

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Georges Perec and On Kawara: Endotic Extravagance in Literature, Art, and Dance

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Abstract:

This article analyzes the work of Georges Perec and On Kawara, two artists who have radically recast our understanding of space and time in literature and the visual arts, through the lens of the author's post-modern dance practice and scholarship. Both artists, deeply affected by the chaos of World War II, began working in the mid-twentieth century: experimental author Georges Perec (1936-1983), known for his affiliation with OuLiPo (*Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, or Workshop for Potential Literature), the organization founded in 1960 to ratchet up the possibilities for conceiving and creating utterly new, or 'potential', literature, and On Kawara (1932-2014), the Conceptual artist known for his large-scale recasting of personal and historical time, and his conversion of 'private life' into vast archives of documentary recording. The article looks both at spatial elements in the work of these artists, and at spatialized responses to their words and objects. It investigates Perec's and Kawara's divergent ideas of the everyday, as articulated through their practices—particularly their commitment to compositional scores and games exemplifying the ludic, and their insistence on the importance of seeing and noticing—and the implications of those practices, and the work they produced, regarding facticity, embodiment, self-representation, transformation, and, above all, the ongoing articulation of space and, by extension, time. Informed by work in human geography; affect, literary, and performance theory; and phenomenology, and by the writer's experience in dance as a practice and area of scholarship, the article links these practices and ideas to those of post-modern dance to explore the fluid relationships among space, movement, bodies, and objects.

Keywords: Georges Perec, On Kawara, space, everyday, endotic, practice, embodiment, ludic.

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Jan. 19, 1970. Feb. 2, 1970. Mar. 30, 1970. Each date is spelled out in one or more fairly small paintings, the white sans serif letters and numbers stark against the dark gray backgrounds. One hundred and fifty of the nearly 3,000 *Date Paintings*—each produced on the date announced in those white letters—made by the remarkable Japanese-born Conceptual and visual artist On Kawara are displayed along the walls of New York City's Guggenheim Museum in this retrospective exhibit, *On Kawara—Silence*, in the spring of 2014, and I encounter them one by one as I progress, slowly, up the spiral ramps. I have seen some of these paintings before, and other elements of this massive accumulation of Kawara's recording of his life: the lists of people he met, the maps of walks he took, the clippings of newspaper articles he read, each correlating to a particular day; all of these are multiply represented here, some clearly displayed, thousands more hidden in plain sight, neatly tucked into rows and rows of binders. I have seen, too, some of the many years' worth of postcards he sent, generally to two people a day, simply informing the recipients, 'I got up at 7 a.m.', and the telegrams, assuring, or proclaiming, 'I am still alive.'

But my relationship to the work of On Kawara is altered—enlarged, spatialized—by the physicality of this encounter, my body moving with and through other bodies in these curving paths, this ambulatory immersion in the artifacts of forty-eight years of paying attention. The long circling walk, my gradual travel through the aesthetically, architecturally, historically, and personally charged space of the Guggenheim Museum, now a complexly curated world made aurally dense by the amplified recitation of the million years before 1969 and after 1981, steeps me both in the embodied experience itself and in the artist's decades-long meditation on time, Kawara's cumulative commitment to his concepts and directives: its implications of memory, loss, and desire, of the present imbued with past and future, its articulation of time as consciousness.¹

Entering the world of *Species of Spaces*, written in 1974 by Georges Perec, the brilliant, genre-crossing French author, I see first his mysterious 'Figure 1: Map of the Ocean', a black-framed empty square (Perec 1997: 2). From there, the book moves on to a long list-poem, repetitions of the word SPACE, first alone, then preceded or followed by a modifier: OPEN SPACE, PARKING SPACE, SPACE RACE, and, finally, portentously, WASTED SPACE (3-4). What Perec is interested in, he writes, is not the 'void, but 'what there is round about or inside' it: 'There isn't very much: nothingness, the impalpable . . . the space around us' (5). Perec is less concerned with the 'infinite' or 'already domesticated interplanetary, intersidereal or intergalactic spaces' (5) of the SPACE RACE than with the spaces of our actual lives, in and of which we 'live,' 'dream,' and 'imagine' (5).

Perec's spatial exploration, even when it stretches to the far reaches of Country or Continent, is not an act of conquest but of curiosity, inclusivity, finding one's—his—place in the world. It brings to mind my experience as a dancer improvising, exploring simultaneously the space in which I move, alone or with others, and the constantly

shifting sensations of my own movement, my own physicality: the interplay of body and space creating each other.

In *Species of Spaces*, Perce conceives and constructs a taxonomy of the spaces of his life, from smallest to largest: The Page, Bed, Bedroom, Apartment, Apartment Building, Street, Neighborhood, Town, Countryside, Country, Europe, Old Continent, New Continent, World, Space. Each brief chapter considers its category via an array of literary forms and strategies: memories, plans, information, quotations, questions, pronouncements, definitions, tables, sub-themes, sub-texts. Some writings are personal, recalling a private moment or story, or documenting the moment of that sentence's writing. Some are contemplative; some represent a fleeting engagement with an idea, or comprise lists of actions, objects, facts, notions. Major pronouncements are funny, silly, and true: 'The world is big' (77).

Moreover, in *Species of Spaces*, Perce situates a person's life in spatial terms. 'To live,' he writes, 'is to pass from one space to another, while doing your very best not to bump yourself' (6). With these words, he posits his work as autobiography: an archival accumulation of details joined in complex systems of personal disclosure and withholding, revealing and smoothing those 'bumps': a literary knitting of concepts, experiences, and observations of the everyday.

This essay brings together two artists, both of whom were born not long before World War II, began working in the mid-twentieth century in the aftermath of its chaos, and have radically recast our understanding of space—and time—in literature and visual art: Georges Perce, the experimental and complexly autobiographical author known for his affiliation with OuLiPo (*Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, or Workshop for Potential Literature), the organization founded in 1960 to ratchet up the possibilities for conceiving and creating utterly new, or 'potential', literature; and On Kawara, the Conceptual artist known for his large-scale recasting of personal and historical time into spatial, visual form, and for his conversion of 'private life' into vast archives of documentary recording. I address here these artists' articulation, in language and objects, of space. I investigate their divergent ideas of the everyday, as articulated through their practices, particularly their commitment to ludic compositional scores and games, and the implications of those practices, and the work they produced, regarding facticity, embodiment, self-representation, and transformation.

Perce and Kawara are both likely and unlikely fellows. (Others have also linked their work. Indeed, two essays in the Kawara catalogue refer to Perce; see Jeffrey Weiss, 'Bounded Infinity', and Ben Highmore, "I make love to the days" in Weiss and Wheeler 2015.) Separated by their fields, their divergent aesthetic inclinations, and, to the extent that we can deduce or speculate, their personalities, they are joined by the critical role of everydayness or dailiness in their work, including the 'endotic extravagance' of this essay's title, which also refers to the extraordinary amount of work each artist produced. Perce uses the word 'endotic'—as distinguished from 'exotic'—in his 1973 essay, "Approaches to What?" (Perce 1997: 210). More than just a playful use of an unfamiliar

word, it is meant to focus readers on what matters in actual everyday life, rather than in the extraordinary and un-contextualized events projected in the media.

This essay originates in my own field, dance—especially the experimental Western concert dance beginning in the mid-twentieth century: the choreography of Merce Cunningham; historical post-modern dance, primarily New York’s Judson Dance Theater; and contemporary dance emerging from Judson’s lineage or otherwise advancing the form: exploring ways to extend dance’s formal properties and materials, and articulating ideas and questions about those materials, the form itself, and the intersections, or genre-crossing, of dance with other art forms. (For detailed discussions of the JDT, see Sally Banes’s *Democracy’s Body: Judson Dance Theater 1962-1964* (1993), and Ramsay Burt’s *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (2006), which addresses the critical role of European choreographic experimentation in the 1960s and 1970s.)

Perec’s and Kawara’s connections to dance may not be immediately apparent. But as space, time, and the body are dance’s basic formal elements, they are central, too, as material, content, context, and implication in the works of these artists. Moreover, Perec’s and Kawara’s practices blossomed in the early 1960s when the post-modern dance practices I am considering here were also emerging, a period noted for its investigations into and departures from definitions of art forms. The Judson choreographers were just then robustly testing the definitions and boundaries of dance, instituting radical compositional practices that included, significantly, making dances using everyday rather than virtuosic movement and performing in a range of non-traditional spaces.

This essay continues my project of investigating the overlap of spatial values inherent in post-modern dance and the literary work of Perec through dance and choreographic practice as well as scholarship. Through scholarly and embodied enquiry, I consider the ways we achieve, claim, read, and experience spatial knowledge. Bringing Kawara into the discussion—drawn by the ways his work urges us, quite differently from Perec’s, to recognize the body at the center of work which is more often viewed through other lenses—‘thickens the plot’ of a project that aims to shed light on our embodied understanding of space.

In a recent article, I explored Perec’s artistic, critical, and autobiographical correspondences to contemporary dance, including my own experiences of being *touched* by Perec’s writing, invited into it through a kind of physiological rapport, and of dancing, especially the simultaneous experiencing and understanding—‘seeing’—oneself and/as one’s body through multiple systems of organization, visualization, and proprioception, of thinking and feeling.² This working through of critique, affect, and memory underlies *these* pages. I focus here on the involvement of Perec and Kawara, whose work also touches and transports me, with the everyday, articulated through their practices and self-representations. My essay is informed by work in human geography; affect, literary, and performance theory; and phenomenology; and by years of an aesthetic physical practice; its autobiographical, embodied, and performative perspectives are reflected throughout.

I was first drawn to Perec's writing for its ludic qualities. The 'ludic' is one of the 'four fields' of his writing that Perec identifies in a 1978 essay, 'Notes on What I'm Looking For'; the others are 'autobiographical', 'sociological: how to look at the everyday', and 'fictive' (Perec 1997: 141-2). I see the ludic field in particular as having parallels to choreographic methodologies. The games, puzzles, scores, and other devices for generating and organizing material which feature in his work, or drive it, are significant in the Judson lineage and across contemporary experimental dance. (See Satin 2015: 87-91). They figured, too, in other arts when Perec and Kawara, who also engaged games as a compositional procedure, were developing their signature work.

But Perec's writing doesn't reach me only through its scores or formal dexterity; it moves me through its poetry, concreteness, and empathy. Perec homes in on the experience and material phenomena of the everyday, the details of our lives and the worlds where they take place, details we so often ignore, bypass, dismiss. Similarly, Kawara's score-driven output may 'read', so to speak, like the work of an accountant in overdrive, but at the same time it is a monumental and monumentally moving project on personal, collective, and historic time.

Kawara made his *Date Paintings*, also known as the *Today* series, from 1966, when he was about 33 years old, until 2013, the year before he died. (The word 'about' reflects the uncertainty regarding the dates of Kawara's birth and death and the artist's choice not to discuss his personal life.) The start of this series marked a radical shift, a point of departure from which his enormous body of work would unfold for the rest of his long life. In 1966, Georges Perec, whose own life would be, sadly, much shorter, was 30, already a wildly prolific and recognized writer who had won the prestigious Renaudot Prize in 1965 for his early novel, *Things*. The art and private lives of both artists were indelibly marked by the War's ravages, especially of Japan and France, their homelands. By 1966, both were well into the work that was so differently suffused with their suffering, however transformed or displaced.

Their lives have been quite differently documented. Perec's has been most substantially recounted in his translator David Bellos's beautiful biography, aptly subtitled *A Life in Words* (1999), which illuminates the roots of Perec's writing in the terrible losses of his childhood. Perec was born 7 March 1936 in Paris to Polish Jewish parents Icek Judko and Cyrla Perec. ('Peretz' was routinely changed to 'Perec' when the family came to France; Perec devotes considerable attention to his name and its relationship to his identity.³) He was surrounded by a loving extended family in the Jewish neighborhood of Belleville.

Perec's father enlisted in the French Foreign Legion, and was killed in action 16 June 1940. His mother sent 'Jojo' from Paris to Grenoble to live with relatives in fall 1941; she was arrested 23 January 1943, and killed either during or following her transfer to Auschwitz 11 February. Perec, now orphaned, was raised by his aunt and uncle. Having spent his first five years in an immigrant family, immersed in Jewish life and language (Yiddish, Polish), he was now compelled to keep his Jewishness a secret, to

forget it. He ‘was a desperately unhappy child’, Bellos writes (1999: 68). And his work—however ‘ludic’ so much of it is—belies any suggestion that he *forgot*.

Perec lived in Paris for most of his life, apart from a year in Tunisia (described in *Things*). He attended the Sorbonne for two years. In 1958, he joined a *Régiment de Chasseurs Parachutistes* of the French armed forces, an unlikely match, and served two years as a paratrooper. For nearly twenty years, from 1961, he worked as a scientific archivist. In 1967, he joined OuLiPo. (I will return to these circumstances.) He had many friends, lovers, and a long relationship, including marriage, with Paulette Petras. He died from lung cancer, 3 March 1982, four days before turning 46.

We know much less of Kawara’s life, which is remarkable given not only the huge *amount* of its day-by-day documentation but its seeming *translation* into documentation. There are few recorded dates, ironically enough, to affix to ‘significant’ moments: Kawara was famously elusive and private, resisting efforts to reveal personal material, be seen in photographs, or participate in art-world activities. Having converted his life into art, he is reputed to have said, ‘There is no such thing as domestic life’ (Weiss 2015: 37).

Kawara was born in 1932 or 1933 (perhaps 24 December 1932) in Kariya, Japan. Art critic Roberta Smith notes in his obituary that Kawara was ‘raised in an intellectual atmosphere infused with Shinto, Buddhist, and Christian teachings’. A teenager when Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed by the United States in 1945, he was ‘traumatized’ by the events. He moved to Tokyo, immersing himself in Western scholarship and making disturbing figurative art (Smith 2014: A20). In the mid-1950s, he began experimenting with painting, contributing in writing to the critical discussion of its future (Weiss 2015: 33), and participating in ‘left-leaning artists’ groups’ (Gough 2015: 198). He attended art school in Mexico City. From 1962 to 1964, he moved between Paris and New York, making the *Paris-New York Drawings* whose imagery of grids, codes, and language connected him to like-minded artists and set up the concerns and strategies of his later work and what would become Conceptual art. (While Kawara was a critical participant in the early days of Conceptual art, and strongly linked to Conceptual and Minimalist art, his work also reflects developments in painting; see Anne Rorimer’s 1991 ‘The Date Paintings of On Kawara’.)

Kawara moved to NYC in 1964 and lived there for the greater part of his life. Art historian Jeffrey Weiss writes of the ‘rupture’ of Kawara’s leaving Japan and his work in the Tokyo avant-garde. He opted to work in over 100 cities, allowing the travel to enter into the art—for instance, painting the *Today* date according to the convention of his locale—and moving away from his studio as the center of his practice (Weiss 2015: 35). That said, he had multiple studios in NYC. He was married to Hiroko Kawahara, who was instrumental in carrying out some of his archival acts. On Kawara died in 2014 (perhaps 27 June), at 81—his family ‘declined to provide the date of death or the names of survivors, in keeping with his lifelong penchant for privacy’ (Smith 2014: A20)—months before the opening of *Silence*, the Guggenheim exhibit.

Perec’s and Kawara’s work is marked by their devotion to the everyday. The artists share certain characteristics, especially the extensive deployment of lists, maps, charts,

and codes through which content might be offered without commentary or judgment, and compositional strategies of scores, games, repetitions, codes, and formulas. There are differences, though: Kawara, Smith notes, like ‘a true Conceptualist . . . stuck to the facts and also transcended them’ (2015: C29). Perec, too, emphasizes that just-the-facts quality, but some of his lists and puzzles contain, suggest, or are embedded in narrative streams of writing. Their everydaynesses, actually, are of a different order.

This is evidenced in work articulating each artist’s sense of what dailiness is, what is remarkable about it, and how he situates his experiences within the parameters of his own body and in the context of social space and meaning-making. ‘Remarkable’, of course, might refer to those special events and moments, typically separated from those of the everyday, which I noted were missing from Kawara’s biography, and might also or instead refer to the ‘stuff’ of the quotidian, the fleeting and prolonged sensations, actions, interactions, ideas, observations, and objects so often missing from our typical responses to the ubiquitous variations on ‘What’s up?’—what cultural theorist Ben Highmore rephrases as ‘What’s going on when nothing much is happening?’ (2011: 3).

In “‘I make love to the days’: Accounting for On Kawara’—an essay in *Silence’s* catalogue whose title (borrowed in part from a *Date Painting* subtitle) suggests the mathematical, systematic counterpart to that love in Kawara’s art of chronology—Highmore recalls the ‘What’s going on . . .’ question, examining the ‘day’ of Kawara’s dailiness and looking at Perec’s ‘day’ as well. He considers the instability of that seemingly familiar unit, variously defined in terms of conscious time, work time, free time, and other socially as well as personally defined categories, and the ways we experience them through the power and ubiquity of the news media (Highmore 2015: 205-6). Both Perec and Kawara resist the conception of dailiness of the newspapers, he writes. Perec’s work, though, is marked by its ‘insist[ence] on the significance of the insignificant’; Kawara’s contrasts newspaper ‘event-time’ with a ‘longer’ time order more keyed to the ‘temporal dimensions of the daily as it is lived by a human body’ (208).

These views of dailiness—and of Kawara’s and Perec’s sensibilities—are consonant with a post-modern dance perspective, including dance as an opportunity for practitioners and viewers to conceive, produce, observe, and relish the vast possibilities for variously trained as well as pedestrian human movement, and choreography as a field in which to experiment with mathematical, score- and game-derived, and otherwise system-linked generation of movement, spatial organization, and deployment of time. Dance practice compels us, too, to see how our bodies and our appetites for movement change over time, creating and challenging our embodied identities as well as our stylistic and technical preferences. And dance urges us to carry the commitment to noticing into the circumstances of everyday life, from the recognition of what we notice in the small worlds of our own separate bodies—the muscular complexity called for in squeezing an orange—to the discovery and acknowledgment of pattern and chance in public space, the interplay of people and objects in the life of the streets.

Perec articulated this connection of the daily to the life of the body. In his 1973 ‘Approaches to What?’, he argues that the focus in the ‘daily papers’ is on ‘everything

except the daily', and that this reportage of the 'spectacular' or at least 'significant' separates us from what's 'really going on, what we're experiencing, the rest' (1997/1973: 209). Narrowing his focus, he shifts this observation down to embodied, private, spatial experience, lamenting the 'anaesthesia'—the lack of sensation—characterizing our relationship to the 'habitual' (210). Pointedly, poignantly, he asks, 'But where is our life? Where is our body? Where is our space?' (210).

Perec, writes Highmore, is 'another vociferous investigator of the daily' (2015: 208). This adjectival link to the voice is notable, given the Kawara exhibit's title, *Silence*, as well as its affect: The show is marked by the quiet privacy central to reading, a primary act for Kawara's viewers, writ large, as it were, in the experience of the Guggenheim visitor amidst the spatial density of the show; one imagines, too, that Kawara's own process was, essentially, silent, probably serene.

By contrast, the excited feeling of much of Perec's writing—so much language, so much wordplay—suggests the writer's own liveliness and animation. In his 1974 'Reading: A Socio-physiological Outline', Perec wrote about reading itself as 'an act'; recalling anthropologist Marcel Mauss on the culturally produced 'history of our bodies', he writes of 'an economy of reading' based on 'physiology, muscular effort . . . and spatio-temporal' perspectives (Perec 1997: 170). He describes the reader's embodied investment, her integrated experience of eyes, voice, lips, and hands, her postures, her environment. Even with his plethora of words, the masses of objects they conjure, and the salience of his compositional choices, Perec kept the body—his own and the reader's—at the center of his writing. And here, he suggests the embodied aspect of reading that predominates in the spatially determined circumstance of encountering Kawara's work, where—as in watching dance—we 'get' something kinesthetically.

Perec's exposition of his (and our) reading (and writing) bodies suggests, too, a life in which that reading, those bodies are framed. Kawara mutes those real-life implications, his myriad of self-representation at odds with any potential for the revelation of private life. Highmore, in fact, distinguishes Kawara's everydayness from that of Perec and other French intellectuals (Certeau, Barthes, Lefebvre . . .) in that his 'facticity', '[stripped] of narrative supports' and stuck in materiality, bypasses the charged implications of real-life elements and 'offers us a daily life without transcendence' (Highmore 2015: 208).

The complex relationship of facticity and transcendence—even emotion—has long been a factor in dance. In an essay written in 1966, 'A Quasi Survey of Some "Minimalist" Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A', iconoclast choreographer Yvonne Rainer argued for focusing on the movement rather than the mover, now recast as a 'neutral doer' rather than the object or seducer of the viewer's gaze. Her manifesto opens, significantly, with a chart itemizing the options for choreographers and visual artists to 'eliminate' and 'substitute', i.e., the 'role of the artist's hand' in art and the corresponding 'phrasing' for choreographers replaced by 'factory fabrication' and 'energy equality and "found" movement' (Rainer 1974: 63). This move toward 'human scale' in both visual and performing arts is apparent in dances characterized by everyday and task-based

movement, undancerly affect, ‘backstage’ behavior, and a general sense of the ‘body as object’.

Objects

Dances

eliminate
or
minimize

1. role of artist’s hand
2. hierarchical relationship of parts
3. texture
4. figure reference
5. illusionism
6. complexity and detail
7. monumentality

1. phrasing
2. development and climax
3. variation: rhythm, shape, dynamics
4. character
5. performance
6. variety: phrases and the spatial field
7. the virtuosic feat and the fully extended body

substitute

1. factory fabrication
2. unitary forms, modules
3. uninterrupted surface
4. nonreferential forms
5. literalness
6. simplicity
7. human scale

1. energy equality and “found” movement
2. equality of parts, repetition
3. repetition or discrete events
4. neutral performance
5. task or tasklike activity
6. singular action, event, or tone
7. human scale

But the neutrality was complicated. Rainer, who illuminated many of these principles in *Trio A* (1966), the core dance of early post-modernism, tied it to self-representation, theory, and affect: At Judson, she was ‘more involved in experiencing a lion’s share of ecstasy and madness than in “being myself” or doing a job’, but she was committed to dismantling performative ‘artifice’ through ‘submerging of the personality’ and replacing outmoded ‘specialized’ bodies and movements with ‘more matter-of-fact . . . more banal’ choices (Rainer 1974/1968: 65). And eventually she granted that each person’s movement is particular, ‘invested with character [and] “expression of self”’ (in Phelan 1999: 7). More than that, writes performance scholar Peggy Phelan, *Trio A* was unmistakably characterized by its ‘musicality’, its ‘melody’ emerging from its ‘intimate humming of breath and blood’, its ‘flow’, its ‘undisguised celebration of thought’ (6)—an embodied extension of Noel Carroll’s characterization of ‘discursive expression’ (Carroll 1981: 101). Having learned *Trio A*, I can attest to how challenging (as well as pleasurable) it is to execute those ‘everyday’ actions within the dance’s exacting score. Having seen

Rainer (and others) perform it many times, I can attest, too, to how kinesthetically engaging it is to watch.

Rainer noted in that *Trio A* essay that ‘Dance is hard to see’ (1974: 68): It challenged viewers to respond in real time to something taking place faster and more complexly than our eyes and mind could keep up with. Her solutions included making dances that either intensified the difficulty or used strategies like repetition to restate the situation in the materials of the form.

For Perec, the difficulty of seeing (everything, anything) was central to his project of interaction with the everyday: paying attention to the details of the world around us, the spaces in and through which we live, especially that which we typically bypass without recognizing either the thing or place itself or our experience of choosing to observe or ignore it, to incorporate or rethink it. Bellos responds to ‘radically obvious and obviously childish’ aspects of *Species of Spaces*, writing, ‘that is the point of endotics: to look *without any pretensions* at the world that lies around you’ (Bellos 1999: 532, emphasis in original).

Like the drawing teachers who instruct us to ‘Draw what you see, not what you think you see’, Perec advises us to look with extreme care and closeness at our surroundings, to not anticipate what is there, to not gloss over what we assume is superfluous. Echoing Rainer’s call to the ‘banal’, he writes in his iconic *Species of Spaces* chapter, ‘The Street’, ‘You must set about it more slowly, almost stupidly,’ ‘Force yourself to see more flatly’ (Perec 1997: 50, 51). Through paragraphs describing episodes of activity (‘I saw two blind people in the Rue Linné’) (49), insights emerging from repeated or prolonged viewings of streetscapes (‘Beauty of the women. The fashion is for heels that are too high’ (51), and broader analyses of systems and conventions (‘The parallel alignment of two series of buildings defines what is known as a street’) (46), he demonstrates that nothing is too insignificant to notice. He continues the project through instructions to the reader, naming categories (cars, dogs, people, buildings), qualities, contexts, and other opportunities to see more fully. ‘Carry on,’ he writes, ‘until the whole place becomes strange, and you no longer even know that this is what is called a town, a street’ (53)—that is, until you are in a state of embodied spatial disorientation, liberated, potentially, from your assumptions.

In some instances, such as his *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* and other ‘exhaustions’ of spaces—a term that variously implies thoroughly knowing or going over, or emptying out, depleting, using up—Perec was more or less in place while he watched the streetscape continuously shift. In others, he re-viewed an arrangement of his own making, intentional or otherwise, creating a kind of verbal still life. One example, resonant because of its subject matter’s commonness, is his 1976 ‘Notes Concerning the Objects that are on my Work-table’ (1997). Here, Perec describes these objects—many typical for such a space (a pen, a desk-lamp, paper), some less so (stones, boxes, ashtrays)—one by one, as it belongs to a category, and as it is embedded in some story or context. His preference is for the space ‘to be cluttered, almost to excess’, while his dream was of a ‘virgo intacta’ (144): a wonderful stand-in for his writing, often

simultaneously marked by excess and (through structurally, semantically, and narratively missing elements) absence. He notes the correspondence of his frequent re-organization of the objects to stages of his writing (144); the objects that have ‘accumulated there purely by chance’ or been kept not for function but for the pleasures and memories they impart (145). This table-as-narrative is announced in his first line—‘There are a lot of objects on my work-table’ (144)—and followed through in ways that make it clear that the real subject is Perec himself:

[This project] . . . will be . . . a way of marking out my space, a somewhat oblique approach to my daily practice, a way of talking about my work, about my history and my preoccupations, an attempt to grasp something pertaining to my experience, not at the level of its remote reflections, but at the very point where it emerges. (147)

Perec says here that he sometimes works elsewhere, writing in a café (147). This, we know, was an important element of Kawara’s peripatetic work life. In ‘The Newsreader’, art historian Maria Gough considers a photograph of Kawara’s work-table, taken (presumably by Kawara) at his Greene Street (NYC) studio in 1979, observing that it ‘stages a near-complete inventory of the multiple and overlapping serial practices by means of which . . . he records the passage of time’ (2015: 197). Gough’s use of ‘staging’ notes the intentionality of the work, its performance of Kawara’s space as he would like it to be ‘read’. We see, on the table, a *Date Painting*—June 28, 1979—and a casual but not ‘cluttered’ (Perec’s word) array of art supplies and equipment: brushes, ruler, scissors, paint, rubber stamps, postcards, a NYC map, a little notebook, a folded copy of the *New York Times*. Like Perec’s, this table includes items directly related to work, but these point to specific series (*I Went, I Got Up*, etc.) as well as to work in general; and others that are personal: eyeglasses, keys, cigarettes, and a ‘conspicuously unemptied’ ashtray, ‘the accumulation of stubs indexing time expended on production’ (197) (and perhaps, I think, a tiny intervention into Kawara’s ascetic persona). Gough links the folded *Times* to the newspapers in Kawara’s art—in *Date Paintings*’ subtitles, as liners of their storage boxes, as content of *I Read*—and to earlier work (Picasso’s and Braque’s *papiers-collés*); to the value of their ‘periodicity’ in underscoring Kawara’s portrayal of time; to their participation in creating, as Benedict Anderson wrote, of ‘community in anonymity’ (in Gough 2015: 198), and to their evidence of the worldly elements ‘driven out of the paintings themselves’ (201).

For Perec and Kawara, interaction with the everyday was inherently linked to practices encompassing ways of working and producing particular art. Similarly, early post-modern dancers called for a practice based on everyday movement, drawing attention to the ways dances and the choreographic spaces they created were built; then and now, dancers identify their practices as ranging from participation in daily class and rehearsal to the reframing of quotidian and intentional movement in public space.⁴ Both Perec and Kawara were associated with unusual quantity: producing unusually large

numbers of objects, organizing and recasting tremendous amounts of information. While both were focused on the everyday and on the day itself, neither was strictly bound to a daily regimen; what was central, instead, was adherence to the rules of the games that they set up as the defining structures for each project.

Weiss's definition of practice takes off from Michel de Certeau's view of 'culture as a kind of practice . . . defined less by artifacts than by procedures and means' (Weiss 2015: 45, f.n. 4). Addressing himself to Kawara's work in terms equally applicable to Perec's, Weiss describes practice as 'a "field of operations" or procedures that the objects—as artifacts—both motivate and represent' (27). This calls to mind artist/theorist Allan Kaprow's 1974 observation that not only does an artist's practice produce results bearing its marks or efforts, it reproduces its own point of view. 'It could be argued', wrote Kaprow, 'that any time you use a formal tool (like a grid) to look at the world, whatever you look at will be formal (for instance, it will always be gridded)' (1993: 160). For Perec and Kawara, these 'formal tools' re-routed the vast stores of information with which they engaged, merging the material elements and the strategies of their representation.

This re-routing mattered to both of them. *Silence* was created with Kawara and the show's curators; the collaborative decision was 'to attempt to represent his practice as a practice' and to link the term 'practice' to the 'sociocultural analysis of everyday life' (Weiss and Wheeler 2015: 19, 21). The exhibit was meant to represent an ongoing project rather than a collection—a notion altered somewhat by Kawara's death, which enclosed the artworks. That project was composed of multiple projects, each articulating the artist's systems and repetition, 'deliberately based on self-limiting principles of record-keeping and strict repetition. These principles are expressed through systems for dating, collecting, mapping, and enumerating the coordinates of daily life' (19, 21).

Beginning in October 1961, when he was already known for his writing, Perec worked for almost twenty years as a scientific archivist in the Laboratoire de neurophysiologie médicale of the CNRS Laboratoire Associé 38. His tremendous range of responsibilities included gathering, analyzing, organizing, systematizing, categorizing, and indexing information 'for a highly technical field about which he knew exactly nothing' (Bellos 1999: 252). Playfully, 'diabolic[ally]', he created documents marked by 'red herrings, puns, irreverent asides, fancy layouts, and subversions of every imaginable kind' (261, 259). Then and later, his writing bore the mark of his archival attitude to the reams of material he addressed, transforming it, ebulliently, from a general sense of profuseness through modes of close attention, observation, and classification.

These writerly inclinations continued most vividly in Perec's involvement with OuLiPo. Founded in 1960 by writers and mathematicians who devised systems, particularly 'constraints', that urged writers toward extreme literary choices, OuLiPo was a community of loosely like-minded enthusiasts for the opening up of literature. That is, participants agreed on the importance of the constraints, but differed on such elements as whether to divulge the constraints to readers, and on whether it was necessary, or even

desirable, to actually create work from them. Perec and his colleagues wrote lipograms, isograms, pangrams, anagrams, palindromes, puzzles, acrostics, and much, much more.

One work for which he is widely known, a lipogram, is *La Disparition* (1965), or *The Disappearance*, composed without the letter 'e' and retaining that element in Gilbert Adair's English translation, *A Void*. What is most significant about this book here, both in terms of Perec's work and as a parallel to Kawara's, is the relationship it raises between the commitment to a system of working and the 'big picture' that commitment and system produce. Perec's linguistic and compositional acrobatics went beyond play to acknowledge the profound importance of seeing and noticing, of holding on to the moments of the life that he knew might have been lost, like his mother's, his father's, the millions of European Jews who 'disappeared'. In Kawara's case, the artist converted the everyday acts of his own life into a practice of unfathomable acts of repetition as art, a continual re-creation and transformation of time.

Perec's and Kawara's practices were grounded in the ludic devices of games and scores: both artists played conventional and competitive games—chess and mah-jongg for Kawara, pinball and Go for Perec (Weiss 2015: 37; Bellos 1999: 137, photos 36/37)—busman's holidays extending and interrupting their practice. Kawara referred to his approach to painting as a game (Weiss 2015: 35), while the OuLiPian Perec more typically used the term 'constraint'; for both, the enterprise determined the work itself, which pointed back to its own making. Weiss notes those 'sociocultural theories [that describe] the game as a kind of closed system constructed to facilitate the autonomy of play' (36). In particular, he addresses the views of sociologist Roger Caillois on two extremes of the game: those based on improvisation and free play, and those more focused acts of working through the rules (36-7).

Caillois' 1958 discussion suggests to me a kind of affectual reading of Perec's and Kawara's divergent versions of 'staying in the game'. Caillois describes *paidia*, one 'pole' of a 'continuum' of games, in terms of 'turbulence', 'carefree gaiety', 'uncontrolled fantasy', and 'frolicsome and impulsive exuberance'. *Ludus*, the opposite pole, is associated with 'arbitrary, imperative, and purposely tedious conventions', and 'requires an ever greater amount of effort, patience, skill, or ingenuity'—and to a 'taste for gratuitous difficulty' (Caillois 2001: 13, 27). Certainly Perec's and Kawara's practices and the work they generate exemplify *ludus* in extremis, and at the same time suggest something of each artist's personality as he frames it in his work.

I imagine Kawara in terms of the calm steadiness of his work. I don't mean only the literal (or not) dailiness of his practice (even the *Date Paintings* were not produced daily), or the regularity of his efforts, which were attached to whichever project(s) he was working on at a given time. These variously called for more attention to enumerating the 'events' of his daily life (*I Went, I Read*, etc.), the laborious maintenance (much, eventually, done by his wife) of the *Journals* minutely documenting his *Date Paintings*, or the extensive efforts of the *Date Paintings*, a mechanical—and/or meditative—process which took many decisions, hours and stages to complete within the mandated day: Preparing the canvases in any of eight sizes; hand-mixing the variations on three colors

(gray, blue, red); centering the dates, which reflected the conventions of wherever he was; applying the acrylic paint in a set series of phases, building up over hours to produce a surface nearly free of the traces of the 'artist's hand' that Rainer's proposed swapping out for 'factory fabrication' (1974: 63).

These elements conspire to produce in the viewer lucky enough to encounter the work in volume in a dedicated space an experience of social choreography-derived immersion in the artist's exacting devotion to the rules of his game. Again the extents of that facticity could be disputed; Kawara's art suggests, too, a resistance to the destructive human behavior that had led to war and devastation, his great temporal-spatial sweep of silence analogous to what dance theorist André Lepecki described as the 'stillness [that has] emerged in moments of historical anxiety' (2001: 2). Art historian Alexandra Munroe responded to art generating 'a perceptual experience with the specific power—indeed the ethical mandate—to purify consciousness through the act of concentrated contemplation' and moving the response to art from the 'optical' to the 'phenomenological', from the 'durational' to the 'ontological' (2009: 287).

I experience the 'durational' and the 'ontological' as joined rather than exclusive. Nonetheless, this displacement of the art encounter into spatial and experiential dimensions reframes our responses, especially to art which coaxes us toward an embodied, interactive reception. Agnes Martin's five-by-five-foot square paintings of the 1990s, for instance, invite the viewer to stretch her arms, sharing her 'wingspan' with the canvas's dimensions. Robert Irwin's great pale translucent maze of 1998 urges us into active participation, into constantly changing perception, like driving through the mountains as the sun goes down. Richard Serra's enormous hulks of lovely rusted steel (1970s – present) variously cradle the nestling viewer or surprise her with sprawling landscapes that shift as she sits, stands, or walks. Yoko Ono urges us to imagine paintings and events cued by her directions (1964); we watch the films of the fly on bare skin (1970), of Ono sitting, impassive and unprotected, as viewers approach her with scissors (1964); we climb the tall trembling stairway and see the sky (2015).⁵ I am moved aesthetically, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, even kinesthetically, by these works, as I am by dance.

I imagine Perec as inclined toward the far ends of Caillois' *ludus*, including the 'conflict...with the obstacle' (Caillois 2001: 29), an internal circumstance rather than one involving a competitor and suggesting a sense of aggressiveness or just gleeful accomplishment-in-motion rather than the quiet control of Kawara's art. Perec's acts of linguistic excess at the lab, for instance, were often aimed at the scientists' 'ineradicably Gallic pseudo-English' (Bellos 1999: 261). His *The Art of Asking Your Boss for a Raise* is a novel-as-flow-chart response to a challenge to use the computer's *modus operandi* as a guideline (Bellos 2011: viii-ix). At once funny, empathetic, and sharp-edged, it tells the downward-spiraling tale of a corporate office worker in what reads as a single unpunctuated sentence repeatedly turning back on itself and starting over; it uses the operating system to critique itself and its corporate context. Perec sometimes went to lengths to carry out a score when it beckoned, such as getting official OuLiPo approval;

for instance, he got permission to leave out the 'u' typically following the 'q' in the isogram *Les Revenentes*, or *The Exeter Text* (Schwartz 1988: 41). Perec's writing, most dramatically in *Life: A User's Manual*, exudes his apparent pleasure in creating his own order, including apparent disorder, within a sense of plenty: allowing lists of verbs and tender memories (real or not quite) and little stories and huge, extravagant, seductive score-driven puzzles to share page-space.

In 1974, Allan Kaprow, whose own Happenings exuberantly blurred the separation of art and everyday life, looked at John Cage's mix of formal compositional tools and open-ended non-formalist merging of musical sound and noise, art and life. The 'formalist-anti-formalist clash is misleading', he wrote (1993: 159-60): the two perspectives refer back to each other, reflect each other, switch positions. This applies to the experience of artworks and actions, which, however fully we 'get' them as objects or object-like bodies, we also perceive through the permeability of our ideas, sensations, environments. This is the complex facticity of dance that I raised earlier, what Judson dancer Trisha Brown described as 'that edge between mechanically derived motion or action and emotional affect' (in Rainer 1993): No matter how uninflected, how 'neutral' the performance, or how intellectually thrilling its choreographic origins, for both the dancer and the viewer dance is resonantly *felt*, its very physicality inherently rich not only with 'discursive expression' but with the remarkable experience of bodies, people alone and intertwined in loops of labyrinths.

I see Perec's and Kawara's work this way as well. Both of them, in work derived from the commitment to sets of rules followed, however playfully, with rigor, create 'art worlds' charged with personal, cultural, historical, and affectual meaning. These worlds—spaces created with words and objects, with images and implications—compel the readers and viewers encountering their work to be present: to fully notice the streets and spoons, the beds and coats and notebooks, of their spaces, of their lives; to not 'sleep through their lives in a dreamless sleep' but to give these everyday things 'a meaning . . . to let them, finally, speak of what is, of what we are' (Perec 1997: 210).

About the time Perec and Kawara were bringing their work into being, early post-modern dancers worked along similar lines, performing in non-theatrical spaces, making dances from pedestrian and task-based movement, acknowledging how remarkable even everyday movement and everyday bodies could be. They, and Perec and Kawara, urged us to pay attention, to really see what is in the (always changing) space around us, to recognize our own (always changing) place in it, to be alert to the entwining sensations and relationships and circumstances that make up our lives.

Both Georges Perec and On Kawara made these urgings, directly and not, through their bodies of work. Both had become artists as survivors of one of the most terrible periods of recent human history. They knew how much each person, each object, each feeling, each action, each encounter mattered, and how fragile and impermanent each was. Kawara's spatial representations of the everyday point to the enormous scope of time, and remind us of our small moments within it. Perec's everyday is in the details of

‘the space around us’ that might escape notice without the effort of looking for them, integrating them, understanding that they underscore the value of our very lives.

(1 July 2015, I rode the Métro to Belleville, to Rue Vilin, looking for Georges Perec. I hoped especially to find #24, where he lived as a small child. I couldn’t find it or any of the places he’d described. I spoke to one person after another, gradually accumulating a small team of volunteers, most notably a kind, enthusiastic *mec*—Perec might have called him a *mensch*—who was delighted with my search—‘*Ab, oui, l’homme qui a écrit le roman sans e!*’—and explained that the street had been demolished since Perec last wrote about it. He pointed out the lovely park there now. I wish I had gotten his name.)

Notes

¹ *On Kawara—Silence* took place at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, 6 February-3 May 2015. It included *Date Paintings*, 1966-2013; *I Met*, 1968-1979; *I Went*, 1968-1979; *I Read*, 1966-1995; *I Got Up*, 1968-1979; *I Am Still Alive*, 1970-2000, *Paris-New York Drawings*, 1962-1964, and other works. Among them was *One Million Years*, consisting of *One Million Years: Past*, 1970-1971, displaying the million years preceding their recording, and *One Million Years: Future*, 1980-1998, displaying the million years after. In 1993, Kawara created a spoken performance version of the work, which was included at the 2015 Guggenheim exhibit. For extensive material about Kawara and the exhibit, see Weiss and Wheeler (2015).

² See Satin (2015). Other work in this Perec/dance project includes an earlier version of that piece, with the same title, presented with *Hidden Dip*, a dance/video collaboration with Victoria Hunter, at Species of Spaces: A Transdisciplinary Conference on the Work of Georges Perec, March 2014, Teesside University, England; a full-evening dance, *What Happens Now?*, performed in Santa Fe, New Mexico, August 2014; a paper, ‘Off Line: Perec, Kawara, Feeling Dance’, and a dance (Hunter, Heike Salzer, Satin) at the Emotional Geographies Conference, University of Edinburgh, June 2015; a performative presentation, ‘What Do You See?: Being Here, Seeing Here’, at Performing Place 3, University of Chichester, 19 June 2015.

³ See, for instance, Perec’s 1979 essay, ‘Ellis Island: Description of a Project’. He writes, ‘I was born in France, I bear a French first name, Georges, and a French surname, or almost, Perec. The difference is miniscule: there’s no acute accent on the first e of my name because Perec is the way the Poles write Peretz. If I had been born in Poland, I would have been called, let’s say, Mordecai Perec, and everyone would have known I was a Jew’ (Perec 1997: 136-7).

⁴ The tremendous attention to walking as a performance practice, especially in the U.K., is an example of this. Writers such as Fiona Bannon (2010), Bill Psarras (2013), and Carl Lavery (2005) write about embodied private experiences of social choreography in public space; numerous choreographers complicate the experience of public space through specific and site-adaptive dance (see Victoria Hunter 2015; Melanie Kloetzel and Carolyn

Pavlik 2009). The choreography of Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion exemplifies an understanding of everyday movement quite distinct from that of the early post-modernists (see Domm 2008; Briginshaw 2005).

⁵ Robert Irwin's 'Excursus: Homage to the Square³' was first presented in 1998 at Dia Center for the Arts, then in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood; it is at Dia Beacon June 2015-May 2017. 'Inside Out' (2013), one example of this type of work, and 'Intervals' (2013), one of the landscape-like works, are among Richard Serra's sculptures, shown at the Gagosian Gallery in NYC 26 October 2014-15 March 2014. Yoko Ono's 'Grapefruit' (1964), 'Fly' (1970), 'Cut Piece' (1964), and 'To See the Sky' (2015) were shown at *Yoko Ono: One Woman Show, 1961-1971*, Museum of Modern Art, NYC, 17 May-7 September, 2015.

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