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Review of Japanese Culture and Society, Volume 28, 2016, pp. 261-274 (Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press



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Lost in the Archive: Yoko Ono and John Lennon's *Four Thoughts*

Kevin Concannon

In late May and early June of 1968, the work of Yoko Ono was to be presented at the Arts Lab Gallery in London. Listings in the British underground newspaper of record, *International Times* (hereafter *IT*), promise an exhibition titled *Yoko Ono Water Show* “for one week,” from May 28 through June 1.¹ The next issue of *IT*, however, while still listing *Water Show* as continuing through June 1, lists a new exhibition, *John Lennon and Yoko Ono: Four Thoughts*, opening at Arts Lab on June 2 and continuing through June 9. Although this latter exhibition marks, as I propose, Ono and Lennon’s first truly collaborative exhibition, little mention of it appears in the voluminous documentation of all things Beatles—or in the literature on Ono, for that matter. Its scant representation in the literature no doubt arises from the dearth of documentation of the exhibition itself, which is somewhat surprising given the amount of attention Lennon generally received from the press as a member of The Beatles, the world’s most famous pop group at the time, not to mention Ono’s growing reputation as an avant-garde artist. Ono caused quite a sensation with her performances of *Cut Piece* at the *Destruction in Art Symposium* in 1966, her solo exhibitions at Indica Gallery (1966) and Lisson Gallery (1967), and her controversial *Film No. 4 (Bottoms)* (1967), the feature-length version of which attracted vast press attention surrounding its production and London premiere.

There remains much confusion about what constitutes the first collaboration between the two artists. My argument therefore, which I detail in this paper, is the following: even though some maintain that the couple’s first collaborative exhibition was Ono’s *Half-A-Wind* show held at London’s Lisson Gallery the previous year, in 1967, *Four Thoughts* marks Ono and Lennon’s first truly collaborative exhibit (one they both publicly and mutually agreed from the outset as a joint project). In the *Half-A-Wind* exhibition, which Lennon sponsored, Lennon suggested to Ono that she sell the other (invisible) halves of her half sculptures in bottles (fig. 17.1). She did just that and



17.1

Yoko Ono with John Lennon's *Air Bottles*, 1967. Photo by Clay Perry. © Yoko Ono.

provided the exhibition with another title, *Yoko Plus Me*, referring obliquely to Lennon. In *Lennon Remembers* (2000), Lennon recalls: “That was our first public appearance. I didn’t even go to see the show, I was too uptight.”²² *Half-A-Wind* was billed as a solo show, and Lennon’s participation, beyond his co-author credit for *Air Bottles* in the exhibition brochure, remained largely anonymous at the time. The literature on Ono and Lennon typically cites even yet another contender for the designation of their first joint exhibition, *John by Yoko, Yoko by John* held at the Coventry Cathedral on June 15, 1968, in which the couple famously created *Acorn Piece*, a conceptual sculpture in which acorns were planted facing east and west (fig. 17.2). The online *Beatles Bible*, for example, continues to make this claim, characterizing it as “their first public event.”²³ Since the *Four Thoughts* exhibition has been largely lost to history, it is only natural that the well-publicized conceptual event at Coventry has enjoyed this historical priority, even though it actually followed *Four Thoughts* chronologically. In this essay, I share my archival and other research findings to reconstruct the events surrounding Ono and Lennon’s *Four Thoughts*, which I argue, constitutes a defining moment in the direction of Ono and Lennon’s path of peace as the political tumult of May 1968—the very moment their relationship as a couple was sealed—forced a choice between violent revolution and non-violent resistance.



17.2

John & Yoko, *Acorn Event*, 1968. On June 15, 1968, Ono and Lennon planted acorns facing east and west as a conceptual sculpture for the National Sculpture Exhibition at Coventry Cathedral, London. Photo by Keith McMillan. © Yoko Ono.



17.3

Yoko Ono and John Lennon, *Danger Box/Build Around It* 1968, 1969. Perspex coin holder with embossed printing. 6.35 x 6.35 x .8 cm. Published by Bag Productions. © Yoko Ono.

The Arts Lab Exhibition in the Press

What exactly happened at Arts Lab that late May and early June of 1968 has been described with seeming authority on a variety of web sites in recent years. In 2005, the online art dealer Heart Fine Art, offered for sale *Build Around It/Danger Box*, issued as a multiple in 1969 (fig. 17.3). The piece takes a typically Fluxist format, repurposing a small plastic coin holder (intended to display a rare coin) along with another plastic piece that fits around it, each embossed with one of the two titles: Lennon's *Build Around It* and Ono's *Danger Box*, but fitted together as a single piece. To enhance the item for sale, the dealer *incorrectly* claims that it is a rare work that was originally available for sale in the *Four Thoughts* exhibition, explaining: "The first public collaboration between the Beatle and Ono, a show that was quickly organized after the relative failure of Ono's *Water Show*, which closed immediately before. The box was displayed as one of a number of 'for sale' objects in *Four Thoughts* held in the Arts Lab from June 2nd–9th 1968."⁴ Another seller on eBay later that same year was found offering one half of the multiple, listing it as *Danger Box* (lacking another half, *Build Around It*), with much the same story, most likely lifted from the Heart Fine Art listing earlier that year. The eBay seller, however, after repeating the story of the follow-up show to a "failed" *Water Show*, asserts "Sotheby's verification."⁵ The problem of these "sales listing" is threefold. First, there was no *Water Show*, "failed" or otherwise, as explained below. Second, there was no multiple of

GALLERY:

Tuesday May 28th FOUR THOUGHTS - Yoko Ono with John Lennon.
Tuesday 11th June FILM EXHIBITION - contributors: Tony Scott, Tony Sloman, Malcolm Legrice, David Curtis, John Collins, Raymond Selfe.
Saturday 15th June MASKS - (please make one - any sort - and bring it along)
Saturday 22nd June Jeff Nuttall and John MacCarthy.

COMING SOON: Reg Beach and Nick Riddihaugh phenomena.
 Vivian Sunder paintings.

17.4

“End of May Alteration” section, from *Arts Laboratory Schedule for May and June 1968*. Mimeographed handout. Courtesy of Biddy Peppin and David Curtis.

Build Around It/Danger Box for sale at Arts Lab in 1968; it could not have existed at this date, given that Ono and Lennon had just gotten together. Third, the multiple was produced/distributed by Bag Productions, a company that was not established by Ono and Lennon until 1969 and was thus listed in the 1970 exhibition catalogue *Three [to Infinity]: New Multiple Art*, published by the Arts Council of Great Britain for the Whitechapel Arts Gallery.

Despite a host of documents, both contemporary and retrospective, that offer brief snippets of information about the Arts Lab exhibition(s), exactly what was shown—and who was showing—remain largely a mystery. The *IT* listings that *Yoko Ono Water Show* was followed by *John Lennon and Yoko Ono: Four Thoughts*—both ostensibly at Arts Lab—are contradicted by a mimeographed *Arts Lab Program for May and June of 1968*, which announces, in the “End of May Alterations” section, that the exhibition scheduled to open on May 28 is *FOUR THOUGHTS—Yoko Ono with John Lennon* (fig. 17.4).⁶ The earliest event change listed in this addenda section is for May 24, so the document precedes the putative “failed” *Water Show*, which *IT* previously listed as opening on May 28. In other words, the *Yoko Ono Water Show* evidently did not happen, or it appears to have “failed” to happen, so to speak.

Curiously, *Four Thoughts* seems to have generated little press attention for what should have been a highly newsworthy event. As mentioned above, Ono was already an art celebrity in London for her *Film No. 4 (Bottoms)*, among other things, and Lennon was at the height of his fame and creative powers. The exhibition, however, took place in May 1968. On the day following the opening of the exhibition, the French President Charles DeGaulle left Paris, returning a day later to dissolve the National Assembly and the threat of revolution along with it. For Lennon and Ono, it was exactly during this period (on May 30, specifically) that they began recording *Revolution 1* and *Revolution 9* at Abbey Road Studios. The world press, it seems, had more pressing matters to attend to than their exhibition.

On June 2, 1968, *The Observer of London* ran a brief review of *Four Thoughts* titled “Sculpture?” with a heading that seemed to indicate that the exhibition was being treated as Lennon’s exhibition:

John Lennon: The Beatle's first piece of art work. In a show otherwise given over to the bland Oriental offerings of Yoko Ono, a Japanese lady who made the famous "multi-bottoms" film, Lennon produced a long low white wood plinth with two slats of wood angled upon it, encrusted with white, broken, plastic beakers and two porcelain doorknobs. Called *Build Around*, spectator participation is invited, an offer rapidly being taken up—empty Coke bottles and cups appear like magic. The work is accompanied by a handout in the form of a questionnaire, answers already filled up by Lennon. "What do you appreciate most in your friends?" Admiration. "What is your dream of happiness?" Black knickers.⁷

That, unfortunately, is the sum total of the review, other than the customary information on dates, location, and admission fees.

The *Four Thoughts* exhibition is absent from almost all histories of Lennon and Ono—or of Ono's art—until 2000, when the art historian Reiko Tomii and I found *The Observer* clipping while researching the chronology for *YES Yoko Ono*, a retrospective curated by Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks. We also found the *IT* listings. The resulting entry in "Chronology" in the accompanying exhibition catalogue appears to be the source of the somewhat embellished stories that appear in the sale listings for the related multiple.⁸

Other than the *IT* listings and *The Observer* review however, little has emerged about *Four Thoughts* in terms of contemporary documentation. A few months after the fact, Anthony Fawcett, John and Yoko's personal assistant in 1968–1970, contributed a story on the "meaning of John and Yoko" to *Petticoat* magazine, published in London, which included a brief mention of *Four Thoughts*:

The relationship developed slowly and it was May of this year when they finally shared an exhibition at the Arts Laboratory in London. The show was really Yoko's with John as the "guest artist." Their sculptures were made out of wooden objects and random materials, deliberately unfinished because spectators were asked to make their own additions. The exhibition was not really successful maybe because the objects became lost or damaged in the general Arts Lab chaos. The opening night was very quiet and many of the crowd did not even recognize John as he sat casually on the stairs.⁹

Another piece of archival evidence confirms that the exhibition that opened at the end of May 1968 at Arts Lab was a joint exhibition. Later that summer, on August 24, the couple appeared as guests on the television show *Frost on Saturday*. During the program, Ono tells host David Frost that Lennon proposed that she make a piece with the front panel from a wooden drawer, asking people to add to it, calling it *Build Around It*. Handing Frost the piece, she says, "This is by John." Ono explained to Frost, "So I said, 'That's your piece, so why don't we do a group show?' I was just going to do a one-woman show, so I asked John to participate in that."¹⁰



17.5

Ono and Lennon, with Lennon's *Build Around It*. In 17.5 Lennon's *Build Around It* is visible in the foreground, with a broken plate (right) possibly a version of Ono's *Mend Piece*. Photographs by Jane Bown on June 11, 1968 and published in *The Observer*, June 16, 1968. Courtesy of The Observer (London).



17.6

The October 1968 issue of *Beatles Book Monthly* also references an exhibition at Arts Lab in a story about the Frost show: “And then there was the exhibit called *Built Around* which John and Yoko put on show at London’s Arts Laboratory a few months ago. It consisted of a wood base with chunks of broken plastic and porcelain to which visitors were invited to add. They did, too—all sorts of things from biscuit wrappings and tin cans to Coke bottles and brooches!”¹¹ Even at the time, in the months between May and October of 1968, there was apparent confusion about not only what was *in* the exhibition, but what the titles of the included works and the exhibition itself were. The *Beatles Monthly* author, for example, attributes Lennon’s piece to both artists, and incorrectly titles it *Built Around*.

A Photograph as a Clue

Noteworthy in such an excruciating dearth of hard information about the Arts Lab exhibition is an ambiguously captioned photograph of Ono and Lennon, published by *The Observer*, a few weeks after their rather curt review of the exhibition (fig. 17.5). The image, in which Lennon’s *Build Around It* is clearly visible, is accompanied by a notice about the Coventry show, *John by Yoko, Yoko by John*, which opened on June 15, 1968. Assuming that the image was taken at the *Four Thoughts* opening, I contacted the photographer Jane Bown through *The Observer* to ask about her recollection of the show. She provided several other photos from the same shoot (fig. 17.6) and, through Gareth James, her editor at *The Observer*, shared her memories. James reported: “I’ve spoken to Jane about this shoot and her recollections are rather patchy. She’s pretty sure that she was the only photographer there—whether others attended later she cannot say.... She remembers that Lennon and Ono were lovely and relaxed.”¹²

Within days of this exchange with Bown and James, I managed to contact the curators of the *Four Thoughts* exhibition at Arts Lab, Bidy Peppin and Pam Zoline, in my search for documents and photographs from the exhibition. I sent them all of the photographs I had collected along with the excerpt from Ono's *Memories of John Lennon* (2005).¹³ Peppin kindly annotated Ono's recollections. Her annotations are a valuable first-person account and parts of them are rendered below in italics, in relation to the relevant passages by Ono.

"Paper Cups" (by Yoko Ono Lennon)

In 1968, John and I decided to go to the opening of the Arts Lab, a gathering place for art students and cutting edge artists in London.

Peppin: Yoko's initial contact was with Jim Haynes; then Pam and I met up with her at the Arts Lab to discuss things. We were delighted that she wanted to show at the Arts Lab, even more so because it would be with John. However she refused to divulge the form that the exhibition would take, while insisting that the works be shown anonymously.

John went to the machine and got two coffees in paper cups and led me to the staircase.

John and I could hardly drink our coffee. People kept going up and down the narrow stairs shouting "Excuse me, excuse me." Each time, we had to stand up and make way for them. It was intense watching what was going on in the party down there too.

Peppin: We didn't have openings as such (apart from one—Takis' "Signals," organised by Takis himself). The gallery also functioned as a passage, meeting place and sometimes coffee bar or bookshop, and all the other spaces—the theater, cinema and restaurant—led off it. By night there were lots of people passing through, and sitting on the floor.

Some people were about to bump into my sculpture, which was placed on the floor without a stand. The work was a very special version of *Mend Piece*—a group of sculptural pieces impossible to put together—a mend piece which can't be mended. It gave me a laugh when I came up with the idea. But now it was not so funny.

"At least they should put a rope around it or something," I muttered. John, noticing my worry, took my hand and said, "You know, when the going is rough, we keep our chins up. That's what we do." This was the first time it was shown to us that together, we were NOT SO POPULAR! Indeed. However, as John said in "WONSAPONATIME," "Being in love they cloong [sic] even the more together man."

Peppin: No, it had nothing to do with popularity, or the lack of it. But there was a problem. The objects arrived on the day that the show was due to start (delivered by someone else—not Yoko herself). There had been no prior discussion about what the works consisted of or how they should be displayed—we only knew that they were to be shown anonymously.¹⁴ If there had been any discussion we could have worked out a good way of displaying them. There was a wonderful guy at the Arts Lab called Craig Gibson who could make almost anything out of wood. John and Yoko could have consulted him, and he could have built stands or whatever, she would have been part of the discussion about where things were to be placed, and [Ono] would have paid for the materials (the gallery did not have a budget for shows). In any event, the works arrived too late to do anything; the show looked awful and the ideas were lost.

We obviously didn't make it clear enough to Yoko that what the Arts Lab offered was a space for artists to use (Pam and I acted as gatekeepers) but not a gallery in the conventional sense. It was the wrong place for that particular exhibition. It needed a pristine, properly equipped, dedicated art gallery....

Normally artists explained exactly what they were going to do, and we'd then discuss the proposal and decide if the work was likely to work effectively in the Arts Lab environment. Yoko had already staged interactive and performance pieces in informal venues (such as the 14-Hour Technicolour Dream), so even though she was not prepared to give any indication of what she and John were planning, we were delighted to offer her the space. It was a shock when the exhibits arrived, and we discovered that we were expected somehow to turn them into a show.

Since then there were many times we had to keep our chins up. It was harder when I had to take the brunt of the attack after John's passing. But I always remembered what John had said in the Arts Lab that evening, and kept my chin up through the storms.

Peppin: We had two meetings with Yoko (John was at the second, but Pam might not have been); she was focused on her own agenda and was not going to share her plans. In hindsight, I should have recognized that she was unaware that artists had to mount their shows themselves. (Most enjoyed taking ownership of their exhibitions by this means.) It was due to this fundamental misunderstanding.

Based on Peppin's account, it seems there was not actually a proper opening for *Four Thoughts*, an odd situation for Ono, who was used to a more formal gallery scene, having held shows at London's Indica Gallery and Lisson Gallery in the previous two years. Peppin was also adamant that the exhibition was the joint show *Four Thoughts*, and could not explain the *IT* listing for the solo *Water Show*. The mystery of how the listing for *Water Show* appeared at all remains. In early conversations at the time of the *YES Yoko Ono* research, Ono seemed to recall *Water Show*, so it appears to have been at

least planned. From the archival evidence thus far discovered however, nothing supports its actual implementation at Arts Lab in May of 1968. Ono's 1971 Everson Museum exhibition did feature a participatory *Water Event*, however. And as with other works by the artist, *Water* pieces or events both preceded and postdated the Arts Lab exhibition in multiple iterations and formats.

In May 2007, I visited Pippin and David Curtis, both of whom had worked at Arts Lab in London during and around the period of the *Four Thoughts* exhibition. They kindly dug up the mimeographed May 1968 schedule and gave me a copy. We also walked over to the building that housed this particular incarnation of Arts Lab (one of a few different physical locations for the organization over the course of its existence) when *Four Thoughts* was presented. Pippin disputed the attribution of Arts Lab as the location of Bown's photographs. Certainly, no sign of "paper cups"—an accoutrement of a gallery opening alluded to in Ono's title above—let alone the gallery visitors, is visible in any of her shots.

It is clear, nonetheless, that the photographs were taken sometime between May 28 and June 15. Namely, between the openings of their two joint shows—*Four Thoughts* at Arts Lab and *Acorn Event (John by Yoko/Yoko by John)* at Coventry Cathedral—through which Lennon and Ono in effect made their public announcement as a couple. No photographer would have thought of photographing them together before the former, and Bown's photo accompanies the notice for the latter. Two more pieces of information helped me make an informed speculation.

In the course of my correspondence with archivists at *The Observer*, my original contact, Garreth James, passed along my query to a colleague working on the Bown photographs; this colleague, informed me that "the archivist at Apple [the Beatles Company] thinks the photograph was taken at the Savile Row Apple HQ."¹⁵ Since Bown photographed Lennon and Ono before June 15, the photographs must have been taken at Apple's Wigmore Street Headquarters, from which the offices were later moved to Savile Row (purchased on June 22, 1968) in July 1968. In the process of securing publishing rights for the photographs for this article, I received from *The Observer* a full set of contact sheets of Lennon and Ono bearing the date of June 11, 1968, two days after the exhibition's closing.¹⁶ It is therefore now safe to assume that Bown shot these photographs on this date. Given the photograph's inclusion of Lennon's *Build Around It*, known definitively to have been included in the *Four Thoughts* exhibition, I initially assumed it to be of the opening. Based on the dating of the contact sheets, the generosity of *The Observer's* archivist in sharing the newspaper's own research, and comparisons with photos of Apple's Wigmore Street Headquarters, it seems almost certain, however, that the photos were taken at Apple on June 11, 1968. Given that this was only two days after the exhibition's official closing—and that the photos include Lennon's piece—it seems probable that the other object is Ono's.

What *Exactly* Was Shown in *Four Thoughts*?

Given the evidence available, I will speculate that *Four Thoughts* consisted of Lennon's *Build Around It* and a *Mend Piece* by Ono. To describe *Mend Piece* as "bland Oriental offerings," as the *The Observer* characterized Ono's work, seems peculiar, even by standards of the day. Typical iterations of *Mend Piece* involve broken crockery that viewers are invited to reassemble with glue and other materials—some practical and some, like string, not practical at all. "Bland" seems a strange characterization, as does "Oriental." *The Observer* notes that Lennon's piece was accompanied by a questionnaire already filled out by Lennon: "What do you appreciate most in your friends?' 'Admiration.' 'What is your dream of happiness?' 'Black knickers.'" *Mend Piece, Build Around It*, and a questionnaire (three works) seem somehow one piece short of *Four Thoughts*, which leads me to further speculate that Ono may have shown another piece as well. Of course, we have to remember that with Ono, "numbers" are not always accurate: Ono had exhibited her *Three Spoons* (1967), the previous year with *four spoons* in the piece, so perhaps our "inventory" is complete.

Ono only recalls that the exhibition featured (a single iteration of) *Mend Piece* (per her article in *Memories of John Lennon*, cited above). Were this to have been the only work in the show however, the discussions about *Build Around It* in the (admittedly limited) media coverage at the time are hard to reconcile. Even though the press did not directly mention *Mend Piece* (this could be the work noted by *The Observer's* critic as a "bland Oriental offerings"), the press might have simply been more intrigued by Lennon's offerings. Bown's photograph (fig. 1.5), published in *The Observer*, includes a broken porcelain plate that appears to have objects attached to it. The *Beatles Book Monthly* (October 1968) describes a "wood base with chunks of broken plastic and porcelain to which visitors were invited to add"; this porcelain plate might be the porcelain described here. I suspect that, given its apparently broken condition, the plate may have been one of Ono's *Mend Pieces*. In five of Bown's 62 frames, Ono, Lennon, and an unidentified man seem to be focusing on, doing something with, or perhaps attaching things to the broken plate (figs. 17.7 and 17.8). But Ono has stated that it is not her *Mend Piece* for Arts Lab.¹⁷ One must consider the personal assistant Fawcett's assertion that "the exhibition was not really successful maybe because the objects became lost or damaged in the general Arts Lab chaos" as a likely explanation for *The Observer's* limited information. Published five days after the opening, it is likely that the reviewer visited the exhibition after the loss and damage that Fawcett describes in his *Petticoat* article.

While the political tumult of May 1968 probably contributed to the lack of comprehensive press documentation, it may also have provided inspiration. Sessions for the new Beatles album began on May 30, two days after the *Four Thoughts* opening, and they began the project with Lennon's *Revolution*. Ono was by Lennon's side in the sessions and famously worked with him on at least a version or two of the track. As detailed by the Beatles scholar Mark Lewisohn,



17.7

Ono, Lennon, and unidentified man inspecting a broken plate with attached objects, possibly with a version of Ono's *Mend Piece* on the floor. Photographs by Jane Bown on June 11, 1968 and preserved at *The Observer's* archives. Courtesy of The Observer (London).



17.8

Take 18 was different.... The last six minutes were pure chaos—the sound of a “Revolution,” if you like—with discordant instrumental jamming, plenty of feedback, John Lennon repeatedly screaming “alright” and then, simply, repeatedly screaming, with lots of on-microphone moaning by John and his new girlfriend Yoko Ono, with Yoko talking and saying such off-the-wall phrases as “you become naked” and with the overlay of miscellaneous, home-made sound effects tapes.¹⁸

Work on the various versions of the song *Revolution* continued throughout the entire run of *Four Thoughts* and beyond. In July, work began on the (faster) single version of *Revolution*, which was released at the very end of August.

Writing in the radical newspaper *Black Dwarf*, the contributor John Hoyland took Lennon to task for what he clearly considered bourgeois politics: “Now do you see what’s wrong with your record ‘Revolution’? ... In order to change the world we’ve got to understand what’s wrong with the world and then destroy it ruthlessly.... There is no such thing as a polite revolution.”¹⁹ Lennon replied with a “very open letter” to Hoyland that he demanded be published in *Black Dwarf*: “I’ll tell you what’s wrong with the world: people—so do you want to destroy them? Until you/we change our heads—there’s no chance.” And he ends his letter with a postscript: “You smash it—and I’ll build around it.”²⁰

Lennon’s *Four Thoughts* sculpture, *Build Around It*, is thus provided a context that emerged from the song(s) he and Ono were working on at that moment. And that context is consistent with Ono’s *Mend Piece* as well. As the world around them seemed to be coming apart that May of 1968, Ono and Lennon advocated for rebuilding it. This sentiment, a reflection of their shared (nascent, at this point) peace activism, surfaced in the *Frost on Saturday* program later that August. As Ono introduced Lennon’s piece, she stated:

Well, that particular one was mine, but you see, for instance, this piece here is called *Build Around It*, this is by John. You see that's why I was saying, that I have learned a lot from John because I was doing all these instruction pieces, to make people get involved in it and everything. And then he suddenly one day said, "Why don't you use this as a piece and call it '*Build Around It*,'" and it's also an instruction piece to let people do something to it, but the idea is that most art, you know, people, more sort of artists, are interested in destructive things to destroy the establishment, etc. And we never thought of something like, just keeping this as is, and building around it, the concept was so beautiful. And so I said, "Well, that's your piece, so why don't we do a group show," and I was just going to do a one-woman show then, so I asked John to participate in that.²¹

Earlier in the Frost program, Ono and the host discuss her *Mend Piece*. In this case, it is the conventional *Mend Piece* introduced in 1966 at the Indica Gallery exhibition in which she and Lennon first met: a broken porcelain teacup with a tube of glue. Participants are invited to mend the cup.

In the same program, Ono follows up her discussion of *Mend Piece* (which, like many of Ono's pieces, has been presented in multiple materials, formats, and contexts over the years) with her thoughts on art and revolution. "Basically, the artist's role in society is extremely important in the sense that... well now people are talking about revolution and things like that. Basically I don't believe in revolution. Because they say [about] revolution, if nothing happens, then you have to use violence too. And the thing is if you go on making all these rituals..., and participating in that instead of violence."²²

By then, both Ono and Lennon had already established their credentials as "peaceniks," Lennon notably with *All You Need Is Love*, in a live worldwide satellite broadcast, and Ono, for example, with her *Film No. 4 (Bottoms)* that she described in advertisements as "365 BARE BOTTOMS Strike a blow for WORLD PEACE."²³ However, the politics of May 1968 challenged all that; the summer of love, less than a year earlier, had dissipated into revolution. As Ono and Lennon recorded *Revolution* at Abbey Road, the Rolling Stones recorded *Sympathy for the Devil* across town at Olympic Studios, and Jagger claimed the mantle of the "Street Fighting Man." Ono's *Mend Piece*, a piece that cannot be mended, suggests a moment of despair. Lennon's ambivalence about whether he should be counted in or out for the revolution likewise marks a decisive moment at which the two artists choose peace in the face of massive cultural pressures to go the other way. Within a year, they would launch the first of their *Bed Ins* for peace—and soon after, their worldwide *War Is Over* billboard campaign.

In spite of all the archival evidence, in the end I am left with only my *own* thoughts about what was in the *Four Thoughts* exhibition. Not unlike the “special” *Mend Piece* that Ono describes in *Memories of John Lennon*, it seems that the puzzle pieces in the archive are “impossible to put together—a mend piece which can’t be mended.” What seems clear, nonetheless, is that at the moment of this first true collaboration Ono and Lennon’s trajectory was set on peace, not violent revolution.

Notes

1. “What’s Happening,” *International Times*, May 17–31, 1968.
2. Lennon, in Jann S. Wenner, *Lennon Remembers* (Verso: London, 2000): 39.
3. “John and Yoko Plant Acorns for Peace at Coventry Cathedral,” *The Beatles Bible*, <http://www.beatlesbible.com/1968/06/15/john-lennon-yoko-ono-plant-acorns-peace-coventry-cathedral/> (accessed: March 4, 2017).
4. Heart Fine Art, as reposted by Fluxlist, May 16, 2005, <https://www.mail-archive.com/fluxlist@scribble.com/msg18912.html> (accessed: on February 6, 2015).
5. “Danger Box: Ono, Yoko and Lennon, John 1968 Fluxus,” eBay listing 7374616937, December 11–18, 2005 (accessed on January 6, 2006; no longer available as of writing). The reference to the “failed Water Show” is repeated in another listing of the multiple offered by BeatBooks.com in December 2005.
6. This program was kindly provided to me by Bidy Peppin, curator of Arts Laboratory at the time of the exhibition, during a visit on May 22, 2007.
7. Anonymous, “Sculpture?,” *The Observer* (London), June 2, 1968.
8. Reiko Tomii and Kevin Concannon, “Chronology,” in *YES Yoko Ono* (New York: Abrams, 2000), 315.
9. Anthony Fawcett, “You Too Can Blow Up a White Balloon,” *Petticoat* (October 26, 1968).
10. Yoko Ono, on *Frost on Saturday*, August 24, 1968.
11. Frederick James, “John and Yoko Talk About Art and Vibrations,” *Beatles Book Monthly* (October 1968), 23.
12. Gareth James on behalf of Jane Bown, e-mail to the author, March 21, 2007. More recently, in March of 2015, *The Observer’s* archivist provided the contact sheets from this shoot with a date of June 11, 1968, two days following the exhibition’s closing.
13. Yoko Ono, “Paper Cups,” in *Memories of John Lennon* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 301–2.
14. The request for anonymity seems odd given that the “end of May alterations” lists Ono and Lennon and was presumably freely available by May 24 at the latest. Official chronologies of The Beatles mark May 20 as the beginning of Ono and Lennon’s romantic relationship. If the plan for a joint show was hatched in this context, that would leave only three days for the new plan—and only a week for the meetings Peppin describes. It is also possible that the “alteration” was a change from a scheduled solo *Water Show* to the joint *Four Thoughts*.
15. In his email to the author, January 21, 2008, Robin Silas Christian, archives assistant at *The Observer*, indicated that the archivist at Apple thinks it is most likely the photograph was taken at the Savile Row Apple headquarters.
16. In March 2015, I obtained two contact sheets with 62 frames from this shoot from the archives of *The Observer*.
17. Ono, in her email to the author, March 16, 2015, states that the objects in the photos I sent for review (including fig. 5) had “nothing to do with it.”
18. Mark Lewisohn, *The Complete Beatles Recording Sessions* (New York: Sterling, 1988), 135.
19. John Hoyland, “An Open Letter to John Lennon,” *Black Dwarf* (October 27, 1968). The episode is recounted in Leo Burley, “Jagger vs. Lennon: London’s Riots of 1968 Provided the Backdrop to a Rock’n’roll Battle Royale,” *The Independent*, March 9, 2008: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/jagger-vs-lennon-londons-riots-of-1968-provided-the-backdrop-to-a-rocknroll-battle-royale-792450.html> (accessed: May 15, 2015).
20. John Lennon, “A Very Open Letter to John Hoyland from John Lennon,”

Black Dwarf (January 10, 1969).

21.

Yoko Ono, on *Frost on Saturday*,
August 24, 1968.

22.

Ibid.

23.

Advertisement (clipping) for *No*.

4 (*Bottoms*) from an unidentified
periodical in the artist's archives,
probably July or August 1967.