

**Click here to view
current issues**
on the Chicago Journals website.



Space/Time

Author(s): Nikos Papastergiadis

Source: *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, Spring/Summer 2016, Vol. 41 (Spring/Summer 2016), pp. 126–135

Published by: The University of Chicago Press on behalf of Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26558046>

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26558046?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

The University of Chicago Press and Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry



On Kawara, *I Went*, 1968–79, clothbound loose-leaf binders with plastic sleeves and inserted printed matter, 12 volumes, 4740 pages total, produced and published in 2007 by mfc-michèle didier. Inserts: ink on photocopy, 27.9 × 20.3cm each, detail. © and courtesy The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York and Michèle Didier

Space/Time: Matter and Motion in On Kawara

– Nikos Papastergiadis

For these people, the natural world was not an object suitable for experiment, analysis and exploitation. It was not an object at all. It was alive with certain mysteries and powerful forces, and man's life still possessed a richness and a dignity which came from his sense of participation in the movement of these forces.

— Philip Sherrard, 1956¹

The end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 60s were a decisive period in On Kawara's life and work. It was then that he began his lifelong project of travel and turned toward what he called 'primordial'² forms of image-making, articulated through direct communication systems and sustained over considerable periods of time. This was also a time when new theories of worldliness were being developed in France, when the ideas of progress and enlightenment that were the foundations of the modern consciousness were being challenged. The scope of the civilisational shift can be measured by the epigraph to this essay, drawn from critic Philip Sherrard's contemporaneous commentary on Greek

modernist literature. At one level, Sherrard simply notes the continuities of belief in the cosmos that are from the time of Pythagoras, infuse the lifeworld of the peasant and stretch into the imagery of modern poets. At the same time, however, these prefatory words also register a lament for the loss of

the cosmos in our modern world. They denounce the advances of science that have stripped away the superstitions of the past and, in de-sacralising life, have objectified the world, turning it into a resource whose value is only expressed in commodity terms. While On Kawara is only a generation apart from Sherrard, there is a distinct break in their historical consciousness: over the next five decades, On Kawara would develop a practice that revealed a new twist in the nexus between philosophical meaning, aesthetic perception and the movements of the cosmos.

On Kawara travelled widely and was fascinated by daily news events. His famous *Date Paintings* (1966–2013) were made in over a hundred cities. In 1973 alone he dispatched *I Got Up* (1968–79) postcards from 28 cities. Travel was never an interruption but a constitutive element in his artworks, which can be seen as documents that both punctuate the flow of time and trace the trajectories of his journeys. Throughout On Kawara's work there is a paradoxical focus: one that zooms in on everyday activities, and another that zooms out towards the fundamental meaning of time and place. Yet there is no overt reference to reinstating a spiritual connection to nature in his work; rather, he admitted to a deep fascination with science.³ In particular, he was interested in how the recent discoveries on the relationship between matter and motion were interconnected with a transformation in our understanding of consciousness. This brings us to one of the great paradoxes in the history of thought. Whereas in the age of the Enlightenment it was science that stripped the world of mystery, it is through contemporary science that we are re-discovering the enigmatic interplay between consciousness and the movement of cosmic forces. In this essay, I will argue that the aesthetic order – the cosmos – that arises from On Kawara's practice depends on an attunement to the priority and endlessness of motion.

1 Philip Sherrard, *The Marble Threshing Floor: Studies in Modern Greek Poetry* (1956), Athens: Denise Harvey, 1980, p.128.

2 See Jonathan Watkins, 'Survey: Where "I Don't Know" is the Right Answer', in *On Kawara* (ed. J. Watkins and Rene Denizot), London: Phaidon, 2002, pp.40–109.

3 See 'Tribute: Testimonies and Reflections on On Kawara', in *On Kawara*, *op. cit.*, p.15.

Matter

The materiality of the object is banal – ordinary postcards and corner-shop maps. On Kawara used tourist postcards to announce his daily awakening: *I Got Up*. He made lists of his meetings with people: *I Met* (1968–79). He read and clipped items from the newspaper: *I Read* (1966–95). He traced his daily journeys onto photocopied local maps: *I Went* (1968–79). All these series of works are deeply interrelated. However, to discuss the concept of movement in his work, I will focus on *I Went*. In this body of work, On Kawara used a red ballpoint pen to indicate the origin, direction and destination of travel. A red dot marks the location where his day began; on days when he stayed at home, it is the sole mark on the map. The method by which each map is marked and the size at which it is cropped are consistent. On Kawara stamped each map with the date.

These gestures invite reflection and speculation on the relationship between a functional purpose and a metaphysical proposition. How to approach this radiant task? In art criticism there are three commonplace roles – promoter, detective and surveyor – that each lead in a different direction. For instance, it is tempting to adopt a simple inversion of the rule that technical effort plus material cost equals surplus value, and to celebrate the value of On Kawara's minimalist gestures by claiming that the austerity of their execution is proportionate to the depth of symbolic meaning. Similarly, we can begin an investigation into the appearance of a seemingly ordinary surface in order to unveil the myriad possibilities hidden beneath it. Finally, there is the challenge of connecting the iconic symbol to its cultural context.

I will suggest another path, one that oscillates between recalling details of On Kawara's work and reflecting on ideas that he held in common with other philosophers and thinkers of his time. I will begin with a contemplation of the marks made on the maps: What are they doing? Then I will ask: Where are they pointing? This dual mode of attention zooms in on the matter at hand, and zooms out to show an open horizon. Throughout On Kawara's practice there is both a discrete object that refers to a specific incident, and the acknowledgement of wider spheres of possibility. Hence, an approach that starts by contemplating the abstract relation of the part to the whole is justified on two grounds.

First, there is the paradox of presence. The work is constituted in and presents a response to motion. However, it announces its own form by means of a cut, an inscription, a suspension; and, through this sequence of activity, it furnishes a shape.⁴ It is about motion, but it creates meaning through a material form and a symbolic gesture. Each part is assembled to fit into, or rather, intimate, a near infinite order, and to point to an overarching structure.

Second, there is the enigma of embodiment. All his works are announced in the first person and yet the body of the artist is nowhere to be seen; in all his monographs and catalogues there is not a single interview or portrait.⁵ The works remain to symbolically register his material tracks in this world. They provide precise records of the time he got up, the places he went, the people he met, as well as the date and language in which this occurred. But these are only incidental details – we know nothing of what motivated his movements or their emotional impact.

The formal and metaphysical paradoxes are also evident in the anecdotal accounts of On Kawara's outlook and disposition. While he was nowhere to be seen during art events, the postcards and telegrams that he sent were mostly to critics and curators. He frequently met with fellow artists. Dan Graham described On Kawara not as a hermit, but as an engaging friend with an encyclopaedic knowledge and an enchanting belief in 'world culture'. On Kawara's hope for institutions like the United Nations was underscored by his preference for using 'UN stamps and the UN Post Office'.⁶ This worldly sense of identity stands in stark contrast to his incessant engagement with the material production of impersonal systems of communication.

Motion

When invited to select an essay to accompany his 2002 Phaidon monograph, On Kawara chose an article by the anaesthetist Stuart Hameroff and the renowned physicist Roger Penrose that explores the human capacity for creativity and the relationship between consciousness and the cosmos.⁷ The authors adopt Alfred North Whitehead's proposition that the universe is

4 See Joan Kee, 'Uncommon Knowledge: The Art of On Kawara', *Artforum*, vol.53, no.5, January 2015, pp.170–77.

5 See 'Tribute: Testimonies and Reflections on On Kawara', in *On Kawara, op. cit.*, 2002, p.8. Seung-duk Kim has recalled one occasion in which On Kawara agreed to an interview, but when the interviewers arrived at the meeting place 'all they found was a cigarette smouldering in an ashtray'. *Ibid.*, p.26.

6 *Ibid.*, pp.24–25.



On Kawara, *I Got Up*, 1968–79, stamped ink on postcards, dimensions variable, detail. © and courtesy The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

comprised of ‘occasions of experience’, then proceed to consider whether the ‘oscillation’ and ‘attunement’ of the tiny supramolecular operations in the mind may provide a site for the quantum world. It is significant that here ‘attunement’, a musical metaphor first used in antiquity, serves as the key to open the connection between the human capacity to produce a stream of consciousness and the wider forces of cosmic motion.

Could On Kawara’s attraction to these scientists’ challenge to the mind/matter binary have been motivated by a deeper recognition that new physics amounted to the emergence of a kindred articulation of cosmological language? Might he have been inviting us to peer into the cosmos through the markings on his maps? After all, is the sensation of reading a marked map not akin to staring at the night sky? On Kawara’s maps double as mirrors that bring forth both terrestrial earth and celestial sky into the same imaginary frame. The maps, like the *Date Paintings*, are not temporal or spatial records of a creative journey, but stations at which there is the incidence, the taking-place, of creation.

Before continuing on this metaphysical exploration, however, it is necessary to conduct some preliminary clearing activities. A crucial distinction needs to be made about the frame that surrounds On Kawara’s practice: I will argue that it is worldly but not global.

Globalisation refers to a programme of integration and unification. In a globalising world, everything ultimately becomes the same. Standardisation brings efficiency and greater connectivity not just in commercial transactions, but also in the delineation of cultural values and political rights. In this singular organisational regime, everything flows through the continuous temporal cycle of the 24-hour city, work and life without breaks; and a uniform language is imposed on all places, so that one place merges with another. The space of the globe (rather than world) becomes a continuous and smooth surface where all relations between past and future, near and far, foreign and familiar, have to submit to the regime of integration.

On Kawara’s incessant announcements, recordings and especially the traces he left on maps forebode this nightmarish globalising utopia. But his rejection of globalisation is not a withdrawal from the world. On the contrary, I see On Kawara’s practice as a worldly activity,

7 Stuart Hameroff and Roger Penrose, ‘Conscious Events as Orchestrated Space-Time Selections, 1996’, in *On Kawara, op. cit.*, pp. 120–27.

65 B (8) OCT 23 1969

**POLICE IN MONTREAL
END WAGE DISPUTE**
OCT. 24, 1969

MONTREAL, Oct. 23 (Canadian Press)—The city administration reached agreement today with its police and firemen on the terms of new contracts, bringing an end to a dispute that resulted in a 16-hour walkout by the two forces Oct. 7. *N.Y. TIMES.*

Lucien Saulnier, chairman of the city's executive committee, said the agreement provided for an increase of \$1,450 in the salary of a first-class police constable, who now earns \$7,300 a year.

An arbitration board had awarded the policemen a \$1,100 increase. The 3,700 city policemen found the ruling unacceptable and left their posts along with most of the city's 2,400 firemen, clearing the way for a night of mob violence, arson, vandalism and looting, during which a provincial police officer was killed.

First-class firemen will receive \$8,320, an increase of \$1,370. An arbitration board had awarded them a \$1,000 increase.

Mr. Saulnier said the agreements gave the policemen the parity they had sought with their Toronto counterparts, based on the standards of living of the two cities.



Impact
Bert Lahr, at left, and E. G. Marshall in the 1956 Broadway production of Samuel Beckett's play "Waiting for Godot."

Beckett Wins Nobel for Literature
OCT. 24, 1969 N.Y. TIMES

By JOHN M. LEE

Special to The New York Times

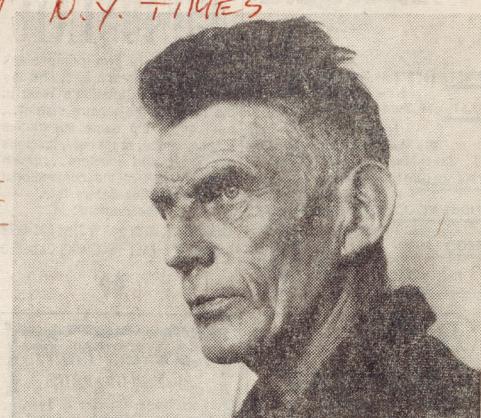
STOCKHOLM, Oct. 23—

Samuel Beckett, the avant-garde writer acclaimed for his plays and novels of loneliness, despair and human degradation, was announced today as the winner of the 1969 Nobel Prize in Literature.

The selection committee, comprising members of the Swedish Academy, cited him "for his writing, which—in new forms for the novel and drama—in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation."

Mr. Beckett, who was born in Dublin 63 years ago, now lives in Paris, is best known for his play "Waiting for Godot," published in 1952, which evoked the futility of modern life.

Mr. Beckett could not be reached for comment on the prize. He was reported by his Paris publisher to be out



Samuel Beckett

Louff Ozkok

of touch in Tunisia, and Nobel officials were unable to say whether he had received word of the award.

There was conjecture here that Mr. Beckett would refuse to come to Stockholm

to accept the award, as is customary, at formal ceremonies on Dec. 10. The Nobel laureate in literature has traditionally addressed the

Continued on Page 32, Column 3

so much as an interview. Jean-Paul Sartre, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954, declined the award.

This year, the prize carries a cash award of about \$73,000.

There are five Nobel Prizes established under the will of Alfred Nobel, the Swede who invented dynamite, and a sixth prize established in economics through a grant by the Bank of Sweden. The first economics prize is to be announced on Monday.

Last week, three United States scientists were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for their discoveries concerning viruses and viral diseases. On Monday, the International Labor Organization won the Nobel Peace Prize. Prizes for chemistry and physics will be announced next Thursday.

Yeats and Shaw Cited

It was not immediately clear whether Mr. Beckett should be regarded as an Irish or a French winner, although Nobel officials recognize the country of work and residence. Mr. Beckett has lived in Paris since 1937, and he has written mostly in French.

The only Irish Nobel win-

the grotesque and of tragic farce, can be said to be a negativism that knows no haven."

But, using a photographic analogy, Dr. Gierow said that when a negative was printed, it produced "a positive, a clarification, with the black proving to be the light of day, the parts in deepest shade, those which reflect the light sources."

The academy official continued: "The perception of human degradation is not possible if human values are denied. This is the source of inner cleansing, the life force in spite of everything, in Beckett's pessimism."

Praising Mr. Beckett for "a love of mankind that grows in understanding as it plumbs further into the depths of abhorrence," Dr. Gierow concluded rhapsodically:

"From that position, in the realms of annihilation, the writing of Samuel Beckett rises like a miserere from all mankind, its muffled minor key sounding liberation to the oppressed and comfort to those in need."

His Own Translator

The award covered Mr. Beckett's novels as well as his plays. He was a novelist

On Kawara, *I Read, 1966–95*, newspaper pasted on paper with ink additions, 27.9 x 21.6cm each, detail. © and courtesy The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York

or a form of *mondialisation*, a term developed by Kostas Axelos during his editorship of the left-wing journal *Arguments* from 1958 to 1962,⁸ and now more widely known through the work of Jean-Luc Nancy.⁹ At the time, *Arguments* was not only responding to the global spread of social processes, ethical issues and economic structures, but also proposing to rethink the link between the world and creativity.¹⁰ Axelos's conception of mondialisation prefigured the critiques of globalisation that, in the Anglophone world, only began to come to the surface in the late 1990s. Axelos and the contributors to *Arguments* claimed that the phenomenon of global integration was preceded by an imaginary process of 'becoming worldly'. The economic structure could only happen because it had already occurred in thought. The process of worldliness announced itself primarily as a form of play, a relation with others.¹¹

In the same year that Axelos joined *Arguments*, Roger Caillois published his highly influential book on the significance of play in human consciousness and creativity.¹² Caillois claimed that games should not be dismissed as a mere transitional phase in a child's development; rather, they constitute the fundamental activity through which innovation occurs. He went on to argue that play was the vital tool for the conceptual mapping of our sense of being in the world. Much later, Jacques Derrida was to pick up this thread that passes from Axelos and Caillois; he would emphatically state in 1967: 'It is the game of the world that must be first thought'.¹³

It may also come as a wonderful non-surprise that On Kawara financed his travels from his winnings in the game of mah-jong. Like Marcel Duchamp, he loved chess and was captivated by roulette.¹⁴ Caillois's and Axelos's sociological and philosophical observations on games can also shed light on On Kawara's artistic methodology, which has often been described as Sisyphean for its blunt acceptance of futility combined with the joyful will to start again. Similarly, Caillois noted that games encourage both an impulsive and improvisational form of play that he defined as *paidia* and a more inquisitorial and skilled form of ingenuity that he termed *ludus*. However, he also stressed the *agon* of the game, the sense that the perpetual entanglement of the participants overrides any passing outcome: 'At the end of the game, all can and must start over again at the same point. Nothing has been harvested or manufactured, no masterpiece has been created, no capital has accrued.'¹⁵ In each game, and in each day, there is enough, 'one day contains everything'.¹⁶

On Kawara's *Date Paintings* were also executed within the confines of a set of rules that resemble a game: each painting had to be finished on the day that it was begun and those that were not completed by midnight had to be destroyed. It is as if the currency of each painting was confined to a temporal and spatial boundary. In a game, the relationship between place and people is sustained through a reciprocal tension. This relational consciousness has profound affinities with the sensibility articulated by On Kawara. In both instances, we see a positioning that is neither external to the physical condition nor utterly immersed in the world; spatio-temporal relations are delicately poised between the inside and the outside. The near infinite systems developed by On Kawara can thus find resonance with Axelos's claim that 'the human is the great partner of the play of the world, yet the human is not only the player, but is equally the "outplayed", the plaything'.¹⁷

8 See Kostas Axelos and Sally Hess, 'Planetary interlude', *Yale French Studies*, no.41, pp.6–18, 1968; and Stuart Eeden, 'Introducing Kostas Axelos and "the World"', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol.24, 2006, pp.639–42.

9 See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization* (trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew), Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.

10 On Kawara moved back and forth between Paris and New York between 1962 and 1964, and I wonder if at some point he picked up a copy of *Arguments* from the Boulevard Saint-Michel.

11 The historical references to Axelos and *Arguments* are from S. Eeden, 'Kostas Axelos and the World of the Arguments Circle', in Julian Bourg (ed.), *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004, pp.125–48.

12 See Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* (1958, trans. Meyer Barash), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

13 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984, p.50. This is a reference to Axelos's *Vers la pensée planétaire: Le devenir-pensée du monde et le devenir-monde de la pensée* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1964), which in turn is a response to both Martin Heidegger's concept of worlding and the fragment from Heraclitus in which he declared that *aion* (time, but also the world, the cosmos) is 'like a child playing a game'. (I am in debt to Stuart Eeden for this little journey in the history of thought.)

14 Conversation with Jeffrey Weiss, 30 March 2015. Weiss recently curated 'Silence: On Kawara', Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 6 February–3 May 2015.

15 R. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, *op. cit.*, p.6.

16 Jason Farago, 'On Kawara: Silence review – bringing cosmic time to a human scale', *The Guardian*, 6 February 2015, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/feb/06/on-kawara-silence-review-date-paintings> (last accessed on 2 December 2015).

17 K. Axelos, quoted in S. Eeden, 'Introducing Kostas Axelos and "the World"', *op. cit.*, p.134.

As Jeffrey Weiss notes, On Kawara's project utilised simple communication systems that operated within a frame of repetition. The paintings, lists and maps were always assembled as variable elements that could be 'combined and recombined in a play of contingency and purpose'.¹⁸ From this perspective, Weiss is right to conclude that On Kawara 'uses the game to frame the everyday'.¹⁹ In this combination of openness to possibility and the attentive following of the rules of the game, there is another paradox that is revealed. Through the function of the game, we witness not the closed mechanism for regulating outcomes, but a process of attunement that sharpens the interplay between the body and mind. As we zoom in on a game, we can see how it opens a space that functions as an enclave, a space of exemption from the everyday. However, Weiss also observes that On Kawara's methodology functions like a triple helix, for it 'applies ordering systems to a subjective epistemology that means to be existential in scope'.²⁰ From this perspective, the closed ritual of the game zooms out to a wider sphere. If we recall my earlier claim that the map functions as a mirror to attune consciousness and cosmos, then the function of the ritual is also a mimetic act of bringing forth the meaning of the cosmos in the world-making activity of art.

The experience of this kind of player in a world stands in stark contrast to existence on a flat globe. In a globalised world there is no need for maps. Each step will simply take you from one familiar place to the next. All signs are obvious. But in the *worlding* of mondialisation, maps have multiple functions; they are mnemonics, but they are also provisional, iterative and relational. One map is always dependent on another. No map is complete in itself. In this world, difference is irreducible. There is no *meta-monde* that can agglomerate all worlds. In the flow and rub of different ideas, things and peoples, new worlds are forever in production. The worlding of mondialisation is thus an abstraction: it operates in the imagination. However, it is also materialised in the parallel process of social interaction and is defined in the perpetual encounter with cultural difference. In the spirit of this reciprocal relationship between the human activity of creativity and the world as a cosmos, Nancy asks: 'What is the world as the product of *human beings*, and what is the human being insofar as it is *in the world* and as it *works* this world?'²¹ The world of mondialisation exists in creation. The process and the products of creation are thus interconnected with the imaginary construction of a cosmos.

Meaning

A cosmos is usually understood as a synonym for the universe. In Ancient Greece, it had a more layered range of meanings. It referred to an intermediate zone between the earth and the unbounded universe; it was a circumambient sphere that was also the source of the divine and creativity. However, cosmos was also a term used to denote the whole of humanity, and, perhaps most relevant for our purpose, it articulated the activity of organising time and space so that it was both attractive to the other and meaningful for the self. Cosmos was both a wider concept for belonging and a specific activity for making order out of chaos. When Penelope rearranges the bedroom to receive her husband, and check that it is *her* Odysseus that has come home, Homer tells us that she is making a cosmos. The art of cosmos is not just cosmetic, in the modern sense of decoration, but a mode of placing one's body in the world so that it is attuned to the harmonics of motion in time and space. Hence, we can claim that the cosmos is produced in the encounter with the other. It exists in the journey and all the relations that are formed through motion. The matrix of these relations creates a cluster of inhabitation. Cosmos is the community that forms through motion and communication, the coexistence with others and the effort to create an order that can hold you together.

Through this wide and active concept of cosmos, I want to note the attention that On Kawara gives to motion while at the same time seeking to punctuate this flow through the iteration of temporal and spatial records. On Kawara's work assumes both the modest quality of the incident as a minor occurrence and its critical form as a rupture that marks the emergence of newness; it combines an instantaneous engagement with the everyday and an exploration of this locus as a world. The paintings and maps are documents, but not as registers or personal aides for memory. For On Kawara, each document is a suspension of the normal flow of time and an abstraction that symbolically presents the spatio-temporal dimensions of the incident.

18 J. Weiss, 'Bounded Infinity', in *On Kawara - Silence* (exh. cat.), New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2015, p.37.

19 *Ibid.*, p.38.

20 *Ibid.*, p.35.

21 J.-L. Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, op. cit., p.39. Emphasis in the original.

Yet, from what position do we start to frame the meaning of the incident? I have already discarded either cultural contextualisation or formalist analysis. I will now zoom in on one biographical comment, and then zoom out towards the widest possible framework. In one of his rare confessions, On Kawara declared that he collected dates.²² Each date is unique and together there are many, however, even within their uniqueness, they also point to the infinite. The paradoxical relationship between singularity and unity catapults us to the vast concept of creation.

According to the early work of Cornelius Castoriadis,²³ and again in the more recent writings of Nancy, the key feature of creation is the condition of its emergence, which they both evoke through the religious concept of *ex nihilo*. Nancy writes: 'In creation, a growth grows from nothing and this nothing takes care of itself, cultivates its growth.'²⁴ The link between art as a world-making activity and the cosmos of creation is further entwined in this absorbing passage, in which Nancy evokes art as the most explicit form of world-making activity:

*Worldhood ... is the form of forms that itself demands to be created, that is not only produced in the absence of any given, but held infinitely beyond any possible given: in a sense, then, it is never inscribed in a representation, and nonetheless always at work and in circulation in the forms that are being invented.*²⁵

The incessant production of worldhood in art is both mysterious in that its appearance is barely perceptible in the work, and banal in that it is through this work that the appearance of art is recognisable. It is only in the taking place of creation that the distinct being of art emerges.

On Kawara's incessant announcements, recordings and especially the traces he left on maps forebode a flattened globe. Yet his rejection of globalisation is not a withdrawal from the world but an affirmation of artistic practice as a worldly activity, or a form of mondialisation.

In this sense, creation is understood as the 'originary extroversion of what does not subsist in itself'.²⁶ Nancy thereby postulates that being and artwork are not immanent within a process, or even the result of a subject's action, but dependent on a prior opening of the world to the spacing of time. Creation, in other words, comes out of nothing - *ex nihilo*. Yet, in both Castoriadis's and Nancy's theories of creativity there is a profound break with earlier religious or Romantic visions of creation. Creation is neither an essence that originates in the divine, nor is it a consequence of our capacity to discover, and align ourselves with, the external order of the cosmos. Creation is therefore not a process of mediation, or a tapping into an external source of creativity;

nor is it a process of opening the world to an incorporation of external forces. The emergence of creation and world produces a folding topology in which it constitutes the outside through the inside. Through this conceptual framework, Nancy asserts the ubiquity of presence in art. With On Kawara's painting in mind, Nancy declares that art exists in constituting presence; in short, the work of art is 'geared toward bringing forth ... what is outside-the-world in the world'.²⁷

To explore this link between worldhood and creation, I want to now turn to Georg Lukács, whose early writings were first translated into French by Axelos in *Arguments*. The opening passage of Lukács's *The Theory of the Novel* (1914–15) lyrically evokes 'those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths'. We are then reminded of the symmetry that relates divine order, the spheres of the cosmos and human creativity:

22 The subtitle for *DEC. 21, 1966* reads: '... I don't know what I do but I know that I collect dates; that is, painted canvases on which the dates are written by me.'

23 Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society: Creativity and Autonomy in the Social-historical World* (1987, trans. Kathleen Blamey), Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997.

24 J.-L. Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, op. cit., p.51.

25 *Ibid.*, p.52.

26 J.-L. Nancy, 'The Technique of the Present: On On Kawara' (1997, trans. Alisa Hartz), *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006, p.199.

27 *Ibid.*, p.200.

RODOLFO LEONARDO FRANCISCO LUIS GONZALEZ GARCIA
MIGUEL FLORES SANCHEZ
VIVIEN PATRICIA BLUNDELL
RICCARDO SANTANGELETTA
JORGE SANCHEZ SILVA
KEN ROGERS
JOVITA PEREZ FRANCO
ADELA MIAZGA
CONSUELO ARAGON DE FORTE
KEIKO HASHIMOTO
HIROAKI IDAKA
LUIS RUIZ ROZA
LIBERTAD PONCE RAMIREZ
MAGDALENA HERNANDEZ
BILL BARKER
RANDY WIGHT
MARTA JARILLO ZEMPOLTECA
ALFRED FREDERIK WYTENBACH
CECILIA ROSALES MORALES
FERNANDO DEL TORO
MAGDALENA HASHIMOTO
KIYOHITO TANABE
KIMIO IKEDA
ROBERTO HASHIMOTO

1 JULIO 1968

On Kawara,
I Met, 1968–79,
typewriting
and stamped ink
on paper, 27.9
x 20.5cm each,
detail. Photograph:
Kris McKay. © and
courtesy The Solomon
R. Guggenheim
Foundation, New
York

*The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars... Thus each action of the soul becomes meaningful and rounded ... complete in meaning – in sense – and complete for the sense; rounded because the soul rests within itself even while it acts; rounded because its action separates itself from it and, having become itself, finds a centre of its own and draws a closed circumference around itself.*²⁸

Lukács contrasted this classical world with the world in which, as Friedrich Hölderlin claimed, the Gods have vanished. Lukács described our world as shaped by a ‘second nature’, where, instead of fixed laws, there is ‘the embodiment of recognised but senseless necessities’.²⁹ This fall from certitudes into the boundless and exilic state is a familiar modernist trope. It is commonplace to read Lukács’s early cosmic pessimism as a transitional phase in his movement from Kant to Hegel, or as the apprenticeship period prior to his embrace of Marx in the wake of the Russian Revolution. However, Lukács was not offering a lament over the death of a divinely ordered universe; rather, he provided an account of the transition from a human activity that attributed the universe with a divine order to another that now recognises nature as meaningless. Is this not a double movement, one that suspends a belief in the divine and then diverts responsibility back to the artist to create a form that holds an order for totality? Lukács’s point on creation in the necessarily alienated era of second nature thus not only highlights the departure from the idealised Greek era in which meaning was immanent to life itself, but also underlines the responsibility of the artist to find meaning by creating a new integration of parts.

The challenge to find creative affirmation in the context of pervasive alienation is at the core of On Kawara’s practice. His production of serial works could be seen as an effort that both beckons the infinite and concedes futility: nothing in art is equal to eternity. The object must face and allow space for its own degradation and alienation. What sort of perspective comes from this unrestricted hospitality? On one level, the project that On Kawara embarked upon embraced the multitude of forces and events that pervaded his existence. However, in the construction of systems of representation he also developed a grounded perspective. The gaze in On Kawara’s work is routinely concentrated on the contours of the incident: in withdrawing attention from all that surrounds the incidental, he disavows the all-pervasive infinity. Hence, there is no view of the world, but there is the incessant production of world views. In each instance, there is one view after the other of the world. Such incessant production of world views presents the world as a process: a perpetual act of becoming. In each date painting, with every list of people he met and on all the maps of the journeys that he undertook, the paradox between alienation and transformation remains. The perspective is directed toward seizing the moment and it is also dissolved in the evocation of a horizon of infinite plays.

In conclusion, I would like to note the relative silence that On Kawara maintained about the meaning of his work. His reticence should not be confused with either a reclusive aversion of intersubjectivity or a secret promotion of vitalism. All that we can confidently conclude from On Kawara’s stance is that he eliminated pathos. He did not frame his work by stating either the ideological or affective circumstances of his being, which suggests that he thought the play of meaning must be seen elsewhere. I have argued that it is best witnessed from the dual perspective of both zooming in on eventless time and zooming out to hold cosmic boundlessness. The paradox of this combination stretches us along the unbearable extremes of contemporary culture. It is On Kawara’s achievement that the prosaic document and the contemplative meditation are held together side by side, that one is interwoven with the other. It is in the space between cool contemplation and routine reiteration that On Kawara produced a form that is both of his time and space, and an opening of time-space.

28 Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1914–15, trans. Anna Bostock), London: Merlin Press, 1971, p.29.

29 *Ibid.* p.62.