

In their extravagant art works, performances, stage sets, publications and architectural designs, the Mavo group remained close to mass culture, yet operated in opposition to bourgeois society.

overlapped and succeeded Mavo is something Weisenfeld seems to have mastered, but the details remain rather difficult for the reader to grasp. In any case, the debut of Mavo was noted in newspapers in July 1923. There are various explanations for the name, none completely convincing. A nice one is that the letters stood for *masse/vitesse* and alpha/omega, another that they came from members' names (except there is no "v" in Japanese). The name was an exotic concoction, and the members used it like a logo. Most of them had come to Tokyo from the provinces and were stimulated by the shock of urban culture. In their constructivist assemblages and collages they incorporated materials from daily life, a practice that was seen as the newest thing and as a form of truth-telling about technological, industrial and mass-media society. (By World War I, the rotogravure press plus a national education system fostering a high rate of literacy created a boom in newspaper and magazine publishing; several newspapers—as today—had national circulations.) In their extravagantly dramatic writing and graphic design the Mavoists operated at a high pitch. They remained close to mass culture, yet at the same time positioned themselves in opposition to bourgeois society, and somehow managed to endure the contradiction.

The September 1923 earthquake furnished unexpected opportunities for the Mavoists, who resolved to revive the damaged spirit of the city through art. They excelled at "signboard architecture" on temporary buildings, and were part of a general freeing of architectural style, a shift toward playful and expressive forms and away from conventional institutional structures (like the Western-style brick buildings that had come to dominate the Ginza in the second half of the 19th century). Murayama called architecture "theatrical art exposed to the street." In 1924 he designed an addition to his home that became known as the Triangular Atelier; it also served as a gathering spot and exhibition space.

The group produced a magazine from July 1924 to August 1925 that they described as an "explosive disruption." One issue might have been literally so: a real firecracker was attached to the cover. That issue was banned by censors, resulting in considerable financial loss to Mavo. This sort of "coterie magazine," common at the time, was typically short-lived. While it lasted, Weisenfeld says, *Mavo* published on an "absurdly broad array of topics" meant to "integrate discussions of the arts with the more topical issues of daily life." The magazine included advertisements for cafés and other businesses appealing to avant-garde culturati. One member of the group, Takamizawa Michinao, advertised for a wife in *Mavo's* pages (no replies).

Murayama himself already had a wife, a new-era working woman who bobbed her hair and posed with him for profiles in the mass-market magazines. The couple was part of a new wave of intellectuals as celebrities. Murayama became famous for his long, "artistic" hairstyle, and he and other members affected Russian-type shirts. They also wore tunics and women's shoes in some of their dancelike performances (probably a carryover from Expressionist dance productions their leader saw in Berlin). Murayama published short stories and did design work, notably theater sets. As he gradually moved on from the hijinks of Mavo, the group collapsed in 1925. In the long run, Murayama's greater achievements were in theater (he was hailed as the "first constructivist stage designer" in Japan and esteemed for his producing and writing for the theater); he also had a lasting influence in commercial design. His radical activity was brought to an end when he was imprisoned by the militarist government in 1932 for his informal affiliation with the Communists; he was jailed again in 1940.

The Mavo interlude, brief as it was, is both instructive and entertaining. Weisenfeld notes, in fact, that "Mavo art activities and production must be understood within the context of a growing middle-class consumer demand for entertainment." The artists were good copy. They were not, however, particularly original in their political or artistic ideas, adopting freely from abroad: "In Japan, Western modernist styles functioned as prefabricated signifiers from which Japanese artists chose, often combining the disparate and seemingly contradictory at will," she says.

Weisenfeld also explains that Mavo members included both Communists and anarchists. Their own activities, which they described as "terrorist," included staging events to get attention, inciting viewers and readers by being deliberately provocative, and insulting well-known figures in the press. (A photomontage by Mavoist Yanase Masamu had the great title of *The Length of a Capitalist's Drool*.) Yet, she notes, "Consumer culture provided new media and venues for communication, even if it threatened to commercialize and assimilate the avant-garde into the mainstream, thus dulling the impact of the message. In the end, this tension in Mavo's work can perhaps never be resolved, as the artists' practice simultaneously sustained the very systems they wanted to subvert."

When Artists Collaborate

The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism, by Charles Green, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001; 248 pages, \$68.95 hardcover, \$24.95 paper.

BY ANNE ROCHETTE AND WADE SAUNDERS

In *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism*, the Australian artist and critic Charles Green explores collaborative artistic practice with a focus on the late 1960s and early '70s. It's a timely topic since plural authorship continues full bore. Pragmatically, col-

laboration may facilitate projects of baffling complexity, such as the ephemeral installations of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, which would daunt a single author. It is also an essential critical tool for some artists, calling into question traditional notions like self-expression and subjectivity.

Green proposes to investigate joint work "through a very selective history of artistic collaborations after 1968—specifically those that involved unorthodox models of authorship." He conveys well the richness and variety of '70s art works linked to Conceptualism and reminds us that even recent art history was far more complicated than we may now remember. He makes impressive claims for collaboration, calling it "a crucial element from modernist to postmodern



Marina Abramovic and Ulay: *Point of Contact*, 1981. Photo Rudi Monster. De Appel Gallery, Amsterdam.

art" and asserting "the suddenly compelling relevance of alternative 1970s art practices to 1990s conceptualist agendas." In fact, though, Green doesn't do much to prove this part of his case, since he chiefly considers '70s Conceptualism, not '80s and '90s postmodernism. Instead he attempts to construct a new "model of authorship" that involves a "third artist," a phantom figure allegedly generated when artists set about working jointly; hence the book's title. Green is sensitive and acute on the intricacies of that not-me/not-you and the unexpected ways in which it can propel art works.

The author considers Joseph Kosuth; Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden and *Art & Language*; the Boyle Family; Anne and Patrick Poirier; Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison; Christo and Jeanne-Claude; Gilbert & George; and Ulay and Marina Abramovic. Some artists are covered in detail, others peremptorily or only inasmuch as they serve Green's agenda. His discussion of Gilbert & George treats 1969-73, the period of the *Singing Sculpture*; he ignores the ensuing 25 years of their consequential photographic work. Yet he follows several of his subjects into the late '80s. He strays widely from collaboration—examining issues of regionalism and recounting Australian culture skirmishes—and at moments the book reads like a compilation of previously published texts. His claim to a de-centered art history is undermined by his choice of artists, who, excepting the Poiriers, are anglophone or have shown in Australia. One regrets that Bernd and Hilla Becher only appear in an aside. The Bechers' collaboration predates those Green chose, and their influential work dwarfs many of the oeuvres he considers.

Green tends to be anecdotal rather than analytical when describing the concrete processes of collaborative work, and his writing seldom helps the reader "see" the pieces he discusses. He patronizes Donald Judd's criticism, calling it "hyperpedantic" and "highly moralistic." Yet in his early '60s reviews, Judd had the rare capacity to render precisely what he saw and to elucidate the relation between the making of a work and its meaning. Green could take a lesson.

The author seems more interested in couples, or nuclear families, than in collectives, which makes sense in terms of his "third artist" but tends to misrepresent the full range of collaborative practice. As a rule, collectives are shorter-lived than collaborating couples, but this doesn't reduce their appositeness to Green's study. Nevertheless, Green has the merit of addressing an issue often left aside by critical writing: the manner in which plural authorship opens up potentialities, affecting both art works and the ways we may read them.

The Third Hand begins with Joseph Kosuth's pieces "made around 1970, in relation to one type of artistic collaboration—the delegation of manufacture—because this delegation was crucial to the often-debated integrity of his early work and necessary to his defeat of painting." Although Kosuth involved others in the realization of his schemes, calling his projects "collaborations" is problematic: they are uniquely credited to his name, resemble his contemporaneous work and evidence his singular handling of language. And it's a kangaroo-sized leap to claim that, with his texts anonymously placed in Australian newspapers, Kosuth "had succeeded in producing a work that was not art." Despite Kosuth's extensive use of studio assistants for his large-scale installations, Green says little about employees, a gray area of collaboration. (Interestingly, many of Kosuth's former assistants are now themselves recognized artists.) Issues of delegation of manufacture go way back in Western art history, and dubbing Kosuth a precursor of collaborative art is a stretch.

In discussing Australian artist Ian Burn (1939-1993), who occasionally collaborated with Mel Ramsden and participated in the New York "chapter" of the English collective Art & Language, Green coins the telling term "conceptual bureaucracy." Burn and Ramsden, he observes, "disavowed art and reinforced their disavowal by rejecting conventional authorship and publicly replacing it with the hybrid figure of bureaucratic collaboration." According to Art & Language cofounder Michael Baldwin, Burn's and Ramsden's early work had a discursive bent: "Collaboration . . . was not a kind of working-togetherness. It was a matter of destroying the silence of beholding with talk and with puzzles, and a forcing any and every piece of artistic 'work' out of its need for incorrigibility and into the form of an essay." Though the history of Art & Language would require a book on its own, one wishes Green had focused more on that ongoing, if schismatic, enterprise and less on local hero Ian Burn, though his presentation of Burn's work is sensitive and well informed.

Green contends that works of the Boyle Family, the Harrisons and the Poiriers center on memory and are thus important because "memory plays such a crucial role in the construction of power and the social adjudication of responsibility." Confronted with a modernist crisis of representation, these family-based artists explore, in an almost archeological

manner, "memory's link to self." This argument is feasible, though the relevance of the family unit (which Green calls a "domain of activity") to the investigation of memory remains obscure. The labor intensiveness of these teams' undertakings virtually mandated collaboration, and often prompted recourse to numerous hands.

Green may be right that the Boyles', Harrisons' and Poiriers' works are "a relatively unknown quantity in part because of the critical and curatorial concern with marketable individual subjectivity." But their (debatable) neglect—the Poiriers and Harrisons, after all, have been commercially successful—may also spring from the works' being less than they first appeared to be. While these teams have mattered in their respective niches, Green offers little evidence of their larger influence. Gilbert & George, the Bechers and Peter Fischli and David Weiss, among others, have had sustained visibility, independent of their relation to individual subjectivity. Co-authorship, in itself, neither denies nor grants an oeuvre consequence.

Christo and Jean-Claude have retrospectively asserted joint authorship of their projects back through *Wrapped Coast* (1969), realized near Sydney, Australia. Jeanne-Claude is usually "responsible for all correspondence and project administration." Yet in 1990, Christo said, "The work is a huge, individualistic gesture that is entirely decided by me." Green's spin on this limpid sentence is that Christo's "use of the pronoun 'I' was equivalent to an inversion of the royal 'we': By 'I' he meant 'Christo' the artist, not Christo Javacheff the person; he was allowing himself to be subsumed by his doppelganger, the Christo corporation." Though Green toes the party line, writing something doesn't make it so. Here again he could usefully have addressed the nitty-gritty of what happens in collaborations. While the couple's public projects are obviously joint efforts, the works simply continue, conceptually and visually, what Christo did as a Nouveau Réaliste bachelor. And it is largely Christo's hands, or those of assistants, that have produced the thousands of salable pieces used to fund the projects. Green writes that Christo and Jean-Claude's "relationship to the market was relatively unimportant compared with their relationships to museums and curators." But collectors, more than institutions, have bought those myriad smaller works.

Gilbert & George started and are still going strong as collaborating artists. The *Singing Sculpture* (1969-73), their emblematic debut, was disturbingly funny. Green's analysis is rich and allusive, and he nicely describes how that piece cultivated a "literalist dumbness [in Michael Fried's use of the term]; their work was thus monstrous in its denial of conventionalized artistic identities. Gilbert & George had re-created [themselves] in a double performative gesture—calling themselves an artistic collaboration and calling themselves works of art." But as Green informs us, the team retired the piece in 1973, "because, as Gilbert later noted, they found the work 'too limiting.'" In ignoring their major photographic production, Green neglects the brilliance with which Gilbert & George have spent three decades subverting T.S. Eliot's phrase about "the man who suffers." They've separated the men who enjoy—their perfect archives, kitchenless house and "dandy" status—from the

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minds which create works savaging all that.

Green further analyzes self-absorption and remoteness in his perceptive account of the influential performance works of Ulay and Marina Abramovic ("Marina Abramovic and Ulay" in the book). He catches the sadhu-like quality of these pieces and their lives: "The actions were structured so that they could not be easily looked at, even though, like all works of art, they were. It was collaboration that enabled the artists to escape the audience's gaze, for what was presented was art about, and theoretically available to, something beyond communication: nonmaterial, nonverbal, pre-rational perception."

Today we have videotape access to certain of the performances in the series "Relation Works" (1976-80) and "Nightsea Crossings" (1981-86). Watching Ulay and Abramovic interact is like watching a film couple that clicks on-screen: what they do together is much better than what they do apart. Ulay and Abramovic are unique in the book since their roughly 10-year collaboration is bracketed by less important individual "befores" and "afters." One wishes Green had examined why what was lost in the break-up has stayed lost in their solo work since. His proposed "third artist" figure, a hermaphroditic doppelganger, is a seductive hypothesis in the case of Ulay and Abramovic's mystical quest and of Gilbert & George's deadpan composite persona. It feels out of touch with the pragmatic organization of other collaborative teams.

In *The Third Hand*, Green is convincing about certain oeuvres, and his parsings of plural authorship illuminating. He is sometimes quite articulate on the construction of an artistic identity through a process of negotiation, translation, alteration and conflation of single subjects. But when he writes that "the collaborating artists presented in this book were quite exotic; their extreme identities absolutely invited personal curiosity," one wants to draw the line. Some artists, like Gilbert & George, have placed their lives front and center; others, like Fischli and Weiss, just offer us the work. In the most fruitful collaborations, partners trespass their own limits, so the ensemble becomes greater, and of a different order, than the individual talents. But Green's approach is more theoretical than practical, so he rarely fixes that alchemical process. He confirms, backhandedly, that it's simplest to treat ensembles as we do individual artists. Unless one is willing to get into factual details of the creative and production processes, how art works come to be made matters less than what they are. □

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