

"A Lunatic of the Sacred": The Life and Work of Charlotte Moorman

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resent the perspective of an animal, insect, machine, or other inanimate matter.” Are the humans in *New Engineering* constructing the world, or is the world in various nonhuman forms—tsunami to meltdown—also very much constructing us?

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*:

A Political Ecology of Things (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010)
Many still believe that humans are distinct in having minds and not just brains. Sure, animals (as etymology suggests) are animated compared to nonliving matter, but both lack meaningful motivation. The political scientist Jane Bennett, however, explores the possibilities of matter exerting its own potent agency. Through her lens of “vibrant matter” the questions of “we”—its membership, its politics, and its ecologies—become more expansive and complicated: “It is difficult . . . for a public convened by environmentalism to include animals, vegetables, or minerals as bona fide members, for nonhumans are already named as a passive environment. . . . A more materialist public would need to include more earthlings.” Through examples spanning power grids, garbage, and stem cells, Bennett makes a compelling case for imagining the vastly distributed nature of Nature. Her chapter on food, for example, expands kaleidoscopically on ideas that Berger raises on the socioeconomics of eating. Heavy on the heavies of Western philosophy, many of her ideas link to concepts explored by speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, and other new materialisms popular in contemporary art now. Bennett’s vibrant proposal for a more inclusive and participatory notion of us expands the circle beyond modernist human to animal through to things, and all the forms of we in between. In the end, possibility aesthetics is not simply about what happens tomorrow as much as reconceiving who matters today.

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1. Fredric Jameson, “Future City,” *New Left Review* 21 (May–June 2003): 65–79.

Nicole L. Woods
**“A Lunatic of the Sacred”:
The Life and Work of
Charlotte Moorman**

A Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde,

1960s–1980s. Exhibition organized by Lisa G. Corrin, Corinne Granof, Scott Krafft, Michelle Puetz, Joan Rothfuss, and Laura Wertheim Joseph. Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University Library, Evanston, IL, January 16–July 17, 2016; Grey Art Gallery, New York University, September 8–December 10, 2016; Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Austria, March 4–June 18, 2017

Lisa G. Corrin and Corinne Granof, eds. *A Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde,*

1960s–1980s. Exh. cat. With texts by Corrin, Ryan Dohoney, Granof, Hannah B. Higgins, Rachel Jans, Laura Wertheim Joseph, Scott Krafft, Kathy O’Dell, Jason Rosenholtz-Witt, Joan Rothfuss, and Kristine Stiles. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016. 224 pp., 150 b/w and color ills. \$40 paper

“A lunatic of the sacred.” “A magician.” “A proto-feminist.” “The artist who brought women into performance.” These portrayals, offered by the artists Carolee Schneemann and Alison Knowles at a roundtable event honoring the life and work of Charlotte Moorman, the Juilliard-trained cellist, performance artist, and festival organizer of the post–World War II avant-garde, announce the particular—and yes, even astonishing—influence of Moorman’s practice in the 1960s and beyond. They also obliquely address the complicated ways in which we remember and reevaluate women artists in retrospective. In terms of historical reception, the clever, indeterminate nature of Moorman’s oeuvre has often suffered a double exclusion: first, because of the probing, elusive, and durational character of the work; second, due to Moorman’s marginalized relation to her male peers and collaborators who have received significantly greater recognition for their experimental efforts. An urgent corrective to this delayed reception came in the form of a sprawling exhibition of Moorman’s diverse activities as a musician, performer, and curator, presented at venues in Illinois, New York, and Austria.

On a cold January afternoon in the packed Pick-Staiger Concert Hall at Northwestern University, Schneemann and Knowles, pioneers of the American avant-garde in their own right and frequent Moorman collaborators, were joined by other aesthetic allies of the “topless cellist”—Jim McWilliams (graphic designer), Sandra Binion (video artist and performer), and Andrew Gurian (filmmaker)—for a discussion moderated by the art historian Hannah Higgins. The panel marked the occasion of Moorman’s first career retrospective, *A Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde, 1960s–1980s*. In addition to the panel, exhibition programming included two lectures by Joan Rothfuss and Barbara Moore, as well as several compelling student performances of musical compositions framing Moorman’s own artistic evolution and influences; among them were Takehisa Kosugi’s *Chamber Music* (1962) and John Cage’s *Cello Etude Boreales, no. 1* (1978), performed by Drake Driscoll; Morton Feldman’s *Projection One for Cello* (1950), performed by Riana Anthony; and Nam June Paik’s *One for Solo Violin* (1962), performed by Myrtil Mitanga.

Rothfuss, an independent curator and author of the indispensable biography *Topless Cellist: The Improbable Life of Charlotte Moorman* (2014), expertly shed light on the show-woman’s byzantine presence in the 1960s experimental performance circuit by weaving “three stories of Charlotte” for the audience. The first, the “traditional” tale, as Rothfuss characterized it, is truncated and problematic—an overly simplified narrative that squarely situates Moorman as the guileless muse of her frequent collaborator Paik, lacking any personal agency or artistic will of her own. The second, a “riches-to-rags” spin of the first tale, positions Moorman not just as a muse but as the “tragic” muse of Paik. Her seminude or nude performances in now-legendary Paik pieces like *Opera Sextronique* (1967) and *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (1969) amounted to a sacrifice of her body and reputation for his art—she was once famously arrested for violating New York’s indecency laws—and with it, the acquisition of a physically compromised and financially unstable existence. The third, the ostensible “success story,” gives an account of Moorman as a sprightly, efficacious administrator of music, dance, poetry, and film, who invented a singular way of performing by expanding and reshaping compositional

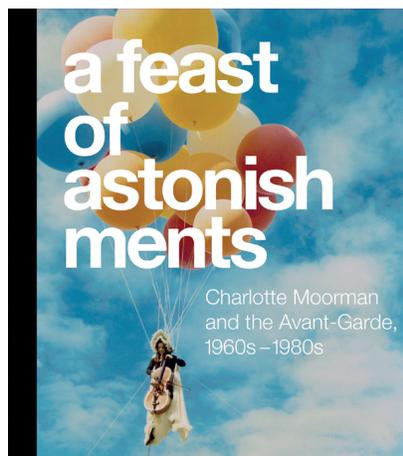
scores written by others. Indeed, as Lisa Corrin, the director of the Block Museum and an organizer of the exhibition, asserts in the foreword to the exhibition catalogue, “Moorman was the master of her own body, both as a raw material and as a vehicle for her creativity” (x).

Following Rothfuss’s lecture, Barbara Moore underscored the historical recovery of Moorman as a leading curator of the avant-garde by extemporaneously chronicling the fifteen Annual New York Avant-Garde Festivals that Moorman organized from 1963 to 1980. Moore, a writer and associate of Fluxus, presented a detailed retelling by sharing personal anecdotes from her experience working with Moorman, as well as a contextual narration of the ubiquitous photographic work of Moore’s late husband, Peter, which faithfully documented nearly all the festival performances. Indeed, nearly one hundred of Peter Moore’s photographs, many previously unpublished, achieved a specific thematic of witnessing in the exhibition’s galleries. Barbara Moore’s recollections of the Annual New York Avant-Garde Festival summoned an impressive roster of visionary artists managed by Moorman through creative contacts and business partners.¹

The conceptual fluidity that Moorman insisted on as an organizing principle facilitated an aesthetic porousness among performers that remarkably unified each year’s disparate offerings. The festivals took place across notable New York locales, including Central Park, Shea Stadium, Grand Central Station, the decks of the Staten Island Ferry, Floyd Bennett Field, and the World Trade Center. As the cocurator Corinne Granof rightly notes, in overseeing such a complex network of practitioners and city bureaucracies, “Moorman brought new art to the widest possible audience, creating a truly democratic area for experimentation” (11). This egalitarian fusion of the visual and performing arts in the public sphere marked a turning point in the reception of the avant-garde by larger audiences.

Moorman presents a unique challenge to the periodization of her brand of avant-gardism, which is cleverly hinted at in the title that defines the singularly archival-based exhibition. The phrase *A Feast of Astonishments* is appropriated from a review of the second Annual New York Avant-Garde Festival by the critic for *The Nation*, Faubion Bowers,

who meticulously catalogued the raucous performances staged over a two-week period at Judson Hall on Fifty-Seventh Street in late summer 1964. In his critical assessment, Bowers emphasized the cross-fertilizations among the artists, including a recap of how each evening began, for example, with



George Brecht’s *Entrance/Exit Music* realized via electronic tape by James Tenney or Paik’s *Robot Opera*. He thus communicated an invaluable, on-the-scene beholding of the events, including one Christian Wolff performance of “utterly disparate, dissociated instruments whose spurts of sonorities cohered in such unlikely directions and clusters that a unique sweetness developed.”² This characterization of discordancy also remarkably described one’s experience at the Block Museum. The whack of musical sounds, films, overheard interviews and commentary, crackling and clanging recorded audio, and more, greeted each viewer at high volume when one walked through the museum’s glass doors.³ We heard Moorman’s disembodied voice throughout the galleries—an insistent recorded presence with a slight Southern drawl. Moorman was also there in the exuberant curatorial choices; she had been joyfully and noisily resurrected for us to reassess her role within a paradoxical avant-garde canon.

One of the more moving aspects of Moorman’s rediscovery was located in an adjacent gallery, which the Block Museum dedicated to her personal archive. The Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections at Northwestern presciently acquired the Charlotte Moorman Archive in 2001, making it possible for

scholars and curators to closely track the artist’s career by following its ample paper trail. The special collections curator, Scott Krafft, skillfully organized the archival materials on view, and in this space, one could spend hours poring over love letters, professional correspondence, and festival drafts, or listening on headset to various telephone answering machine recordings. The installation included displays in vitrines and a monumentally scaled 1971 fish-eye photograph of Moorman sitting among overcrowded boxes and papers in her studio apartment on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. Framed by two metal shelving units stacked with brown file boxes, film canisters, domestic items, even toys, the objects and the photograph were arranged as if awaiting our curious encounter. Two particularly poignant moments provoked by the myriad objects and ephemera were Polaroid photographs of a smiling, though devastatingly emaciated Moorman—cancer and a mastectomy had ravaged her body—and a Rolodex card of John Lennon’s New York address, which Moorman had lightly crossed out in pencil, with a small note indicating his date of death. Other papers documenting her illness included journal entries recording daily morphine injections, doctor’s missives, letters to friends with updates on her progress, and even a desperate note imploring her neighbors to ignore any double-parking infractions incurred by vehicles ferrying her to and from the hospital. If the main galleries manifested the vocal, almost stubborn presence of Moorman via multifarious recordings through the loudspeaker system, this small room, apart from the larger show, allowed viewers to ponder the archive as an intimate space inhabited by professional accomplishment and personal pain. As Krafft details in his essay, it was Frank Pileggi, the artist’s beloved and bereft husband, who first tried to suss out the scholarly and artistic value of the hordes of boxes left behind in their loft.⁴ Moorman instructed him, in no uncertain terms, “don’t throw anything out.”

The foyer of the exhibition consisted of wall text and an enlarged press photograph by Moore depicting artists associated with the third Annual New York Avant-Garde Festival at Judson Hall in 1965. The wall texts were framed by Paik’s seven-foot portrait-sculpture *Charlotte Moorman II* (1995): a musical cyborg formed by nine antique cabinets

containing several working color televisions, a cello that formed the trunk of the body and was flanked by two small monitors, a viola that visually mimicked an arm with electrical guts spilling out, a two-channel original Paik video of Moorman performances, and a head topped with stringy wires signifying long brown hair. Across the room from the sculpture, which served effectively as an anchor piece, stood a vitrine with materials related to Moorman's early life: biographical information, a photograph of her debut recital as a classical cellist with the pianist Philip Corner in New York in 1963, and a black-and-white image of "Miss Charlotte Moorman" riding atop a parade car as "Little Rock's Miss City Beautiful" in 1952. Moorman, who was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1933, earned a bachelor's degree in music at Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana, and later studied cello at the University of Texas in Austin and at Juilliard in Manhattan. A member of the American Symphony Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski, she grew restless with the classical music scene, left her first husband, Thomas Coleman, and shifted her attention to the creative work of the emerging New York-based avant-garde. Deemed the "Jeanne d'Arc of New Music" by the French-born composer Edgard Varèse, Moorman was uniquely suited to embrace the new tenor of musical experimentation with her aural sharpness and attention to instrumental quirks. The exhibition's presentation of key musical notations by Moorman established her absorption of the dizzying range of intermedia operations evidenced in, for example, the early Fluxus performances and, more critically, the diverse vanguard scores by Cage, Earle Brown, Feldman, Giuseppe Chiari, and Karlheinz Stockhausen. In the galleries, viewers experienced by proxy her rather unorthodox interpretations of many composers' works. Monitors showed looping videos of her various performances of Cage's 26' 1.1499" for a String Player (1955) for the Merv Griffith and Mike Douglas television shows, and we observed Moorman's spirited expansion of the original composition by the addition of extraneous material objects and everyday actions—the effect of which Cage once coldly derided as having "murdered" his score.⁵

The emphasis on collaboration in the exhibition's overarching theme and title—

Charlotte Moorman and the avant-garde—underscored the degree to which Moorman's activities instantiated an embrace of other artists' ideas, other musicians' compositions, and other aesthetic sensibilities outside her own classical training. Moorman's determined fostering of a viable artistic community, whose roster of players was ever-shifting, demonstrated a willingness to not only engage in the most rigorous experiments of her time but also to create the conditions in which a wider public might participate in its explorations.

Indeed, the Block Museum galleries gave viewers ample opportunity to investigate this spirit of inventiveness, most notably in the sections devoted to the Annual Avant-Garde Festivals, which first began in small concert halls and eventually moved to iconic public spaces. Treating museumgoers to a wealth of acoustic and visual materials, *A Feast of Astonishments* revived original film footage, photographs, audio recordings, and media receptions from the festival proceedings. In the main gallery, viewers immediately encountered Moore's 16mm documentary film on Stockhausen's controversial piece *Originale*, which was elaborately performed in eighteen scenes at the second festival at Judson Hall in 1964. Contextualizing the fallout from Stockhausen's inclusion in the



Charlotte Moorman performing on Nam June Paik's TV Cello wearing TV Glasses, Bonino Gallery, New York City, 1971 (artworks © Estate of Nam June Paik; photograph © Takahiko Iimura)

event were detailed wall labels and placards, which crucially conveyed the multifaceted positions of aesthetic preferences and personal politics in the New York avant-garde.

An underlying thematic that sustained the exhibition's focus was the mobilization of the concept and practice of the repertoire. In musical terms, we are familiar with the basic contours: a complete list, stock, or index of pieces that a performer or company is accustomed to playing. In the case of Moorman, her repertoire included multiple realizations of not only Cage's 26' 1.1499" but also Paik's *Concerto for TV Cello and Videotapes* (1971) and McWilliams's *Sky Kiss and Ice Music* (1972)—performances that entailed Moorman playing cello strings over televisions, with an unaltered cello hitched to gigantic balloons over the Sydney Opera House, and strumming a cello made of ice while naked. The exhibition also recounted the events surrounding Moorman's infamous arrest in 1967 at the Cinematheque in Manhattan while performing Paik's *Opera Sextronique* in the nude, as the score dictated. Paik was not formally charged, but Moorman was tried and convicted for partial nudity, with the sentence later suspended. In one long gallery, vitrines exhibited copies of the official judgment in her trial, as well as letters attesting to her character by Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, and others. As Laura Wertheim Joseph crucially explains in her essay, the point of Paik's composition, as Moorman interpreted it, was not "to flaunt disregard for society's mores" but rather to "satirize that which is sham and hypocritical" (57). At the Block Museum, this scandalous event and others related to her performance repertoire were effectively presented as visual pivots, in archival photographs, diagrams, performance objects, and audio recordings, so the experience of wandering through the show was one of frequently turning here to watch this, there to read that, and then back again to listen.

One clear takeaway from all this movement was that Moorman's catalogue of performances demonstrates the degree to which she was conceptually wedded to the "open score" format. A small gallery was thus rightly dedicated to displaying Moorman's numerous dynamic performances—counted in the hundreds—of Yoko Ono's charged event-score *Cut Piece* (1964–66). This area featured chromogenic color prints of

Moorman's performances with general audiences or the artist's friends, with framed remnants of satin dresses long ago cut and torn hanging on the wall. Viewers could sit on a wooden bench and watch an emotionally intense video projection of Moorman performing *Cut Piece* on the garden rooftop of her Pearl Street apartment; she perched among her closet interlocutors, some of whom gingerly or playfully cut away her clothes. Ono directed the video of the performance, and the accompanying wall text stated that Moorman's cancer had by that point aggressively returned and metastasized throughout her body—a fatal progression that had remained undiagnosed for nine months while she helped Paik prepare for his 1982 retrospective at the Guggenheim.⁶

To highlight the participatory nature of the works on hand, the exhibition offered ample opportunities to engage—beyond looking and reading—with certain pieces. To be sure, the acoustic component was consistently heard throughout, especially in pieces like Schneemann's *Noise Bodies* (1965), in which the percussive costume clanged and clamored in audio from the third Annual Avant-Garde Festival, but also in Max Neuhaus's *Lid from American Can*, presented at the fourth festival in 1966. In the gallery, the audience was encouraged to play music by



Charlotte Moorman performing Jim McWilliams, *Ice Music for Sydney*, 1972, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1976 (photographer unknown; photograph provided by Kaldor Public Art Projects)

shuffling tin can lids with their feet. Another sound-activated work was tucked under the staircase on the first floor of the museum. Created specifically for the 1975 festival at the Gateway National Recreational Area/Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, Knowles's *Bean Garden* is now part of her own repertoire of works. At the Block Museum, willing visitors were instructed to take off their shoes and walk, drag, or lightly kick a floor of dried beans. The vibrations generated by the sound garden—the raised platform had microphones placed underneath—nicely complemented the experimental energies viewers confronted in the main galleries, and all the while a large black box screened films documenting Moorman's performances abroad.

In addition to electrified cellos and noise instruments, film programs, and personal and reported accounts, viewers got a sense of how deeply involved Moorman was in every part of the process of producing the festivals and in actively supporting the work of fellow artists. She spent countless hours on the telephone negotiating the tricky logistics of venues and procuring necessary equipment for performers. Moorman fashioned the earliest publicity materials in simple columnar formats, with one visually striking addition that departed from conventional musical handbills: the composers' original signatures were printed down the middle, a design element that continued into the 1970s. In her catalogue essay, Higgins notes that this "autographic element presents each performer and composer as unique" despite their shared space on the page and stage. As such, we might read Moorman's organizing work as committed both to the collective nature of the festivals and to the individuality of each participant.⁷

The festivals continued to grow exponentially, and by 1966 Moorman turned over the duties of creating promotional materials to McWilliams. The vibrantly colorful posters he designed until 1980 have a less conventional format than Moorman's earlier ones—many are chaotically superimposed with densely arranged texts and graphic images, with a running list of performers and information that is often difficult to ascertain at a glance. Around the corner from the displays of Moorman's repertoire, the Block Museum reserved a prominent wall for McWilliams's posters, which befittingly revealed the elaborately staged nature of the festivals and added

to the visual delights offered throughout the galleries. In the short introduction to the catalogue, Rothfuss relates that McWilliams never received payment from Moorman for his poster designs, and that he used his connections in the design world to print the posters for free.

Unlike other prolifically eccentric impresarios of the 1960s and 1970s avant-garde, including the self-declared Fluxus chairman George Maciunas, who perceived Moorman as an adversary, the dimensions of Moorman's administrative work went largely unexplored until this exhibition.⁸ In organizing her wide-ranging festivals, Moorman was among the first of her era to usher in the artist-as-manager occupational role that has become a mainstay in various contemporary art practices of the past forty years. Within this more compelling narrative and its conceptual buttress for the retrospective, the curators and catalogue writers examining Moorman's legacy rightfully re-present her to the public as a performance artist in her own right: a discerning talent scout, a hardscrabble business manager, an indefatigable promoter, and a centripetal force in the Euro-American artist communities of the mid- to late twentieth-century. Several writers directly address Moorman's impact on what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu



Charlotte Moorman performing Nam June Paik, *TV Bra for Living Sculpture*, 1969, on the roof of her loft, 62 Pearl St., New York, July 30, 1982 (artwork © Estate of Nam June Paik; photograph © Vin Grabill)

calls the field of cultural production, including the shift to an increasingly globalized network of art, film, and music among the transatlantic avant-garde (Higgins, Rachel Jans), the fusion of feminist ideals and liberation politics (Joseph, Kristine Stiles, Kathy O'Dell), and the experimental notational and conceptual practices of a plethora of contemporary genres (Ryan Dohoney, Jason Rosenholtz-Witt). In doing so, the catalogue richly elucidates the manifold ways that one can approach, or re-approach, Moorman's complex body of work.

By asking us to regard Moorman as a constitutive force in the 1960s avant-garde, *A Feast of Accomplishments* was a revelation on many fronts. The galleries produced a kind of awe in viewers and listeners, owing to one's reeducation not only in Moorman's experimental activities but also, more crucially, in the sheer capacity and scope of those activities. The Block Museum embraced the chaos of her music and art, and in doing so, demonstrated the tenaciously collaborative way in which she lived and worked—a mode of labor with its own gendered politics. *A Feast of Astonishments* left little doubt: Moorman was a transformational figure in the advancement and promotion of the avant-garde in the late twentieth-century, and we should all be eager to learn more.

Nicole L. Woods is an assistant professor of modern and contemporary art at the University of Notre Dame. In fall 2017 she holds the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Visiting Senior Fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art. She is currently completing the first scholarly monograph on the Fluxus artist Alison Knowles.

1. Over the ensuing decades, Moorman's creative interlocutors included the free jazz saxophonist Ornette Coleman; pianist Cecil Taylor; the musical forerunner of Afrofuturism, Sun Ra; German kinetic artist Otto Piene; composers John Cage, Philip Corner, Meredith Monk, and James Tenney; poets Jackson Mac Low and Allen Ginsberg; dancers Yvonne Rainer and Elaine Summers; engineer Billy Klüver; and a host of Fluxus artists, including Knowles, Paik, Dick Higgins, Geoffrey Hendricks, Yoko Ono, and Ay-O, among others.
2. Faubion Bowers, "A Feast of Astonishments," *The Nation*, September 28, 1964, 172–75.
3. The Grey Gallery's presentation was a notably quieter affair, with audio playing throughout the show at lower levels. This is an interesting curatorial choice, as it appears to privilege the material production and display of objects over the chaotic sonorous activities of Moorman's musical preferences.

4. The Charlotte Moorman Archive (CMA) contains a treasure trove of materials and, importantly, complements two other corpuses at Northwestern: the John Cage Collection and the Dick Higgins Archive. In his catalogue essay, Krafft itemizes the CMA: "2,100 printed books and pamphlets, several hundred periodical issues, 120 vinyl LPs, 500 printed music scores, 800 oversize posters, 31 motion picture films, 393 audiotape recordings (including eleven years of Moorman's incoming answering machine messages), 90 videotape recordings (both original and commercial), 24,000 photographs, and printed documentation (flyers, handbills, etc.), for about 2,100 events (concerts, etc.*)" (191).

5. See Benjamin Piekut, "Murder by Cello: Charlotte Moorman Meets John Cage," in *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 143. Piekut's astute analysis of Moorman in the context of a burgeoning avant-garde scene in the early 1960s is essential reading for any scholar reexamining her legacy in relation to larger cultural and musical forces in New York City.

6. For an account of Moorman's struggles with her health, her complicated relationship with Paik, and her all-encompassing artistic activities, see the following exhibition catalogue essays: Kathy O'Dell, "Bomb-Paper-Ice: Charlotte Moorman and the Metaphysics of Extension" (153–67); and Kristine Stiles, "'Necessity's Other': Charlotte Moorman and the Plasticity of Denial and Consent," (169–83).

7. For more on the festivals, see Hannah Higgins's "Live Art in the Eternal Network: The Annual New York Avant-Garde Festivals" in the exhibition catalogue (61–91).

8. An important exception is Rothfuss's recent book; its compelling account of Moorman's life is the foundation on which the exhibition is built. See Joan Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist: The Improbable Life of Charlotte Moorman* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014). For more on Maciunas's antipathy toward Moorman, including his blacklisting of her, see Granof's introductory text in the catalogue (9).

Robert Slifkin

Ladytron

Lynn Hershman Leeson: *Civic Radar*.

Exhibition curated by Peter Weibel and Andreas Beutin. ZKM / Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany, December 13, 2014–April 6, 2015; Falckenberg Collection, Hamburg, Germany, June 14–November 15, 2015; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, February 10–May 21, 2017. Organized for Yerba Buena Center by Lucía Sanromán

Peter Weibel, ed. Lynn Hershman

Leeson: Civic Radar. Exh. cat. With texts by Andreas Beutin, Hou Hanru and Laura Poitras, Pamela Lee, Peggy Phelan, Ruby Rich, Jeffrey Schnapp, Kyle Stephan, Kristine Stiles, Tilda Swinton, and Weibel. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2016. 384 pp., 430 color ill., 62 b/w. \$70

In our current age of digital avatars, technological surveillance, and turbulent identity politics, few artists seem as relevant—and arguably as oracular—as Lynn Hershman Leeson. For more than fifty years, the artist has explored the ways in which a self is constructed, controlled, and exteriorized through various forms of mediation. The recent exhibition *Civic Radar*, organized by the Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe (ZKM), and which traveled to Hamburg and the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, along with its richly illustrated and comprehensive catalogue, provide a valuable and unprecedented opportunity to recognize and appreciate Hershman Leeson's sustained investigation of what of Marshall McLuhan described as "the pattern of sex, technology, and death" that has fueled the imagination, if not the material evolution, of modern humanity!¹ *Civic Radar* effectively positions her works as a crucial and progenitive instance of a tradition of techno-feminism that reaches from McLuhan's *Mechanical Bride* (1951) to Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (1984) and has arguably flourished most effectively in more popular iterations such as films like *Metropolis* (1927), *Blade Runner* (1982), and *Her* (2013), not to mention Hershman Leeson's trilogy of sci-fi-inflected movies, *Conceiving Ada* (1997), *Teknolust* (2002), and *Strange Culture* (2007), which all, notably, feature the actor Tilda Swinton.