Nina Yankowitz

Re-Rights/Re-Writes

By Joyce Beckenstein

Nina Yankowitz, a pioneer feminist artist, takes the word as her vehicle and drives it from its most abstract, primal form through an expansive contemporary lexicon of databases. Cutting a zigzag path through her own shifting perspectives, she steers her message through traditional media—painting, mosaic, and sculpture—then, without missing a stop, through performances, high-tech installation art, and cyberspace. But high- or low-tech, she refuses to stick an emblematic stamp on her work. In fact, she recalls the lament of one curator, who in 1985 quipped, "You just don't fit into any slot."[1] Yankowitz is happy to keep it that way.

Her process, consistent albeit eclectic, reaches its apotheosis in *Crossings* (2009; Figs. 1 and Pl. 7) an installation/game that premiered at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, Greece.[2] Religious texts provide the thematic armature for this project, but the work is not "religious" in its intent. *Crossings*, instead, takes religious scriptures as an organizing principle to underscore how tangled cultural values blur the intent of words as they appear in the texts of the world's five major religions. In it, Yankowitz asks: "Are world religions really different? Or, are the same ideas and values pitched to each flock from a different set of agendas?" Taking as her premise that the world's religions preach essentially the same core values, she concurs with Lucy Lippard's observation that ethnocentric differences account for narrow-mindedness, and that "Everyone is ethnocentric to some degree…It's not easy to reach across cultures."[3]

Crossings uses technology as a reasoning tool to bridge multicultural divides by cross-referencing scriptural texts to illustrate the similarities that unite most faiths. Yankowitz makes this conceptual exercise easy for new-millennium audiences by presenting her message as an intriguing electronic, interactive game. Players entering *Crossings* find themselves in a virtual temple representing the world's five major faiths: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. A schematic projection of composite religious architecture, symbolizing the unifying principles of all faiths, slowly rotates on an entrance wall. Entering the installation's inner sanctum, the player stands on a floor projection of iconic mosaics—quatrefoils, stars, arabesques, and circles. An electronically woven soundtrack plays a chorus of voices simultaneously reading scriptures from Old and New Testaments, Buddhist and Hindu texts, and the Qur'an. They speak many tongues in a multitude of cadences and dialects, including Arabic, English, German, Hebrew, and Italian.

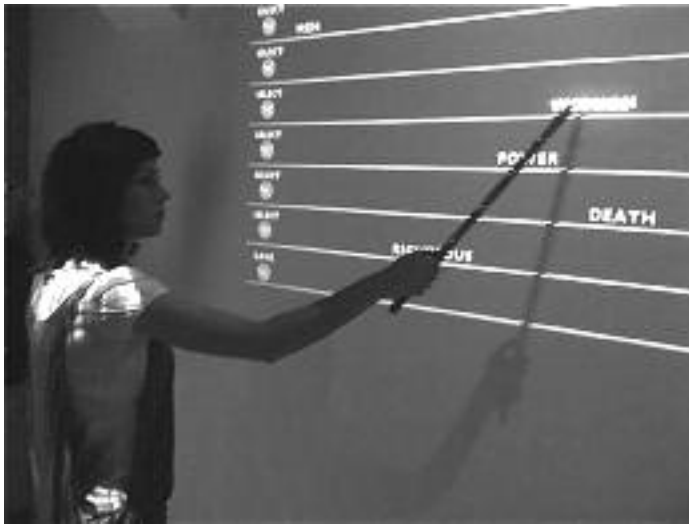

Fig. 1. Nina Yankowitz, *Crossings* (2009), interactive installation with computers, infrared tracking wiimote, projectors, metal wand, variable size. Photo: Mauri Kaipainen.

A player activates the "game" with a hand-held infrared wand. Tapping the wall with it lights up the dark space with illuminated words that suggest narrative gospel shining through stained glass windows. On one wall, bright red words, randomly selected from a database of thousands, emerge along six horizontal lines. Using the wand, the player selects one word per line and slides that word from left to right, assigning it a relative weight. Placing a word to the far left ascribes it a low weighting or value, way to the right, the highest weighting. These word placements trigger a search engine to locate scriptures that attribute similar emphasis to the chosen word(s). The results appear simultaneously on an adjacent wall, now color coded in LED light, hued orange, blue, green, yellow, and purple, a different color assigned to each of the five represented faiths.[4] Comparative scriptures about death, for example, uniformly agree that death is a given, but that it arrives in different forms. Three examples allocating a high weighting to the word "death" produced these examples:

"Death even to the well-fed man comes…in varied shape."[5]

"And what is death? The parting and vanishing of beings out of this or that order of being."[6]

"And every man shall be put to death for his own sins."[7]

The curious, seduced by the game, may ask: "Will scriptures vary when "death" is given a lower weighting? How are less emotionally charged words such as "if," "should," or "want" treated? They can find out by reweighting the words and/or choosing others with a wand tap. Players don't, however, learn the color-coded religious sources of their choices until they finish the game and press a SAVE button to retrieve a printout.

The lure of the "game" deflects the often-prickly issues undermining cross-cultural conversations about faith, so it is with a sense of play that one enters the *Crossings* sanctuary. Further easing the dialog, players are usually surprised to find that, for all the wand waving, the scriptures hardly vary. But the endgame becomes problematic as those leaving the sanctum, self-edited "bible" in hand, stop to ponder the choices they've made. It becomes clear that during the moment spent as an anointed wizard in high-tech Oz, the wielded wand took the mercurial temperature of their personal biases. That prompts the sober question: "What are the consequences when an individual or single institution assigns values to these words and interprets them to sway human attitudes?" Yankowitz's wand here cuts a wide and deep swath, from self-reflection to global value systems, making clear that individuals, not scriptural texts, drive human interactions. If her premise is correct, then information technology (the one thing in our global universe that all seem to worship) may presage an effective means of fostering greater understanding. *Crossings* points the way.

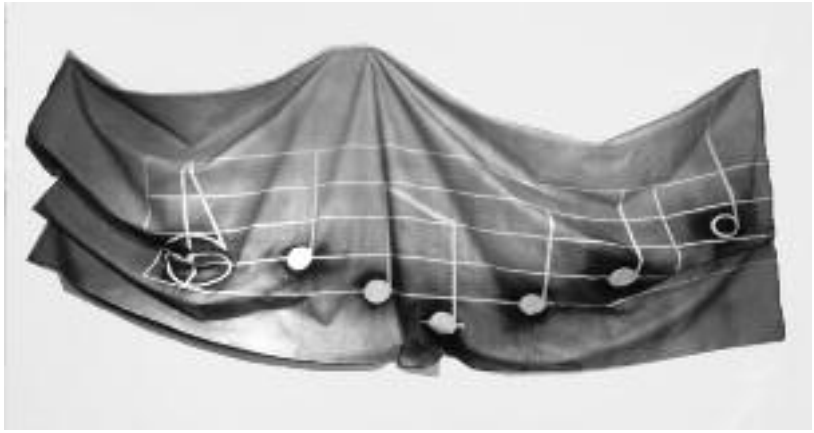

Fig. 2. Nina Yankowitz, *Oh Say Can You See – A Draped Sound Painting* (1967-68), latex paint on cotton duck, audio by Phil Harmonic a.k.a. Ken Werner, 4'x10'x 6". Photo: Jay Cantor.

Computers and information technology are for today's artists what marble was for Michelangelo and pocket-sized tubes of paint were for Monet. Microchips and software are the new tools informing today's visual language. From its onset, artists have found in the electronic age a riveting way to engage audiences more directly, and to navigate art's dead zone—that space between the viewer and what hangs on the wall or sits on a pedestal. In 1967, Robert Rauschenberg, working with Billy Klüver, a research scientist at Bell Labs, and then joined by Robert Whitman and Fred Waldhauer, formed Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), "an organization devoted to facilitating interaction between artists and engineers in order to address the technical challenges of realizing artistic concepts."[8]

Now, almost fifty years later, technology makes possible art that is intensely complex in its logistics but remarkably user-friendly for the viewer/participant. Such art most often requires collaborations between the artist, who provides the conceptual blueprint for the work, and the technology experts who make the art happen. For *Crossings*, Dr. Mauri Kaipainen a professor of media technology at Södertörn University (Sweden), who holds a PhD in musicology and cognitive science, recalls it this way:

> I got to know Nina in Rovaniemi, Finland in 2008 at the eMobilArt meeting of artists and scientists. I was impressed with her sketches for the Cathedral project [*Crossings*] as well as her … enthusiasm. We focused on the issue of (religion and) mutual understanding … elaborating the idea cross the seas in an endless number of skype calls … always enjoyable as creative brainstorms, but never systematic and organized. During the fall of 2008 and winter, 2009, the idea matured to something that would combine the intellectual challenge with an interesting and beautiful interface.[9]

Kaipainen says it was his role "to define the automated means to annotate the massive amounts of religious text so that the computer would always be able to find the related topics from the database in which they were stored." He credits Peter Kroger, who came aboard later in the project, as the "tech hero," who made everything work, with very short warning."

Some of Yankowitz's earliest works were collaborative efforts; they weave a thread throughout her story that unfolds against the backdrop of the feminist revolution, Vietnam War, civil rights movement, and a reinvention of the art object. She's also embraced technology in her many incarnations of the word as musical notation, abstract sign, automatic scrawl, relief, minimal glyph, narrative text, and bar code. After a quick start out of the gate as a feisty young artist, she faded into the background for awhile, as did many women artists who came of age in the 1960s. Now she's again hit her stride, this time using high-tech art on a global interactive stage.

Yankowitz was a student at The School of Visual Arts in New York City in 1968, a time when "the rebellion initiated in the fifties by the Beats, on the one hand, and civil rights activism on the other, exploded into a full-fledged counterculture."[10] She spent that summer with Group 212 in Woodstock, New York,[11] befriending other young artists and performers. Most of them, enraged by the Vietnam War and emboldened by the nascent cries of civil rights and feminist activists, were finding their voices in protest. Baby boomer artists who teethed on Warhol's Brillo boxes bit into more iconoclastic forms, and musicians, most notably Bob Dylan, wrote "complex lyrical songs that ranged from powerful social commentary to symbolic tales with profound poetic imagery."[12]

In Woodstock, Yankowitz recalls, "I met Ken Werner[13] Sunny Murray, Dave Burrell and Juma Sultan, who made drums for Bob Dylan. I met Juma at Dylan's house … Dylan let me in. I was so intimidated." She performed, danced, and draped bolts of patterned lounge chair fabric through the trees. The dalliance of youth? On the contrary. This intuitive experimentation that August produced a seminal work, *Oh Say Can You See—A Draped Sound Painting* (1968; Fig. 2). Yankowitz here painted the music score of the first bar of the national anthem on a stretch of cloth then attached it to a wall like a haphazardly hung curtain. Wanting to protest the Vietnam War, she asked Kenneth Werner to use a synthesizer to distort the anthem to match the comically droopy swag of the piece. This young artist, already adept at blurring distinctions between images and sound, could also play a subversive hand, here casting a patriotic icon and its heroic song in the less honorable light of an ill-conceived war.

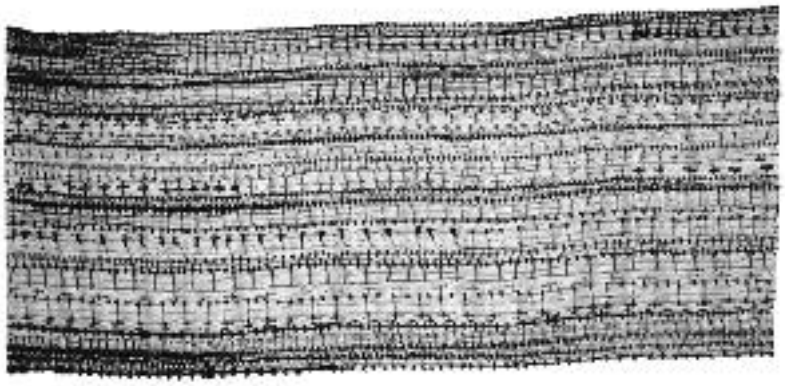

Fig. 3. Nina Yankowitz, *Dilated Grain Readings* (1972 -74), extruded acrylic/flash paint on linen, 109" x 49". Photo: Alan Nyssola.

Such anti-war activism paralleled a formal art movement that reconsidered traditional forms and stretched the boundaries for making art. By 1971, "sculpture" might well have passed as an answer to the question "What is a painting?" Robert R. Littman made that the point of his 1971 exhibition, "Hanging/Leaning," which left it up to the artwork to decide its identity. He wrote in the catalog introduction, "Matter and gravity, not structure or space, were primary considerations … a renewed freedom existed—letting the material 'make itself' instead of order being imposed."[14] Yankowitz's *Untitled* (1969), a painted canvas, falling in folds and pleats similar to those of *Oh Say Can You See*, hung in sync with its gravitational pull, more sculptural than painterly in its disdain for the flat wall. Yankowitz and Eva Hesse were the only women in this show, which included art by Robert Morris, Joel Shapiro, and Keith Sonnier.

In 1973, The Whitney Museum formally acknowledged the obsolescence of conventional definitions for new genres by merging their annual exhibitions—one year painting alternating with one year sculpture—into biennial extravaganzas. Yankowitz exhibited *Painted Thread Readings* (1973), a work made of duck binding that she stripped down to threads, then coated with red paint, reweaving, twisting, and braiding the fibers into a richly textured hanging scroll. With nubbed pigment forming text-like "reading paths" down its surface, the painting was so ambiguous as to be singled out by John Perreault, in the *Village Voice*, as an example of "notable sculpture"![15]

In a subsequent series of works, Dilated Grain Readings (1972–74; Fig. 3), Yankowitz linked the run-on visual rhythms seen in her Whitney piece with the idea of rhythmic sound. "When I hear sound I see color, and when I see color I hear sound," she says. There are some physical bases for these connections, but Rudolf Arnheim has distinguished between science and synesthesia. "Some people see colors when they hear sounds," he writes.[16] Yankowitz's sensations are of the synesthetic variety, but she explores them with Newtonian zeal. Her densely textured Dilated Grain Readings read like prehistoric glyphs, a Ur Song, in Braille, done on linen. From a distance these colorful notations resemble musical scores. Up close, beads and bubbles of color squeezed straight from the tube look more like a primitive tapestry.

Years later, Yankowitz began to write free-form verse, straddling the words with automatic writing in the form of black and white scribbles. Then she elaborated her idea of text-as-scribbled-notations in a two-act opera, *Scenario Sounds/Personae Mimickings or Voices From The Piano* (1979; Fig. 4). Conjugating her "libretto" into a score of red, blue, and green scrawls, she now added sound—guttural groans and falsetto trills—that she interpretively sang with French, German and Italian inflections in a 1980 performance for the 12th International Poetry Festival in New York.[17] Joyce Kozloff's introduction to the limited-edition, hand-signed artist's book with audio cassette (1981) offers a keen understanding to Yankowitz's uninhibited but serious vision:

> I found my friend Nina … who … never studied … (foreign language or music) … at the piano, bursting into "opera" … a bizarre range of sounds suggesting personalities, emotions, dialects, all juxtaposed in a cacophonous collage.… The audience took the proceedings quite seriously. I … felt … amusement at Nina's sheer chutzpah.[18]

Yankowitz later recorded a *Scenario Sounds* CD.[19] This not–so-easy-to-listen-to avant-garde recording commingled sound and voice the way her dilated thread paintings wove color and texture. The montage of dialects also points to the orchestration of tongues that inform several later works, including *Crossings*. As Kozloff summed it up, "Nina transformed visual art into a temporal and aural experience … her ideas accessible in a new way."[20]

For a woman artist in the 1970s, Yankowitz had an amazing start, being included in the first Whitney Biennial and in exhibitions at the few New York galleries then featuring women artists. She recalls: "Jill Kornblee, who exhibited Dan Flavin and Malcolm Morley, initially said she didn't show women artists, but ultimately added many to her stable, including Janet Fish and me." Kornblee held three solo exhibitions of Yankowitz's works between 1969 and 1971. James R. Mellow, in a *New York Times* review, referred to Yankowitz's "second one-man show"

at Kornblee. He described the work as "tasteful, like a decorative wall hanging … seductive … between old-fashioned easel painting and some new species of handcraft."[21] "Can Women Have 'One-Man' Shows?," cried Cindy Nemser in her op-ed response to the review. "Mellow still has not caught on… women are not ashamed of their sex and resent being mistaken for men."[22]

About the same time, Yankowitz personally faced a number of conflicting feminist issues. "I felt two-faced exhibiting my art while others were unfairly ignored. I was included in the '73 Whitney Biennial, where I had previously marched in protest of their disproportionate representation of women." It is interesting to note the similarities between Yankowitz's feminist experiences and those of Louise Bourgeois, one of feminism's greatest heroes and role models, who despite her stature still experienced feminist conflict as late as the 1990s. In their documentary film, *Louise Bourgeois: The Spider, the Mistress and the Tangerine*, filmmakers Amei Wallach and Marion Cajori capture Bourgeois's solidarity with women trumping her artist persona. When the Guggenheim Museum launched its SoHo space with the 1992 exhibition, "From Brancusi to Bourgeois," Bourgeois joins ranks with activists protesting the museum's token nod to all women by including her as the only woman in that show. But "feminism established Bourgeois's reputation," says Wallach,[23] voicing a fact of life for most every woman who crested on the wave of the feminist revolution.

Though Yankowitz was an active participant in the feminist movement—a member of the "mother" collective that formed the groundbreaking magazine *Heresies*, and interviewed by Joan Braderman, whose documentary, *Heretics*,[24] chronicles that publication's evolution, she was later side-stepped. She was, for example, unmentioned in retrospectives such as *Global Feminisms*, which "included artists with a more a direct feminist agenda as well as ones who do not proclaim themselves as feminists but definitely raise feminist and gender issues in their work."[25] Yankowitz acknowledges viewing the movement's purpose differently from many of her sister activists, and says: "I didn't believe you had to reference female issues using female-specific imagery to be a feminist…. I thought of the movement more as a way to end the divisions between male-female-gay-heterosexual genres. Now, looking back, I recognize the importance then of projecting a unified voice through that inherent female imagery."

She claims no specific seat along the feminist spectrum, but the movement infiltrates Yankowitz's sensibility as it does the consciousness of anyone—male or female—who lived through those formative years, or who has since reaped its rewards. More specifically, few women artists can deny the direct or indirect influence of gender-focused artists, such as Judy Chicago, whose *The Dinner Party* (1974–79), celebrating the achievements of well- and lesser known women throughout history, also raised craft to the level of high art.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Pattern and Decoration (P&D) movement countered the tenets of formalism with crafts and craft-inspired art, including folk art, fabric designs, quilts, embroidery, and tile art. While Yankowitz was not a direct participant in that movement (though she says she was

Fig. 4. Nina Yankowitz, *Scenario Sounds/Personae Mimickings or Voices From The Piano* (1979), page from 1/6 limited edition silkscreen print books, 8 1/2" x 11". Photo: Nina Yankowitz.

invited to participate), many of her colleagues and friends—Joyce Kozloff and Miriam Shapiro included—were among the movers and shakers of this celebratory craft revival. "Where convinced modernists saw Minimalism's aloof stillness, silence, and simplicity as potent with rarefied meaning, others could comprehend only a void," writes H. H. Arnason, in his discussion about P&D.[26] Concurrent with the movement, Yankowitz created many tile installations, including two ceramic murals for New Jersey schools for the blind and hearing impaired.[27] Incorporating her use of abstract glyphs as "text" into ceramic, she used clay slip oozed from ketchup bottles onto handmade tiles, approximating "Braille" for the deaf to "hear" and the blind to "see." These tile works anticipate her later narrative works and interactive installations.

For *Hell's Breath – A Vision of Sound Falling* (1982; Fig. 5), curated by William Hellerman for P.S. 1, Queens, New York,[28] Yankowitz again integrated sound as she had in her draped works and opera, and as she would do later with *Crossings*'s sacred voiceovers. But this scenario played more like "Hell – The Musical." It consisted of an impressive room-size "stage set," comprising eight red, white, and black ceramic tile panels surrounded by a frieze. High-relief images of devils with gaping mouths, and snakes set the stage for a sound experience: a wafting cacophony of metallic groaning church organs and fallen souls echoing remorseful wails. The vibrations, experienced as the sensation one feels in the groin when an

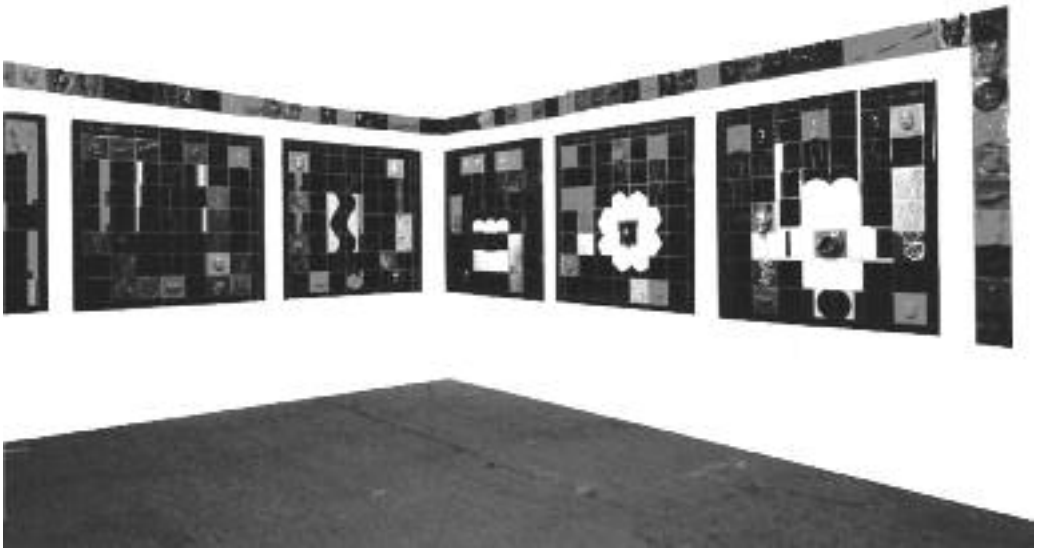

Fig. 5. Nina Yankowitz, *Hell's Breath – The Sounds of Falling* (1982), ceramic relief panels with frieze, 5′ x 37′ x 3″. Photo: Barry Holden.

elevator drops, vividly captured the idea of falling from grace.

"I didn't want to be known as a tile artist," Yankowitz says almost as abruptly as her flirtation with craft looked elsewhere. There's this wrecking ball in *Sphere* (1990), a fresco-secco painting made on canvas panels abutting one another like tiles, that indeed sounds the death knell. Included in "The Technological Muse: Affirmation and Ambivalence in American Machine Imagery (1840-1990)," the 1990 inaugural exhibition for the Katonah Museum of Art, *Sphere* consists of a cannon-like ball, powered by an electric train motor, hurtling along a track in front of an abstract cityscape painting, a commotion of abstract ovals, circles, and triangles. The ball disappears and reappears through two black spiky blast holes puncturing the work. Yankowitz describes the piece as a study of layered perspectives. Compositionally, she teases the viewer's sense of center as the eye follows the moving ball. Thematically, the ball as bullet train suggests the speed of travel through time and space. And politically, in keeping with the exhibition's theme, the machine-made wonders facilitating life portend a descent into some dark and dangerous abyss. Her thoughtful analysis of these multiple perspectives dissects her sensibilities, which then barrel headlong into issues of gender, bias, ecology, and faith.

An important travelling group exhibition in 1993, "Ciphers of Identity,"[29] dealt with racism, sexism, homophobia, and subjugation. It included Yankowitz's *Dog on Beam* (1993; Fig. 6), a sculpture of a copper dog stuck in place on a balance bar, unable to reach its ball, without falling. Maurice Berger wrote that: "the perilously perched animal… recalls our own struggle against the destabilizing forces of society…. A… (humiliating) balancing act that continually undermines any stable sense of center."[30]

Humiliation also informs Yankowitz's *Yellow Man* (1998), exhibited in "Size Matters" at Gale Gates Gallery in New York. This small faceless and feckless mechanized robot, perched on a pedestal attached to the wall, mindlessly salutes no one in particular as he babbles slavish salutations—"yes sir," "no ma'am," etc.—in a variety of languages and dialects, reminiscent of both the gibberish of *Scenario Sounds* and the sacred echoes in *Crossings*.

But it is with a series of glasshouses, created between 2002 and 2009, that Yankowitz's interests—with themes, text-base imagery, and technology—coalesce into a mature body of signature works. Yankowitz loves to play with tension, and these glass architectural structures, shielding all they expose, make sturdy but vulnerable homes for both her didactic tableaus and her implied narratives, particularly her ecological themes. They also provide a neat wrap for her fascination with oddball multimedia combinations, as evidenced in *Femme Fatale* (2003; Fig. 7). As close as Yankowitz to that date came to gender specific imagery, it contains a model F-15 suspended upside down over a pile of fluffy white feathers that Lilly Wei referred to "as an ironic equation of war machines with the female body."[31] Teeming with subversive contrasts—strong/weak, male/female, war/peace, nature/ machine—the work was included in "Outside/In," an exhibition Joyce Kozloff curated for Wooster Arts Space.

For later glasshouses (prototypes for the schematic

Fig. 6. Nina Yankowitz, *Dog on Beam (*shown with *Empowered)* (1992), copper, aluminum ball, leather, 5′ x 11′. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts/ University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMBC).

Crossings temple), Yankowitz mined computer databases for a series of text-based installations, as she would again do on an exponentially larger scale for *Crossings*. Downloading prodigious amounts of information from the Internet for *Kiosk.edu* (2002–04; Fig. 8), she searched for short quotes by visual and performing artists and architects that condensed the essence of their visions into short, pithy prose: "*Color is my day-long obsession—joy and torment*," wrote Claude Monet. "*Writing about music is like dancing about architecture*," said Laurie Anderson. "*We can't destroy the past…it's gone*," exclaimed John Cage.

Yankowitz projected these quotes with hundreds of others on the surface of *Kiosk.edu*. At night, the bold red, white, and black texts appear to float like twitters from cyber-heaven. *Kiosk.edu* shelters an enormous glut of information, but there is irony here that tells in her title that shorts "education." One wonders, "Does the blind person running a hand over Yankowitz's tile mural, or the reader attempting to "sing" the color scrawls of her *Scenario Sounds*, experience more "felt" knowledge about the power to communicate than someone searching Wikipedia.com?" As she later did with *Crossings*, Yankowitz here uses the allure of technology to plumb a daunting universe for its words and texts. But then she slows the viewer down, making a few choice words by selected individuals speak volumes. Knowledge, instantly accessible, is easily forgotten, she suggests. Hence the need to entomb but reveal it in glass, especially when it relates to the contributions of those unrecognized in their lifetimes. Though similar to Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer's use of text-as-image, Yankowitz uses words to inform, not to inflame. She says, "I want to re-right/re-write history, especially about women."

Buried Treasures/Secrets in the Sciences (2006; Pl. 8), a particularly ambitious installation dedicated to women in science, does just that. Protective as it is suffocating, and surreal as it is enlightening, this glasshouse acts as a physical and virtual vitrine for histories of women whose contributions have long been stuffed away in time's storage bin. An oversized chemistry tube sitting on a laboratory table inside the glass container drips virtual chemicals. The drops form puddles of comic-book-like word balloons divulging little known facts—who knew that the actress Hedy Lamarr, remembered as a Hollywood sex siren, was the co-inventor of a frequency hopping technology that ultimately led to secure military communications, even cell phone technology? Her story quivers in a globule on the floor, just long enough to be read, before slithering away in the wake of the next elucidating bubble about another woman in science.

Concurrent with her use of text within glasshouses, Yankowitz produced a number of ecological installations. Using the inside/out metaphor to illustrate the threat of climate change she created *Cloud House* (2004; Pl. 9), a glass and aluminum enclosure that squeezes

Fig. 7. Nina Yankowitz, *Femme Fatale* (2003), aluminum, glass, fiberglass, feathers, 8'4" x 6'4" x 7'2". Photo: Barry Holden.

weather into a confined interior space. A generator producing ultrasound vibrations creates a cold mist that forms clouds within the structure that wanes pale grey by day, and waxes hot red to violet LED light by night. A beautiful sight that sucks in the viewer with the attention-getting hook of a looming tornado, *Cloud House* omens the extinction of the generic home as a consequence of eco-carelessness. As an algorithmic projection above the house unfolds phases of an origami-like moon, it is for the viewer to decide whether some hidden cosmic order will override human folly.

Exponentially raising this eco-apocalyptic bar at the Museum Quarter in Vienna, Austria, in December 2011, Yankowitz appropriated the venue's entire glass-walled space to create her site-specific installation *Global Warming Schauram Bursting Seams* (Fig. 9). Imagine hearing water, faintly gurgling, then dripping, rushing and gushing; then watching water—

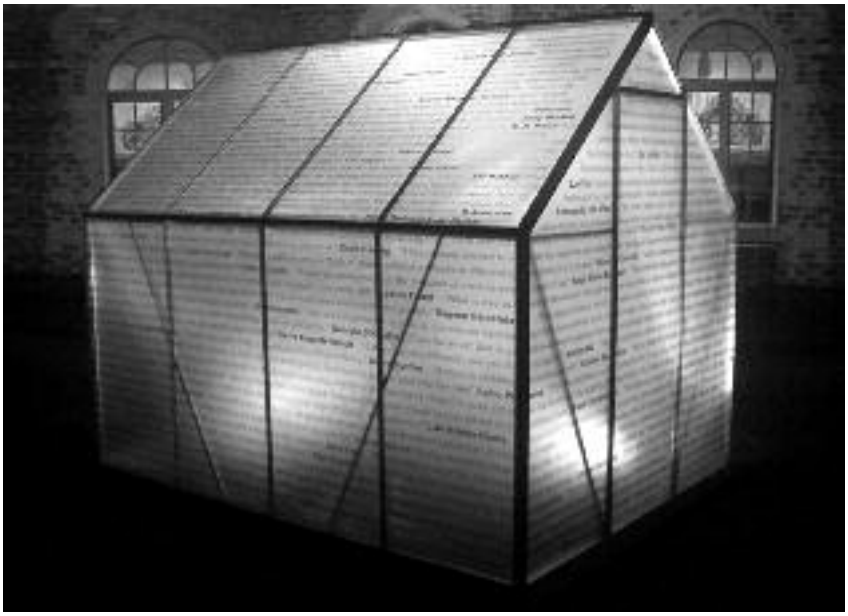

Fig. 8. Nina Yankowitz, *Kiosk.edu* (2002-04), aluminum, glass, LED light, digital texts, 12'4"x 6" 4" x 7'2". Photo: Barry Holden.

Fig. 9. Nina Yankowitz, *Global Warming Schauram Bursting Seams* (2011), projectors, computers, P. Kroger mappings, 250 sq. feet. Photo: RGB Klein.

weeping, seeping, and cascading through moldings, crevices, and within glass walls. A virtual window projected onto an actual window bears witness to an onslaught of typhoons, tornadoes, and scorching sun announcing the arrival of global Armageddon. The viewer gazes at the devastation helplessly, from behind the glass wall. What is one to do?

Make a cell phone call. That, at least, is an option handed the audience facing a crisis of another sort—global terrorism—in "*The Third Woman" Interactive Performance and Film-Game* (2011; Fig 10), an international collaborative effort involving conceptual, electronic, performance and design artists.[32] The work pivots on *The Third Woman,* a ten-minute film conceived and produced by Martin Rieser and Pia Tikka that riffs on Carol Reed's 1949 spy thriller, *The Third Man*. *The Third Woman* follows the misadventures of Lara Line as she becomes embroiled in a saga about modern-day terrorists trafficking in bio-hazardous materials. The film is the centerpiece for a series of separately orchestrated installations, to date exhibited in several venues: New York City; Vienna, Austria;, Bath, England; and Xian, China.

Yankowitz is credited with producing the movie's teaser and a separate, related documentary. She also directed and organized a 2011 exhibition unique to Galapagos Space in Brooklyn, New York. Here, as the audience sat cabaret style in small groups viewing Yankowitz's trailer scenes, women performers dressed in outfits printed with Margarete Jahrmann's scannable barcode designs, shimmied about, asking audience member-players to aim their cell phones at the coded frocks to download a series of directorial options. The audience never saw the original Rieser/Tikka film. They instead viewed it in sequential segments on a large screen and on their cell phones. When the film paused, players texted their directorial decisions to such questions as: Should Lara say

A." She was not supposed to get so nosy."
B. "I love him, but they're on my tail."
C." Should I kill her too?"

Their cell phone responses connected via WiFi to computer techs, who tallied the vote and edited the movie to reflect the audience's majority opinions. The event ended with a viewing of the audience-(re)directed film.

Hardly intended to author a community action plan for dealing with bioterrorism, this "U-vote the plot movie" created a film more "dada" than anything else. However, just as *Crossings* enabled individuals using options to edit their

Fig. 10. Nina Yankowitz, "*The Third Woman" Interactive Performance and Film-Game* (2011), "The Algorithmics" performers, computers, projectors, audio, projection screen, water projections, 2500 sq. ft. Galapagos Theatre. Photo Composite: Martin Rieser.

own "bibles," so did *The Third Woman* installation at Galapagos underscore the potential for individuals harnessing technology to impact life's big picture.

There is another side to all this that speaks to a new, egalitarian age for art. Works such as *Crossing*s and more so *The Third Woman,* share ownership of the creation with a brigade of collaborators, viewers included, all of whom are messengers of the message they helped craft. The artist suffering self-effacement here does so willingly, with the hope that all involved in the art process will see in art a call to arms for the betterment of living.

Nina Yankowitz harvests her near-half-century process with such installations. They morph her abstract notations into barcodes and allow the word as image and idea to fly through cyberspace. She steps from center stage—where she once sang her falsetto *Scenario Sounds*—into the crowd. Bowing to her public as protagonist in her process, she continues to trade up her text-based messenger tools to present multiple views of the world in media that communicate in the vernacular of the day. Her art is thus as ever changing as life. •

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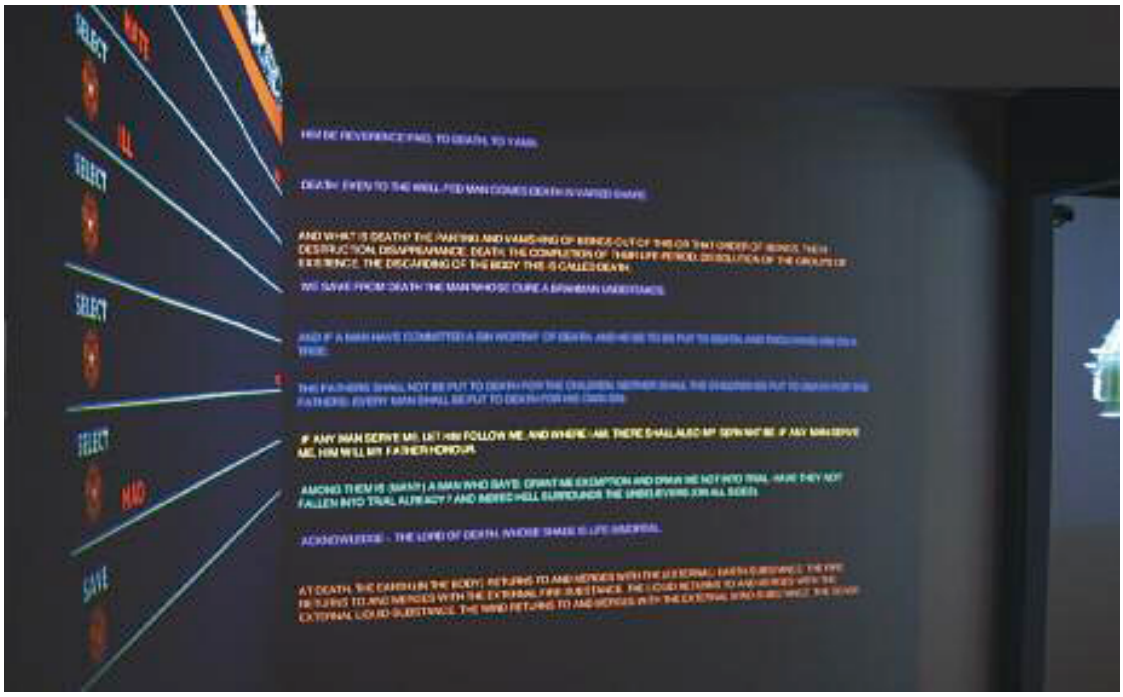
NOTES

1. All artist quotes based on my interview with Nina Yankowitz, June 2, 2011.
2. *Crossings* (2006–09), an art installation conceived by Nina Yankowitz, done in collaboration with Mauri Kaipainen, Barry Holden, Pia Tikka, Peter Kroger and Scott Fitzgerald; e-MobilArt, European Mobile Lab for Interactive media Artists, funded by The European Union. See www2.media.uoa.gr/~charitos/emobilart/exhibition_crossings.html.
3. Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings, New Art in Multicultural America*; (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 10.
4. The color coding of the texts as they appear in *Crossings* are as follows: blue for Old Testament, yellow/gold for New Testament, purple for Hindu Rig-Veda, orange/red for Buddhist, and green for Qu'ran.
5. This passage is from the Rig-Veda, one of the four Vedas or primary texts of Hinduism, dating from 1500 B.C. It is from Hymn CXVII, Liberality (purple).
6. These were the words of Buddha, c. 500 B.C. (The Eightfold Path) (orange-red).
7. This passage is found in Deuteronomy 24:16:07, the fifth book of the Hebrew bible (Old Testament) (blue).
8. Susan Davidson, *Robert Rauschenberg, A Retrospective* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publ., 1998), 290.
9. This and the following quotes are from an email exchange with Dr. Mauri Kaipainen, June 12, 2012.
10. Lisa Phillips, *The American Century, Art & Culture, 1950-2000*, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art and W.W. Norton, 1999), 173.
11. Group 212 was the name given to the community of artists who gathered in the environs of New York State's Ulster County, between Woodstock and Saugerties, along State Highway, Route 212 in the late 1960s.
12. John Carlin, "Pop Apotheosis: Rock Music Rules," in Phillips, *The American Century, Art & Culture, 1950-2000,* 179.
13. Kenneth Werner, aka Phil Harmonic, was an electronic musician and multimedia artist who provided the musical accompaniment for Yankowitz's multi-media work, *Oh Say Can You See*" (1968).
14. Robert Littman, *Hanging/ Leaning* (Hempstead, NY: The Emily Lowe Gallery, Hofstra University, 1970), introduction.
15. John Perreault, "Two Seasons Stacked for Baling," *The Village Voice* (Feb. 1, 1973).
16. Rudolf Arnheim, *New Essays on the Psychology of Art*, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986), 205–07. Synesthesia is a sensation produced in one modality when a stimulus is applied to another modality, as when the hearing of a certain sound induces the visualization of a certain color, see http//dictionary.reference.com.
17. Other venues for *Scenario Sounds/Personae Mimickings or Voices from the Piano* included Cal Arts University, Valencia, and Leah Levy Gallery, San Francisco, both 1981.
18. Joyce Kozloff, introduction to Nina Yankowitz, *Scenario Sounds/Personae Mimickings or Voices from the Piano* (New York: Street Editions, 1981), a limited edition hand-signed artist's book and audiotape, hereafter *Scenario Sounds*.
19. Yankowitz, *Scenario Sounds*; a CD version was issued by NY Art Projects, LLC in 2007. The publication is in the Franklin Furnace Archive, currently housed in the Museum of Modern Art, New York City.
20. Kozloff, *Scenario Sounds*, introduction.
21. James R. Mellow, "Cheops Would Approve," *New York Times* (Dec. 5, 1971). Mellow incorrectly referred to the December 1971 exhibition as the "second one-man show," while, in fact, it was Yankowitz's third solo show at Kornblee.
22. Cindy Nemser, "Can Women Have One-Man Shows?," *New York Times* (Jan. 9, 1972), Letter to the Editor.
23. Amei Wallach, from my Dec. 15, 2011, interview with her about her 2008 film, *Louise Bourgeois: The Spider, the Mistress and the Tangerine*, directed by Wallach and Marion Cajori.
24. *Heretics,* Written and directed by Joan Braderman, produced by Joan Braderman and Crescent Diamond Productions, 2009.
25. Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, *Global Feminisms* (London: Merrell, 2007), 11; catalog for the "Global Feminisms" exhibition organized by the Brooklyn Museum.
26. H.H. Arnason, *History of Modern Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 615.
27. Yankowitz created two tile relief walls (each 4'x12') in 1980, sponsored by the New Jersey Council for the Arts, for the School for the Blind and Hearing Impaired, Jersey City, and School for the Blind and Hearing Impaired, Newark.
28. Bill Hellermann, a composer, guitarist, and experimental musician launched the first exhibitions of sound sculpture and audio art, bringing into usage the term "Soundart"; see www. Issue projectroom.org.
29. "Ciphers of Identity," curated by Maurice Berger, opened at the Fine Arts Gallery, University of Maryland Baltimore County, November 1993, and traveled to multiple venues including Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, N.Y., 1994.
30. Maurice Berger, *Ciphers of Identity* (Baltimore: Fine Arts Gallery, Univ. of Maryland Baltimore County, 1993), 28.
31. Lilly Wei, "Outside In," *Art News* (March 2004): 134.
32. www2.media.uoa.gr/charritos/emobilart/exhibition_gr/third_woman.html, "The Third Woman" and Interactive installation with film material created and produced by Martin Rieser and Pia Tikka. Other participating artists include Anna Dumitnu, Cilona Harney, Margarete Jahrmann, Barry Roshto, Nita Tandon, and Nina Yankowitz; e-MobilArt, funded by The European Union.



Pl. 7. Nina Yankowitz, *Crossings* (2009), interactive installation with computers, infrared tracking wiimote, projectors, metal wand, variable size. Photo: Mauri Kaipainen.

Pl. 8. Nina Yankowitz, *Buried Treasures/Secrets in the Sciences* (2006), aluminum medical table, paper scroll, text and algorithmic projections, 12'4" x 6'4" x7'2" Photo: Barry Holden.

Pl. 9. Nina Yankowitz, *CloudHouse* (2004), aluminum, glass, water mist, ultrasound generator, 8'4" x 6' 4" x 7' 2". Photo: Barry Holden.