

Situating Freedom: Jackson Mac Low, John Cage, and Donald Judd

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Abstract

Tracking the evolution of post-World War II aesthetics in Anglo-American anarchism from the 1940s to the 1980s, I demonstrate anti-authoritarianism opened up many new directions in the arts and inspired some of the most iconic works in the history of modernism. A shorter version of this article first appeared in *The Writings of Donald Judd* (Chinati Foundation: Marfa, TX, 2009).

In 1968, in an essay for *Encounter* magazine, the British anarchist art critic Herbert Read (Fig. 1) wrote “the anarchist is a pragmatist, or more specifically, a pragmatist realist. He does not believe in any philosophical or political doctrine except in so far as it results in actions that are in accordance with the creative or positive tendencies in human evolution.”¹ Read’s characterizations were inspired by a recently published anthology, *Patterns of Anarchy*, which had drawn attention to pragmatism in the course of discussing ethics. Anarchism, wrote the editors, is ethics individualized. Configured as “the product of an individual’s unshackled analysis of his surroundings,” anarchist ethics fostered a pragmatist approach to decision making

¹ Herbert Read, “My Anarchism,” *The Cult of Sincerity*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 77.

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“free of coercion.”² This individualist grounding, which refuses to posit “obligatory imperatives,” in turn subverts the possibility of hierarchical relations of power over others. “Uncoerced and uncoercing,” anarchist ethics integrates means and ends into a seamless continuum founded upon free agency.³ This congruence also informs the anarchist approach to social activism, which is configured non-hierarchically, as participatory process.⁴ American artist Donald Judd shared this perspective. Maintaining “the best art is opposed to the main kinds of power” Judd rejected the “inherited traditions” of Western aesthetics in a bid to foreground our evaluative agency as pragmatic and anarchist.⁵ His “specific objects” — a term he invented for his art work to circumnavigate the imposition of the category ‘sculpture’ on the viewer — do not aspire to impose meaning: they seek to stimulate our freedom to discover it.⁶ I will return to Judd’s art at the end of this article, but first, we need to track the genealogy of his aesthetic concerns within Anglo-American anarchism.

The quest for a more deeply anti-authoritarian aesthetic, which complimented the emphasis on personal ethics, first comes to the fore in the late 1930s in Britain, when anarchists began critiquing Marxist aesthetics as codified by the Communist movement under the leadership of the Soviet Union. Through most of the 1930s, Communists in Europe and North America had championed socialist realism, a style which went hand in hand with the subordination of art production to ideology as codified by the party apparatus. Communists claimed their art was antithetical to the aesthetic values of Fascism, however, from an anarchist perspective, political authoritarianism had its own internal logic. This was Read’s argument in his ground-breaking critique, *Poetry and Anarchism* (1939). Reflecting on the state of the arts in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union,

² Leonard I. Krimerman and Lewis Perry, “Anarchism: The Method of Individualization,” *Patterns of Anarchy: A Collection of Writings on the Anarchist Tradition* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 557.

³ Ibid. I also explore this issue in Allan Antliff, “Anarchy, Power, and Post-Structuralism,” *Substance* no. 113 (2007): 58–59.

⁴ Jesse Cohn, “What is Anarchist Literary Theory?” *Anarchist Studies* 15 no. 2 (2007): 116.

⁵ Donald Judd, “La Sfida del Sistema” *Metro* 14 (Juen 1968): 42, cited in David Raskin, “Donald Judd’s Skepticism,” PhD. diss. (University of Texas at Austin, 1999), 22. Raskin’s most recent reappraisal of Judd’s oeuvre includes a chapter “Citizen Judd,” on his political activism. See David Raskin. *Donald Judd*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

⁶ Raskin, “Donald Judd’s Skepticism,” *passim*.



Figure 1 Herbert Read

Read observed that both regimes subordinated all aspects of society, including the arts, to the central control of the state, a feature he characterized as “totalitarian.”⁷ The Communists celebrated the achievements of State socialism while in Nazi art ideals of racial nationalism were glorified, “but the necessary method,” wrote Read,

⁷ Herbert Read, *Poetry and Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1939), 23.

was the same. Both movements imposed ideology through art, generating programmatic styles of “rhetorical realism, devoid of invention, deficient in imagination, renouncing subtlety, and emphasizing the obvious.”⁸ The corollary to art’s ideological subordination was the repression of any artistic independence in society at large. Hence the vicious campaigns against recalcitrant artists in Russia and Germany, no matter what their motivations. The counterpoint to this instrumentalist approach to art making was a poetics of innovation that would break up calcifying art forms. “I realize that form, pattern, and order are essential aspects of existence; but in themselves they are attributes of death,” Read wrote:

To make life, it is necessary to break form, to distort patterns, to change the nature of our civilization. In order to create it is necessary to destroy; and the agent of destruction in society is the poet. I believe that the poet is necessarily an anarchist, and that he must oppose all organized conception of the State, not only those which we inherit from the past, but equally those which are imposed on people in the name of the future. In this sense, I make no distinction between Fascism and Marxism.⁹

In a keynote essay on literary radicalism for the British anarchist literary journal *Now*, poet and war resister George Woodcock (Fig. 2) extended Read’s argument, suggesting that if subordinating creative work to a political program was a dead end, art produced in the absence of such pressures was not necessarily radical either. In the existing democracies, Woodcock observed, many seemed content to work within the capitalist market, adjusting their production to suit the tastes of the bourgeoisie and established cultural institutions.¹⁰ In effect, they compromised their creativity and themselves, disarming their capacity to be radical by entering into a subordinate relationship with the powers that be. Taking his cue from Read’s critique of repression under totalitarian regimes, Woodcock concluded autonomy is the measure of radicalism. “The really independent writer, by the very exercise of his function, represents a revolutionary force” he argued:

⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁹ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰ George Woodcock, *The Writer and Politics* (London: Porcupine Press, 1948), 16.

The man who is ready to apply to any subject on which he writes, a standard of values based on a sincere conception of the truth, is bound to act in his writing against injustice and falsehood, *even* if he does not write for the specific purpose of expediting social change.¹¹



Figure 2 George Woodcock

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

In effect, radicalness resided in the relationship of the writer to the work and the quality of this relationship trumped other criteria. In a remarkable passage Woodcock seemed ready to bid goodbye to the securities of radical art as socially-critical agitprop, asserting "Any honest artist is an agitator, an anarchist, an incendiary. By expressing an independent standard of values he attacks the principle of authority; by portraying the truth according to his own vision he attacks the factual manifestations of authority."¹²

For Woodcock, freedom of the individual was the "supreme value . . . above society." "The social problem" he writes, "is fundamentally an individual problem for each man to solve personally. Society will be free only when each individual knows the meaning of freedom; harmonious only when each individual realizes his own harmony; integrated only when each individual has become integrated within himself. Anarchism is only secondarily a social teaching. Its primary object is the realization by the individual of his own nature."¹³ It followed that the writer's role was "not to make laws or to elaborate dogmas. It is the humble task of realizing and portraying truth. It is the task of revelation, and true revelation is no more than making men aware of the natural and harmonious laws that already exist within them."¹⁴

How, then, would a libertarian artist signal a revelatory truth was being communicated? Woodcock assumed this dimension of meaning would be transmitted through content, stating "The novelist who shows the hollowness of middle-class life, the poet who displays without comment the spiritual agonies of war, as well as the painter who shows on his canvas a symbol of the schizoid futility of a modern city, are all playing their part in subverting a corrupt society." As to form, Woodcock posited the desire to communicate "sincerely" might lead an artist to abandon more rarified standards of prose, but did not elaborate.¹⁵

At the time Woodcock staked his case, one of anarchist-pacifism's preeminent figures was an American writer, Kenneth Patchen. (Fig. 3) During World War Two, Patchen, whose writings appeared in British and American anarchist journals, had distinguished himself as an uncompromising opponent to the conflict in terms that were unequivocal.¹⁶ In 1946, he reflected "There is no man in authority

¹² Ibid., 18.

¹³ Ibid., 24.

¹⁴ Ibid., 27.

¹⁵ Ibid., 18; 27.



Figure 3 Kenneth Patchen, 1954

anywhere who is not guilty. All their authority is evil – founded on hatred and darkness, not love: designed to destroy – not to save.”¹⁷

Patchen’s anti-war artistic strategy was to attack literary forms that habituate the reader’s consciousness to authoritarian relationships, lulling us to “sleep” and thus, sustaining the status quo. The displacement of the author’s voice by the text was his principal target. Patchen’s voice continually punches through narratives which are overtly manipulated to break up their coherence, setting the reader up to dialogue, not with the story, but with Patchen through the story. Early on in his anti-war novel, *The Journal of Albion Moonlight* (1941) Patchen introduces himself, asking rhetorically, “My purpose? It is nothing remarkable: I wish to speak to you.”¹⁸ Later, anticipating objections as to what a writer should be doing, he argues his point: “Men were made to talk to one another. You can’t understand that. But I tell you that the writing of the future will be just this kind of writing – one man trying to tell another man of the events in his own heart. Writing will become speech.”¹⁹ Direct communication demands transparency. In a telling passage Patchen reveals that everything, from constructive narrative to disruptive interjection,

¹⁶ Larry Smith, *Kenneth Patchen: Rebel Poet in America* (Ohio: Bottom Dog Press, 2000), 170–71.

¹⁷ Kenneth Patchen, “Ezra Pound’s Guilt,” *Poetry Folio*, Alex Comfort and Peter Wills, eds. (Barnet, UK: The Editors, 1946): 10.

¹⁸ Kenneth Patchen, *The Journal of Albion Moonlight* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 22.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 200.

is his voice: “I think you will agree,” he writes, “that I am alive in every part of this book; turn back twenty, thirty, one hundred pages – I am back there. That is why I hate the story; characters are not snakes that they can shed their skins on every page – there can be only one action: what a man is. . . ah! But I am in the room with you. I write this book *as an action*. Like knocking a man down.”²⁰

De-alienating himself as writer from the text, Patchen communicates “with sincerity” to borrow a phrase from Woodcock. And, by making his readers aware of themselves in the act of reading, he refuses power over others as exercised through the closed fictive storyline. During the war Patchen wrote an entire book, *The Memoirs of a Shy Pornographer* (1945) dedicated to this one point. The book narrates the travails of a shy romance writer whose novel is spiced up by unscrupulous publishers who strategically replace the verbs and nouns in his love scenes with asterisks. The story proves to be a commercial sensation, and the traumatized writer is subsequently hounded by legions of sexually predatory bohemians in search of a kindred spirit – the point being that commercialized art imposes falsehoods on writer and reader alike.²¹

What does Patchen’s authentic mode of writing communicate, once the obstructions are stripped away? First and foremost, it is his moral universe in the raw. The *Journal* is filled with plaintive protestations against violence and war, directly addressed to the reader: “What are we going to do? Where can we turn?” Patchen pleads, “There is so much hate in the world. I would crawl a thousand miles on my hands and knees if that would stop the war.”²² Patchen presents text and authorial voice as an organic unity: and in his quest he deployed a myriad of formal innovations such as typographical variations for emphasis, autonomous narratives on the same page, and, in one instance, a drawing of a hung man incorporated into a discourse on the moral insanity of torturing torturers.²³

How effective these artistic strategies were might be gauged by the recollections of War Resisters League militant David Dellinger (Fig. 4) (founded in 1923 as an outgrowth of anarchist efforts to oppose World War 1, the League remains active to this day). Dellinger recalled attending a league meeting in New York City in 1943 where

²⁰ Ibid., 261.

²¹ Kenneth Patchen, *Memoirs of a Shy Pornographer* (New York: New Directions, 1945).

²² Patchen, *Journal of Albion Moonlight*, 206–7.

²³ Ibid., 245.



Figure 4 David Dellinger

literary critic Paul Goodman and others were discussing how to respond as anarchists to the US war drive. At the time, Dellinger was preparing to be jailed for his refusal to serve. Moved by the situation, he rose to speak:

I began to tell them about this wonderful poem by Patchen that had recently been published in an edition of *Retort* magazine. Only I didn't have a copy, but I tried to recite it anyway. When I stopped after only a few lines I heard a voice in the audience. A man had risen and was reciting the whole poem. Then it struck me. I was meeting Kenneth Patchen.²⁴ Patchen's poetic disposition, "Instructions for Angels," asserts the superiority of peace over violence in the most intimate terms.²⁵

The rapport between activist and writer carried over to Dellinger's subsequent incarceration as a war resister. Patchen was one of five activists he corresponded with, and when Dellinger's wife bore a son in 1944, the couple named their child "Patch" to honour the writer.²⁶ Patchen's stylistic innovations in the name of sincere anti-authoritarian communication — person to person — mirrored the means-ends ethics of Dellinger's politics. Upon his release from prison in 1945 following the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Dellinger issued a "Declaration of War" that pinpoints the salient features. The American state, he wrote, had mobilized "all the destructive fury, violent hatred, regimentation, and dishonesty of military warfare" in the name of victory. "The combatants were conscripts rather than

²⁴ Larry Smith, Interview with David Dellinger, cited in *Kenneth Patchen*, 169.

²⁵ Kenneth Patchen, "Instructions for Angels," *Retort*, 1 no. 4 (1943): 28.

²⁶ He could choose five correspondents. See Smith, *Kenneth Patchen*, 170.

free men.” “Every day that the war went on” they had been “compelled to act in contradiction to the ideals which motivated many of them.” Under these circumstances the defeat of Japan was a “hollow farce,” bringing “a partial end to killing that never should have begun” in the first place.²⁷ Dellinger’s war against war, on the other hand, was premised on different ethics, namely the refusal to submit “to any authority *or impose it on others* in the name of peace.” Dellinger continued:

The war for total brotherhood must be a non-violent war carried out by methods worthy of the ideals we seek to serve. The acts we perform must be the responsible acts of free men, not the irresponsible acts of conscripts under orders. . . . Our allegiance transcends nationalities and classes [and] every act we perform today must reflect the kind of human relationships we are fighting to establish tomorrow.²⁸



Figure 5 Jackson Mac Low

²⁷ David Dellinger, “Declaration of War” (1945) *Revolutionary Non-Violence* (New York: Anchor Press, 1971), 21. American victory was merely “entrenching white imperialism as the tyrant of the Pacific, and contributing unemployment, slums and class hatred to the United States.”

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

Seemingly, Patchen's aesthetic and the politics it communicated were the perfect complement to Dellinger's activism, but the ethical efficacy of this approach was destined to be called into question. In 1954, in a pivotal article published in the anarchist journal *Resistance*, successor to the World War 2 era journal, *Why?*, the American poet Jackson Mac Low (Fig. 5) would chart a new direction.

Born in 1922, and educated in Chicago, Mac Low had come to adulthood during the war, and his anarchist politics were steeped in the strategies of resistance promulgated by Dellinger and the War Resisters League. Mac Low joined the *Why* collective some time in 1945, and he continued to contribute after the editors adopted a new name, *Resistance*, that better reflected their stance towards post-war American society.²⁹ In an article on "Co-ops, Politics, and Anarchism" published in *Why's* December, 1945 issue, Mac Low distinguished anarchism from the representational politics of the left and right. Anarchists, wrote Mac Low, rejected the politics of "voting, parliaments, and party-nonsense" in favour of "Direct Action, in direct affirmation of the Real thing."³⁰ Louis Cabri has unpacked the politics of this position and its implications for Mac Low's poetics in his incisive essay, "Rubus Effect Remove Government: Jackson Mac Low, *Why?/Resistance*, Anarcho-Pacifism." "Direct Action" and "Real" were capitalized to signal the hall mark of political authenticity in anarchism was the harmonization of means and ends. One is not represented, one represents oneself. And one does so directly, by taking action. Congruence was *the* central issue for Mac Low. And it inspired his very public break with the poetics of "authenticity" as practiced by Patchen. Cabri refers to Mac Low's critical review of Patchen's poetry published in late 1954 in *Resistance*, wherein he took the writer to task for "sentimentality, hysterical unmotivated violence, incoherence, [and] sloppy technique." Worse still, thanks to Patchen's popularity, these qualities had "come to be associated in the minds of a number of young (and not-so-young) writers with The Good, the Courageous — in short, with the Lonely Persecuted True Genuine Advanced Guard of American Literature." Mac Low objected to this development, asserting "*Resistance* is an anarchist magazine: in literature this does not mean sentimentality, violence,

²⁹ Louis Cabri, "Rubus Effect Remove Government: Jackson Mac Low, *Why?/Resistance*, Anarcho-Pacifism," *Crayon: Festschrift for Jackson Mac Low's 75th Birthday*, Andrew Levy and Bob Harrison, eds. Vol. 1 no. 1 (1997): 45–48.

³⁰ Jackson Mac Low, "Co-ops, Politics and Anarchism," *Why* 4 no. 7 (1945): 3, cited in Cabri, 50.

incoherence, and lack of craft. It means personal responsibility, the craftsman's responsibility."³¹ Evoking the foundational touchstone of pacifist anarchism — "personal responsibility" — Mac Low accused Patchen of failing in his capacity as poet to meet the criteria of means-ends congruency that mark out an ethical politics. Patchen's writing was expressive and powerful to be sure, but in the end it was still coercive, even if a libertarian voice was shouting for our attention. By way of underlining the insufficiencies of Patchen's "incoherent" prose, Mac Low referred readers to an exemplary poem by Mary Catherine Richards published in the previous issue of *Resistance*:

Hands:

birds.³²

Authenticity in anarchist aesthetics entailed sincerity not only of message, but of craft. A writer, for example, needed to be attentive to the medium because the medium is the writer's means of communication. So when Mac Low called Patchen to account in terms of craft, he was suggesting Patchen's poetry was, from an anarchist point of view, insufficiently libertarian because of formal failings. The gap between words in Richard's poem was more successful because it stimulated, through form, an opening to creative agency, uncoerced and indeterminate, on the part of the reader. Last but not least, inscribing this agency poetically ensured congruency of means and ends was realized by poet and reader alike, because it also released the writer from any authoritative role in the process.

At the time he penned his critique, Mac Low was developing a new "simultaneous" poetics in accord with these values. His first simultaneous poems, based on the Jewish Torah, were completed in January, 1955. Compositional features, such as the number of lines in each stanza, were determined by throws of a die. The poems were also written for one or more voice and featured periodic gaps when a reader could speak freely.³³ Similarly, Mac Low specified that elements such as tempo and loudness could vary throughout

³¹ Jackson Mac Low, "Counter-Review," *Resistance* 12 no. 4 (1954): 11, cited in Cabri, 53–54.

³² Mac Low cited in Cabri, 54.

³³ Jackson Mac Low, *Doings: Assorted Performance Pieces, 1955–2002* (New York: Granary Books, 2005), 18.

a reading. Noise makers or musical instruments could also be employed to indicate the end of lines and stanzas.³⁴ The virtue of such poetry was its marked quality of collaboration: crafted so as to open itself up to the agency of others, the poems reduce the writer's voice to one amongst many in contrast to Kenneth Patchen's assertive singularity.³⁵

In the mid-1960s Mac Low summarized the politics of such work in a biographical statement. "An 'anarchist,'" he related "does not believe, as some have wrongly put it, in social chaos. He believes in a state of society wherein there is no frozen power structure, where all persons may make significant initiatory choices in regard to matters affecting their own lives. In such a society coercion is at a minimum and lethal violence, non-existent." Simultaneous poetics were intended to actualize this ideal. "How better to embody such ideas in microcosm," Mac Low continues, "than to create works wherein both other human beings and their environments and the world 'in general' are all able to act within the general framework and set of 'rules' given by the poet. [The poet is] the maker of the plot, the framework — not necessarily of everything that takes place within that framework! The poet creates a *situation* wherein he invites other persons and the world in general to be co-creators with him! He does not wish to be a dictator but a loyal co-initiator of action within the free society of equals which he hopes his work will help to bring about."³⁶

Mac Low's poems are a framework for situating readers and listeners anarchically. And the role of chance in their creation is also important. Chance, Mac Low argued, similarly 'situates' the poet by producing outcomes that are unpredictable, and hence challenge the habitual ways of thinking that plague even the most spontaneous compositions. In this way, poet, performers, and audience alike are led to question assumptions and create anew through a process that was intensely collaborative and 'open'.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See the text of the "5th Biblical Poem," in *ibid.*, 20–21.

³⁶ Jackson Mac Low, "Biographical Note," *A Controversy of Poets: An Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry*, ed. Paris Leary and Robert Kelly (New York: Anchor Books, 1965), 231. Elsewhere Mac Low writes that, through his poetics, "audiences and performers may live for a time in a climate close to utopia." See Jackson Mac Low, "Language and Politics," *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy* Charles Bernstein, ed. (New York: Roof Books, 1990), 220.

³⁷ Jackson Mac Low, "The Poetics of Chance and the Politics of Simultaneous Spontaneity, or the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Revised and Abridged) July 12, 1975," *Taking Poetics From*



Figure 6 John Cage Preparing a Piano

Mac Low's stance echoes the position of another anarchist, John Cage (Fig. 6), when asked about the politics of his own work in the early 1960s. Recalling his participation in the tightly scripted sequence of events for performance artist Alan Kaprow's 1959 staging of "18 Happenings in 6 Parts" at a New York art gallery, Cage recalled, "I did not like to be told . . . to move from one room to another. Though I don't actively engage in politics, I do as an artist have some awareness of art's political content, and it doesn't include

Naropa Institute: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, Anne Waldman and Marilyn Webb, eds. (Boulder, Colorado: Shambala, 1978), 175.

policemen.” Suggesting mass society in the US was intrinsically hostile to anarchism, Cage insisted he could still facilitate “anarchist moments” artistically from “spaces, or times, or whatever you want to call them” when the “things that I’m so interested in — awareness, curiosity, etc. — have play.”³⁸

I reference Cage because Cage was an impetus for Mac Low’s own efforts. During the early 1950s, when Mac Low was formulating his simultaneous poetics, he and Cage were discussing these issues. As Mac Low recalls, Cage was interested in “‘non-intentional’ works by methods minimally involving the ego” through “the use of chance operations and the composition of works ‘indeterminate as to performance.’ These methods were designed to allow fundamental elements, such as sounds, to ‘be themselves’ unencumbered by ‘personal expression, drama, psychology, and the like.’”³⁹

The definitive instance of such work is the performance, in August 1952, of Cage’s composition “4’33”.” The event took place at “The Maverick,” a community of summer cottages adjacent to the village of Woodstock, New York, where “musicians, sculptors, writers, [and] painters” were invited to live and work rent free.⁴⁰ Cage’s composition was performed by David Tudor and was presented as a piano sonata in three movements.⁴¹ The length of the performance — 4 minutes and thirty three seconds — had been determined by throws of a die. Tudor sat down in front of a piano, closed the lid of the keyboard, remained in this position for a short time, and then opened the cover to mark the end of the first movement. He closed

³⁸ Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner, “An Interview with John Cage” (1965), *Happenings and Other Acts*, ed. Mariellen R. Sandford (London: Routledge, 1995), 69. Cage argued that anarchism could only be realized socially by small scale self-sufficient communities, and observed that American society had evolved in a different direction economically and organizationally. On the creation of anarchist moments, Cage continues, “It is not during organized or policed moments that these things happen. I admit that in a policed circumstance I can take an aesthetic attitude and enjoy it, just as I can listen to Beethoven in a way other than he intended and enjoy it on my terms, But why do you think so many Happenings have become intentional? I think that those people for one reason or another are interested in themselves. I came to be interested in anything but myself. This is the difference. When I say that anything can happen I don’t mean anything that I *want* to have happen.”

³⁹ “Mac Low to the Publisher,” *Doings: Assorted Performance Pieces, 1955–2002*, 12 (sidebar).

⁴⁰ On the Maverick, see Blanche Cooney, *In My Own Sweet Time*, (Ohio: Swallow Press/Ohio State Press, 1993), 92.

⁴¹ A video of Tudor performing the piece in 2006 can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HypmW4Yd7SY>

and opened the lid twice more, and then walked off the stage. The performance hall was set in the woods with one side open to the elements, allowing the sound of crickets, wind, and other chance noises to mingle with shifting seats and comments amongst the audience: and this was the composition's content, which the audience imbued with meaning.⁴²

Mac Low dates his own poetic adaptation of Cage's ideas to 1954, when the composer moved to an anarchist-inspired intentional community in Stony Point, New York.⁴³ There, in the course of discussing "chance operations, indeterminacy, and related matters," he thought through the implications.⁴⁴ "I decided to see what could be done by utilizing non-intentional methods of composition with language," he recalls, and out of this, his post-Patchen poetics emerged.⁴⁵ The trajectory is telling. What we have is a genealogy wherein the means-ends imperative in pacifist anarchism culminates with the depersonalization of the art work so as to open it up to the free agency of others. The work creates "anarchist moments" as Cage puts it, by "situating" us – to paraphrase Mac Low – in such a way as to empower us anarchically. And this leads to Donald Judd, and the means-ends congruence of his "specific objects" which, according to Raskin "assert a material *presence*. . . but only as a function of the work's physical characteristics."⁴⁶

⁴² Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History* (London: Routledge, 2000), 32.

⁴³ Mac Low recalls: "In 1954 Cage moved to a cooperative community in Rockland County, New York, which had been started by some anarchist-pacifist friends of mine and mainly included people who had just come north from Black Mountain College, in North Carolina"; "Jackson Mac Low Interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg (16 January, 1991: transcript rewritten and edited by Mac Low)," *Crayon: Festschrift for Jackson Mac Low's 75th Birthday* 1 no. 1 (1997): 265. The "GateHill Coop" was founded by "libertarian" anarchists Vera and Paul Williams, who build a small community of affordable houses on cooperatively owned land in Stony Point, not far from New York City. Cage dates his adoption of anarchism to 1954, when he moved to GateHill; Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage* second edition (London: Routledge, 2003), 278–79. Mac Low relates that the 5th Biblical Poem was first performed in spring, 1955 by himself, Cage and Richards in the dining room of a GateHill Coop house; Mac Low, "The Poetics of Chance," 178.

⁴⁴ "Jackson Mac Low Interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg (16 January, 1991: transcript rewritten and edited by Mac Low)," 265–66.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ David Raskin, "Specific Opposition: Judd's Art and Politics," *Art History* 24 no. 5 (November, 2001): 647.

As I suggested in my opening statement, Judd's intent was to clear the ground of socially-imposed preconceptions — the artistic correlate, from an anarchist perspective, of representational politics — to make way for an authentic encounter that stimulates free inquiry. “By testing experiences against beliefs,” Raskin writes, “Judd thought his art provided an avenue through inductive generalizations to liberty.” Or, as Judd himself wrote, “methodological skepticism . . . is the first element of human freedom [leading to] the time when there shall be no more government.”⁴⁷ No better example exists of how his art occasions such politics than the series of 100 *Untitled Milled Aluminum Boxes* Judd installed between 1982 and 1986 in two refurbished artillery sheds located on the site of a decommissioned army base (Fort D.A. Russell) at Marfa, Texas (Judd was a life-long supporter of the War Resisters League and his decision to transform a military site into an art center speaks for itself). At first glance, upon entering each shed, we are confronted by a series of highly polished, uniformly rectangular 104.1×129.5×182.9 cm objects, each set equidistant from the next. One quickly discovers, however, that the uniformity is an illusion. Closer inspection reveals each object has its own specificity: a top panel tilts down into the interior at a set angle in one box, while another is opened up on its side; a low ‘shelf’ is inserted a few centimeters from the floor in one, and another contains a smaller box suspended within it. All the while, light streaming through the shed's floor-to-ceiling curtain windows intensifies the dynamic interplay between us and the specificity of each object. As one moves around Judd's boxes and negotiates the installation space, light refracts off each polished surface, creating illusionistic effects that are in constant flux depending on where we stand, the time of day, the seasons, and so forth. The impact is exhilarating, and, dare I say, liberating: it has to be experienced to be fully appreciated.⁴⁸

This marks Judd out as a Post-Patchen anarchist in the tradition of Cage and Mac Low. Cage creates “anarchist moments”; Mac Low speaks of realizing anarchy “in microcosm”; and Judd presents us with freedom's “first element” in the form of an aesthetic attuned

⁴⁷ Donald Judd cited in *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Judd's installation can be viewed at <http://www.chinati.org/visit/collection/donaldjudd.php>

to individuated, subjective agency. All three aspired, by the intensification of means-ends congruence, to foster, through art, creative consciousness in the absence of hierarchy and authoritarianism.

Having traced the evolution of this variation in anarchist aesthetics in the main through literary debates, I would like to offer a closing observation regarding the *style* of Judd's writing from the 1950s forward. The steady stream of opinions, views, and assessments that constitute Judd's written legacy are so emphatic they leave no doubt as to who is doing the writing and why. Judd continually tells us he is speaking for himself, that these are his opinions, that he is the pivot on which the argument turns, all of which, he argues, makes for good criticism. Take for example, this prognosis from his 1984 essay, "A Long Discussion Not About Master-Pieces, But Why There Are So Few of Them": "The main failure of criticism, the correction of which would provide authority, is that its information has almost nothing to do with what the artists think or thought or the circumstances of a particular development. The artists hardly ever talk to each other but the critics almost never talk to the artists, and if so, in my experience, never listen . . . Criticism destroys all discussion, is not communication to the public, and isn't even rudimentary education."⁴⁹ Or again, from the same essay; "The artists of my age . . . have not written and talked enough, myself included."⁵⁰

Judd emphatically insists that self-expression is the prerequisite for direct and authentic communication — a stance that seemingly brings us full circle back to Patchen, and the declarative style of anarchic realization. There is, however, another perspective from which to assess Judd's position: the anarchist imperative to stop being represented and to represent oneself. Judd voices his opinions because he wants to open the field of art criticism to authenticity, discussion, and exchange in a bid to further the values his art circumscribes. In 1971 Judd donated a print work to benefit the War Resisters League which illustrates this stance. Conjoining quotations in serial fashion, Judd reproduced statements on war and American democracy. The quotations begin with 19th century political commentator Alexis De Tocqueville's observation that war is the surest means of suppressing civic liberties and they end with former Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who oversaw the war in Vietnam through two administrations,

⁴⁹ Donald Judd, "A Long Discussion Not About Master-Pieces, But Why There Are So Few of Them: Part 2," *Donald Judd: Complete Writings, 1975–1986* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 1987), 71–72.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

inadvertently revealing the bankruptcy of presidential elections for effecting meaningful social change.⁵¹

The anarchist politics of authenticity are overtly asserted here, as the reader takes in cumulative observations on war and the workings of the American political system spanning some 200 years. Selected by Judd, the quotations are a compelling invitation towards synthesis, communicated in a unitary fashion, yet they also stand as statements independent of Judd, open to our interpretive agency.⁵² The realization of anarchism's "first element" through art finds its compliment in such writing, which is always a starting point, not an end in itself. In this Judd parallels Mac Low and Cage, who were similarly compelled to speak plainly on numerous occasions, in tacit acknowledgment that beyond the transitory congruence of anarchism's realization through art, there are other terms of engagement.⁵³

⁵¹ Donald Judd, "Typewritten print (22×17") in a signed and unlimited edition which was offered for the benefit of the War Resisters League in 1971," Donald Judd, *Complete Writings, 1959–1975* (Halifax, Canada: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2005), 205–207.

⁵² These are the terms in which Judd praises the work of abstract expressionist painter Barnett Newman in 1964, signaling these terms of discourse traverse into the work of the anarchist abstract expressionists. Judd writes; "the openness of Newman's work is concomitant with chance and one person's knowledge; it doesn't claim more than anyone can know; it doesn't imply a social order. Newman is asserting his concerns and knowledge. He couldn't do this without the openness, wholeness, and scale that he has developed." According to Judd, Newman's "openness and freedom are credible now" — ie; authentic — in contrast to his "earlier closed and somewhat naturalistic" work. See Donald Judd, "Barnett Newman," *Complete Writings, 1959–1975*, 202.

⁵³ It is a mistake, then, to characterize (as some have) the art of Cage, Mac Low, or Judd as utopian gestures of disengagement, that is, to claim that the desired outcome — an anarchist consciousness — resides elsewhere than the present, and hence, facilitates "the politics of deferral that authorize the dualism of 'ends' versus 'means'"; Jesse Cohn, "What is Anarchist Literary Theory?" *Anarchist Studies* 15 no. 2 (2007): 116. Their work is neither autonomous from the social nor escapist in intent: just the opposite. These artists seek to foster a consciousness that will empower our ethical agency in the world. Admittedly, however, if the anarchist experience does not inspire social action, it is in danger of becoming "isolated, impotent, socially negligible"; John Moore, "Composition and Decomposition: Contemporary Anarchist Aesthetics," *Anarchist Studies* 6 no. 2 (1998): 119. Hence the artists' insistence on the political relevance of their work and their invitation for us to take action, as opposed to retreat into their art for sanctuary or refuge. On Judd's opposition to utopianism see Rudi Fuchs, "Donald Judd (Artist at Work)," *Donald Judd*, ed. Nicholas Serota (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 16–17.

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