

Hard Work: Lee Lozano's Dropouts*

JO APPLIN

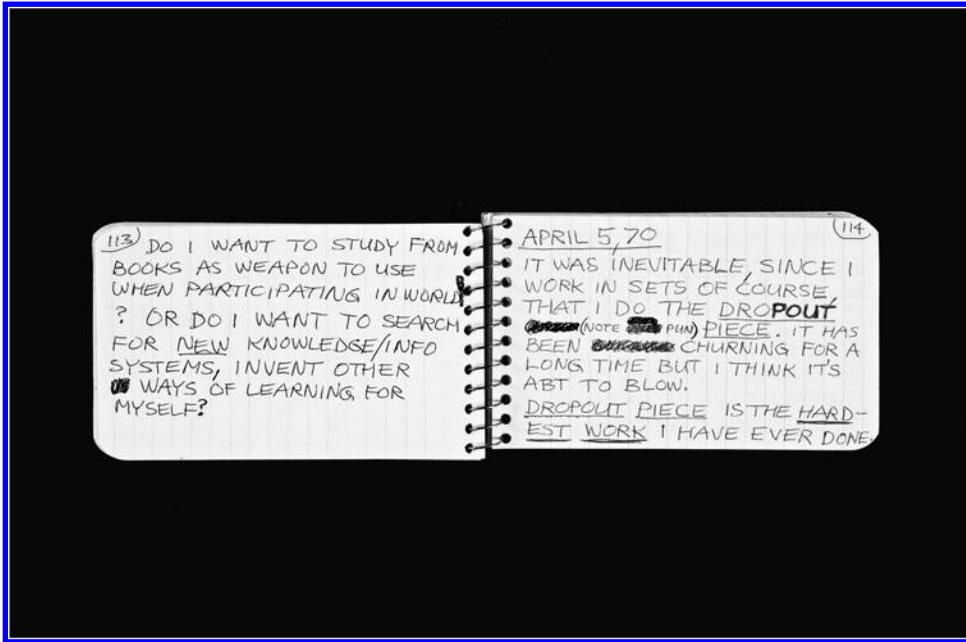
In April 1970, Lee Lozano put down her tools for good. With *Dropout Piece*, Lozano marked the end of a ten-year career in New York as a painter and conceptual artist, during which she produced an eclectic body of work in diverse media and achieved significant success.¹ Lozano's dropout had its roots in *General Strike Piece* of 1969, which involved the artist recording her "gradual but determined" withdrawal from the New York art world over the course of that summer. In August 1971, Lozano embarked upon a further strike action to supplement *Dropout Piece*: her "boycott of women," which required that she cease all contact with other women. Although the boycott was planned only as a six-month-long experiment, after which she hoped her relations with women would be "better than ever," for the rest of her life Lozano acknowledged other women only when compelled to do so.² Waitresses, her friend Sol LeWitt would later recall, could expect Lozano to ignore them completely.³

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1. Regarding *Dropout Piece*, Lozano noted, "It has been churning away for a long time but I think its about to blow." Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook* 8, April 5, 1970. Between 1968 and 1970 Lozano filled eleven small spiral-bound notebooks with notes, ideas, drawings, and information. In addition she filled three larger "laboratory" notebooks with drawings and her language pieces. A facsimile copy of these three notebooks has been published as *Lee Lozano: Private Notebooks 1967–1970* (New York: Primary Information, 2010). The eleven "private notebooks" are unpublished. Although she dubbed them "private," Lozano carefully edited the notebooks in early 1972 as if for future public consumption, one final act of housekeeping before she quit the art world. Each alteration was carefully dated and new information clearly flagged, often in a differently colored pen.

2. Lee Lozano, "boycott of women," August 1971. The Estate of Lee Lozano, Hauser & Wirth. Although Lozano certainly carried out her boycott, she never named it as a "piece," unlike her other strike actions.

3. Sol LeWitt cited in Katy Siegel and David Reed, "Making Waves: The Legacy of Lee Lozano," *Artforum* (October 2001), p. 25. Carol LeWitt confirmed that Lozano would cover her eyes and turn away whenever the two of them met. Email correspondence with author, April 23, 2014. On Lozano's



Lee Lozano. "Pages from Private Notebook 8." 1970.
 © The Estate of Lee Lozano. Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth.

Lozano's strike actions were part of the conceptual turn her work took around 1969, seemingly in contrast to the earlier Pop-like, raucous, and borderline pornographic images of broken-down tools and body parts—flaccid hammers, bent nails, and phallic screws—that she had been making since 1962. To date, emphasis on Lozano's later practice has suggested a neat split, as though the conceptual pieces were a disavowal of the figurative drawings and paintings that preceded them.⁴ Accounts of Lozano's "Great Refusal" of work and women fre-

return to the limelight post-dropout, see Katy Siegel, "Market Index: Lee Lozano," *Artforum* (April 2008), p. 330 and p. 390. See also John Waters, *Role Models* (London: Beautiful Books, 2011), p. 272, in which Waters describes Lozano's dropout and LeWitt's comments in his chapter on Cy Twombly. In an important article on Lozano, Helen Molesworth has argued persuasively that her boycott of women and *General Strike Piece* are not opposing actions but are both "structured by the principle of rejection." Helen Molesworth, "Tune In, Turn On, Drop Out: The Rejection of Lee Lozano," *Art Journal* 61, no. 4 (Winter 2002), p. 70. Molesworth's exhibition and catalogue *Work Ethic* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2003) also includes a brief discussion of Lozano's work refusal.

4. While Lozano's standing as one of the few women artists associated with conceptualism has rightly been noted, it has been at the expense of a more detailed focus on her earlier work. Lucy Lippard described Lozano as "the major female figure" in conceptual art during the 1960s. Lucy R. Lippard, "Escape Attempts," in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. xii. Two retrospective exhibitions, in Basel in 2006 and Stockholm in 2010, went some way toward offering a broader picture of Lozano's work. See *Lee Lozano: Win First Don't Last*

quently allude to unspecified personal circumstances that may have contributed to her gradual withdrawal into language, and then into silence, noting her financial troubles and possible mental-health problems, as if such circumstances would directly explain her artistic choices.⁵ To read Lozano's career in such terms, however, is to ignore the extent to which she was, from the outset, committed to an ongoing formal, physical, and political investigation into the changing conditions of work as a material and intellectual practice to be engaged, figured, and refused. For Lozano, dropping out was not simply a matter of stopping work. On the contrary, she claimed, "*Dropout Piece* is the *hardest work* I have ever done."

There was a politics to Lozano's various refusals, albeit one mired in a confused and confusing strategy that was in the end far from progressive. By late 1971, Lozano was at an impasse from which she did not, or could not, emerge. The costs of that stasis—professionally, personally, and politically—were catastrophically high. As early as June 1968, Lozano made a list in a notebook of the things and institutions with or in which she no longer wished to participate. The list, titled "Some *Institutions* I Do Not Believe In," opened with "onanism" and continued with "domination, slavery, competition, winning, marriage, the family, parenthood, patriarchy, matriarchy, possession, security, food, god," and concluded with what Lozano called "heirarchy." [sic]⁶ A year later, Lozano compiled another list, this time a short series of refusals headed by an emphatically repeated "NO" that documented a fantasy of an isolated, silent, and diminished world in which Lozano could imagine herself living. The list ran: "NO telephone, radio, records, reading, drugs, visitors, mail, window view, clock."⁷ By the time Lozano withdrew entirely, her art-life project had fallen apart, and during the early 1970s her life began to spiral in directions she could not have anticipated. Such a radical series of negations, refusals, and strict instructions for living might suggest a subject only just coping, living an increasingly unhappy, melancholic existence. But I am less interested here in whether Lozano suffered the mental "breakdown" in the early 1970s that some have suggested triggered *Dropout Piece* than in the fact that a material language of breakdown and failure marked Lozano's work, and world, from the beginning.

One could attempt to locate Lozano's strike actions and boycott comfortably within a narrative of the New York art world's politicization in the late 1960s, arguing that her work strike and dropout offered an early instance of what Kathi Weeks has described as a future-oriented feminist utopia predicated on a postwork imagi-

Win Last Don't Care (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel, 2006) and *Lee Lozano*, ed. Iris Müller-Westermann (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 2010).

5. Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer's recent *Lee Lozano: Dropout Piece* (London: Afterall, 2014) offers a particularly insightful take on Lozano's later "dropout" actions, as well as her life after she quit the art world. "The Great Refusal" was Herbert Marcuse's term, in his *Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 25, for the series of wildcat strikes and boycotts that occurred in 1969. Julia Bryan-Wilson has written about "The Great Refusal" in relation to the Art Workers' Coalition in *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 118.

6. Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook* 1, June 1968.

7. "No-Info Piece," Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook* 2, July 17, 1969, p. 99.

nary that “refuses the existing world of work that is given to us and demands alternatives.”⁸ But such a reading would be too easy: Lozano had no explicit political agenda, nor did she offer any alternatives to not working, and her boycott of women was the culmination of a deeply fraught relationship with the women’s movement, making it difficult to reconcile her actions easily with a clear feminist position. Her refusals ultimately left her in a politically compromised situation from which there was no way out. However, to acknowledge Lozano’s apolitical stance is not to claim that her practice was politically insignificant.

Work

In 1963, Hollis Frampton took a photograph of Lozano’s cluttered workbench strewn with pots of brushes, stacks of paper, exhibition labels, books, and other paraphernalia.⁹ Lozano sits center-frame in the shot, closely cropped in stark monochrome and surrounded by an array of mechanical odds and ends that have been arranged along the front of the desk in piles and rows. Items in the lineup include a chunky drill bit, a coiled wire spring, and various cogs, screws, bolts, keys, clamps, sections of pipe, and bullets. The close coupling of flesh and metal is

8. Kathi Weeks, *The Problem of Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 233. As well as being a key feature of the Marxist autonomist tradition, the “refusal to work” has been explored extensively at various moments within the artistic avant-garde. See *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (1981; London: Semiotext[e], 2007).

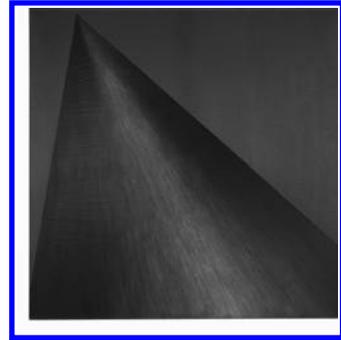
9. Todd Alden discusses Frampton’s photograph in his fine essay “The Cave Paintings Exist Because the Caves Were Toilets: Reactivating the Work of Lee Lozano,” in *Lee Lozano: Win First Don’t Last Win Last Don’t Care*, pp. 13–20.



*Hollis Frampton.
Lee Lozano. 1963.
© Estate of Hollis
Frampton.*

a playful nod to the outrageous and darkly erotic drawings and paintings she was making at that time, in which body parts and machine parts meld into dysfunctional, broken, and perverse tools.

Frampton framed Lozano twice in the photograph, first in the camera viewfinder and second in the large blank canvas propped against the wall behind her. The canvas will soon contain an oil painting of a workshop tool: a giant C-clamp, perhaps, or a close-up of a screw. Or maybe it will be painted in waves and washes of thinly applied brushstrokes of amber or violet-gray, for within the year Lozano would begin to move away from figurative paintings of tools to produce a series of large abstract-geometric paintings. *Crook, Pitch, Ream, Cleave, Lean, Peel, Clamp, Split, Hack, and Stop* were some of the titles Lozano used for these works, a playfully deviant range of gestures and actions that teeter on the edge of Minimalist respectability. "All verbs," Lozano insisted in her neatly written 1967 list of painting titles, although many could function as nouns too, blurring the distinction between the objects of the workspace and the uses to which they were put. Lozano's list stands as a provocative counterpart to her friend Richard Serra's *Verb List*, completed later that same year, which consisted of a similarly handwritten list of actions relating to different processes and kinds of work. The verbs Serra listed ranged from



Lozano. *Pitch*. 1964.
© The Estate of Lee Lozano.
Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth.



Lozano. *No title*. 1967.
© The Estate of Lee Lozano.
Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth.



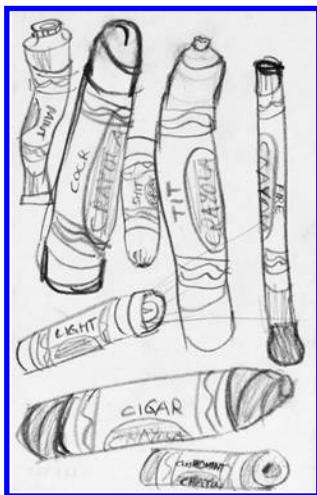
Richard Serra. Verb List. 1967–68.

© 2016 Richard Serra/ARS, New York.

those we might expect a sculptor to perform, such as “to roll, to crease, to fold, to store, to split,” to those suggesting a vocabulary equal to the new kinds of materials and processes of making that Serra and his post-Minimalist peers like Robert Morris were then exploring: “to heap, to bundle, to gather, to erase, to scatter.” Lozano’s list, on the other hand, strains and pushes at the limits of formal description, moving away from the literalism of Serra’s inventory of specific physical actions relating to his treatment of vulcanized rubber, lead, and cold-rolled steel. Titles like *Shoot*, *Slide*, *Goad*, *Clash*, *Swap*, *Butt*, and *Stroke* impart instead a psychosexual undertone to the artistic labor involved in the production of her works.

Though Lozano was not a sculptor, in the early 1960s, objects, tools, and other random items culled from her studio floor provided the source material for her numerous drawings and paintings. The thingness of things and the work they do were consistent themes. Lightbulbs, clamps, French curves, crayons, wrenches, screwdrivers, thumbtacks, staples, and drills recur repeatedly across paintings and sketchbooks in playful, erotic, violent, and ludicrous formations. In one wax-crayon drawing of a set of Crayolas, Lozano repurposed the tip of each crayon as, variously, a cock, a tit, a turd, a match, a vagina, and a paint tube. In other drawings, twisted, broken wrenches clamp onto wilting hammerheads, and drooping screwdrivers slump and fall: These are tools that no longer work, locked into awkward postures, unproductive poses, and mechanical embraces, as bolts fail to join, nails aren’t hammered home, and screws miss their mark.¹⁰

10. For an extended discussion of Lozano’s early tool drawings and paintings, see Jo Applin, “Lozano’s Labor,” in Müller-Westermann, *Lee Lozano*, pp. 116–27.



Lozano. No title.
c. 1962.
 © The Estate of Lee
 Lozano. Courtesy of
 Hauser & Wirth.

To the right, another stool holds a small transistor radio and a loosely piled stack of photographic prints. On closer inspection these are revealed as preparatory shots of the photograph we are looking at, a witty reprise of the *mise-*

11. At the invitation of Richard Bellamy, the show was to have opened at the Green Gallery in 1965, but it was canceled when the gallery went bankrupt. Bellamy had included Lozano in a group show at the Green Gallery the previous year, alongside Richard Smith, Donald Judd, Mark Di Suvero, Neil Williams, Dan Flavin, and Miles Forst.



Frampton. Shot of Work Table in the Studio of Lee Lozano. 1966.
 © Estate of Hollis Frampton.

In 1966, Frampton took a second photograph of Lozano's workbench that was used later that year as the poster for her upcoming exhibition at Paul Bianchini's gallery.¹¹ Lozano is depicted not at work but in absentia, her body substituted by her tools and working space, as if in anticipation of her decision to stop working three years later. In the photograph, Lozano's desk and empty chair stand next to a tall, paint-spattered stool on which an empty coffee cup, an ashtray, and cigarettes rest.

en-abyme of the first portrait's frame-within-a-frame, as well as a nod to Frampton's own labor as the photographer.¹² Also in 1966, Lozano appeared as one of a cast of thirteen in Frampton's early film *Manual of Arms*, a series of portraits or "screen tests" in which he trains his camera on each of his subjects for a minute or two. In her segment, Lozano meets Frampton's camera with a raucous laugh; he later recalled wanting to capture something of her "active and aggressive" character.¹³ Here, however, we are presented with a more contemplative scene, a still life from which Lozano has dropped out, her art—or the materials of her art—standing in for her presence. Other items on Lozano's desk include a matchbook from Max's Kansas City bar and a gift from Carl Andre: his prized switch key from his days as a railroad worker.¹⁴ The key sits next to a sheaf of sketches that have been stacked loosely underneath Lozano's abandoned spectacles, situating Frampton's photograph in a longer tradition of *trompe l'oeil* quodlibet imagery, in which personal items, often spectacles and papers, were arranged upon a tabletop. Many of the industrial knickknacks, bolts, screws, drill bits, and other found objects included in Frampton's first photograph are present in the second, scattered around as though a series of unwieldy paperweights. Toward the rear of the table, nestled among the screws and cogs, towers a wooden sculptural assemblage titled *Cock*, made by Andre in 1963 from reclaimed wood.

Materials for many of Andre's early works, such as *Cock*, were picked up with Lozano during their walks together around New York and subsequently photographed by Frampton, their mutual friend.¹⁵ While the tessellated wooden blocks that make up *Cock* indicate the Minimalist turn Andre's work would take, the work's double-entendre title is entirely of a piece with the kinds of non-Minimal objects Andre was making at that time. These included his *Polymorphous Perverse Carpentry* pieces, begun in 1959, and the since-destroyed *Dog Turd Sculptures* from 1962, which Andre made from shit-like excrescences of hardened concrete, and which are now known only through Frampton's photographs. Lozano also made a memorable work during this period using a reclaimed toilet seat onto

12. This image recalls Mel Bochner's 1968 plan to embark upon a project of photographing his friends' worktables as a series of metonymic portraits. The only photograph that survives from this project is the one Bochner took of Eva Hesse's similarly chaotic table, which also contains a number of pot-latch gifts, exchanges, flyers, tools, and materials. On Bochner's photograph of Hesse's worktable, see Anne M. Wagner, "Another Hesse," *October* 69 (Summer 1994), pp. 49–84, and Briony Fer, "Worktable," in *Eva Hesse: Studiowork* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 48–82.

13. See Hollis Frampton and Scott MacDonald, "Interview with Hollis Frampton: The Early Years," *October* 12 (Spring 1980), p. 108.

14. In 1967 Lozano described one of her earliest conceptual "pieces," which involved her spending "every night for three weeks" at Max's Kansas City. Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook* 4, August 1969, p. 3.

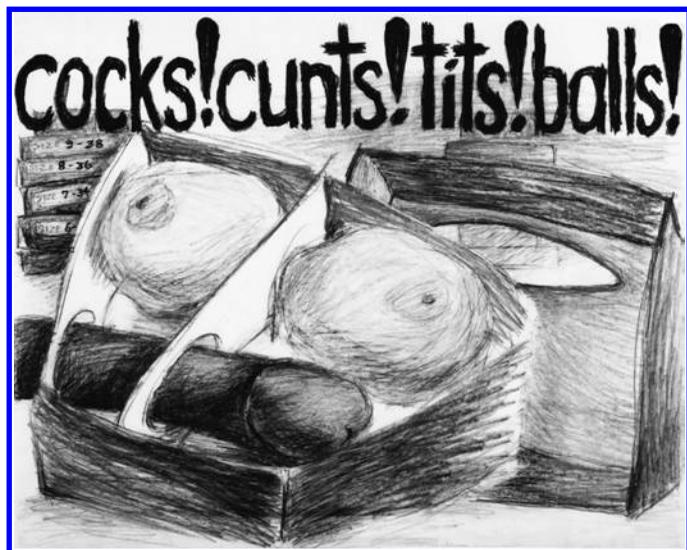
15. Andre has since declared Lozano the owner of the largest collection of his early "minor works"; see Carl Andre, "In the Matter of Lee Lozano" [1983], in *Abstract Painting 1960–69*, ed. Donald Droll and Jane Nocol (New York: P.S.1, the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, 1983), n.p. Lozano and Andre's walks around the city took place at the same time that Andre and Frampton were engaged in their series of extensive written exchanges about art. See *Carl Andre, Hollis Frampton: Dialogues 1962–1963*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Nova Scotia: Press of the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, 1981).

which she painted a lurid grinning mouth with a fecal, phallic cigar clamped between the teeth.

As well as a shared interest in collecting industrial objects that had been discarded on the streets of the city (and, by extension, a mutual fascination with the afterlives of things that no longer worked), Andre and Lozano both reveled in a scatological play with language and form in their early works, a rich vein that Lozano continued to mine for some years. "Let them eat cock!" reads the text scratched in thick black wax crayon across the bottom of a drawing from 1962. Lozano never lost sight of the lived and messy aspects of the body and sex. A number of notebook entries deal with the smell of menstrual fluids and farts, rotten teeth and bad breath, and she posits at one point a "Paste in the Crack Theory" (she wants to know what to call it—her word of choice is "grease," although "smegma" is also suggested).¹⁶ If Andre was by then moving toward Minimalism, Lozano was in the midst of her own reckoning with the burgeoning spectacle of Pop, which she reconfigured in her own idiosyncratic, grubby terms.¹⁷ Lozano reduced Pop's pinup girls and matinee idols to a riot of body parts, stored in a series of outrageous "body boxes," the title of a series of drawings she made around 1962 of wonky compartments from which burst cocks and tits and legs and heads. The headline slogan inscribed across the top of one drawing heralds, with profane glee, "cocks! cunts! tits! balls!" Lozano's imagery at this time was connected by a sense of things and bodies turned upside down; hers was a world in which reproduction is thwarted (all those squashed screwdrivers and broken cocks),

16. Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook 4*, December 19, 1969, p. 87.

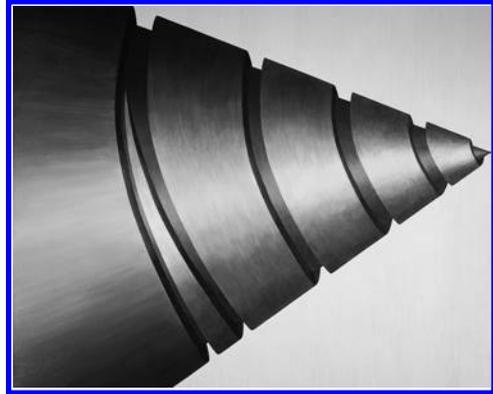
17. Hal Foster has suggested that although there were a number of female artists involved in Pop, including Lozano, they tended to be "too visible as objects" to be its "principal subjects." In fact, Lozano's early drawings came to light only much later and were not exhibited at the time—she only achieved prominence around the middle of the decade with her large-scale abstract paintings. Hal Foster, *The First Pop Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 15.



Lozano. No title. c. 1962.
© The Estate of Lee
Lozano. Courtesy of
Hauser & Wirth.

machines malfunction (handguns shoot clenched fists, not bullets), and gender divisions, bodies, and objects break down and fail.

By 1964, Lozano's palette had been toned down to the point that it resembled those of her Minimalist peers. She produced a series of intense black, white, and gunmetal-gray paintings of workshop tools. Several meters in length and height, the paintings were made using a stiff, stubby brush that produced thick, textured strokes, as though the surface of each canvas had been combed. Lozano painted the metal tools at deliberately skewed, austere, and distressing angles. The flattened, pointed end of a drill bit, gleaming as if spotlighted, fills one single-paneled work, while in another painting, a long black screw slides along the bottom of the pale-gray canvas, the expected sharp tip instead curving and bulging indecently, its phallic form made overt in its bulbous shaft. The erotic possibilities of workshop tools, and regular puns on the word *screw*, were not lost on Lozano, who here "burlesques" the phallus, to borrow Mignon Nixon's phrase.¹⁸ Clearly



18. See Mignon Nixon, "Posing the Phallus," *October* 92 (Spring 2000), pp. 99–127. See also Mignon Nixon, "Infinity Politics," in *Yayoi Kusama*, ed. Frances Morris (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), pp. 176–86, where she discusses Kusama's "burlesque" treatment of the erotic object and its attachments.

Top: Lozano. Ream. 1964.

Middle: Lozano. No title. C. 1964.

Bottom: Lozano. No title. Date unknown.

All: © The Estate of Lee Lozano.

Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth.

these are paintings about the laboring body, but they are about other kinds of work too, an unproductive and non-generative work—a kind of work that doesn't really work. Lozano deflates tools, at times by lampooning their industrial, hard edges, at other times by softening, torquing, and dismantling them. Through these visual strategies and her frequent wordplay in titles—*A Boring Drawing* is the droll name for a lithograph depicting a cross-section of an electric drill—Lozano offers a sly commentary on the working processes of her Minimalist-sculptor peers, such as Serra and Andre, whose work quickly became associated with blue-collar, industrial labor—all forklifts and hard hats. A pencil drawing of a large metal wrench thrust into the fly of a pair of worker's blue jeans satirizes this macho paradigm for artistic creativity in a typically blunt manner.

Both Serra's *Verb List* and Lozano's *List of Titles of Paintings (All Verbs)* play on the polyvalent nature of the verb "to work." Work might signal an activity but also a place: One may be at work on a sculpture, or at work in the office or studio. We can work through, at, and away at problems, materials, concepts, or rules, just as we can work on a lump of clay or a sheet of metal. We can also work situations to suit our own ends. Of course, not all work is salaried. Rather, as Weeks has pointed out, "working" is a condition, a state of being, demanded of subjects by the state not solely for economic ends but, significantly, for social, political, and familial ones too. For work in all its multifarious and gendered forms is, as Weeks puts it, "fundamental to the basic social contract."¹⁹ Lozano's varied practice, from her tool paintings to *Dropout Piece*, evinces a desire to work both through and against the social possibilities and necessities of work.

Not Working

Lozano's decision to begin her *General Strike Piece* in February 1969 was prompted in part by an invitation from critic and curator Lucy Lippard to attend a meeting of the recently formed Art Workers' Coalition. The coalition's formation was sparked by an event at the Museum of Modern Art at which the artist Takis withdrew one of his pieces in protest at the conditions under which artists were expected to work. The AWC's efforts rapidly expanded to agitate against the Vietnam War and to protest on behalf of the feminist and civil-rights movements in America. Meanwhile, in August 1970, thousands of women (not including Lozano, then embroiled in her own private strike action) marched up New York's Fifth Avenue as part of the Women's Strike for Equality, organized by the National Organization for Women—a group co-founded in 1966 by Betty Friedan to demand equal rights for women at home and in the workplace.²⁰ Yet while

19. Weeks, *The Problem of Work*, p. 8.

20. In *The Feminine Mystique* Friedan argues that the problem of work (both the overload of domestic labor and absence of paid employment for women) was key to the "problem with no name." See Betty Friedan, "The Problem with No Name," in *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), pp. 13–30.

Lozano's adoption of a language of refusal appears, at one level, entirely of its moment, rather than act in concert with her peers, she did not engage with the communities of politically engaged artists and women gathering around her.

Though the coalition would have seemed a perfect home for her anger, Lozano noisily and publicly denounced its activism and that of affiliated women's groups in her written statements, notebook entries, and in the "write ups" of her conceptual pieces. Lippard, whose name appears several times in Lozano's notebooks around this period, recalls Lozano declaring herself "appalled" during a meeting of the Ad Hoc Women Artists Committee (an offshoot of the AWC) that she attended.²¹ Along with more than sixty other people, including Andre, Frampton, LeWitt, and Lippard, Lozano prepared a written statement to be read aloud at the public hearing of the AWC, held at the School of Visual Arts, in New York, on April 10, 1969, and open to all "art workers." Lozano's statement was a brief polemic in which she rejected the idea of art-world reform, demanding instead a wholesale overthrow of the entire system. Lozano wrote, "There can be no art revolution that is separate from a science revolution, a political revolution, an education revolution, a drug revolution, a sex revolution or a personal revolution," concluding by refusing emphatically the label "art worker." Instead she defined herself as an "art dreamer," stating, "I will participate only in a total revolution simultaneously personal and public."²²

It is important that Lozano chose a public, open, and ostensibly collective event as the site to declare her refusal to participate under current conditions. She did not quietly withdraw; instead she occupied a space of resistance predicated on an entirely public performance of not working. Furthermore, Lozano did not leave the art world and New York immediately but, as she stated in the "write up" for *General Strike Piece*, withdrew "gradually and determinedly," maintaining a presence in the art world throughout the course of the strike. Indeed, Lozano's refusals were aimed not at the making of art but rather its subsumption by the art market.²³ Unlike Andre, Frampton, and others who used the AWC as a platform to call for real, material change through collective action and debate, Lozano's statement at the open hearing was neither a rallying cry nor an attempt to galvanize her peers into a mass strike action. Rather it was a single instance of one artist speaking—striking out—alone. In this Lozano's strike calls to mind the resistance of the hero of Herman Melville's short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener," in which the

21. Lucy R. Lippard, "Cerebellion and Cosmic Storms," in Müller-Westermann, *Lee Lozano*, p. 191.

22. Lee Lozano's "Statement for the Open Public Hearing, Art Workers' Coalition" has been reprinted in several publications. It is available online, along with all of the statements that were prepared for the open hearing: <http://primaryinformation.org/files/FOH.pdf>.

23. In this Lozano was certainly of her time. Many conceptual artists produced works that were conceived explicitly *contra* commodification. However, rather than continue to make works that challenged that system, Lozano refused the system in its entirety.

APRIL 10, 69

STATEMENT FOR OPEN PUBLIC HEARING,
ART WORKERS COALITION.

FOR ME THERE CAN BE NO ART REVOLUTION THAT IS SEPARATE FROM A SCIENCE REVOLUTION, A POLITICAL REVOLUTION, AN EDUCATION REVOLUTION, A DRUG REVOLUTION, A SEX REVOLUTION OR A PERSONAL REVOLUTION. I CANNOT CONSIDER A PROGRAM OF MUSEUM REFORMS WITHOUT EQUAL ATTENTION TO GALLERY REFORMS AND ART MAGAZINE REFORMS WHICH WOULD AIM TO ELIMINATE STABLES OF ARTISTS AND WRITERS. I WILL NOT CALL MYSELF AN ART WORKER BUT RATHER AN ART DREAMER AND I WILL PARTICIPATE ONLY IN A TOTAL REVOLUTION SIMULTANEOUSLY PERSONAL AND PUBLIC.

LEE LOZANO
60 GRAND ST., N.Y.C.

MASTURBATION PIECE - (STARTED AT ABT SAME TIME AS GRASS PIECE AND GENERAL STRIKE PIECE; "PETERED OUT" WITHIN APPROX. 10-DAY PERIOD).
(DESCRIBE VERBALLY, AT DISCRETION).

GENERAL STRIKE PIECE - (STARTED "OFFICIALLY" DAY AFTER READING OF STATEMENT AT OPEN HEARING; PARTS BEGUN WITHIN A PREVIOUS ~~2~~ 2-MONTH PERIOD).
DESCRIBE VERBALLY.

BOOK-OF-CHANGE PIECE - (STARTED IN 1965, "OFFICIALLY" STARTED ~~APRIL 21, 69~~ APRIL 21, 69)

WAY OUT PIECE - (~~CONCEIVED~~ CONCEIVED MAY 6, 69) [CONT. NEXT PAGE]

Wall Street office worker states simply one day that he “prefers not to” work.²⁴ The power of Bartleby’s actions lies in his active resistance and performance of refusing to work, for he continues to show up to the office every day, to instantiate bodily his refusal of labor, just as Lozano, for the planned duration of her own refusal to work, from *General Strike Piece* until her final *Dropout Piece*, continued to be actively present rather than simply absent.²⁵

Lozano typically handwrote her conceptual “pieces” or investigations after the fact. She noted in block capitals the title, date, and instructions for a specific piece, usually marked with codas, footnotes, and additional comments. In the “write up” of *General Strike Piece*, Lozano listed all the parties, openings, exhibitions, and other events her strike prevented her from attending.²⁶ Despite the seriousness of her endeavor, Lozano’s tongue remained—at first, at least—firmly in cheek: She suggested a suitably bombastic soundtrack to accompany her strike would be the score for Stanley Kubrick’s 1968 movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* (specifically Strauss’s “Thus Spoke Zarathustra,” which accompanies the film’s introductory scenes recounting the invention of the tool). By April 1970, however, Lozano had upped the ante and declared her intention to drop out entirely.

If Lozano’s *Dropout Piece* can be accommodated within an established modernist tradition of refusal and retreat—think of Marcel Duchamp famously and, as it transpired, not *really* giving up making art to play chess—what are we to make of Lozano’s decision to boycott women?²⁷ Lippard has suggested that the emergence of the women’s art movement took Lozano by surprise and that she “rationalized her lack of political participation” by turning away from the community to focus instead on developing work and ideas addressing her own individual identity and freedom in the privacy of her studio and via a range of personal actions.²⁸ In an important essay on Lozano’s work, Johanna Burton has argued persuasively that Lozano’s elliptical description of her various “art-life” actions demonstrated a search for what Lozano dubbed a “new honesty” that

24. Herman Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” in *Billy Budd, Sailor and Selected Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

25. Lozano’s actual work stoppage is difficult to date precisely. She continued to paint until 1970, and her work was included in a small number of exhibitions post-*Dropout Piece*, including small solo exhibitions of her conceptual work in *Infofiction 1* and *Infofiction 2* that were held in Nova Scotia and London, respectively, in 1971 and 1972.

26. Lozano published a typed version on page 10 of the April 1969 issue of Vito Acconci and Bernadette Mayer’s *0-9* magazine, a short-lived publication that ran over seven mimeographed issues between 1967 and 1969. Reprinted in *0-9: The Complete Magazine*, Vito Acconci and Bernadette Mayer, eds. (New York: Ugly Duckling Press, 2006).

27. The unstable status of Lozano’s *Dropout Piece* and “boycott of women,” owing to the fact that they were not presented as formal “write ups” but exist only as statements in her notebooks, recalls one of Duchamp’s own infamous notebook entries from 1913 in which he asked, “How to make a work which is not a work of art?”

28. Lippard, “Cerebellion and Cosmic Storms,” p. 191.

("QUOTE"): SOUND OF "DAISY" FADING IN BACKGROUND FOLLOWED BY SOUND OF
"ALSO SPRACH ZAAATHUSTRA"(R. STRAUSS) FOLLOWED BY SOUND OF
"THE BLUE DANUBE" (J. STRAUSS) - SOUNDTRACK, 2001 (S. KUBRICK)

GENERAL STRIKE PIECE (STARTED FEB. 8, '69)*

GRADUALLY BUT DETERMINEDLY AVOID BEING PRESENT AT OFFICIAL OR PUBLIC "UPTOWN" FUNCTIONS OR GATHERINGS[†] RELATED TO THE "ART WORLD" IN ORDER TO PURSUE INVESTIGATION OF TOTAL PERSONAL & PUBLIC REVOLUTION.[°] EXHIBIT IN PUBLIC ONLY PIECES WHICH FURTHER SHARING OF IDEAS & INFORMATION RELATED TO TOTAL PERSONAL & PUBLIC REVOLUTION.[§]

IN PROCESS AT LEAST THROUGH SUMMER, '69.

* WITHDRAWAL FROM 3-MAN SHOW COMPILED BY RICHARD BELLAMY, GOLDOWSKY GALLERY, 1078 MADISON AVE.

† DATE OF LAST VISIT TO UPTOWN GALLERIES FOR PERUSAL OF ART - FEB. 13 OR 14, 69
" " " " " A MUSEUM - MARCH 2A, 69
" " " " " UPTOWN GALLERY OPENING - MARCH 15, 69
" " " " " A BAR - APRIL 5, 69
" " " ATTENDANCE AT A CONCERT - APRIL 18, 69
" " " " " " FILM SHOWING - APRIL 4, 69
" " " " " AN "EVENT" - APRIL 18, 69
" " " " " A BIG PARTY - MARCH 15, 69

° TERMS OF TOTAL PERSONAL & PUBLIC REVOLUTION SET FORTH IN BRIEF STATEMENT READ AT OPEN PUBLIC HEARING, ART WORKERS COALITION, SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS, APRIL 10, 69. FURTHER PARTICIPATION IN ART WORKERS COALITION OR ANY OTHER GROUP DECLINED AS PART OF GENERAL STRIKE PIECE. THIS INCLUDES ARTISTS AGAINST THE EXPRESSWAY GROUP & OTHERS.

§ FIRST PIECE EXHIBITED AT ART/PEACE EVENT, N.Y. SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL, PUBLIC THEATER, MARCH 5, 69. GRASS PIECE & NO-GRASS PIECE EXHIBITED IN NUMBER 7 SHOW COMPILED BY LUCY LIPPARD, PAULA COOPER, MAY 18, 69. INVESTMENT PIECE & CASH PIECE^{EXHIBITED} IN LANGUAGE III SHOW, DWAN GALLERY, MAY 24, 69.

LEE LOZANO, JUNE 12, 69.

Lozano. General Strike Piece. 1969.

© The Estate of Lee Lozano.

Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth.

ironically echoed the contemporary feminist movement's insistence on blurring the personal and the political (other "art-life" actions by Lozano included the self-explanatory *Masturbation Investigation* and *Grass Piece* of 1969, in which she recorded her activities first stoned and then not stoned for the pendant *No Grass Piece*).²⁹ As Burton points out, Carol Hanisch's polemical essay "The Personal Is Political" had argued that it was crucial for the women's-liberation movement to try to understand the views of those apparently apolitical women who lived and worked outside of the movement, rather than attend solely to the views of those members already committed to its collective aims.³⁰ Throughout the essay, issues of "good" or "right" action are debated, specifically the question of what could be considered to constitute a political act within the context of the women's-liberation movement. Hanisch calls for a wider definition of the political that would seek to accommodate even the most apolitical of subjects. Her widely circulated paper was written in February 1969, the same month that Lozano announced her refusal to participate in the AWC.

For a period of time, any member of the women's-liberation movement who was deemed to be putting the interests of the individual over those of the collective was roundly and aggressively "trashed" via public smear campaigns and outright personal attacks.³¹ Despite the individualistic nature of Lozano's boycott and strike, her own outspoken "trashing" of both the art world and, occasionally, her peers, both male and female, whose behavior she deemed to lack integrity, suggests a certain affinity with the emerging radical-feminist arm of the WLM that was, by 1969, beginning to gain public and political purchase. Shulamith Firestone's call in *The Dialectic of Sex* for a "dream action" in the form of "a smile boycott" against men provides a radical inflection to Lozano's boycott of women that from another perspective registered (and continues to register for many of her peers) as too individualistic, dogmatic, and undialectical to either fathom or forgive.³²

By 1968, Lozano had decided to reject the feminist movement in no uncertain terms, writing across the page of a notebook, "I AM NOT A FEMINIST."³³ In

29. Johanna Burton, "The New Honesty: The Life-Work and Work-Life of Lee Lozano," in *Solitaire: Lee Lozano, Sylvia Plimock-Mangold, Joan Semmel*, ed. Helen Molesworth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 18–38.

30. See Carol Hanisch, "The Personal Is Political," in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: Radical Feminisms, 1970), <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>.

31. For a contemporary account, see Jo Freeman (writing as "Joreen"), "Trashing: The Dark Side of Sisterhood," *Ms.* (April 1976), pp. 49–51 and 92–98.

32. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970; London: Paladin Press, 1972). See also Shulamith Firestone, *Airless Spaces* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), in which Firestone refers to her earlier "Smile Boycott" and mental-health problems. In one chapter, Firestone addresses the idea of breakdown explicitly, recalling a visit to Valerie Solanas, author of the infamous *S.C.U.M. Manifesto* (New York: Olympia Press, 1968), and how they argued about feminism.

33. Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook 1*, April 1968.

April 1970, another entry would state, "Women's Lib brought bad luck."³⁴ The statement was written in the context of a meeting of women at Lippard's loft organized in support of a demand for fifty percent representation of women artists at the Whitney's sculpture biennial. Lozano noted angrily that the meeting was far from supportive, sisterly, or open. Instead it offered "the same jibberjabber allcunt disorder as in juniorhighschool," and she observed scathingly that "a self-appointed chairwoman could not control the blabnoise."³⁵ For Lozano, the "allcunt disorder" of those meetings was the opposite of the sharply focused "dialogues" she had been holding in her loft with various invited participants since April 1969.

Dialogue Piece was a long-running collaborative work aimed at producing conversations that privileged listening, openness, and mutual participation. It began two months after Lozano embarked upon *General Strike Piece*, while she was still in the process of extricating herself from the art world. For *Dialogue Piece* Lozano initiated a series of conversations with artist and curator friends in her studio. She recorded the structure, length, and nature of each dialogue in a subsequent "write up," but not the specific details of what was said. The general topics of the discussions ranged from contemplating the "shittiness" of the art world with Brice Marden to getting stoned with Serra. Lozano made a careful record of all the dialogues, including those she considered to have failed or broken down in some way; she also charted a series of missed encounters with people with whom she had hoped to have a dialogue.³⁶

Dialogue Piece stands as yet another portrait of the artist in her studio, and the list of people she included reads as a who's who of the New York art world at the time. Robert "Moose" Morris, Jasper "Jap" Johns, Marcia Tucker, Claes Oldenburg, Michael Heizer, Larry Weiner, and Larry Poons ("Poonsie") all made appearances in these informal one-on-one "rap sessions," Lozano's perverse take on the contemporaneous "consciousness raising" groups in which women gathered together to narrate their personal experiences to one another as a form of political engagement.³⁷

The conceptual aspect of *Dialogue Piece* did not signal a turn away from drawing and painting toward an outright dematerialization of the work of art, but rather a retooling of that earlier work to new ends. The encounters documented in *Dialogue Piece* were as sexually, psychically, and bodily charged as her

34. Lee Lozano, "Women's Lib Brought Bad Luck," April 1970. The Estate of Lee Lozano, Hauser & Wirth.

35. Lee Lozano, no title, April 1970. The Estate of Lee Lozano, Hauser & Wirth.

36. The artist Ian Wilson, who was also working on a series of ephemeral dialogue pieces titled *Oral Communication*, refused to have a conversation with Lozano, a rejection that riled her and which she documented as part of *Dialogue Piece*. See Lippard, "Cerebellion and Cosmic Storms," p. 198.

37. By 1971, consciousness-raising was recognized as "the backbone of the Women's Liberation Movement" by the Chicago chapter of the WLM. See "How to Start Your Own Consciousness-Raising Group," a leaflet distributed by the Chicago Women's Liberation Union in 1971, <http://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwlhuberstory/CWLUArchive/crcwlu.html>.

two-dimensional renderings of workshop tools, but Lozano's medium was no longer the tactile greasiness of a wax crayon. Instead, language, text, and other people became her tools. For a time Lozano considered the feasibility of stopping all other work except the dialogues, asking: "What if I stopped doing different *pieces* and just did the *Dialogue Piece* for the rest of my life as my 'work'? I could move to an exotic place and do it there; it has no space or time boundaries."³⁸ One month later, in the middle of her general strike, Lozano wrote, "The dialogues are a saying goodbye."³⁹ Lozano was, it seems, entirely taken with the kinds of open-ended opportunity potentially offered by *Dialogue Piece*, which promised a way of being both part of and apart from the art world. Across Lozano's various withdrawals, refusals, strike actions, and boycotts, a nascent, shaky, and ultimately failed attempt at "world-building" emerges.⁴⁰ We might think of this effort as an attempt at starting over, or starting again, what in another context Judith Halberstam has described as "queer failure."⁴¹ This model of failure resists a homogenized culture that insists upon positivity and optimism in the face of real social, political, and economic failings, allowing instead for a "wondrous anarchy" in which boundaries between winners and losers are disturbed.⁴² Failure, for Lozano, was integral to the dialogic process; at one point she imagined organizing dialogues with a baby and a cat.

Action

Perhaps rather than consider Lozano's *Dropout Piece*, *General Strike Piece*, and boycott of women as selfish, misguided, or apolitical actions, it would be more productive to think of them as inherently political, in the sense outlined by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1958).⁴³ Arendt places the question of what con-

38. Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook 2*, May 19, 1969. Of her dialogue with Alan Saret, Lozano wrote: "He asked me what did I hope to accomplish with *Gen'l Strike*? What have you learned abt people from the dialogues? First question difficult to answer. To second I answer that I've discovered people don't like to have rules laid on them." Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook 2*, June 22, 1969, p. 81.

39. Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook 2*, July 1969, pp. 45–47.

40. My understanding of "world-building" is indebted to the work of Hannah Arendt. See in particular Arendt, "What Is Freedom?," in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (1961; New York: Penguin, 2006), p. 160.

41. Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 87–122.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

43. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). Despite Arendt's infamous silence on questions of both gender and the body (for her model is based on the Greek *polis*, from which all women and domestic staff were excluded), her definition of politics continues to offer a powerful model for thinking about collective and individual actions and questions of agency. Margaret Canovan notes that *The Human Condition* was "hailed as a textbook of participatory democracy" during the student movement of the 1960s. See Canovan, "Introduction," in Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. xvi. Interestingly, both Arendt and Lozano refused explicitly to countenance being called "feminists."

stitutes a truly political act at the heart of her investigation into the three interlocking spheres of work, labor, and action. While “work” refers to the production of the nonnatural world, which includes everything from the production of a work of art to a table or a tool, “labor” suggests natural cycles of reproduction and consumption, from making babies to baking bread. “Action” alone belongs properly to the public sphere, and is considered by Arendt to be the defining condition of politics. The public sphere is where politics happens. It is the “space of appearances,” where subjects come together to be heard and to listen, to act: “With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world.”⁴⁴ For Arendt, political acts are not made in private, nor conceived in the abstract. Rather, “politics” describes a pragmatic and material practice of world-building.

Notwithstanding her decision to stop participating in the public sphere, Lozano shared with Arendt a commitment to action as “the political activity par excellence.”⁴⁵ In 1968, Lozano wrote, “Once and for all the sum of myself to date is in terms of the *verb*, not the noun; the act, not the word; the idea that leads to an act, not the idea for its own sake,” a statement that might also be read as a riposte to the too-easy pigeonholing of her work at that time as conceptual or “idea art.”⁴⁶ But if Lozano recognized the singular importance of action over thinking—of participating within the public sphere, in Arendt’s terms—what are we to make of her decision to stop acting entirely with her turn toward a decisive model of *inaction*? It was precisely this question that had preoccupied Hanisch when she wrote: “There are things in the consciousness of ‘apolitical’ women (I find them very political) that are as valid as any political consciousness we think we have. We should figure out why many women don’t want to do action. Maybe there is something wrong with the action or something wrong with why we are doing the action or maybe the analysis of why the action is necessary is not clear enough in our minds.”⁴⁷

44. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 176 and p. 199.

45. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 9.

46. Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook* 1, May 9, 1968. On the subject of Lozano’s conceptualism, see Andre, “In the Matter of Lee Lozano,” in which Andre notes the importance of “matter” to Lozano’s process at both a conceptual and material level. The literature on conceptual art is by now extensive. For contemporary surveys, see Gregory Battcock, *Idea Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1973), and Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton, 1972). See *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999). More recent collections of essays about conceptual art include *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Jon Bird and Michael Newman (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), and *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, Practice*, ed. Michael Corris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For a defining critique of conceptual art’s reliance upon forms of institutional and administrative structures, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October* 55 (1990), pp. 105–43. For an important account of conceptual art and affect, see Eve Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect, and the Antihumanist Turn* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

47. Hanisch, “The Personal Is Political,” <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>.

Surely Lozano recognized the problematic position she found herself in as an artist who ceased to participate in the public sphere by dropping out. For if a strike is defined by a set of achievable aims and demands, a dropout is attended by no such expectation. Compared to the organized strike and boycott, *Dropout Piece* signals an unwillingness to negotiate, a refusal to attempt to improve matters or demand alternative conditions to the status quo. Once Lozano quit her activities within that art world and went silent, she gave up her standing as a voice to be reckoned with. For as Arendt argued, to enter political debate—to be a political subject—one must be seen to participate, to *speak*, in the public realm, and so be heard by others, because “action is entirely dependent upon the constant presence of others.”⁴⁸ In Arendt’s terms, once a subject elects to leave the realm of participation, they stop existing at all in political terms: “A life without speech and without action . . . is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men.”⁴⁹ But perhaps Lozano intuited Arendt’s claims: By the time she quit for good, she was going simply by the letter *E*, in recognition that “Lee Lozano” the artist had ceased to exist to the world.⁵⁰

Wondering about the possible losses and gains to be made in striking out alone as a political gesture or feminist statement, Wendy Brown asks, “What sustains a willingness to risk becoming different kinds of beings, a desire to alter the architecture of the social world from the perspective of being disenfranchised in it, a conviction that the goods of the current order are worth less than the making of a different one?”⁵¹ There is an optimism at the heart of Brown’s interrogation of the limits and possibilities of changing the structure of one’s social world that is reflected, in part, by Lozano’s own hope that her general strike and boycott of women might result in a world made better through a period of abstention. But such a position does not adequately get to what it is that makes Lozano’s striking out alone so outrageous, brave, and ultimately flawed. It turned out that Lozano’s *Dropout Piece* resulted in a situation that was, in the end, all too possible, and all too “toxic.”⁵² Despite Lozano’s short-lived hope that an improved world lay ahead (for example, her stated ambition that, after a short

48. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 23.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

50. Or, as Andre concluded, in Lozano’s reduction of herself to the letter *E*: “Lost were four vowels and four consonants. Literally.” Andre, “In the Matter of Lee Lozano,” n.p.

51. Wendy Brown, “Feminism Unbound,” in *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 107.

52. I’m thinking here of Lauren Berlant’s description of the contemporary experience of “cruel optimism” as the subject’s “attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be *impossible*, sheer fantasy, or *too possible*, and toxic.” Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 24.

period of withdrawal, she would resume relations with women so that things would be “better than ever”), the “architecture” of her social world had by then not so much “altered” as crumbled entirely.⁵³

Impasse

The decision to drop out was an ongoing source of anxiety for Lozano, albeit one marked by an occasional optimism, for she hoped it would ultimately enable her to escape the “paralysis” and “sticky depression” she experienced in its immediate aftermath.⁵⁴ “I’m having a schizoid [politics of] experience,” she wrote at one point, acknowledging the popular anti-psychiatry of R. D. Laing, whose experimental treatments during the 1960s advocated an approach to understanding psychosis as a psychedelic experience.⁵⁵ For Laing it was important to understand the schizoid subject’s experience as no madder than the world in which they lived. Laing’s writings became part of the countercultural Zeitgeist, and Lozano cited him a few times in her notebooks, including jotting down the details of his 1967 book *The Politics of Experience*. In the late 1950s, Lozano had entered a two-year period of psychoanalysis at college, and she had readily drawn upon its insights in her polymorphously perverse images of tools from the early ’60s. As Lozano herself noted, a schizoid language marked many entries in her notebooks. Although Lozano’s ambivalence toward psychoanalysis erupts at points in her notebooks, her entries betray a keen interest in its vocabulary and perspective, particularly in relation to questions of sexuality and violence: “hammers=hard fuckers,” she noted at one point in relation to her tool series.⁵⁶ In another entry Lozano recalls being called in to meet with the psychoanalyst of a current boyfriend in an attempt to deal with his impotence. It is hard to tell which of the two she held in higher contempt, the “spoiled, richboy cripplebaby man” or the “pronouncementcurse” of the “analyst shrinker.”⁵⁷

Not only psychoanalytic texts interested her; one of the other books she noted was Doris Lessing’s sci-fi proto-feminist novel *The Four-Gated City* of 1969. The book developed ideas raised first in Lessing’s 1962 *The Golden Notebook*, which

53. Lee Lozano, unpublished “boycott of women,” first week of August 1971. The Estate of Lee Lozano, Hauser & Wirth.

54. Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook* 8, April 5, 1970, p. 137. A few days before noting the paralysis in which she found herself, Lozano wrote, “I’m skimming over bottomless despair-pits, total self-invisibilities, scary life-death cracks. I doubt that any(thing/one) else exists.” Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook* 8, April 2, 1970.

55. Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook* 5, undated (probably written sometime in January 1970), p. 34.

56. Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook* 7, February 15, 1970, p. 3.

57. Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook* 8, March 27, 1970, p. 70.

narrates the political, sexual, and feminist awakening of a female protagonist, Anna Wulf, who we are told has been undergoing psychoanalysis. *The Golden Notebook* proceeds by way of disjointed segments of Anna's variously colored "private" notebooks, in which she documents and compartmentalizes different aspects of her life. Anna's notebook entries detail a series of encounters in which her personal and political lives clash and unravel. The "golden notebook" of the title ties the broken strands of Anna's world together, to disastrous ends, and the final pages detail her painful breakdown. Lessing presents Anna's collapse in such a manner as to suggest that it is caused by the madness of the outside world rather than by Anna's interior one, and that she is a woman faced with a series of insurmountable problems and life choices (Lessing, like Lozano, read Laing). In a later preface, written in June 1971—just two months after Lozano embarked upon her *Dropout Piece*, and less than two months before she decided upon her subsequent boycott of women—Lessing argued that the novel was less about Anna's political coming of age than her psychological collapse. For Lessing, the motifs of "breakdown" and what happens when people "crack up" were far more important than the impact the novel had on feminism and the women's-liberation movement, despite the heralding of the book as a foundational text by many of the movement's members.⁵⁸ Lessing does not offer the personal and political as an empowered pairing but as a muddled site of conflict leading to breakdown, not breakthrough; to impasse, not progress.⁵⁹

I want to suggest that something of the madness described in *The Golden Notebook* might underpin the series of refusals articulated by Lozano's *General Strike Piece*, *Dropout Piece*, and boycott of women, while resisting any attempt to neutralize their charge by considering them as psychologically determined events—that is, as "evidence" of a personal breakdown. These were, rather, a series of actions, albeit ultimately failed ones, that, for a time at least, were conceptually and deliberately grounded within the discursive, public sphere of the social and political. Nonetheless, they also made sense in relation to a contemporary figuring of psychic collapse, and I do not want to dismiss a notion of breakdown completely but to keep it in play, as Lozano did, retaining its critical potential rather than reiterat-

58. "This novel was not a trumpet for women's liberation. It described many female emotions of aggression, hostility, resentment." Doris Lessing, "Preface," in *The Golden Notebook* (1962; London: Fourth Estate, 2011), p. 8.

59. In the book's final pages charting Anna's psychological demise, Lessing wrote: "It occurred to her that she was going mad. This was the 'breakdown' she had foreseen; the 'cracking up.'" Lessing's point is clear: Anna's psychoanalysis has failed. Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p. 564. Themes of breakdown and madness, first addressed in *The Golden Notebook*, return in *The Four-Gated City* in 1969 and again in 1971, the same year Lessing revisited *The Golden Notebook* to comment on the subject of breakdown, when her novel *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* was published, a book indebted to Lessing's reading of Laing. On this see Marion Vlastos, "Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy," *PMLA* 19, no. 2 (March 1976), pp. 245–58. As Vlastos writes, "In essence, Lessing and Laing are saying that individuals become sick because the world is sick" (p. 246). See also Frederick R. Karl, "Doris Lessing in the Sixties: The New Anatomy of Melancholy," *Contemporary Literature* 13 (1972), pp. 15–33.

ing its deployment as a form of causation or as a reason to ignore the real political implications of Lozano's art.

In psychoanalytic terms a breakdown is signaled by an impasse in the analysand's situation. It marks the beginning of the end. If managed well, as Christopher Bollas has argued, breakdown can become the catalyst for the final analytic breakthrough.⁶⁰ Both analyst and analysand must wait out the impasse. Catastrophe occurs when the analyst "stops listening" and fails to recognize the signs of imminent breakdown, resulting in a situation from which the analysand never fully recovers. He or she remains stuck in an impasse that the analyst never quite grasps, unable to move on except in what Bollas describes as the most "diminished" of ways.⁶¹ Lozano's reduction of her own name to the letter *E* (from "Lee") could be read as an erasure of self akin to precisely this kind of diminished subjectivity. Lozano wrote that *Dropout Piece* would only work if she abstained from eating, drinking, dancing, or smoking too much—a "diminished consumption," she noted, to match her reduced levels of activity, energy, and participation.⁶² A work such as *Dialogue Piece*, with its future-oriented, almost utopian quality, in which Lozano imagined a time when she could resume her activities in a renewed form, might be considered one attempt by Lozano to work her way out of the impasse triggered by her strike and subsequent *Dropout Piece*.

As sexual, economic, and social inequalities continue to shape the experience of women in the workplace and at home, Lozano's strike actions and her idiosyncratic renderings of tools, things, bodies, and worlds that fail or refuse to work might yet provide an alternative model with which to approach such concerns. Lozano's diverse body of work offers an ambivalent and at times frustrating investigation into vexed questions of participation and work refusal, advancing a radical subject position forged—imperfectly—in the late 1960s and early '70s that deployed a language of negative freedoms and complex feminisms. Lozano embodies, then, a kind of "scandalous feminism," to borrow Jacqueline Rose's term for a feminism that embraces and takes seriously the darkness and failures of

60. See Christopher Bollas, *Catch Them Before They Fall: The Psychoanalysis of Breakdown* (London: Routledge, 2012). For Bollas, the analyst's task is to listen for the coming breakdown, to anticipate it and so prepare in advance. His claim is that the analyst and analysand should see the breakdown through together, over the course of several days, if need be, in eight-hour-long sessions. This idea of working through by waiting out offers a powerful model for rethinking the analytic encounter, and also Lozano's various attempts at stopping and starting over. Bollas cites Laing's early "pioneering" work at Kingsley Hall, London, as an important early instance of the analyst living and working alongside the analysand (p. 7).

61. *Ibid.*, p. 5. See also Herbert Rosenfeld, chapter three, "Breakdown," in *Impasse and Interpretation* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1987). Rosenfeld is particularly interested in the moments when analysis fails, when an impasse is reached and neither analyst nor analysand knows quite what to do.

62. "Dropout only works along with *diminished consumption*: of calories, cigs, dope; of joyous energy (like dancing), emotions, intensity; of restlessness, ambition, work." Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook* 8, April 5, 1970, p. 137.

the emotional, psychic, and lived experiences of women.⁶³ Such an “outrageous” feminism does not set out to sanitize but to lay itself out on the table, in all its mad and unreasonable forms, and is important precisely because of its refusal to conform, to be sane; in Lozano’s words, for its embrace of the “schizoid.” The politics of Lozano’s actions can appear at best opaque and at worst downright reactionary. But such a reading ignores the complexity of Lozano’s earlier work in favor of a selective focus on the last two years of her nonproduction and the mythologizing of her strike actions. As early as 1961, Lozano had been reconfiguring notions of work, labor, and breakdown at the level of materiality and form. With her tool paintings, in which drill bits and screws unravel and crumple, hammerheads morph into chubby penises, and metal screwdrivers slouch, Lozano set about figuring a world in which both tools and concepts of work were radically subverted. Ignoring this flattens and simplifies both the artist and the art world she left behind. Additionally, it risks sidestepping the aporia produced by Lozano’s boycott of women, which refuses to settle politically or critically (to argue for or against its political correctness is to miss its point entirely).

After she quit the art world, things never really picked up again for Lozano. Her boycott of women was, of course, always bound to fail as a model of radical practice. It was every bit as counterintuitive and contrary as Lozano’s shift toward large-scale abstraction in 1967, at the tail end of a modernism already in the process of dematerialization; a transition in which Lozano was also, paradoxically, involved with her conceptual pieces.⁶⁴ “Win first don’t last win last don’t care,” Lozano wrote in red capitals across a blank sheet of paper.⁶⁵ Rather than consider Lozano’s decision to drop out as a definitive end point to her career, I suggest that it is better understood as one attempt, one more attempt, to live on, to wait out the impasse at which she found herself.⁶⁶ Just a year or two later, the emerging event that was feminism and a political reorganization of aspects of the art world might have provided a context for Lozano’s actions. But waiting it out didn’t work for Lozano. Her refusal to continue to act, her decision to stop speaking (to women, at least), effectively removed her from the political sphere. Under the self-imposed conditions of Lozano’s own withdrawal and refusal to join in, how could *Dropout Piece* have worked out any other way?⁶⁷

63. Jacqueline Rose, *Women in Dark Times* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), p. x.

64. Lozano’s final series of large abstract *Wave Paintings* were shown at the Whitney Museum in December 1970.

65. Lee Lozano, “Win first don’t last win last don’t care,” 1970. The Estate of Lee Lozano, Hauser & Wirth.

66. In another context, Berlant has described the “impasse” as a kind of holding pattern or means by which subjects learn to survive under parlous political conditions. Short of simply giving up, “living on” is how most subjects learn to get by. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 5.

67. Molesworth suggests Lozano’s antipathy towards the art world and women was “in part an aversion to community,” drawing on Leo Bersani’s arguments in *Homos* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996). See Molesworth, “Tune In, Turn On, Drop Out: The Rejection of Lee Lozano,” p. 71.

I want to end by returning to Frampton's photograph of Lozano's workbench in which the artist has dropped out of the picture. Piles of work papers and art supplies are strewn across the tabletop alongside other mundane items such as cigarettes and matchbooks, the artist's spectacles, and an abandoned coffee cup. Art and life appear deliberately muddled up, as though a material manifestation of the "art-life" experiments that would just two years later engulf Lozano's world entirely. Although the busy, cluttered desk suggests a scene of industry, Lozano's stool is pushed back from the table, as though she had only briefly slipped from sight. Frampton did not, then, capture the productive "gap" between art and life, but the unproductive impasse between working and not working in which Lozano ultimately found herself stuck. Via a series of playful metonymic substitutions with the tools of her trade, Frampton's proleptic portrait of Lozano depicts her as both resolutely present and missing. We cannot know all of the reasons why, just a few years later, Lozano absented herself for good. Perhaps, when it came to working, Lozano simply preferred not to. But one thing is clear: Just as Lozano stopped working, so the world, it seems, stopped working for her.