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Human Knowing Explored, Enfolding Many Senses

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This is a review of *By Alison Knowles, A Retrospective (1960-2022)*, edited by Karen Moss with Lucia Fabio. University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archives, 271 pp. ISBN 10-0983881340, $43.26 (USD).

This review explores a particularly illuminating set of approaches to human knowing through various approaches to artmaking. *By Alison Knowles* is a book that functions as a catalogue for Knowles's retrospective. It contains a series of important essays and reprints of historical essays as well a chronology of Knowles's Art/Life/Events, including a series of images of aspects of her work and individual pieces from along this rich journey. Knowles is an artist that I have followed, starting in the late 1970s in terms of her work as part of the Fluxus movement. One definition of Fluxus follows from the Tate museum:

> Fluxus is an international avant-garde collective or network of artists and composers founded in the1960s and still continuing today. Founded in 1960 by the Lithuanian/American artist George Marinas, Fluxus began as a small but international network of artists and composers, and was characterised as a shared attitude rather than a movement. Rooted in experimental music, it was named after a magazine which featured the work of musicians and artists centred around avant-garde composer John Cage. The Latin word Fluxus means flowing, in English a flux is a flowing out. Fluxus founder Maciunas said that the purpose of Fluxus was to 'promote a revolutionary flood and tide in art, promote living art, anti-art'. This has strong echoes of dada, the early twentieth century art movement. The first Fluxus event was staged in 1961 at the AG Gallery in New York and was followed by festivals in Europe in 1962. The major centres of Fluxus activity were New York, Germany and Japan. Fluxus played an important role in opening up the definitions of what art can be. It has profoundly influenced the nature of art production since the 1960s, which has seen a diverse range of art forms and approaches existing and flourishing side-by-side. Fluxus had no single unifying style. Artists used a range of media and processes adopting a 'do-it-yourself' attitude to creative activity, often staging random performances and using whatever materials were at hand to make art. Seeing themselves as an alternative to academic art and music, Fluxus was a democratic form of creativity open to anyone. Collaborations were encouraged between artists and across artforms, and also with the audience or spectator. It valued simplicity and anti-commercialism, with chance and accident playing a big part in the creation of works, and humour also being an important element. (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/f/fluxus)

Fluxus is a movement which celebrates the exploration of all of the senses. Knowles's work was both intimately tied to Fluxus and many of its practitioners in term collaborative events, as well as certain milieux of exposition—like event scores, performances, shows, and unique publications. More centrally, her practice was about

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developing a body of work which was very much of itself, which this book illuminates. I hope to unpack elements of her practice in this review. In terms of this, this elegant book is full of ideas, as well as sensual and intellectual approaches to meaning exploration, housing salient aspects of the richness and breadth of her work. This publication is by far the most comprehensive I have seen related to her oeuvre. It is quite moving in Knowles's own special way of exploring subject↔object unity. I am excited to have the chance to deeply examine it. Her approach to art production truly embodies a set of approaches to poetics and to a special creative, artistic branch of human knowing. In particular it explores a series of approaches to poetic narrative which explode, enhance, and extend the realm of embodied poetics—a poetics which explores meaning production through all of the senses, examining many different forms of vocabulary, both logocentric and non-logocentric.

The curator of the show, Karen Moss working with a strong research team [individually represented in the initial essays], has assembled an incredibly diverse set of works each exploring differing poetic narrative strategies, some veering closer to the poetic, others pointing in the direction of narrative but in a Fluxus-oriented manner, exploring multiple signifying registers often engendering new *embodied* narrative strategies, including the haptic and the architectonic. What does this Fluxus manner consist of? In terms of second-order cybernetics, often the person interacting with the work falls into a circular causal generative relation, especially in terms of event scores that are interpreted by performers such that the content arising is sometimes entirely indeterminate of the initial score—in other words the event scores trigger responses that are specifically individual, yet are embodied experiences. This second-order reading also is understood with certain modes of interactive viewing of the specific works—like Flux Boxes which are collections of objects to be explored in the name of poetics. Her sub-branch of event-scores she calls Propositions. which I will discuss later. Many works call for direct sensual interaction including the haptic, and all other sensual potentials, and are to a degree performative in nature. Some would suggest that just reading the event score is performative. Here, at times the interactant drives sets of possibilities, and derives through interaction a set of assumptions and associations based on their own particular choices and history of lived experience. Historically I have called this strategy interauthorship.[2] This is not to say that Knowles is not a sublime author with a deep knowledge of differing approaches to language. On the contrary she is a master of this exploded notion of poetic narrative that flows across and into a series of differing language fields, or what might be called mixed-semiotic relations. The term *mixed-semiotic* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.147) suggests that there are multiple milieux of semiotic information that have been intermingled, combining different operational planes, that is, text, object, image, housing strategy, and music/sound each form a differing milieu. Differing media-elements may also simultaneously function in multiple milieux.

2. Recombinant poetics

Moss, in the curator's introductory text entitled "By Alison Knowles: Make a Retrospective" starts off with the question the curator asked herself:

> What does it mean to "make a retrospective" for an artist whose production involves ephemeral, nontraditional materials and live durational works that defy easy categorization and do not fit seamlessly into standard museum structures? How does a curator start to research a prolific, process-oriented practice dispersed across the globe—from her New York studio (a wall to wall installation of art, found objects, specimens of nature, snippets of writing, and memorabilia) to international archives, foundations and museums? [p. 17]

She continues, "Then as one gains an understanding of the artist's diffuse yet deep production, how does one codify, organize, and develop a framework for such a multifaceted body of work" [p. 17]. I must admit, I asked a very similar question to myself in terms of how to approach writing this book review. She finishes up this thought with this: "What follows is a kind of 'open score' for Knowles artistic practice; these 'propositions,' to borrow her language, suggest how we might think about Knowles's oeuvre through the lenses of process, procedure, pedagogy, and impact" [p. 17].

Ranulph Glanville, a cybernetician, architect, and artist of some note (see Seaman, 2021, p. 223), decided late in his life to substitute the term composer for the historical notion of the observer. The composer composes their thought and experience through their own individual lens of systems, associations, understandings, interactions and readings. I believe Knowles's embodied exploration of a multitude of different poetic narrative spaces, enables the viewer/interactant to play up this pluralistic reading of the term *composer*, sometimes being more literal and sometimes more figurative. This exemplifies Glanville's discussion of experiencing and thinking as composing. Polysemy abounds in her work. The work often plays with differing registers of word plays, puns, as well as oscillations between literal and metaphorical interpretation. She often employs linguistic humor and the use of objects and sound as part of an overarching sensual system of interpretation.

Here, I am not talking about expanded notions of music, or sculpture, or language alone—I am talking about a multitude of suggestive poetic languages which are brought together, often drawn directly from the life of the senses, either in still or time-based form, or enabling the exploration of meaning generating systems of combinatorics both linguistic and physically extra-linguistic. This is a somewhat exploded network of possibilities including at times combinatoric potentialities related to differing forms of more-or-less non-traditional artistic production and performance. I like to think about the notion of subtle *fields of meaning force* (see Seaman, 1999, 2010) that are brought together, each having a suggestive meaning potential—or proclivity for poetic association—functioning in a polysemic manner, not necessarily in one finished order as in a combinatoric text. Each different field falls in relation, sometimes in space, sometimes in time, often authored by Knowles in mind of how these differing fields operate in terms of triggering meaning forces, acting upon each other through a kind of subtle shifting of meaning forces, in thought.

The thought arises through the relations that are often enacted either by performer, participant, collaborator, or by some combination of these. I call this generative meaning production, which is often quite emergent in nature. The observer/composer becomes creative in their understanding of these open works.[3] They are often accretive in meaning arising at times in being explored/experienced through being enacted by the participant/interactant—or perhaps by being actively elicited through the performance of others. They also shift in memory over time because the poetic narratives are generally not fixed, but play out across a series of perspectives, possibilities, strategies, and quite an elaborate set of vocabularies of elegant polysemic approaches. Both elicited memories triggered through association and shifting or displaced memories arising from having a history of some form of interactions with a work, are central to the potentials of process.

In many of her works she explores an area of production called the *open work*. Umberto Eco in the early 1960s looked carefully at the potentials of the participation of the viewer with diverse works of art. He provides the definition of the *open work*:

> To avoid any confusion in terminology, it is important to specify here the definition of the "open work," despite its relevance in formulating a fresh dialectics between the work of art and its performer, still requires to be separated from other conventional applications of the term. Aesthetic theorists, for example, often have recourse to the notion of "completeness" and "openness" in connection with a given work of art. These two expressions refer to a standard situation of which we are all aware in our reception of a work of art: we see it as the end product of an author's effort to arrange a sequence of communicative effects in such a way that each individual addressee can refashion the original composition devised by the author. The addressee is bound to enter into an interplay of stimulus and response which depends on the unique capacity for sensitive reception of the piece. In this sense the author presents a finished product with the intention that the particular composition should be appreciated and received in the same form as he devised it. As he reacts to the play of the stimuli and his own response to their patterning the addressee is bound to supply his own existential credentials, the sense of conditioning which is peculiarly his own, a defined culture, a set of tastes, personal inclinations and prejudices. Thus his comprehension of the original artifact is always modified by his particular and individual perspective. In fact, the form of the work of art gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood.
>
> A work of art is a complete and closed form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an open product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on unadulterable specificity. Hence every reception of a work of art is an interpretation and a performance of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself. Nonetheless, it is obvious that works of those like those of Berio and Stockhausen are "open" in a far more tangible sense. In primitive terms we can say that they are quite literally "unfinished": the author seems to hand them on to the performer more or less like the components of a construction kit. (Eco, 1989, pp. 3–4)

Knowles's Propositions are of the open work variety given the potential of differing individual interpretations or what might also be called versions that embody these interpretations. Additionally, she has participated in numerous collaborative Fluxus-based works which also explore human derived, touch-based combinatorics—the

3. Definition of the open work or link (see Seaman, 2010; Eco, 1989).

individual exploration of Flux Boxes and the like. Additionally, one could suggest that works that she does and re-does over and over again represent perhaps a new branch of the open work in terms of accretive meaning by adding new elements, processes, objects, spaces for interaction, and unique venues, exploring what I call differing states of meaning production, as well as exploring textual combinatorics, and/or aspects of navigation when works explore more architectonic features.

She is enamored of the metaphor of the book which becomes actuated in many differing forms. The interaction with these differing "books" is also quite open. I will loop back to some of the above ideas in relation to some of the differing essays in the book. These essays embody partially the breadth of perspectives which Knowles oeuvre entails.

"Director's Foreword"

Julie Rodrigues Widolm, Director, University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, discussed the retrospective:

> By Alison Knowles: A Retrospective (1960-2022) is the first comprehensive exhibition of the American artist Alison Knowles (b. 1933, Scarsdale, NY), who has produced a significant but underexamined body of work since the early 1960s. While Knowles is best known as a core member of Fluxus, the avant-garde movement founded in 1962, her groundbreaking experimentation-from painting and printmaking to sculpture and installation, sound works, poetry, performance events, and artist's books has continued for more than sixty years, influencing contemporary art and artists. Her interdisciplinary approach to being an artist may seem commonplace today, but it was decidedly radical in the 1960s. [p. 6]
>
> Her multifaceted The House of Dust generated possibly the first computerized poem in the United States in 1967, followed by a public sculpture and numerous related performances. Knowles's quotidian, poetic works emanate from her extended engagement with ordinary materials, found objects, and everyday life. [p. 6]

The director discusses the curator:

> Art historian and independent curator Karen Moss has worked with Knowles for almost thirty years, first on In the Spirit of Fluxus at the Walker Art Center (1993) and later on Knowles's solo exhibition and residency at the San Francisco Art Institute (2003). Karen is a close friend of BAMPFA … The Knowles project started in 2018, and I am so grateful for Karen's tireless efforts and perseverance during the pandemic to bring the exhibition and catalog to their fruition in 2022. [p. 6]
>
> And, of course, I would like to express our deepest appreciation to Alison Knowles, who for six decades has pushed us all to move beyond binary thinking and the perceived limits of knowledge, toward a higher consciousness of meaning-through art, community, and collaboration in the performance of everyday life. [p. 6]

"By Alison Knowles: Make a retrospective" by Karen Moss

Moss discusses a set of perspectives that are in different contexts played out through Knowles's work:

By, preposition

— Identifying the agent performing an action
— in proximity to
— indicating the means of achieving something
— in the vicinity of and beyond
— through or through the medium[4] [p. 12]

Moss describes Knowles variety of Event Scores—Propositions.

> Knowles's open scores are minimal, poetic texts that can be performed by others, yet they are clearly written by Knowles, reflecting her authorship. Referred to sometimes as "propositions," the scores are invitations to perform simple actions or gestures, often in combination with found objects. [p.12]

As the scores are interpreted and embodied in actions by individuals, they take on differing meanings in an open, indeterminate fashion driven by each performer. The performer is also a viewer of the self, introspective, performing. Also, other viewers and the artist herself potentially witness these differing instantiations of the scores. In a second-order cybernetic manner Knowles, as artist, takes on an interesting role, which is quite different from a reader exploring an interactive computer program in term of circular causality. The artist can compare one iteration or version to another. Through introspection the artist can also decide to add new elements, possibly exploring new signifying vocabularies of poetics. For the author, the intention is to be in a poetic form of control, steering the defining of the initial event score. The human knowing arises in part, for both the author and the interactant, by letting emergence play itself out and observing that emergence closely, as well as comparing one emergence to another as many iterations are performed. Through introspection one can begin to see new material possibilities, new possible realms of emergence. In particular this introspection is about observing the differences that arise across multiple iterations as new signifying milieux are introduced, with the open potential to add to and/or alter the work indefinitely. For Knowles these poetic changes may keep occurring over a lifetime.

In terms of poetic works by Knowles, I would rather call a translated text a version than a translation, in that each language has elements and qualities that resist translation, like figures of speech or specific puns, and must be negotiated, and willfully recreated in the spirit of the original, in the process of moving from one material language to another. Each of us is the center of our own senses of language, vocabulary and lived experience. There is a kind of logic to this cross-language negotiation, but it is perhaps different for each new version maker. Moss describes her curatorial logic:

> The curatorial logic of *By Alison Knowles: A Retrospective (1960-2022)* has aimed to closely follow the artists specific working methods and trajectory. The retrospective begins with "Art/Life/Events,"

4. Moss's footnote states: "These definitions are loosely drawn from the Oxford English dictionary and Merriam Webster Dictionary."

> an illustrated time line to introduce important moments in Knowles's biography alongside the highlights of her career. The first part of the exhibition's installation is organized chronologically, from 1960 to the early 1970s, to show the transition from Knowles's early paintings and prints to the advent of her event scores and participation in Fluxus Festivals, as well as her collaborations with George Brecht and Robert Watts on BLINK and with additional Fluxus artists on performances and publications. This section culminates with installations of The Big Book, The Identical Lunch, and The House of Dust. The second, nonchronological part of the exhibition presents Knowles's work from the early 1970s to today, across various media and materials as well as subjects and themes. More specifically, it focuses on a range of experimental printmaking processes; hanging mixed-media works and scrolls; flax and bean instruments and sculptures; sound works; and artist's books, multiples, and other publications. Specific sections are devoted to Knowles's collaborative exhibitions and events since 2000, which include the most recent reactivations of her intermedia works. [p. 13]

The joy of the book was for me in part trying to navigate associations that arose out of a very different realm of time-based, whole-body experiences—events that could never be wholly captured, but were meant to be experienced in the moment, yet were now part of this particular book and textual significations. I think this happens when one is one with the moment as Alison Knowles is, and one is one with the history of relevant experiences that help us read those moments from a distance. In my understanding, Knowles was perhaps both deeply interested in process, and the human knowing that arises through being one with the experiences of living as they are unfolding, and simultaneously interested in qualities of differing reproduction techniques, and all of the beauty of their individual signifying qualities. This also includes the understanding of the qualities that are richly emergent—exploring this form of beauty as well. Even her objects—like making paper—formed themselves as part of an elegant vocabulary of material processes, with absolutely lovely monochromatic art making as being one such attribute.

There was a collective ethos that informed many collaborative Fluxus works. Yet, certain of Knowles's works are also of themselves. Often people have written about art and life and the blurring of these two perspectives. Knowles was interested in perhaps inverting the word order—valuing life over art or better, exploring and re-valuing the sensual bodily experiences of daily life by re-experiencing them through art. Along with events, this activity very much focused on sensual experience and processes as they related to the creation and generation of interactive object constellations, handmade paper, and a variety of kinds of prints, as well as performative instantiations of her Propositions.

The breadth of her works enables the exploration of an exploded sense of how a poetic text can bridge the physical world, objects, organic substances, and living processes like eating, and re-examine them through the expanded senses employed as part of the Fluxus art context—through new forms of exhibition, publication and human interaction.

This also enabled her to explore common sounds in an uncommon manner of enhanced listening, and of exploring the artist's voice as being both literal and metaphorical. The works often employed punning understandings, the shifting across

many different material languages, from the language of objects, to that of sounds, to printed, spoken and typed texts, to transitive housings (Flux Boxes and the like) and variable combinatoric readings, to re-instantiations, polysemy, and an ongoing accretive pluralistic understanding. This might also move into the room, into the sound of rooms, into architectonic/sculptural explorations—for example, like reading a book that was being negotiated physically as an architectonic sculpture, simultaneously. The exhibition sought to, at differing moments, explore each of these living variables at very least through reproductions and textual articulation. Knowles's oeuvre endlessly swerves and moves in a sophisticated manner across all chosen vocabularies!

Daily routines might suddenly be put in the subtle spotlight of being reconsidered as art. Thus, out of the Duchampian Readymade came a practice that explored the readymades of everyday experience—beans and books for example, and shook up the world of understanding with a sound pretext, as well as other new and illuminating sensual readings. The abstract poetic objects taking any form that made poetic sense to Knowles in the moment, were the embodiment of a life-pedagogy—of a person's wisdom that had become embodied in scores and processes, in prints of every technological variety available, in making paper by scratch, in subtly enabling the re-seeing of experiences that might be normally passed by, often in relation to chance and indeterminate processes. All of this was in part arising though a long and deep friendship with John Cage, not to mention important collaborations with many seminal Fluxus artists, as well as a collaboration with Duchamp on the side. This was Alison Knowles's embodied accretive network of new proximities and combinatorics of fields of experience, enabling the re-understanding of humanistic meaning production by exploring human knowing in an ongoing, life-long manner. This retrospective—*By Alison Knowles*. Moss finally states:

> While no single exhibition or publication can do full justice to such a prolific eighty-nine-year-old artist, the goal of by Alison Knowles: A Retrospective (1960-2022) is to amplify her presence in art historical and critical discourse, and to bring into sharper relief Knowles's prescient contributions to contemporary art. [p. 14]

This goal is clearly achieved via the catalogue and all of the thought and association that it elicits. The essays also speak about many individual concepts and preoccupations. Moss states:

> These essays provide art historical, critical, and philosophical contexts for Knowles's work and bookend an illustrated chronology of the artist's education, exhibitions, performances, residencies, collaborations, and commemorations. Compiled by Lucia Fabio, it is an unprecedented attempt to construct a detailed narrative of Knowles's life and oeuvre. [p. 14]

I will later move through the essays and point briefly to some of the salient ideas that are entertained there. In her remarks about this process of working on such a show, Moss states the following:

> When I first embarked on the project of an Alison Knowles retrospective, I considered a series of questions: What does it mean to "make a retrospective" for an artist whose production involves ephemeral, nontraditional materials and live, durational works that defy easy categorization and do not fit seamlessly into standard museum strictures? [p. 17]

Of course, this is the very thing that attracts many people to Alison Knowles work—these difficult salient qualities.

> How does a curator start to research a prolific, process-oriented practice dispersed across the globe-from her New York studio (a wall to-wall installation of art, found objects, specimens of nature, snippets of writing, and memorabilia) to international archives, foundations, and museums? Then, as one gains understanding of the artist's diffuse framework for such a multifaceted body of work? Finally, and most critically, how does one communicate the overarching significance of an octogenarian who has been duly an acknowledged and appreciated by her avant-garde peers and subsequent generations of artists, but underrepresented in mainstream institutions and scholarship? What follows is a kind of "open score" for Knowles's artistic practice; these "propositions," to borrow her language, suggest how we might think about Knowles's oeuvre through lenses of process, procedure, pedagogy and impact. [p. 17]

In discussing her work we need to think about what might be called *states of media* [my phrase]. This might be an initial score or set of prints, a combinatoric poetic text, or handmade paper. Found objects and materials as ephemeral and quotidian as beans, can find themselves shifting contexts and material milieux, from the visual to the textual, to the spoken, to the physical, to the to the re-formed sculptural object. Additionally, Knowles explored the various means of being electronically printed, and to the filming, and or sound recording of a work. Any of these individual meaning perspectives might become an operative fragment in the subsequent life of her work, or at times functioning as the catalyst for the creation of a future instantiation which has subtly migrated in form, for personal reasons, to a new and potentially extended context. This use of a past work for future material is often explored. Such a process might lend itself to exploring architectural form, related to the abstraction of a book through a huge shift in scale, enabling a new means of being read through literal physical negotiation. Alternately, a book and/or text could be abstracted into becoming a differing kind of architecture—a physical built architecture, and not a metaphorical one. Books in all of their potential literal and metaphorical forms were central to Knowles as were pluralistic notions of the term *reading*. These differing perspectives, enfolded, always contributed to processes of human knowing.

Proposition 1: Process

Moss states:

> At first glance, it is difficult to identify the floating, fragmented shapes in the 2021 print Onion Skin Song, a continuation of Knowles's print series Three Songs, begun in 1971; upon close inspection, the unmistakable striations of delicate organic matter become apparent, Knowles has explained that the prints are "made by running the onion skins through a blueprint machine." [p. 17]

Moss further quotes Knowles on this process:

> This method duplicates exactly, like a shadow image, the tone and striations of the skin and reproduces them on a vellum sheet. Finding in my environment a dozen onion skins, they were placed on a plastic sheet, covered with [Saran] wrap and the prints were run. The blueprint machine turns and crushes the skins as it makes the prints. Once the dials are set, the lights and darks of the skins are interpreted and printed by the voltage. These chance elements—crushing action, plus the differing electrical charges—I find preferable to calligraphy I might draw by hand. [p.17]

The metaphor of the onion is a nice one. Each layer can be peeled away leading to a center of nothing. Yet, when we are talking about process, the process of the peeling, and printing, the rememberings and repositioning, the abstracting and technological enabling—new readings all become enfolded in the process.

Many of the "poetic elements" she uses intentionally cross ideational boundaries between process and conceptual worlds—here substitution of an architectural process of printing blueprints, can be poetically conflated with making a blueprint of an ephemeral, organic throwaway (or in this case a possible pragmatic fragment from something that might have been used in another daily process, like making onion soup). Alternately, we might think about the architecture of an onion. We come to understand the poetic crossing from objects to words to processes and back. We might even come to associate the history of printing and the idea that onionskin paper is used as a transparent part of typing words, thus, sometimes her meanings are transparent and sometimes she just likes physical transparencies. She often incorporates what I believe to be the most obvious of allusions in terms of the unsaid, yet implied. We become in(onion)dated with differing layers of meaning—both literal and metaphorical, while also tapping into memory and associations of differing accretive moments—perhaps also enfolding past rituals of the cutting of onions and crying. Moss suggests: "The onion with its seemingly endless layers, is an apt metaphor for understanding Knowles's art: One must peel away the skins to delve deep and comprehend the essence" [p. 18].

Again, the object is explored often through the process, even if we end up with the notion of the original onion, empty at the end of peeling away the layers (should I say layers of meaning) having found a new instantiation in a highly detailed reproduction. It now inhabits a new world of being re-contextualized and re-read—the onion becomes polysemic across the fields of readings. The meanings pass though differing physical semiotic milieux as we come to understand them from our own perspective. We might say that each milieu can embody a language and vocabulary of it's own. Thus, we are reading and understanding the work, both linguistically and extra-linguistically, by enfolding associations and by being deeply engaged with negotiating these polysemic spaces, moving across each of these worlds of artistic vocabulary through time, enfolding all of the various senses (pun intended) through our active composing/observing, and the introspective enfolding of related memories.

It is interesting to note that Varela, Thompson and Rosch use this peeling away of onion layers as a metaphor for mind in their book *The Embodied Mind* (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991, p. 232).

In terms of sound—the cutting of onions…the rhythms, not heard here but possibly being remembered or "read" against the memory of other of her works dealing with foods, salad in particular, our memory of differing registers of sensory events plays into the accretive nature of meaning production.

Beans as poetic material are another subject↔object explored often in her oeuvre in differing guises. In particular the sonic world is of great interest to her…and from childhood ones considers "beans, beans, the musical fruit" as another silent but deadly allusion to childhood humor, completely unspoken, of course [forgive me]. Bean there, done that…

"Do You Remember? Alison Knowles in Context"—Nicole L. Woods

Woods wrote a deep and rich essay exploring many perspectives embodied in Knowles's work. I will touch on just a small set of points here. Woods discusses the work *Do You Remember:*

> Do You Remember is an unusually technological work for Knowles, yet its economy of means and poetic associations are characteristic of her larger oeuvre. Collaborative, elusive, and textual in nature, Do You Remember is a call-and-response to [Emmett] Williams's work that speaks to the affective nature of personal and professional relations, of lives lived within the context of love, friendship, ambition, and artistic labor…For his part, Williams structured the poem according to six progressions of enigmatic content, creating a furtive visual language of textures, colors, spaces, and foods:
>
> | | | | | | |
> |---|---|---|---|---|---|
> | And | I | love | soft | pink | nights |
> | | you | hated | hard | blue | valleys |
> | | | | mellow | red | potatoes |
> | | | | livid | green | seagulls |
> | | | | | yellow | dewdrops |
> | | | | | | oysters |
>
> [p. 31]

Above are Williams initial text modules. As a generative text one can see the differing nature of the words parsed above. The following is a section of the poem derived from Williams's generated text. The text was to be projected as a loop onto a canvas that Knowles had worked on earlier, dedicated to Williams. Together in proximity these two works inter-signify in a new instantiation of two differing historical works functioning now in dynamic conversation. Here is a short fragment of the generated text (which was also typeset and hung adjacent to the printed canvas):

> do you remember when I loved soft pink knights / and you hated hard blue valleys / and I kissed mellow red potatoes / and you loved livid green seagulls / and I hated soft yellow dewdrops / and you kissed hard pink oysters / and I loved mellow blue nights… [p. 32]

Woods in her essay tries to position and articulate Knowles as a feminist artist working in collaboration with a number of different male Fluxus artists. She also points to the lack of an extensive archive of Knowles's works:

> The relative dearth of Knowles's personal studio archive is the consequence of at least two factors, First, having lived in New York for most of her life, Knowles has had finite space and modest means to hold such a trove. (In fact, she has been known to discard things for both practical and aesthetic reasons, including her old canvases.) Second, given that experimental women artists are, to this day, woefully underrepresented in the art press and historical literature, not to mention the lack of material support from institutions, there has been little aspiration or desire on Knowles's part to actively retain every fragment, source notebook, and bill of sale. We might have no tangible sense of Knowles's life, processes, or artworks were it not for [Dick] Higgins's aversion to throwing out anything, which resulted in his saving her college journals, letters, early solo show announcements, biographical curriculum vitae, exhibition histories, and other historical threads. In fact, thanks to the preservational impulse of a number of male artists Knowles was closely affiliated with-including Williams, Maciunas, Brecht, and Nam June Paik, we have better opportunity to know her pioneering role in the development of the American postwar avant-garde. [p. 35]

Knowles's strong set of collaborative relationships with the above members of Fluxus and others, was perhaps first as an artist and poet, and not as a feminist.

> Knowles's aversion to holding (and beholding) prompts a series of important methodological questions. How does one find an artist through the voices, caprices, limited authority, and tangled remembrances of others-in Knowles's case, many male others? How might such an exploration serve or challenge modernist and even feminist histories? And what does all of this tell us about Knowles-an intermedia artist who has always preferred her work to be discussed outside of what she perceives as the limiting categories of "woman artist" and "feminist artist"? This is not to suggest that Knowles does not have deeply felt convictions about the fight for gender equality in the art world, the discursive space of art history, and beyond. To the contrary, surveys of her production have demonstrated that Knowles, without appearing overtly activist, has consistently explored the domestic everyday, and often around the contested bonds of subjectivity in and around sociopolitical praxis as it relates to gender. [p. 36]

Knowles certainly embodies a feminist stance that is of itself, like her work. This, as Wolfe states, in part points to the everyday and gender equality. Like the polyvalent nature of her work, I also think of her as the consummate humanist, where her work can be experienced richly by all as part of the set of process exploring new approaches to human knowing.

Woods in her essay also articulates this notion that "Knowles acted upon her fascination with the flexibility of linguistic daily operations and their spatialization to defamiliarize the categories of other media—celluloid, computational, sculptural" [p. 37]. These are just a portion of the media-oriented defamiliarization of the material categories Knowles sensually explores over her lifetime, sometimes utilizing spoken and written language, and sometimes without (or should I perhaps say sometimes exploring alternate material/technological vocabularies, and mixed signifying milieux that found themselves in proximity) forming a new variety of poetic narrative.

"Twins: A Parable"—Hannah B. Higgins

Hanna B. Higgins discusses an interesting two-sided print in her essay *Twins: A Parable*.

> The word "TWINS" appears in hollow, sans serif, capital letters at the lower left of a 1979 print by Alison Knowles (pp. 158–59). Slightly off-kilter, it has the spontaneous feel of a stamp thumped to the inkpad and thumped again to the paper. On two stamped lines below the word, Knowles's choppy handwriting appears as zig-zagging pencil lines, like mountain peaks: the top line reads "button"; the bottom, "bean." Above these lines and "TWINS" are splotch-like pairs. Each button has its bean. Each bean has its button. [p. 45]

The image itself, is a twin, given the reverse side which puts a spin on the traditional single side of the historical exhibition of images. Knowles quite often explores collections of objects that are similar but different. In this case she looks at similar but different beans and contrasts them with similar but different buttons, making also a comparison across categories to point at similar but different forms. It must be noted that Knowles had twins herself. Higgins states:

> Simple contrast and comparison between bean and button, as among the elements that form the set of beans or buttons, creates a visual experience that feels like a social diagram, a visual parable of the social relationship between twins and the world. Each pair signals a human relationship between two like and unlike beings. But each piece of the pair is also like the others spread far and wide across the image, with which they form a set as culture (button) and nature (bean). [p. 46]

Higgins points at the fact that the buttons were cultural images themselves. She speaks of what the buttons included in the image: "One was cast to look like a Buddha, another is in a head wrap, a third wears a fez, a fourth a conical hat, a fifth maybe a warrior's helmet" [p. 45]. Higgins continues discussing the work:

> Among humans, there may be local affinities, for example among pairs of siblings, or relationally within families or between friends, that are in tension with the social patterns of the larger community that is itself a set. There may be conflicting affinities depending on circumstances. [p. 46]

Higgins examines pattern generation and exploration, and the nature of human growth and patterning through DNA:

> Like DNA from two common sources, self-selecting and then replicating itself uniquely in gestation, the sequence and placement of the pairs of buttons and beans on the two sides is fraternal in nature, a unique doubling of the logic within each side of the print, subject to the laws of chance. If there is a social dimension to the relationship Knowles calls "twins" here, it would be that things that appear alike may not be, and also that exact duplication is not only impossible, but also undesirable—as the artist opted for difference. [p. 47]

Then, Higgins reveals her oneness with the subject↔object of this work, and its multiplicity of readings:

> Twins demonstrates Alison Knowles's commitment to exploring— in both her city surroundings and the natural world—duplication, sameness, and difference across graphic technologies, as mechanisms that are qualitatively human, dehumanizing, culturally binding, and in tension person to person. But Twins also speaks to her giving birth to fraternal twin girls—my sister Jessica and me—on August 21, 1964. We twins were fourteen and going through peak adolescence when our mother made Twins, in 1979. [p. 47]

Thus, Knowles made twins twice…perhaps weaving together her narrative identities from two quite different spheres—life and art—both exploring autobiographical subject matter. In her prints Knowles often explores differing technological processes, yet, re-setting them in motion, exploring new subjective territories (as I discussed above related to onion skins). Her use of the computer as a poetic vehicle is akin to this strategy, humanizing what others (including Higgins above) might call dehumanizing mechanisms of production and reproduction. Knowles's exploration of differing varieties of patterns, one being daily life patterns as they cross with patterns in art making, are often explored in her oeuvre:

> From a distance of four decades, I now see our different perspectives on Twins as a matter of how perception works more generally: human beings tend to be pattern seekers and variety makers. The cycles of day/night, month/year, birth/growth/decay, peace/war, feast/famine give shape to an inhabited world organized through pattern. Today, I am a scholar, a pattern seeker who frames complexity and variation so that people can make sense of time that is deeper than their immediate proximity. Variety, however, keeps the world interesting. "The greater the variation," according to the philosopher John Dewey, "the more interesting the effect, provided order is maintained"[5] Order is, of course, in the eye of the beholder. [p. 48]

What is fascinating about this book is that enables one to trace a series of historical processes and patterns, as they are added to and abstracted, forming not only polysemic readings locally between objects, words and processes falling in proximity, but also in an accretive manner, as new objects, words and processes are added in. This contributes to Knowles's specific exploration of the now over time, exploring accretive meaning production, yet it is here systematically unpacked from the differing perspectives of each essayist. In terms of materials explored in artmaking, beans are quite unique in Knowles's oeuvre. Here Higgins discusses this multi-faceted exploration of beans:

> The beans in Twins tether the work to Alison's long-standing interest in beans as wholesome, nutritious, and affordable food, and as art material. In October 1964, Alison wrote Variation #1 (Make a Soup), a follow-up to her more famous work Make a Salad, from 1962.4 Fluxus co-founder and erstwhile director George Maciunas called her bean soup (lovingly) "shit porridge" when she served it to friends at Fluxus New Year's. Beans show up in Alison's book works, including The Bean Rolls (1963–64), The Book of Bean (1981), and A Bean Concordance (1983). In the 1990s, she made Bean Turner instruments: paper pages full of beans.[6] Whether printed on a page or

5. Higgins's footnote: "See Dewey (1934, p. 164)"
6. Higgins's footnote: "*The Bean Turners* resulted from Alison's daily sourcing. One Bean Turner (that we know of) actually came to life when bean worms hatched and flew out of the seams of the instrument. Alison restored it, but it has become emblematic of the porous but necessary art-life boundary in her work."

> embedded in its surface— that is, enveloped within an empty fold, to swoosh and move within the handmade paper—beans bring pleasure in Alison's work through their scattering. [p. 49]

This selection of beans in terms of differing signifying milieux—explored in terms of multiple senses, also points to the life-long patterning of identities that are central to human knowing. This kind of abstraction/displacement/re-placement and return is experienced via a circular causal introspective conversation with the self, by the artist, and by the viewer, as one experiences similar but different patterns, levels and qualities of abstraction, and various processes, over a lifetime. This again points to the wisdom embodied in, and pointed at across Knowles's life and her art.

Higgins finishes her essay with the following:

> Twins is a metaprint, a print about printing, about color, about duplication, about seriality, about inversion, about food, about nature and culture, about the similarity and dissimilarity of twins, and the many different ways that pairs of things (in the world) are also not pairs at all but fluid and sometimes overlapping categories of other things. By gesturing toward nature and culture as both different and the same, through the complex relationship of pair and set, Twins models for a blurring of subject and object, human and nonhuman relationality. [p. 53]

This again points to the economy of her work, in terms of the punning way that Knowles could explore differing vocabularies of signification, compressed in a single work, each signifying element functioning in relation to the others in proximity, and how such a work figures in a broader sense in a retrospective *By Alison Knowles*.

"Touch, Listen, Smell, Eat, Look: Intersensory Perception in the Work of Alison Knowles"—Lucia Fabio

Fabio discusses what he calls Intersensory Perception. This essay starts with the following quote from Knowles:

> The events I perform, the prints I have made and the environments I build are designed to put the spectator/performer in touch with him/herself and the real world. Since all feelings reside in the individual sensibility, I am interested in touching, awakening and activating certain of my own and your own personal responses. Some of this happens through sound, some through the use of found objects in a given environment, some through the glorification of daily occurrences such as eating a sandwich or examining a button. I regard simple routine activities taken for granted and materials cast off as worthless to be extraordinary, precious, magical and worth of all kinds of perusal. My environments and performances are collections of such things. Listen as if you had never heard it; look at it as if you had never seen it before. Investigate again what you already know. [p. 55; Alison Knowles as quoted in Shapiro, 1975, p. 86]

Lucia Fabio discusses the activation of the senses in Knowles's work:

> Alison Knowles's artistic practice of the past sixty years has consistently encouraged audiences to explore their everyday surroundings through simple actions and sensorial experience. She invites people to see, touch, hear, smell, and taste her work via event scores, environments, and books that utilize familiar objects and materials, eliciting intersensory perception in the manner of everyday interactions. Intersensory perception coordinates information presented through separate modalities

> into an integrated experience: it is the way we interact with the world, a unified perception of objects and events. [p. 55]

Above, I have called these intersensory perceptual modalities of communication, poetic vocabularies, in deference in her interested in exploring a more open, metaphorical definition of the book. They exemplify a mixed-semiotic variety of communication and potential means of coming to know in a particular context. These vocabularies are both linguistic and extralinguistic, operating on each other as subtle meaning generating forces in the service of meaning production. Fabio's essay discusses how Knowles's work pushes beyond the privileging of the visual, to enable the exploration of other senses. I here use the term *mixed-semiotic* for these variables (see Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 147). It suggests that there are multiple milieux of semiotic information that can become intermingled in context, combining different operational planes, that is, text, image and music/sound each might form a differing milieu. Media-elements—objects, foods, aromas, and so forth, as well as process-oriented activities may also be encountered in differing works. Additionally physical media-elements, sculptural elements, fabric and hand-made paper, as well as architectonic spaces, may simultaneously become enfolded in the richness of a work, and function in multiple milieux. I am quite interested in notions surrounding the concept of fields of meaning (discussed above), that are brought into proximity, or change proximity in terms of combinatoric processes, be they analogue—like in playing with the media housed in a mutable Flux Box, or computational—media that becomes reordered in a generative computer derived poem—like the beautiful combinatoric text *Houses of Dust*, which plays itself out in many different instantiations and proximities over the life of the text, and its differing relational housings and instantiations, over Knowles's lifetime, since the text was first generated.

In *Semiotics of Visual Language*, Saint-Martin speaks about the relevance of *neighboring*, which is central to many aspects of Knowles's work, including word placement in generative texts:

> The relationship of neighboring is the most important topological notion by which the function of continuity is constructed in any spatial field, whether physical or perceptual. Its importance to physical sciences was underlined by Bachelard when he stated that any force in the continuity of the field "presents itself as determined by the condition of neighboring. The term, vague in everyday language, acquires all of the desirable conciseness in mathematical expressions."[7] (Saint-Martin, 1990, p. 69)

I have mentioned proximity above and neighboring is a deeply related concept. It plays into the notion of the subtle intermingling of fields of meaning force that are brought together in her work which I have discussed above.

7. Saint-Martin's footnote: "See Bachelard, 1951, p. 6."

"Sonic Possibilities, Meditations on Being, and the Mysterious Wisdom of Alison Knowles"—Lauren Fulton

Fulton writes about a series of Knowles's interests and attributes:

> As an artist, Alison Knowles is wholly invested in reviving our connection with the earth through the activation of our individual bodies. Inquiring into the obligations we have within society, and to nature and ourselves, she shares a great deal in common with the American transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau, who also founded a practice in the service of seeking fundamental truths and maintaining a sensitive relationship with nature.[8] [p. 63]

Part of Knowles's interest was in sound production and close listening. Describing the captivating effect a Knowles object has on its viewer, Fulton quotes Henry Martin who comments on the sense of possibility her practice presents. Martin states:

> [It is] always very spare, and always very factual, and it refuses to release or reveal its poetry until one moves up very close. Its aspect from a distance can be very intriguing, but mainly it is very mysterious, and the mystery is magnetic.[9] [p. 63]

Fulton continues:

> The experience of a Knowles piece is unmistakable: the work unfolds over time as its mystery becomes legible. The effect of one of her objects, Martin claims, results from its sonic potentiality: "To activate its sounds, you have to move up close enough to touch it."[10] Here, he's referring to a suite of "sound panels" Knowles made in 1991: four large cyanotype and screen-printed muslin panels adorned with beans, buttons, and other found objects. She entitled each with reference to the sounds associated with a season of the year, conjuring Thoreau and their shared naturalist appreciation of cyclical time, the cosmological, and the aeolian. [p. 63]

This cyclical time becomes layered and enfolded as the artist and the viewer/participant observes the return to works which are re-presented in new contexts as a form of introspective circular causality as it relates to interpretation. One also views works through the lens of earlier works that are similar but different.

Fulton speaks to the specificity of a particular interaction:

> The action Knowles introduces has that certain tangibility we become attuned to in her sound panels. Through our bodily intervention, Knowles asks us to take a moment to stay dialed in to the work's specificity. As is common with her event scores, and Fluxus performance more generally, the participant takes center stage to produce a variety of sensations that pass through the body and often intermingle to grant some form of ontological knowledge. [p. 64]

This kind of interaction, up close and personal, explores a special branch of 'close focus' related to human knowing. Fulton goes on to describe a series of other relevant

8. Fulton's footnote: "It should be noted that Knowles is an avid reader of Thoreau's work."
9. Fulton quotes Martin(1992, p. 9).
10. Fulton quotes Martin(1992, p. 9).

sonic events, and iterative approaches to a series of important collaborations. She ends the text with the following:

> Always, Knowles relishes the found and the foraged, and how such things can impact and ultimately enhance our consciousness. At another point in the conversation she says that she believes someone who could love one of her objects would be unlikely to support war. Indeed, Knowles's process is "nourishing." It offers sustenance to those willing to participate in a revelatory awakening, induced differently for every individual. [pp. 68–69]

Thus, again, such works explore various signifying vocabularies in terms of engaging multiple senses in the service of polysemic meaning production.

"The House of Dust: A Work in Translation"—Maud Jacquin and Sébastien Pluot

The House of Dust, which started as a generative text is a deeply meaningful work for me. I was initially introduced to it through the writings of Hannah B. Higgins and Doug Kahn in their book *Mainframe Experimentalism*. (Higgins & Kahn, 2012, p. 195). I have found that this generative computational work is both elegant and subtly powerful. One can relate it to some texts from the OULIPO movement (Seaman, 2001, pp. 423–430) and the early spatial text of Mallarmé's "A Throw of the Dice Will Never Annul Chance," (Mallarmé, 1982) which empowered an analogue substitution process made by the viewer/participant.

> Alison Knowles's The House of Dust is among the earliest computerized poems, consisting of the phrase "a house of" followed by a randomized sequence of 1) a material, 2) a site or situation, 3) a light source, and 4) a category of inhabitants taken from four distinct lists.[11] In 1967, the process generated an extraordinarily large group of unique quatrains printed on dot matrix paper, the lines of which resemble musical staffs.[12] Soon after, using the poem as a score, Knowles translated one of the quatrains into a physical structure that she installed in New York City, in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan.[13] [p. 71]

Interestingly the work was re-embodied many times, with new additions, or what the authors of this essay call a series of translations.

> In both New York and California, The House of Dust was in a constant state of transformation, altered by various processes including the addition of other artworks. This major work by Knowles is therefore a "panorama" of translation procedures: the ordinary language of the poem is translated by the algorithm's artificial language, generating a score, itself interpreted as an architecture, which is then translated by other artworks and by the activities of its inhabitants.[14] [p. 71]

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11. The poem was coded in the computer language Fortran with the help of James Tenney. Historically, the first poem using computerized permutations was "Stochastische Texte," produced by Theo Lutz in 1959; an algorithm reassembled The Castle (1926) by Franz Kafka.
12. A set of prints was published by Walther Konig Verlag under the title *A House of Dust* (c. 1969).
13. Knowles received a Guggenheim Fellowship that enabled her to build two structures. What we call "the house" in this text was in fact two houses, one smaller and one bigger, that were installed together.
14. In her essay "Notes on the Index" Rosalind Krauss (1977) calls Marcel Duchamp's "Tu m'" (1918) "Panorama on the Index."

One of the more interesting "translations" was an architectural one. My first association when viewing the architectonic component was the work of the experimental architect Frederick Kiesler. Kiesler has one work in particular that has both architectonically formal and perhaps conceptual relations. It was never realized, but a model was produced. This work was a proto-architectural sculpture entitled *Endless House 1959,* (Phillips, 1989, p.125). It is a highly organic form, circular in nature. Both Kiesler and Knowles collaborated with Marcel Duchamp, which was another interesting relation between them. Yet, I believe Knowles arrived at the form in a kind of parallel manner—both individuals being interesting in organic forms. Additionally, the architecture from Knowles was also generated with the help of an algorithm!

> This subversion of rational, logocentric logics is also expressed in The House of Dust's architectural process and form, which both contrast with the way modernist and post-modernist architects have used algorithms. Nothing in the physical structure that Knowles built is evidence of the fact that the work was produced with the help of an algorithm. She ironically used a machine—a technology aimed to create order out of chaos—to generate chaos out of order. As the artist herself has explained, she wanted her architecture to be non-Euclidian, nongeometric, organic; or, in other words, symmetrically opposed to the modernist logic. [p.72]

The work has a very long history which I won't present here. Needless to say, the history is rich and also involves pedagogy— the space was also used to function as an experimental teaching environment, looping back to the one of the foci given by Moss that was central to Knowles's work, where Alison explored the following: lenses of process, procedure, pedagogy, and impact.

The authors state that this was essentially an anti-cybernetic project:

> Knowles's evolving project deconstructed the fantasy of a cybernetic universal language, of regulatory control over people's bodies and imagination. Against the clarity and stability of modernist grids and the transparency of large windows and mathematics that pretend to calculate and expose everyone's complexity, Knowles's open-yet-opaque, ever-changing, and ambivalent structure was a site where the unconscious had its place, an alternative to the controlled industrialization of art that promoted clear and transparent understanding. [p. 72]

Yet, this reading seems to fall in line with many new cyberneticians and designers, like the late Ranulph Glanville, as discussed in my book *The Architecture of Ideas*. Many people have followed along after his passing, his art and ideas. He was both a self-proclaimed cybernetician as well as an anti-cybernetician who intentionally explored unmanageability (Seaman, 2021, p. 243) as a means to further aspects of human knowing. His interests feel in many ways highly aligned with the potentials of the loss of control, and openness to chance in Knowles's work (Seaman, 2021, p. 243). Both were highly influenced by and sympathetic with the work and ideas of John Cage related to chance. Also, both were interested in the social responsibility of the individual, and in particular the individual taking an active role in the experience of becoming through process, and introspection, as well as ethics.

The accretive notion of context was central to Knowles:

> By privileging displacement, participation, and the constant addition of new elements, each of these examples testifies to the artist's ongoing effort to work against the idea of architecture as stable and immutable. To the universality and "constructed" character of the artwork and of language itself, she opposed the relativity of the local, taking into account the processes of endless mutation generated by changes of context. [p. 74]

The open reading exploring the metaphor of architecture also enfolds the architecture of thought.

"Alison Knowles: Art/Life/Events"—Compiled by Lucia Fabio

This excellent and rich section of the book outlines Knowles's oeuvre and her trajectory through the world of life and art. This section was for me incredibly exciting. One could finally see reproductions and fragments of process from many of her works that have remained hidden in the past, for one reason or another.

"From a Dialogue on Transvironmental Books"—Between George Quasha and Alison Knowles

This text presents a salient dialogue related to her unique forms of authorship related to the metaphor of the book. In one section she discusses an interesting sense of scale:

> AK: George, couldn't we extend the scale further and have a whole city as the contents of a book? Huge pages as the side of an office building, a single page with water pouring down the front in the park, a page out flat as bridge, as door to the city.
>
> GQ: I've dreamt of such a city all my life, the house or castle with a vast interior. In the transvironmental city one travels to the depths of inside while extending the roads and gardens of outside. It's all one transrupting surface where anything leads to anything else, governed only by imaginal necessities. The book is the instrument by which we tap in on the reading that produced it. We not only could read it, we live in it. Our limbs leave invisible pollen on the pages for the next readers. [p. 241]

In the following section Quasha presents the definition of the transvironment.

"Auto-dialogue on the Transvironmental Book: Reflections on The Book of Bean (1982)"—George Quasha

Quasha defines his notion:

> *What is a transvironment?*
> Awkwardly stated, a transvironment is a transformationally experienced environment. It is a construct—it may also be a construction or artifact—that creates an opportunity for a fundamental alteration in perception and interpretation of the surrounding world, the context and circumtext. It causes a rupture in plane, a psychotopological catastrophe, a radical transstructuring of texture and

> text, a literal transfiguration of appearances. It alters the phenomenon of scale, including the relation of self to object (e.g., the book, the window), the function of distance in knowing identity, the comparison of micro- and macro-worlds. [p. 243]

This definition can be explored across many of Knowles's works. In particular he points to a kind of transaction between artist and interactant.

> Transactions Between Reader and Text Life is about taking something from one place and moving it somewhere else. Often the something goes from the outside of something else to the inside of yet another something, or vice versa, such as food, money, germs, genitals, information, etc. Life is a series of transactions to which specific values are given, and culture arises in part from the effort to regularize and assure these transactions. Art plays a paradoxical role, since on the one hand it too attempts to make certain transactions effectively or efficiently happen; yet on the other hand, it attempts to disrupt the more familiar transactional patterns in the interest of reviving or adding to the power of the somethings. The transvironmental is an extreme statement of the latter. It sometimes turns nothings into somethings, or shows the presence of somethings where nothing had appeared. [p. 244]

This is also the space of association, where the elements of life that might normally be passed by, forming through associational triggers additional layers and oscillations to this ongoing notion of reading writ large.

"Tuna and Other Fishy Thoughts on Fluxus Events (1992)"—Kristine Stiles

Stiles unpacks a particular variety of lunches:

> *Identical Lunch* is about the body that eats. Motion (mastication, drinking, and swallowing) and sound (chewing, crunching, nibbling, gnawing, gulping, champing, sipping, lapping, and other mandibular functions) determine its formal structural elements. Finally, along with consumption, eating might result in the disgorgement of food and certainly includes the excretory functions of salivating, sweating, urinating, and discharging excrement.
>
> Now the body that eats and drinks is alive. It is nourished, gains sustenance, and survives. The profundity of the Identical Lunch is sustained by the simplicity with which edible organic matter ("a tunafish sandwich on wheat toast…") signifies the primary nurturing action of life. But the eating and drinking body quickly seeks pleasure in nurture, a pleasure that social privilege provides. Thus the body that eats is classed and gendered with dietetic entertainments, amusements, and obsessions that range from gluttony to anorexia. [p. 245]

Central is the concept that we never see or perform the exact same thing twice. Stiles states:

> Individual variations in the process of eating, from eater to eater, expose the impossibility of an Identical Lunch. For, despite the attempted repetition of elements, chance determines the composition. [p. 245]

In terms of event scores, as mentioned early in this review, the Event Scores or what Knowles calls her Propositions are repeated in terms of the score, yet are unique for each different performative iteration/interpretation. Yet, this also points at life in

general. As we live and grow and experience repeated things, in my estimation we never see the exact same things twice. Once one has experienced differing renditions of a such score, memory loops back, and potentially enfolds readings and understandings—when we read the original score again, we perhaps read it in part through the lens of the memory of related events. This is what I call pattern flows of identity processes.

Stiles illuminates a set of attributes that are potentially relevant to the entire Fluxus movement:

> As an object of history, the entity "Fluxus" has become synonymous as a category of art with Performance Art. Indeed, many critics have conferred on Fluxus a radical position within the visual arts. I believe the radicality of Fluxus derives uniquely from the ways in which Fluxus artists deemphasized the object and positioned it in relation to the body. The body then became in Fluxus performance both an objective and subjective sign at the center of all action… By locating existential meanings in the framework of the social, Fluxus elevated the body—its thoughts, experiences, perceptions, processes, and actions—to the center of aesthetic concern and destabilized objects, thereby liberating them from their privileged iconic status within theocratic traditions. [p. 246]

Stiles points to the historical displacement by theoreticians, which at times can operate on lessening the political power of actual Fluxus performance:

> Fluxus performance is increasingly deemphasized by the plethora of Fluxus objects and ephemera that are reevaluated and elevated to the condition of "art" and displayed in exhibitions and books.[15] Although these "items" are precisely the vehicles through which Fluxus values have penetrated more widely into social discourse, the materialist fascination with the archival and museum Fluxus object threatens to deflect attention away from the social and political import of the Fluxus performance. [p. 246]

Given this historical essay is included in this book, Moss herself must also to some extent agree, yet this book and included essays, I believe, speaks to the political as well as the poetic in Knowles's work:

> In the rush to exhibit, historicize, and theorize the profuse production of Fluxus, the critical content of Fluxus objects themselves equally threatens to be lost. For the telling element in the Fluxus object is its relationship to performative acts whether mundane or quixotic. [p. 246]

Stiles points in particular to the relation to the event score:

> Such conditions of reception, namely the absence of direct experience, characterize Fluxus events in general. For few people actually ever "see" a "performance." But unlike other genres of Performance Art, Fluxus events must also be distinguished primarily by their relation to a text, the Fluxus Score. These texts are the agents that engage the reader in the theater of the act. Mere

15. Stiles footnote says: "See, for example, the essential but massive catalog of Fluxus documents, objects, and ephemera by Jon Hendricks (1988)."

> reception of the text constitutes performance and Fluxus events have been described as "language happenings."[16] [p. 247]

John Cage's mentorship of Fluxus is legendary and his interpretation of "Composition as Process" (the title of a three-part lecture from 1958) is particularly central to the ways in which Fluxus artists adapted the compositional technique of textual notation from the musical paradigm.[17]

So, just reading an event score functions like a potentially punning idea, both as a trigger of the imagination of the reader as part of the performance, as well as a functioning as vehicle of the potential in terms of generating new interpretations and instantiations by others, as well as the original authors themselves as has often been the case.

Stiles points to the invention of the event score (Brecht was himself a research scientist as well as an artist):

> George Brecht's invention of the Event Score, in the late 1950s, cannot be overestimated as a contribution to the decentering of the author, the revisioning of the objects and its relationship to process, but most significantly, to the establishment of the receiver as central in the production of consciousness. The Event Score consisted of simple words or short sentences that Brecht typed on small cards and sent to his friends. [p. 247]

Brecht was both a friend and collaborator with Knowles. She, as mentioned above, entitled a sub-genre of event scores that she authored "Propositions." In her title to this essay Stiles also points at Knowles's playful use of language. Along with puns and homonyms, Knowles is at times playing with making expressions that are both literal and metaphorical—like Styles's use of the term *fishy.* Puns and language play can enhance meaning in a resonant manner, or in a fishy way, playfully throwing off the meaning as a poetic mechanism, or oscillate between many linguistic and non-linguistic perspectives, both political and poetic.

"The Sculpture of Indeterminacy: Alison Knowles's Beans and Variations (2004)" —Julia Robinson

Robinson quotes from Knowles:

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16. Stiles's footnote states: "Ronald Gross and George Quasha with Emmett Williams, John Robert Colombo, and Walter Lowenfels, ends., Open Poetry: Four Anthologies of Expanded Poems (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), 385. See also the editors' comments on Benjamin Patterson's Methods & Processes, in which Patterson attempted "to structure specific environments for conditioning . . . microenvironments composed of instructions." Such works anticipate the aesthetic formulations of Lawrence Weiner, who insisted that conceptual "receivership" constituted "ownership" of his art. See Weiner's "October 12, 1969," in Ursula Meyers, Conceptual Art (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972), 218."
17. Stiles's footnote states: "John Cage, "Composition as Process," in Silence (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 18–56. Cage gave the first of these lectures at Rutgers University. Excerpts were published in the Village Voice in April 1958. In September, he delivered all three parts—Changes, Indeterminacy, Communication—in Darmstadt, Germany."

> In the process of papermaking particularly the shapes formed by the wet pulp as it is left to air dry are respected and become indigenous to the sculpture. In performances I am drawn to objects for their sound. My orchestra consists of beans, toys, papers, and words. … Each instrument comes out of silence makes its performance and returns to silence. (Alison Knowles[18])

Cage was important to Knowles both as a friend and as a mentor. His ideas surrounding Indeterminacy were quite important to her. Robinson discusses this:

Shaping Indeterminacy

> The concept of indeterminacy stands as a source of the earliest affinity between Knowles and certain of her peers—particularly those closest to Cage—in the years leading up to the 1962 inauguration of Fluxus. While Cage had established (and taught) indeterminacy within the framework of his course "Experimental Composition," those artists who adopted the concept took it in substantially different directions in their own projects. Indeterminacy created the preconditions for a work of art (or a performance) to be arranged by an artist without the artist knowing exactly how it would turn out.[19] So rather than composing a score note by note, so to speak, the artists developed scores that operated as templates, open to expansion in the arena of realization. Elements of chance were incorporated into the temporal framework so that each performance of a single score might differ greatly, far beyond the expectations of the composer. [p. 250]

Robinson went on to point at elements of Indeterminacy in Knowles's work:

> Shoes of Your Choice is a lucid illustration of indeterminate composition. It suggests the difference between Knowles's term, a "proposition," and a conventional score, which would be composed from beginning to end. Like much of the art of the early 1960s, Shoes of Your Choice incorporates the everyday, the found object, into the frame of aesthetic consideration. But through its indeterminate nature, this score allows for an open work whose ultimate form and duration can never be known until each performance of it is complete. A dynamic of spontaneity helps define the found object (which also is or becomes a [Duchampian] readymade). [p. 252]

In terms of exploring the poetics of objects as they fall into relation, sometimes from a distance to the scores Robinson writes:

> Though the indeterminate score was no longer always physically present, Knowles used its conceptual basis to redefine sculpture: altering expectations, reorienting and redefining found elements, and constituting the object itself as much out of durational and experiential structures as out of matter. Indeterminacy persisted in the work to unstructure expectations. [p. 251]

So one finds this continual reorientation of objects and subjects explored through a series of differing poetic vocabularies in the work, subtly accretive across the planes of sensual experience. These many senses of each instantiation can individually be explored. Robinson points out:

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18. According to Robinson's footnote, this is an unpublished statement (2003), a typescript page provided by the artist.
19. Robinson's footnote states: "Cage distinguished works that used chance operations in the process of composing from those that were 'indeterminate with respect to performance.' See John Cage, 'Lecture on Indeterminacy,' in *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 35– 40, for a more detailed definition of Cagean indeterminacy."

> The use of language to perform against itself, against its established usage, is another. The indeterminate textual score as it has been expanded to implicate objects and subjects can operate as a matrix for performativity. [p. 253]

Thus, Knowles explores a rich plurality of strategies of authorship across many fields of production, and polysemy. This is explored through time and space, and this particular ongoing/shifting approach is played out here as a vehicle of the space of mechanical reproduction, and text, in this book, and in her physical retrospective, exemplifying an incredibly impressive and elegant sense of personal and shared poetics.

The following description speaks to her sense of process:

> I collect shoe heels …
> I am not hunting usually, just rushing to
> get somewhere like everybody else, but
> suddenly, unexpectedly, akin to the found
> item, a found time opens up ….
> The heel I pick up … quickly, offhandedly
> … gets stashed in my pocket.
> There is a chemistry peculiar to the
> mysterious terrain I find myself in at
> that time ….
> I love to surf the street ….
> At home it gets cleaned, studied, it is
> drawn in silhouette, perhaps screen-printed
> with the name of an animal….
> You know that worn shoe heels cannot be
> bought. Not for sale anywhere.
> Isn't it special to have recognized the
> energy expended in a shoe heel.[20] [p. 256]

"The Book of the Future: Alison Knowles's The House of Dust (2012)"—Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

> Each social formation generates its own conventions to bar the subject from experience and speech, and each social formation accordingly requires specific and urgent discoveries of linguistic strategies that rupture such collectivization of silence and prohibition. [p.259]
> The House of Dust is one of the foundational works in the formulation of a conceptual aesthetic of language that considered the displacement of the conventional promises of poetry to be among its primary functions, in the same manner that conceptual art insisted on the dismantling of traditional forms of visuality in painting and sculpture. [p. 260]

Knowles, as exemplified from many different perspectives above embodies this notion in her artistic production.

> Thus one could argue that Knowles has succeeded in constructing an extreme opposition between the (involuntary?) poetics of her choices and the anonymous and aleatory, yet totally deterministic

20. Knowles, acceptance statement, College Art Association Lifetime Achievement Award, New York, 2003.

> and controlling, principles of their electronic permutations. The contradictory diversity resulting from these permutations generates an experience of a total decentering of its subjects: not one material, site, or inhabitant is privileged over any other. Every element from the four lists can enter into mutual interaction with the others, acquiring in each instant a whole new spectrum of meaning. Thus the experience of the singularly "poetic" linguistic instantiation is suspended in a permanent process of fluctuation (or flux) in which every element redefines every other element as the result of a perpetually shifting set of mutual and modular relationships. [p. 261]

This instance discussed by Buchloh related to the long life of the work the *House of Dust*, points to my concept of differing qualities or vocabularies of fields of meaning forces, brought into proximity, exerting subtle properties across differing planes of experience, and exploring meaning through changing neighborings over time. By all means this points to the deep interest that Knowles explored across the history of her Oeuvre, enfolding aspects of growing, and the ongoing 'coming to know' that lasts a lifetime, by falling in relation to the re-seeing and re-understanding of multiple forms of sensual experience.

Conclusion

So it is by the punning enfolding of many senses over time that Alison Knowles elegantly explores human knowing in the broadest poetic sense. I am deeply appreciative of the breadth and depth of this book, and the beautiful and thoughtful work it becomes a vehicle of: *By Alison Knowles – A Retrospective (1960-2022)*.

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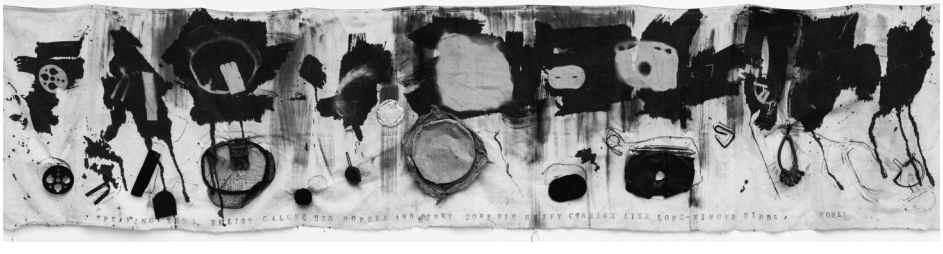
Appendix: Images from the Catalogue

Alison Knowles and Amanda Degener: Tamashi, 2002; screen print on indigo- and walnut- dyed handmade flax paper in box, published by Cave Paper. Photo: David Familian.



Alison Knowles: Iliad Oddities (Greene Street), 2010; found objects and cyanotype on cloth; 24 x 108 in.; Alison Knowles Studio, New York.

Students gather at The House of Dust, California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), Valencia, CA, 1971; Courtesy California Institute of the Arts, Institute Archives.

Installation view, Alison Knowles: Celebration Red (Homage to Each Red Thing), 1994/2016, at Alison Knowles, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. Courtesy the Carnegie Museum of Art.