

THE HOUSE OF DUST

BY ALISON KNOWLES

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The exhibition and research project “*The House of Dust* by Alison Knowles” was created in the context of the international research program in art and curatorial practices *Art by Translation*, whose first three-year session (2016-2019) is dedicated to the processes and ideological stakes of translation in the arts. *Art by Translation* develops research and organizes exhibitions and discursive events in a variety of European and North American contexts. Each time, the

research is enriched by local and international contributors – artists, professors and doctoral students from different disciplines. As part of this broader context, this project will examine the myriad implications of Alison Knowles’ major, but still little known work, *The House of Dust*. By making *The House of Dust* a platform for both artistic experimentation and theoretical and historical reflection, it aims to extend its generative potential into the present.



The House of Dust installed at the Valencia campus, CalArts, 1971.

POETRY IN TRANSLATION

The House of Dust is an evolving and generative artwork that engages in an in-depth reflection on issues of translation, and particularly on the ways in which translation processes were radically reconfigured in the art of the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, to pay attention to *The House of Dust* and its many developments means evaluating the numerous coincidences between this work and a series of crucial transformations concerning translation in the art of this period: the challenging of the notion of intentionality (i.e., the idea that the artwork is the translation of the author’s interiority or will); the critique of the permanence of the artwork and the awareness that its transformation by spatial, historical and institutional context is irreducible; the attention drawn to the interpretive power of the score; the establishment of new systems of translatability between mediums, and dialogues between disciplines like the visual arts, music, performance, architecture and technology. The goal of this introductory text, which accompanies the publication of *The House of Dust* archives and the reconstruction of its history, is to explore this work from the perspective of translation, and to serve as a point of departure for the collective research of the *Art by Translation* program.

NON-TRANSPARENCY OF LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

All discourses, whatever their status, form, value, and whatever the treatment to which they will be subjected, would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur. We would no longer hear the questions that have been rehashed for so long: Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse? Instead, there would be other questions, like these: What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject functions? And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking?

Michel Foucault¹

The House of Dust is originally a computer generated poem starting from four lists pre-established by the artist. The computer program, written in FORTRAN with the help of James Tenney, randomly combines different elements (or at least as randomly as the “chance” function of the language allows) in order to assemble an extraordinarily large group of unique quatrains. With Stéphane Mallarmé’s project *The Book*, Marcel Duchamp’s *Three Standard Stoppages* and the *Unhappy Readymade*, and later John Cage’s use of chance operations, aleatory processes had already radically reconfigured beliefs concerning the intentionality of the author and opened up a space for otherness, whether resulting from chance or the other’s subjectivity.² In leaving the task of composing her poem to chance—a poem whose subject is the creation of “houses” that are more or less abstract—Knowles stages the destitution of the author’s omnipotence by turning poetry against itself. If poetry has long been the locus of the expression of subjectivity, and the house a metaphor for the subject (“the ego is not master in its own house” Freud indeed said), this poem, composed of random constellations, questions the very possibility of an immediate expression of the author’s interiority.

Yet, *The House of Dust* is not only a poem, it is in many ways also an interpretable score. When Knowles chose to give tangible form to one of its verses—in the shape of two houses with organic forms installed in Chelsea, and then at the Los Angeles art school, CalArts—she opened the poem up to interpretation, inviting the reader to physically create or imagine other possible incarnations for the poem. Just like the language-based scores which occupy a central place in Knowles’ practice and that of

other artists in the Fluxus movement, *The House of Dust* affirms the interpretative multiplicity of the artwork, and as such the incompleteness of language, its inadequacy to enunciate a signifier’s truth, thus contributing to the destitution of the power of the Logos.

The computer is the most obvious incarnation of the Logos that *The House of Dust* strives to dismantle. Knowles designed her poem-score at a moment when scientific rationality was identified by forms of taxonomy and by the supremacy of mathematics in the field of knowledge, when logic imposed itself in the form of administration in the political and legal systems, and when computing started using algorithms to meddle in the control and configuration of language, as well as social and economic life. In this context, *The House of Dust* intervenes as a power of disruption. Even though the poem is laid out by an algorithm, language—that which it localizes, materializes and characterizes—is more than uncertain; even though its support (the perforated sheets of paper typical of the printers of that time) are emblematic of the administrative arsenal, they are read like the staves of musical scores, open to interpretation, and therefore unpredictable.

Since the end of the 1940s, algorithmic environments have been governed by a fantasy of a complete calculation that would allow everything to be translated without alteration. The earliest days of the development of cybernetics generated the dream of a computer that could offer transparent translations of one idiom to another.³ In the spirit of computational systems, language would be reduced to an essentially (and archetypally modernist) utilitarian task: to communicate a message without ambiguity, leaving no interpretation possible. But “what does a literary work ‘say’?” Walter Benjamin asks in *The Task of the Translator*: “What does it communicate? It ‘tells’ very little to those who understand it. Its essential quality is not communication or the imparting of information.”⁴ Likewise, when John Cage uses computers for his work HPSCHD, he clearly demonstrates a disregard for the underlying aims of communication theory: “Communication is impossible and is not desirable. I just don’t like the idea that two different people can get an idea out of the

1. Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” in Paul Rabinow (eds.), *The Foucault Reader*, Pantheon Books, 1984, p.119.

2. *The Book* was an unfinished project that Stéphane Mallarmé developed over the course of several decades, entailing pages which did not succeed one another, but that were arranged according to a permutational system. Each of these parts, left unconnected to one another, was to be comprised of loose sheets of paper so as to allow every possible combination.

Three Standard Stoppages is described by the following proposition: “The Idea of the Fabrication: — If a straight horizontal thread one meter long falls from a height of one meter onto a horizontal plane distorting itself as it pleases and creates a new shape of the measure of length”. Quoted from Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (eds.), *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, Da Capo Press, 1989, p.22.

The 1919 *Unhappy Readymade* was a gift for Duchamp’s sister, Suzanne. Duchamp described it as involving: “hanging a geometry textbook from his balcony in such a way that the wind turned the pages and chose problems which the weather would take care of solving.” Mallarmé imagined a similar contrivance in ‘The Book, Spiritual Instrument,’ a chapter of his *Divigations*: “On a garden bench such a new publication lies; I rejoice if the passing wind half opens and unintentionally animates aspects of the book’s exterior—several of which, because of the flood of things perceived, maybe nobody has thought of since reading existed.” in Jerome Rothenberg and David Guss, *The Book, Spiritual Instrument*, Granary Books, 1996, p.14.

3. See the text *Translation* by Warren Weaver, written in 1949. Thanks to Jeff Guess for indicating this text.

4. Walter Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’ in Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (eds.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*. Harvard University Press, 2004, p.253.

head of one of them intact into the head of the other, which is the notion of communication.⁵ But if the 1960s were marked by a “dogged optimism toward technological and economical developments,” Cage did not have the intention of using the computer in order to “bring order out of chaos.”⁶ Like Cage, Knowles refuses to use technology to facilitate and sustain the myth of a possible transparent communication. With *The House of Dust*, she employs the computer, not in order to extend the performance of a compositional or constructive system, nor to optimize the modeling of a set of specifications, but in order to head in the other direction, to make her lists more complex, to create a poetic text, to muddle functional parameters and make them open to an inventive performativity. The same contrast, the same “against the grain” use of the medium, is revealed in the material chosen for printing the poem: administrative paper (which is supposed to be a vehicle for a certain authority and for recording irrevocable declarative rules) ultimately receives the results of random processes and gives rise to open interpretations.



Michael Bell and Peter Van Riper on top of *The House of Dust* at CalArts, 1970.

CONTEXTUAL TRANSFORMATIONS

The ‘Tower of Babel’ does not figure merely the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompleteness, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system and architectonics. What the multiplicity of idioms actually limits is not only a ‘true’ translation, a transparent and adequate interexpression; it is also a structural order, a coherence of construct.

Jacques Derrida⁷

Thinking about the impossibility of a transparent communication naturally brings us to the myth of Babel, and the way in which Derrida deconstructs the fantasy of a universal language—a language which would allow all men to understand one another perfectly, without any ambiguity (the term “Babel” is close to the Hebrew “*Babal*,” meaning confusion). Like *The House of Dust*, this myth appeals to architecture to reveal a particular relationship to language. As Jacques Derrida emphasizes in *Des Tours de Babel*, the construction of the ziggurat comes to materialize the project of linguistic unification; it is the manifestation of so-called “structures” common to all languages, or more broadly, of a conception of language as a closed and static system. It is thus these systematic conceptions that are radically undermined by the divine destruction or “deconstruction” of the tower of Babel. Although her approach is very different, Knowles’ use of architecture also comes to question the notion of universality and the systematic—which is to say, closed-off and stable—character of the artwork and of language. By creating organic architectural forms that she subjects to multiple transformations, Knowles engages in a reflection on the impermanence of all artwork (and all linguistic utterances), and on the way in which the work is constantly transformed by the different contexts in which it is embedded.

Far from the image of the tower of Babel as a massive, well-organized structure reaching toward the sky, the “houses” that Knowles chose to create based on one of the poem’s quatrains are low to the ground, on a human scale, featuring organic forms and numerous openings that not only establish a link with the outside, but that also invite participation. To adapt to their irregular forms, the visitor must modify his or her posture, stride, stoop and bend over. In this regard, *The House of Dust* echoes another of Knowles’ works, created the same year, which also combines language and architecture: *The Big Book*. It is a book, architectural in size, wherein each of the pages demarcates singular rooms, inhabited by furniture and household objects which emphasize function. The readers (this is how Knowles calls the work’s visitors) are invited to literally crawl between the pages of the book, contorting themselves in order to enter the openings and thus undergoing an embodied experience of the book-house. With *The Big Book* as with *The House of Dust*, Knowles tries to dwell in the text, that is, to make visible the opening up of language to the active and sensorial—and thus eminently singular—participation of the reader. It is significant that *The Big Book* was one of the central works of *Pictures to be Read/Poetry to be Seen*, an exhibition which took place in 1976 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and included artists associated with Fluxus: Alan Kaprow, Eyvind Fahlström, Alison Knowles, George Brecht, Ray Johnson and Wolf Vostel.⁸ The exhibition advocated a conception of language not based on the comprehension and communication of meaning, but on the formal nature of graphic signs which, even if they could fall under a semantic category, do not necessarily carry meaning.

According to the curator Jan van der Marck, “the meaning of a work is to be found in its overall perceptual organization and not necessarily in its potential to convey information.”⁹ He evokes works that offer wide fields of interpretations, that are not bound to logic, that are “alogical, discontinuous, non-sequential and non-explicit (...) that invite speculation but resist interpretation.”¹⁰ He also states that the images produced by the artists in the exhibition act like “linguistic prisms, refracting and scattering visual information with disregard for immediate comprehension.”¹¹

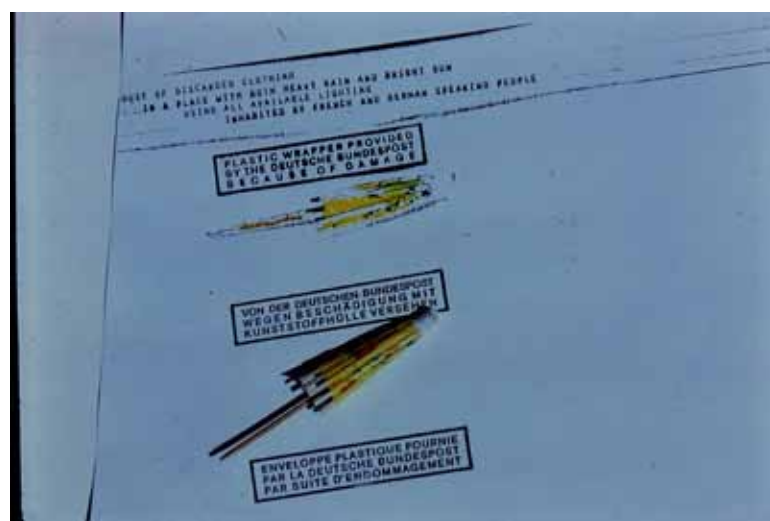
Beyond their material forms and the type of engagement they seek to generate on the part of the spectator, the history of Knowles’ “houses” reveals the artist’s desire to make their transformation an essential condition of the artwork. Even though the houses were only moved to the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) when Knowles was invited to teach there by Allan Kaprow in 1970, and later to the College of the Canyons where one of them was installed on a children’s playground in 1982, the artist constantly sought new contexts for her work with the intention, if possible, of transporting them at least once every ten years. She initiated prolonged (and unsuccessful) discussions with the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, for instance, and with the Oakland Museum of Art which offered an ideal location along a river. For Knowles, the geographic displacement of the houses automatically entailed the transformation of the quatrain that they materialized. While in New York, her architectural proposal corresponded to an interpretation of the quatrain:

A HOUSE OF PLASTIC
IN A METROPOLIS
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE

Installed at the College of the Canyons, it became, Knowles tells us, an incarnation of the following quatrain:

A HOUSE OF PLASTIC
IN A WARM WINDY TERRAIN
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY LITTLE BOYS

However, the artist did not content herself with emphasizing these spontaneous shifts in meaning from one quatrain to another. In each of the contexts where the houses had been or should have been installed, Knowles wanted their forms, their textures or their colors to be modified in accordance with the type of usage and the local conditions, usually through the participation of different communities. In Chelsea, for example, where the houses were placed on the site of a housing cooperative, Knowles organized a collection of objects (shoe heels, used clothing, colored paper, etc.) in the surrounding primary schools, and proposed workshops in which neighborhood children could participate in transforming the structures by affixing different objects (or their representations) to their surfaces according to a random principle that was also controlled by a computer program. In Minneapolis, she planned, in her own words, to “[transform] the surface using sand, rocks, and materials natural to the environment” but also to collect objects among her community of friends and artists.¹² The houses were never relocated to Minnesota, and Knowles decided to associate each of the collected objects with one of the poem’s quatrains, thereby inverting the score’s logic so as to highlight once more the unstable and nearly arbitrary relationship between the text and its interpretation. For her last installation on the playground site, the house was painted with colorful polka-dots to invite a joyful use of the structure. Each of these examples, which privilege displacement, participation and the constant addition of new elements, testifies to the artist’s continual effort to work against the idea of architecture as stable and immutable. To the universality and “constructed” character of the work and of language itself, she opposed the relativity of the local, taking into account the processes of endless mutation generated by changes of context.



Object given to *The House of Dust* and paired with one of the poem’s quatrains.

DISSEMINATION

... the so-called original is in a position of demand with regard to the translation. The original is not a plenitude which would come to be translated by accident. The original is in the situation of demand, that is, of a lack or exile. The original is indebted a priori to the translation. Its survival is a demand and a desire for translation.

Jacques Derrida¹³

Conscious of the evolution and the variability of languages, Benjamin declares that acts of translation and interpretation must not pretend to “reflect” the original. On the basis of this analysis,

Jacques Derrida claims that the translation can not correspond to the original, but must “augment” it. The translation is the condition of the survival of the original, and of its dissemination.

Alison Knowles disseminates. She often produces texts which become objects, which themselves generate performative practices that can be documented and become texts in turn. On different occasions, certain stages are individualized and mutate in such a way that many chains of events resist any stable historical recombination. Reconstructing this nebula’s unpredictable chain of events represents a challenge that does not come down to picking up on linear principles, but rather accepting associative chains of signifiers which mutate, migrate and come together, forming recompositions, cuttings, splices.

Footnotes, one of Alison Knowles’ later works, is particularly representative of this process of dissemination. The work, which plays with the possible double meaning of the term “footnote” (i.e., “notes created on foot” and “notes at the bottom of the page”) began with the artist’s sketchbooks, which have accompanied her during her daily walks throughout the years. These books were then split up and served as inspiration for the creation of sculptural works, including a number of colored bricks. Later, Knowles offered each one of these works to someone close to her, requesting that they choose a title and write it on a label attached to the object, bearing the inscription “Footnotes”. This project shares with *The House of Dust* not only the premise of a succession of translations from one medium to another, but also, through the metaphor of a house made out of scattered bricks, the idea of the transformation of the artwork and of language in relation to chance and to changes in contexts. Following the same logic, *The Big Book* was also progressively dismantled so that its many fragments could migrate toward other uses.



The small *House of Dust* with both painted stones and actual stones placed on the dial drawn on the tennis court at CalArts.

The House of Dust can not be considered in isolation. The piece is not only constantly modified by its interaction with other works, but has also generated a multitude of new proposals by Knowles and other artists. From the beginning of the project in Chelsea, for example, Knowles enlisted the musician and artist Max Neuhaus to create a sound device in the smaller of the two houses. His proposal—to convert thermal variations outside the structure into sonic undulations audible in its interior—represented a particularly appropriate response to Knowles’ work, since it activated translation processes while simultaneously testifying to the influence of context on structures that appear otherwise immutable. Yet it was at CalArts that the work’s mutability and generative force was truly expressed. The houses not only held all of the seminars taught by Knowles, but the artist constantly encouraged her students to respond to the architecture and conceptual premises of the artwork. With this aim in mind, for instance, she orchestrated the encounter of *The House of Dust* with another of her poem-scores, *Proposition IV (Squid)*, a work also based on a principle of random permutations and calling for a multiplicity of performative interpretations. If *Proposition IV (Squid)* existed independently of *The House of Dust*, its activation in this context allowed the participation of her students and the organization of the space around the houses. In response to this poem—in which each verse was composed of a numeric quantity, a direction and a color—a dial was drawn on the ground to indicate different directions and to invite performative actions. One of Knowles’ students, Matt Mullican, placed five (golden) roast chickens on the grass in accordance with one of these directions. Knowles herself interpreted the verse “99 Red North” by composing four lines of red apples that started at the house and were arranged heading north. The way in which Knowles’ interpretation itself evolved as a result of interaction with other existing artworks, and generated new proposals, is yet again representative of the logic of dissemination at the heart of her work. Indeed, it would seem that *99 Red North* formed a hybrid with another work, *Gift Event II*, which involved the premise of bartering one object for another. Here, the public was invited to take an apple, leaving an object in the same place in exchange. Notably, one visitor took this as an opportunity to leave his car keys and to park his yellow vehicle facing a different direction each day. Furthermore, according to Knowles the action *Gift Event II* was itself a variation of 1963’s *#16 Giveway Construction* (“Find something you like in the street and give it away. Or find a variety of things, make something of them, and give it away”), which was in turn an evolution of *#6 Shoes of Your Choice* from March 1963 (“A member of the audience is invited to come forward to a microphone if one is available and describe a pair of shoes, the one he is wearing or another pair. He is encouraged to tell where he got them, the size, color, why he likes them, etc.”).

For this research project and series of exhibitions, it seems essential to us to not attempt to reconstruct *The House of Dust*, which would give it the status of a relic, but rather to propose “translations” which extend the work’s logic to ensure that it survives. By inviting architects and contemporary artists to interpret some of the poem’s quatrains, the project intends to reactivate *The House of Dust* as a generative platform, and to revive the principles of opening and dissemination that lie at the heart of Knowles’ work.

Maud Jacquin and Sébastien Pluot
Translated from French by Tyler Harper

5. Interview with John Cage filmed by Virginia Dwan following the conference *James, Joyce, Marcel Duchamp, Eric Satie, An Alphabet*, 1982.

6. Branden W. Joseph, “HPSCHD – Ghost or Monster” in Hannah Higgins and Douglas Kahn (eds.), *Mainframe Experimentalism Early Computing and The Foundation of the Digital Arts*, University of California Press, 2012, p. 161.

7. Peggy Kamuf (ed.), *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, Columbia University Press, 1991, p.244.

8. *Pictures to be Read/Poetry to be Seen*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, October 24–December 3, 1967, with Shusako Arakawa, Gianfranco Baruchello, Mary Bauermeister, George Brecht, Oyvind Fahlström, Ray Johnson, Alan Kaprow, R.B. Kitaj, Alison Knowles, James Nutt, Gianni-Emilio Simonetti, Wolf Vostel.

9. Jan van der Marck, Introduction of the publication *Pictures to be Read/Poetry to be Seen*, MCA Chicago, 1967, p.5.

10. Ibid. p.5.

11. Ibid. p.5.

12. Alison Knowles, “Letter of Intention for an Art in Public Places grant. National Endowment for the Arts”, May 16th, 1980, from the archives of Alison Knowles.

13. Jacques Derrida, quoted in Christie McDonald (ed.), *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*. Nebraska University Press, 1985, p.152.

AN INTRODUCTION TO ALISON KNOWLES'S *HOUSE OF DUST*

HANNAH B. HIGGINS

Fluxus artist and poet Alison Knowles graduated from New York's Pratt Institute in 1956 and, for the next ten years lived in an industrial loft on Canal Street and Broadway, where she was steeped in the community of urban artists homesteading in SoHo and living nearby in Greenwich Village. She married Fluxus cofounder, Dick Higgins, in 1962 and they lived there, together, where he wrote his early work in the old coal bin at one side of the loft and she made performance scores and early screen paintings in the other. My twin sister, Jessica, and I were born there in 1964 and spent the first few years of our lives toddling around the unrenovated industrial space and being cooled in the sweltering summers on the fire escape. By the middle 1960s, that community had grown to include the artists now associated with Fluxus, Happenings, pop art, experimental film, early conceptual art, and the circle of composers and students around John Cage.

These artists interacted in the cafés and informal loft venues of the neighborhood, often performing in one another's work and routinely appearing side by side in the small magazines and publishing houses that cropped up to support the new experimental art scene. It is in this general context that Alison produced her benchmark *House of Dust*, which began as a poem made by computer with the help of James Tenney, then a resident composer at Bell Labs. At the time he was married to the performance artist and filmmaker, Carolee Schneemann, and was a regular participant in downtown performance art events. Tenney introduced a group of his artist friends to the computer in a casual workshop organized in the winter of 1967 in the living room of Alison and Dick, by then the founder of Something Else Press. In addition to Alison, the seminar included Phil Corner, Dick Higgins, Jackson Mac Low, Max Neuhaus, Nam June Paik, and Steve Reich.

The resulting *House of Dust* is among the first computerized poems, consisting of four lists beginning with "a house of" followed by a randomized sequence of a material, a site or situation, a light source, and a category of inhabitants.² Alison gave Tenney the lists, and he translated them into Fortran IV, a then-contemporary computer language. He then ran the poem on the mainframe computer at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn. The computer generated four hundred quatrains before a repetition occurred. As she describes it, a foot-high stack of computer printout appeared one day on her doorstep.



Michael Bell performing naked in the small *House of Dust*, probably to respond to this line of the poem: "Inhabited by people speaking many languages wearing little or no clothing".

By using the computer to manage the sequencing, she was freed from dictating a specific order and narrative arc for the elements of the list. The chance operations widely associated with John Cage's compositional technique were thus easily adapted to programmed randomization by computer. Even so, the author's role was not displaced altogether; the list of possibilities bears the stamp of her commitment to the everyday elements of culture, expressed in her related work with beans, daily food, shoe parts, scraps from nature, weather, and found objects.

A HOUSE OF WOOD
UNDER WATER
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY FRIENDS

A HOUSE OF LEAVES
IN A METROPOLIS
USING ALL AVAILABLE LIGHTING
INHABITED BY ALL RACES OF MAN REPRESENTED
WEARING PREDOMINANTLY RED CLOTHING

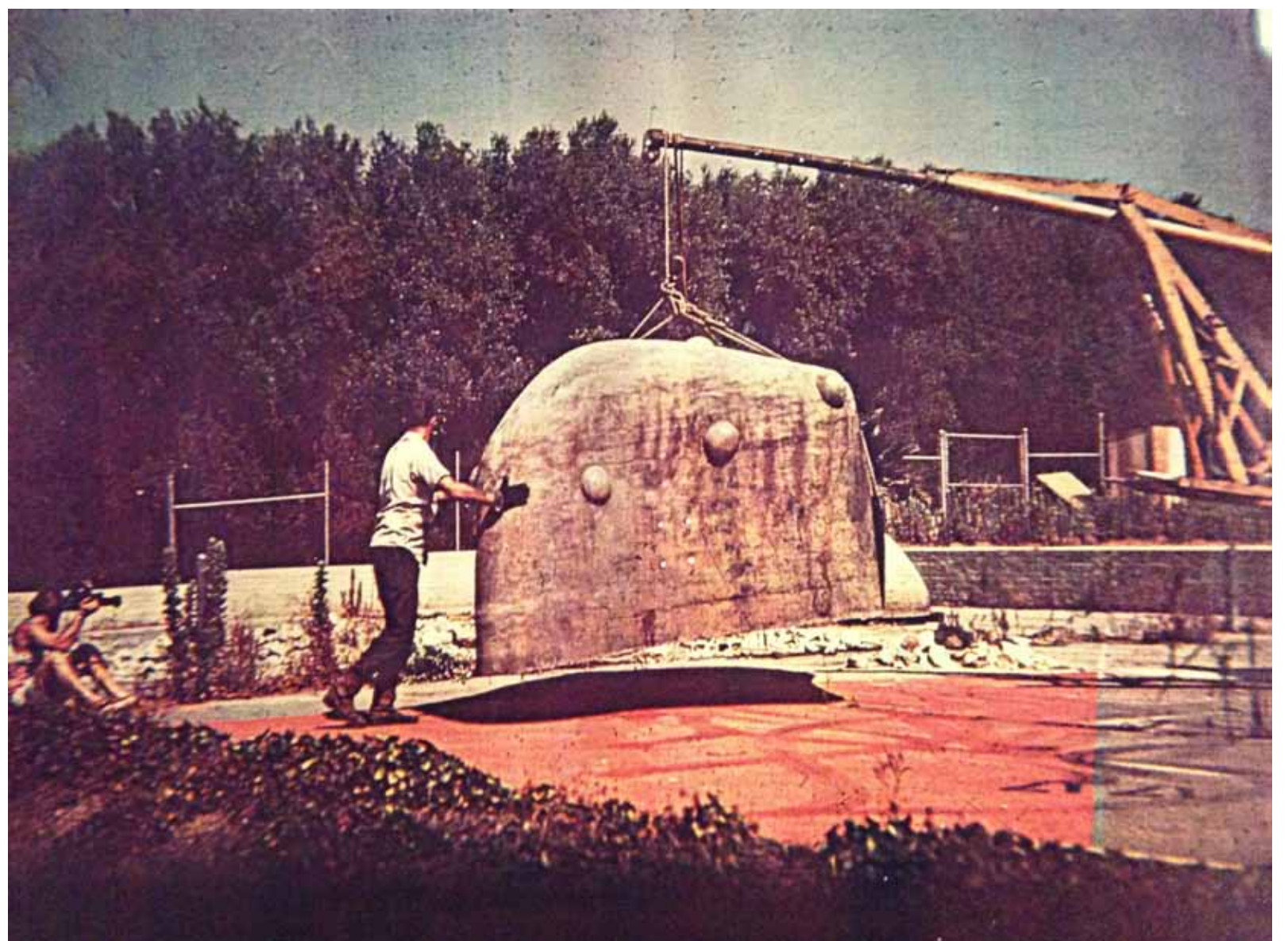
A HOUSE OF ROOTS
IN AN OVERPOPULATED AREA
USING ELECTRICITY
INHABITED BY HORSES AND BIRDS...

A HOUSE OF WOOD
IN A METROPOLIS
USING ELECTRICITY
INHABITED BY FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

Even these few stanzas demonstrate that the imagery coheres in the reading process as elements surface and then resurface in new contexts, offering their unprepossessing terms to ever-new circumstances and fugitive inhabitants. Significantly, the four-line quatrain and sequence of elements are fixed, which gives the piece an armature that holds the reader's interest in its patterning of the familiar and the novel.

1. A version of this introduction was published in *Mainframe Experimentalism: Early Computing and the Foundation of the Digital Arts*, eds. Hannah B Higgins and Douglas Kahn (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012) 195-200.

2. Dick Higgins wrote "Hank and Mary: A Choral for Dieter Roth" (1968) in *Computers for the Arts, 1968/1970* (Somerville, MA: Abyss Publishing), 1970. The 625 line poem consists of all iterations of the sentence "Hank shot Mary dead." with each word moved to each place in the sentence, including repetition of the same word at all four locations. The result is highly alliterative. "Shot shot shot shot," for example, can be followed by "Mary shot Hank shot."



Installation of *The House of Dust* on the tennis court of the Burbank campus, CalArts, 1970.

In 1968, the poem was translated into a physical structure when Alison received a Guggenheim fellowship to build the following quatrain:

A HOUSE OF PLASTIC
IN A METROPOLIS
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE

In the construction process, plastic became fiberglass dust and the physical *House of Dust* (actually two structures) was made as a biomorphic plaster model, which was then cast in full-scale fiberglass at George Krier's foundry in Philadelphia. Another participant in the SEP computer seminar, composer Max Neuhaus, produced a sound work for the small House via thermal circuits that translated the heat of the sun into a sound "like waving grass."³ Located in blister-like bumps that covered the house's surface, these circuits were activated by sunlight, effectively making it possible for people sitting in the house to hear the movement of the sun.

The physical *House of Dust* was originally installed at the Penn South Housing Coop, a sprawling subsidized housing complex funded by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union at 28th street and 8th Avenue, in Chelsea. Failing to see it as anything other than a bizarre imposition of annoying electronic noise and a lumpy mound (a Golem?) in the suburban park-space of their apparently bucolic housing project, the work was arsoned by residents. After being repaired in Philadelphia, the *House of Dust* was moved to the temporary campus of CalArts in Burbank, California, where she taught from 1970 to 1972. For the children of faculty, the structures were ideal for hide and seek, but for the weird fiberglass odor. Indeed, when CalArts moved to its permanent home, one remaining *House of Dust* (the large structure was destroyed in the San Fernando Valley earthquake of 1971) stayed behind as a play structure for a Catholic grade school.

But before the House became an abandoned house, it encouraged ingenuity. There was a film screening in the House, for example. And in the spring of 1970, one of Alison's students at the time, Michael Bell, organized classes on poetry every Wednesday from 5am to 8am and performed naked as an interpretation of one of the quatrains.⁴ Jeff Raskin, another student, had a contact at CalTech's Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena, where a new printout of the House poem was generated. That second poem printout was dropped by helicopter onto the physical house as a performance called *Poem Drop* in 1971 in collaboration with CalArts students Norman Kaplan and Richard Banks. Another student, Andrew Schloss, designed the poster for many activities around the house.

Most importantly, Alison's performance score, *Proposition IV (Squid)*, was used to generate performances in the space around the structures.⁵ Originally intended for a ten-foot circle, as implemented at the House, *Proposition IV (Squid)* was staged on its grounds and an adjacent parking lot. The score consisted of actions inscribed by four so-called quadrants (a number, an element—such as water, air and fire in various intensities—a compass/color combination and silence). Through *Proposition IV (Squid)* the House spawned tentacles. One student, Andrew Schloss, who was then studying at Bennington College, used the BASIC computer language to design the program for *Proposition IV (Squid)* that was then printed up for student use.⁶ Another student performed alone with the direction "5 Yellow North" by parking his yellow truck adjacent to the House at five o'clock each day for a week.⁷ Matt Mulligan purchased five cooked chickens at a local grocer (a familiarly fatty hue of yellow) and arranged them

at about 25 cm apart in a row on the lush, green grass nearby.⁸ Finally, her use of *Proposition IV (Squid)* resulted in a work, *99 Red North*, which consisted of lines of ninety-nine apples in a loose grid (straight rows of apples) oriented North. The audience was invited to exchange each apple for an object. As Alison put it, "One man left his car keys, thus forcing himself during the week of the event to know Burbank better."⁹

These examples of how people interacted with the *House of Dust* demonstrate that the randomized, machine-generated poem necessitated a programmatically elastic response. The poem slides across disciplines, from list to program to poem to sculpture to program to performance work and back – activating relationships among the arts and between the arts and the world of computer programming. In interacting with the work through people's medium of choice, social entanglements, friendships, and entirely new artworks became possible. Umberto Eco described this movement as typical of "open work," meaning work completed by others engaged with it and available to movement across media.¹⁰

Support for this "open work" view of the *House of Dust* project originated in its being constructed through a mechanism of translation and collaboration at the outset. Unlike the translation of most poetry from finished form to approximate finished form in another written language, the generation of the original poem was an act of simultaneous construction (writing) and translation between two languages – English and Fortran. An act of translation performed the task of writing the poem. The built house is a manifestation of just one set of permutations whose realization implies the possibility of building, or attempting to build, them all.

8. This fantastic 5, yellow something was recounted to me in the above email with Sébastien Pluot, August 9, 2016.

9. Alison Knowles, interview with the author, July 13, 2008.

10. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).



Poem Drop event at CalArts, 1971.

3. Alison Knowles, interview with the author, July 28, 2008.

4. Michael Bell et al., "The House of Dust by Alison Knowles," *Experiments in Art and Technology: Los Angeles Survey*, no. 7 (January 1971): 8-11.

5. Alison Knowles, "Proposition IV (Squid)," in *More by Alison Knowles* (New York: Printed Editions, 1979), unpaginated.

6. The notes in *More by Alison Knowles* (New York: Printed Editions, 1979) describe that "The elements in Proposition IV were randomly programmed at Bennington College by Andrew Schloss." However, an email exchange August 9, 2016 with the foremost expert of the House, Sébastien Pluot, describes that "Andrew Schloss designed the program for Proposition IV (Squid). A print out was made and used for the various works happening around the house. A quadrant was installed on the floor that was giving the directions."

7. Knowles's files contain descriptions of each event associated with *The House of Dust*. These were assembled with Charlie Morrow as a possible grant application that was never completed.

THE BOOK OF THE FUTURE:
ALISON KNOWLES' *THE HOUSE OF DUST*

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. From the perspective of the bourgeois division of labor (with its assignment of cultural specializations and its principles of condensing talents in chosen individuals, and investing them with mythical expertise), the capacity to rupture the collectively imposed interdiction of subjective speech has been identified conventionally as 'poetry' within the domain of language, and as 'art' within the realm of visual representation or alternate perceptual models of object experience.

Diverse social groups have been barred, perpetually or for extended periods of history, from access to language on the grounds of class, race and gender. Likewise, individual subjects, descending from these groups, have found themselves condemned to silence by the sheer immensity of the trauma and lack that socially and politically imposed prohibitions leave in the subject's psychic formation. As for the collectively imposed censorings of speech in the twentieth century, these have appeared in the most contradictory configurations: either as the results of political oppression under totalitarian regimes in the first half of the twentieth century, or as the effects of massively enforced repressive tolerance under advanced forms of capitalist consumer culture in the present.

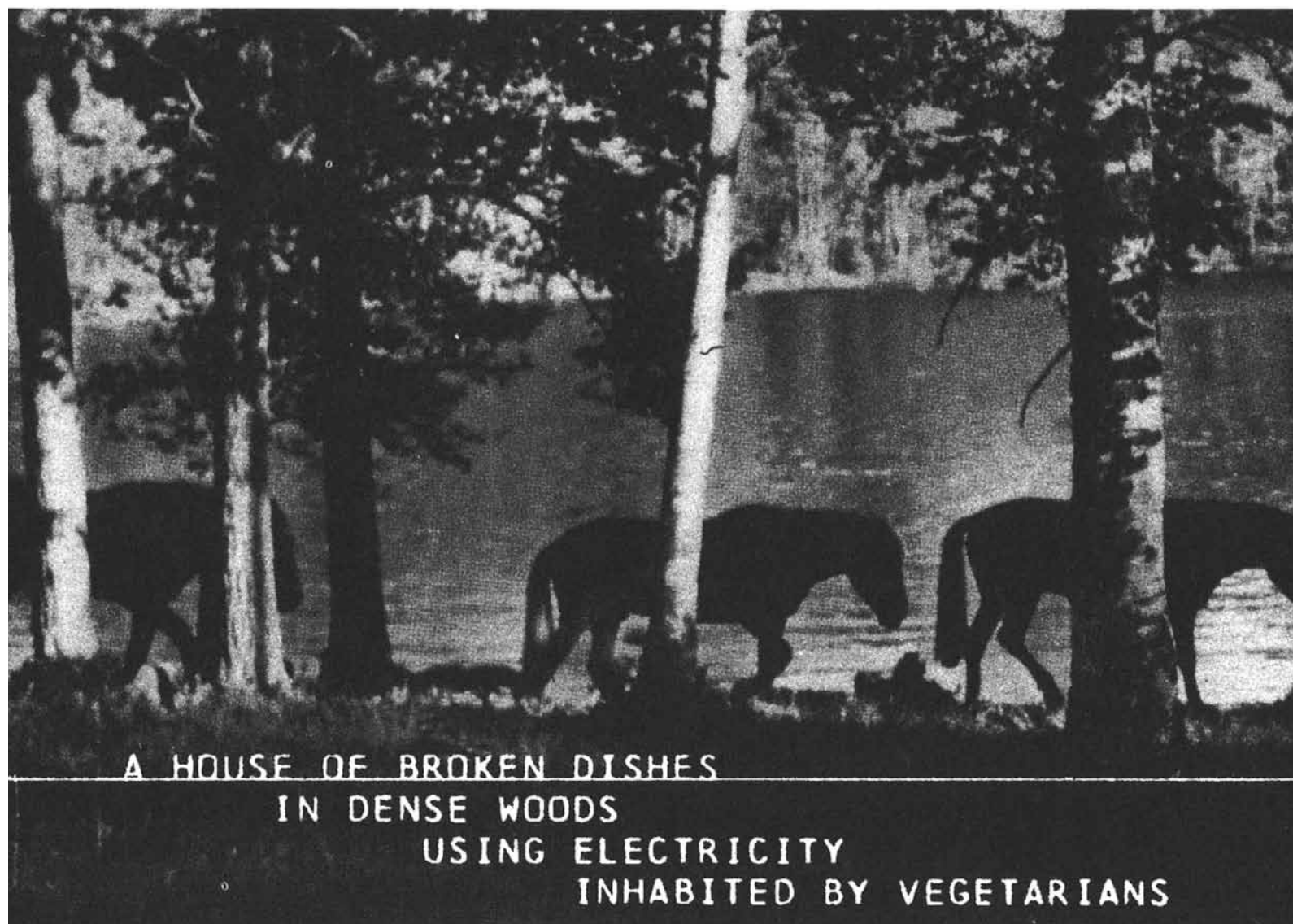
They have led to social and subjective pathologies inasmuch as one would have to call a society in which the subject is barred from access to authentic experience and its linguistic representations a pathological one. And it is difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle collective silences from the subject's individual pathological speechlessness, or worse yet, as in the present, from the infinity of substitutional speech acts that provide the subject with an ever expanding simulacrum of seemingly available forms of experience and language.

As a result of the increasingly necessary specialization of the linguistic and visual interventions that could potentially oppose and rupture these collective silences, 'poets' in the late nineteenth century who understood the ramifications of their involuntary position of assigned and condensed talent, saw themselves confronted with two contradictory tasks that — if they wanted to fulfill their 'poetic' projects at all — had to be addressed simultaneously.

First of all they had to invent an array of possible tools and strategies to undermine the vast number of socially produced simulacra and substitutions. Yet, under the conditions of a rapidly advancing modernity, these strategies could not be inserted any longer within the gratuitous spaces of exemption that traditional culture had provided. Rather, from now on, as Stéphane Mallarmé was the first to recognize, these interventions had to operate at the very sites and within the very patterns of speaking and reading where the subject's silences and the collective reification of language were socially encrypted: in the newspapers where the industrialized and instrumentalized forms of linguistic production were touted as promises of universal 'information' and 'communication' (to be replaced in the twentieth century by the new technologies of media culture, radio, advertising and industrial music). What might have been at one point the communal conversations of social groups would now be performed by professional 'speakers.'

And these industrial voices of the 'experts' compensate for the lack of public enunciation, while producing these substitutions, actually enforced the internalization of the language regulations of the prefabricated idioms of media culture.

And second, no less urgent and no less difficult to imagine, the 'poet' of modernity had to undermine the seemingly inevitable creation of a new myth of the poet's privileged access to speech, a myth that poetry had corroborated traditionally already by the mere fact of its existence. In every word and every syntactical construction, writers had simultaneously to oppose the most advanced forms of linguistic alienation and to make them the very



A HOUSE OF BROKEN DISHES
IN DENSE WOODS
USING ELECTRICITY
INHABITED BY VEGETARIANS

Postcard edited by Gebr König Verlag, Cologne, 1967.

parameters of their intervention in language. This conflict, however, would only be confronted by the very great poets of modernity, from Mallarmé to the Dadaists, even though the intensity of the dialectics of industrial silence and subjective speech would become ever more intensified with each decade. Thus it might at first be surprising that in 1967 Alison Knowles would have chosen one of the most traditional metaphors for the subject's identity formation in language, the "house," as the key concept of her book project *The House of Dust*, published in 1969 by Walther and Kasper König in Cologne.

That year the artist was offered the opportunity to participate in a workshop taught by the electronic composer and computer engineer James Tenney. Tenney wanted to introduce artists and writers who — like himself — were involved in the post-Cagean aesthetic of chance operations and aleatory permutations, to the potential usage of the new digitalized language systems processed by computers. Each participant was required to submit a project at the end of the seminar, and Knowles submitted four word lists to be translated into the computer language Fortran, to generate the largest possible number of constellations and permutations.

The four lists were defined by a series of interlocking terms that would form a new sentence each time the aleatory operations of the computer language would unite them in a new configuration (thus the first list consisted of 17 materials from which the "House" could be built, the second list counted 25 sites where the "House" could be situated, the third list, quite astonishingly, listed only four possible light sources to illuminate the "House", and the last list enumerated 23 different potential inhabitants of the "House").

The 'list' as a format of textual presentation is of course one of the key epistemes of an emerging Conceptual (rather than a 'poetic') usage of language at that very moment of the mid to late 1960s, and it could be found as a word — or verb — list in various applications in works by such different artists as Ed Ruscha, Dan Graham, Richard Serra and Lawrence Weiner. The list as an anti-literary and anti-poetic form could credibly claim to be merely the indexical accounting of accumulated qualities or serially aligned objects, taking on the guise of a readymade text that might have been generated, if not written, by these objects themselves. While the reasons for the attraction to this peculiar format, the mere mechanical enumeration of objects, were undoubtedly somewhat different in each case, the various preoccupations with lists still shared certain qualities that allow for a historical comparison.

First of all, they were pronounced in a passive voice that appears to be as far from subjectivity, intention, and authorial presence, as it is from any type of intervention, control and agency. Beyond the comparability of the passive voice, the elusive and eccentric choices of Knowles' four lists, share several features for example with the often outlandish sites and the peculiar banality of Weiner's materials and processes identified in his book *Statements*, which was published at the same time as *The House of Dust*.¹

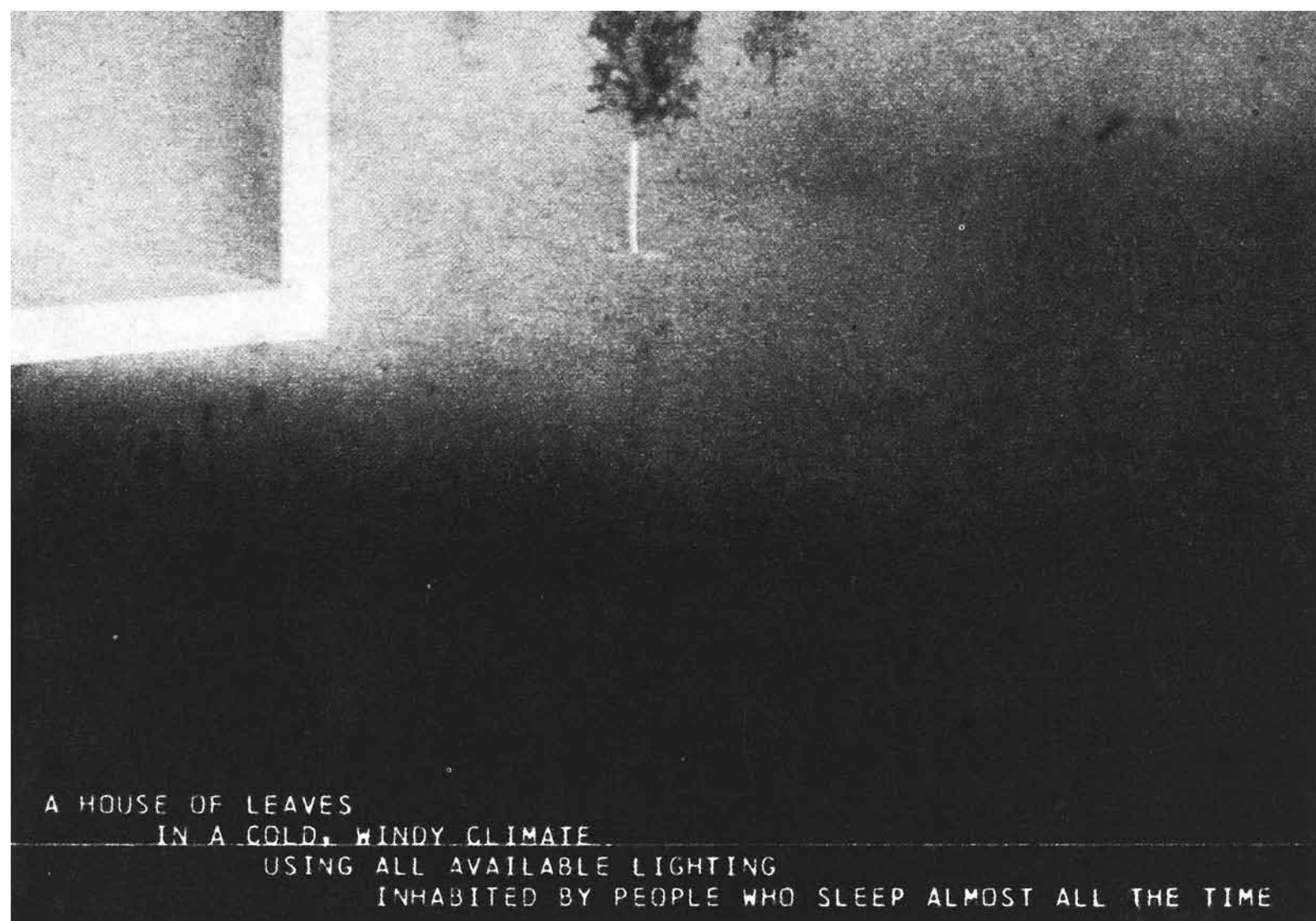
Both Knowles' and Weiner's approaches to language are not only defined by the manifest absence of grammatical subjects that function as speakers to convey authorial intentions, but they also align the performative enunciation with the material processes that the language describes. Both refer constantly to either the most eccentric or the plainest of locations (e.g. Weiner's 'arctic circle' or 'the boundaries between two countries', or Knowles' *in a deserted airport* or *in green mossy terrain*).

This situates their textual operations not only outside of the discursive and institutional frames where a poetic or artistic intervention could have been traditionally expected, but it positions them manifestly at the intersection of altogether different discursive orders (e.g. the mapping of the legalistic and political onto the geographic and topographic in the concept of a "borderline", or the conflicting temporalities and the extreme opposition between activity and passivity in the vision of a 'deserted airport'). Equally, in their choice of materials, both Knowles and Weiner alternate rapidly from the most peculiar to the most common, seemingly in order to avoid predictability or systematicity of any kind, and in order to achieve the type of non-taxonomy that Borges famously invented in his description of a Chinese encyclopedia.

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.

In accordance with the technical needs of the computer that served to print out the permutational program that Tenney had fed into the machine (certainly the technical needs of the computers of the late 1960s), the 'poem' was printed on the green striated paper, typical of computer printouts of the time, including the sprocket holes necessary for the paper's transportation within the computer's printing system. These features alone convey to the *House* an additional, if perhaps involuntary or innocent affiliation with the aesthetics of administration that governed Conceptual Art of the late Sixties. On each of the perforated detachable sheets, 11 quatrains appear, and a copy of *The House of Dust* on the average seems to contain 27 pages, bringing the number of quatrains to a total 297, far from the 400 necessary to reiterate one of the permutations.

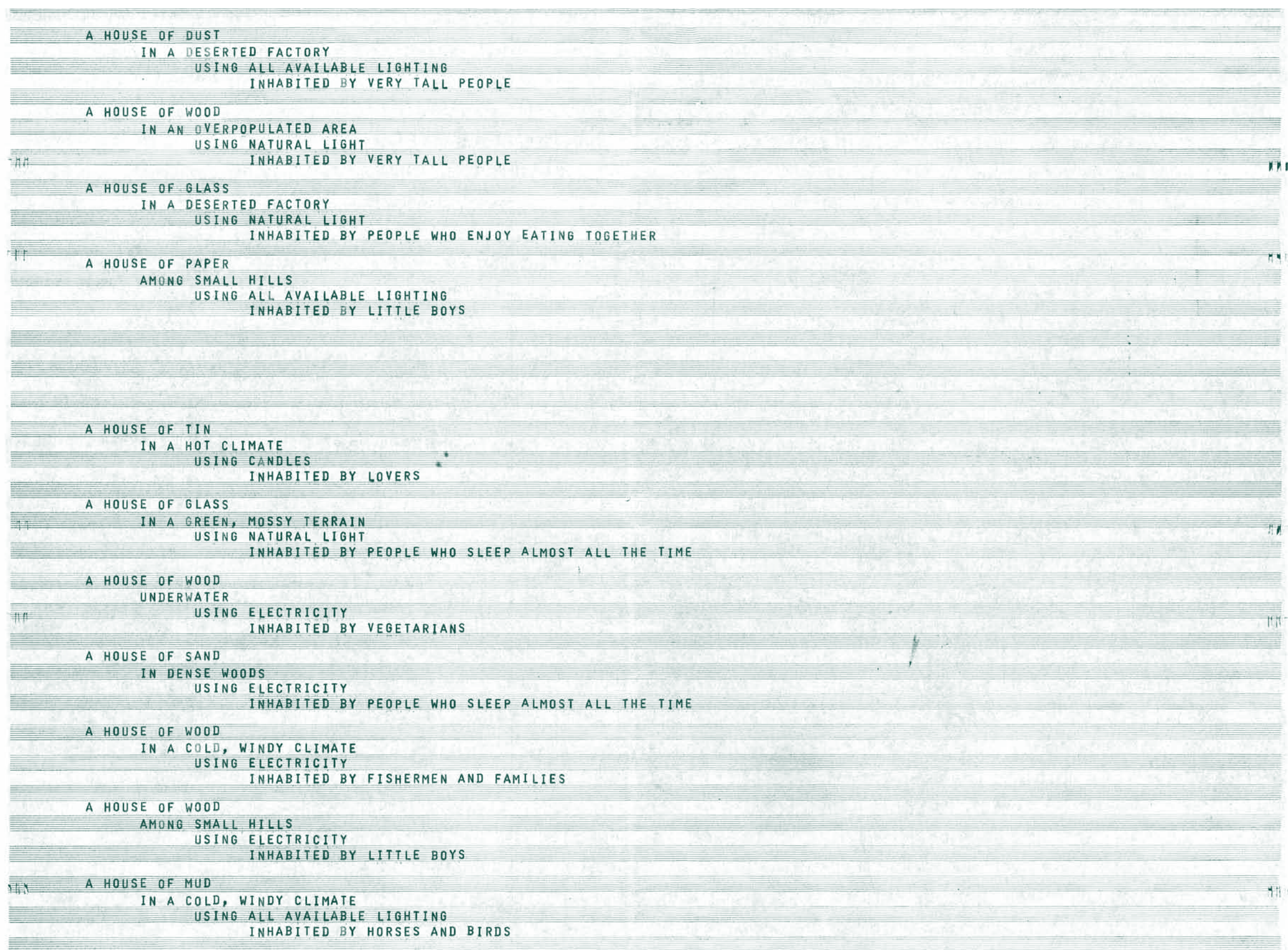
Unfolding the sheets in order to read the 'poem', one becomes aware that the printout functions like a scroll without beginning or end, as is only appropriate for a poem that does not know either of these traditional ordering principles (there is neither a first nor a last quatrain, quite simply, and every printout of the poem begins and ends with a different page of quatrains). *The House of Dust* has consciously jettisoned the traditional spatio-temporal demarcations of textual structures. Instead of turning pages, we read by folding and scrolling a textual band (in this respect the poem anticipates the radical transformation of the reading order that computers have brought about in general). The effect of a textual rotation results from the semblance of limitless permutations, as much as from the seemingly endless number of possible and different printouts. As for its distribution form and presentational devices, it is important to recognize that *The House of Dust* as a book is equally open ended, refusing to have been bound, and the folds of the printout paper determine the sequence of pages, not the cuts of the page or the binding of the book. It is only appropriate then for the poem to appear in a transparent plastic pouch, a container within which one would usually carry a set of maps or construction plans.



A HOUSE OF LEAVES
IN A COLD, WINDY CLIMATE
USING ALL AVAILABLE LIGHTING
INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO SLEEP ALMOST ALL THE TIME

Postcard edited by Gebr König Verlag, Cologne, 1967.

1. *Statements* was published by the Louis Kellner Foundation (i.e. Seth Sieglaub) in New York in 1968.



Print out of *The House of Dust*, Gebr König Verlag, Cologne, 1967.

This emphasis on anonymity and mechanical enumeration in Knowles' project, and in particular on the actual production process of a computer generated set of permutations stands in the greatest possible contradiction to the concept and image of the "House" that Knowles made the center of her project. And this conflict surfaces more emphatically with the emerging metaphorization of language itself as the "House" of the subject, and as the foundation of identity. After all, the "House of language" as a system of phonetic, lexical, grammatical and syntactical articulations pre-exists us, and it continues to exist and operate in our absence, even after our departure from that language. Therefore it appears to be a system that offers us a guaranteed 'foundation' of an infinity of combinatory options, generating the subject's fragmentary role in the performative self constitution in language.

Of course it has to be recognized that the actual lists that Knowles handed to Tenney, while they seem to have been motivated by the artist's desire for indeterminacy, were also far from being totally aleatory and were marked by very particular 'poetical' features. Nevertheless, from their inception, the four strands of language that Knowles provided were as diverse and heterogeneous as possible, so that neither lexicality nor semantics would conventionalize the quatrains. Even the inevitable grammatical logic of the ensuing sentences would eventually serve as an additional principle of lexical and semantic dissemination, splintering and differentiating the quatrains' various linguistic functions even further.

Thus we might be surprised at first when Knowles enumerates both conventional construction materials (such as *brick, stone, steel, glass*), and rather unlikely, not to say unthinkable ones (such as *discarded clothing, leaves, sand, paper, weeds, roots, broken dishes* among others) as the materials from which a large number of houses could be built in various configurations of sites, illuminations and occupants. Clearly, Knowles corroborates her principles of total openness and indeterminacy by foregrounding that her lists allow for the simultaneous inclusion of the most conventional and unthinkable choices of materials and sites.

A similar range of all possible options, from the most eccentric and outlandish to the most plausible and commonsense, governs the third list, that of the sites and places, where the house could be built (from the lapidarily specific geographical destinations such as *In Michigan* or *In Japan* to the general topographical descriptions such as *Among High Mountains* or *In a Desert* or *On an Island*, to the peculiar botanical descriptions of *green mossy terrain* or *heavy jungle undergrowth*, to a sudden shift into a merely meteorological identification such as *in a hot climate*, or *in a cold and windy climate*).

The fourth list enumerates the potential inhabitants of the *House* under construction, ranging from the very plausible groups of *friends* or *lovers*, or *American Indians*, or the perfectly possible combination of *people who enjoy eating together* or *children and old people* to much stranger, and far less likely social groups. Among those we find *collectors of all kinds*, or *French and German speaking people*, leading to the outright fairy tale populations of *people who sleep very little*, or *little boys*, or *all races of men wearing predominantly red clothing*, or *people speaking many languages wearing little or no clothing*, concluding with the group of animals *horses and birds* and *birds and fish*, not quite fulfilling the principle of Noah's' ark.

Once again, as with the choice of possible construction materials, the diversity and contradictory nature of the possible sites and potential inhabitants, do not add up to a particular kind of revolutionary or even radical vision in which a new social formation would be anticipated in utopian spaces and relations. The extreme tension between the most elusive and the most concrete of materials is mirrored in a similar span of sites that range from the most probable to the most phantasmagoric. Both find users and inhabitants that themselves appear to be drawn from a vast gamut of subject positions and social relations, thereby ultimately affirming that the "House" in Knowles' linguistic permutations is anticipated as disseminated and fluctuating, as dispersed and as evading fixities of any kind. It is not the house or the book of the future that will be inhabited by a new class or a new social group or a newly found gendered identity. It is a house whose very dispersal concretizes the impossibility and the undesirability of such fixity: undesirability because fixity of the subject entails its immediate atrophy, and an impossibility that originates in the insight that the technical and mechanical forms of controlling and determining the subject's potential access to experience are in a continuous flux. And only in that state of perpetual dissemination and dissolution could the subject at least temporarily evade the experience of control and the subjection of the self to the mechanisms of reification.

Moreover, the choice of materials, sites, inhabitants and lighting conditions gives *The House of Dust* also a peculiarly theatrical framework, as though we were witnessing the construction of a stage for an imminent performance. Yet, what is to be performed on the stage of the *House* are first of all linguistic actions, such as the suspension of the denotative principles of any instrumentalizing typology or taxonomy, as systems of a dubious linguistic order.

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 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 other, 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.

In many cases, though typically once again not in *all* instances, the combinatory logic of materials, sites and inhabitants can promise at best a rather preliminary, precarious construction of meaning. In fact, Knowles' quest for the ephemeral and transitory nature of her architecture seems to mimic the very precariousness of her poetic project. It is a project that has understood the contradictory nature of the claims that conceive identity exclusively within a linguistic model of the subject at this point in history.

The House of Dust recognizes how such a process—in order to record the actual conditions of experiencing language and its disappearance from the tools of constructing the subject—has to be self-effacing and self-destructive in order to be poetic at all. Furthermore, Knowles' project seems to have also understood

what Friedrich Nietzsche meant when he conceived of language as "The Prison House," as the total opposite of language as a matrix of the self-constituting subject.

One aspect of Nietzsche's concept seems to have articulated the insight that the most consequential execution of the subject's desire to be 'at home' within language would be its utter bodily and psychic 'subjection' to the rules and the institutions of the nation state, guaranteeing an identity within the rigorously enforced systems of linguistic regulations, idiomatic certainties, and lexical availability. Thus the subject would feel most 'at home' where language had become the ground for deeply engrained prejudices, false belief systems, and all forms of psychic and political (self) deception. A home where language had become the house in which the self could hide behind the organized and prefabricated articulations that serve repression and disavowal. Or where the house of language provided the articulations of socially mobilized forms of irrationality that—when unleashed—allowed again and again for the politically and psychically vengeful aggressivity of defrauded subjects.

In extreme opposition to such a subject written in stone, Knowles' *House of Dust* conceives of the process of subject formation as a perpetual process of construction and undoing, precisely to prevent it from becoming an inhabitant of "the prison house of language," a merely substitutional system of fraudulent and aggressive convictions. It recognizes that the formation of the subject at this point in history has become a more complex and by necessity a more open process, since the subject's intersections with language (and the supposed identificatory guarantees that language had promised) are certainly no longer the primary, possibly not even its most desirable foundations.

The House of Dust has taken into consideration that the very process of subject formation has become infinitely more fluid, in fact, that subjectivity itself is only thinkable not as fixity of any kind anymore, but as the continuous *undoing* of all fixities (of language, first of all, of course, since it is in language that all the other moral and ideological phantasms and fixities are deeply anchored and violently defended). Thus *The House of Dust* provides a linguistic structure that recognizes this infinity of additional factors that enter into the processes of subject formation in the present. Perhaps the most important one being the one to which Knowles (as one of the first writers) subjected her poetic project: advanced electronic technology. As Maurice Blanchot had stated once:

For example, it is accepted as a certainty that Foucault, adhering in this to a certain conception of literary production, got rid of, purely and simply, the notion of the subject: no more oeuvre, no more authors, no more creative unity. But things are not that simple. The subject does not disappear; rather, its excessively determined unity is put in question. What arouses interest and inquiry is its disappearance (that is, the new manner of being which is disappearance is), or rather, its dispersal which does not annihilate it but offers us, out of it, no more than a plurality of positions and a discontinuity of functions (and here we re-encounter the system of discontinuities which rightly or wrongly seemed at one time to be a characteristic of serial music.²

2. Maurice Blanchot, "Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him," in: *Foucault / Blanchot* (New York, Zone Books, 1987), 76-77.

AUGUST 07, 2012

A SCHOOL BASED ON WHAT ARTISTS WANTED TO DO: ALISON KNOWLES ON CALARTS

JANET SARBANES

This interview with Fluxus artist Alison Knowles took place in her Soho apartment in June 2011. Knowles describes being recruited for the original CalArts faculty by Allan Kaprow, the assistant dean of art; what it was like to teach at the institute in the first two years; the kind of student she encountered there; and the radical nature of the pedagogical situation. She also describes several pieces she did at CalArts, including an iteration of her famous House of Dust.



Alison Knowles in *The House of Dust*, CalArts.

JANET SARBANES: What drew you to CalArts?

ALISON KNOWLES: I had taught only sporadically. I had taught things like a workshop or a summer program, but Fluxus, once I got into it, really took us all over the place and gave me a kind of credential for teaching because I don't even have a master's. I graduated from Pratt Institute as an artist. I never thought I'd be teaching, really. But then I began to feel that teaching should have to do with the real experience of the teacher rather than only book learning or whatever you want to call it. And CalArts offered that. It offered positions to people who didn't necessarily have a degree background. And so, since I had been traveling with the Fluxus group and had some opinions about new forms, I was able to jump in and enjoy teaching in Allan Kaprow and Paul Brach's department. I had little to do with the Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro situation, but it was very, very lively and a number of my students were involved with it. I just didn't have time to do anything more than I was doing.

JS: Who recruited you for the School of Art?

AK: It was Kaprow and [Maury] Stein [the first dean of critical studies]. I think Stein was behind it and he was a wonderful organizer, but I was hired by Allan Kaprow. And Paul Brach came to New York, and we had meetings with him. But Kaprow was the thinking behind the school as far as I'm concerned. Brach simply wanted to be sure it was very different from UC San Diego and that it had his mark on it. And that he could ride his horse around in his hat—not that he wasn't a fine guy, but Kaprow, I think, had the vision of a school based on what artists wanted to do rather than what the school wanted them to do.

JS: How would you describe the sense of community at CalArts at that time? Because that's kind of the mythos of the school—that it aspired to be something more than a school, something approaching a true community of the arts.

AK: Well, so many things went on that were not particular to one or another department. Like the theater department or the intermedia department, the visual arts, painting—we all sort of supported each other in various things that were going on. We attended, we participated. And I would say that as one school, it was very much interlocking departments.

JS: There wasn't a set curriculum, was there? So how did you structure a typical day?

AK: I think each person did pretty much with that idea whatever they wanted to. I was putting up something called the House of Dust so I had these huge sculptures coming in on a flatbed truck and they had to be activated. I mean, I wasn't going to have them just sit on the land. They were weird-looking things, but they were important because the building itself was so unfortunate—the CalArts building—I felt you might as well put an apartment house there. So I would have my classes and my meetings out at the House of Dust, and we had a rail to run sound lines out there so we could do readings, and we had quite a number of food events out there. I had a piece called Gift Event II, where people would bring things to eat and things to present.

I also did a piece called 99 Red on the tennis court of the first CalArts campus [the Villa Cabrini in Burbank]. I lined up 99 apples, not all in one line but in three lines, and the idea was that you could take an apple if you put something in its place. So I have a wonderful slide of someone who left his car keys because he'd always wanted to walk to work. [laughs] He took his apple and left his car keys.

That broken tennis court also provided me with the very first base for the *House of Dust*. There were two sculptures, but one went down after the first year with an earthquake or something, so then there was just one small amoeba-shaped house. It was so different not only from the Villa Cabrini, but also from the big building we moved to in the second year, which we always called the Dow Chemical Center. [laughs] The house seemed very refreshing in its weirdness compared with the rest of the school. It had a circular hole in the top, so people who were into serious meditation could start at five in the morning out there under the light. I remember Michael Bell did several events—Michael Bell was a student of mine who was finally asked to leave the school. He was doing pretty outrageous things. But that's fine because that's kind of what this little house was for. And people could study and read out there.

JS: What was it made of?

AK: It was a shell that these sort of struts were put over in a shape, and then onto that we put blocks of one-by-twos, and then the cement was poured over that, and on the outside I threw chips of stone, chips of gravel, very finely ground so it had this sort of pavementlike quality. I made it; I went to somewhere in Connecticut or Massachusetts to a special foundry and made those two huge houses. The second one—it was interesting to have two, but it was perhaps ill-conceived because it was about eight or ten feet inside the large house and it couldn't withstand the rocky atmosphere of CalArts and it split and had to be taken down. But the small one was more the size of a large couch, maybe higher. No, I shouldn't say couch, but it would fit in this room.

I remember saying to Allan that I could come to CalArts only if they brought the House of Dust, too, and then there was sort of a long pause of a week because they had to fund the truck to bring it out from New York. But, as I said, it functioned very well not only next to the Villa Cabrini, where CalArts was temporarily, but also at CalArts itself. The small house was transported there from Villa Cabrini by helicopter.

JS: Wow—did it seem like they had unlimited funds at that time?

AK: It did, it did.

JS: Because their budget was so much bigger than the CalArts budget is now. [laughs]

AK: [laughs] Well, you wonder why I took that job. I had never been offered a real wage like that or been considered a real teacher like that or been able to do exactly what I wanted with people to do actions. And I was given everything I needed. And Dick [Higgins, Knowles's husband] had a job there, too. The girls could go for two years to a California school, which they loved. I think CalArts is a great thing, and so it's a different school now, so what? I mean, schools change, and I think CalArts couldn't really have gone on in that direction much further.

JS: Why do you say that?

AK: Well, some things began to happen that were not supportable, things that would be going on all weekend or things that were not supervised, and we had to keep the trustees somewhat with us.

JS: Could you tell me about the poetry drop you did from a helicopter?

AK: Because of the access I had to the jet propulsion labs with Jim Tenney, I was able to get four feet of poetry generated from the computer. The folded paper had these very beautiful green lines. We've had the poetry drop reproduced in various situations, but it's never been as beautiful as what we dropped over the House of Dust. It was the old computer paper. Very fine, very lovely.



Activities at CalArts when Knowles taught there.

JS: So you had it cut up?

AK: [shows the original] No, see it was in one piece like this, right? That was what was dropped from the helicopter over the House of Dust.

JS: That's great. That's not what I pictured. I'd imagined something more like fortune cookie fortunes.

AK: [laughs]

JS: It's such a beautiful poem, the House of Dust poem. ["A House of Dust on open ground, lit by natural light and inhabited by friends and enemies..."]

AK: It may be the first computer poem, I don't know, but that's what they say. When I read it at the White House, I dropped it down like this and stood holding it. So you see the thing that's important about CalArts is that the people who were involved out there were not only usually not professional teachers, but they were let go to do what they wanted with their students, and so that meant in my case that I would listen to what the students would like to do with me. If someone had a sudden idea about going to LA and seeing a show that they liked, we organized that. I had no foregone conclusion as to the curriculum. And I think that's what most people remember, that we would decide as a group what we were going to be doing. I had access to silkscreen production, making silkscreens and producing limited-edition prints. So we had the means then to advertise what we were going to do at the *House of Dust* with silkscreen posters, which meant they were learning a printing method as well. The department allowed me to buy a 20-by-24 graphic arts camera for I can't imagine how much money, so the students also learned how to use that tool, which, of course, could go to offset once you had the negative or you could make paper prints or something. The lab that I set up there was just magnificent. It had two darkrooms, big printing tables, and then out the window was the House of Dust. I think students coming in there for their first year—it kind of blew their minds that they were going to such an unorthodox college situation. If people didn't like Paul Brach's class, they could come into mine or they could go into Judy Chicago's feminist program. They found out what was available that day and went there. It was outrageous. [laughs]

JS: It sounds pretty nonhierarchical, as far as faculty and students were concerned. What was your relationship with the administration? With Robert Corrigan [CalArts' first president] and Herbert Blau [CalArts' first provost]?

AK: They were wonderful teachers. I think Corrigan had some problem with the structure of the school, but he was a great guy. Blau, too. Blau was really fine people to be heading a school. But I think they both left after the first two years or year?

JS: Blau was fired by the trustees after the first two years. Corrigan left a few years later.

AK: I think those trustees were really hoping from the beginning that the students would be directed into Disney's work. And when they discovered that that was the furthest thing from our minds, they became more and more churlish and disappointed with us.



One of *The House of Dust* events. With James Tenney and Richard Teitelbaum.

And I certainly didn't want to stay any longer than I did because I felt them kind of closing in. They were paying our salaries and what did an evening event on the land mean to them? Or Celebration Red with 99 red apples? I mean, just the mindset—not there. And so I was not surprised that finally we were all gone. Also, for an artist living in the east and New York City as I had all my life except for a couple of years at Middlebury College, California was another continent, another world. It was nothing to drive three hours to a party or drive a couple of hours to get your groceries. [laughs] I just couldn't do that. I had my car, I did the best I could, but I didn't even learn to drive until I was 20. So it wasn't a natural place for me to live. Although we had a wonderful living situation up in the hills of Piru. Richard Teitelbaum and Barbara Mayfield had their house, and I had room for my children and I think somebody else—Peter Van Riper—was up there at that time. And Simone Forti, who's still a dear friend, was practicing her nudity on a rock in the backyard every morning. And just amazing things going on. I think they were orange pickers' houses that we lived in.

JS: I wonder how the students seemed to you—did they seem like a different kind of student than you encountered elsewhere?

AK: Well, already they were sort of extraordinary to want to come to that school. I think in any class after a little while there are five or six people who are really doing it and the rest are waiting for them to do it and to follow, and so that fell out quite naturally. The students, at least, in my situation, were engendering their own ideas about what to do, whether it was events at the House of Dust or the zoo in LA or whatever it was that they conceived of as a project. What distinguished them, I think, was a real push into their own lives. If they didn't wish to do Gift Event II, they weren't required to, though they might be required to come up with something of their own to offer to the group. I was just so delighted that people actually graduated from that school. They'd had so much experience in so many different parts of the school, with so many different people in the school, that I guess generally a degree was just given if they held out a couple of years there.

JS: It sounds like your teaching there in some ways fit the model of the [Fluxus] event score, in the sense that you'd give students something fairly simple to do that could be interpreted in any number of ways.

AK: Yes, according to the personality or the dimensions of the person doing it. Certainly one of my best-known pieces, *Make a Salad*, has been done in the simplest possible way, but as long as you know that you're doing it as a performance, it has a different aura.

It's my favorite thing to be faced with students putting actions together for a performance after two or three days. I was talking to my host yesterday for a workshop in Virginia, and she said, "You don't have to bring anything. They've got all these pieces they want to do. It's going to be up to you to edit which ones they do." And that's kind of thrilling to me.

JS: How would you say teaching relates to your art practice?

AK: For me, they're not that distinct. As I said, I have no credentials to teach, but I'm kind of teaching with you now and I'll do this once in a while. Again, I have no formal way to present—say, as Allan would, having taught for years. But I listen. I like to listen to what people have to say back to me and it helps me to make new work that they have a strong reaction to. Of the hundreds of salads that have been made, there has never been one the same as the other. I had a salad yesterday out on the street while I was doing errands, and I noticed that I never would have put wedges of tangerine in a salad—I never mix fruit with lettuce. So one has one's idées fixes about salad.

JS: There are a few people I haven't been able to find much information about concerning their time at CalArts, and I thought you might be able to tell me something about them. One is Maury Stein, who was the first head of critical studies, and the other is Nam June Paik, another Fluxus artist who was also there when you were there.

AK: I know quite a bit about when Paik was there. Stein was a very busy figure and sort of off in the clouds. I certainly met him sometimes and liked him, but Paik was always a close friend. It was very strange for him to take this teaching job, and he didn't know what to do. He said, "I don't know how this is going to roll for me." Also, he always had understandable but crazy English. Paik was always struggling not only to be understood but to figure out what to do. I remember going into one of his happenings in New York, and he still didn't know what he was going to do really. He had the equipment there, and there was Charlotte Moorman waiting to do something with her cello, and the audience was there, and he was really just putting it all together and in a terrible sweat and terribly nervous about it, running back and forth. But that was always part of the spirit of the piece, and it was not anything that was trumped up or in any way false. He just became terribly nervous when the moment arrived. And so you enjoyed that.

JS: What school was he in at CalArts? Art? Music?

AK: I think he struggled with Shuya Abe to make a video class. Shuya Abe was a very skilled videographer so Paik kind of sat behind Shuya while he taught. But these guys from Tokyo, these two guys really brought video over here in a big way. No question about it.

JS: Did you interact much with people in the schools of theater, music and dance?

AK: Absolutely. I mean, Jim Tenney was a live wire out there. He would eat his lunch at the piano, so every day from twelve to one you could hear him play. It was a very avant-garde piano that he was interested in playing. All those ideas of Cage's prepared piano were carried by Tenney to CalArts, not that he didn't have his own way of composing. And he was so outgoing and so friendly that you could ask him about his work and he would talk about it. Certainly one of the highlights of CalArts was Jim Tenney.

JS: So how many years were you there total?

AK: Really two. Dick left after one, and we had two daughters he took back to the East Coast, and I was feeling like I would lose touch with the family if I stayed any longer. If he had stayed out there with the family I might have stayed on. But I was also beginning to wonder about whether I wanted to go on being a teacher or whether in fact I wasn't losing track of my own work.

JS: What do you view as the failings of CalArts and the way it was organized or not organized in those early years?

AK: Well, I'd just say that we came in there without the organization that a good teacher usually imposes. So I think the people who couldn't get along there were people—and I mean students—who couldn't relate. But we really had people all around to help the people who had more traditional backgrounds, the ones who were uneasy about trying to make their own work right away or work outdoors or do something with two dogs and a fish. I mean, whatever was proposed, we'd have people to help and to get something out of that person.

This text was first published in 2012 on the website East of Borneo. Many thanks for agreeing to have it reprinted here



Shigeo Kubota and Simone Forti in *The House of Dust*, Cal Arts, 1970.

1967

Fall 1967. Composer James Tenney conducts a workshop on FORTRAN programming with the following participants: Phil Corner, Dick Higgins, Nam June Paik, Alison Knowles, Jackson Mac Low, Max Neuhaus and Steve Reich. The workshop takes place at Alison Knowles and Dick Higgins's apartment in New York. Tenney was a composer in residence at Bell Labs from 1961 to 1964 and then at the Polytechnic institute of Brooklyn.

The poem is generated by James Tenney using the language FORTRAN IV and the computer from the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn. At the time, it is entitled *Proposition N°2 for Emmett Williams*. 50 pages are printed.

A special edition of *The House of Dust* is published by Gebr König Verlag in Cologne. It is generated by the Siemens Systems. A series of postcards made of an image or an object associated with a quatrain are also published.

1968

November 22, 1968. Knowles asks Billy Klüver, co-founder of *Experiments in Art and Technology* (E.A.T) for an E.A.T grant.

The House of Dust wins a Guggenheim grant and Knowles decides to build a physical structure from one of the quatrains of her poem. At the time, the structure is designated by the name *Chance House*.

Knowles works with architect William N. Breger, who was a family friend, to build the following quatrain:

A HOUSE OF PLASTIC
IN A METROPOLIS
LIGHTEN BY NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY PEOPLE FROM ALL
WALKS OF LIFE.

1969

June 27, 1969. Contractor George Kreier, Jr. from Philadelphia writes to Knowles to explain the material used and the production process of what is then called the *Happening House*. Fiberglass, reinforced polyester resin and plywood are commonly used in the construction of molds for monumental concrete buildings. Knowles assists with bending the wood for the structure in the factory. The sound piece created by artist and musician Max Neuhaus is added to the small House.

Knowles meets with Henry Margulies, manager of Penn South – a housing cooperative development located between 8th and 9th Avenues and West 23rd and 29th Streets in Chelsea, New York – and supporter of Knowles' project. They also meet with some members of the cooperative to discuss the possible participation of children and residents to workshops involving the gift of objects and the transformation of the structure.

March 6, 1969. Alison Knowles produces another poem entitled *Patina Selection for The House of Dust* designed by Jef Raskin. The poem is to be used to determine the placement of the collected objects – those given by the children and residents of Penn South – on the exterior surface of *The House of Dust*. Also based on

principles of random permutation, the poem gives instructions about which house (high or low), which direction, which object/material, and what weight or number. (Raskin is the inventor of a human-computer interface for Apple Macintosh. He was then Assistant Professor of Arts and Music at the University of California in San Diego).

October 7, 1969. The smaller of the two Houses is installed on a lawn at The Ladies Garment Workers Union Housing Co-op (Penn South), at the corner of 26th Street and 8th Avenue, behind building 4. Children start to play with the structure, bringing objects and affixing them on the surface of the House according to the instructions given by the computer printout. A film is made by Gladys Washburn.

Petitions against the House gather 600 signatures.

Henry Margulies dies.

October 14, 1969. The board of directors of Penn South votes for the House to be taken away from the Co-op.

October 16, 1969. The smaller of the two structures is deliberately set on fire. The week after, on October 22, the two structures are placed on a flatbed truck and moved to Philadelphia for restoration.

Knowles is invited to CalArts by Allan Kaprow and Paul Brach, dean of the Art Department, to teach in the printing studio with Peter Von Riper. *The House of Dust* is moved by train to California. Rocks fall over the truck and the Houses during the trip.

1970

The House of Dust poem, still called *Proposition N°2 for Emmett Williams*, is reprinted in the book *Computer for the Arts* edited by Dick Higgins (published by Abysse Publications) together with the computer program designed by James Tenney.

The book *Fantastic Architecture* edited by Dick Higgins and Wolf Vostell (published by Something Else Press) includes an extract of the König edition of *The House of Dust*.

Knowles starts teaching at CalArts where she will stay for two years. She teaches there at the same time as some of her Fluxus colleagues (Allan Kaprow, Nam June Paik and Shuya Abe, Dick Higgins, Emmett Williams), conceptual artists (John Baldessari, Judy Chicago, Miriam Shapiro, Douglas Huebler, Michael Asher), experimental musicians (James Tenney, Charlemagne Palestine, Ravi Shankar, Richard Teitelbaum), dancers (Simone Forti, Shigeko Kubota). Her students include Michael Bell, Norman Kaplan, Richard Banks, Josef Bogdanovich, Richard Teitelbaum, Willard Van De Bogart, Matt Mullican, Barbara Bloom, Suzanne Lacy and Faith Wilding.

The House of Dust is installed on an abandoned tennis court at the Villa Cabrini, the interim campus of CalArts in Burbank. A dial composed of eight quadrants, one for each direction, is painted on the floor in relation to *Proposition IV (Squid)*, another poem-score used by Knowles to generate new works and performances by

herself and her students. Probably a development of *Patina Selection for the House of Dust*, the program for *Proposition IV (Squid)* is designed by Andrew Schloss.

Many performances, actions, picnics, concerts, screenings happen in and around the House. In particular, Michael Bell offers a poetry class from 5am to 8am every Wednesday. He also performs naked in the House to interpret the quatrain ending in, "INHABITED BY PEOPLE SPEAKING MANY LANGUAGE, WEARING LITTLE OR NO CLOTHING."

Among other artists who respond to *Proposition IV (Squid)*, Matt Mullican performs a food event with 5 roasted chickens and Michael S. Bell gathers a great number of blue heterogeneous papers that he glues inside the House.

Alison Knowles performs *99 Red North* with 99 apples oriented North. This piece merges with another of Knowles' work entitled *Gift Event II* that invites the audience to take an object in exchange for another. Someone parks his car around the House in a different direction each day and leaves his car keys in exchange for an apple.

The House is moved to a hill on the new Valencia campus.

1971

Knowles brings to California some of the objects gathered by the children of Penn South from storage in New York.

A printout of the poem is dropped from a helicopter over the House. The event called *Poem Drop* is organized with the help of Norman Kaplan and Richard Balks. It is filmed by Allan Kaprow.

An earthquake splits the big House.

1972

Knowles leaves California and *The House of Dust* is left to the school on temporary loan and maintained by student Michael Bell.

Knowles offers *The House of Dust* to the Oakland Museum of California.

1973

April 9, 1973. *Proposition IV (Squid), Performance Piece for 4 Voices*, is performed at the Kitchen, New York as part of the International Computer Art Festival.

1978

March 31, 1978. Several options are proposed for installation of *The House of Dust* in the public space of Oakland.

April 6, 1978. George W. Neubert, curator of the Oakland Museum, proposes the estuary of Laney College Campus, in front of the Museum, since Knowles wanted the House to be near the water.

1979

Oct 15, 1979. Neubert announces the refusal from the Oakland Museum to accept Knowles' gift to their collection due to financial reasons

and regulations in the public space. Moreover, they do not want to undertake the physical transformation of the poem by embedding the new gift objects in its surface.

November, 1979. Knowles explains the idea of a portable exhibition of *The House of Dust* that would include several documents as well as the gift objects sent to the House. The exhibition is planned to travel to the Walker Art Center, St. Catherine and the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

1980

Alison Knowles organizes a *Gift Event Celebration*. Friends of the House give a small object, which is paired with one of the quatrains of the poem. Each object is installed in one of the quadrants of the dial drawn on the floor.

Gift Objects are presented at the Detroit Art Institute in the exhibition "A Decade of Women's Performance Art."

An exhibition of *The House of Dust* at Galerie "A" in Amsterdam, Holland, curated by Harry Ruhé.

May 16, 1980. Knowles applies for an Art in Public Space Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. She proposes that the House would be moved to the campus of the University of Minnesota and placed along the Mississippi River with the help of students.

1981

Michael Bell curates an exhibition entitled "Artifacts from *The House of Dust*" at Midlands Art Council, Michigan.

March, 1981. *The House of Dust* is shown at San Jose State University Art Gallery in an exhibition curated by Mike Crane.

1982

June, 1982. The College of the Canyons in Valencia, California, moves the smaller house to their campus by helicopter. It is installed on a sand playground and painted with yellow, red and blue polka dots. Knowles does not participate in the events that happen there.

1987

The House of Dust is shown at Art Awareness, Lexington, New York, in an exhibition curated by Lorraine Archaki.

1990

The House of Dust is shown in a Fluxus exhibition at Kunstsentret, Hovikodden, Oslo, curated by Ina Blum.

2014

The House of Dust is shown in the exhibition "A Letter Always Arrives at its Destinations," La Panacée, Montpellier, France, curated by Sébastien Pluot. A new version of the computer program is produced and a printer distributes the pages of the poem to the public. Alison Knowles is invited to perform *Loose Pages* with Jessica Higgins and conducts *Newspaper Music*.

THIS PROJECT IS PART OF

ART BY TRANSLATION

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAM IN ART AND CURATORIAL PRACTICES

DIRECTED BY MAUD JACQUIN AND SÉBASTIEN PLUOT.

— ESBA TALM ANGERS – ENSA PARIS / CERGY – CNEAI, PANTIN

— SUPPORTED BY THE JAMES GALLERY, CUNY, THE FRENCH MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND THE FRENCH INSTITUTE.

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SPECIAL THANKS TO ALISON KNOWLES, CAROLINE ANDRIEUX, EMILY APTER, MICHAEL BELL, ILARIA BONACOSSA, SYLVIE BOULANGER, ETIENNE DE BOURSETTY, MARK BLOCH, SARAH BUTLER, KATHERINE CARL, DOROTHÉE CHARLES, LUISA ESPECIAL, JAMES EWING, SIMONE FORTI, JAMES FUENTES, VALLEJO GANTNER, HANNAH HIGGINS, JESSICA HIGGINS, SILVIA KOLBOWSKI, JEFFREY PERKINS, EMILIE RENARD, JULIA ROBINSON, SOPHIE ROBNARD, NINA SAFAINIA, ANNE-MARIE ST-JEAN AUBRE, JANET SARBANES, JOSHUA SELMAN, WILLARD VAN DE BOGART, GLADYS WASHBURN, JENNIFER WILKINSON, CHRISTIAN XATREC.

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DESIGN
DIEUDONNÉ CARTIER

VERSIONS OF THE TEXTS BY HANNAH HIGGINS AND BENJAMIN H.D. BUCHLOH WERE ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN HANNAH B HIGGINS AND DOUGLAS KAHN (EDS.), *MAINFRAME EXPERIMENTALISM: EARLY COMPUTING AND THE FOUNDATION OF THE DIGITAL ARTS* (BERKELEY, CA: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 2012). THE INTERVIEW OF ALISON KNOWLES BY JANET SARBANES WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN EAST OF BORNEO, AUGUST 7, 2012. [HTTP://WWW.EASTOFBORNEO.ORG/ARTICLES/A-SCHOOL-BASED-ON-WHAT-ARTISTS-WANTED-TO-DO-ALISON-KNOWLES-ON-CALARTS](http://WWW.EASTOFBORNEO.ORG/ARTICLES/A-SCHOOL-BASED-ON-WHAT-ARTISTS-WANTED-TO-DO-ALISON-KNOWLES-ON-CALARTS)

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ARCHIVAL MATERIAL OF *THE HOUSE OF DUST*

THIS JOURNAL GATHERS FOR THE FIRST TIME WRITTEN DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS TO RECONSTITUTE THE HISTORY OF *THE HOUSE OF DUST*.

THESE ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN ORGANIZED IN CATEGORIES SO AS TO REFLECT THE VARIOUS LOCATIONS AND STAGES OF TRANSFORMATION OF THE PROJECT.

WORKSHOP WITH JAMES TENNEY AND PRODUCTION OF *THE HOUSE OF DUST* POEM, 1967.

Program for Proposition No. 2 for Emmett Williams, by Alison Knowles, realized by James Tenney.

EE317M	TENNEY	SOURCE STATEMENT	FORTRAN SOURCE LIST
	0	\$IBFTC ARCH LIST,REF	
	1	DIMENSION MAT(3,17),SIT(8,25),LIT(4,4),INH(11,22)	
	2	INTEGER SIT	
	3	CALL RAND1	
	4	READ(5,101)((MAT(I1,J1),I1=1,3),J1=1,17)	
	15	101 FORMAT(6X,3A6)	
	16	READ(5,201)((SIT(I2,J2),I2=1,8),J2=1,25)	
	27	201 FORMAT(6X,8A6)	
	30	READ(5,301)((LIT(I3,J3),I3=1,4),J3=1,4)	
	41	301 FORMAT(6X,4A6)	
	42	READ(5,401)((INH(I4,J4),I4=1,11),J4=1,22)	
	53	401 FORMAT(6X,11A6)	
	54	DO 200 N=1,50	
	55	WRITE(6,102)	
	56	102 FORMAT(1H1)	
	57	DO 200 M=1,12	
	60	JM=1.+RAND(17.)	
	61	JS=1.+RAND(25.)	
	62	JL=1.+RAND(4.)	
	63	J1=1.+RAND(22.)	
	64	WRITE(6,202)(MAT(I1,JM),I1=1,3),(SIT(I2,JS),I2=1,8),(LIT(I3,JL),I3=1,4),(INH(I4,J1),I4=1,11)	
	105	202 FORMAT(1H0,5X,11HA HOUSE OF ,3A6/12X,8A6/18X,6HUSING ,4A6/24X,13HI NHABITED BY ,11A6)	
	106	200 CONTINUE	
	111	CALL RAND3	
	112	STOP	
	113	END	

1. Computer program for *Proposition N°2* for Emmett Williams by Alison Knowles, designed by James Tenney reprinted in *Computer for the Arts*, edited by Dick Higgins, Abyss Publications, New York, 1970.

2. Print out of *The House of Dust*, Gebr König Verlag, Cologne, 1967.

A HOUSE OF BRICK
IN A DESERTED AIRPORT
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY CHILDREN AND OLD PEOPLE

A HOUSE OF LEAVES
IN DENSE WOODS
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY FRIENDS

A HOUSE OF SAND
ON THE SEA
USING CANDLES
INHABITED BY LITTLE BOYS

A HOUSE OF GLASS
IN A DESERTED CHURCH
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO EAT A GREAT DEAL

A HOUSE OF BRICK
IN MICHIGAN
USING CANDLES
INHABITED BY FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

A HOUSE OF PAPER
IN HEAVY JUNGLE UNDERGROWTH
USING NATURAL LIGHT
INHABITED BY FRIENDS

A HOUSE OF MUD
IN A DESERTED FACTORY
USING ALL AVAILABLE LIGHTING
INHABITED BY FRIENDS

A HOUSE OF STRAW
IN MICHIGAN
USING CANDLES
INHABITED BY HORSES AND BIRDS

A HOUSE OF LEAVES
IN JAPAN
USING ALL AVAILABLE LIGHTING
INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO READ

A HOUSE OF DISCARDED CLOTHING
INSIDE A MOUNTAIN
USING ELECTRICITY
INHABITED BY FRENCH AND GERMAN SPEAKING PEOPLE

A HOUSE OF DISCARDED CLOTHING
IN A GREEN, MOSSY TERRAIN
USING CANDLES
INHABITED BY PEOPLE WHO SLEEP VERY LITTLE



```

BEGIN JCR 0062 AT 1522-44 03/06/69

$BE1$RASKIN$
PROGRAM ALISON
C PATINA SELECTION FOR HOUSE OF DUST
DIMENSION KOMPS(16), KAT(16),LCAD(16), MAT(10),NUMB(16)
C READ IN THE POINTS OF THE COMPASS
READ 32,(KOMPS(I),I=1,8)
32 FORMAT(BA2)
C KOMPS IS REALLY N NEE SES SHW NW BEGINNING IN COL 1
READ 10,MAT
10 FORMAT(5(A8,A4))
C
C CHOOSE CATEGORIES FOR EACH AREA
DO 36 I=1,16
KAT(I)=IRANF(1,5)
C CHOOSE AMOUNTS (WEIGHTS) FROM 16 TO 160 OZ.
LOAD(I)=IKANF(16,160)
C CHOOSE NUMBER OF ITEMS FOR EACH AREA
36 NUMB(I)=IKANF(1,100)
DO 101 I=9,16
101 KOMPS(I)=KOMPS(I-8)
C PRINT HEADINGS HOUSES ARE HIGHER AND LOWER HOUSE
PRINT 37
37 FORMAT(7I HOUSE DIRECTION MATERIALS MATERIAL
PRINT 38
38 FORMAT(7 NAME SELECTION WEIGHT OR QUANT
PRINT 39
39 FORMAT(7 (IN OZS.)
DO 5 K=1,16
NAME=# LOW #
IF(K.GT.8) NAME=# HIGH #
C MAT(LL) IS MATERIALS NAME (WITH MAT(LL+1))
LL=2*KAT(K)-1
5 PRINT 7,NAME,KOMPS(K),MAT(LL),MAT(LL+1),LOAD(K),NUMB(K)
7 FORMAT(7 #,A6,#HOUSE #,A2,5X,A8,A4,3X,I3,8X,I3)
PRINT 40
40 FORMAT(7I#)
STOP
END
$EXECUTE
    
```

Object chart and color key - color found on small plaster models

House Name	Direction	Objects/materials	Weight (ozs.)	or Number
Low House	N	Black	68	89
Low House	NE	Toys, child	88	90
Low House	E	Black	152	37
Low House	SE	Black	126	98
Low House	S	Buttons,plus	141	25
Low House	SW	Shoes,Hats	157	51
Low House	W	Black	110	92
Low House	NW	Shoes,Hats	56	49
High House	N	Shoes,Hats	26	4
High House	NE	Shoes,Hats	26	21
High House	E	Black	37	48
High House	SE	Shoes,Hats	160	17
High House	S	Nothing	37	41
High House	SW	Buttons, plus	153	16
High House	W	Toys,child	101	21
High House	NW	Buttons,plus	27	19

There not ready answers available as to how some of these catagories will be treated. The solution of the problem of putting,for example, 49 shoes on the North West facade of the Low House will arise from the situation and the individuals working with the problem of that North west facade. We might well use only the heels. There will not be fabric used directly as it weathers badly and is incompatible, often forms bubbles or disintegrates, with the plastic. Paper can be collaged on the surface. It adheres well and can be entirely molded with the form. There may, for instance, be a picture used showing the 17 required hats on the South East facade of the high house. Two processes will be used for the facades- melting and imbeding and when necessary, drilling and screws.

The demounting of the enclosures amounts to the unscrewing of the stainless steel screws which hold the sections intact. The larger enclosure separates along the same veins as the object key division into three parts, and the smaller enclosure into two.(see models)

3. The House of Dust at Penn South, Chelsea Clinton News, page 3, Oct. 23, 1969.

4. Computer program for Patina Selection for The House of Dust designed by Jef Raskin, 1969

5. Document showing the output of the Patina Selection for The House of Dust program. Each object that was brought by kids and residents from South Penn Co-op is attributed a place on one of the facades of the Houses.



6. Installation of *The House of Dust* at the Valencia campus.

7. *The House of Dust* on the tennis court at the Burbank campus with Emmett Williams (left) and Alison Knowles (right).

8. *The House of Dust* at the Burbank campus.



9. *The House of Dust* at the Valencia campus



To Maurice Stein

102070

"Programs, projects, and offerings..."

of: Michael Bell

Meeting Time - 5 thru 8 AM each Wednesday

Place - House of Dust (above playing diamond, on tennis court)

Programs - To not interfere with the students natural learning style and at the same time help them with my experience, resources, and style to grow in the way that they want to. Hopefully, poesy will enable them to have such illuminations. By that I mean every kind of poesy; action, musical, ritual, concrete, free, blank, ad infinitum.

Projects - Pursuant to the above, the class operates in roughly (after just one meeting) the following manner: The whole course of study is a poem, and a ritual (at least). Some study poetry, some study poesy, some study the poetic creative process, some are listening, some are playing their instruments (voice included), one is making a systematic examination of Phenomenology and the History of Philosophy otherwise, one is going to build a jail cell and carbon write poems on the ceiling, one wants to take pictures of letters by themselves, one wants to play Orpheus, I am studying Calligraphy, and we are all integrating our life experiences to make each moment an event.

Offerings - I can teach anything from Aircraft Maintenance (Reciprocating Engine Mechanics), to Philosophy, to Draft Evasion, To Graphics (small scale), to Psychoanalysis (with emphasis on Freud), to how to change diapers bathe feed and otherwise care for infants, to how to roll a joint and make a screen that never needs cleaning for a pipe, to blueprint making, to accounting procedures, to driving an ambulance, and I am available for that purpose.

10. The House of Dust during a performance at the Valencia Campus.

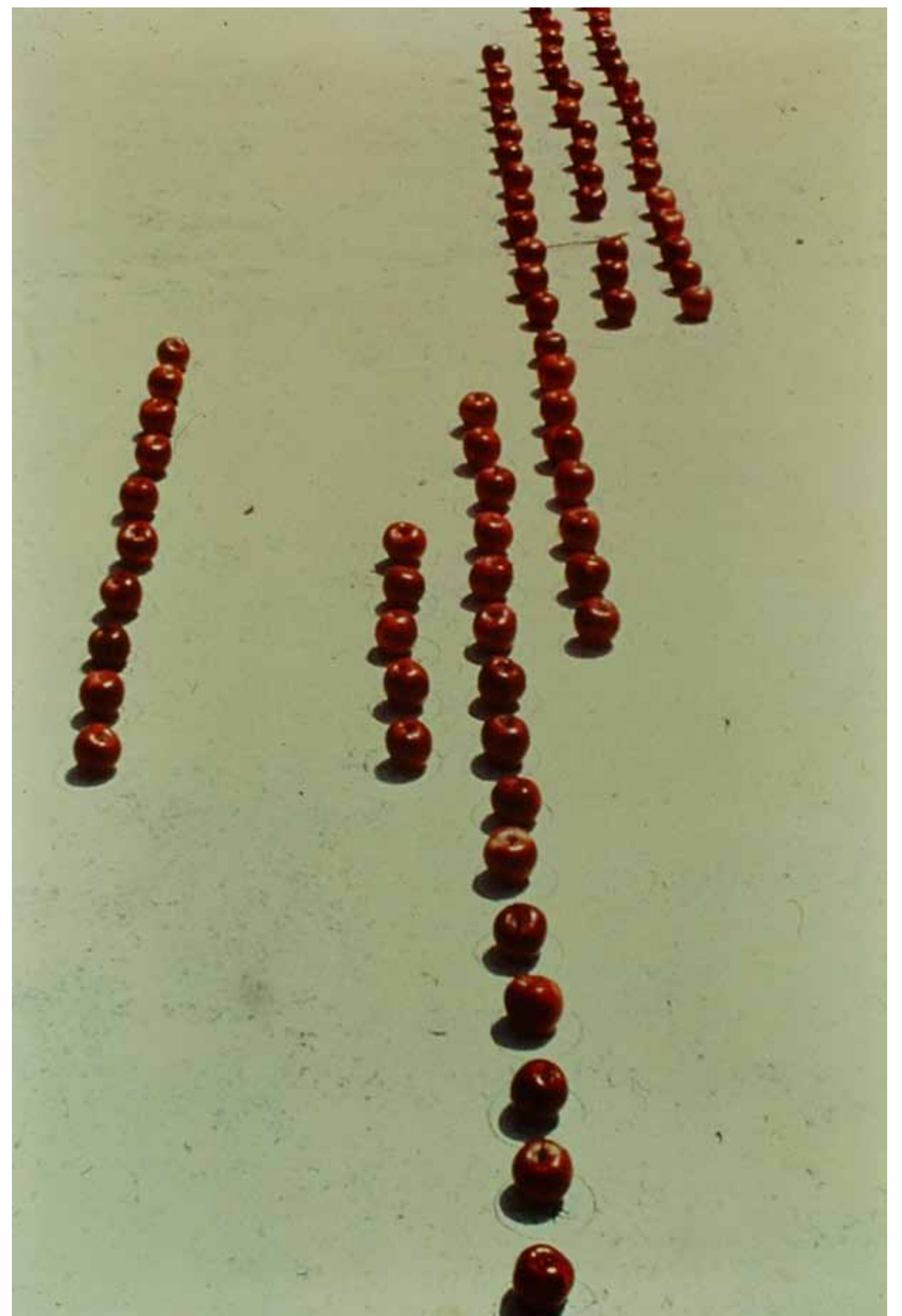
11. Musical performance around The House of Dust.

12. Screening inside The House of Dust.

13. Document describing the class on poetry taught by Michael Bell inside the House.



14. *The House of Dust* and the dial for *Proposition IV (Squid)* drawn on the tennis court of the Burbank campus.



15. *The House of Dust* and the dial for *Proposition IV (Squid)* drawn on the tennis court of the Burbank campus

16. View of Alison Knowles' 99 Red North.

17. View of Alison Knowles' 99 Red North with car keys.



18. Helicopter spreading the print out of the poem over *The House of Dust*.

19. Alison Knowles with headphones and a microphone giving instructions to the helicopter pilot during the *Poem Drop* event.

20. Silkscreens pasted on *The House of Dust*.

21. Alison Knowles' installation with cherries.





22. The small *House of Dust* installed at College of the Canyons and painted with polka dots.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS AND TRAVELLING EXHIBITION OF *THE HOUSE OF DUST*.

Letter of Intention for an Art in Public Places grant
National Endowment for the Arts

To whom it may concern:

It is my proposal to you that I be funded to transform and relocate my object/noem *The House of Dust*. Please find inclosed a brief history of the project from its inception as a computer poem, which I composed by using a Fortran computer, to the placement of the fibreglass sculpture or object/noem on the campus of the California Institute of the Arts. Inclosed is a fragment of the endless poem and several slides and photos of the House in its present situation in Valencia, California on the Cal Arts campus. I am awaiting photos of the new site which is just at a turn of the Mississippi river beside the campus of the University of Minnesota but on public ground. It is a park area beside the river with some trees and much frequented by the people of Minneapolis as well as the students of the adjacent campus. The site is ideal. The object/noem could be set on four cinder blocks embedded in the earth very much as it is based now. It weighs six thousand pounds, is 12' long 4' wide and 4' high and cast in resin and fibreglass with a limestone exterior and can be placed with a fork lift. Commemorating the 10th anniversary of the object/noem I have collected from fifty artists and friends a single hand-held object of their use or finding. These are an intact exhibition presented with hand-colored xeroxes that is traveling as a *House of Dust* extension until the site is assured. This show opens at Gallery A in Amsterdam in September and then travels to San José University in California. These objects would be added as part of the installation of the transformed *House of Dust* in Minnesota. The Walker Art Institute, the Coifman Gallery and many students that I had in California are interested in having the project move from Cal Arts to this site by the Mississippi River. I include the names of these supporters in this letter of intention as well.

The significance of the *House of Dust*, and the reason for moving it and transforming it in a new setting is that it is the materialization of a poem that has a ciclical structure that invites constant renewal. For this transformation process I would use students from the University of Minnesota campus and the University of St. Catherine's near-by. This workshop would involve the imbedment of the gift objects and the transformation of the surface using sand, rocks and materials natural to the environment.

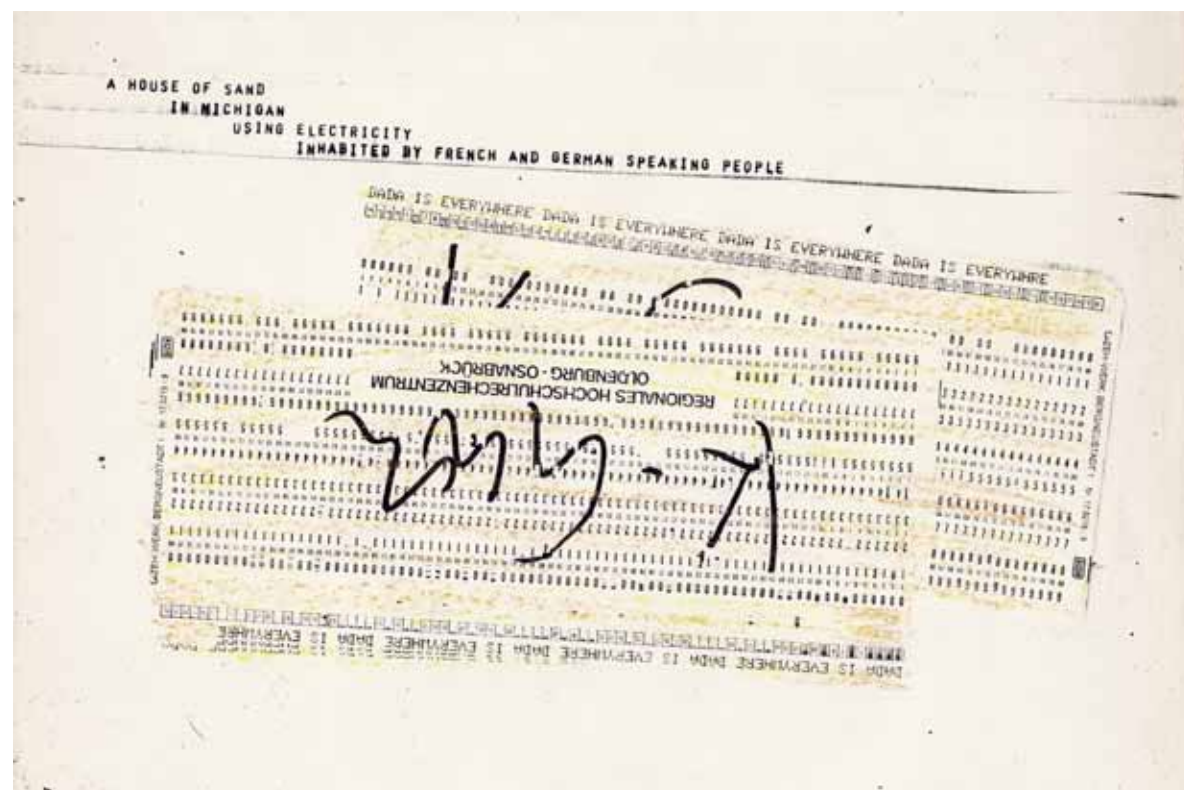
Alison Knowles
May 16 1980

23. Alison Knowles explaining her project for *The House of Dust* in Minnesota as well as her collecting of objects for the House from fifty artists and friends.

1.	Michael Crane	Ca., USA	silver bullets, clast
2.	Dr. Klaus Groh	W. Germany	six computer cards, a yellow doll's parasol
3.	Miriam Shapiro	NYC., USA	post-card of herself
4.	Linda Montano	Ca., USA	tiny yellow chicken
5.	Piotr Rypson	Warsaw, Poland	magnifying glass, pencil
6.	Gerard Minkoff	Geneva, Switzerland	duet from Warsaw
7.	Virginia Poch	Barcelona, Spain	rusted lock
8.	Mary Ann Spencer	NYC, USA	Tiny red shoe
9.	Vaughan Rachel	Ca., USA	plastic credit card
10.	Jerome & Diane Rothenberg	Ca., USA	religious figures on cloth
11.	Anthony Gnazzo	Ca., USA	plastic cards
12.	Barbara Smith	Ca., USA	pink hair clips with napkin
13.	Terry Setter	Ca., USA	roll of film
14.	Annea Lockwood	N.Y., USA	spring and wind-up part
15.	Geoffrey Cook	Ca., USA	plastic box with his name
16.	Hermann Braun	Remscheid, W.Germany	fragment of Chartres Cathedral
17.	Malcolm Goldstein	Vermont, USA	cow's tooth
18.	Andy Voda	Vermont, USA	tiny landscape with animals
19.	Anna Banana	Ca., USA	plastic banana
20.	Ochiishi	NYC, USA	two flowered cloth fragments
21.	Linda Burnham	Ca., USA	perfume bottle
22.	Geoffrey Hendricks	NYC., USA	metal horse clips
23.	Charles Amirkanian	Ca., USA	<u>the Nervous Child</u> (book)
24.	Carol Law	Ca., USA	<u>Playful Friends</u> (pad)
25.	Knud Pedersen	Denmark	wedding ring in gold
26.	Daniel Goode	NYC, USA	wood fragment in circle

27.	Francoise Janicot	Paris, France	franc and centimes coins
28.	Aviva Rahmani	Ca., USA	metal string, 3 pits
29.	Dove Bradshaw	NYC, USA	glove
30.	Philip Corner	NYC., USA	metal hinge
31.	Lena Rivkin	Ca., USA	postcards of dusting
32.	Bici Porbee	Boston, USA	sieve (rusted) with 4 feet
33.	Sari Diener	NYC, USA	flat metal piece
34.	Bruce Dow	Mass., USA	metal circle (open)
35.	Mats B Ulrika Junker	Stockholm, Sweden	bone and card
36.	Larry Wendt	Ca., USA	circuit board + engraving
37.	Dick Banke	Ca., USA	little red shoe with heel
38.	Anna Cueenza	Ca., USA	collage with colored socks
39.	Peter Van Riper	Ca., USA	performance program and computer fragment
40.	Simone Forti	Ca., USA	wood spike, "sprout"
41.	Michael Bell	Ca., USA	plastic "thank you"
42.	Dick Higgins	Vermont, USA	one old die
43.	Eric Andersen	Denmark	green shirt cuff (one button)
44.	Brian Buczak	NYC, USA	two sieves, one German
45.	Paul Brach	Ca., USA	cowboy postcard of self
46.	Kari Miller	NYC., USA	plastic box of nails/tacks

24. List of object donors to *The House of Dust*.



25. The dial drawn on the floor with the *Gift Objects* placed on different quadrants. Location unknown.

26. Gift object sent by Charles Amirkanian.

28. Gift Object sent by Paul Brach.

27. Gift Object sent by Philip Corner.

29. Gift Object sent by Dr Klaus Groh.