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Men with a Pair of Scissors: Joe Brainard and John Ashbery

Rona Cran

Bill Berkson: When Poetry ...

Ted Berrigan: ... meets Painting...

BB: ...one begins to wonder ...

TB and BB (in unison): ... about Art!

*(Much laughter.)*¹

Joe Brainard and John Ashbery were friends. They both loved comic strips and the movies, getting stoned on hash brownies, and each other's work. Brainard described Ashbery as his favorite poet (though in classic Brainard fashion qualified this by also including Frank O'Hara, Ted Berrigan, Ron Padgett, Kenward Elmslie, and 'a lot of people too').² Brainard, Ashbery told me, was like no one he had ever met. Though different in form and medium, their work shares an emphasis on joy, as well as an impulse to embrace the accidental; and both approached their work as a combination of gestures, actions, perceptions, discussions and audience reactions. Natural collaborators, they worked together on several occasions and with varying degrees of formality, resulting in published work like *The Great Explosion Mystery* (in Brainard's *C Comics* No. 2, 1966) and *The Vermont Notebook* (1975), in which Brainard drew pictures 'for' Ashbery's words (emblematic of his love of giving his artworks away as gifts, a tendency Ashbery also shared). Their collaborative instincts, in keeping with the prevailing creative ethos shared by many New York School artists and writers, also resulted, during the 1970s, in a number of casually-produced collages that came about as the result of wine and dinner and conversation.³

This chapter provides the first study of the significance to art and literature of Brainard and Ashbery's creative, collaborative friendship. It is also the first scholarly treatment of Ashbery's visual collages, which he began making in the mid-1940s whilst studying at Harvard University and which he continued to make throughout his life.⁴ In particular, this chapter examines the critical role that Brainard played in the production of many of Ashbery's collages, positing him as a key collaborator with whom Ashbery continued to work even after his death. As intellectual interests in the intersections between

material, visual and literary culture continue to grow, alongside the flourishing critical debates around the New York Schools of poetry (not to mention the developing critical mythology around Brainard and Ashbery individually), it is crucial that the contribution of their affective collaborative practice to modern and contemporary literature and culture is emphasized, and that the significance of what I term Ashbery's 'Brainard collages' is explored. In considering the key equivalences in their outlooks and ideas, I suggest, in section one, that the commonalities between these two joyful, gentle artists, and the informal, below-the-radar work that they completed together, established a framework for collaboration that transcended Brainard's death and was embodied, ultimately, in the collages Ashbery made in the twenty-first century.

In the decades following Brainard's death in 1994, as I discuss in section two, Ashbery created collages that perform the role of a hypertextual interface between Brainard, the viewer and himself: affective spaces made up of a combination of Ashbery's own selections and fragments initially chosen by Brainard, brought together using a style suggestive of both of their work. In so doing, Ashbery (and, by proxy, Brainard) significantly expanded both the potentialities of the collage practice and the parameters of the collaborative activities for which the second generation New York School poets are well-known.⁵ Furthermore, on the understanding that collage itself is always a form of collaborative practice, Ashbery's 'Brainard collages' also transfigured the nature of portraiture. In creating a sequence of Brainard-esque collages using materials that Brainard himself had provided him with, he successfully continued his friend's lifelong process of non-traditional *self*-portraiture, as well as portraiture of others. Carter Ratcliff persuasively suggests that 'just as Brainard's Nancy pictures are about more than Nancy, so his pencil portraits of friends are not only about them. They are about the act of paying close, even obsessive attention to someone else'.⁶ Ashbery's collages pay a similar 'close, even obsessive attention' to Brainard. They are a meticulously crafted conjuration of his friend, whose presence in them seems so vigorous because he remains, to an extent, an active collaborator, pencil and pair of scissors in hand.

i.

Ashbery counted numerous artists amongst his friends. In 2013, the Loretta Howard Gallery put on an exhibition entitled *John Ashbery Collects: Poet Among Things*, which

invited viewers to experience the ‘living collage’ which is Ashbery’s house in Hudson, New York.⁷ Embellishing the gallery walls with trompe-l’oeil paintings of doorframes and windowsills, and even a grand piano, curators Adam Fitzgerald and Emily Skillings made public a version of Ashbery’s art-filled home, displaying pieces of vintage bric-a-brac, ceramic pots, a decoupage paperweight covered with postage stamps, sheet music, a flier of Sylvester the Cat speaking French, various well-thumbed books by Ronald Firbank, Henry James and Gertrude Stein, among others, and, of course, selected pieces from Ashbery’s art collection. To call this an art collection, however, is to mislabel it as something far more cold and pecuniary than it is – many of these artists were Ashbery’s personal friends, and the pieces themselves tokens of those friendships, from a lithograph by Willem de Kooning to a painting by Jane Freilicher. After the show, their work returned to his home in Hudson, taking up its place amongst the many other cherished objects that suggest Ashbery’s keen interest in his own past, including a small jade box that his grandparents brought back from their grand tour of Europe, a metal tray featuring a picture of ice skaters that was a gift from Kenneth Koch to mark the success of Ashbery’s poem ‘The Skaters’, and a bottle of Pee Cola that Brainard gave him and David Kermani (his husband) as a housewarming gift. The house itself is also full of Ashbery’s collage-making materials, including both newer and vintage items ranging from cut-out pictures of macarons to an old Parcheesi board, and in addition to highlighting the art-filled nature of Ashbery’s life, the Loretta Howard show also revealed how many artworks in his immediate environment either are collages or mimic collage techniques, including works by Joseph Cornell, Henry Darger, Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Anne Ryan, Pierre Martory, Trevor Winkfield, Tom Burckhardt, R.B. Kitaj and, of course, Joe Brainard.

Brainard must surely hold the record for textual and visual collaborative activities during the 1960s and 1970s: his conversational aesthetic both shaped and provided the imagery for numerous publications, from the cover and margins of poetry collections and little magazines to flyers advertising readings at the Poetry Project at St. Mark’s Church. He relished the informal and illuminating practice of connecting (or disconnecting) images and words, describing the process of working collaboratively with writers as both ‘fun’ and ‘arduous’, and as requiring a lot of compromises and a willingness ‘to totally fail and not be embarrassed by it’.⁸ In a journal entry written in 1969 he reflected that ‘most of his friends’ were poets. He was ‘especially good’ at “drawing for” words’, he wrote, before clarifying: ‘I don’t like that word “illustrating”’. In the same entry, he mused:

Doing cover designs and drawings for books and poems is something else entirely. This I love doing. And I do it very well. I know how to work with or against words in a good way. I don't think I ever fall into the 'elegant' trap. Or the 'arty' trap. (Too beautiful.) (For the coffee table.) (Etc.) *There is always something slightly unprofessional about my graphic work. Which is probably the best thing about it.*⁹ (italics added).

For Brainard, clearly, there was something troubling or off-putting about artworks (and viewers) that sought visual perfection, in the traditional sense, or that took themselves too seriously. The chance to be 'unprofessional', and to experiment, was important. His attitude in this sense was very much of a piece with the New York City milieu in which he produced most of his work. Many second generation New York School artists and writers were less concerned with ambitions of aesthetic perfection than with suggesting that mistakes or inconsistencies were best understood as evidence of progress and creative growth – and, indeed, evidence of the artists' presence or partnership in (rather than *behind*) the work. In many cases, errors were held in special admiration, emblematic of Susan Sontag's suggestion that a work's vitality lies in its attitude to error. As she writes in 'Against Interpretation' (1966), 'perhaps the way one tells how alive a particular art form is, is by the latitude it gives for making mistakes in it, and still being good'.¹⁰ For Brainard, as Jenni Quilter suggests, 'error is seen as a trace of development rather than an imperfection', as well as being a key part of his anti-capitalist outlook.¹¹ For his friend and fellow 'Tulsa kid' Ron Padgett, unintended, even avoidable, errors were a source of delight. In his introduction to Granary Books' 2012 facsimile of his 1967 collaboration with Ted Berrigan and Brainard, *Bean Spasms*, Padgett recalls publisher Lita Hornick leaving the printing of the book to a 'printer's representative she had happened onto', for whom 'quality was not a consideration'.¹² As a result, the finished text featured irregular inking and was punctuated with typographical errors. Hornick was uninterested in the commercial aspects of publishing and had a policy never to reprint anything, so the errors and irregularities remained – and Padgett 'loved it'. This assertion is typical of the creative attitudes of an informal collective whose primary concern, when collaborating, was what poet Larry Fagin called 'the sheer joy of the activity. Thumbing your nose at formality'.¹³

Elsewhere in his diary in 1969, Brainard wrote that he felt 'pretty much off art for art's sake', expressing surprise that 'there are that many people left who still love art that much. I feel something much lighter in the air. Fun. No bullshit'.¹⁴ To his eye and imagination, even

the smallest, most quotidian detail could spark a wealth of new connections. Speaking to Anne Waldman, he asserted:

The material does it all. You have a figure and a flower and you add a cityscape and it makes the story. You have control if you want to take it but that's something I never wanted to do much. I mean if a story came out I'd sort of follow it, but I never want to read or make a story deliberately.¹⁵

Ashbery, too, will hint at a narrative (in both his poems and his collages), but shies away from making stories deliberately: 'When one goes at ideas directly', he says, 'with hammer and tongs as it were, ideas tend to elude one in a poem. I think they only come back when one pretends not to be paying attention to one, like a cat that will rub against your leg'.¹⁶ Neither offers explanations or explications. Instead, in Brainard's visual art, and in Ashbery's poetry and art, we are repeatedly offered multiple sets of relations among the presented elements, and a charming yet iconoclastic impulse to find an alternative interpretation of what it means to be avant-garde. Ashbery's poetry has always subverted readerly expectations of what poetry should be (or should reveal), demanding that his readers find ways of understanding his work other than straightforward or traditional critical analysis, eschewing New Critical-style 'symbol-hunting'.¹⁷ Ashbery seems to ask that the reader of his work give precedence to the same principle to which he adheres as a writer, and to which Brainard adhered as an artist – namely, to value the *processes* of reading or looking over any definitive answers that the poetry or artwork may or may not yield. Interviewing Ashbery in 1981, Alfred Poulin Jr. commented on the resemblances between his work and 'collage painting', remarking that 'one is not prepared for the kinds of juxtapositions that occur in many of the poems'. Ashbery replied by pointing out: 'I don't think one is prepared for juxtapositions in general is one? And yet one is constantly being faced with them'.¹⁸ His reply is suggestive of his desire, and, indeed, his ability, to account for the environment out of which his poems emerged, as well as to constantly renew the form ('to stretch poetry rather than to level it'), ambitions that the collage practice has enabled across the arts for more than a century.¹⁹

Brainard's cover of the *ARTnews* Annual 34 in 1968 (fig. 1) which Ashbery co-edited alongside Thomas Hess, explores a similar desire to 'stretch' art, and to account for it in an egalitarian way. For the cover, Brainard re-envisioned sixteen icons from the history of art as Nancy, Ernie Bushmiller's cartoon heroine: he refigured Nancy as Duchamp's *Nude Descending the Staircase*, as Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, as Rembrandt's observers of a public autopsy, as emerging out of a Jackson Pollock painting, emerging out of Carlo Carrà's

Interventionist Manifesto, and so on. Brainard's cover marries the history of art with an iconoclastic impulse to take it apart, highbrow culture with the everyday, calling into question the hierarchies of iconography. As Brian Glavey observes in *The Wallflower Avant-Garde*, 'the cover serves as a picture-perfect illustration of Ashbery's shy take on the avant-garde, literally transforming the history of Western art into a playground for a bunch of nancies'.²⁰ There is a gleeful recklessness to this subversive transformation which speaks to Ashbery's essay on 'The Invisible Avant-Garde', contained within the 1968 Annual, in which he praises the beauty of 'reckless things', and argues that 'recklessness is what makes experimental art beautiful, just as religions are beautiful because of the strong possibility that they are founded on nothing'.²¹ Both the *ARTnews* cover and Ashbery's poetry succeed in situating themselves as simultaneously imbricated with and at a remove from the allusions that inspire them, embodying Donald Revell's suggestion 'that the imagination is not an inward quality in search of expression, but, rather, an event that occurs when perception contacts the world with the force of desire in the form of words or paint or sounds'.²²

This buoyant, responsive, non-serious outlook is evident throughout Brainard's work, in which Ashbery (arguing that 'everything will be okay if we just look at it, accept it and let it be itself') discovered 'Joy. Sobriety. Nutty poetry'.²³ This discovery applies equally to Ashbery's own poetry and collages, which (in keeping with the New York School ethos) refuse to explain themselves, and are also full of joy, sobriety, and nutty poetry. It applies, too, to Brainard and Ashbery's semi-collaborative publication *The Vermont Notebook* (1975), a book of prose poems by Ashbery with related drawings by Brainard. Nick Sturm hilariously but astutely suggests *The Vermont Notebook* resembles what might happen if 'Charlotte Gainsbourg and Lena Dunham made a movie, or if Bruce Springsteen and Prince made an album'.²⁴ *The Vermont Notebook* was published in 1975 but was overshadowed by the stunning success of Ashbery's collection *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, which was also published that year, and which won the Pulitzer, the National Book Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award. The *Notebook* is a highly entertaining formal experiment. Partly written on a bus, it is both of and about its environment, a twentieth-century urban pastoral that calls attention to the umbrous corners of ordinary and artistic life in capitalist America. It makes extensive use of lists, in a nod partly to Whitman and partly to Proust, but also as a way of separating out individual fragments while at the same time bringing each element together to form a new whole – as in traditional visual collage. It also collages found texts, recycles old poems (by Ashbery), blends intellect with kitsch, mixes homoeroticism with

consumerist impulses (and attendant anxieties), and presents, throughout, multi-faceted intersections between word and image. Critics productively dispute the nature of the relationship between the latter – are they adjacent? Are they facing? – as well as the nature of the text itself, which is partly a ‘riff on the American travelogue’ and partly a ‘wastebasket for all the extraneous poetic matter ruled out by its famed contemporary’ (*Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*).²⁵

Of course, the sheer variability and illogicality of the text enables multiple readings to exist simultaneously. Throughout it, Brainard’s deadpan drawings exuberantly interrupt Ashbery’s prose poetry, sometimes obliquely, sometimes in reference to it, but in ceaseless interplay. The cumulative effect of Brainard’s drawings and Ashbery’s text is the brilliant encapsulation of poet Bill Berkson’s observation that ‘no one knows for certain when poetry or painting began or whether originally both were parts of some elaborate dance event’.²⁶ Ashbery and Brainard produced the text and images separately, and in sequence: Brainard produced his drawings in response to Ashbery’s writing by ‘trying to relate at certain points but in factual ways not emotional ways’, as he told Anne Waldman.²⁷ In the resulting *Notebook* the poetry and the drawings seem to move both with and against each other, as in ‘some elaborate dance event’ (or even dance-off). While the *Notebook* is not a straightforward or ‘true’ collaboration, given the separateness with which the images and text were produced, it indicates, nevertheless, Fagin’s conception of the ‘sheer joy of the activity’ of collaborating – a joy, the *Notebook* suggests, that can be experienced, or created, even if the collaboration takes place with the collaborators at a temporal and physical remove from one another. In this sense, it can be read as an early indicator of the ‘stretched’ nature of the collaborative impulse informing Ashbery’s twenty-first-century ‘Brainard collages’.

The ‘sheer joy of the activity’ can be read another way, too: as an extension out of the writer and activist Paul Goodman’s conception of the purpose of ‘integrated art’, which had been a key influence on New York School creativity ever since Frank O’Hara read Goodman’s essay in the early 1950s. Goodman suggests that

[a]n aim, one might almost say the chief aim, of integrated art is to heighten the everyday; to bathe the world in such a light of imagination and criticism that the persons who are living in it without meaning or feeling suddenly find that it is meaningful and exciting to live in it.²⁸

For both Ashbery and Brainard, joyful art and/or writing always gives rise to meaning and excitement, arising from a spirit of generosity akin to the desire to choose the perfect gift for someone; from an effort, in other words, to give readers or viewers as much pleasure as possible. Both gesture away from the traditional Maussian model of gift-exchange, predicated on receiving something in return, to reveal a mode of appreciation that suggests instead that the gift is not always vexed. Kenward Elmslie wrote that Brainard elevated ‘gift-giving to a noble art’, and Padgett expanded on this to say that he ‘was a superb gift-giver—not because his gifts were expensive, but because they were just right for you’.²⁹ This partly explains the success of Brainard’s brilliant catalogue-memoir, *I Remember* (1970-1975), in that the memories he lists transcend their personal moment and are offered up as experiences that almost anyone could share (‘I remember loving raw biscuit dough’; ‘I remember daydreams of saving someone from drowning and being a hero’; ‘I remember (visually) socks on the floor, tossed after a day of wear. They always look so comfortable there’).³⁰ Nathan Kernan, reviewing the 2001 Brainard retrospective at the Berkeley Art Museum, also called attention to his gift-giving capacities. ‘Brainard’s art is profoundly generous’, Kernan wrote, ‘and his concern is often simply to give the viewer more of whatever would offer the most visual pleasure [...] he seemed to make each work a new beginning, and a visual gift to be enjoyed on its own intrinsic merits’.³¹ Brainard’s devotion to fully-realised art (contingency and productive error notwithstanding) is particularly evident in the dedication he showed toward painting a series of beautiful portraits of Elmslie’s white whippet, Whippoorwill. Writing to Fairfield Porter in 1973, he discussed how rewarding it felt to learn ‘(inch by inch) Whippoorwill’s anatomy so totally unscientifically [...] I feel that were I to dissect him there would be no surprises’.³² The resulting paintings – gifts for Elmslie – perfectly capture Whippoorwill’s generic, sinewy ‘whippet-ness’ as well as his individual character, the rendering of his large, dark eyes and coy physicality suggesting a shyness coupled with a touching ability to let his guard down given the right circumstances (a description that also reflects Brainard’s own personality).

This generosity, sincerity and concern with visual pleasure can be applied, too, to Ashbery’s collages, as I will discuss – and while his poetry doesn’t always emphasise *visual* pleasure or experience, Ashbery nevertheless offers it up to his readers as an opportunity for communicative and nourishing engagement. He took issue with the suggestion that his poetry fails, on some level, to communicate with his readers, arguing that his ‘intention is to communicate’, and that ‘a poem that communicates something that’s already known by the

reader is not really communicating anything to him and in fact shows a lack of respect for him'.³³ As he affirmed in an interview with Travis Nichols, with regard to reading his work, 'any way in should be taken'. His poetry is written in order 'to satisfy the particular hunger that poetry and only poetry can supply, that kind of satisfying meal, as it were'.³⁴ In this sense, Ashbery's poetry is intended as a form of sustenance: he writes with the idea of satisfying a particular need – a need that is not his own. Like Brainard, he resists the autonomy of modernism in order to try to involve readers as directly and authentically as possible.

Brainard and Ashbery's gift-giving desires mark them out as part of a creative lineage that includes two of their heroes, Frank O'Hara and Joseph Cornell, many of whose works were 'for' someone else, in keeping with what Cornell referred to as the 'necessity of approaching own work in a spontaneous spirit of giving first' [sic].³⁵ Like Cornell and O'Hara, much of whose work is affectively crafted out of everyday fragments lifted from the environment in which they lived, Ashbery and Brainard both exemplify an appreciation for the passing on and sharing of ordinary yet beautiful things, and a zest for the chance accrual of meaning that occurs when old objects find new homes. When Ashbery turned seriously to the art of collage in the twenty-first century, it was to extend and elaborate on the possibilities offered by collaborative, generous art. In so doing, he revived a sustained, decades-long gift exchange between himself and Brainard, which had begun in New York City in the 1960s, had developed in Vermont in the 1970s and which continued in Hudson, long after Brainard's death.

ii.

John Ashbery made his professional debut as an artist in 2008, exhibiting a collection of collages at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery on 5th Avenue in New York City. The exhibition was Ashbery's first public show, but he had been making collages for decades, and as John Yau observed, if 'you didn't suspect that [Ashbery] might be a man with a pair of scissors [...] then you probably haven't read a single thing he has written'.³⁶ A recently-discovered collage poem, entitled 'controls', dated 20 October 1952 and made in collaboration with James Schuyler, indicates an earlier interest in the relationship between poetry and the collage process than has previously been established. This interest was developed, sustained and experimented with in various ways throughout Ashbery's career, and is evident in much

of his fragmentary, accumulative poetry, from *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962) onwards. Like writers as diverse as Nelson Algren, William Burroughs, Gay Talese, and David Bowie, Ashbery also made extensive but private use of collage as a way of thinking through ideas. It ‘stimulate[d]’ his writing, he said: ‘there’s no fear of having my energy drained away’.³⁷ He was, as Yau suggests, an ‘enthusiast who gets excited by all manner of things, from the loftiest realms of high culture to the weirdest currents of popular culture’, and these collages, in which such lofty realms and weird currents are often simultaneously visible, are emblematic of the creative processes by which they have been made.³⁸ In other words, to paraphrase what Ashbery said of Frank O’Hara’s poetry, they are chronicles of the creative acts that produce them.³⁹ They draw attention to the elements that make up a life – and at least until recently, whether or not they would ever be seen by anyone else was largely irrelevant (unlike his poetry).

In keeping with Brainard’s aesthetic, Ashbery’s collages permit the presentation of sophisticated ideas that succeed in resisting grandeur. Visually, they are accessible and democratic, hinting at secrets while never retreating into obscurity. They are ludic and hypnotic, and in fact (like Brainard’s collages) Ashbery’s 1957 assessment of Gertrude Stein’s *Stanzas in Meditation* could easily have been written about them:

Like people, they sometimes make no sense and sometimes make perfect sense; or they stop short in the middle of a sentence and wander away, leaving us alone for awhile in the physical world, that collection of thoughts, flowers, weather, and proper names. And, just as with people, there is no real escape from them: one feels that if one were to close the book one would shortly re-encounter the *Stanzas* in life, under another guise.⁴⁰

Ashbery’s collages are (or do) all of these things. They provoke psychic meandering, and are simultaneously mementos of a life and compelling works of art in their own right, enabling Ashbery to explore ‘the fated nature of the encounter’ with which he was always fascinated.⁴¹ The encounter which the collages primarily explore is that with Joe Brainard, to whose work the above excerpt can also be meaningfully applied. Featuring cartoon figures, knowing jokes about art, camp imagery, visual puns, and board-games, Ashbery’s collages deliberately call attention to the recognisable specifics of Brainard’s body of work.

In addition to two collages dating back to the late 1940s, made when Ashbery was a student at Harvard, the 2008 exhibition also included a number of works dating from the

1970s – some of which were lost for a time, and then, years later, re-discovered in the Hudson house. These 1970s collages had been made in Vermont, at Kenward Elmslie's house, where Brainard used to spend his summers, and where Ashbery himself (and many other New York School poets and artists) would pay extended visits. In keeping with the collaborative ethos of those varied artists and writers, collage-making at Elmslie's house often occurred collectively and companionably, not to mention impulsively: 'after dinner and a certain amount of wine', Ashbery recalled, 'we would sit around the table, cutting up old magazines and splicing them back together for our own amusement'.⁴² This kind of collaboration was less about making art or poetry than it was about connecting or reconnecting with friends. The collages were made for the sake of making them, and for their beauty or humour, with their creators never 'thinking anyone else would see them or be interested'.⁴³ They were typical, in this sense, of Brainard and Ashbery's interest in creating art that was inherently valuable *as art* and on its own terms, but that resisted monetization, as well as being emblematic of the spirit of fun with which they both infused their work.

Ashbery made his collages primarily 'using postcards, whose sense of the picturesque can be skewed'.⁴⁴ This was a creative approach that Brainard initially inspired and then enthusiastically endorsed and encouraged in Ashbery, over a period of many years, regularly sending him 'either postcards or other paper souvenirs, often with an injunction to use them in collages'.⁴⁵ It is also of a piece with the ecology of Ashbery's poetics, which is partly based around the recycling of materials and an interest in the relationship between commodities and waste. When the prospect of an exhibition of his work first arose, Ashbery 'went through shoeboxes of old postcards and found an envelope filled with materials cut out and collected by Joe', which he had sent him for one of his birthdays in the early 1990s.⁴⁶ The 2008 exhibition, as well as subsequent shows at Tibor de Nagy in 2011, 2015, and 2016-17, featured new, original collages by Ashbery that included some of these materials, several of which were dedicated to or made 'for' Joe Brainard. In the most recent exhibition, the gallery also included a vitrine designed to shed further light on Ashbery's creative processes. In addition to a small pair of ornate scissors and a photograph of Ashbery sitting by a window at work on the collages, the vitrine included some of the Brainard material, along with a manila envelope dated 28 November 1983 and a handwritten letter from him (fig. 2):⁴⁷

'Dear John,

Actually, I'm finding it rather hard (a heavy trip) going back through all this stuff again.* Then too, most of what I have seems to have more to do with the color and texture and character of paper, as opposed to imagery, which I expect you'd be more interested in. Correct me if I'm wrong. At any rate – if this small sampling is of any use to you, let me know, and more will follow.

Love,

Joe

*But anything for you!'

The tone of this letter is subtly suggestive of the melancholy and frustration that Brainard was experiencing personally in late 1983, stemming from a combination of grief following the death of Ted Berrigan at the age of just 49 in July of that year, a sense of being out of step with his friends, many of whom worked full time, and an unspecified feeling that this period was 'a very frustrating time in life' for him.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Brainard's letter seems to indicate, in his nostalgia for a lost era of creativity and collaboration, that the period in question – those evenings in the 1970s around Elmslie's dining table – was one of joy; joy that, in the present circumstances in which the letter was written, had since dissipated. By 1983 Brainard was producing less and less art, and he would soon stop making it entirely, choosing to spend the last years of his life 'consecrating his time to his two favorite hobbies: smoking and reading Victorian novels' (he died 25 May 1994 at the age of 52).⁴⁹ For Ashbery, perhaps sensing the sorrow and creative frustrations of his friend and former collaborator, this letter (or at least the later rediscovery of it) seems to have marked the beginning of an ambition to carry on Brainard's work, both on his behalf, and in collaboration with him. In its reminder of Brainard's love of colour, texture, and 'character of paper', the artist's letter invites the poet to consider these things instead of, or alongside, poetic imagery.

In the exhibition catalogue that accompanied his 2008 show, Ashbery described the experience of looking at the 'coloful *disjecta membra*' that Brainard had sent him and that he had subsequently transformed into miniature works of art entirely in keeping with Brainard's own collages:

I can almost feel the warmth of his amused, affectionate gaze, and hear his apologetic stammer as he tactfully pointed out the obvious places where [the fragments] belonged. So these fragments are really about him, and record the atmosphere of a wonderful friendship that lasted far too short a time.⁵⁰

In addition to combining with his own selections those fragments selected for and sent to him by the living Brainard, Ashbery's collages also embody their shared impulses and inspirations: consciously Brainard-esque objects such as images of birds and children, superheroes and cities, Renaissance figures and cartoons encounter each other in media ranging from postcards to board games to simple scraps of paper. Some collages are dedicated to Brainard. *Chutes and Ladders (for Joe Brainard)* (Fig. 3), for example, features an extensive collection of images associated with Brainard, from pansies to children's illustrations to cartoons, pasted onto a copy of an old chutes and ladders board game, on which both chutes and ladders are rendered markedly unobtrusive by the pasted images. The vicissitudes of the game – climbing upwards before being forced to slip back down again – are subordinated to imagery that hints at meaningful sets of relations among the presented elements, an important feature of both Brainard and Ashbery's work. An image of two little boys posing together with a bunch of pink flowers at the bottom of the collage, for example, finds an echo in a much smaller drawing of two men wearing green berets and clinking beer glasses in the top left corner, diminished, perhaps, by experience. Other images, such as 'the naughty boy', are doubled or repeated, while still others find resonances across the board: cartoon monsters and a topless mermaid 'siren' again suggest experience meeting innocence, a further echo of the chutes among the ladders. *The Checkered Game of Life – for Joe Brainard* (2016) (fig. 4) riffs on a similar premise, this time using a Chinese checkers board. Once again, images of cartoons and children are superimposed onto the board game (the dragons around the edge remain prominent), along with images of sailing ships, a hand-drawn image of a garden gate (reminiscent of the world of L. M. Montgomery), a picture of some net curtains, and a picture of oak leaves and acorns. Once again there are suggestions of innocence and experience here, but also of the audacity of travel and the vicissitudes of life (a 'checkered game'). Both of these collages evoke and embody ideas seen in several of Brainard's 1970s collages, such as *Carte Postale* (1978) (fig. 5), which features birds, leaves, a sun, and a postage stamp; *Untitled* (1975) (fig. 6), which features a motor vehicle in front of a Holiday Inn sign, beneath a series of crescent moons and black and white stars; or *Untitled (A Study Craft)* (1975) (fig. 7), in which a sailing ship presides over a checked and lined page

(it looks like it may have been ripped from an arithmetic book), above a semi-obscured fish and a trailing piece of seaweed.

Other collages, such as *Popeye Steps Out – for Joe Brainard* (2016) (fig. 8) further evoke Brainard as a collaborator, as well as a dedicatee. Brainard's most famous works – the Nancy series and his pansy paintings – are both inside jokes, riffing on pejorative terms for gay men. Ashbery enables Brainard's subversive, sometimes self-deprecating, humour to continue, often selecting queer or camp images from the fragments Brainard sent to him and recycling them by placing them prominently in the collages alongside figures more closely associated with Ashbery himself, such as Popeye. As Dan Chiasson has noted, Brainard's 'primary genius was to give long-sought relief from overbearing works of art, pieces of writing, and people [...] He said he sought "the real", associating reality with whatever seemed least likely to make it into a painting or collage'.⁵¹ Ashbery's collages take a similar approach – they are biographical as well as autobiographical, filled (like his house) with cherished objects that each tell a story, clues to real worlds as well as to imagined ones.

Ashbery also exhibited selected collages that he had made during the 1970s, when Brainard was still alive. By so doing, he revived some of Brainard's lifelong concerns with ideas of cultural capital, the policing of public discourse, and the subjective nature of what constituted the underground, or the unofficial (as well as Brainard's own wariness, discussed below, of the institutionalization of his own work). The insouciant 1972 collage, *Diffusion of Knowledge*, for example, features two colourful All-American comic-book heroes (The Fighting American and The Guardian) collaged onto a postcard of the Smithsonian in Washington D.C., leaving it deliberately unclear if they are energetically defending the august institution or attacking it. The collage also speaks to Brainard's emphasis on the value of error in art, featuring some overlapping of color in the background, where during the printing process the registration of the different color plates went out of sync. David Kermani confirmed that the collage should have been considered a 'reject' because of this – but, in Ashbery's eyes, was ultimately deemed more valuable because of it.⁵²

Witty, intelligent, deceptively simple, irreverent, and charming, Ashbery's collages are so closely related to the work Brainard produced during his life that he could almost have made them himself. They are full of the same generosity and compassion with which Ashbery characterized Brainard: 'looking at his pictures and recognizing their references and modest autobiographical aspirations would somehow make you a nicer person without realizing it and having to be grateful'.⁵³ And yet they are never derivative. Brainard's creative

presence is acknowledged, credited and foregrounded, rather than disguised, and in keeping with his lifelong sense of heightened self-awareness, he seems as present in the process of making the collages as he is in the finished creations. In making the collages, Ashbery puts himself ‘back in the place where’, as he wrote in his piece for the Joe Brainard retrospective, he ‘always wanted to be, the delicious chromatic center of the Parcheesi board’.⁵⁴

Ashbery’s collages go beyond tribute or memorialization, in their effort to record and sustain not just a ‘wonderful friendship’, but an extraordinary career (Brainard’s) that is always at risk of seeming marginal because it was so wide-ranging. Perhaps, indeed, Ashbery wished to claim a degree of Brainard’s marginality for himself, and to retreat from the dominant culture which increasingly embraced his poetry and held him up as a great old man of letters. The collages enact a collaboration with Brainard that is ongoing, transcending both time and Brainard’s mortality. Ashbery’s collages – each one a communal gesture – reach out to Brainard’s delicate, intelligent, labour-intensive artwork (he would create thousands of tiny works for a single show, or spend months collaging individual blades of paper ‘grass’), which requires engagement from and exchange with the viewer. They illuminate the creative, collaborative relationship that existed between the two, and shed new light on their shared aesthetic – a suggestive, screwball aesthetic characterized by inventiveness, eclecticism, and lightness of touch, that seeks connections and troubles boundaries, and that fuses the written word with the visual image in a variety of ways. Ashbery’s collages work to resist the finality of Brainard’s premature death, which in spite of the increased attention paid to him critically can never be mitigated by academic books or institutional archives; however well-intentioned, these serve only to emphasise the conclusiveness of Brainard’s passing. As Padgett recalls, and as Ashbery has noted elsewhere, during his life Brainard himself was at pains to ensure that his work was not widely known, working to resist his institutionalization: ‘seeing his work placed in an institutional archive was perhaps too much like having his spirit put in a bottle. Too final’.⁵⁵ Brainard, who (as previously noted) ‘liked drawing “for” words’, always distanced himself from the seriousness and machismo of the New York art scene, taking ‘extraordinary pains for us not to know about his art’.⁵⁶ Hating the idea of any of his works becoming ‘a Joe Brainard’, he took seriously Ashbery’s observation (made in the *ARTnews* Annual for which he provided the cover) that ‘artists are no fun once they have been discovered’, and certainly seems to have concurred with his view that a ‘true Avant-Garde’ must exist in a state of unconsolidated cultural instability.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, while Ashbery’s collages by their very nature – mostly small, and still reasonably obscure – retain

that sense of unconsolidated cultural instability, they are each a step in the direction of the wider revelation of Brainard's art: they urge whoever views them to also discover Joe Brainard. Taking up his position in a lineage of gift-giving collagists, beginning with Joseph Cornell, Ashbery's gift to his viewers is Brainard himself.

Ashbery was often interested, in writing his poetry, in the notion of absent origins and how to depict or evoke them. He worked to discover what we are missing. His use of ellipses, missing words, swift transitions, disjunctive syntax, partial erasure and illogical constructions often serves to indicate present absences in his work, which exist centrally if elusively. With regard to his long poem 'Litany' (*As We Know* (1979)), which is presented as two simultaneous but independent monologues formatted in columns, Ashbery said that his intention was to 'direct the reader's attention to the white space between the columns'.⁵⁸ 'They Dream Only Of America', from *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962), moves rapidly between a host of collaged identities, suggestive of a search for an elusive center. In 'Fantasia on *The Nut-Brown Maid*', from *Houseboat Days* (1977), the poem's speaker describes

... the luxury of

Just being, not alive but being, at the center,

The perfumed, patterned center.⁵⁹

As John Keeling argues, Ashbery demonstrated that he was 'open to the interstices that keep alive the otherness of experience in order to cultivate that which is living, mysterious, and ongoing', whether or not we can see it.⁶⁰ His poetry repeatedly emphasizes the importance of polyphonic, polyvisual experience, warning against the comfort and ease of the singular perspective (just as many of the collaborative artists and poets associated with the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church disavowed the singular art object). As he said to Poulin Jr. in 1981, many of his poems are 'about the experience of experience [...] the way a happening or experience filters through to me'.⁶¹ His collages, then, can be viewed as the experience of his experiences with Brainard – experiences which, like Brainard's memories in *I Remember*, transcend their personal moment and are offered up for sharing. Brainard lives, mysteriously, at their center, a radical presence that is 'not alive but being'.

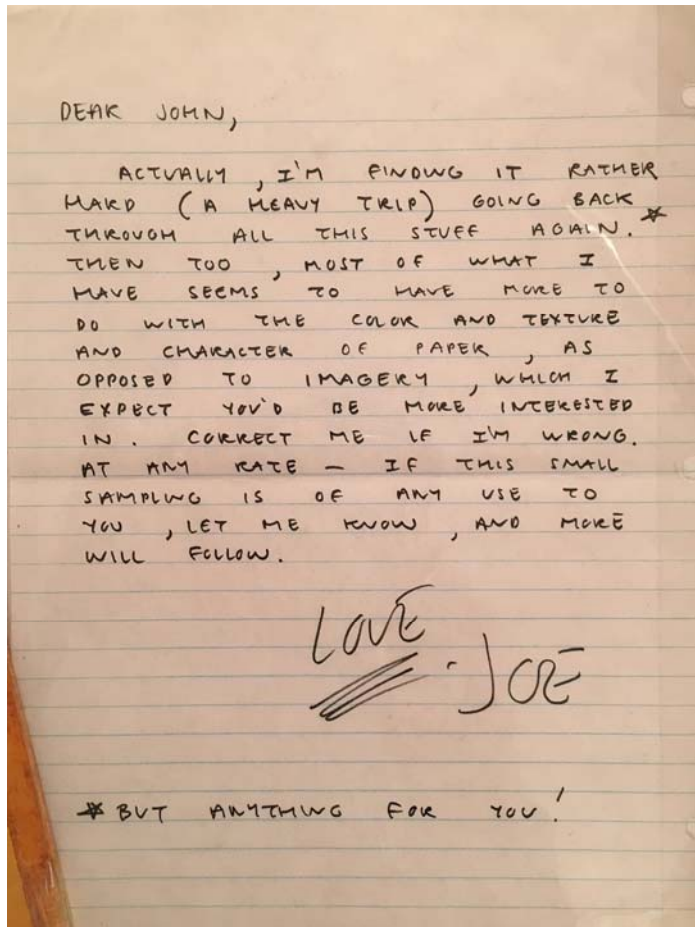
Ashbery's collages – mercurial synchronies emerging out of an unfolding oeuvre – suggest the possibility of Brainard's continuing existence, less as an artefact or dedicatee than as a collaborator. Thomas Brockelman's suggestion that 'collage attempts to embody a kind of immediate presence beyond the necessity of representation' is helpful here, as is Rosalind

Krauss's conception of collage as a system that 'inaugurates a play of differences which is both about and sustained by an absent origin'.⁶² If we view Brainard as that 'immediate' (but not directly *represented*) presence, and, indeed, as the 'absent origin' of many of Ashbery's collages, it becomes clear that, both formally and theoretically, Brainard is key to the collages. Simultaneously present and absent, his position in the collages could be understood as the kind of 'third voice' that collaboration often produces, identified and used by collagists and collaborators from T. S. Eliot to William Burroughs to Larry Fagin and beyond.⁶³ The collages seem to enable us to hear the conversations that took place between Brainard and Ashbery back in Vermont, after dinner, in the summers of the 1970s – goofy chatter that calls to mind Frank O'Hara's idea of poetry being between two people rather than two pages. Un-serious, as yet culturally unconsolidated, Brainard-and-yet-not-Brainard, they evoke the kind of affective meandering that Ashbery identified in Stein:

the feeling of time passing, of things happening, of a 'plot', though it would be difficult to say precisely what is going on. Sometimes the story has the logic of a dream [...] while at other times it becomes startlingly clear for a moment, as though a change in the wind had suddenly enabled us to hear a conversation that was taking place some distance away.⁶⁴



Figure 1. Joe Brainard, cover for *ARTnews* Annual 34, 1968. Reprinted by permission of the Estate of Joe Brainard and courtesy of Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.



DEAR JOHN,

ACTUALLY, I'M FINDING IT RATHER
HARD (A HEAVY TRIP) GOING BACK
THROUGH ALL THIS STUFF AGAIN. *
THEN TOO, MOST OF WHAT I
HAVE SEEMS TO HAVE MORE TO
DO WITH THE COLOR AND TEXTURE
AND CHARACTER OF PAPER, AS
OPPOSED TO IMAGERY, WHICH I
EXPECT YOU'D BE MORE INTERESTED
IN. CORRECT ME IF I'M WRONG.
AT ANY RATE — IF THIS SMALL
SAMPLING IS OF ANY USE TO
YOU, LET ME KNOW, AND MORE
WILL FOLLOW.

Love
JOE

*BUT ANYTHING FOR YOU!

Figure 2: Undated letter from Joe Brainard to John Ashbery (postmarked 28 November 1983).
Courtesy Estate of the Artist and Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

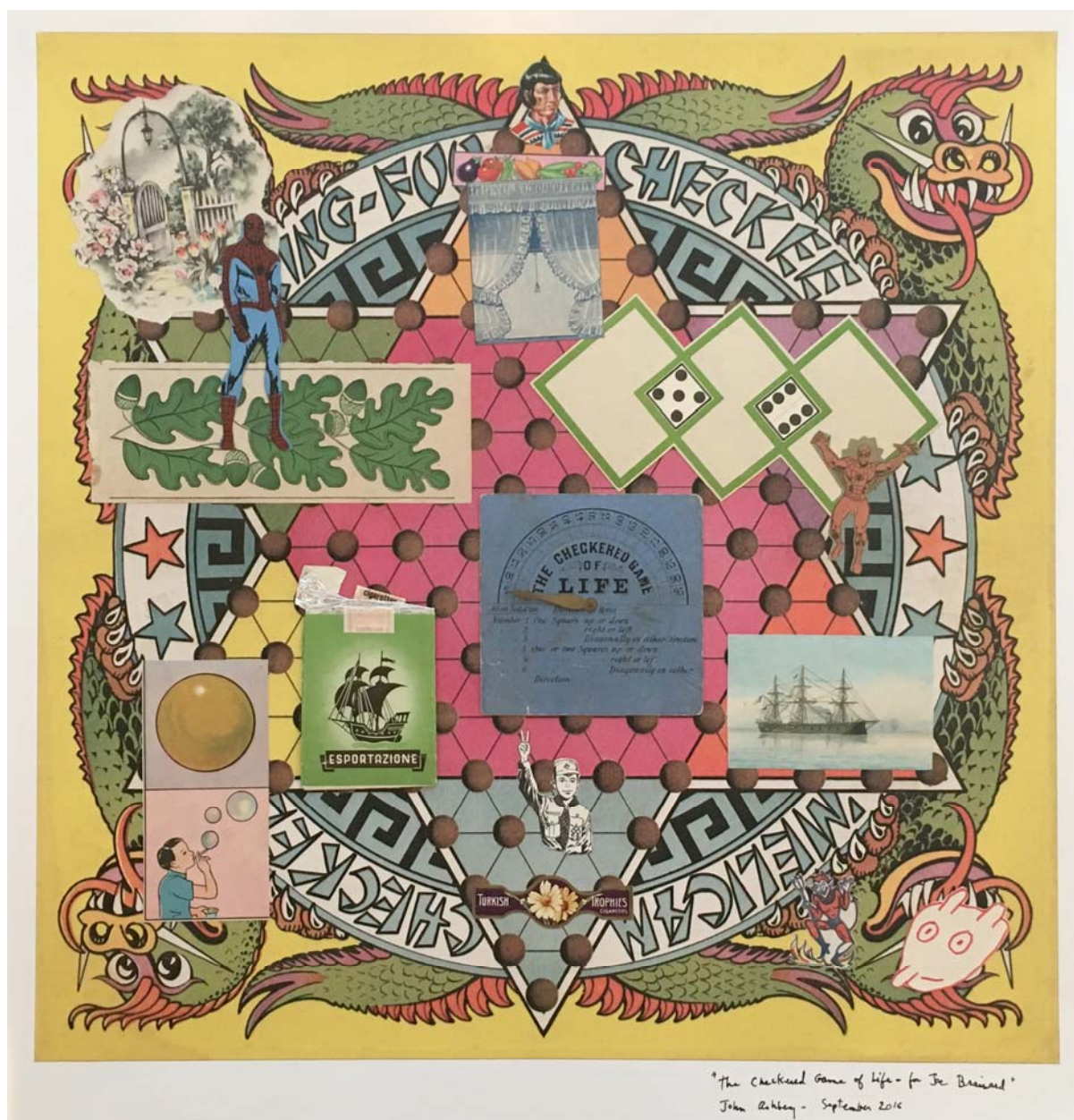


Figure 4. John Ashbery. *The Checkered Game of Life – for Joe Brainard*. 2016. Collage. Courtesy Estate of the Artist and Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.



Figure 5. Joe Brainard. *Carte Postale*. 1978. Collage. Reprinted by permission of the Estate of Joe Brainard and courtesy of Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.



Figure 6. Joe Brainard. *Untitled*. 1975. Collage. Reprinted by permission of the Estate of Joe Brainard and courtesy of Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

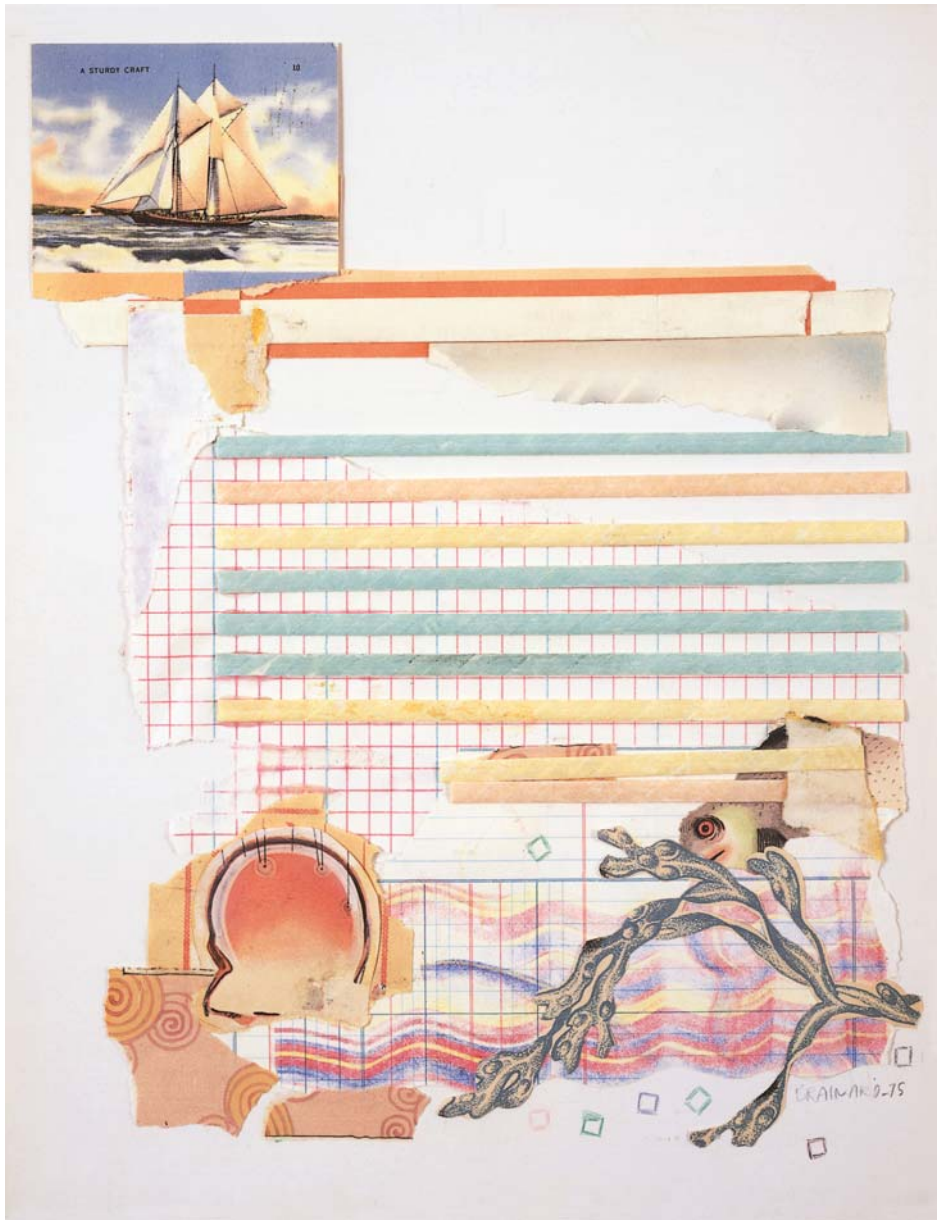


Figure 7. Joe Brainard. *Untitled (A Sturdy Craft)*. 1975. Collage. Reprinted by permission of the Estate of Joe Brainard and courtesy of Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

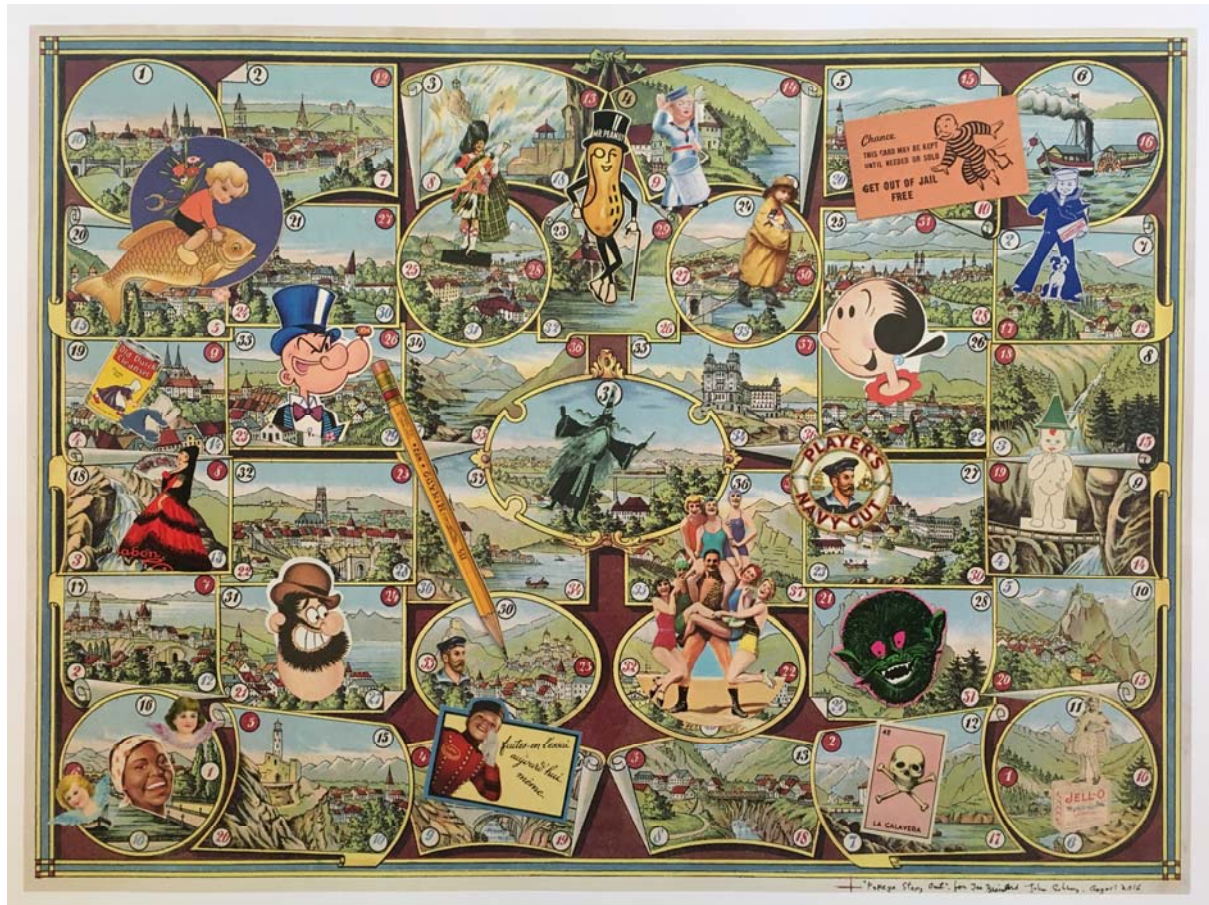


Figure 8. John Ashbery. *Popeye Steps Out – for Joe Brainard*. 2016. Collage. Courtesy Estate of the Artist and Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.



Figure 9. John Ashbery. *Diffusion of Knowledge*. 1972. Collage. Courtesy Estate of the Artist and Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

Notes

¹ Bill Berkson and Ted Berrigan, 'a cross-country telephone conversation late one night in the early 1980s', quoted in Bill Berkson, Foreword to Jenni Quilter, *Neon in Daylight: New York School Painters and Poets* (New York: Rizzoli, 2014), pp. 8-10.

² Brainard, interview with Tim Duglos, 26 September 1977, in Joe Brainard, *The Collected Writings of Joe Brainard*, ed. Ron Padgett (Library of America, 2012), p. 504. Conversation with the author, April 2017.

³ Many of Ashbery's postcard collages from the 1970s are held by the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York City but have not yet been exhibited. Brainard, like many of his New York School friends, was also an enthusiastic post-card sender, often sending several copies of the same postcard to the same person, inscribing different comedic messages and observations on the back.

⁴ Holland Cotter and John Yau have both written excellent pieces on Ashbery's collages in the *New York Times* and the *Brooklyn Rail*. See Bibliography.

⁵ For the numerous writers and artists affiliated with the New York Schools, the act of collaboration provided a means of affirming personal and poetic connections with one another, with the focus primarily on the companionable nature of writing or making art collectively. The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery provided an overlapping space of production and practice, as well as a locus of collaborative solidarity for the emerging second generation of New York School poets and artists. As this informal group of writers and artists with shared interests, outlooks, and backgrounds worked to move beyond the primacy of the singular art object, they produced numerous collaborative books, and hundreds of collaborative poems and artworks, as the result of frequent poetry partnerships, poet-artist partnerships, anonymised production of collaborative books,

mass writing events, and, underpinning it all, close friendships. These works, and the processes that produced them, demonstrated collaborative practice to be a ground-breaking and influential aesthetic phenomenon that forces us to rethink the nature of authorship.

⁶ Carter Ratcliff, 'Joe Brainard's Quiet Dazzle', in Constance Lewallen, ed., *Joe Brainard: A Retrospective*, (University of California: Berkeley Art Museum, and New York City: Granary Books, 2001), pp.48-69, p. 55.

⁷ Since this chapter was written, Karin Roffman and Yale University's Digital Humanities Lab have created a website and virtual tour of Ashbery's home, entitled 'John Ashbery's Nest':

<<http://web.library.yale.edu/dhlab/nest>> (last accessed 14 October 2017).

⁸ Brainard, *Collected Writings*, p. 513.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 248-9.

¹⁰ Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1990 (1966)), p. 12.

¹¹ Quilter, 'The Love of Looking: Collaborations between Artists and Writers', in *Painters and Poets: Tibor de Nagy Gallery* (New York: Tibor de Nagy, 2011), p. 78.

¹² Lita Hornick was the publisher and acquisitions editor at Kulchur Press. Ron Padgett, 'A Note on *Bean Spasms*', *Bean Spasms* (New York: Granary Press, 2012), n.p..

¹³ Larry Fagin, interviewed by Daniel Kane, New York, 26 January 1998. Quoted in Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 157-8.

¹⁴ Brainard, *Diary*, Sunday 19 March, 1969. Quoted in Lewallen, p. 78.

¹⁵ Brainard, interviewed by Anne Waldman, *Rocky Ledge* 3 (November/December 1979), p. 42.

¹⁶ Ashbery, interviewed by Daniel Kane, *Teachers and Writers* 30, no. 5 (May/June 1999), p. 14. See Maggie Nelson, in *Women, the New York School, and Other True Abstractions* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007), for a further exploration of 'the vacillation between "caring" and "not-caring" that characterizes so much New York School writing and attitude' (xxiv).

¹⁷ David Lehman, *The Last Avant-Garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 157.

¹⁸ A. Poulin Jr., 'The Experience of Experience: A Conversation with John Ashbery', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Summer 1981), pp. 242-55.

¹⁹ For a full examination of the relationship between environment, innovation, and collage, see the author's *Collage in Twentieth-Century Art, Literature, and Culture: Joseph Cornell, William Burroughs, Frank O'Hara, and Bob Dylan* (Burlington, VT.: Ashgate, 2014).

²⁰ Brian Glavey, *The Wallflower Avant-Garde: Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 138.

²¹ John Ashbery, 'The Invisible Avant-Garde', *ARTNews Annual* 34 (1968), n.p.

²² Donald Revell, 'Purists Will Object: Some Meditations on Influence', in *The Tribe of John: Ashbery and Contemporary Poetry*, ed. Susan Schultz (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), pp. 91-100.

²³ John Ashbery, 'Joe Brainard', in Lewallen, p. 1.

²⁴ Nick Sturm, 'i said ok wow' (blog): <http://isaidokwow.tumblr.com/post/84723723504/the-vermont-notebook-by-john-ashbery-and-joe> (last accessed 16/02/2017).

²⁵ For discussions about *The Vermont Notebook* see: Glavey; Ellen Levy, *Criminal Ingenuity: Moore, Cornell, Ashbery, and the Struggle Between the Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); John Shoptaw, *On the Outside Looking Out: John Ashbery's Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Susan Rosenbaum, "'Permeation, Ventilation, Occlusion': Reading John Ashbery and Joe Brainard's *The Vermont Notebook* in the Tradition of Surrealist Collaboration", in *New York School Collaborations: the Color of Vowels*, ed. Mark Silverberg (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), pp. 59-89; Christopher Schmidt, 'The Queer Nature of Waste in John Ashbery's *The Vermont Notebook*', *Arizona Quarterly*, Volume 68, Number 3, Autumn 2012, pp. 71-102; and Andrew Lee DuBois, Jr., *Ashbery's Forms of Attention* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2003).

²⁶ Berkson, quoted in Quilter, p. 10.

²⁷ Interview with Waldman, p. 42.

²⁸ Paul Goodman, 'Advance-guard writing, 1900-1950', *The Kenyon Review*, 13:3 (Summer 1951), pp. 357-80.

²⁹ Kenward Elmslie. *Routine Disruptions: Selected Poems and Lyrics*, ed. W. C. Bamberger (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1998), p.221. Ron Padgett, quoted in Holly Wall, 'The World Is Yours: A Portrait Of Joe Brainard', *This Land* (12/02/2012): <http://thislandpress.com/2012/12/02/the-world-is-yours-a-portrait-of-joe-brainard-2/> (last accessed 16/02/2017).

³⁰ Brainard, *Collected Writings*, p. 75, p.77, p. 95.

³¹ Nathan Kernan, review of Joe Brainard retrospective, Berkeley Art Museum, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 143, no. 1178 (May, 2001), pp. 312-23, p. 322.

³² Brainard to Fairfield Porter, Vermont, summer 1973. Quoted in Lewallen, p. 115.

³³ Ashbery, in Janet Bloom and Robert Losada, 'Craft Interview with John Ashbery', *New York Quarterly* 9 (Winter 1972), pp. 11-33.

³⁴ John Ashbery in conversation with Travis Nichols, *The Believer* Vol. 7, no. 2 (February 2009), pp. 51-6, p. 56.

³⁵ Joseph Cornell, Diary Entry, 1 September 1953, Cornell Papers, AAA; Series 3, Box 6, fol. 22. Cornell's works 'for' other people include *Beyond the Blue Peninsula (for Emily Dickinson)*, *A Parrot for Juan Gris*, *A Keepsake for John Donne*, and *Variétés Apollinaris (for Guillaume Apollinaire)*. O'Hara's 'for' poems include 'For the Chinese New Year & For Bill Berkson', 'Song for Lotta', 'Snapshot for Boris Pasternak', 'Sonnet for Larry Rivers and His Sister', 'For James Dean', 'For Bob Rauschenberg', 'For a Dolphin', 'Biotherm (For Bill Berkson)', 'For David Schubert', and 'Little Elegy for Antonion Machado'. This list does not include the many 'to' poems that he also wrote.

³⁶ John Yau, 'John Ashbery: Collages: They Knew What They Wanted', *The Brooklyn Rail*, 10 October 2008, n.p. <http://brooklynrail.org/2008/10/artseen/john-ashberry-collages-they-knew-what-they-wanted> (last accessed 13 October 2017).

³⁷ Cotter, 'The Poetry of Scissors and Glue', *New York Times*, 8 September 2008, n.p. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/14/arts/design/14cott.html> (last accessed 13 October 2017).

³⁸ Yau, n.p.

³⁹ Ashbery, introduction to *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995 (1971)), pp. viii-ix.

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- ⁴⁰ Ashbery, 'The Impossible: Gertrude Stein', *Poetry* 90, no. 4 (July 1957), pp. 250-54, p.251.
- ⁴¹ Geoff Ward, *Statutes of Liberty: the New York School of Poetry* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), p. 160.
- ⁴² John Ashbery, statement for the catalogue of his collage show, 4 September 2008, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, NYC. Copyright © John Ashbery 2008. All rights reserved. N.p.
- ⁴³ Ashbery, quoted in Cotter, 'The Poetry of Scissors and Glue', n.p.
- ⁴⁴ Ashbery, statement for catalogue of his collage show, n.p.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., n.p.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., n.p.
- ⁴⁷ Joe Brainard, undated letter to John Ashbery. Postmarked 28 November 1983. Collection of John Ashbery; used by permission.
- ⁴⁸ Ron Padgett, *Joe: a Memoir of Joe Brainard* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2004), pp. 268-9.
- ⁴⁹ John Ashbery, 'Joe Brainard'. Originally published in the catalogue for *Joe Brainard: Retrospective*, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York, 1997. Reprinted in Lewallen, pp. 1-2, p. 2.
- ⁵⁰ Ashbery, statement for catalogue of his collage show.
- ⁵¹ Dan Chiasson, 'Joe Brainard's Odes to the Survivable Past', *The New Yorker*, 20 June 2012. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/joe-brainards-odes-to-the-survivable-past> (last accessed 8 October 2017).
- ⁵² David Kermani, email conversation with the author, 31 March 2016. Reprinted by permission.
- ⁵³ Ashbery, 'Joe Brainard', pp. 1-2.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 2.
- ⁵⁵ Padgett, *Joe*, p. 281.
- ⁵⁶ Ashbery, 'Joe Brainard', p. 2.
- ⁵⁷ Ashbery, 'The Invisible Avant-Garde', *ARTnews Annual*, October 1968.
- ⁵⁸ Ashbery, interview with Peter Stitt, quoted in John Shoptaw, *On the Outside Looking Out: John Ashbery's Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 227.
- ⁵⁹ Ashbery, *Houseboat Days* (New York: Penguin, 1979), pp. 72-88.
- ⁶⁰ John Keeling, 'The Moment Unravels: Reading John Ashbery's "Litany"', *Twentieth-Century Literature*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Summer 1992), pp. 125-51, p. 151.
- ⁶¹ Poulin Jr., 'The Experience of Experience: A Conversation with John Ashbery', pp. 242-55.
- ⁶² Thomas Brockelman, *The Frame and the Mirror: On Collage and the Post Modern* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2001), p. 1. Rosalind Krauss, 'In the Name of Picasso', *October* 16 (1981), p. 20.
- ⁶³ See T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (London: Faber, 1922); William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind* (New York: Viking, 1967); Larry Fagin, interview with Daniel Kane, New York, January 26, 1998, quoted in Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 157-8.
- ⁶⁴ Ashbery, 'The Impossible: Gertrude Stein', *Selected Prose*, p. 12.

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Excerpts from *The Collected Writings*

Specific Material: 'Interview with Anne Waldman'

Number of Lines: 8

Page Range (in *The Collected Writings*): pp. 511-513

Word Count: 74

Specific Material: 'Diary 1969 (Continued)'

Number of Lines: 7

Page Range (in *The Collected Writings*): pp. 248-9

Word Count: 75

Specific Material: *I Remember*

Number of Lines: 5

Page Range (in *The Collected Writings*): p. 73, p. 77, p. 95.

Word Count: 37