

Kevin Concannon, "*War Is Over!* John and Yoko's Christmas Eve Happening, Tokyo, 1969," *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 17 (December 2005): 72-85.



Figure 6  
 Yokoo Tadanori, *War Is Over!: A Christmas Party for Love and Peace Called for by John and Yoko Lennon*, 1969.  
 Poster, approx. 48.5 x 34 cm. Courtesy Yokoo Tadanori

## *War Is Over!:*

### John and Yoko's Christmas Eve Happening, Tokyo, 1969

Kevin Concannon

On December 15, 1969, news organizations around the globe announced that John Lennon and Yoko Ono had “purchased billboard space in 11 major cities of the world to display their Christmas message for peace.”<sup>1</sup> In the language of each city, the billboards (as well as posters, print advertisements, and postcards) read: “War Is Over! If You Want It. Happy Christmas from John & Yoko” (Figs. 7–8).<sup>2</sup> Reports listed the cities as London, New York, Los Angeles, Montreal, Toronto, Paris, Rome, West Berlin, Amsterdam, Athens, and Tokyo. In a *New York Times* report the following day, however, Tokyo was conspicuously absent from the list, although all other cities were duly mentioned.<sup>3</sup> In the thirty-six years since, no documentation has emerged to suggest that the omission of Tokyo was an oversight of the *New York Times*. Indeed, no *War Is Over!* billboard appeared in Tokyo that Christmas.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, the *War Is Over!* campaign reached the city, as a major demonstration and poster campaign. This article will explore the Tokyo manifestation of *War Is Over!* in the context of Lennon and Ono's broader Peace Campaign as well as the international antiwar movement of which it was an important part.

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Lennon and Ono's Christmas 1969 billboard and poster campaign was only one component of the couple's ambitious Peace Campaign of 1969–70, launched immediately after their March 1969 wedding with a very public honeymoon in Amsterdam (March 25–31, 1969)—the first of two *Bed-Ins for Peace*. At each *Bed-In*, the couple invited the world press to join them in their honeymoon suite for conversation. Many reporters expected scandalous photo opportunities and gossipy copy. But Lennon and Ono were serious about talking peace. Their celebrity status guaranteed an audience, and a hungry press complied. The idea for the *War Is Over!* advertising campaign seems to have emerged at



Figure 7  
John Lennon and Yoko Ono, *War Is Over!*, 1969. Poster (original English version), 55 x 34 cm. Courtesy Lenono Photo Archive



Figure 8  
John Lennon and Yoko Ono, *War Is Over!*, 1969. Poster (French version), 117 x 76 cm. Courtesy Lenono Photo Archive

the second *Bed-In*, in Montreal (May 26–June 1, 1969). On that occasion, Ono told the newly inaugurated *Penthouse* magazine: “Many other people who are rich are using their money for something they want. They promote soap, use advertising propaganda, what have you. We intend to do the same. . . . We’re using our money to advertise our ideas so that peace has equal power with the meanies who spend their money to promote war.”<sup>5</sup> For Ono, who had been using advertising media to make Conceptual Art for several years, this type of campaign, though much larger in scale, was hardly new. As Lennon himself acknowledged, “The poster idea was Yoko’s.”<sup>6</sup>

The *War Is Over!* campaign was officially launched in London on December 15. Lennon performed with Ono and several other musicians as The Plastic Ono Supergroup at the *Peace for Christmas* concert at the Lyceum Ballroom in a benefit for UNICEF, the United Nations children’s charity. *War Is Over!* banners and posters were prominently displayed on and around the stage. Billboards were secured and posters sent around the world. A full-page advertisement appeared in the *New York Times* on December 21.

On December 17 the couple flew to Toronto to announce a much more ambitious summer *Concert for Peace*. The *Los Angeles Times* reported “As they arrived [in Toronto], another plane was climbing high in the skies over the city spewing out block-long letters of smoke. In the streets below, scores of kids were passing out small, printed placards. The messages, in smoke and ink, all read the same: WAR IS OVER! IF YOU WANT IT. Happy Christmas from John and Yoko.”<sup>7</sup> Lennon informed reporters greeting the plane that he planned to send the \$72,000 bill for the campaign to President Nixon. “[The billboards and posters] cost less than the life of one man and I am sending the bill for printing to President Richard Nixon,” Lennon said as he arrived at the International Airport in Toronto with Ono.<sup>8</sup> The press conference, called to announce the ill-fated summer Peace Concert (plans for which would fall apart by March),<sup>9</sup> soon turned into a press conference for the *War Is Over!* campaign.

With Lennon and Ono its most visible stars, the campaign nonetheless depended on the involvement of many other people: Lennon told a reporter for the Dutch television program *Televizier Magazine*: “In Amsterdam, a friend of ours is doing it. In Paris and those places—Europe—it’s a firm, a publicity firm. In Montreal it’s a friend of ours. In Toronto it’s a friend of ours. In New York, it’s a firm—our firm—so it will probably be the worst. In Tokyo it’s a friend. . . . In each place, there are approximately 2,000 posters and, where we could, we got billboards.”<sup>10</sup> In Tokyo, the campaign began when Lennon and Ono sent journalist Yano Jun’ichi 50 copies of the *War Is Over!* poster, according to Hamada Tetsuo, the then president of the Beatles Cine Club in Japan (“cine” being a shorthand of the imported word, *cinema*). Along with posters, the couple sent a tape-recorded greeting intended to be played at a Christmas Eve antiwar demonstration organized as a Christmas party under the name of Lennon and Ono. As Hamada recalls, Ono had contacted Yano, a personal friend of hers who worked at *Asahi Journal*, requesting his assistance in organizing the poster campaign in Tokyo.<sup>11</sup> Yano in turn contacted Hamada about the poster campaign, and the latter proposed the idea of an assembly at the Hibiya Outdoor Concert Hall (Hibiya Yagai Daiongakudō) and candlelight march afterwards.<sup>12</sup> Yano then contacted Yokoo Tadanori, a graphic designer especially popular in the world of underground culture, who quickly designed a new variation of the poster printed on newsprint stock (Fig. 6).<sup>13</sup> Departing from his familiar illustrational style, Yokoo arranged four black-and-white photographs of the couple in a two-by-two grid formation, with each photo randomly orientated, over which he superimposed the original image (i.e., English text) of Lennon and Ono’s poster, rendered in red. All other texts, in Japanese, also appeared in red, with the translation of their slogan prominently visible in a narrow horizontal space between the two tiers of photographs. The copy announcing the event as “John + Yoko Lennon Call for a Christmas Party for Love and Peace” appears above the photos, while the time and venue of the event (“At 4:30 p.m., on December 24 [Wednesday], at the Hibiya Outdoor Concert Hall”) is placed below. The names of the celebrity participants are printed vertically on either side of the photos. Hamada recalls that the new poster was specifically created for the event; he also recalls that around 3,000 to 5,000 copies were printed and they were given to the audience members, who were asked to put them up around the city.

In his autobiography, Yokoo describes the proceedings as “part of a worldwide simultaneous event organized by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, titled ‘War Is Over If You Want It!’,” and reiterates “the organizers were John Lennon and Yoko Ono.”<sup>14</sup> Yokoo notes, however, that more than twenty people collaborated in their efforts, a group consisting of “intellectuals who seemed usually unrelated to John Lennon.”<sup>15</sup> Among those named are writers, artists, and filmmakers. Key members of Beheiren (Citizens’ Federation for Peace in Vietnam) figured prominently in the event. Antiwar songs by Folk Guerrilla, an informal group of music-minded Beheiren members, were also featured.<sup>16</sup> Yokoo characterizes Konaka Yōtarō (a Beheiren member, writer, and

more recently president of the Christian Conference of Asia) as presiding over the event, and the local daily *Tokyo shinbun* reported on the following day that “Beheiren and others” held the event in response to Lennon and Ono’s antiwar posters.<sup>17</sup> The newspaper report names the organizers as Oda Makato (the Beheiren leader and well-known antiwar writer), Konaka, Nada Inada (writer and psychoanalyst), and Iwasaka Akira (the Marxist film critic who had been arrested during World War II for his opposition to the Wartime Cinema Act). Characterizing the crowd as a mix of young Beheiren members and hippies, the report also describes a program that included underground theater skits, poetry readings, song-singing, and messages from antiwar American deserters and secret antiwar organizations within the U.S. military in Japan. Hamada recalls that the socialist anthem “The Internationale” was sung and that the participants also included Communists (including sympathizers of the Chinese Communists) and labor activists. The event was also reported in the major daily *Asahi shinbun* but, strangely, no mention of Lennon or Ono was made. Noting an attendance of 3,500 people, the *Asahi shinbun* report also indicated that the event began with opening comments by Oda and Nada.<sup>18</sup> Notwithstanding the absence of their mention in *Asahi shinbun*, the event was clearly advertised on Yokoo’s poster as Lennon and Ono’s “Christmas Party,” and early in the program, a six-and-a-half-minute recorded message from Lennon and Ono was played over the sound system.<sup>19</sup>

Lennon begins (in Japanese): “Hello, people in Japan. Let’s hold hands and sing a song for world peace—Yoko and I and you—‘Give Peace a Chance!’” Ono continues: “That was John’s message. This is Yoko. John and Yoko and you, let’s sing a song together.” They then launch into the song, Lennon playing acoustic guitar and interjecting occasional Japanese phrases as they sing. After the song, Ono speaks for the remainder of the message as Lennon continues playing guitar in the background. Recorded in Toronto on December 19, the message tells of the plan for the summer Peace Concert, their wish to visit Japan, and a bit about the song.

Right now, young people around the world are gathering for peace; the peace movement is all over the place. There are few new peace songs, so people sing this song in the peace movement. It’s very spontaneous. In Washington recently, for Moratorium Day, when thousands of people gathered, they spontaneously began singing “Give Peace a Chance.” We heard about it and are very happy.<sup>20</sup>

The song, written by Lennon and recorded by the Plastic Ono Band earlier that year, emerged naturally as an anthem for the U.S. peace movement. According to a *Newsweek* report:

The song was first picked up by marchers filing past the White House during the October 15 Moratorium in Washington and on the steps of St. Patrick’s Cathedral

in New York. The organizers of the march did not promote the song. It just happened. Now it will serve as the centerpiece for sing-ins at shopping centers planned in Washington and will join the list of carols to be sung in projected nationwide Christmas Eve demonstrations. “We might not have a leader,” one protestor in Washington said last week, “but now at least we have a song—and a mass movement doesn’t go anywhere without a song.”<sup>21</sup>

The *Tokyo shinbun* account mentions that “a recording of the demonstration in front of the White House” was also played at the Christmas Party. This probably refers to what was (and possibly remains) the largest antiwar demonstration in American history: the “Mobilization” Peace March organized by the New Mobilization Committee, on November 15, 1969. The *Newsweek* story was, in fact, describing this very event. The comments about the emergence of “Give Peace a Chance” as the movement’s new “anthem” were made in the context of an explanation of folk singer Pete Seeger’s performance of the song at the November 15 event—a performance that moved the incredibly large crowd there to communal song.

At the November demonstration in Washington, other musical performers included the musical group Peter, Paul, and Mary; actor-playwright Adolphe Green; composer Leonard Bernstein; John Denver; Mitch Miller; Arlo Guthrie; the Cleveland String Quartet; and the touring cast of the musical *Hair*. Simultaneous antiwar demonstrations also took place in other U.S. cities, as well as in West Berlin, Paris, London, and other European cities. The model for a major antiwar demonstration had been set, and “Give Peace a Chance” had already become the anthem.

While the speakers and other participants in Washington had been rather predictable (politicians, activists, and entertainers),<sup>22</sup> the program in Tokyo was definitely more highbrow. Lennon and Ono, while seen as pop stars, moved freely between the worlds of pop music, Conceptual Art, and avant-garde performance. In the context of the folk singers and pop stars in Washington, “Give Peace a Chance” surely seemed a pop song. In the Tokyo recording, however, Ono explains the origin of the song in performance art.

This song, “Give Peace a Chance,” we made in Montreal when we did *Bed-In* this spring. We didn’t want to make a recording with famous singers; we wanted it to be sung by people worldwide. So we made a recording with people who visited us in Montreal while we were doing *Bed-In*. We all sang together and made it into a record.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed the whole tenor of the Tokyo event, while as stridently political as the Washington demonstration, seemed much more intellectual, as Yokoo noted. Along with the poetry readings and underground theater skits, the program featured, in addition to those listed above, Tsurumi Shunsuke, a philosopher-activist involved in Beheiren

and longtime editor of the intellectual journal, *Shisō no kagaku* (Science of thought); Katagiri Yuzuru, the well-known language teacher; and fashion designer Koshino Junko. Other prominent writers joining Oda and Konaka included novelists Kaikō Takeshi, Nosaka Akiyuki, and Tsutsui Yasutaka, and playwright Kara Jūrō. The poster lists several filmmakers and film critics, among them Hani Susumu, Terayama Shūji, and Teshigahara Hiroshi (who also served as director of the avant-garde showcase, Sōgetsu Art Center, where Ono had performed earlier in the decade).

More unusual by Western standards, however, was the inclusion of several graphic designers, Yokoo Tadanori, Awazu Kiyoshi, Ishiguro Kenji, Uno Akira, and Sugiura Kōhei, and artist Ikeda Tatsuo. Art critics Segi Shin'ichi, Hariu Ichirō, and Takiguchi Shūzō are also listed. The world of pop culture entertainment was represented by Hamada Tetsuo of the Beatles Cine Club; Yasui ("Zuzu") Kazumi, singer songwriter; and music critic Mihashi Kazuo. This alliance of pop culture, intellectuals, and leftist politics, as Reiko Tomii has pointed out, is characteristic of *Asahi Journal* during this period.<sup>24</sup> The journal, the weekly magazine of choice for university students during the campus turmoil in the late 1960s, was decidedly liberal in outlook and had introduced popular culture—in the form of manga—to the magazine by June of 1969.<sup>25</sup> Thus Yano Jun'ichi, a writer for the magazine, was an excellent choice as organizer.

*Asahi shinbun* describes everything running smoothly and according to program until Yokoo Tadanori took the stage. While Yokoo describes a hall surrounded by Zengakuren (All-Japan Federation of Students' Self-Governing Associations) wielding *gebabō* (wood poles for fighting)—with the most extremist members of the group directly in front of the stage, his own performance seems almost slapstick—and was interrupted by extremist students. Yokoo recalls:

When Konaka asked me to greet the audience from the stage, I jokingly suggested that I sing a song to divert the *geba* [militant] students. Then he got serious and rushed to the stage announcing, "Now Yokoo Tadanori will sing a song." Unable to retract my suggestion, I came to center stage like a sleepwalker and stood in front of the microphone. I couldn't sing anything but songs by Takakura Ken. I didn't know any songs that would be appropriate for John Lennon's Christmas Party for Love and Peace.<sup>26</sup>

Yokoo sang "Place with No Address in Abashiri" (Abashiri bangaichi), a ballad about *yakuza* gangsters by the film star Takakura, who was wildly popular for his *yakuza* roles. The result, however, was disastrous.<sup>27</sup> The Zengakuren students grew increasingly agitated as he sang, to the point that he became fearful. Yokoo describes a moment of panic when the students rushed the stage as it became covered with smoke. Flames erupted, and Yokoo was escorted off the stage. Oda Makoto came quickly into the room screaming for Yokoo to escape through the window. Yokoo made a two-story leap out



of a backstage window, which was broken by a pile of weeds that provided a soft landing. The *Asahi shinbun* report indicates that students rushed the stage and began exhorting the crowd to reject the results of the recent election. The audience began chanting with them. The students on stage burned admission tickets to poll stations as part of their impromptu action, and a small fire apparently started.<sup>28</sup> The M.C. was unsuccessful in his attempts to return order to the event, and the concert ended.

Contrary to Yokoo's recollection, there is no evidence that the Christmas Eve *War Is Over!* events, as such, occurred worldwide simultaneously. What Yokoo refers to in his autobiography would most likely have been the New Mobilization Committee's carol-singing events mentioned in the *Newsweek* story. Lennon and Ono's anthem was no doubt sung across America and elsewhere that Christmas Eve, but Lennon and Ono spent their evening in Kent, England, at a sit-in and fast with activist comedian Dick Gregory. The three arrived at Rochester Cathedral in a white Rolls Royce. Finding a crowd awaiting them, and unable to participate in the planned action without their presence causing a commotion, they remained in the car until midnight, when they attended services in the cathedral.<sup>29</sup>

In Tokyo, following the disrupted event at Hibiya, participants marched from the Hall to the nearby Tokyo Station holding hand-made paper-cup lanterns with candles, singing songs and carrying the *War Is Over!* posters—both Lennon and Ono's as well as Yokoo's versions (Fig. 9).<sup>30</sup> Photos of the event recall similar marches across the United States on the October 15 moratorium, in which candles and singing were signature components. A photograph in the *Tokyo shinbun* identified the marchers collectively as Beheiren members.

While the *War Is Over!* campaign (of which the Tokyo demonstration was a significant component) began specifically as a Christmas event, the project extended well beyond the holiday season. Lennon and Ono were soon planning a plethora of peace initiatives including a Peace Station Network of radio and television stations to which they offered "free John and Yoko station breaks and ID's, plus the regular John and Yoko Peace Report."<sup>31</sup> The campaign continued in earnest throughout 1970 with the help of friends Ronnie Hawkins and Ritchie Yorke, who traveled the globe, including Asia, carrying *War Is Over!* placards and otherwise spreading the peace message (Fig. 10). Among several British newspapers that reported a notable incident in Hong Kong (then under British control), the *Northern Echo* reported:

John Lennon's peace campaign nearly started a border incident with Communist China recently—with the help of former American rock star Ronnie Hawkins. Hawkins and a friend [music writer Ritchie Yorke] were on a world peace tour, and while in Hong Kong it was suggested China should be told "War is over—if you want it." So off they went, barged through the first barrier in their car to the hilltop police station and waved two signs, one in English, one in Chinese, at the



Figure 9  
Participants in John and Yoko's Christmas Party at the Hibiya Outdoor Concert Hall march to Tokyo Station, December 24, 1969. Photo courtesy Hamada Tetsuo



Figure 10  
Ritchie Yorke (left) and Ronnie Hawkins holding the English and Chinese *War Is Over!* posters at the Hong Kong–China border in 1970. Photo courtesy Ronnie Hawkins Promotions

Red border guards. Naturally the police were upset and rushed to tell Hawkins to leave immediately, or be arrested. They left.<sup>32</sup>

Hawkins and Yorke returned from their “52,000 mile world tour” representing the *War Is Over!* campaign in early March of 1970<sup>33</sup>—or Year One A.P. (After Peace), as Lennon and Ono dubbed it. Lennon and Ono continued their Peace Campaign throughout the year, telling the *Liverpool Daily Post* in February, for example, about their “new, improved” product: “We are calling it new blue peace like they do with washing powders.”<sup>34</sup>

In many ways, advertising and public relations were at the heart of the *War Is Over!* project. Ono had already been using advertising media to make Conceptual Art for several years. In early 1965, for example, she had placed advertisements in the *New York Arts Calendar* for purely conceptual exhibitions at her imaginary *IsReal Gallery*. Its March issue announced *Draw Circle Event*; in April the gallery featured *Drill Hole Event*. There was, in fact, no physical entity known as *IsReal Gallery*. (The gallery's name, inspired by Ono's patron Sylvia Israel, was a clever play on Israel's name, implying that the make-believe gallery “is real.”) These display advertisements for *IsReal Gallery* (which prominently included the term “Concept Art”) indicated that readers could purchase made-to-order *Draw Circle Events* or *Drill Hole Events* in various materials (including leather, silk, glass, and canvas) and sizes (from 3-1/4 x 2 inches to 40 x 24 inches) for the strangely uniform price of “about \$250.” Perhaps more importantly, the advertisements provided a rectangular space in which readers could create their own circles and holes. Conceptual Art is often understood as a reaction against the

increasing commodification of art that accompanied the art market boom of the 1960s. The use of advertising as an artistic medium, however, denies the unique object-value of art (because of its profuse and ephemeral nature) even as it implicitly invokes advertising's function of increasing (or at least promoting) that very value. With the *IsReal Gallery* ads, Ono valorized not objects on offer from dealers, but the readers' own acts of creation, prompted by her instructions, but freely available to all. The readers of *Calendar* were encouraged to perform *Draw Circle Event* and *Drill Hole Event* privately, in the pages of the *New York Arts Calendar*, or entirely in their imaginations.<sup>35</sup>

Following her move to London in late 1966, Ono continued her advertising works in the British magazine *Art and Artists*. While these earlier advertising works were addressed at least on one level to issues of the art marketplace, with the *War Is Over!* project, the advertising works made a definitive leap into the overtly political. In all instances, however, the works emphasize the readers' participatory power—to make art or to make peace.

Even before her collaboration with Lennon, however, Ono also had experience with manipulating the media, as well as being manipulated by them. Her London performances of *Cut Piece*, in which audience members were invited to the stage to cut off bits of her clothing, and the controversy surrounding her 1967 film production, *No. 4 (Bottoms)*, brought considerable press attention to Ono, who was by year's end known as the “high priestess of the Happening” in the popular press.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the controversy surrounding *No. 4 (Bottoms)* offers a particularly instructive example of her skill with the media. When the British Board of Film Censors banned her film of tightly cropped bobbing backsides, Ono protested in front of their London office, handing daffodils to passersby, telling reporters (who had been previously alerted to the protest) that the flowers—like the film itself—were “for peace.” Several prominent newspapers (including the *Sun* and the *Guardian*) published photographs of Ono's flowery protest, and a week later she was featured in a cover story in the magazine *London Look*.<sup>37</sup> The controversy also resulted in extensive television coverage of the film and its censorship—including the screening of clips from the film on Granada Television and Independent Television. By month's end, the film had been approved for public screening by the Greater London Council Licensing Committee (although still banned elsewhere). And by the time of its London premiere in August, it had benefited from an enormous amount of publicity.

Emerging from one of the most successful recording acts in history as he began his partnership with Ono, Lennon was at this point an established counterculture pop star, completely immersed in the commercial sales machinery of the music industry, yet seen by the world as a major voice of “underground” culture. The public relations machine through which the Beatles were sold to the world had managed for several years to toe the line between an image of wholesomeness and “revolutionary” innovation. The band's trajectory from the pinnacle of popular culture to proponents of a more

literal social and political revolution transformed their relationship with the press. Lennon's personal and artistic relationship with Ono—and their increasingly activist politics—became a focus of press attention more interested in gossip and scandal than their political agenda. But Lennon's extraordinary experience with public relations and marketing—and Ono's established and refined artistic practice of significantly deploying advertising means to conceptual ends—positioned them uniquely for such a project. In an antiwar movement in which capitalism was frequently seen as the enemy, Lennon and Ono effectively used advertising, a quintessentially capitalist tool, in the struggle for peace.

Perhaps more important than their public relations savvy, their focus on the message of peace, too, predated their collaboration. Lennon's anthem, "All You Need Is Love," for example, premiered to a live audience of 400 million in an early worldwide satellite broadcast (in which the Beatles represented Britain) on June 25, 1967. During the same year, when Ono received a significant amount of coverage in the London press with the controversy surrounding her film *No. 4 (Bottoms)*, she informed *The Times* of London, "the whole idea of the film is one of peace."<sup>38</sup> In this sense, *No. 4 (Bottoms)* offers a precedent for *Bed-Ins* in that they both depended to some extent on baiting the media with sexual titillation to gain attention for work that had peace as its stated aim.

Insinuating Conceptual Art into popular culture, as Lennon and Ono did with *War Is Over!*, is a considerable achievement in itself. But the idea of peace was arguably more important to Lennon and Ono in 1969 than either art or music. And it was through pop music that the *War Is Over!* campaign would have its broadest and most lasting impact. In 1971, the couple released a Christmas single that took the campaign slogan as its starting point and chorus. "Happy Xmas (War Is Over)" by John & Yoko/The Plastic Ono Band with the Harlem Community Choir was released in the United States on December 1, 1971. Incorporating the "War Is Over/If You Want It" slogan as the song's chorus, Lennon and Ono recorded this now-classic Christmas single in late October 1971, and released it a little over a month later. Perhaps because it was released so close to Christmas, it was, amazingly, a complete flop. In England, it would be released the following year, with great success. And in the U.S., too, after its initial lack of success, the song became a holiday classic. With the release and re-releases of the record, yet another round of advertising appeared—now firmly in the commercial context—that promoted the idea of peace. T-shirts, posters, and all the other ephemera of record promotion (including several different promotional films/music videos) were issued by record companies distributing the single. Through the song, the *War Is Over!* campaign continues to this day, rejuvenated every holiday season on radio stations, music television, and in shopping malls and homes around the world. Since 1989, Ono has periodically restaged the billboard campaign, installing billboards and banners and placing print ads in conjunction with her exhibitions. During the 1998 Christmas season, for example, she recreated the original 1969 billboard in Times Square, New York.

“Give Peace a Chance,” as mentioned above, is the anthem associated with the original *War Is Over!* campaign. Ono has remade the track at least twice in support of as many antiwar movements since the original was recorded in opposition to the Vietnam War. In 1991, rocker Lenny Kravitz produced a version with new lyrics by Sean Ono Lennon, the couple’s son, and performed by the Peace Choir, a one-off group of pop stars including the likes of Al Jarreau, Cyndi Lauper, Little Richard, M.C. Hammer, Bonnie Raitt, and Ono herself, among many others. Kravitz’s recording was made in response to the first Gulf War. More recently, Ono has released “Give Peace a Chance 2004” in response to the current Gulf War.

Several other prominent personalities involved in the 1969 Christmas Party for Peace remain active in antiwar movements as well. On December 13, 2002, Oda Makoto, Nada Inada, and Tsurumi Shunsuke, for example, all participated in a Tokyo antiwar rally as the U.S. poised for war with Iraq.<sup>39</sup> On March 15, 2003, Nada once again found himself co-organizer of an antiwar demonstration at the Hibiya Outdoor Concert Hall, where more than 10,000 people gathered to protest the war in Iraq.<sup>40</sup>

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Lennon and Ono’s 1969 *War Is Over!* campaign represents an extraordinary conflation of avant-garde artistic practice with the ultimate in pop culture. The billboard and poster project is a work of Conceptual Art that was part of a larger project that began with a performance art work (*Bed-Ins*). Lennon and Ono’s work during this period represents an unprecedented cross-pollination between the world of pop culture and high culture—and between the worlds of entertainment and politics. Hamada Tetsuo sees the event as a turning point: “It was an intensely important event because it included not only people already involved in the peace movement, but Beatle fans, regular people as well.” Lennon and Ono not only brought the avant-garde to the masses but, with the Peace Campaign they launched in 1969, provided a unifying force for a world increasingly determined to collectively transform itself for the better. Their unique mix of performance and Conceptual Art, pop music, and political activism brought together groups of people from an incredibly broad social and cultural spectrum in the common cause of peace. And nowhere was this truer than in Tokyo that Christmas Eve.

Notes

I thank Midori Yoshimoto, whose collaboration, research, and translation skills were essential to the project during and after my research trip to Tokyo in the summer of 2003. I would also like to thank Reiko Tomii for her pertinent questions, illuminating answers, and invaluable editorial guidance on this project.

1. "Beatle 'Peace' Billboard Set for 11 Cities of the World," *Philadelphia Daily News*, 15 December 1969.

2. There are two versions of the *War Is Over!* poster in English, differentiated by the bottom line: on the original version, it reads, "Happy Christmas from John & Yoko," whereas in the second it says, "Love and Peace from John & Yoko." Presumably produced after the Christmas holiday (likely in early 1970), this second version has been most frequently reproduced since then.

3. "John Lennon Conveys Greetings via Billboards," *New York Times*, 16 December 1969.

Numerous published photographs and film documentation have corroborated that the *War Is Over!* billboards appeared in several cities other than Tokyo: London on Shaftsbury Avenue near Piccadilly Circus; New York, at Times Square; Los Angeles, on Sunset Strip; Toronto with multiple billboards and large posters seen in video documentaries of Lennon and Ono's visit to that city to announce the Peace Festival; Rome, on Corso Rinascimento; and Berlin where photos show multiple posters on fence-mounted billboard. Anecdotal reports indicate that, in Paris, the poster was displayed in subway station hoardings.

I have thus far been unable to ascertain through documentary evidence whether billboards (or posters,

for that matter) appeared in Montreal, Amsterdam, or Athens, although they might well have. Additionally, in press conferences of the period, Lennon mentioned the possibility that the campaign had also reached Port-of-Spain in Trinidad through the efforts of a friend, but this seems not to have happened.

4. Hamada Tetsuo, interview with author and Midori Yoshimoto, Hamada's office in Tokyo, 4 June 2004. President of the Beatles Cine Club in Japan at the time, Hamada confirmed that there was no billboard in Tokyo (translation by Hamada's assistant). All quotes of Hamada in this text are from this interview, unless otherwise indicated. None of the other subjects interviewed for this article recalled a billboard in Tokyo.

5. Yoko Ono cited in Charles Childs, "Penthouse Interview: John and Yoko Lennon," *Penthouse* (October 1969), 29, 34.

6. John Lennon cited in "Cities Get the Lennon Message," *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 15 December 1969.

7. Paul King, "John and Yoko Answer the Call-Up to Peace," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 January 1970.

8. "Look for Veto," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 18 December 1969.

9. Because it was ultimately deemed financially unfeasible, the concert never materialized. See "Yorke Withdraws from John & Yoko Festival," *Cash Box* (14 March 1970).

10. Lennon in interview, *Televizier Magazine*, [unidentified Dutch TV; date unknown], probably December 1969; included in *John Lennon: Archives 1969-1970* [unauthorized

DVD, deceptively attributed to Apple Films Ltd., 2005].

11. Yokoo Tadanori recalled this person but was unable to provide a specific name (e-mail to author, 2 June 2005; translation by Reiko Tomii). Prompted by Yokoo's description, Ono identified him as Yano Jun'ichi (e-mail to author, 3 June 2005).

12. Hamada, e-mail to author, 10 July 2005. In this e-mail, he also confirmed Yano's central role.

13. Yokoo, e-mail to author.

14. Yokoo, *Haran e: Yokoo Tadanori jiden* [Toward chaos!: An autobiography of Yokoo Tadanori] (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 1998): 212-13. All translations from this source by Midori Yoshimoto.

15. *Ibid.*, 213.

16. "Hapuningu" [Happening], *Asahi shinbun* [Asahi newspaper], Tokyo regional edition, 25 December 1969, 16. Hereafter all references to the *Asahi shinbun* report are from this source with translation by Reiko Tomii.

17. "'Hansen kurisumasu' hiraku: Beheiren ya zainichi betonamu-jin" ["Antiwar Christmas" held by Beheiren and resident-Vietnamese], *Tokyo shinbun* [Tokyo newspaper], 25 December 1969, 15. Hereafter all references to the *Tokyo shinbun* report are from this source with translation by Reiko Tomii. Hamada notes: "The main organizers of the event were Yuichi Yoshikawa [head administrator of Beheiren], Yotaro Konaka, and myself." (e-mail to author, 10 July 2005).

18. *Tokyo shinbun* noted that this figure

was given by the organizers, while the police estimate was 2,300.

**19.**

In his autobiography, Yokoo describes the concert opening with "Give Peace a Chance" (p. 212), but *Asahi shinbun* indicates it was opened with comments from Nada and Oda. Yokoo clarified this timeline (e-mail to author), noting that he arrived late, hearing the audience singing as he entered. The *Tokyo shinbun* account specifically mentions a recording by Lennon and Ono.

**20.**

Ono in "Love & Peace Message from John & Yoko," promotional flexidisc (Tokyo: Beatles Cine Club, 1969) (translation by Reiko Tomii). Hamada recalled that the flexidiscs were distributed to members of the Beatles Cine Club who attended the event (e-mail to author, 10 July 2005).

**21.**

"The Peace Anthem," *Newsweek* (1 December 1969), 102.

**22.**

Other speakers at the Washington event included Senators Eugene McCarthy, George S. McGovern, and Charles E. Goodell, comedian/activist Dick Gregory, Coretta Scott King, Dr. Benjamin Spock, the Reverend William Sloane Coffin, Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman, and Dave Dellinger.

**23.**

Ono in "Love & Peace Message" (translation by Reiko Tomii).

**24.**

Reiko Tomii, "Akai Akai Asahi Asahi—Red, Red Is the Rising Sun: Wartime Memory in Akasegawa

Genpei's *Sakura gahō*," unpublished paper presented at *Critical Horizons: A Symposium on Japanese Art in Memory of Chino Kaori*, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 23 March 2003.

**25.**

*Ibid.*

**26.**

Yokoo, *Toward chaos!*, 213–14.

**27.**

*Ibid.*, 214–15.

**28.**

The *Tokyo shinbun* report recounted none of these disturbances.

**29.**

"Beatle Baulks at Sit-In Protest," *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 26 December 1969.

**30.**

A photograph accompanying the *Tokyo shinbun* story shows marchers carrying both versions of the posters (Fig. 9).

**31.**

"War Is Over . . . Communications Can Bring Peace" [ad], *Billboard* (24 January 1970): 49.

**32.**

Charles Westberg, "Pop," *Northern Echo* (Darlington, Durham, U.K.), 19 February 1970.

**33.**

"Yorke Withdraws from John & Yoko Festival," *Cash Box* (14 March 1970). The article, which primarily reports the collapse of the Toronto Peace Festival that Lennon and Ono announced at their Toronto press conferences in December, also quotes Yorke as saying that newspapers and magazines around the world

offered free advertising space to Lennon and Ono to aid the project.

**34.**

James Brewer, "Now John and Yoko Plan a Peace Campaign That's Bluer Than Blue," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 5 February 1970.

**35.**

For further information on Ono's advertising works, see my "Nothing IsReal: Yoko Ono's Advertising Art," in *YES Yoko Ono*, exh. cat. (New York: Japan Society and Abrams, 2000), 174–97.

**36.**

Gillian Linscott, "The High Priestess of the Happening," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 3 October 1967.

**37.**

"The Strange Arts of Yoko Ono: The Girl Who Is Filming All Those Bottoms," *London Look* (18 March 1967). The newspaper stories appeared in these and several other newspapers on 11 March 1967.

**38.**

"Bottomless Indignation of Miss Yoko Ono," *The Times* (London), 11 March 1967.

**39.**

"Citizens Hold Rally Against a War on Iraq," *Japan Press Weekly*, <http://www.japan-press.co.jp/2314/citizen.html> (accessed 15 May 2005).

**40.**

"10,000 People in Tokyo Demonstrate to Oppose War Against Iraq," *Japan Press Weekly*, <http://www.japan-press.co.jp/2326/1.html> (accessed 15 May 2005).