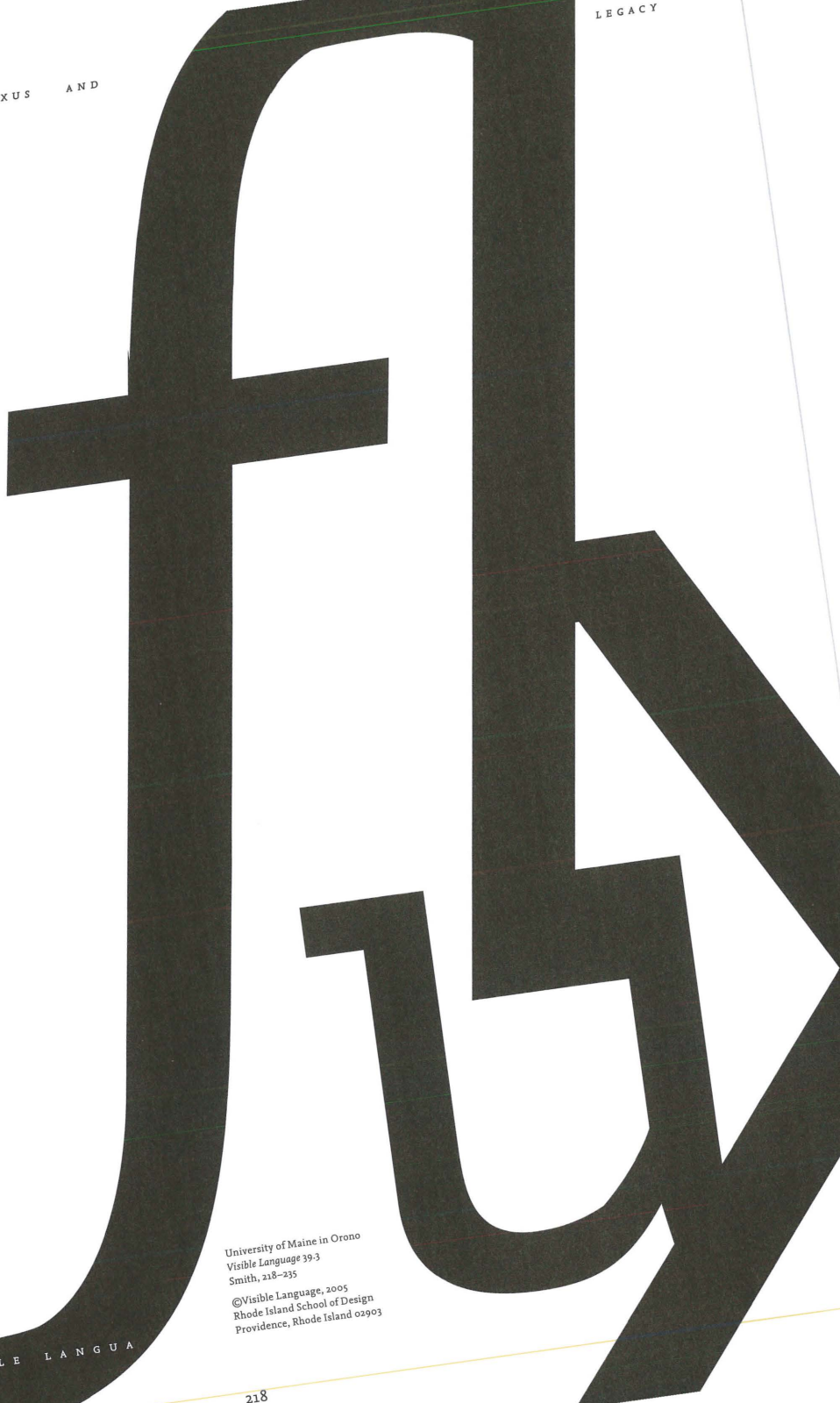


FLUXUS AND

LEGACY



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Abstract

Fluxus embraces a rich network of directions and implications. This essay suggests that it is impossible to understand some aspects of Fluxus by using traditional history as the only approach. Understanding the complex qualities of Fluxus as more than a recitation of documents and dates requires a different approach. The author states that direct participation in Fluxus activities must supplement other forms of inquiry for deep understanding. The typical Fluxus work is a conceptualization of art and artistic processes. These are rooted in direct participatory engagement. We find this argument in the writings of the Fluxus artists when they call for what Dick Higgins labels exemplativist practice. Fluxus implies—even demands—creative and playful interaction in which the viewer moves from a passive to an active role. In this shift, the viewer becomes the co-producer of works, creating new objects, manifestations and experiences.

TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT

*Thoughts, observations, and
suggestions from the front lines.*

OWEN F. SMITH

Introduction

"I give you permission, but not to do anything."

JOHN CAGE

OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES, I HAVE STUDIED FLUXUS AND introduced Fluxus to students in my classes. Along the way, I have become increasingly dissatisfied with traditional scholarly or historical approaches to teaching the subject of Fluxus. We can certainly learn facts about the nature and historical activities of Fluxus just as we can—and do—for other important historical groups or movements. But something else needs to be included to learn about and understand Fluxus. That something else is the Fluxus spirit and its participatory nature.

While in much of my own work as a scholar I have tried to make good use of traditional historical methods (writing a doctoral dissertation on Fluxus, followed by an historical monograph for San Diego State University Press), scholarly approaches fail to disclose important aspects of Fluxus, perhaps the most important. One of the things that bother me the most is that historical approaches by themselves cannot communicate the nature or joy of Fluxus type work. Along with more traditional approaches, I feel that we must initiate other means of learning from and responding to the Fluxus project, using a world-view in keeping with the lessons of Fluxus itself.

To approach Fluxus in an educational environment, whether an art history classroom or a studio space, what first needs to be done is to communicate the work as a lens through which to look at the world. I have come to realize that one cannot approach Fluxus through solely traditional historical methods or models to thoroughly communicate what is interesting or significant in Fluxus. Fluxus does not bring life or meaning to a classroom from the student's awareness of its historical activities, but from its existence as a kind of permission to experiment, to have fun and to take chances.

Fluxus fully begins to resonate for students in the fullest way when we intertwine historical knowledge and living engagement, linking thought and action. The work should be seen as something to do, and doing them gives us our best sense of the future possibilities that Fluxus holds. For this reason, I would propose that you start this essay by considering these comments as part of a performance. This is a performance—or perhaps an experience of—Benjamin Patterson's piece *Seminar I*. Here is the score:

SEMINAR I

The general outline of the seminar is explained to the participants.

Models of the particular genre of activity (compositions) that will be examined are demonstrated and rehearsed by the participants.

Participants are divided into discussion-work groups.

The characteristics, problems, etc. of these models are discussed and new activities are composed within the genre.

Each work group presents its new compositions to the seminar.

General discussion, if any.

Using Patterson's *Seminar I* as a model, here is the general outline of our performance:

FIRST, I will present some ideas and issues of the genre of activity that can be loosely grouped under the name Fluxus. This is the "particular genre of activity" that we will examine today as indicated in the score. In doing this, I will present some concerns and issues I have in teaching about Fluxus and studying it as a historical subject. My aim in doing so is to present some key ideas I feel are central to Fluxus while reflecting with caution on how we approach this subject historically.

FOLLOWING THIS SECTION, I will additionally present some ideas related to Fluxus as a participatory form of thinking and acting in the world. Following my comments, all who wish to continue the performance—and those who wish to participate—should form into "local" discussion-work groups to discuss these ideas and related ideas. In addition, members of these groups should compose new activities within the Fluxus genre, as Patterson instructs.

Part of the Problem: Fluxus, history and the failure of objectivity to inspire learning

AS EVIDENCED BY THIS PUBLICATION, FLUXUS HAS BECOME THE OBJECT of increasing scholarly consideration. In recent years, there have been an ever-increasing number of exhibitions, journal publications and even books on Fluxus. In light of this growing recognition and attention, I would suggest, however odd this may seem, that we ask ourselves this question:

"What is the nature of the information that we are gaining? At what cost are we gaining this knowledge?"

It may seem peculiar to suggest that acquiring knowledge about Fluxus and constructing a history of Fluxus are somehow detrimental, but I believe that this can become the case if we are not careful about how we approach teaching and learning about Fluxus. In addition, I would argue that we must consider not only the particulars through which we might develop a history of Fluxus, but what such a process does to our awareness and understanding of Fluxus—or even to Fluxus itself.

There are two principal concerns that we must consider. The first is that many of the traditional accepted practices of history, art history and cultural institutions such as museums, are directly in conflict with some of the basic attitudes that lie behind many of the specific Fluxus works, events and productions. The second, as I am inclined to argue, is that it is more valuable (in the loosest of terms) to gain a participatory knowledge of Fluxus as a means to understanding its potentials than it is to discern, decipher and determine a fixed concrete knowledge of Fluxus by studying its history.



FIGURE 1 Selection of Fluxus posters and publications 1968-1976. From the author's collection.

This essay is not, however, intended to offer some countervailing truth to current or traditional practices. It is, rather, a presentation of some of the concerns that increasingly affect my own ideas and emphases related to historical and philosophical considerations of Fluxus. This is based on the belief that it is enlightening, in the broadest sense, to pursue an understanding of Fluxus that requires participation. This is more valuable, I would argue, than knowledge of Fluxus that traditionally assumes a critical or analytical distance from the object of knowledge. My basic tack in this presentation is one of advocacy for the value of Fluxus, or for what we have to learn from Fluxus. In general, this advocacy urges a shift from the search for knowledge as an objective pursuit of historical truth, to the active subjective search for interactive understanding. Having said this I do want to qualify my point for I am not arguing in support of an anything goes approach or for quick, cheap understandings that support and allow for fake history by people who think they understand Fluxus. In fact this was my point of starting with the Cage quote about permission—for I am not calling for an anarchy of interpretation but something that is much more work, and includes a heavy dose of responsibility—a responsibility to learn about Fluxus, its history and ideologies for such a deep historical and philosophical understanding of Fluxus will I believe, as it has with me, lead to the freedom and permission to which Cage refers. This coupled with a direct understanding through participation is what will make Fluxus ultimately come alive.

The Fluxus worldview is a principal aspect of the conflict between Fluxus and most historical methods. This worldview is fundamentally connected to a rejection of the western tradition of the metaphysics of presence. This western tradition consists of two interrelated biases. The first bias privileges the object (presence) over the act (absence). The second bias involves a desire to explore and elaborate a pure, self-authenticating knowledge. This logocentric bias means that art history at the present time is principally governed by an unwritten precept that requires historians to trace the art object back to its original context of production. The operational aspects of such a paradigm are principally structured around a view that positions the object in an evolutionary chain of events. The historian must trace this chain of events back to its source — an artist. The goal is to read the intentions and conditions of the artist as the total and originary source of meaning or signification. The underlying essentialist rationale of this position further seeks to elaborate a coherent history of originality. This coherent history is an attempt to locate and determine internally consistent aspects of the object based on a general view that sees a world of conceptually and chronologically separable entities. But if one applies only these kinds of approaches and rationales to Fluxus, the results are questionable because the Fluxus “project” exists in a direct, fundamental opposition to such assumptions.

As I have argued elsewhere, Fluxus is by nature anti-essentialist. It does not seek the illumination of an end or fact. It celebrates participation in a non-hierarchical density of experience. In this way, Fluxus does not refer to a style or even a procedure, but rather to the presence of a total of social activities. Any approach to Fluxus that disregards this central social aspect cannot hope to capture what Fluxus was. Fluxus aesthetics are grounded in social connections as the product of multiple personalities, pressures, opportunities and even failures that were the product of all its participants. The attempt to place Fluxus in history falls into the positivist trap in the sense that human knowledge derives from systematic study. It also falls into the historical trap of defining the presence of something by divining the presence of a core of ideas, people or activities. Traditional methods assign limits to the nature of what is considered and consequently delimit its master codes. To define Fluxus by this means is to negate the value of such a definition. At issue, then, is the applicability of the means that historians use to describe, elaborate and determine the nature of Fluxus historically and conceptually.

What particularly disturbs me is the insidious way in which the network of commercial and scholarly art world actors have stepped in to promote Fluxus. As a result, several of the primary motivating concerns of the Fluxus project have become perverted through the very act of promotion.

Fluxus was part and parcel of a general discomfort about the commercialization of the art object, particularly the way that this “function” came

to dominate the cultural system in the 1950s and 1960s. Fluxus rejected the assumptions on which the commodification of aesthetics was based. Fluxus artists particularly rejected the two central notions of the art network: first, that the artist is someone special, a genius; second, that the artwork as an object is intrinsically valuable and that the status of art gives the artwork a value beyond the value of other objects.

Fluxus works and activities stressed non-hierarchical ways of making and knowing. Fluxus specifically emphasized the equation of art with life. Fluxus stressed the significance of process over against the importance of product through the use of new media, multimedia, intermedia and even non-media. Fluxus initiated what might be called a form of “purposeless play,” to use a Cageian term. The practices of purposeless play replaced the culturally valorized exegesis of the traditional creative making processes. Fluxus generated a significantly new and often disruptive process of making and doing, learning and being. Today, the historicizing process is dissipating and tranquilizing the Fluxus search for and development of alternative systems or processes of being. I would argue that art history (and certainly art criticism) often become an unwitting or even purposeful extension of the commercial system, functioning as a kind of research and development branch for the art market. This is particularly evident in the current exploration of Fluxus’ history, products (art works) and the artists associated with it. This process is objectifying and commercializing the Fluxus project in ways that are antithetical to what I feel were the aims of Fluxus.

In studying and teaching Fluxus we must break from such approaches to practice a participatory engagement that honors the intent of the work rather than worshipping the work in the embalmed and fragmented form of historical objects. In a letter to Walter Hartman, Dick Higgins commented that:

They want our artifacts, which they treat as those of a bygone race of beings. But not the evidence of our existence or even of those activities which produced the artifacts.... What is so spooky is the veneration in which the accidental commodities we have produced are held. It is surely the ultimate reduction of a commodity-oriented society well past the point of absurdity.... The ideas are ignored, and the hammers [used in the Wiesbaden Fluxus Festival] are on exhibit. If only somebody... would smash a piano, steal my hammers, and replace them with their own! There we would enter the real content, the real subject and imagery structure, of fluxus.... It is this tendency to ignore the real subject matter, of the enactment and carrying through things, which has subverted our contribution so far. But when this subversion is no longer possible, when the artifacts are really perceived as having no more value than, simply, autographs, when their market value disappears, that is when the irreversibility of our contribution will become more obvious ...”¹

¹ Higgins, Dick. 1969. Letter to Walter Hartmann, dated March 31, in the collection of the Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart Germany.

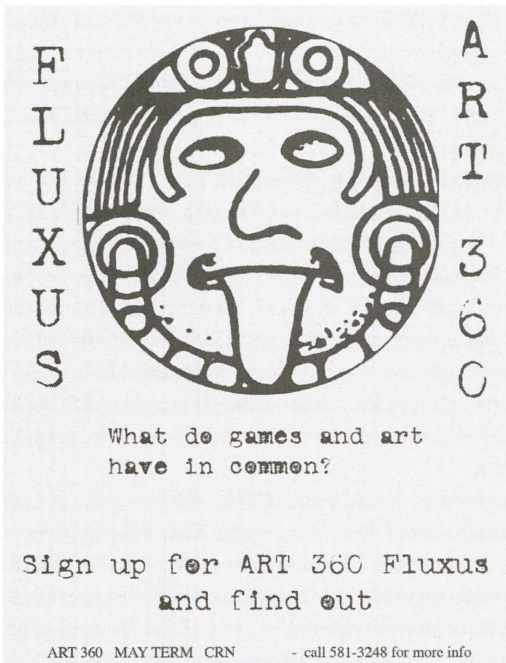


FIGURE 2 Poster for a studio art class, ART 360, on Fluxus taught by the author in the Spring of 2004, University of Maine.

In the process of commodifying aesthetics, it is always the generally accepted use-value—didactic or conceptual—that is discarded as an obstacle to valorization. With the subordination and control of selected use-values by institutions and individuals, by museums, collectors, dealers and scholars, the value of the object receives a qualitatively new exchange based meaning. More than this, and more dangerous to the work, the value of the object detaches itself from the dynamic signification process to be replaced by static attributes evident in the physicality of the sign. The decisive factor in this process is the way that the process concentrates the rich network of communicative possibilities of Fluxus into a limited set of historical and physical characteristics. Instead of an opportunity to participate in the multiple potentials of the Fluxus worldview as a dynamic process, we are now given artifacts as principal to Fluxus: the “original” *Egg kit* by Bob Watts, or “actual” Fluxus works such as one of the “famous” and “rare” Fluxkits made by Maciunas, or a piece of the “real” violin used by Paik in a performance of his *One for Violin Solo*.

The practices of commodification are converting the Fluxus project into a monopolistic situation through the aura of originality and the elevation of Fluxus to the status of a brand name—yet another brand name—in

the history of art, with all the prestige that such a position carries with it. The generic, expansive and open-ended nature of Fluxus is no longer available unless we are willing to pay the price. Once Fluxus becomes sited in an “original” form and “historical” location it correspondingly becomes removed from us.

This is particularly visible in the way that some collectors and scholars have come to see George Maciunas as central to determining what is and is not Fluxus. It is true that Maciunas played a key role in Fluxus, but this does not explain the fetishization of his work and activities. Far more important in this context is the fact that he is dead. For this reason, Fluxus depends upon Maciunas as permanently fixed, controlled and determined, for he will certainly never make another work. Such a limitation then becomes equivalent to a historical copyright, and the copyright is no longer in the hands of the Fluxus artists themselves, but in the hands of collectors, dealers, scholars and museums.

What does one learn from seeing a Fluxus object in a case in a museum or reproduced in a book? What does one gain from knowing the exact history of any given Fluxus project? Ultimately, this gives us more information and more knowledge, but where does this take us? Is it defensible to use means of recording and transmitting information about Fluxus that are antithetical or at least antagonistic to the Fluxus worldview? What is the validity of determining and communicating information and facts as a basis of knowledge on or about Fluxus if such processes interfere with a fundamental understanding of the significance and relevance of such information?

The referential nature of Fluxus works and performances reflects recognition of meaning as a construct of the particular framework, context or situation in which it is placed or occurs. Fluxus works can never claim to be completely original or distinct entities because their meaning and significance change in relation to the context in which they are experienced. Even though Maciunas often sought to stress originality as an aspect of Fluxus, his idea of originality had much to do with the idea of distinguishing Fluxus works as culturally original in contrast with the way that he saw art works as culturally traditional and therefore repetitive. By engaging in a network of referential practices, Fluxus sought to counter the prevailing notions of the significance of materiality in relationship to the praxis of creation and the aura of originality.

Even more specifically, Fluxus questions the historically dependent institutionalized processes that have come to stress a kind of aura that specifically depends on originality. The concern of this traditional emphasis is to separate the original meaning from subsequent interpretations to privilege the “then” of history over the “now” of experience. In Fluxus, though, there is no strong dependency on a determinable past and there is no specific invocation of an anticipated future. Fluxus practice emphasizes immediacy, the intensity of



FIGURE 3 *Orono Fluxus Fluxbox*, 2004 collective publication of multiples by students in ART 360, University of Maine.

experience found in the flow of the constantly changing present as a nexus between a multiplicity of potential pasts and futures.

In cognitive science, one of the principal aspects of a concept is relational definition. Any concept—every concept—always enters into relation with other concepts. A concept is partly defined by its attributes and partly by its relations to other concepts or the data structure in which it exists or is placed. If this is a given of cognition, the issue becomes a question of which part of the schema we emphasize. Traditionally, the visual arts give priority to the physical attributes as reflective of, or physical evidence for—as in a sign system—the primary communicative nature of the object under consideration. I argue that we must reverse the priority of this schema if we are to understand Fluxus. We must place greater emphasis on the significance of the concept in relation to other concepts and we must emphasize the specifically operational nature of these relationships as they develop and alter our ideas, perceptions and—ultimately—our worldview. In such an approach, what becomes important is a process of expansive interaction, rather than a product-centered notion of knowledge.



FIGURE 4 *Origami Made Easy*, Andy Hurtt, 2004. From the author's collection.

What, then, does this leave us with? How are we to consider Fluxus in the light of these ideas? Should we abandon all perceptual, social, semiotic and other kinds of systematic approaches to Fluxus to celebrate anarchy of interpretation? The simple answer is no. We should not reject them altogether. Rather, we should open avenues of consideration between a field of information, in this case Fluxus, and the multiple possibilities of this material as an interactive aspect of our environment.

Together with traditional approaches, we must initiate other means of learning from and responding to the Fluxus project or worldview. This is particularly important for those aspects of Fluxus that are not a resolution, but a continuance of play. This kind of approach is of particular import when teaching about Fluxus.

Some possible solutions, or at least some thoughts about where to go from here and how to get

WHEN I STUDIED ART HISTORY AND STUDIO ART AS AN UNDERGRADUATE I never heard mention of Fluxus. In fact, my first interaction with Fluxus had nothing to do with my academic work at all. It came as a matter of chance when in 1976 a friend took me to see the Fluxus Festival held at And/or Gallery in Seattle. What I saw intrigued me. There were events and performances, a



FIGURE 5 *Scores and First Aid*, Slou, 2002-2003. From the author's collection.

small exhibition of work, and a lot to look at, interact with and even do. At the same time, I had little or no context for this kind of work so I filed it away as an interesting event and did not think much more of it.

Some years later, in 1984, I took a class as a graduate student in art history that covered “alternative art forms” from the 1950s through the 1970s. Here, I was once again introduced to Fluxus. In this case, I met Fluxus as part of a historical record of artistic activity from Duchamp and Cage to Happenings, performance art, book art, mail art, conceptual art, earth art and much more.

Although this consideration of Fluxus was rather brief, about one and a half lectures, even this much was remarkable as part of a class on the history of art. With this reintroduction, I was excited to learn more about Fluxus, in part because it seemed to be a crucial expression of the changes in art making, and particularly because I had experienced it directly and it just “made sense” to me as something that would allow me to bring together my interests in making art as well as studying the history of art. In this context, Fluxus really began to mean something. It began to have a presence for me and it ultimately became the focus of my work that continues to this day. Why am I explaining all this? In part, because these first experiences still shape my thinking. More importantly, I am offering my experience as an example of how the

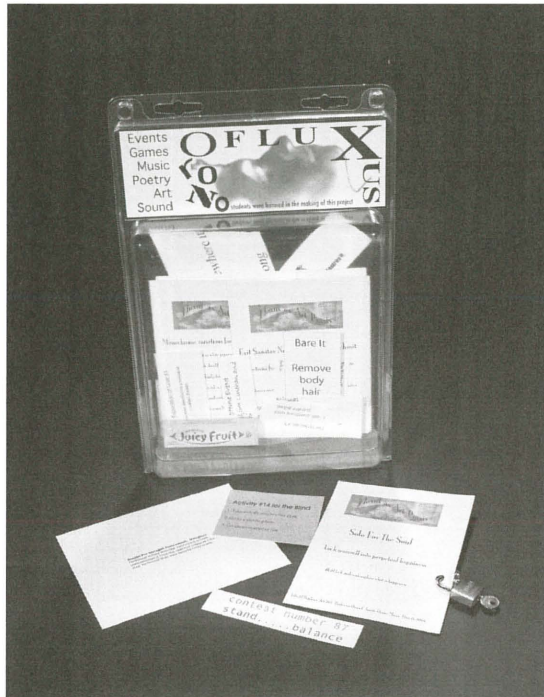


FIGURE 6 *Orono Fluxus Events, Games, Music, Poetry, Sound*, 2004. Collective publication of scores and event works by students in ART 360.

balanced combination of historical knowledge and direct participation are key to teaching and learning about Fluxus.

A primary aspect of all Fluxus type work is a conceptualization of art and artistic processes based in direct participatory engagement. For such an awareness to take hold, experience holds the key. Dick Higgins describes this kind of work in the following way: “[it] is always at the center of an emanation of experience . . . we offer implicativeness [sic] as a goal—the work has not only its own integrity but suggests a whole vast range of further possibilities.”²

In this context, learning about Fluxus must entail more than historical knowledge of a score by Eric Andersen or an object by Robert Filliou. It entails a direct hands-on engagement. Fluxus “implies,” even demands, a creative playful interaction in which the viewer not only moves from a passive to an active role, one in which the viewer also becomes the producer of works, creating new objects, manifestations and experiences.

Many authors have made note of Maciunas’ idea of Fluxus type work leading to the disappearance of the artist—and here is the real gist of this idea. Fluxus in one form is not at all about a set of particulars, historical or other-

² Higgins, Dick. 1978. “An Exemplarist Manifesto.” Reproduced in *A Dialectic of Centuries: Notes towards a Theory of the New Arts*. New York: Printed Editions, p. 162.



FIGURE 7 *Museum Educational Materials*, developed by students to teach about Fluxus for the University of Maine Museum of Art exhibition “BETWIXT & BETWEEN The Life & Work of Fluxus Artist Dick Higgins,” 2002.

wise. It is about setting in motion an awareness that can or will lead one to become part of Fluxus by taking on the conceptual and creative roles demonstrated by the historical events and activities. In this way, knowledge of Fluxus is a lens and a frame for continued thinking and acting in contemporary contexts. This involves a genuine engagement in the world as it is experienced and lived. If we understand this as well as other aspects about what might be seen as the “Fluxus agenda,” then our path is clear. We must act in consort with the work to play out its implications and potentialities in what I call a praxis model of engaged productive learning. To do this, however, we must understand the aims of Fluxus type work. This is work that should generally be seen as part of what Dick Higgins labeled “Exemplativist art.”

If Fluxus is more than a historical moment, to be analyzed, studied and taught, the question might be, “how are we to understand it?” more significantly, the question might be “How are we to engage with it?”

Dick Higgins offered one answer to this through his concept of exemplativism. This is a key concept in his creative practice and a central concept for understanding the continued significance of Fluxus and the Fluxus attitude.



FIGURE 8 *Fluxfilm Badfootage*, Bud Grant, Tara Lane and Matt Rhodes, 1999. From the author's collection.

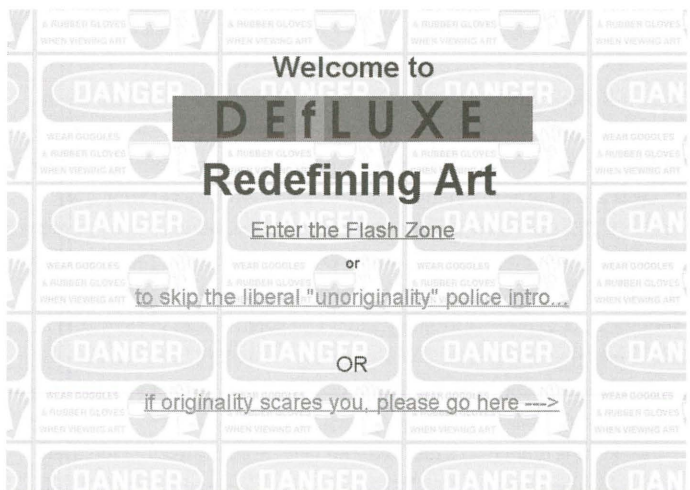


FIGURE 9 *DEFLUXE* web site, Braeme Thurrell, 1996. Archived at <http://www.altarts.org/dfx/dfxsite1/index.html>

In a broad sense, exemplativist work is simply a form of work in which the form epitomizes at least a part of what it describes. In many cases, exemplativist work exists as a concrete manifestation of or even an example of its conceptual ground.

Fluxus and exemplativist praxis both seek to indicate possibilities without being overly proscriptive or evaluative. The aim of exemplativist work is neither to defend nor describe in detail, but rather to suggest and infer. With this notion as a base point, Fluxus then becomes significant as an educational field. Fluxus is not so much an education based in the specifics of artists, dates or particular works, but a field of learning that involves examples of how certain concerns and ideas were raised, developed and presented. Higgins describes the work and processes of exemplativist art in the following way:

[the] focus is the process of transferring his model to the reader or spectator. The detail is the example, not the defense of it. If the work is an essay, the process of the transfer is what is given.... An exemplative work is merely one which gets its crucial aesthetic impact from its transference of a model from the artist's mind to the spectator's.³

From this point of view it is clear that Exemplativism (and Fluxus), is founded on a simple recognition of creative engagement (art) as potentiality, rather than as a fixed point in culture. Higgins again:

So many of the artists became unhappy about this eternal, unyielding quality in their art, that they began to wish their work were more like shoes, more temporary, more human, more able to admit of the possibility of change. The fixed-finished work began to be supplemented by the idea of a work as process, constantly becoming something else, tentative, allowing more than one interpretation.⁴

What is at the new core is a concern for enriching the experiential world of the spectator by "... enlarging the repertoire of their over-all experience"⁵ and to do so requires not only a new mentality but a new means of making art—art that presents a view even while it intentionally remains open for the spectator or viewer to extend the process as a means of creating the greatest range of usefulness.

When we return to the work itself, the most basic lesson that Fluxus gives us is that one should be attentive to the potential of the world around us. This is a freedom to be open to new things. It is ultimately a freedom born of responsibility. The conceptualization of art as part of, or connected to, perceptual experience is an established aesthetic. What is different is the way that Higgins and other Fluxus artists place this notion in a broader participatory frame. Such an engagement in art is what Higgins has called "post-cognitive." He calls upon us as participant observers (in this case as "artists" or "viewers") to consider how we create or relate to art, perhaps both. As well, he calls on us

³ Higgins, Dick. 1978. "Exemplative Works of Art." *A Dialectic of Centuries*, p. 24.

⁴ Higgins, Dick. 1969. "Intending." In *foewqom bwhnw*, New York: Something Else Press, p. 47, 49.

⁵ Higgins, Dick. 1969. "Danger and Boredom." In *foewqombwhnw*, p. 123.

to consider our expectations of art, and he asks us to reflect on what it is that comprises these expectations. Such an engagement in art is an engagement in which art becomes a matrix for suggestions and potentialities for thinking, perceiving and acting. This is part of Fluxus and part of a broader conceptualization that Higgins describes in the following way:

... the focus has come off of the individual and his identity ... off of the new means of perception. It came to be instead on the object qua object, the poem within the poem the word within the word—the process as process, accepting reality as a found object, enfolding it by the edges, so to speak without trying to distort it.... The work becomes a matrix any kind of matrix will do for the particular needs of the particular work. The artist gives you the structure; you may fill it in yourself.⁶

6 Higgins, "The Post-Cognitive Era: Looking for the Sense in It All," *A Dialectic of Centuries*, p. 8.

7 Patterson, Ben. 1965. "Notes on Pets," *the Four Suits*. New York: Something Else Press, p. XX.

8 Ken Friedman has rightly pointed out to me that that Fluxus has since its inception been concerned with education and the artists associated with it have actively participated in and created a wide variety of educational ventures over the years. Ken wrote "Filliou's book, Hansen's academy, the work Jeff Berner and I did at the San Francisco State College Experimental College, the Fluxus West workshops in various places, and the different kinds of work that treat Fluxus as a learning practice outside of the traditional teaching and learning activities that some Fluxus artists practiced when employed as professors of art, music, etc." Ken additionally added that "A nice distinction might be Beuys as an artist outside the academy attempting to create a Free International University and Beuys in the academy as an ordinary—or even extraordinary—art professor."

To learn about Fluxus is to do Fluxus, but it is neither just fun and games nor silly and pointless provocations (although many students at first think one or all of these to be the case). The role for the Fluxus artist, and by extension for those of us who want to learn about Fluxus, was described by Ben Patterson when he wrote in *The Four Suits* that "I require that the central function of the artist be a duality of discoverer and educator: discoverer of the varying possibilities for selecting from environmental stimuli, specific percepts and organizing these into significant perceptions, and concurrently as an educator, training a public in the ability to perceive in newly discovered patterns."⁷

For Patterson, and I believe for us today, the lesson of Fluxus is that the artist/musician/poet is no longer a person tied to the craft of a particular medium, but is an explorer of perception and a public educator who moves between traditional intellectual disciplines and media categories in a process of detection, examination and communication. As participants in the Fluxus experience we, both students and teachers, are offered a set of conceptual frames with which to think a place to act, and a value structure that makes sense of the world for its own sake. I believe that these ideas are just as significant today as they were some forty plus years ago when Fluxus first coalesced.⁸

Author Note

OWEN SMITH IS ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY AND DIGITAL ART AT THE University of Maine in Orono, and Director of the New Media Program. As a specialist in alternative art forms, he has an interest in all aspects of Fluxus. In 1998, San Diego State University Press published his book, *Fluxus: the History of an Attitude*, the first comprehensive monograph on the history of Fluxus. In 2002, he co-edited a special issue of *Performance Research* devoted to Fluxus. He is also an artist whose work has been exhibited widely. Smith's art can be seen on line at <http://www.ofsmith.com>