

Abstract

A brief survey of current Fluxus-based practices and their relation to historical Fluxus opens an essay that examines current Fluxus-based practice. The author focuses on artists active in Fluxlist, an Internet discussion list that serves as a central locus of current Fluxus activity. Klefsstad moves on to discuss the contentious problem of canonicity in Fluxus, reflecting on the changing role of the art canon in an era of artistic innovation. In such a time, the author contends, critical categories can no longer be the basis of canon construction. Instead, collectors and arts institutions create the canon and the rise in economic value of selected artifacts determines their canonical status. At the same time, the exclusive—and exclusionary—nature of the canon helps to establish and reinforce economic value. A complex network of economic and political dynamics points to a central question that asks how such anti-canonical groups such as Fluxus can relate to the possibility of such a canon. Klefsstad concludes by proposing that the continuing spirit of Fluxus is found in the actions of those excluded from the canon.

WHAT HAS

BEEN CREATED

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IN 1992, KEN FRIEDMAN, CHRISTEL Schuppenhauer and others organized an exhibition in Cologne to celebrate

the thirtieth anniversary of Fluxus. The exhibition title was *Fluxus Virus*. The exhibition included work by artists working in the Fluxus mode who were too young to have been part of the original Fluxus group. The title of this show has proved, I think, prophetic: Fluxus today has gone viral.

By "viral" I mean that the dissemination has become horizontal and not vertical; spread by Web and acquaintance. This spread is not unlike that of the original group, but it is different in one significant way. In contrast to the implicit and explicit ideals

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of Fluxus in the 1960s, the era of its first flowering, today's dissemination is shaped by a now existent history of Fluxus with associated realities of followers and acolytes and even the development of a canonical Fluxus.

In fact, the very notion of a Fluxus canon has caused some bitterness within the large and loose group who now pursue Fluxus-style actions. Allen Bukoff, a maker of Fluxus works and events and the keeper of Fluxus Midwest, which in the past consisted largely in a well-maintained internet archive of Fluxus works and provided an important source of Fluxus documentation for many younger artists, has felt snubbed by the "original" Fluxus artists. For these artists have seemingly not been willing to admit him into the charmed circle of the canon of historical Fluxus. He sent an embittered letter around the Fluxus community, and replaced his websites, using their domains instead as a place to post his letter of protest against the Fluxus group. Eric Andersen, a member of the "original" Fluxus community though not a founding member, thinks that Ken Friedman, certainly by all accounts historically part of that group as a very young man, is not legitimately a member of Fluxus. He has mounted a campaign to de-canonize Ken in any forum where he can get a hearing. His hounding of Ken has sometimes been carried to great lengths.

Accounts of the interactions surrounding many modernist artist-made groups—attempts to expand a particular canon, explode it, make it irrelevant, pull it together, purify it, etc., are all very familiar, and indeed familiar to Fluxus. Alarms and campaigns such as these alternately enliven and embitter the Fluxus forum known as the Fluxlist. The Fluxlist, a Fluxus-inspired internet mailing list, has become the primary forum for a discussion of, and engagement with, Fluxus today. Such struggles over recognition or control are particularly intractable in the groups that form around the notion of Fluxus; this is in part because ideas of Fluxus vary so much that room for argument is created.

To some Fluxus was a group of people who performed certain actions and produced a certain set of artifacts bounded by a specific time frame. This is the Fluxus enshrined by exhibitions such as *In the Spirit of Fluxus* at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. For the most part this Fluxus can be seen now only in documentation—a few videos and books and papers usually seen in vitrines, unviewable and by virtue of this presentation format with little direct affect on the present day artists and creators. Some books, like the *Fluxus Codex*, can still be purchased for relatively little and owned, read and used. This Fluxus is a movement like any other, with a beginning, middle and an end. I'll not deal with its history here as scholars such as Hannah Higgins and Peter Frank, as well as participants such as Ken Friedman, have covered it far more thoroughly and completely. The definitive source for such history is Owen Smith's *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*.¹

The "viral mode" of Fluxus—the world of Fluxpractices, let's call them, Fluxbeliefs or even Fluxplay—spread very widely and still has the power to

¹ See the bibliography of material included elsewhere in this issue, especially those by Hannah Higgins, Peter Frank and Owen Smith.

infect. This loose set of practices and inclinations has created a kind of vast cloud of Fluxpractitioners around the world. Where I personally came in to this Fluxus context was as one who had heard, in the sixties and seventies, about Fluxus, later read about the actions and ideas that flowed from it, and who had, as a result of these contacts, developed practices that more resembled the habits of the religious than the career-minded gestures of an artist.

The Fluxlist

WITH THE SPREAD OF THE WEB IN THE NINETIES, DICK HIGGINS AND KEN Friedman recognized its potential as a means of establishing associations and exchanges of ideas concerned with Fluxus and associated art forms and practices such as mail art. Such exchanges might be seen as an extension of Robert Filliou's concept of the Eternal Network. Higgins and Friedman originally founded the Fluxlist based on their desire to enable the discussion of the works and ideas of historical Fluxus or what I am describing as the canonical Fluxus artists. Additionally it might be argued that Higgins and Friedman wanted the Fluxus group's existence to be recognized for the remarkable event it had been, and wanted to enable art historians and others to communicate with each other and with Fluxus artists. At first, the Fluxlist did work somewhat this way.

But even in the first year of the Fluxlist's existence, the queries and discussions of original Fluxus dried up and the viral version of Fluxus began to take over: all sorts of random adherents of the mode of thought that was Fluxus came to make up the list membership. More gradually there were no original Fluxus artists in the list membership at all: Dick died, and Ken was harried off the list by a concerted campaign of insult by Eric Andersen. However, the list became its own entity and it fostered many fascinating discussions: on the grounds of making, on the relation of art making and mainstream culture, and on how to conduct a creative life that wasn't called art, to name a few. These long and interesting threads eventually gave birth to the kinds of collective projects that characterized the original Fluxus group—as well as bits and blurbs of the kind of amusing and not amusing detritus that falls into most such internet communities.

One project was the Fluxbox (organized by Owen Smith, one of the editors of this issue), which had no single title, but instead bore a list of 168 names contributed by listmembers, any one of which the recipient could choose as the name for his or her box. It contained 39 small works made by listmembers who had signed on to the project and was organized and administered entirely online.² Extra boxes were made and found their way into the collections of various museums. A second Fluxbox was also created a couple of years later.

Another project was the Fluxlist address book, in which all recipients of the book created covers for the books, sent them to Carol Starr (longtime member of the Fluxlist and coordinator of this project), along with their land and email

² The individual contributions for this project can be seen online at <http://www.fluxus.org/FLUXLIST/box1/boxfram.html>



FIGURE 1 *Fluxlist Box I*. By permission of the artist.

3 The project can be viewed online at: <http://www.fluxlist.com/fluxarchive/fluxaddress/>

addresses and information. The book was compiled and sent out to all who contributed. Mine has Carol Starr's dog on the cover; the cover I contributed was made of duct tape and slide film.³

Happy New Ears, the fluxpoetry book compiled by Roger Stevens, was another of the list's projects; it contains writing—concrete poetry, sound poetry and other experiments—by members of the list. Many other online projects have been conducted as well through the domain of the Fluxlist—running word games, John Bennett's ongoing flow of poems, a variety of sound projects, as well as empirical reportage and its consequences.

The Fluxlist today is largely a source of information and exchange feeding off-list projects. Just three examples (among many) of which I know are *The Secret Life of Fluxus: Event Scores*, an exhibition of event scores and their enactments which I curated for the Tweed Museum last fall, and at present, a collection of scores based on Bennett's long-running "bendy dictions" which is currently calling for contributions, as well as an anthology of sound works.

Anthology of Responses: Fluxlist Members

LAST SUMMER, IN PREPARATION FOR THIS ARTICLE, I SENT A REQUEST TO a number of active artists on the Fluxlist for the following: images or descriptions of any works they had done in conscious relation to earlier Fluxus works; images or descriptions of work in the tradition of Fluxus that could have been

done with no knowledge of the canonical Fluxus; and a brief account of how they discovered Fluxus and their ideas of what it was. I got back some wonderful writing, not all addressed to these questions. I reproduce some of it here. The range and spread of projects and ideas that operate in the Fluxus mode (that incidentally go far beyond the Fluxlist or anything associated with Fluxus—one sees the spirit in the works of many young artists all over the world) give me the idea that canonicity is exactly what these new Fluxus-type works are erasing. That it is now the viral phase of Fluxus, the thing that alters the flux meme and removes its “replication inhibitor,” enabling infinite replication, without permission from the host organism, canonical Fluxus. Fluxus as manifested through the variety of activities associated with the Fluxlist has become, not a school or association of people, but a strategy available to all as originally intended—only its origin story has boundaries any more.

ALAN REVICH, JULY 20, 2005

A COLLECTION OF IDEAS ABOUT FLUXUS

“... it was meant to be a long-lasting idea or tradition with continuing converts and practitioners. That is the way I look at it and that is the way I deal with it.”

DON BOYD

“I think what makes Fluxus so dynamic and interesting to me is that there is no definition—I wish people would just accept that. The appealing idea is that Fluxus is inclusive. Artists spend most of their careers being rejected which is why Fluxus is so refreshing...”

DAWG

“Fluxus is not a moment in history, or an art movement. Fluxus is a way of doing things, a tradition, and a way of life and death.”

DICK HIGGINS*

“Fluxus is more valuable as an idea and a potential for social change than as a specific group of people or a collection of objects.”

KEN FRIEDMAN*

This is how I see Fluxus as well.

I posted something back in March that works for me and seems to fit:

- 1) Fluxus makes the mundane magical.
- 2) Fluxus happens when one feels that life and art must be taken so seriously, that it becomes impossible to take life or art seriously.
- 3) Ordinary acts and ordinary objects perceived in extraordinary ways.

And I still think Ken Friedman's description of Fluxus is maybe the best one:

*globalism,
the unity of art and life,*

*intermedia,
experimentalism,
chance,
playfulness,
simplicity,
implicativeness,
exemplativism,
specificity,
presence in time, and
musicality.*

JOSH RONSEN, JULY 23, 2005

A DEFINITION OF FLUXUS

FLUXUS IS A MULTIMEDIA ART MADE FROM THE CURDLED ACTIVITIES OF various people—most commonly poets but sometimes painters, musicians, dancers, housewives and water skiers. There are hundreds of types of Fluxus. Dada is often used to induce coagulation in the art, although some Fluxus is curdled with ideas from Situationalism or Neoism or with extracts of various species of Pop-Art (sometimes called vegetable art). Dada is an urge traditionally obtained from the stomach lining of rocking horses or from a studio-produced substitute. Pranks and sight-gags are added to Fluxus to reduce the pH, alter texture and develop flavor, and some Fluxus also has politics, either on the outer skin or throughout. The natural color of Fluxus ranges from off-white to yellow. In some parts of the world, such as Wisconsin in the United States, the art is low in sarcasm, making Fluxus a paler yellow than normal. In this case, it is common to add elephant dung as a coloring agent. Some Fluxus is made with the addition of audience participation. As a response to the loss of diversity in mass-produced Fluxus, a cottage industry has grown up around home Fluxus-making in some locations. In many European countries this has historically been the normal means of Fluxus. Different styles and flavors of Fluxus are the results of using different species of fonts and typefaces, different levels of banality, variations in length of Flux Events (very short vs. very long), differing processing treatments (dissembling the seriousness of high art, filming buttocks and other body parts, political protesting, cross dressing) and different breeds of performance art, film, music and other theaters. Other factors include simplicity, the unity of art and life and the addition of chance and playfulness to some Fluxus. Some controversy exists regarding the safety of Fluxus made by the traditional methods of using pure Dada and regarding how Neo-Dada affects flavor. In most Eastern countries, Fluxus is considered a vile substance. Thus, it is rarely found in any Asian museums.

PETER FRANK, JUNE 29, 2005**HOW DID I COME TO KNOW ABOUT FLUXUS?**

ON DECEMBER 27, 1963, SOMETIME I BELIEVE VERY EARLY IN THE AFTER-noon, I walked into the Thibaut Gallery at 799 Madison Avenue on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. An exhibition organized by critic Nicolas Calas, called "Hard Center" (parodying the "Hard Edge" geometric painting then the rage), was on view. As I entered, to the left I saw a chess set both of whose teams were white. To the right I espied a chair on which a cane and a rubber ball rested. Further back hung three lead yardsticks, the center one shorter than the outer two. A wooden box with a dowel that slid in and out sat in the middle of the gallery. In the back, a stamp machine dispensed stamps the likes of which I'd never before seen. I was absolutely enchanted. "This isn't art," I thought to myself, "it's better." On the way out of the gallery I dropped my glove on the floor. The receptionist alerted me. "It's okay," I assured her, "it's part of the exhibition."

I was thirteen-and-a-half at the time. I immediately went home and started assembling objects like this. I was already familiar with and enthusiastic about Pop art (thru gallery shows and *Time* Magazine and such) and assemblage (through the catalogue to the MOMA show), but the gravity of these dumb, easy objects—these readymades ready to be re-made—seduced me into putting six empty grape juice cans snugly into a shoebox, or take a toy safe and insert several small objects (including one that I considered an artwork in itself—an artwork as part of an artwork, a curious and highly performative idea, I thought).

The name "Fluxus" may not have been available to me at that time, but I recall that by the following spring I'd seen the Bob Watts stamps several other places—Al Hansen slipped me a sheet of them when he was working as a gopher at Castelli—and seen ads for Yoko Ono's objects and performances, and I believe even sent away for a sampler from PO Box 180, Canal St Station, NY 13 NY (this was a few months before zip codes were introduced).

Thus, I cannot be clear when I first heard or saw the term "Fluxus," but know exactly, almost to the hour, the first time I saw Fluxstuff—and what a revelation that was. My introduction to the Something Else Press and inter-media theory came later, in the spring of 1966—again through the agency of Al Hansen, who took me by the Something Else Gallery and introduced me to Dick and Alison—but that was a welcome expansion on what I knew by then of Fluxus and happenings and the whole world of art-into-life.

ALAN BOWMAN, JULY, 2005**BEFORE I WAS AWARE OF 'FLUXUS'**

MY FATHER WAS A VERY FUNNY MAN. QUIET, GENTLE AND SOFT-SPOKEN BUT wickedly sarcastic, he could cut you dead without even appearing to think. If



FIGURE 2 *Mobius Event Score*, Erik Kalstrom. By permission of the artist.

FIGURE 3 *Fruitscores Illustrated*, Alan Bowman. By permission of the artist.

you spent time with him however, a much more interesting factor about his sense of humor became apparent; he was extremely clever with words, he would spot similarities in sound, double meanings, absurdities in the English language, pick up on the errors and arrogance of others and use them to make comments which, for the most part, people often didn't get. He was able to use word play in a most subtle way. The fact that people often didn't realize what he had said, or more often simply didn't understand was often hilarious, having grown up with him my brother and I would latch on immediately and would be crying with laughter at the hapless fool who dared to cross our Dad!

It was this ability to play with the English language, to make slightly surreal observations about a perfectly banal statement, to rearrange quotes and to repeat other people's observations out of context and make them appear perfectly relevant, that initially put me on the path towards my discovery of Fluxus. I only wish I had inherited his way with words.

From the age of ten I wanted to be an artist, urged on by my teachers I worked hard to achieve this goal, to pass my exams and go to art school! Because that's what artists did, they went to art school and wore groovy clothes, black ones like the existentialists in Tony Hancock's 'The Rebel' and then became rock stars like the Beatles and The Stones and got really cute

devoted, blonde girlfriends and lived very groovy lives indeed.

So at eighteen I got my first office job and a brunette.

I stayed in office jobs for a good while too, interspersed with a time as a telephone operator, laborer, carpet fitter, painter and decorator, gardener and picker up of golf balls. It was in the office however where the initial ideas for much of the way in which I work surfaced.

Driven by tedium I would draw; I began to play with the photocopier, then the rubber stamps and other items from the stationary cupboard, then documents and eventually colleagues. I suppose that this is where my fascination for finding something special in the mundane, the everyday comes from.

With a sense of humor akin to my father's and a fascination for subtle jokes inspired by his, often overlooked, linguistic interventions I began to make pieces in the office space. A false document inserted into a huge civil archive, a tiny message of warning on the ceiling legible only when standing on piled furniture.

From there it all began I suppose.

CRISPIN WEBB, JUNE 26, 2005

HOW DID I COME TO KNOW ABOUT FLUXUS?

WELL I CAN START BY MENTIONING DON BOYD. HE WAS ESSENTIAL TO MY relation to Fluxus and contemporary ideas in art. The first time I heard of Fluxus was from a little thing that Don had put on the board in the hall, I think it was Beuys version of the Fluxus manifesto. This grabbed my attention for some reason so being the curious person I am I went to the library to find out what this fluxus thing was ... I found one book and no real answers so this begun my research and interest in Fluxus. I began meeting with Don and had him look at my contrite freshman painting and started to understand the philosophy behind Fluxus. I heard about Fluxlist through searching on the web and signed up my friend by accident with his campus mail. It was hilarious he got like two hundred emails a day for a while. It was like spam or something. I remember signing up, and not sure what was going on, kind of a mystical experience or nostalgic or something. I was hearing these names I had read about and then I saw Don post something, which freaked me out a little. I just didn't think this was Fluxus, but it was and so began my involvement in dialogue and projects as a group and with individuals from all over the world. I remember reading about George Maciunias and started thinking what would he have done with email technology and I thought a lot more than I'm doing with it right now, so I started emailing a lot and building a network with these people, one that I was involved in, not voyeuristically participating. I wanted it to be real Fluxus... cause so many people were saying things like it's not real it's over 'cause Maciunias is dead. Maybe, but I thought I could use it for something, a model to inform my work and others, it is, and

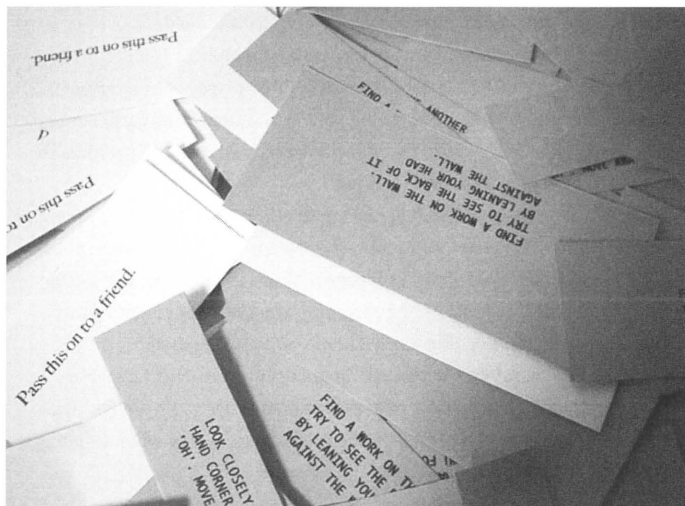


FIGURE 4 *Printed Scores*, Zoe Marsh. By permission of the artist.

continues to be, fun.

SOL NTE, JULY, 2005

I'M AFRAID I REALLY DON'T HAVE ANYTHING SUITABLE AS FAR AS FLUXUS influenced works apart from the following:

TRAIN MUSIC

Fill a train carriage with the smell of its destination.

SOL NTE, 1999

Exhibited March 2003 on a small framed card in the manner of George Brecht at "The Art of Music" at The Borough Museum and Art Gallery, Newcastle-Under-Lyme, UK.

As to the relationship of old and new Fluxus I don't really know what I could say. I used to believe there was some relationship, but I think the reality is that Fluxus finished a long time ago, probably with the death of Maciunas. Fluxus is now more an inspiration than anything else, although it is an excellent inspiration.

D. B. CHIROT, JULY 2005

THOUGHTS ON HIS FLUXUS HERITAGE

MAIL ART AND CONCRETE POETRY WERE PART OF FLUXUS AND I'VE DONE THEM.

I think since I work pretty much always with an open-ended finding—that is, the moment—and the accidental—play a very large part and to me this is related to Fluxus—there is some Fluxus I consider more programmatic such

as event scores. Yet even in these, I hope to leave much room for improvisations of the moment.

Something I think of re Fluxus is this: I connect in my mind Fluxus with the ephemeral—and in Baudelaire one finds the first definitions of Modernism as the eternal within the ephemeral (the quote is from *The Painter of Modern Life*). I think Fluxus relates to this interrelationship—for me by tilting much more towards the ephemeral—while recognizing the eternal as in the Eternal Network.

Also in Fluxus another aspect I think of is the relation with Eastern thinking—Zen especially—as I have text translated by Brecht and then done into other versions by Higgins of ancient Zen text—I like that—(his pieces for me have some of the nonsense/play quality which also is in Fluxus—very much).

I see also very much in Fluxus that life/art is explored—the so-called separation of these—investigated—questioned—as I find in Fluxus the celebration of the everyday in all its manifestations. Yet also in a way by framing it, Fluxus still makes art of it—it is very much a, how does one say it, self-reflexive approach. I have always wondered in this sense how truly “free” Fluxus is—by free I mean free of the art/life separation questions—or—it suffices in that it asks the questions.

Also with Fluxus something I deeply appreciate is that it extended through so many media—including the media of the mail art—also very early on with television via Nam June Paik—there is a sense of using both electronics and handmade acoustical made up instruments—not a separation of these.

Another aspect of Fluxus that I have always liked is that even when making something ephemeral it is not virtual, i.e., to me Fluxus is always something concrete—objects, bodies, etc. It is very much part of the physical world even when it is at its most vanishing—that to me is important especially as now we are ever more into the virtual realms—a recalling us to the physical world.

And as I say, even in its vanishing, the ephemerality is an acknowledgment of the vanishing of things.

Fluxus and Canonicity

A RESULT OF THE FLUXUS CONTINUANCE IN VIRAL FORM IS A PERHAPS inadvertent interrogation of the notion of the canon—any canon. What does it mean when an anti-canonical practice becomes a hypercanonical archive? Does it delegitimize any further productions of those who now cultivate what they once rejected?

There have been battles over the use of the name Fluxus as a canonical designation for two different associated phenomena: the original Fluxus group and their actions; and the ongoing influence of the ideas put forth by that group, which has created many other practitioners and groups of artists who

call themselves (with greater or lesser degrees of conviction) Fluxus as well. This specific struggle relates to the general changing nature of canonicity in the current artworld. The issue is gaining in importance because of certain structural and social changes regarding the role of art in culture.

Has Fluxus escaped the original Fluxus group? What is "Fluxus" if not membership in that group? In the world at large, there seem to be two ideas of Fluxus—let's call them, just for here and now (I'm not interested in the final dispensation of the names) Fluxus and "Fluxus." The first describes the virus that is still active, causing the kinds of actions that Fluxus makers do; the second describes canonical Fluxus.⁴

Now, because canonicity is a form of property, negotiable to cultural institutions in return for money, positions, opportunities and status, it cannot be diluted without loss of value. It's a value-concentrating quality or function. The original Fluxus group cannot admit new members to its ranks, then, without diluting or even destroying canonicity and thus damaging the academic or artworld status of its original members, a status they regard themselves as having earned. Fluxus without the quotes, however, which "Fluxus" also used to be, denies the importance or relevance of canonicity. And so the battle is joined.

Many current artists who were never part of the original group and who pursue some sort of Fluxus practice do not want to be known as "Fluxus"—they have a kind of respect for the original historical moment that precludes wanting the rewards that moment creates in the form of canonicity. But many current artists who have given much support to the ideas of Fluxus and who have acted, as they see it, as friends of "Fluxus," resent what they see as the hoarding of value that canonicity represents. They want to see the use value of Fluxus restored by breaching the canonicity of "Fluxus"—sort of like breaking the vitrines of old paper at a "Fluxus" show and handing out the documents to passers-by, thus restoring them to currency and to their Fluxus nature.

The tempest may be teapot-sized to many, but arguments over canonicity will be more and more central to arts practice in this century, as that practice becomes more and more fragmented, marginal and diffuse. Paradoxically, as any culture-wide standard of "greatness" or importance recedes farther and farther into the distance, the economics of the artworld become more and more dependent on the now comparatively arbitrary designation of importance that canonicity represents. David Galenson of the University of Chicago, who writes about which characteristics of artworks most influence their monetary value, has found that innovation is what ensures canonicity, which in turn ensures the artwork's value.⁵ In a climate of perpetual innovation, as is now the case, such innovations yield diminishing returns, and few innovations relate back to any coherent issue or critical category. So critics have largely lost their ability to grant canonicity, and canonicity itself becomes more and more

4 This is the same kind of distinction that led Rene Block to label some works "Fluxus" (viral) in an attempt to distinguish them from Fluxus (canonical) works.

5 From "Life Cycles of Modern Artists," <http://mnartists.org>, Jan. 7, 2005.

arbitrary, sometimes a mere consequence of the monetary value of works; sometimes a cause of it.

Critics in the past have created canons (such as Abstract Expressionism, for instance). This was based on some underlying category found across the practices of many artists; a category that would be understood as a consequence of a certain historical moment and which would be seen as capable of development. Admission to the canon would be based on an artist's relation to a critical category, his or her establishment of a new step in its development. Art critics are no longer seen as cultural bellwethers—whether because of the elaboration of critical language during the theory wars, or the etiolation of the connection of the artworld to the world of mainstream media during the past couple of decades of hyper-innovation—the role and position of the critic has changed. In a worst-case scenario, it can be argued that people don't even read any art critics, and there are really no art critics of broad stature.

Also, given the seemingly fragmented nature of the artworld, there are no major movements or trends driven by artists that would sweep their participants into canonical status. There is no trend large enough or with enough broad cultural import to create the career of a critic. Hyperinnovation has created a Micronesia of art practices, each island with a standing army of one.

There are now, really, only curators—the ones who curate museum shows, and in particular, the ones who determine who is shown in the international circuit of biennials and fairs. Each of these fairs or institutions act as collection points, concentrators of content. They create the larger entities of meaning that art needs to be broadly intelligible. Curators have a peculiar relation to art in general—they are scholars, preservers, representatives of large institutions, the keepers of the vitrines and the accumulators of value. A good curator is, eventually and finally, a curator who increases the value of his institution's holdings through the exercise of his judgment, his choice, his taste, his erudition. Additionally they seek to keep out of that institution any holdings that might dilute or taint the value of what is preserved in the vaults.

The narrative of the canon is increasingly tautological, and increasingly impossible to breach or influence for any artists or writers outside of the institutional aegis. A canonical artist is an artist whose work holds its economic value, and artists whose innovations are deemed contributory to the academic narratives of art-historically driven institutions are canonical. This likely can't continue forever; in any case, it's a climate in which artists are increasingly concerned with their status in or out of the canon, and the spoils, even as they diminish for most, are increasingly struggled over.

This relationship determines the shape of the artworld, determines who has a career, who is allowed to make art, who is allowed to work, to have an influence, to teach. Especially to teach—the new canonicity cannot be divorced from the nature of the artworld as, increasingly, a small anteroom of

the university or the art school, the disciplinary institution whose impulses are conservative—that is, concerned with conservation of value.

Art then, increasingly, becomes a matter of words and money, those shapeshifting mediators, those transmutors of matter. The old role of art as the permeable membrane between matter and mind, body and thought, is dissolving under the need to yield the appropriate harvest to scholars and their institutions. Its transmission is mediated by specialist knowledge; its role in the culture is increasingly “professionalized,” the work made by people with advanced degrees, for consumption by those with advanced degrees, adjudicated by those with advanced degrees. This relationship is not new, but its dominance of the fortunes of the artworld is new. What is also new is that this set of relations has become the final arbiter of the meaning of works that came into being as attempts to subvert this kind of conservation or inflation of value.

Implied in all this, of course, is the necessary intermediary existence of dealer/collector. Their holdings, to acquire value, must pass through the hands of curators and museums, who in turn fund those same curators and institutions and supply them with their holdings. These are the symbiotic halves of the current artworld. When the critic Robert Hughes wrote, “the price of a work of art is an index of pure, irrational desire,” he was not living in this decade. The price of a work of art now is an index of its relevance to a highly detailed art-historical narrative that contests with other such narratives in a relatively hermetically sealed institutional world.

In the context of this artworld it can be argued that the effect of touring shows like that of Dick Higgins’ work, curated by his daughter Hannah Higgins and supported by her book, established “Fluxus” as a sealed room, the value of whose contents can be reliably expected to rise. The show several years ago at the Walker Art Center (and others) of the *In the Spirit of Fluxus* did similar work: the spirit of Fluxus becomes, in these settings, the corpus of “Fluxus.”

Perhaps this is inevitable, but isn’t this is exactly the kind of thing that Fluxus originally struggled against? No one can deny the incredible nimbleness of this consumer culture’s commodification and cooptation machine, but some younger Fluxus practitioners felt, and feel, betrayed by its operation just exactly here. Do the original artists of Fluxus have to get on board, lay their willing hands on the controls of this machine? Some other younger artists and others who use Fluxus practices to make things see the accumulated value of canonicity to be only the due, and a fairly meager one at that, of the original Fluxus group. After all, why should they be singled out and punished above all other makers, forbidden to take part in the appreciation of their works and days?

But this, in any case, is the battleground on which the term “Fluxus” lies bleeding. It’s also clear that the impulse to make work in the manner of Fluxus

is not exclusive to those who were in the original group, or even exclusive to people who have ever heard of the group. It's simply the desire to make, to make thought, to make fun, to make jokes, to make objects, to make questions. The original Fluxus group focused that desire and gave it a name; they eventually ended up being folded into the arms of the insatiable desire of the artworld, with its institutions and collectors, driven by the economic value of innovation. It's up to new people to open the door of the artworld and break the lock on the thing, to ensure that they make good their escape from the disciplinary institution.

Author Note

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