The case for Bengt af Klintberg

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This essay started as a collision at three conceptual intersections. The first intersection is historical. It represents the meeting of Robert Filliou's (1971a) *Research at the Stedelijk* with Gustave Flaubert's (1976, 1994, 2005) *Dictionary of Received Ideas*. The second intersection is economic and philosophical. It involves the intersection of knowledge production and research methodology, not the study of specific research methods but the comparative study of methods in the larger framework of a philosophy of science. The third intersection is the intersection of performance practice where it meets the 'framework for a generative dictionary of key themes and terms in contemporary performance research' (Allen, Kerr, and Thompson 2006: 55).

Filliou's project, as Allen, Kerr, and Thompson describe it, 'was a self-reflexive inquiry into research methodology: essentially research about research. Instead of beginning the research process with a specific topic in mind, he set out to develop over the course of several weeks a research agenda that would permit him to discover what was worth researching, and to invent a methodology that would help him to determine what a useful methodology would be for researching research.'

Someone, possibly Filliou himself, sent me *Research at the Stedelijk* when it was published three and a half decades back. It was a marvelous poetic work, filling an important niche in the literature of intermedia and concept art. For all its interesting properties, though, it did not help anyone to discover 'what was worth researching' to any greater degree than any other normative poesis helps us to discover or determine what we should do.

Neither did *Research at the Stedelijk* offer a useful methodology for researching research in a sense larger than the poesis of discovery. It helped us to think about what we could think about in the same kind of way that philosophy of science did. In shifting the ontological grounds of his inquiry, however, Filliou also transformed the metaphysical and epistemological outcome. In some ways, this was good. In others, it opened gaps that his methodological inquiry could not remedy.

For me, this range of concerns took useful shape in a comparative - that is, methodological - contrast with other works by interesting thinkers at the same time, including for example Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), Paul Feyerabend (1974), Clifford Geertz (1985), Thomas Kuhn (1970), Gerard Radnitzky (1970). While such Fluxus colleagues as Filliou Dick Higgins, and Nam June Paik offered provocative questions that helped to inspire my research on these issues, the philosophy of science offer resources that a Fluxus and intermedia did not. We had something to contribute, and we were not the only interesting contributors. While Filliou, who studied economics at the University of California Los Angeles before working as an oil economist, lost interest - or hope - in other approaches to knowledge and knowledge production, it is not clear to me that the situation is as hopeless as he
believed it to be. I may, of course, be wrong. The geo-political events of the past fifty years give evidence for either position.

Giving up on science and philosophy, Filliou approached knowledge and knowledge production from an optimistic perspective anchored in art practice. Gustave Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas* came at the problem from another perspective, the resigned and cynical critique of commonly accepted beliefs.

For English-language readers, Flaubert's dictionary is best compared with Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*. As Flaubert did, Bierce (2003) presented a polemical critique of society in dictionary form. The two authors were roughly contemporary. Flaubert lived from 1821 to 1880. Bierce lived from 1842 to his disappearance in 1913. Flaubert began work on his dictionary in the 1850s in connection with *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, his last novel, published posthumously. Bierce developed his novel slowly in the form of notes, epigrams, and aphorisms published in his newspaper columns for the San Francisco Examiner and The Prattler. Bierce's dictionary was published in 1906 as *The Cynic's Word Book*, and then given its final title as *The Devil's Dictionary* in the 1911 edition of Bierce's collected works. Flaubert's dictionary was published in 1911, as an appendix to *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, the story of two hapless, mediocre bureaucrats in dark buddy comedy with two heroes that resemble a Laurel and Hardy-like pair with nothing of the affectionate good nature that transformed Laurel and Hardy from misadventure to happy endings. This is the context of Flaubert's Dictionary, a context as malign and hopeless as Bierce's devil might have wished.

Flaubert apparently intended this as a dark reflection on bureaucracy and bourgeois society in the emerging machine age. The years in which he developed his dictionary saw the emergence of increasingly powerful nation-states, the birth of the German Empire in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, the inexorable growth of an industrial revolution that would slowly transform Europe - and the world - from a largely rural agrarian economy to a primarily urban industrial economy. The larger changes in social, economic, and political life were still beginning when Flaubert died, but one could sense them in the changing times.

When Flaubert died in 1880, Max Weber (1864-1920) was just about the begin law studies at Heidelberg, before emerging as the first great analyst of bureaucracy. Philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) was working on the ideas that would lead to his philosophy of science and to pragmatism. (In 1886, Peirce would develop a concept for using electrical switches to perform Boolean algebra, anticipating a key step in digital computing by many years.) Physicist Albert Abraham Michelson (1852-1931) was measuring the speed of light to a new and unprecedented level of accuracy. It was an age of invention and discovery. It was also the age of imperial expansion and growing European colonialism in Africa. It was also a time of intellectual complacency that saw US Patent Commissioner Henry Ellsworth to suggest in 1843 that human invention must soon end. (Richard Nixon was mistaken in his claim that Charles Duell, patent commissioner in the late 1800s, stated, 'Everything that can be invented has been invented.' By the late 1890s, Duell knew better.) The progress of mechanical invention and science, however, led to another kind of complacency, emblematized in a public feeling marked by scientism and a
mistaken faith in progress, at least for the European world that Flaubert satirized in his Dictionary.

*The Dictionary of Received Ideas* is a collection of idées reçues and clichés more typical of thoughtlessness than thought. Much as Bierce's dictionary poked cynical fun at everything pompous and hypocritical in society, Flaubert's dictionary represented everything he hated in the conventions of conditioned social life. It was to be 'a collection of platitudes which would be 'the historical glorification of everything generally approved.' It would he said, for instance, show that 'in literature, mediocrity, being within the reach of everyone, is alone legitimate and that consequently every kind of originality must be denounced as dangerous, ridiculous etc.' The work would, he said, be 'raucous and ironic' and would lead to the great modern idea of equality, demonstrating 'everything one should say if one is to be considered a decent and likeable member of society,' (Hitchens 2006: unpag ed). Flaubert's Dictionary was not about truth or reason, but about the appearance of good sense and the generation of social acceptance.

Exploring these themes in an article that would finally come round to performance research took me in many directions, each too long to wrap around the concept of re-received ideas.

The third intersection involves the intersection of knowledge production and research methodology. Methodology is more than the study of specific research methods. It is the comparative study of methods in the larger framework of a philosophy of science. These issues have interested me for many years. The growth of what is labeled as an information society or a knowledge economy makes these topics more urgent than ever.

Here, too, interesting thinkers were at work, some as far back as the 1940s when Australian economist Colin Clark (1940) laid the foundation for work that Daniel Bell (1999) would explore in his 1976 classic, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*.

The great technologies of each era are linked to large axial forces. In pre-industrial societies, the major technological forms are based on craft. Industrial societies use machine technology. Postindustrial societies use intellectual technology. The skilled labor base of each society reflects these technologies. The skilled labor base of pre-industrial societies comprises artisans, manual laborers, and farmers. The skilled labor base of industrial societies is made of engineers and semi-skilled workers. The skilled labor base of postindustrial societies is based on scientists, technologists, and professionals. Here we find the growing emphasis on knowledge production that typifies the knowledge economy, its social organization, and its economic life. (see for example Friedman 1996, 1998a, 1998b).

Specific methods of thought and typical methodological approaches to creating, gathering, and organizing knowledge typify each era. For pre-industrial societies, these are common sense, trial and error, and experience. For industrial

Societies, this shifts to empiricism, and experimentation. In postindustrial societies, this transforms once again to models, simulations, decision theory, and systems thinking. The time perspective of each society is closely linked to the methods and
methodological approaches in typical use. Pre-industrial societies are oriented to past. Industrial societies are oriented toward ad hoc adaptation, and experimentation. Postindustrial societies are oriented toward the future with an emphasis on forecasting, and planning.

To explain these, Bell typified the large axial principle of each era as a specific zeitgeist or paradigmatic worldview. Pre-industrial society was oriented toward and organized around traditionalism. Industrial society was organized around productivity. Postindustrial society is organized around codified knowledge.

Others had addressed these patterns in different ways, and - in a massive series of studies on the conditions and creation of knowledge - the economist Fritz Machlup.

After exploring these issues several times since the 1970s, I returned to the theme myself in several articles dealing with knowledge and with knowledge production and research in art and design (see for example Friedman 2004).

This intersection was far too large a venture for the generative dictionary the editors requested.

The third intersection involves the theme the editors set forth: 'to develop the framework for a generative dictionary of key themes and terms in contemporary performance research' (Allen, Kerr, and Thompson 2006: 55). This idea led to a theme and an absence. In this gap, an important issue emerged at the boundary between received ideas and their return.

Received Ideas, Re-received Ideas and a Gap

The concept of received ideas in 're-received ideas' suggests an interesting and problematic gap involving ideas that were never received in the first place - or at least not received properly.

What is a received idea? According to Merriam-Webster, that which is received is generally accepted or common.

The word receive has several relevant meanings: '1 to come into possession of, ACQUIRE, 2 to act as a receptacle or container for … to assimilate through the mind or senses [here, the example is to 'receive new ideas' - KF] … 3 to permit to enter, ADMIT, WELCOME, GREET … 4 to accept as authoritative, true, or accurate, BELIEVE.'

The Oxford English Dictionary points two a relevant meaning and to two related terms, 'Generally adopted, accepted, approved as true or good. Chiefly of opinions, customs, etc.; received idea = idēe reçue S.V. IDÉE. Cf. also received text S.V. TEXT.'

One of these, idēe reçue, means 'a generally accepted notion or opinion.'

The meaning of the second related concept, text, involves 'The wording adopted by an editor as (in his opinion) most nearly representing the author's original work; a book or edition containing this.' With a qualifying adjective, the text may mean 'any form in which a writing exists or is current, as a good, bad, corrupt, critical, received text.'

The received text is the authorized version - accepted as good or standard, though it may also be corrupt.

This gets to the general problem of received ideas, and the cynical use of the term in Flaubert's Dictionary. The problem of received ideas is threefold. In the first instance, these ideas crowd and fill the mental landscape, making it difficult for other ideas to blossom or take hold. In the second, they define the ways with thin, often with unfortunate consequences. In the third, they are often wrong, and the first two problems make it difficult to analyze, challenge, correct, or revise them.

It was precisely in this sense that Filliou's Stedelijk project would point toward new conceptions of research - and ways to use artistic methods in research. The grand irony of Filliou's work is that he was transformed from a thinker at the productive border zone between art and public life into an artist whose ideas were themselves transformed into received ideas. This was not Filliou's fault, but the doing of an art world that has a difficult time accepting the productive economies of the border zone.

Filliou himself addressed this problem in a manifesto titled 'A Proposition, a Problem, a Danger, and a Hunch' (Filliou 2004). He wrote,

'A refusal to be colonized culturally by a self-styled race of specialists in painting, sculpture, poetry, music, etc…, this is what 'la Rêvolte des Médiocres' is about. With wonderful results in modern art, so far. Tomorrow could everybody revolt? How? Investigate.'
'A problem, the one and only, but massive: money, which creating does not necessarily create.'

The difficulty, of course, is that the specialists also got hold of Filliou's work, colonizing it and adapting it to the art markets, both the economy of buying and selling art, and the attention economy for thinking about it. Filliou's proposition for a solution unfortunately made little difference,

'So that the memory of art (as freedom) is not lost, its age-old intuitions can be put in simple, easily learned esoteric mathematical formulae, of the type a/b = c/d (for instance, if a is taken as hand, b as foot, d as table, hand over head can equal foot on table for purposes of recognition and passive resistance. Study the problem. Call the study: Theory and Practice of A/B."

To be sure, it does not seem that anyone else has managed to solve the problem, either. Neither the problem nor the difficult of solving it are Filliou's fault. Rather, they seem to be embedded in a series of challenges we are only coming to understand.

Even in the face of a well-understood problem, we often find that understanding is only the first of many difficult steps toward a solution. In this case, we only see the edges of the problem.

To address the challenge of re-received ideas, I am going to turn to a case study, examining the work of an artist - a friend and colleague of Filliou - whose work inhabits the uncomfortable gap of problematic reception.

The Case of Bengt af Klintberg.

One of the greatest influences on international performance art today is perhaps the least known. Outside the art world, Bengt af Klintberg is a distinguished folklorist and scholar (see, for example, Klintberg 1989: 70-89). He is an expert on urban legends (see, for example, Klintberg). He is so well known for his work on urban legends that the Swedish word for 'urban legends' is 'klingbergare,' a word translated as 'Klintbergers' with the rough meaning of 'Klintberg tales.' He has also written some charming books of children's tales and poems, including one of my favorite book titles, När Kingkong spiller pingpong, which means: When King Kong Plays Ping Pong. (Dick Higgins was fond of that one, too. If Something Else Press were still in business, I am sure he would have published the English edition.)

In contrast to the internationally renowned folklorist, there is another Bengt af Klintberg, a Klintberg whose work is hardly known. I want to consider the work of this Klintberg in the light of re-received ideas.

This Bengt af Klintberg was a pioneering artist in performance and intermedia. In the early 1960s, his work helped to shape central aspects of the event structure and performance art around the world.
Klintberg began as a poet and theater director who first came to wide public attention with a series of Musical and Literary Laboratories at Stockholm's Athena Theater in 1962 that he organized together with Staffan Olzon. When Olzon and Pi Lind founded Stockholm's Pistol Theater, they presented Klintberg's happening-play, Lidner, honored as the best play presented in a private theater in Stockholm in 1965.

Klintberg encountered Fluxus on a 1962 trip to Copenhagen where he was attending a conference on folklore. One of his folklore colleagues offered him a free ticket to a Fluxus concert at Nikolaj Kirke, warning him that the concerts were strange and that some viewers had become quite upset. Klintberg saw that as a recommendation and promptly made plans to attend. (See Klintberg 1990.)

Klintberg watched the concerts with interest and joined the artists afterward for dinner. That night, he had a long conversation with Dick Higgins and exchanged addresses with George Maciunas, Emmett Williams, and Arthur Köpcke. He developed a close relationship with Dick Higgins around shared interests in literature, folklore, and magic theater. He also began to correspond with Joseph Beuys, whose mythic and folkloric performances and objects fascinated him. (Bengt and I had an active correspondence from the mid-60s to the mid-70s, and we have been in close contact since 1986.)


In 1967, Something Else Press published a selection of Klintberg's scores in an English-language booklet titled *The Cursive Scandinavian Salve* (Klintberg 1967, 2004). The Ubu Classics edition is retitled as The Cursive Scandinavian Slave. These publications were the basis of Klintberg's importance in the history of intermedia and performance art.

The scores were simple, poetic presentations of the kind of material now associated with Fluxus performance. Klintberg's chapter in the Fluxus Performance Workbook (Friedman, Smith and Sawchyn 2002: 56-62) reveals the tone of his work.

Klintberg's events include scores for intimate and private performances, public performances, and concerts, as well as occasional instructions for objects or installations. Like many Fluxus works, some of the scores function in any - or all - of these categories.

**Klintberg's Event Scores: A selection**

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(SEE DICTIONARY):
Theater
Lettuce Music for Sten Hanson
Orange Event Number 4
2 Exhibitions
Ice
Mold
Three Magic Events
Streetcar Random (music for any number of participants)
Calls (Cantos I-6)
Two Flag Events
Seven Forest Events
Party Event
Plan Against Loneliness
From The Great Bear Pamphlets

Through Klintberg's simple event scores, *The Cursive Scandinavian Salve* exerted a deep impact on the English-speaking art world. To understand its effect, one must understand the Something Else Press and especially the Great Bear Pamphlets.

Dick Higgins founded Something Else Press after a famous argument with George Maciunas over delays in the Fluxus publishing program. Frustrated by Maciunas's failure to communicate the new art to a large public, Higgins wanted to establish a publishing house rather than an avant-garde artist's outlet. He planned to publish experimental and radical work along with avant-garde classics and he wanted to make them visible. (See Higgins 1992.)

Higgins did not publish limited editions aimed at the tiny population of the downtown New York art scene. He aimed his publishing house at the international book trade, seeking an audience among the broad, book-buying public. While he could not compete with Doubleday, Random House, or the other trade giants, he was a trade publisher. He intended Something Else Press to be the smallest and most experimental of the big houses.

Most Something Else Press books appeared in standard trade formats as cloth bound editions suitable for libraries and scholars with a few paperback editions for students and artists. The Press distributed its books internationally through established firms rather than Fluxus-style committees. The Press published most editions in runs of in three to five thousand copies.

With a characteristic mix of bold insight and practical naiveté, Higgins launched a business venture to promote experimental intermedia and contemporary art. Early on, he decided that the books would not carry the message far enough, so he created the Great Bear Pamphlets.

The Great Bears were a series of small, inexpensive pamphlets designed for the widest possible audience. The roster of Great Bear authors reads like a Who's Who of the international avant-garde. Higgins included material by Ay-O, George Brecht, Robert Filliou, Allan Kaprow, Alison Knowles, Claes Oldenburg, Nam June Paik, Jerome Rothenberg, Dieter Roth, Emmett Williams, and many more. The pamphlets made an important contribution to the literature of the avant-garde. Long out of print,
the Great Bear Pamphlets are now available in a series of free digital editions on Ubu Web (Ubu Classics 2004). One of the pamphlets was the 1967 edition of Bengt af Klintberg's scores.

The Great Bear Pamphlets generally ran between sixteen and thirty-two pages in length in a size just right for copying on the new Xerox machines that were coming into wide use for the first time in the middle of the 1960s. Each two-page spread fit a standard sheet of Xerox paper.

People copied the Great Bear Pamphlets in colleges, libraries, and museums around the nation. Artists and poets built useful libraries of experimental art for the cost of copies. On the one hand, copying the booklets in their entirety was a violation of copyright and wide copying meant that the Press lost sales revenue. On the other hand, it was the 1960s, and Higgins implicitly encouraged wide copying - even pirate editions - by producing to a format that would spread the word. As an evangelist of Fluxus and intermedia, Higgins was always more eager to spread ideas than to make money, and Something Else Press was far better at spreading ideas than turning a profit.

Profitable or not, Higgins understood how to influence the era through contemporary print technology, and he used several formats that encouraged widespread copying. The Great Bear Pamphlets were the first.

Following the success of the Great Bears, he launched the Something Else Newsletter. The Newsletter was free. The printing technology was simple multilith offset lithography. Higgins used direct mail distribution in a sophisticated direct mail marketing program applied to intellectual and artistic debate. The Newsletter was the main tool in a long-term campaign.

While scholars and critics were the primary audience for the Something Else Newsletter, it was particularly influential among artists. The newsletter helped to define what Robert Filliou termed 'the eternal network.' It linked like-minded souls together in a web of discourse, serving as an important precursor to the phenomenon of artist magazines and periodicals.

Higgins built a strong intellectual constituency through Something Else Press, and he achieved an impact rivaled by few small publishers.

The technology of an era helps to redefine its art. Printing technology led to the emblemata of the Middle Ages. The successive developments of woodcut, etching, lithography, silk-screen, photography, desk-top computing, Internet, and the Word Wide Web each influenced the published artistic production of their times. Like Maciunas and Dieter Roth, Higgins eagerly exploited the use of new technology to carry multiple messages. The major difference was that he developed a way to spread the messages he put into print.

In its decade of active production, Something Else Press had an extraordinary impact on the world of ideas. The Press books reached a circle of connoisseurs, scholars, and advanced artists. The books became an intellectual and historical resource used and
studied for decades after the press closed in 1974. The Great Bears and the Something Else Newsletter were evangelical projects, designed to spread the Fluxus gospel.

So it was that Bengt af Klintberg’s booklet, The Cursive Scandinavian Salve, found a huge readership. These astonishing performable works were based on the idiom of folk ritual. The booklet caused the same kind of excitement that had attended the earlier Great Bear publication of By Alison Knowles. It became part of the borderless international laboratory of experimental art.

Experiment and Influence

Klintberg's ideas exercised a clear if subtle influence on the other Fluxus artists. For example, the evolution of Alison Knowles's work between 1960 and 1975 reveals a gradual introduction of primitive structures and folk ideas. In the early 1960s, her work was spare and lean, using the most pared-down structure and content imaginable. By the end of the 1960s, the layered physical structure of her transenvironments and books became visible in her performances. The tone remained simple and plain. The structure became dense and multi-layered. The new content often included folklore and ritual.

The way in which art historians have described the structure and development of past art is not helpful in this case. This is not a case of pupils learning from teachers, apprentices adopting and adapting the techniques of masters, or artists imitating the work of other artists to enhance their own work. The situation resembles the development of science. Mature artists enriched their work in dialogue with other mature artists. Klintberg’s work contributed to Knowles's work by raising the possibility of certain ideas. Most important, Klintberg introduced Knowles to the richness of folklore as a source of contemporary art.

In 1963, Knowles went to Stockholm for a series of performances. During her visit, Klintberg took her to the folklore archive where he worked. She was collecting material on beans at the time. Knowles was astonished at the abundance and variety of bean-lore in Sweden alone. As a result, she began to study similar sources for her future work, and this in turn helped her to shape a new kind of content.

Knowles's work was well established in tone and style. Klintberg's events did not influence Knowles's approach to performance. A community rooted in dialogue and exchange is a laboratory of ideas. This process is similar to the exchange between Picasso and Braque when they developed Cubism. The Fluxus circle was a forum of dialogue and exchange and Bengt af Klintberg was a central source of folklore knowledge in the circle.

Key figures in performance art and intermedia such as Joseph Beuys knew and admired Klintberg’s work. So did some seminal performance artists operating on the boundary between poetry and folklore, artists such as Jerome Rothenberg. In addition to the underground circulation of his manuscripts and scores and the wide public circulation of the Great Bear collection, Klintberg’s work was represented in such key
anthologies as *Technicians of the Sacred*, a book that exerted profound influence on the development of American performance art.

In the early 1960s, when Klintberg's work was in circulation, he was one of the first artists to generate a folklore-based performance process. In the mid-'60s and late 1960s, nearly everyone interested in this kind of work knew of Klintberg's work. Many had seen him perform. Some were in direct correspondence with him.

Fluxus performance activities were a central foundation for performance art in the early 1960s. By the early 1970s, the developments taking place in feminist performance art had redefined the development of performance art. During those years, many artists adapted ritual ideas and made use of folk rituals in a form of performance identified by the term 'magic theater.' The ideas implicit in magic theater have existed for centuries in the folk rituals of ordinary women and men. Klintberg was one of the first to bring these ideas and issues into art, first because he is a folklorist and second because he is an artist and poet.

**Dialogue in an Extended Laboratory**

It is simple to trace the origin of contemporary performance art from its beginning in the late 1950s to the middle of the 1960s because few artists were active in performance in those days. David Antin, Eleanor Antin, Joseph Beuys, George Brecht, Robert Filliou, Ken Friedman, Al Hansen, Geoffrey Hendricks, Dick Higgins, Allan Kaprow, Milan Knizak, Alison Knowles, Jackson Mac Low, George Maciunas, Larry Miller, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson, Jerome Rothenberg, Carolee Schneemann, Mieko Shiomi, Ben Vautier, Emmett Williams and a few dozen more formed an invisible college. This was a laboratory of dialogue and innovation.

While these artists essentially invented performance art, few were known as performance artists. Most worked with performance as part of a broader practice. They influenced the generation of performance artists who emerged during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the first generation of artists to be known specifically as performance artists.

What Bengt af Klintberg brought to this circle was a sense of folklore and magic theater rooted in Northern Europe. Eastern European and Jewish traditions were also significant. They arrived with an equally important performance poet, America's Jerome Rothenberg.

Rothenberg has much the same relation to the early development of performance art that Klintberg did. While he is better known in American than Klintberg, his importance is also undervalued.

Art historians and critics specializing in performance art have generally undervalued artists whose work emerges from literature and music. Figures such as Jerome Rothenberg, Jackson Mac Low, David Antin, and Meredith Monk are less prominent in the art world than equally influential figures that also made salable art objects. This
is understandable in a field traditionally tied to objects and object making. Object-oriented institutions - museums, galleries, magazines - shape the visibility of art ideas and structure recent art history. In arguing the case for Bengt af Klintberg, I argue that others made huge contributions to the laboratory of the experimental arts.

Jerome Rothenberg is an excellent example. Rothenberg and Klintberg represented the complementary poles of an intermedia ecology emerging at the meeting ground between poetry, theater, performance, and folk ritual.

While Klintberg's performance style was spare and lean in the Fluxus tradition, the magic theater that he helped to innovate gave rise to a number of quite different styles.

Aspects of magic theater emerge in the work of Vito Acconci, for example, and in the work of important American feminist performance artists of the 1970s such as Alyson Pou, or Cheri Gaulke.

**An Unknown Artist**

By the middle of the 1960s, Klintberg withdrew from the art world to focus on folklore. In a contemporary milieu that places weight on visibility, this leads some to the incorrect conclusion that Klintberg was a private artist without public influence or recognition. This notion is mistaken. Klintberg was a private artist of a kind, but his work was not private. Rather, the work was recognized in a way that Klintberg himself never was.

One can dispute the impact of artists who pursued some aspect of their work in private. The discovery of Hilma af Klint's spiritual paintings is a case in point and the difference is clear. Klint's spiritual paintings were unknown because the artist hid them. Klint became an important artist through the retrospective discovery of her work a century and a half after her birth in 1862 and a century after her 1944 death.

In contrast, Klintberg's events were visible and public. They were well known in Europe and in the United States. Published in several languages, Klintberg's event scores were public and widespread during the crucial years of the early 1960s. While circumstances have obscured Klintberg's influence since then, he was public and visible at the time. He was an important figure among the early pioneers of performance art and intermedia.

By the late 1960s, Klintberg withdrew from the art world to concentrate on folklore, becoming a renowned authority on urban legends and modern folk tales. His work in scholarship and serious literature complements activities in folklore and children's books. His work as an artist remains almost unknown in Sweden. It occasionally surfaces in the rest of the world, for example, when Klintberg took part in the 1990 Biennale of Venice (Oliva, Di Maggio, and Sassi 1990) or the 1992 Fluxus performances and exhibitions in Copenhagen.
Despite Klintberg's absence from the art scene, Klintberg's work played an influential role in contemporary art. He was a part of a laboratory of artists who played equally important roles in developing issues in performance art. The ideas and paradigms he introduced to contemporary art developed in ways that had little to do with his personal style. Art history is in part the history of influence and development. It is time for art historians to explore Bengt af Klintberg's contributions.

Klintberg and Öyvind Fahlström were among the few important Swedish figures of the 1960s to influence international art and American art, followed by Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd and Erik Dietmann. Klintberg helped to shape the development of performance art. He was one of the few Scandinavian artists to develop a truly international presence.

Klintberg never became a star in the hothouse atmosphere of the art world. This is not great loss considering the speed with which stars rise and fall. The great loss involves a lost record of ideas. Despite this loss, Klintberg's work has been durable and visible, holding its own and remaining visible without the public funding that accounts for so many Scandinavian art careers.

Even so, the story of Bengt af Klintberg's work is a gap in contemporary Scandinavian art history. Other Nordic experimentalists are well known through books, exhibitions, and catalogues. This includes such artists as Addi Körcke, Bjørn Nørgaard, Dieter Roth, Henning Christiansen, Per Kirkeby, Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd, or Erik Dietmann among the artists who came of age in Klintberg's generation. The case of Bengt af Klintberg has been different.

Bengt af Klintberg is a public figure and a respected presence in literature and scholarship. It is odd to call him an unknown artist. It is nonetheless true. Bengt af Klintberg is the most famous unknown artist in Sweden since Strindberg.

**Back to the Future**

The question of re-received ideas is well worth considering. In many research fields, the past quarter century has been an era of contest, inquiry, and debate. Clifford Geertz (1988: 137) describes 'the whole scene of methodological soul-searching in the arts and sciences,' the same problems that so clearly bothered Filliou. Geertz writes 'The pervasive questioning of standard modes of text construction - and standard modes of reading - not only leaves easy realism less persuasive; it leaves it less persuasive. Whether or not 'natural history' is a crime in the mind, it no longer seems quite so natural, either to those who read it or to those who write it. Besides the moral hypochondria that comes with practicing a profession inherited from contemporaries of Kipling and Lyautey, there is the authorial self-doubt that comes from practicing it in an academy beset with paradigms, epistemes, language games, Vorurteile, epoches, illocutionary acts, S/s, problématiques, internationalities, aporia, and écriture - 'How to Do Things with Words'; 'Must We Mean What We Say?'; 'il n'y a pas de hors-
'The Prison-House of Language' The inadequacy of words to experience, and their tendency to lead off only into other words, has been something both poets and mathematicians have long known …' (Geertz 1988: 137-138).

Filliou understood this, and he sought a way to link thought to productive action - or perhaps he sought to link thought to productive inaction, as it was for John Cage. Attempting this through art suggested a new kind of research as well. Moreover, it suggested 'an art that clucks and fills our guts' in the words of Dick Higgins's (1966) Something Else Manifesto.

This cuts directly against the grain of Flaubert's Dictionary, a brilliant but pessimistic protest against a world that he saw increasingly governing by cliché and thoughtless, constrained by bureaucratic rules, and manipulated by instrumentalist anti-heroes such as Bouvard and Pécuchet.

Finding the intersection where Filliou and Flaubert meet proved too great a task for me to achieve in dictionary form.

I was equally unable to resolve the problems where knowledge production and research methodology meet in productive renaissance.

I had greater luck with a generative framework for research in performance art. Rather than a dictionary definition, this suggested a useful opportunity to fill a gap. I filled it with a case study, allowing an early and important contribution to the evolving genre of performance art to be re-received as it should have been received the first time.

That is where I stop.

Selective References


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[Complete references for this article are available at www.performance-research.net]