

The

FLUXUS

Reader

EDITED BY KEN FRIEDMAN

AE ACADEMY EDITIONS

THE FLUXUS READER

Edited by KEN FRIEDMAN

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Much Fluxus research has been made possible by four individuals who have been responsible for publishing the three largest series of publications of Fluxus material: objects, scores, and multiples, books and catalogues. George Maciunas' Fluxus editions launched Fluxus publishing as an organized phenomenon. Dick Higgins' Something Else Press books brought Fluxus to the larger world. Gilbert Silverman and Jon Hendricks are responsible for the catalogues that have become the largest series of Fluxus research documents.

Several collections are central to the research on Fluxus. Three major collections are now readily accessible. Hanns Sohm's Archiv Sohm is now located at Stadtsgalerie Stuttgart and Jean Brown's collection has become The Jean Brown Archive at the Getty Center for the History of the Arts and Humanities. The collections and archives of Fluxus West and my own papers have been distributed among several museums and universities. The largest body of material is located at Alternative Traditions in Contemporary Art at University of Iowa, the Tate Gallery Archives in London and the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College. Substantial holdings that once belonged to Fluxus West are now part of the Museum of Modern Art's Franklin Furnace Archive Collection, the Museum of Modern Art's Performance Art Archives, the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, the Ken Friedman Collection at the University of California at San Diego and the Henie Onstad Art Center in Oslo. All of these holdings are available for research, publication and exhibition under the normal conditions of research archives and museum collections. A number of important private collections are available under restricted access or by special appointment. Most notable among these are the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Foundation in New York and Detroit, Archivio Conz in Verona, and MuDiMa in Milan.

The documentation section was edited by Owen Smith. I developed the first versions of the documentation at Fluxus West in 1966 and supported improved versions over the years since. Project scholars and editors included Nancy McElroy, Kimberley Ruhe, Matthew Hogan, Judith Hoffberg, Giorgio Zanchetti, and James Lewes. Hoseon Cheon, Dick

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The Norwegian School of Management has been generous with resources, time and freedom for research and publishing. The poetic and playful dimensions of Fluxus often involve intensely practical phenomena. We wanted to work with industry. Our experiments in media and industrial production, successes and failures both, led me to doctoral work in leadership and human behavior. Our ideas on design, manufacturing and marketing took me to Finland and then to Norway. This is the place to thank Lisa Gabriellson and Esa Kolehmainen who brought Fluxus into a working industrial organization at Arabia in Helsinki, and this is the place to thank John Bjørnbye, Ole Henrik Moe and Per Hovdenakk, who brought me to Norway, together with the American Scandinavian Foundation, which funded a year of research.

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Here, I thank also Ditte Mauritzon Friedman. Canon and deacon of Lund Cathedral, psychotherapist-in-training, and wife, Ditte has enriched my perspective on Fluxus and on life. And I thank Oliver Mauritzon, walking companion, philosopher and the first taster of whatever I happen to be cooking for Ditte.

Another wise man made this book possible in many ways. He was the secret patron of Fluxus West. The Fluxus West projects in San Diego, San Francisco and around the world did more than anyone thought possible on limited resources and money. As creative and resourceful as it was possible to be, however, money often ran out. That was when our patron stepped in. He made it possible for me to follow my passion for knowledge. He helped me to organize and preserve the collections that are now housed in museums and archives around the world. He was profoundly generous, the more profound considering that he was a patron of the arts on a college professor's salary. I dedicate this book to an outstanding human being: advisor and patron, friend and father, Abraham M Friedman.

THE CONTRIBUTORS

The scholarly content of *The Fluxus Reader* has been the product of a laboratory of ideas, a virtual colloquium. It has been my pleasure here to work with a number of the leading scholars now writing on Fluxus. The authors of the history chapters wrote doctoral dissertations on various aspects of Fluxus. **Owen Smith** is associate professor of art history at the University of Maine. He wrote on George Maciunas at University of Washington. Simon Anderson is head of art history, theory and criticism at the School of the Art Institute Chicago. He wrote on Fluxshoe and British Fluxus at the Royal College of Art. **Hannah Higgins** is assistant professor of art history at University of Illinois at Chicago. She wrote on the interpretation and reception of early Fluxus at University of Chicago.

The authors of the theory chapters have specialized in different aspects of intermedia. **Ina Blom** is doctoral research fellow in art history at the University of Oslo. She has written extensively on Fluxus and intermedia. Craig Saper is assistant professor of criticism at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. He has written on intermedia, multimedia, artist publishing and visual poetry. **David Doris** is a doctoral fellow in art history at Yale University. The chapter on Fluxus and Zen was adapted from his award-winning master's thesis at City University of New York.

The chapters on critical and historical perspectives have been written by three internationally renowned scholars in art history, art theory and literary theory. **Stephen Foster** is professor of art history at University of Iowa and director of the Fine Arts Dada Archive. **Estera Milman** is associate professor of art history at the University of Iowa and founding director of Alternative Traditions in Contemporary Art. **Nicholas Zurbrugg** is professor of English and head of the department of English, Media and Culture Studies at De Montfort University.

The section titled 'Three Fluxus Voices' is the result of two unique collaborations. The first is an extensive interview between Fluxus artist **Larry Miller** and Fluxus co-founder George Maciunas. Made just before Maciunas's death in 1978, it sheds important light on Maciunas' view of Fluxus. The second is the only known interview with Maciunas' wife, Billie. This interview was recorded by **Susan Jarosi**, doctoral candidate in art history at Duke University. The section ends with Larry Miller's own thoughts on what it is to think about Fluxus. Here, I beg the reader's indulgence. There could have been, perhaps there should have been any number of other views, other chapters. Time and space limit every book. I selected these three voices because they are unique and because they form a conceptually elegant triad. If there is a clear message in the sections on history, theory, critical and historical perspectives, it is that there no way to encapsulate Fluxus in any neat paradigm. On another occasion, and for other reasons, I will present other voices: here, time, a page limit and circumstance dictate a useful choice that makes available an interview with ideas that have never before been published.

The section titled 'Two Fluxus Theories' makes available the thoughts of two Fluxus artists who have attempted to theorize Fluxus and place it in a larger intellectual and cultural framework. The first is by **Dick Higgins**, Fluxus co-founder and legendary publisher of Something Else Press. The second is my own: as editor of this book, I feel obliged to put my thoughts on the table here, too.

FLUXUS READER WEB SITE

The World Wide Web is making a vital difference to many fields of human endeavor. The arts and scholarship have been particularly well served by this medium.

One of the most important developments for research and writing on Fluxus is a consortium of five major universities and museums with a key focus on Fluxus and intermedia. These five are developing a Web-based series of virtual resources for scholarship and reflection on contemporary art. University of Iowa's Alternative Traditions in Contemporary Art, the University of California Museum of Art at Berkeley, Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth, Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and Franklin Furnace in New York maintain the site. ATCA at University of Iowa will be hosting a wide variety of scholarly and pictorial materials that dovetail with the material in this book, and a portion of the site will be dedicated to expanding and reflecting on the specific chapters presented here.

The URL is: <<http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/spec-coll/resources/atca.html>>. Please visit the site.

INFORMATION AND IDEAS

I welcome queries and idea on any of the subjects covered in this book. If you have questions or thoughts you would like to pursue, please contact me at:

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KEN FRIEDMAN: INTRODUCTION: A TRANSFORMATIVE VISION OF FLUXUS

A little more than thirty years ago, George Maciunas asked me to write a history of Fluxus. It was the autumn of 1966. I was sixteen then and living in New York after dropping out of college for a term. George had enrolled me in Fluxus that August. Perhaps he saw me as a scholar, perhaps simply as someone with enough energy to undertake and complete such a project.

Not long after, I grew tired of New York and I was ready to move back to California. That was when George appointed me director of Fluxus West. Originally intended to represent Fluxus activities in the western United States, Fluxus West became many things. It became a centre for spreading Fluxus ideas, a forum for Fluxus projects across North America – outside New York – as well as parts of Europe and the Pacific, a travelling exhibition centre, a studio in a Volkswagen bus, a publishing house and a research programme. These last two aspects of our work led George to ask me once again to take on a comprehensive, official history of Fluxus. I agreed to do it. I didn't know what I was getting into.

This history project was never completed. In part, I lacked the documentation, and despite gathering documents and material for years, I never did accumulate the material I should have done to carry out the job. Moreover, I found that it was the ideas in Fluxus that interested me most, far more than the specific deeds and doings of a specific group of artists. While I am a scholar in addition to being an artist, my interest in Fluxus does not focus on documentation or archival work.

The documents and works I did collect have not gone to waste. They found homes in museums, universities and archives, where they are available to scholars who do want to write the history of Fluxus, as well as to scholars, critics, curators and artists who want to examine Fluxus from other perspectives. The history that I never finished gave rise to several projects and publications that shed light on Fluxus in many ways. This book is one of them.

The key issue here is explaining a 'how' and 'why' of Fluxus. Emmett Williams once wrote a short poem on that how and why, writing 'Fluxus is what Fluxus does – but no one knows whodunit.' What is it that Fluxus does? Dick Higgins offered one answer when he wrote, '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.' For Dick, as for George, Fluxus is more important as an idea and a potential for social change than as a specific group of people or collection of objects.

As I see it, Fluxus has been a laboratory, a grand project summed up by George

Maciunas' notion of the 'learning machines'. The Fluxus research programme has been characterised by twelve ideas: globalism, the unity of art and life, intermedia, experimentalism, chance, playfulness, simplicity, implicativeness, exemplativism, specificity, presence in time and musicality. (These twelve ideas are elaborated in the chapter titled 'Fluxus and Company'.) These ideas are not a prescription for how to be a Fluxus artist. Rather they form a description of the qualities and issues that characterise the work of Fluxus. Each idea describes a 'way of doing things'. Taken together, these twelve ideas form a picture of what Fluxus is and does.

The implications of some ideas have been more interesting – and occasionally more startling – than they may at first have seemed. Fluxus has been a complex system of practices and relationships. The fact that the art world can sometimes be a forum for philosophical practice has made it possible for Fluxus to develop and demonstrate ideas that would later be seen in such frameworks as multimedia, telecommunications, hypertext, industrial design, urban planning, architecture, publishing, philosophy, and even management theory. That is what makes Fluxus so lively, so engaging and so difficult to describe.

We can grasp the phenomenon through the lens of several disciplines. One such discipline is history, and there is a history of Fluxus to be told. While the core issues in Fluxus are ideas, Fluxus ideas were first summarised and exemplified in the work of a specific group of people. This group pioneered these ideas at a time when their thoughts and practices were distinct and different from many of the thoughts and practices in the world around them, distinct from the art world and different from the world of other disciplines in which Fluxus would come to play a role. To understand the how and why of Fluxus, what it is and does, it is important to understand 'whodunit', to know what Fluxus was and did. History therefore offers a useful perspective.

Fluxus, however, is more than a matter of *art* history. Literature, music, dance, typography, social structure, architecture, mathematics, politics ... they all play a role. Fluxus is, indeed, the name of a way of doing things. It is an active philosophy of experience that only sometimes takes the form of art. It stretches across the arts and even across the areas between them. Fluxus is a way of viewing society and life, a way of creating social action and life activity. In this book, historians and critics offer critical and historical perspectives. Other writers frame the central issues in other ways.

The ideal book would be three times as long as this one is and impossible to publish. I therefore chose to focus on issues to open a dialogue with the Fluxus idea. Rather than teaching the reader everything there is to know about Fluxus, this book lays out a map, a cognitive structure filled with tools, markers and links to ideas and history both.

Fluxus has now become a symbol for much more than itself. That companies in the knowledge industry and creative enterprise use the name Fluxus suggests that something is happening, both in terms of real influence and in terms of fame, the occasional shadow of true influence. Advertising agencies, record stores, performance groups, publishers and even young artists now apply the word Fluxus to what they do. It is difficult to know whether we should be pleased, annoyed, or merely puzzled.

Tim Porges once wrote that the value of writing and publishing on Fluxus rests not on what Fluxus has been but on 'what it may still do'. If one thread binds the chapters in this book, it is the idea of a transformative description that opens a new discourse. A new and

appropriately subtle understanding of Fluxus leaves open the question of what it may still do. That's good enough for me.

Owen Smith and I were discussing this book one afternoon. We reached the conclusion that it is as much a beginning as a summation. If, as George Brecht said in the 1980s, 'Fluxus has Fluxed', one can equally well say what someone – Dick? Emmett? – said a few years later: 'Fluxus has not yet begun.' There is an on-line discussion group called Fluxlist where the question of what lies between those two points has been the subject of much recent dialogue. One of the interesting aspects of the conversation has been the philosophical subtlety underlying the several positions. Those who believe there is a Fluxus of ideas and attitudes more than of objects feel that there is, indeed, a future Fluxus. This Fluxus intersects with and moves beyond the Fluxus of artefacts and objects. This vision of Fluxus distinguishes between a specific Fluxus of specific artists acting in time and space and what René Block termed 'Fluxism', an idea exemplified in the work and action of the historic Fluxus artists.

Beginning or summation, this book offers a broad view of Fluxus. It is a corrective to the hard-edged and ill-informed debates on Fluxus that diminish what we set out to do by locating us in a mythic moment of time that never really existed. Fluxus was created to transcend the boundaries of the art world, to shape a discourse of our own. A debate that ends Fluxus with the death of George Maciunas is a debate that diminishes George's idea of Fluxus as an ongoing social practice. It also diminishes the rest of us, leaving many of the original Fluxus artists disenfranchised and alienated from the body of work to which they gave birth. In the moments that people attempt to victimise us with false boundaries, I am drawn to two moments in history.

The first moment occurred in sixth-century Chinese Zen. It reflects the debates around Fluxus in an oddly apt way, and not merely because Fluxus is often compared with Zen. It involved the alleged split between the Northern and Southern schools of Zen. The real facts of the split seem not to have involved the two masters who succeeded the Sixth Patriarch, one in the North and one in the South, Shen-hsiu and Hui-neng. The long and tangled stories of schism seem rooted, rather, in the actions of Hui-neng's disciple Shen-hui and those who followed him. It has little to do with the main protagonists who respected and admired each other to the point that the supposedly jealous patriarch Shen-hsiu in fact recommended Hui-neng to the imperial court where he, himself, was already held in high renown. This is like much of the argument around Fluxus. It seems that the protagonists of one view or another, the adherents of one kind of work or another, those who need to establish a monetary value for one body of objects or another, seem to feel the need to do so by discounting, discrediting or disenfranchising everyone else. That makes no sense in a laboratory, let alone a laboratory of ideas and social practice.

The other moment I consider took place a few years ago, when Marcel Duchamp declared that the true artist of the future would go underground. To the degree that Fluxus is a body of ideas and practices, we are visible and we remain so. To the degree that Fluxus is or may be an art form, it may well have gone underground already. If this is true, who can possibly say that Fluxus is or isn't dead? We don't know 'whodunit', we don't know who does it and we certainly don't know who may do it in the future.

PART III
CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL
PERSPECTIVES

NICHOLAS ZURBRUGG: 'A SPIRIT OF LARGE GOALS': FLUXUS, DADA AND POSTMODERN CULTURAL THEORY AT TWO SPEEDS

Like many of the chronologically postmodern artistic movements following the modernist cultural renaissance of the early twentieth century, Fluxus arose in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These decades ushered in, to appropriate the famous lines from Charles Dickens' 1859 novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, both 'the best of times' and 'the worst of times'. For an apocalyptic cultural theorist such as Jean Baudrillard, the postmodern condition is 'an amnesiac world'¹ of 'catastrophe in slow motion'. Resisting the defeatist 'ethical abdication' that Félix Guattari diagnoses within most dominant cultural theory,² the affirmative momentum of Fluxus cultural practices is best introduced in terms of what Ken Friedman identifies as its commitment to 'robust paradigms for innovation' and 'human growth',³ and its resilient 'spirit of large goals'.⁴ A certain lightness of touch, and a certain innate resistance to dogma differentiates the Fluxus aesthetic from both the more precise kind of political agenda that Joseph Beuys associated with the 'clearly marked goal',⁵ and the still more stringent philosophical rigour that Jürgen Habermas advocates in terms of the pre-postmodern – and in retrospect, quintessential anti-postmodern – Enlightenment ideal of 'communicative rationality'.⁶

At first glance, the calculatedly 'viral, fractal quality' and 'aphoristic and fragmentary form' commended by postmodern theorists such as Baudrillard certainly seems to share something of the enigmatic register of its Fluxus precursors' provocations.⁷ Contemplating Baudrillard's writings, one might well ask 'Is this theory?', and contemplating the whimsical simplicity of a Fluxus object, a Fluxus event or a Fluxus score, one might well respond – somewhat like Andreas Huyssens' son before Beuys' 1982 Kassel Documenta installation – with such questions as: 'Is this art?', 'Is this politics?', 'Is this theory?' or 'Is this just a joke?'.⁸ Beuys' finest works, like the finest of Fluxus works and the finest of Baudrillard's paragraphs, are all perhaps best understood as a kind of highly serious joke; as something funny 'ha ha', and perhaps funny peculiar, but also as something funnily relevant and funnily revealing. As the Australian performance artist Stelarc suggests, deceptively simple art may well ignite unexpectedly intense insight:

I remember once, at one of the Kassel Documentas, walking over a square bit of concrete sort of in the ground, with a circle of brass in the middle, which seemed to be a very minimal, simple, beautiful little piece. But then, going into the museum, I discovered that this was Walter de Maria's installation, and that brass circle was in fact

a kilometre deep brass rod into the ground And all of a sudden, you know, the kind of spatial dimensions and structural aesthetics of that piece exploded cerebrally!⁹

Over the years I have responded to Fluxus in somewhat similar stages, and never more so than to *Personal Space* (1972), a text by Ken Friedman that I first encountered in Richard Kostelanetz's anthology *Breakthrough Fictioneers* (1973), which also included – among many other works – a concrete poem that I had written entitled 'wind chasing dog', in which these words read right to left, or left to right, around a rectangular structure. A pleasing extra-linear realistic work, I had thought, having watched a dog chasing the wind, or chased by the wind, on a hillside in 1971. But what could one make of Friedman's *Personal Space*, which advises the reader:

Immediately after reading this instruction, close the book. Strongly visualise two (2) inches of space around the book in all directions. Fill this space with any ideas or materials you may wish. This space is your Personal Space. As such it is not only personalised, but portable – that is, it may be unwrapped from around this book and used anywhere ... Remember when you set up this Personal Space to construct it carefully so that it does not collapse.¹⁰

Undisturbed by the restricted poetic – or at least, semantic – space of 'wind chasing dog', I wondered where the more conceptual spiral of Friedman's instructions actually led. If, as Paik observes, 'Fluxus is a kind of minimal aesthetic', didn't Friedman's work typify the way in which 'a minimal aesthetic, by definition, is not so easy to succeed in'?¹¹ And if, as Friedman remarks, 'Explosive humour' can be 'a tool for clearing ground', insofar as 'Good nature, charity, humour from the deep spring of hope are the core of Fluxus', didn't the slightly far-fetched quality of this work also confirm his warning that 'humour has sometimes moved from a form of liberation to a kind of trap'?¹²

If it is the case, as Friedman remarks, that 'When Fluxus is nothing but jokes, it's difficult to build on the cleared ground' – just as it is equally difficult to build helpful accounts of contemporary culture, when postmodern theory is nothing but jokes and self-deconstructing wordplay – it seems evident that most Fluxus jokes function within rather wider dynamics, reassessing tired conventions by provoking what Friedman calls the 'delicate interplay between clearing and building that gives birth to social reconstruction'. Viewed in this context,

Zen time and vaudeville time are balanced by building and development. There is a place for humour, a place for jokes in art. There is also a time to build, a time after the 'Sweeping Away'. The gate to Fluxus is open. It's a good time to contemplate first principles.¹³

Far from simply offering a minimalist joke, *Personal Space* now seems to typify the way in which Fluxus works prompt a more maximal approach to 'first principles' and to 'richer debate'. In Friedman's terms,

These sorts of discussions are thought experiments, comparable to the thought experiments used by physicists to test propositions as valid questions ... We work to develop new models, approaching art as an experimental vehicle in the service of life ... We don't oppose making art. We simply think that the best way to make art is an experimental attitude that allows for many approaches.

Research and the development of robust paradigms for innovation are an important source of human growth. The world can afford new ways of thinking about art. The world requires them.¹⁴

If the Fluxus aesthetic and the provocative register of Baudrillard's writings sometimes appear to resist evaluation, this is surely because they both employ the same self-deflating logic which initially typecast Dada as little more than an irritating joke.

Tristan Tzara's 'Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love' (1920), for example, taunts the reader with the apparently absurd suggestion that 'Dada is a dog – a compass – the lining of the stomach', before rather more aptly claiming that 'Dada is a quantity of life in transparent, effortless and gyratory transformation'.¹⁵ As Tzara indicates, Dada's anti-logic invites conceptual transformation. Scratch a Dadaist or a Fluxus artist once and you find a nihilist. Scratch them twice, and more positive values appear.

Baudrillard's writings display similar ambiguities. Deploping the 'atrocious uselessness' of contemporary existence, and declaring 'disgust for a world that is growing, accumulating, sprawling, sliding into hypertrophy'¹⁶, Baudrillard sporadically defends what Tzara terms the 'gyratory transformation' of language, arguing, for example, that, 'What counts is the singularity of ... analysis', as opposed to 'language that is maddeningly tedious and demoralising platitudinous'.¹⁷ On other occasions, Baudrillard damns his own insights with faint praise as 'an intelligence without hope'.¹⁸ By contrast, both Dada and Fluxus tend to evince intelligence with hope, or in Friedman's terms, 'the power of unrealistic goals, of dreams and aspirations' pursued with 'whole-hearted integrity'.¹⁹

Of course, at their most provocative, Fluxus texts rival even Tzara's nihilism, repudiating both high art and Dadaist anti-art. Noting that 'Dada said to hell with serious art', and that 'today Dada is serious art', Ben Vautier amusingly concludes:

I am not interested in Dada historical maniacs.
I prefer a naked girl in my bed to Dada.²⁰

In much the same way, Baudrillard perfects the studied irreverence of the avowal: 'I don't want culture; I spit on it.'²¹ Nevertheless, both Vautier and Baudrillard also sometimes share the crucially affirmative postmodern impulse to emulate, elaborate and update the innovative velocity of Dada's most transgressive and transformative energies, by generating the kind of 'magic' that Baudrillard associates with more or less privileged moments when 'you cause things to exist ... by confronting them'.²² But at their most distinct extremes, Fluxus practices and postmodern cultural theory differ in terms of their self-confidence and their commitment to positive change. While most postmodern cultural theorists envisage the present as (to return to Dickens) 'a season of Darkness', most Fluxus artists maintain faith in 'the spring of hope'.

For Dick Higgins, for example, 'The very name, "Fluxus", suggests change, being in a state of flux', and reflecting 'the most exciting avant-garde tendencies of a given time or moment – the fluxattitude'.²³ While sensitive to the 'frail' quality of such 'beginnings', Higgins warns that 'it would seem unwise to dismiss them as impossibilities, simply because they do not measure up to the achievements of the modernisms of the bulk of the twentieth century, now ending'.²⁴ Likewise, Emmett Williams evokes the Fluxus aesthetic in terms of its aspiration 'to do things that we had never seen before, to make the kind of books that simply didn't exist';²⁵ and Friedman equates the Fluxus aesthetic with an 'unwillingness to be told what sort of goals are too large'.²⁶ Turning to the way in which its flexible goals facilitated its collective survival, Paik cites Fluxus as 'one of the very few anarchistic groups'

in which 'many different egos – twenty, thirty different artists – kept quite good friends and collaborated'.²⁷ Williams similarly finds Fluxus 'the longest-lived thing, in terms of an art movement, in the twentieth century';²⁸ and Friedman posits that 'no group of artists since the Middle Ages has maintained a sense of community for such a long time'.²⁹

Remarking that Fluxus is 'still making waves', as its successive festivals make new ties, and consolidate old alliances, Williams adds:

We've had quite a few of these reunions – we had a great one in 1982 in Wiesbaden, and two of them in '92 in Wiesbaden and Cologne, and then the one in Korea, shortly after that, and wherever the great German Fluxus show goes, there's a kind of getting together too – last winter in Lithuania . . . having first come from Istanbul, and going now to Warsaw . . . then Prague and Budapest. It just gets livelier and livelier.³⁰

As Williams intimates, the fortunes of Fluxus typify the way in which the best of the postmodern avant-gardes displace, replace and then eventually rejoin earlier traditions, initially subverting 'nice classical education', and subsequently offering alternative classical repertoires:

We often talk about that situation, you know, and when people say 'But this was heralded as such a great experimental troupe during the sixties, how can you justify doing what you did then thirty years later?', I cannot see why on earth not. I mean, I can certainly see a situation where you could do Mozart and the Fluxus classics on the same evening. After all, Mozart didn't stop after the second performance of a work, and is there any reason why Fluxus should? No-one ever said of Fluxus, 'These are spontaneous performances – you can only do it one time.' Some of us still do the Fluxus classics because the pieces are strong and good, and audiences still like them and we like to perform them. Maybe we look funny up there on the stage in our sixties and seventies, but that's no reason to stop.³¹

It is easy to overlook the more affirmative impulses in Fluxus, Dada – and, to a lesser extent, in Baudrillardian theory. In each instance, such impulses are implicit rather than explicit, and initially remain understated and overshadowed by iconoclastic counterparts. Only later decades reveal that initially negative 'anti' gestures may well make way for the more consequential experimental alternatives that Renato Poggioli defines as 'ante-creation',³² and that Friedman thinks of as a kind of 'useful thought experiment', even if accompanied by certain 'evident flaws'.³³

Ironically, the widespread construction of Dada as a nihilistic 'anti-art' movement only received systematic challenge in the mid-1960s, when critical enthusiasm for so-called 'neo-Dada' performances prompted veteran Dadaists such as Raoul Hausmann to dismiss 'empty repetitions of Dada events', and to defend the originality and the 'constructive idea' behind Dadaist experiments, which 'remain art', he argued, 'in spite of their anti-art tendency'.³⁴

Marcel Janco's essay 'Dada at Two Speeds' (1966) still more interestingly distinguished 'two Dadas, negative and positive'. While recognising 'the spiritual violence' of Dada's 'first phase', or its 'negative speed', Janco emphasises 'the prophetic work of positive Dada, which opened to art a new road, upon which . . . artistic creativity has remained dependent through the present day'.³⁵ In turn, Higgins differentiates the phases in the careers of Fluxus artists, noting how art in flux constantly evolves beyond both its origins and its own most cherished early aspirations:

For 'pure Fluxus', one must look to the first pieces of the late fifties and early sixties. But just as Max Ernst did not die with Dada, so Fluxus artists did not end with the self-

consciously defined Fluxus 'tendency' ... Almost all the original Fluxus artists have changed and evolved to do other work.³⁶

The heroic quality of the Fluxus aesthetic's openness to 'other work', and to the perils of 'frail' hybridity – (as opposed to the seductive security of well-defined 'purity') – seems still more admirable when one considers the conservative fatalism of much contemporary cultural theory. Deploring this loss of nerve, Higgins reflects:

In times like this, there are really rather few people who have kept the faith, kept the vision, and kept their nerve ... Although this is not a world in which everybody seems to be doing all kinds of incredibly stimulating things, as they did, say, in the nineteen sixties, although this world is basically somewhat of a down-world, it's probably therefore a nexus point – some sort of transition point – towards whatever is going to come next – hopefully a positive one.³⁷

Academia, Higgins suggests, makes it old, or makes it traditional, rather than making it 'positive' and 'new'. Tending 'to choose to teach whatever it is they can teach', academics usually ignore 'any new work that doesn't readily fall into classifiability'.³⁸ Unclassifiable 'wide goals', in other words, are dismissed as 'anti-art' by those who can only teach in terms of tried and trusted classifications.

But as Higgins suggests, it is precisely the narrow academic priorities and expectations of mainstream critical categories that most accurately deserve the designation 'anti-art' in terms of their incapacity to accept innovation:

When I do artistic work ... I follow my nose, and it has a tendency to lead me out – always out – of established intermedia ... towards trying the frontiers of this and trying the frontiers of that. People are often dismayed, because what I'm working on simply does not fit the priorities which they've set for themselves.³⁹

If suspicion of both old and new aesthetic priorities prompts Baudrillard to complain that 'The maximum in intensity lies behind us; the minimum in passion and intellectual inspiration lie before us',⁴⁰ Fluxus artists rather differently complain of over-exposure to different kinds of inspiration. Relating, for example, how he 'became ill over the matter when ... very young', before finally accepting that he could 'not stop working in all these different media', Higgins explains:

I kept asking myself, 'Dick – you cannot possibly be serious? When are you going to be just a composer, or just a poet, or just a visual artist?' ... I realised that I couldn't specialise, because every time I tried, I got depressed.⁴¹

Baudrillard, by contrast, usually argues that 'We shouldn't presume to produce positive solutions',⁴² somewhat as Jameson insists that multimedia texts such as video art 'ought not to have any 'meaning' at all'.⁴³ As Nam June Paik observes, academic chic seems to compel incredulity towards creative innovation.

Of course all intellectuals are against technology, and all for ecology, which is very important. But in a way, we are inventing more pollution-free technology ... we have to admit that compared to Charles Dickens' time, we are living better, no? So we must give up certain parts of intellectual vanity, and look at the good parts of so-called high-tech research.⁴⁴

Perhaps times are changing. As Baudrillard indicates in his interviews of the early 1990s, his writings are gradually acknowledging what Paik calls 'the good parts of so-called high-tech

research'. Describing his 'rather critical or pejorative vision of technology as a first position' shared by almost all cultural theorists, because 'everybody speaks of technology in this way' and feels 'obliged to do this', Baudrillard now hints that a 'second position' and a 'more subtle form of analysis' might consist of 'seeing technology as an instrument of magic'.⁴⁵

And somewhat as Guattari's *Chaosmosis* defends technological art still more stridently, arguing that 'It is in underground art that we find some of the most important cells of resistance against the streamroller of capitalist subjectivity',⁴⁶ Jean-François Lyotard similarly cites the 'artistic community' as 'a model for society' insofar as it offers a flexible, creative community 'which ... has no laws, no rules ... people who do research, invent things, show them to one another, discuss them'.⁴⁷

For Lyotard, this kind of 'avant-garde' community, in which members uncompromisingly 'say what they think', offers exemplary 'witnesses of changes in the culture, and probably in society itself'.⁴⁸ More specifically,

There's a sort of ethic in all this, a very deep ethic, even among the nastiest, and God knows artists can be nasty ... they feel responsible for having to do something, they don't know exactly what, they're searching. They have considerable responsibility with respect to what they feel themselves called to do ... And that's beautiful, it's a highly moral model for a community to function in. That's why I've always thought that this community in flight, inexistant, in perpetual conflict, is a sort of model – and of course this community lives in anguish – 'Can I do it, can I measure up to this demand imposed on me from where I don't know, can I make this instead of that, see if I can get sound out of an old pot – what is art, what is painting, what is poetry – and orality, and writing?' These questions are always with us, and cannot be perceived without a sense of anguish, because they are grave questions. Amen.⁴⁹

Despite the levity of his final self-consciously self-deflating 'Amen' signalling – perhaps – a certain discomfort before 'grave questions', Lyotard's account of this kind of 'community in flight' admirably complements Friedman's evocation of Fluxus' curiously advantageous 'disorganisation'.⁵⁰

Obviously, this mentality did not appeal to all Fluxus artists. As Beuys explains, if he broke away in the early 1960s, in order 'to address deeper elements'⁵¹ than Maciunas' wish to 'direct ... human capabilities toward socially constructive goals such as the applied arts', by the systematic 'elimination of the fine arts',⁵² this was because he found Fluxus too 'disorganised' for his purposes.

What they lacked was a real theory, a recognisable underlying structure with a clearly marked goal. They held a mirror in front of people, without using it to lead to a betterment of their condition. Despite this ... Fluxus actions had a value, because they made ... conscious attempts to produce an important development'.⁵³

As Friedman and Paik intimate, the pluralistic momentum of Fluxus seems incompatible with a strictly defined party line. Friedman, for example, emphasises that, 'Inside Fluxus, no one was willing to have George Maciunas speak for or supervise our political views',⁵⁴ and Paik, too, cherishes its predominantly leaderless anarchy.⁵⁵

Like those of Dada (and to a lesser extent, of the finest flourishes of postmodern theory), the contradictory energies of the Fluxus aesthetic derive from the point 'where yes and no and all the opposites meet',⁵⁶ manifesting the kind of conceptual agility that Baudrillard incites when asserting that theory should 'Make enigmatic what is clear, render unintelligible

what is only too intelligible' and spread 'the germs or viruses of a radical illusion'.⁵⁷ Yet for all its vital 'viral' rhetoric, Baudrillard's theory seldom identifies or inaugurates radical 'beginnings'. Advocating contamination by innovation, and then self-consciously lamenting the implausibility of this ideal, Baudrillard frustratingly concludes: 'As for art ... There must be some meaning to it ... but we cannot see what it is.'⁵⁸

Cannot see, or cannot yet see? As Higgins emphasises, even though we may not know for sure where the 'beginnings will lead to', it is our responsibility to facilitate and follow the fortunes of new possibilities, especially when their most positive 'speeds' seem likely to lead beyond familiar postmodern cultural debates, towards wider, more challenging goals. Quite simply, 'We are not just modern or postmodern today. We are premillennarian, and it is up to us and those who come after us to determine what that means.'⁵⁹

NOTES

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- 2 Félix Guattari, 'Postmodernism and Ethical Abdication', Interview with Nicholas Zurbrugg, *Photofile* [Sydney], no. 39 (July 1993), p 13.
- 3 Ken Friedman, 'Rethinking Fluxus', in Nicholas Tsoutas and Nicholas Zurbrugg, eds, *Fluxus!*, Brisbane, Institute of Modern Art, 1990, pp 23–4.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p 26.
- 5 Beuys, cited in Götz Adriani, Winfried Konnertz and Karin Thomas, eds, *Joseph Beuys: Life and Works*, trans Patricia Lech, New York, Barron's, 1979, p 86.
- 6 Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', *New German Critique*, no. 22 (Winter 1981), p 7.
- 7 Jean Baudrillard, 'Fractal Theory', Interview with Nicholas Zurbrugg, in Mike Gane, ed, *Baudrillard Live*, London, Routledge, 1993, p 171.
- 8 Andreas Huyssens, 'Mapping the Postmodern', *New German Critique*, no. 33 (Fall 1984), p 5.
- 9 'Telematic Tremors: Telematic Pleasures, Stelarc and "Fractal Flesh"', Interview with Nicholas Zurbrugg, in Anna Novakov, ed, *Carnal Pleasures: The Public Spaces of Desire*, Seattle, WA, Bay Press (forthcoming).
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- 11 Nam June Paik, Interview with Nicholas Zurbrugg, in *Fluxus*, Special Issue of *Lund Art Press*, vol 2, no. 2 (1991), p 135.
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- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 Tristan Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love' (1920); reprinted in *Seven Dada Manifesto*, trans Barbara Wright, London, John Calder, 1977, p 43.
- 16 Baudrillard, 'The Anorexic Ruins', p. 31.
- 17 Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, trans Chris Turner, London, Verso, pp 119–21.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p 119.
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- 24 Dick Higgins, 'Music from Outside', in René Block, ed, *The Readymade Boomerang*, Sydney, The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990, p 138.
- 25 Emmett Williams, Interview with Nicholas Zurbrugg, in *Positively Postmodern: The Multimedia Muse in America*, Washington DC, Maison Neuve, forthcoming.
- 26 Friedman, 'Rethinking Fluxus', p 26.
- 27 Paik, Interview with Nicholas Zurbrugg, in *Fluxus Research*, p 135.
- 28 Williams, Interview with Nicholas Zurbrugg, in *Positively Postmodern*.
- 29 Friedman, 'Rethinking Fluxus', p 17.
- 30 Williams, Interview with Nicholas Zurbrugg, in *Positively Postmodern*.
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- 35 Marcel Janco, 'Dada at Two Speeds', in Lucy Lippard, ed, *Dadas on Art*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1966, p 38.
- 36 Higgins, 'Music from Outside', p 134.
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- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Baudrillard, 'The Anorexic Ruins', p 40.
- 41 Higgins, 'Music from Outside'.
- 42 Baudrillard, 'Fractal Theory', p 170.
- 43 Fredric Jameson, 'Reading Without Interpretation: Postmodernism and the Video-text', in Negel Fabb et al., eds, *The Linguistics of Writing*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1987 pp 217–8.
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- 47 Jean-François Lyotard, Interview with Alain Arias-Misson, *Lotta Poetica* [Verona], series 3, no. 1 (January 1987), p 81.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ibid., pp 81–2.
- 50 Friedman, 'Rethinking Fluxus', p 13.
- 51 Beuys, cited in Adriani, Konnertz and Thomas, *Joseph Beuys*, p 87.
- 52 Ibid., pp 82–3.
- 53 Ibid., p 86.
- 54 Friedman, 'Rethinking Fluxus', p 21.
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- 56 Tristan Tzara, 'Lecture on Dada' (1920); reprinted in Herschell B Chipp, ed, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1968, p 389.
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- 58 Ibid., p 147.
- 59 Higgins, 'Music from Outside', p 138.