

# TWELVE FLUXUS IDEAS

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**Twelve Fluxus Ideas**

by Ken Friedman

**1. The Fluxus Idea, 1962-2007**

**1.1 The birth of Fluxus, more or less**

Forty-five years ago, the first organized Fluxus festival took place in Wiesbaden, Germany. This generally calls for anniversary celebrations on the decade – the mid-point between forty and fifty offers a good moment for reflection, and an opportunity to reflect on the relation between Fluxus and design.

Emmett Williams once wrote, “Fluxus is what Fluxus does – but no one knows whodunit.” This concise description makes two radical statements. The statement that no one knows “who done” Fluxus rejects the idea of Fluxus as a specific group of people. It identifies Fluxus with a frame of action and defines Fluxus as a cumulative, aggregate of Fluxus activities over the past forty-five years. I never asked Emmett what he thought of this interpretation of his playful conundrum, so I don’t know whether he would have agreed with me. Dick Higgins did.

Dick explicitly rejected a notion that limited Fluxus to a specific group of people who came together at a specific time and place. Dick 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, for George Maciunas, and for me, 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.

As I see it, Fluxus was a laboratory. The research program of the Fluxus laboratory is characterized by twelve ideas:

globalism,  
the unity of art and life,  
intermedia,  
experimentalism,  
chance,  
playfulness,  
simplicity,  
implicativeness,  
exemplativism,  
specificity,  
presence in time, and  
musicality.

## **1.2 Ideas and Issues**

The Fluxus idea is distinct from the specific group of people. The Fluxus idea existed long before the specific group of people identified with Fluxus.

At different times, many experimental artists, architects, composers, and designers have been involved with Fluxus, closely or at the margins. They created, published, exhibited, and performed under the Fluxus label or in the Fluxus context. This gave a tangible form and shape to the Fluxus idea.

The idea involved a community larger than the specific group.

The Fluxus idea implies model-making and paradigm formation. This article will consider some of the models and paradigms that are essential to understanding Fluxus.

## **1.3 Examples and Contrasts**

New models in mathematics precede and lead to new applications in physical science. New paradigms in art emerge when the world-view of the larger society within which art is embedded begins to shift. Changes in vision transform culture and science as they reshape history. These changes are visible in the shifting paradigms of art.

The sciences of transdisciplinary complexity came into their own during the decades in which Fluxus emerged. Fluxus and intermedia were born just as technology shifted from electrical engineering to electronic engineering.

The first computers used punch cards and mechanical systems. These systems date back to the Jacquard loom of 1801 and the Babbage computing engine of 1834. The computing systems in use when Fluxus began were based on the Hollerith punch-card system of the 1890s.

Computation science was still in its infancy in 1962, along with early forms of cognitive science, evolutionary psychology, and the neurosciences. Chaos studies had not yet emerged as a discipline, but the foundations of chaos studies were already in place.

Fluxus grew with the intermedia idea. It had strong foundations in music, Zen, design, and architecture. Rather than pursuing technical – or technological – solutions to artistic problems, Fluxus artists tended to move in a philosophical vein. The work was both direct and subtle. This proved to be a blessing, and most Fluxus work avoided the dead-end solutions typical of the 1960s approach to art and technology.

The experiments in art and technology that typified the 1960s were important, but they were ultimately without purpose. Their importance lay in the effort to explore new media and new possibilities. Nevertheless, the tendency of the artists to focus on technical solutions rather than philosophical implications rendered the work both spectacular and shallow. At the end of the day, art, and technology was retinal painting written large. It was seemingly modern because it echoed the dramatic forms of the world around it. Like the belching smokestacks and grinding wheels of 1930s murals, it echoed the time in a way that made it meaningful to those who saw it while giving it what would become a quaint patina as the technology on which it was based changed.

New paradigms engender new technology as well as new art, but few technologies give birth to interesting art forms.

It is too soon to tell whether much interesting art will emerge from the technologies of the past for decades.

Buckminster Fuller noted a three-decade time lag between innovative paradigms and their wide practical adoption in useful technologies and behaviors. Many of the new disciplines have only now been around for thirty years. Some are not yet a decade old. The time may not yet be ripe for obvious application in visual art.

Electronic processors and video equipment gave rise to new art forms. Artists could exploit these obvious technologies. Significantly, the paradigms on which they operate are not new.

Electronic music, for example, began with electrical equipment rather than the electronic equipment that is available today. Electronic music was called *electronic music* because the term seemed more workable than *electric music* or *electrical music* would have been.

The first electronic music was created with wired circuits and electrical tubes, not with transistors and computers. The early equipment used to generate electronic music resembled an old-fashioned telephone switchboard in appearance and operation. This technology was generations older than the modern computers that generate electronic music today.

The equipment available to artists and composers in those days was analog equipment, wired, and arranged by hand. It was very different from the powerful workstations that now contain more computing power than the early mainframes.

The past and present of technological art and electronic music are merely an example. The technological applications of electronic art are still primitive, even if the paradigms are not. It seems that video and the electronic arts are still in their primitive stage. Video has passed out of its Stone Age and entered the Bronze Age.

Video is now a recognized art form, as electronic music, electrostatic printing, electrostatic transfer, and electrostatic printmaking have become. The media are now distinct and simple but the artistic results are not often powerful or elegant.

A failure of philosophy is the problem. Too many artists are entranced with the physical qualities of media and unconscious about ideas. Art is burdened by attention to physical media and plagued by a failure to consider the potential of intermedia.

#### **1.4 From Technology to Philosophy**

The equipment available to artists today does far more physically than the art requires. Most videos are long on technique and short on content. Of course, that is also true of painting.

Computerized graphic design often illustrates the problem. Graphic designers explore the capacity of a computer to set hundreds of complex graphic objects on a page with multiple layers and hitherto impossible effects while they remain unaware of such simple issues as legibility and basic communication theory.

The technical power available to computer-based designers outstrips their design ability in many cases. The result has been an avalanche of complicated, trendy typography and fussy, mannerist design created to look up-to-date rather than to communicate.

The most powerful use of computers in science is creating elegant, simple solutions to complex problems. In fields such as physics, economics, or biology, scientists use computers to model different kinds of realities, bringing difficult equations to life and working out the possible end states of different systems. When artists use the mechanical power of the computer to complicate rather than to simplify, it suggests that they do not understand the paradigms of the new technology. They have merely learned to manipulate the equipment.

The explosion of unworkable Web sites loaded with bells and whistles is another example. Empirical research in psychology and cognition demonstrates that Web site visitors want ease of use, fast download times, and user-friendly navigation features. The vast majority of the world's home users surf the Web over simple modems and copper-wire telephone connections. Sensible designers – and intelligent design students – recognize the fact that the astonishing power of broadband connections makes their computing environment entirely different than the online experience of the ordinary users for whom they design Web sites. Many designers do not.

These same problems are reflected in the ways that artists use the Web and digital media.

The art forms that will one day emerge from computation science and chaos studies have not yet reached the level of video and electronic music, as basic as they still are. The physical forms of computation science or chaos are not as simple or as obvious electronic music or video.

Right now, technology dictates the use of media and technological frenzy inhibits the learning process. It may even be that evolution demands the creation of many dead ends on the way to interesting art.

The computer-generated images presented today as computer art or the fractal images of chaos studies are simplistic presentations of an idea. They are laboratory exercises or displays of technical virtuosity, designed to test and demonstrate the media and the technology. They are the intellectual and artistic equivalent of the paint samples that interior designers use to plan larger projects. They may be interesting and useful in some way, but they are only relevant to people shopping for paint.

In contrast, Fluxus called for approaches to art and life that are simple rather than simplistic.

The level of complexity in any given work was determined by philosophical paradigms and not by available technology. This is an important difference a technological age.

It is distinguishes Fluxus forms as humanistic forms, forms determined by the artist rather than by the tools. It shaped the roots of intermedia as opposed to multimedia. The idea of simplicity owes as much to the Fluxus refusal to distinguish between art and life as to the intellectual curiosity that characterizes Fluxus artists.

### **1.5 Paradigms are More Important than Technology**

The paradigms of any complex, transformative era are its most interesting features. Paradigms born today will transform the global environment tomorrow. This is the environment in which Fluxus took shape and the environment in which Fluxus continues to grow. It has not led to an art of technical applications, but an art of subtle ideas. Some of those ideas have been complex, but few have been complicated. Many have been simple. Few have been simplistic. (Simplistic Fluxus works do crop up as thought experiments or as demonstrations in the tradition of Diogenes or the Hodja.)

The essence of Fluxus has been transformation. The key transformative issues in a society don't always attract immediate notice. Transformative issues involve paradigm shifts. When paradigms are shifting, the previous dominant information hierarchy holds the obvious focus of a society's attention until the shift is complete. One simple example of this phenomenon can be seen in the expectations we had for videophone compared to what we thought of telefax.

For decades, journalists hailed videophone as the coming revolution in telecommunications. Videophone appeared to be a natural marriage of television and telephone. It was a great idea. It made for fascinating illustrated articles in magazines and great snippets on TV shows.

By contrast, telefax was humble, almost primitive. Users could send a message, but they could not talk and see their message at the same time. On an emotional level, therefore, telefax seemed closer to telegraph than television, nowhere near as exciting as videophone.

In the end, it did not matter that telefax lacked excitement. Telefax was useful. It was application-oriented and user-friendly. It was simple and flexible. As a result, telefax became the most profound development in communications technology of the 1980s and early 1990s.

At first, the telefax was so obvious that it was almost overlooked. Videophone was such a dramatic idea that it held public interest long before becoming possible as a practical, cost-effective technology. It diverted public attention from the telefax while telefax quietly transformed the way we sent and received messages.

That is the way it was with Fluxus.

Fluxus took shape in Europe, the United States, and Japan during the 1950s. It started in the work and actions of many people. Their activity went unnoticed most of the time. When it was noticed, people did not give it much thought.

Nevertheless, the processes created and nurtured by the Fluxus community were new paradigms for considering art, architecture, music, and design.

The artists, composers, architects, and designers who constituted the Fluxus community worked with simple ideas. The ideas sometimes seemed so simple that they were easy to ignore.

As often happens in developing paradigms, simplicity is a focus for concentrated thinking. It generates depth, power, and resonance. That is how Fluxus survived and why Fluxus was never just an art movement.

The environment also changes. Just as the telefax redefined the way that people communicate, new media will once again transform our way of sending and receiving messages.

Telefax was developed before the widespread availability of the personal computer. Today, personal computers and the various ways of linking them are beginning to replace telefax -- including computers that emulate a telefax. The telefax that was once revolutionary has become an entry-level technology.

In the middle of the 1800s, Pony Express redefined overland message delivery speed. Pony Express lasted only two years before it was replaced by the telegraph. The telegraph was later replaced by the telephone, an invention that was once thought of as a special kind of toy for transmitting musical concerts and news broadcasts.

Today, satellite-linked telephones, computer networks, and e-mail are shaping a platform that will slowly encompass the earth. This platform will eventually make videophone possible through a new technology unimagined by the original inventors of the videophone concept. The technologies of Internet and the World Wide Web have replaced Telefax with email and email attachments. Web telephony and Web conferencing will bring the videophone to life for users with good connections.

Despite the growth of advanced technology, the relatively simple telefax remains useful and so do landline telephones. Today, as in past times, there are situations in which older technologies are better suited to modern applications than the more advanced solutions. One example is the suitability of entry-level mobile phone systems for developing nations that use a simpler and less expensive technology than the GSM systems that are standard in many European nations.

Some technologies and paradigms will probably never lose their value. Books are an example for reading. The human voice is an example for speaking and singing. These are examples of simple paradigms and technologies that are accessible and available under such a wide variety of options that they will always be useful for some applications.

Fluxus works in the same way. It is a useful series of paradigms and options.

### **1.6 Fluxus and the New Global Perspective**

Fluxus grew from a global tradition. It was neglected because it is anti-nationalistic in sentiment and tone. Artists who are not easily used as national flag-bearers typify it.

While artists such as Marcel Duchamp and John Cage are described as Fluxus ancestors, ideas played a larger role than individuals.

De Stijl and the Bauhaus philosophy were central to some. Russian revolutionary art groups such as LEF influenced others.

For many, the idea that one can be an artist and -- at the same time -- an industrialist, an architect, or a designer is a key to the way one can view Fluxus work and the artist's role in society.

It is as important to work in the factory or the urban landscape as in the museum. It is important to be able to shift positions and to work in both environments.

Dada was farther from Fluxus in many ways than either De Stijl or Bauhaus. The seeming relationship between Fluxus and Dada is more a matter of appearances than of deep structure. Robert Filliou pointed this out in a 1962 statement making clear that Fluxus is not Dadaist in its intentions.

Dada was explosive, irreverent, and made much use of humor, as Fluxus has also done. Nevertheless, Dada was nihilistic. It was a millenarian movement in modernist terms.

Fluxus was constructive. Fluxus was founded on principles of creation, of transformation and its central method sought new ways to build.

While Fluxus offers something to everyone who is interested, it demands perspective and commitment in return. Anyone can have it. Everyone must work to get it.

The premises and the results are simple.

The path from the premises to the goal can be difficult.

Fluxus is a creation of the fluid moment. The transformative zone where the shore meets the water is simple and complex. Profoundly simple premises can create rich, complex interactions that lead to surprising results.

Finding the simple elements that interact to shape our complex environment is the goal of much science. In culture, too, and in human behavior, simple elements combine in many ways.

On the one hand, we seek to understand and describe them. On the other, we seek to use them. The fascination and delight of transformation states in boundary zones is the way in which they evolve naturally.

### **1.7 A When, How and Who of Fluxus**

Let's jump back to the anniversary year, 1962. Several people in Europe, Japan, and the United States had been working in parallel art forms and pursuing many of the same ideas in their work. The Lithuanian-born architect and designer George Maciunas had tried to present their work in a gallery and through a magazine named *Fluxus*. The gallery folded and the magazine never appeared.

Maciunas organized a festival in Wiesbaden, Germany, in 1962, featuring the work of many of the artists and composers whose work had been scheduled for publication in the magazine. The idea of the festival was to raise money to publish the magazine, so it was called the Fluxus Festival. The German press referred the participants by name of the festival, calling them "die Fluxus leute," the Fluxus people. That's how a specific group of artists came to be called the Fluxus group.

The artists in Wiesbaden included Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Arthur K pcke, George Maciunas, Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson, Karl Erik Welin, Emmett Williams, and Wolf Vostell. They were already in contact with artists and composers such as George Brecht, Jackson Mac Low, La Monte Young, Ben Vautier, and with many of the individuals whose work was soon to appear in *An Anthology*.

While Maciunas's festival gave Fluxus its name, many of the artists and composers involved the festival had known and worked with each other long before 1962.

The New York Audio-Visual Group, for example, had been active since 1956. In Germany, a similar group of artists and composers had been working together equally as long. Maciunas's projects offered these people a forum. For many them, Fluxus was a forum and a meeting place without ideological or artistic conditions and without a defined artistic program.

After Wiesbaden, artists who had been working on similar principles met others who were active in the Fluxus community. Some of them became active in the Fluxus group. Most of them were working on a similar basis and they took part in Fluxus because of what they had already done.

These artists were to include Joseph Beuys, Giuseppe Chiari, Henning Christiansen, Philip Corner, Robert Filliou, Bengt af Klintberg, Yoko Ono, Willem de Ridder, Takako Saito, Tomas Schmit, Daniel Spoerri, Robert Watts, La Monte Young and others. Some, like La Monte, had been in touch with George long before Wiesbaden. The group kept growing through the mid-sixties, eventually coming to include other artists like Milan Knizak, Geoff Hendricks, Larry Miller, Yoshi Wada, Jean Dupuy, and myself.

There were two groups of original Fluxus members. The first group was comprised of the nine who were at Wiesbaden. The second group included those who came into Fluxus in the years after, distinguished by innovative work that led the others to welcome them.

Fluxus has been able to grow because it has had room for dialogue and transformation. It has been able to be born and reborn several times in different ways. The fluid understanding of its own history and meaning, the central insistence on dialogue and social creativity rather than on objects and artifacts have enabled Fluxus to remain alive on the several occasions that Fluxus has been declared dead.

## **2. Twelve Fluxus Ideas**

### **2.0 Core Issues**

Twelve core ideas can be seen as basic to Fluxus. In 1981, Dick Higgins wrote a list of nine criteria that he suggested as central to Fluxus. He stated that a work or a project is Fluxus to the degree that it fulfills a significant number of criteria, and that the more criteria any one piece fills, the more Fluxus in intention and realization it is. I expanded Dick's list to twelve. The ideas are much the same as Dick's, but I changed some of the terms to account more precisely for nuances of meaning.

There has been some confusion over the use of the term criteria. Dick and I both used the term in the original sense of characteristics or traits, not standards of judgment. In short, we intended *description*, not *prescription*.

We're describing ideas, not prescribing standards.

The **Twelve Fluxus Ideas** are:

**Globalism**

**Unity of art and life**

**Intermedia**

**Experimentalism**

**Chance**

**Playfulness**

**Simplicity**

**Implicativeness**

**Exemplativism**

**Specificity**

**Presence in time**

**Musicality**

## **2.1 Globalism**

*Globalism* is central to Fluxus. It embraces the idea that we live on a single world, a world in which the boundaries of political states are not identical with the boundaries of nature or culture. Dick Higgins's list used the term *internationalism*. Higgins referred to Fluxus's complete lack of interest in the national origin of ideas or of people, but internationalism can also be a form of competition between nations. War is now unacceptable as a form of national expression. Economic interests on a global scale erase national boundaries, too. The only areas in which nations can push themselves forward as national interest groups with identities defined against the identities of other nations are sports and culture. The international culture festivals are sometimes like soccer championships where culture stars and national politicians push against each other with all the vigor and savagery of simulated warfare. Fluxus encourages dialogue among like minds, regardless of nation. Fluxus welcomes the dialogue of unlike minds when social purposes are in tune.

In the 1960s, the concept of internationalism was expressive. The United Nations was young, the cold war was an active conflict, and mass political groups operating as national interest groups seemed to offer a way to establish global dialogue. Today, *globalism* is a more precise expression. It is not simply that boundaries do not count. In the most important issues, there are no boundaries.

A democratic approach to culture and to life is a part of the Fluxus view of globalism. A world inhabited by individuals of equal worth and value suggests -- or requires -- a method for each individual to fulfill his or her potential. This, in turn, suggests a democratic context within which each person can decide how and where to live, what to become, how to do it.

The world as it is today has been shaped by history and today's conditions are determined in great part by social and economic factors. While the western industrialized nations and some developing nations are essentially democratic, we do not live in a truly democratic world. Much of the world is governed by tyrannies, dictatorships, or anarchic states. Finding the path from today's world to a democratic world raises important questions, complex questions that lie outside the boundaries of this essay. Nevertheless, democracy seems to most of us an appropriate goal and a valid aspiration. It is fair to say that many Fluxus artists see their work as a contribution to that world.

Some of the Fluxus work was intended as a direct contribution to a more democratic world. Joseph Beuys's projects for direct democracy, Nam June Paik's experiments with television, Robert Filliou's programs, Dick Higgins's *Something Else Press*, Milan Knizak's *Aktual* projects, George Maciunas's multiples and my own experiments with communication and research-based art forms were all direct attempts to bring democratic expression into art and to use art in the service of democracy. The artists who created these projects wrote essays and manifestoes that made this goal clear. The views took different starting points, sometimes political, sometimes economic, sometimes philosophical, sometimes even mystical or religious. As a result, this aspect of Fluxus can be examined and understood in large global terms. These terms are given voice in the words of the artists themselves. Other Fluxus projects had similar goals, though not all have been put forward in explicit terms.

Concurrent with a democratic standpoint is an anti-elitist approach. When Nam June Paik read the earlier version of the *12 Fluxus Ideas*, he pointed out that the concept of anti-elitism was missing. (He still liked the piece. In fact, he published it three times in different books and catalogues.)

Nevertheless, I had failed to articulate the linkage between globalism, democracy, and anti-elitism. In fact, one cannot achieve a humanistic global community without democracy or achieve democracy in a world controlled by an elite. In this context, one must define the term "elitism" to mean a dominant elite class based on inherited wealth or power or based on the ability of dominant elites to incorporate new members in such a way that their wealth and power will be preserved. This is quite contrary to an open or entrepreneurial society in which the opportunity to advance is based on the ability to create value in the form of goods or services.

The basic tendency of elitist societies to restrict opportunity is why elite societies eventually strangle themselves. Human beings are born with the genetic potential for talent and the potential to create value for society without regard to gender, race, religion, or other factors. While some social groups intensify or weaken certain genetic possibilities through preferential selection based on social factors, the general tendency is that any human being can in theory represent any potential contribution to the whole.

A society that restricts access to education or to the ability to shape value makes it impossible for the restricted group to contribute to the larger society. This means that a restrictive society will finally cripple itself in comparison to or in competition with a society in which anyone can provide service to others to the greatest extent possible.

For example, a society which permits all of its members to develop and use their talents to the fullest extent will always be a richer and more competitive society than a society which doesn't allow some members to get an education because of race, religion or social background. Modern societies produce value through professions based on education. Educated people create the material wealth that enables all members of a society to flourish through such disciplines as physics, chemistry, or engineering. It is nearly impossible to become a physicist, a chemist, or an engineer without an education. Those societies that make it impossible for a large section of the population to be educated for these professions must statistically reduce their chances of innovative material progress in comparison with those societies that educate every person with the aptitude for physics, chemistry, or engineering.

In suggesting a world with no restrictions based on elite social advantage, Fluxus suggests a world in which it is possible to create the greatest value for the greatest number of people. This finds its parallel in many of the central tenets of Buddhism. In economic terms, it leads to what could be called Buddhist capitalism or green capitalism.

In the arts, the result can be confusing. The arts are a breeding ground and a context for experiment. The world uses art to conduct experiments of many kinds -- thought experiments and sense experiments. At their best, the arts are cultural wetlands, a breeding ground for evolution and for the transmutation of life forms. In a biologically rich dynamic system, there are many more opportunities for evolutionary dead ends than for successful mutation. As a result, there must be and there is greater latitude for mistakes and transgressions in the world of the arts than in the immediate and results-oriented world of business or social policy. This raises the odd possibility that a healthy art world may be a world in which there is always more bad art than good. According to some, the concept of bad art or good is misleading: this was Filliou's assertion, the point he made with his series of *Bien Fait, Mal Fait* works.

Ultimately, the development and availability of a multiplicity of works and views permits choice, progress, and development. This is impossible in a centrally planned, controlled society. The democratic context of competing visions and open information makes this growth possible. Access to information is a basis for this development, which means that everyone must have the opportunity to shape information and to use it. Just as short-term benefits can accrue in entropic situations, so it is possible for individuals and nations to benefit from the short-term monopoly of resources and opportunities. Thus, the urge for elitism based on social class and for advantage based on nationalism. In the end, this leads to problems that disadvantage everyone. Fluxus suggests globalism, democracy, and anti-elitism as intelligent premises for art, for culture and for long-term human survival.

Paik's great 1962 manifesto, *Utopian Laser Television*, pointed in this direction. He proposed a new communications medium based on hundreds of television channels. Each channel would narrowcast its own program to an audience of those who wanted the program without regard to the size of the audience. It would not make a difference whether the audience was made of two viewers or two billion. It would not even matter whether the programs were intelligent or ridiculous, commonly comprehensible or perfectly eccentric. The medium would make it possible for all information to be transmitted and each member of each audience would be free to select or choose his own programming based on a menu of infinitely large possibilities.

Even though Paik wrote his manifesto for television rather than computer-based information, he predicted the worldwide computer network and its effects. As technology advances to the point where computer power will make it possible for the computer network to carry and deliver full audio-visual programming such as movies or videotapes, we will be able to see Paik's *Utopian Laser Television*. That is the ultimate point of the Internet with its promise of an information rich world.

As Buckminster Fuller suggested, it must eventually make sense for all human beings to have access to the multiplexed distribution of resources in an environment of shared benefits, common concern and mutual conservation of resources.

## **2.2 Unity of Art and Life**

The *unity of art and life* is central to Fluxus. When Fluxus was established, the conscious goal was to erase the boundaries between art and life. That was the sort of language appropriate to the time of pop art and of happenings. The founding Fluxus circle sought to resolve what was then seen as a dichotomy between art and life. Today, it is clear that the radical contribution Fluxus made to art was to suggest that there is no boundary to be erased.

Beuys articulated it well in suggesting that everyone is an artist, as problematic as that statement appears to be. Another way to put it is to say that art and life are part of a unified field of reference, a single context. Stating it that way poses problems, too, but the whole purpose of Fluxus is to go where the interesting problems are.

### **2.3 Intermedia**

*Intermedia* is the appropriate vehicle for Fluxus. Dick Higgins introduced the term “intermedia” to the modern world in his famous 1966 essay. He described an art form appropriate to people who say there are no boundaries between art and life. If there cannot be a boundary between art and life, there cannot be boundaries between art form and art form. For purposes of history, of discussion, of distinction, one can refer to separate art forms, but the meaning of intermedia is that our time often calls for art forms that draw on the roots of several media, growing into new hybrids.

Imagine, perhaps, an art form that is comprised 10% of music, 25% of architecture, 12% of drawing, 18% of shoemaking, 30% of painting, and 5% of smell. What would it be like? How would it work? How would some of the specific art works appear? How would they function? How would the elements interact? That thought experiment yields interesting results. Thoughts like this have given rise to some of the most interesting art works of our time.

### **2.4 Experimentalism**

Fluxus applied the scientific method to art. *Experimentalism*, *research orientation*, and *iconoclasm* were its hallmarks. Experimentalism does not merely mean trying new things. It means trying new things and assessing the results. Experiments that yield useful results cease being experiments and become usable tools, like penicillin in medicine or imaginary numbers in mathematics.

The research orientation applies not only to the experimental method, but also to the ways in which research is conducted. Most artists, even those who believe themselves experimentalists, understand very little about the ways ideas develop. In science, the notion of collaboration, of theoreticians, experimenters and researchers working together to build new methods and results, is well established. Fluxus applied this idea to art. Many Fluxus works are the result of numbers of artists active in dialogue. Fluxus artists are not the first to apply this method, but Fluxus is the first art movement to declare this way of working as an entirely appropriate method for use over years of activity rather than as the occasional diversion. Many Fluxworks are still created by single artists, but from the first to the present day, you find Fluxus artists working together on projects where more than one talent can be brought to bear.

Iconoclasm is almost self-evident. When you work in an experimental way in a field as bounded by restrictions and prejudices as art, you have to be willing to break the rules of cultural tradition.

## **2.5 Chance**

One key aspect of Fluxus experimentation is chance. The methods -- and results -- of chance occur repeatedly in the work of Fluxus artists.

There are several ways of approaching chance. Chance, in the sense of aleatoric or random chance, is a tradition with a legacy going back to Duchamp, to Dada and to Cage. That's been very famous and much has been made of it. Perhaps those who have written about Fluxus have made more of chance than they should have, but this is understandable in the cultural context in which Fluxus appeared.

By the late 1950s, the world seemed to have become too routinized, opportunities for individual engagement in the great game of life too limited. In America, this phenomenon was noted in books such as *The Organization Man*, in critiques of "the silent generation," and in studies such as *The Lonely Crowd*. The entire artistic and political program of the Beats was built on opposition to routine. Random chance, a way to break the bonds, took on a powerful attraction, and for those who grew up in the late 50s and early 60s, it still has the nostalgic aroma that hot rods and James Dean movies hold for others. Even so, random chance was more useful as a technique than as a philosophy.

There is also evolutionary chance. In the end, evolutionary chance plays a more powerful role in innovation than random chance. Evolutionary chance engages a certain element of the random. Genetic changes occur, for example, in a process that is known as random selection. New biological mutations occur at random under the influence of limited entropy, for example, when radiation affects the genetic structure. This is a technical degeneration of the genetic code, but some genetic deformations actually offer good options for survival and growth. When one of these finds an appropriate balance between the change and the niche in which it finds itself, it does survive to become embodied in evolutionary development.

This has parallels in art and in music, in human cultures and societies. Something enters the scene and changes the world-view we previously held. That influence may be initiated in a random way. It may begin in an unplanned way, or it may be the result of signal interference to intended messages, or it may be the result of a sudden insight. Many possibilities exist. When the chance input is embodied in new form, however, it ceases to be random and becomes evolutionary. That is why chance is closely allied to experimentation in Fluxus. It is related to the ways in which scientific knowledge grows, too.

## **2.6 Playfulness**

*Playfulness* has been part of Fluxus since the beginning. Part of the concept of playfulness has been represented by terms such as *jokes*, *games*, *puzzles*, and *gags*. This role of gags in Fluxus has sometimes been overemphasized. This is understandable. Human beings tend to perceive patterns by their gestalt, focusing on the most noticeable differences. When Fluxus emerged, art was under the influence of a series of attitudes in which art seemed to be a liberal, secular substitute for religion. Art was so heavily influenced by rigidities of conception, form, and style that the irreverent Fluxus attitude stood out like a loud fart in a small elevator. The most visible aspect of the irreverent style was the emphasis on the gag. There is more to humor than gags and jokes, and there is more to playfulness than humor.

Play comprehends far more than humor. There is the play of ideas, the playfulness of free experimentation, the playfulness of free association and the play of paradigm shifting that are as common to scientific experiment as to pranks.

## **2.7 Simplicity**

*Simplicity*, sometimes called *parsimony*, refers to the relationship of truth and beauty. Another term for this concept is elegance. In mathematics or science, an elegant idea is that idea which expresses the fullest possible series of meanings in the most concentrated possible statement. That is the idea of Occam's Razor, a philosophical tool which states that a theory that accounts for all aspects of a phenomenon with the fewest possible terms will be more likely to be correct than a theory that accounts for the same phenomenon using more (or more complex) terms. From this perspective of philosophical modeling, Copernicus's model of the solar system is better than Ptolemy's -- must be better -- because it accounts for a fuller range of phenomena in fewer terms. Parsimony, the use of frugal, essential means, is related to that concept.

This issue was presented in Higgins's original list as *minimalism*, but the term minimalism has come to have a precise meaning in the world of art. While some of the Fluxus artists like La Monte Young can certainly be called minimalists, the intention and the meaning of their minimalism is very different than the minimalism associated with the New York art school of that name. I prefer to think of La Monte as parsimonious. His work is a frugal concentration of idea and meaning that fits his long spiritual pilgrimage, closer to Pandit Pran Nath than to Richard Serra.

Simplicity of means and perfect attention distinguish this concept in the work of the Fluxus artists.

## **2.8 Implicativeness**

*Implicativeness* means that an ideal Fluxus work implies many more works. This notion is close to and grows out of the notion of elegance and parsimony. Here, too, you see the relationship of Fluxus to experimentalism and to the scientific method.

## **2.9 Exemplativism**

*Exemplativism* is the principle that Dick Higgins outlined in another essay, the *Exemplativist Manifesto*. Exemplativism is the quality of a work exemplifying the theory and meaning of its construction. While not all Fluxus works are exemplary, there has always been a feeling that those pieces that are exemplary are in some way closer to the ideal than those that are not. You could say, for example, that exemplativism is the distinction between George Brecht's poetic proposals and Ray Johnson's -- and probably shows why Brecht is in the Fluxus circle while Johnson, as close to Fluxus as he is, has never really been a part of things.

## **2.10 Specificity**

*Specificity* has to do with the tendency of a work to be specific, self-contained and to embody all its own parts. Most art works rely on ambiguity, on the leaking away of meanings to accumulate new meanings. When a work has specificity, it loads meaning quite consciously. This may seem to contradict the philosophical ambiguity and radical transformation of Fluxus. Nevertheless, but it is a key element in Fluxus.

## **2.11 Presence in time**

Many Fluxus works take place in time. This has sometimes been referred to by the term *ephemeral* but the terms *ephemerality* and *duration* distinguish different qualities of time in Fluxus. It is appropriate that an art movement whose very name goes back to the Greek philosophers of time and the Buddhist analysis of time and existence in human experience should place great emphasis on the element of time in art.

The ephemeral quality is obvious in the brief Fluxus performance works, where the term ephemeral is appropriate, and in the production of ephemera, fleeting objects and publications with which Fluxus has always marked itself. But Fluxus works often embody a different sense of duration as: musical compositions lasting days or weeks, performances that take place in segments over decades, even art works that grow and evolve over equally long spans. Time, the great condition of human existence, is a central issue in Fluxus and in the work that artists in the Fluxus circle create.

## **2.12 Musicality**

*Musicality* refers to the fact that many Fluxus works are designed as scores, as works that can be realized by artists other than the creator. While this concept may have been born in the fact that many Fluxus artists were also composers, it signifies far more. The events, many object instructions, game and puzzle works -- even some sculptures and paintings -- work this way. This means that you can own a George Brecht piece by carrying out one of Brecht's scores. If that sounds odd, you might ask if you can experience Mozart simply by listening to an orchestra play one of Mozart's scores. The answer is that you can. Perhaps another orchestra or Mozart himself might have given a better rendition, but it is still Mozart's work. This, too, is the case with a Brecht or a Knizak or a Higgins that is created to be realized from a score.

The issue of musicality has fascinating implications. The mind and intention of the creator are the key element in the work. The issue of the hand is only germane insofar as the skill of rendition affects the work: in some conceptual works, even this is not an issue. Musicality is linked to experimentalism and the scientific method. Experiments must operate in the same manner. Any scientist must be able to reproduce the work of any other scientist for an experiment to remain valid.

As with other issues in Fluxus, this raises interesting problems. Collectors want a work with hand characteristics, so some Fluxus works imply their own invalidity for collectors.

Musicality suggests that the same work may be realized several times, and in each state, it may be the same work, even though it is a different realization of the same work. This bothers collectors who think of "vintage" works as works located in a certain, distant era. The concept of "vintage" is useful only when you think of it in the same way you think of wine: 1962 may be a great vintage, then 1966, then it may not be until 1979 or 1985 that another great vintage occurs.

Think of the composers and conductors who have given us great interpretations of past work. Imagine creating a complete Beethoven cycle or a series of Brahms concertos. Then, a decade or two later, imagine a dramatically different, yet equally rich interpretation of the same work. This shows why the concept of vintage can only be appropriate for Fluxus when it is held to mean what it means in wine. You must measure the year by the flavor, not the flavor by the year.

Musicality is a key concept in Fluxus. It has not been given adequate attention by scholars or critics. Musicality means that anyone can play the music. If deep engagement with the music, with the spirit of the music is the central focus of this criterion, then musicality may be *the* key concept in Fluxus. It is central to Fluxus. It embraces many other issues and concepts. It embraces the social radicalism of Maciunas in which the individual artist takes a secondary role to the concept of artistic practice in society. It typifies the social activism of Beuys when he declared that we are all artists. It is visible in the social creativity of Knizak when he opens art into society, as well as the radical intellectualism of Higgins and the experimentalism of Flynt.

All of these and more appear in the full meaning of musicality.

### **3. Fluxus After Fluxus**

#### **3.1 Fluxus on the Way**

The first Fluxus disappeared a long time ago. It replaced itself with the many forms of Fluxus that came after.

The many varieties of Fluxus activity took on their own life and had a significant history of their own. Fluxus was co-created by many people and it has undergone a continuous process of co-creation and renewal for four decades. Only a handful of the original Fluxus artists are still alive now. Whatever Fluxus is – or will be – it can no longer be the Fluxus of their era.

#### **3.2 Fluxus Today**

Fluxus today isn't the Fluxus that was sometimes considered an organized group and sometimes referred to as a movement. Fluxus is a forum, a circle of friends, and a living community. Fluxus as a way of thinking and working is very much alive.

What was unique about Fluxus as a community was that we named ourselves. We found and kept our own name. Art critics named abstract expressionism, pop art, minimalism, and conceptualism. Fluxus named Fluxus. The German press took our name and fell in love with it, but it was our name to begin with. What made it Fluxus was that it was not confined to art and perhaps that saved us from being named by others. If it locked us out of the art market on many occasions, it made it possible for us to make interesting art on our own terms.

In the last forty-five years, interest in Fluxus has gone through several cycles of growth and neglect. We are still here, still doing what we want to do, and still coming together from time to time under the rubric of Fluxus. Since this is exactly what happened during the 1960s and 1970s, it is clear that Fluxus did not die at some magical date in the past. If you read your way down the many lists of Fluxus artists who were young and revolutionary back in the 1960s, the 1990s have shown many of them to be transformative and evolutionary. They transformed the way that the world thinks about art, and they transformed the relationship between art and the world around it.

The Fluxus dialogue has taken on a life of its own. A Fluxus vital enough to continue in its own right was exactly what people intended at the beginning, though this has sometimes had consequences that startled them as much as anyone else. If it has not happen in exactly the ways that they planned, it is because there are no boundaries between art and life. What counts is the fact that it happened.

### **3.3 Fluxus Tomorrow**

Will there be new Fluxus artists? I do not know. Perhaps it does not matter. Many younger artists now label themselves with the Fluxus name. Many acknowledge interest in Fluxus, together with an intellectual and artistic debt. Even more vehemently, many assert that Fluxus has had no influence on them or their ideas.

While I have welcomed people into projects and exhibitions, I have nothing to say on whether any artist outside the historical circle is or is not a Fluxus artist. Some see this as an exclusionary practice. It is not. I take no position.

Fluxus has become a symbol for much more than itself. Companies in the knowledge industry and creative enterprises use the name Fluxus. Advertising agencies, record stores, performance groups, publishers and some young artists now apply the word Fluxus to what they do. This suggests that something is happening in terms of real influence and in terms of fame, the erstwhile shadow of influence. 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. A new and appropriate understanding of Fluxus leaves open the question of what it may still do. That is good enough for me.

Back in the 1980s, George Brecht wrote, "Fluxus has fluxed." A few years later, Emmett said, "Fluxus has not yet begun." Perhaps they are both right. An on-line discussion group called Fluxlist often explores the question of what lies between those two points. 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 a future Fluxus that intersects with and moves beyond the Fluxus of artifacts and objects. This vision of Fluxus distinguishes between a Fluxus of specific artists acting in time and space and an idea exemplified in the work and action of the historic Fluxus artists.

A broad view of Fluxus corrects hard-edged and ill-informed debates on Fluxus. These diminish what we set out to do by locating us in a mythic moment of time that never existed.

Fluxus was created to escape 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 the original Fluxus artists disenfranchised and alienated from the body of work to which they gave birth. In the moments that people attempt to victimize us with false boundaries, I am drawn to two moments in history.

A key moment in 6th century China mirrors the debates around Fluxus in a suitable way. It involved the split between Northern and Southern schools of Zen. The split seems not to have involved the two masters who succeeded the Sixth Patriarch, Shen-hsiu and Hui-neng. The schism seems to have been the creation of Hui-neng's disciple, Shen-hui, and those who followed him. The main protagonists 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 was already held in high renown. This is like much of the argumentation around Fluxus. Protagonists of one view or another, 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 discount, discredit or disenfranchise the rest. That makes no sense in a laboratory, let alone a laboratory of ideas and social practice.

The other moment took place 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 have gone underground already. If this is so, who can say that Fluxus is or isn't dead? What survives and what remains interesting is the body of knowledge, the ideas, and practices that flourish in the laboratory named Fluxus.

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Friedman is also a designer and artist who had his first solo exhibition in New York in 1966. He has been active in Fluxus, the international experimental laboratory for art, design, and architecture. His work is represented in major museums and galleries around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Tate Modern in London, and Stadtsgalerie Stuttgart.

**Publishing history**

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