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Fluxus Heidelberg Center BLOG

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 27, 2008

Icarus - Fluxus Poetry

Icarus - Fluxus Poetry by Litsa Spathi
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Labels: **Fluxus Video**, **Icarus**, **Litsa Spathi**, **Nobody**

posted by Nobody @ **4:39 AM**   **0 comments**

SATURDAY, JANUARY 19, 2008

Drink DaDaCol

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Labels: **DaDaCol**, **Fluxus Video**, **Litsa Spathi**, **Ruud Janssen**

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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 16, 2008

George Brecht - events & performances
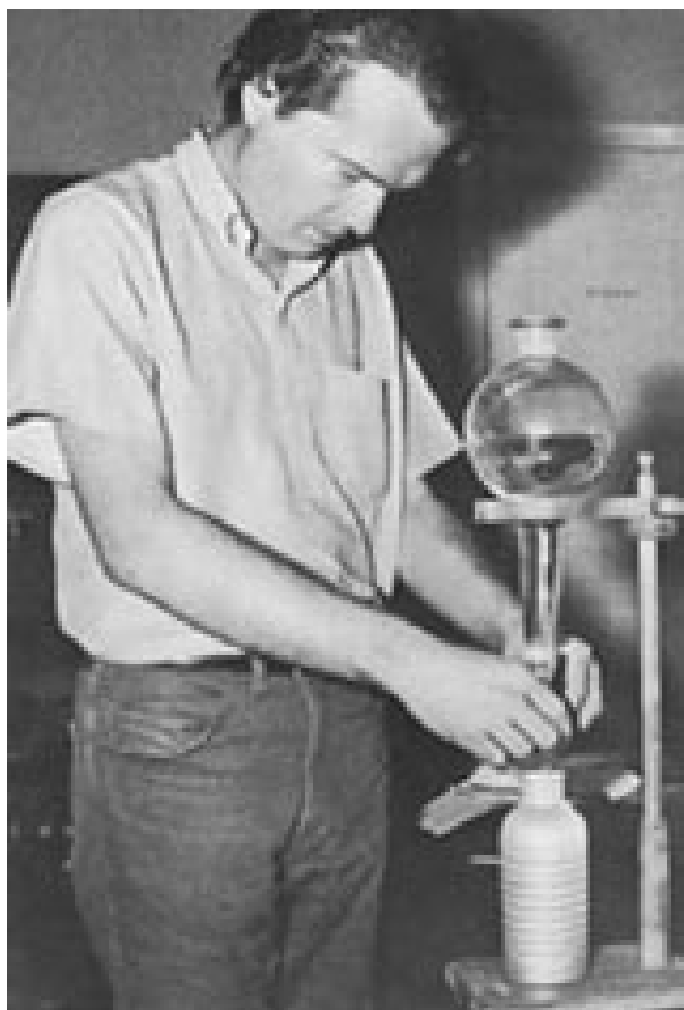
1959. For single or multiple performance. A source of dripping water and an

empty vessel are arranged so that the water falls into the vessel.
1959. Second Version. Dripping.
1959. Fluxversion 1. Performer on a ladder pours water from a pitcher very slowly down into the bell of a French horn or tuba held in playing position by a second performer at floor level.
Performed in 2002 by Ben Patterson. Patterson wrote in the liner notes: "Recently, as I was preparing a concert of classic Fluxus works, I decided to re-examine the original scores, rather than rely on my memory of preformances of the traditional interpretations of these works. Thus, I discovered that George Brechts original instructions for Drip Music allowed for both a single source or multiple sources of dripping water. Remembering Georges first career as a chemist, employing laboratory equipment to produce multiple, dripping sources seemed appropriate. A device was constructed including 3 gerbil water bottles suspended from metal rods and a piece of molded plastic packaging, amplified with contact microphone. Only micro adjustments were made to provide differing drip frequencies. No electro-acoustic manipulations or editorial tricks." [source: Alfa Marghen]
On CD-Rom together with '370 Flies' (2003, Ben Patterson) edited by Alga Marghen. CDR edition limited to 200 signed copies. A reproduction of the Drip Music score is stamped on the back cover.
More images on Fluxorama 2001-2004.

SPANISH CARD PIECE FOR OBJECTS
1959-1960. From one to twenty-four performers are arranged within view of each other. Each has before him a stopwatch and a set of objects of four types, corresponding to the four suits of Spanish cards: swords, clubs, cups, and coins / One performer, as dealer, shuffles a deck of Spanish cards (which are numbered 1-12 in each suit), and deals them in pairs to all performers, each performer arranging his pairs, face up, in front of him / At a sign from the dealer, each performer starts his stopwatch, and, interpreting the rank of the first card in each pair as the number of sounds to be made, and the rank of the second card in each pair as the number of consecutive five-second intervals within which that number of sounds is to be freely arranged, acts with an object corresponding to the suit of the first card in each pair upon an object corresponding to the suit of the second card in that pair / When every performer has used all his pairs of cards, the piece ends.

COMB MUSIC (COMB EVENT)
1959-1962. For a single or multiple performance. A comb is held by its spine in one hand, either free or resting on an object. The thumb or a finger on the other hand is held with its tip against the end prong of a comb, with the edge of the nail overlapping the end of a prong. The finger is slowly and uniformly moved so that the prong is inevitably released, and the nail engages the next prong. This action is repeated until each prong has been used.
In 1988 performed by John Armleder, engineered by Brenda Hutchinson at Studio PASS, NY (:05). This event was recorded on cassette (Tellus #21). See UbuWeb.

CANDLE PIECE FOR RADIOS
1960. See Arte Sonore.

CARD PIECE FOR VOICE
1960. See Arte Sonore.

MOTOR VEHICLE SUNDOWN
1960. Motor Vehicle Sundown is a verbal instruction piece scored for any number of motor vehicles arranged outdoors. For each vehicle, 22 auditory and visual events and 22 pauses are written onto randomly shuffled instruction cards. Beside 'pause', the events include: Headlights on and off, Parking lights on and off, sound horn, sound siren, sound bell(s), accelerate motor, radio on and off, strike window with knuckles, open or close door (quickly, with moderate speed, slowly), open or close engine hood, operate special equipment (carousels, ladders, fire hoses with truck-contained

pumps and water supply), operate special lights (truck-body, safety, signal, warning, signs, displays). At sundown '(relatively dark/open area incident light 2 foot-candles or less)', the performers arrive at the same time, seat themselves in the cars and start their engines at approximately the same time. They follow the instructions, substituting equipment for that which they do not have, and turn off their engines when they are finished.

TIME-TABLE EVENT
1961. To occur in a railway station. A time table is obtained. A tabulated time indication is interpreted in minutes and seconds. This determines the duration of the event.

WORD EVENT
1961. Exit. See scorecard UbuWeb.
1961. Fluxversion 1. The audience is instructed to leave the theater.

CHAIR EVENT
1961. See scorecard UbuWeb.

INCIDENTAL MUSIC
1961. Five piano pieces, any number of which may be played in succession, simultaneously, in any order and combination, with one another or with other pieces.
The piano seat is tilted on its base and brought to rest against a part of the piano.
"Incidental Music, Part 2. Wooden blocks: A single block is placed inside the piano / A block is placed upon this block, then a third upon the second, and so forth, singly, until at least one block falls from the column.". A registration is made by Larry Miller in 1979, as part of his video 'Flux Concert'. See Electronic Arts Intermix.
Photographing the piano situation.
Three dried peas or beans are dropped, one after another, onto the keyboard. Each such seed remaining on the keyboard is attached to the key or keys nearest it with a single piece of pressure-sensitive tape.
The piano seat is suitably arranged and the performer seats himself.

TEA EVENT

1961. Preparing / Empty vessel.
1961. Fluxversion 1. Distill tea in a still.

TWO DURATIONS
1961. Red / Green.

TWO ELIMINATION EVENTS
1961. Empty vessel / Empty vessel.

TWO EXERCISES
1961. Consider an object / Call what is not the object 'other' / Exercise: Add
to the object, from the 'other', another object, to form a new object and a
new 'other' / Repeat until there is no more 'other' / Exercise: Take a part
from the object and add it to the 'other', to form a new object and a new
'other' / Repeat until there is no more object.

TWO VEHICLE EVENTS
1961. Start / Stop.

THREE AQUEOUS EVENTS
1961. See scorecard UbuWeb.

THREE GAP EVENTS
1961.

THREE TELEPHONE EVENTS
1961. When the telephone rings, it is allowed to continue ringing until it
stops / When the telephone rings, the receiver is lifted, then replaced / When
the telephone rings, it is answered.

THREE LAMP EVENTS
1961. On.Off. / Lamp / Off.On.

THREE WINDOW EVENTS
1961. Opening a closed window / Closing an open window.

THREE BROOM EVENTS
1961. Broom / Sweeping / Broom sweepings.

THREE YELLOW EVENTS
1961. 1. Yellow yellow yellow / 2. Yellow loud / 3. red.
1961. Fluxversion 1. Three yellow slides are projected on a screen / Pause /
One yellow slide is projected and then the projector falls down on the floor
as the slide is removed / After the projector is returned to its place, a red
slide is projected.

DIRECTION
1961. Arrange to observe a sign indicating direction of travel / Travel in the
indicated direction / Travel in another direction.

INSTRUCTION
1961. Turn on a radio / At the first sound, turn it off.

MALLARD MILK
1961. See Arte Sonore.

NO SMOKING EVENT
1961. Arrange to observe a NO SMOKING sign / Smoking / No smoking.

FIVE EVENTS
1961. Eating with / Between two breaths / Sleep / Wet hand / Several words.

KEYHOLE EVENT
1962. Handwritten card with 'KEYHOLE' and beneath 'Through either side /
One event'.

PIANO PIECE
1962. A vase of flowers on a piano.
1962. Three Piano Pieces. Standing / Sitting / Walking.
1962. Center.

ORGAN PIECE
1962. Organ.

SOLO FOR WIND INSTRUMENT
1962. [Putting it down].

FLUTE SOLO
1962. Disassembling / Assembling.

SAXOPHONE SOLO
1962. Trumpet.
1962. Fluxversion 1. The piece is announced / Performer enters stage with
an instrument case / places it on a stand / opens it and pulls out a trumpet /
realizes the mistake / puts it quickly back in the case and exits.

SOLO FOR VIOLIN, VIOLA OR CONTRABAS

1962. Polishing.

STRING QUARTET
1962. Shaking hands.

DANCE MUSIC
1962. Gunshot.

CONCERT FOR CLARINET
1962. Nearby.
1962. Fluxversion 1. Clarinet is suspended by a string tied to its center so that it holds it in a horizontal position about 6 inches above the performer's mouth / Performer attempts to play a note without using his hands / He should do this either by swinging the reed end down or jumping up to it and catching the reed with his mouth.
1962. Fluxvariation 2. A clarinet is positioned upright on the floor / Performer with a fishing pole, sitting at a distance of a few feet should attempt to hook, lift and bring to his mouth the reed end of the clarinet.

CONCERTO FOR ORCHESTRA
1962. [Exchanging].
1962. Fluxversion 1. Orchestra members exchange their instruments.
1962. Fluxversion 2. Orchestra members exchange their scores.
1962. Fluxversion 3. The orchestra is divided into two teams, winds and strings, sitting in opposing rows / Wind instruments must be prepared so as to be able to shoot out peas. This can be accomplished by inserting a long, narrow tube into wind instruments. String instruments are strung with rubber bands which are used to shoot paper missiles / Performers must hit a performer on the opposite team with a missile / A performer hit three times must leave the stage / Missiles are exchanged until all performers on one

side are gone.
Conductor acts as referee.

ENTRANCE-EXIT
1962. A smooth linear transition from white noise to sinus wave tone is broadcast. Title is announced at beginning and at end, but at end, title is announced by a tape played backward. Recorded 1962 with James Tenney and George Maciunas.
Available on cassette Tellus #24 (The Audio Cassette Magazine) Special edition: 'Flux-tellus' (1990). For excerpts see UbuWeb.

SYMPHONY No.1
1962. Through a hole.
1962. Fluxversion 1. Performers position themselves behind a full size photo of another orchestra and insert arms through holes cut in the photo at the shoulders of the photographic musicians / Performers may hold instruments in the conventional way and attempt to play an old favorite / In case of wind instruments, holes must be cut at mouths of photographic musicians.

SYMPHONY No.2
1962. [Turning].
1962. Fluxversion 1. Thick score books are positioned on music stands in front of the orchestra members / As soon as the conductor begins to turn the pages of his book, orchestra members start turning theirs / The books are leafed through either at different rates of speed or same rate of speed, but all are turned to the last page.

SYMPHONY No.3
1964. at three / from the tree / all night / at home / on the floor / the yellow ball / in the water.
1964. Fluxversion 1. [On the floor]. Orchestra members sit down on the very forward edge of the chair and hold instruments in ready position / Upon signal from the conductor, all players slide forward and fall smoothly off their chairs in unison.

OCTET FOR WINDS
1964. Equal number of performers seat themselves opposite each other. A large pan of water is placed between the two groups and a toy sailboat is placed on the water. Performers blow their wind instruments at the sail of the boat pushing it to the opposing group. Both groups try to blow the boat away from themselves and toward the other group. If possible, all performers should play some popular tune while blowing on the sail. Piece ends when the boat reaches one end or the other of the pan.

FOR A DRUMMER
(For Eric) 1966. Drum on something you have never drummed on before / Drum with something you have never drummed with before.
1966. Fluxversion 1. Performer drums with drum sticks or drum brushes over the surface of wet mud or thick glue until brushes or sticks get stuck and can't be lifted.
1966. Fluxversion 2. Performer drums with sticks over a leaking feather pillow making the feathers escape the pillow.
1966. Fluxversion 3. Performer drums over drum with 2 ends of slightly leaky water hose.
1966. Fluxversion 4. Performer drums over drum with rolled newspapers until the rolls disintegrate.
1966. Fluxversion 5. Performer dribbles a ping-pong ball between a hand-held racket and drum skin.
1966. Fluxversion 6. Performer drums with mallets or hammers on a helmet worn by another performer.
1966. Fluxversion 7. Performer drums with brushes inside a vessel filled with cream until cream is thick.

EVENT SCORE
1966.

SYMPHONY No.4
1964. Record.

SYMPHONY No.5
1966. I. before hearing / II. hearing / III. after hearing.

SYMPHONY No.6
1966. The music of dreams / dream music. Second version: dream.
1966. Fluxversion 2. Second version: dream. Event Score / Arrange or
discover an event / Score and then realize it.

Labels: **events and performances.**, **George Brecht**

posted by Nobody @ **10:03 PM**   **0 comments**

George Brecht

The artistic career of George Brecht (New York 1926) began in the late
fifties, while he was working as a research chemist in New Jersey. This dual
situation enabled him to employ scientific models of the time to reflect upon
experience, and to use art a means to represent his thoughts. In 1956-1957,
he wrote a reference work entitled Chance Imagery, a systematic
investigation of the role of chance in the 20th century in the fields of science
and avant-garde art. The piece revealed his respect for Dadaist and
surrealist projects as well as for the more complex aspects of the work of
Marcel Duchamp, whom he considered the embodiment of the 'artist-
researcher'. At the same time he initiated a series of experiments he called
'Chance Paintings', randomly staining bed sheets with a clearly anti-pictorial,
anti-representative intent. Brecht referred to these early attempts to convert
time and chance into the basis of his work as a kind of 'corrected abstract
expressionism'. In this period, which coincided with the death of Jackson
Pollock, he struck up relationships with artists imparting classes at Rutgers
University, in particular Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts with whom he co-
signed a text (A multi-dimension project, 1957). The piece was an attempt
overcome and go beyond the huge influence exerted at that time by abstract
expressionism, in pursuit of a form of advanced art, radical conceptual
practices and multimedia.

Brecht's closeness to John Cage, with whom he shared an interest for
Oriental thinking, led him to attend the classes on 'Experimental
Composition' Cage was giving in New York. He encouraged Brecht to look
for new mediums for his creative practice, such as the generation of a new
(musical) score by means of procedures involving chance and the use of

surrounding noise employed as sound ready-mades. Brecht was convinced that 'experience in every dimension' could be highlighted and encapsulated in the shape of verbal scores and, from there, developed the concept of 'event scores' with which he structured the space and time of his work, at the same time inviting the audience to participate in the piece.

This is precisely what happened in his first exhibition 'Toward Events: An Arrangement' (1959) in New York's Reuben Gallery. These works brought together objects similar in shape to the vocabulary emerging from Robert Rauschenberg's assemblage and combination, and from the 'collection' in the work by Joseph Cornell and Marcel Duchamp. One radical difference however lay in the insistent emphasis on the temporary and participatory nature inherent in the words 'event' and 'arrangement'. This quality alone reveals Cage's impact and the originality with which Brecht had been able to broaden his sources. All of the objects made in the years immediately following this group of works included a variety of different types of scores. In some cases they would arise out of the creation of the object, while in others the object was discovered and Brecht subsequently wrote a score for it, thus highlighting the relationship between language and perception. Or, in the words of the artist, "ensuring that the details of everyday life, the random constellations of objects that surround us, stop going unnoticed." The event-score was as much a critique of conventional artistic representation as it was a gesture of firm resistance against individual alienation, as may be appreciated in his last long-format score Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event) 1960 to John Cage. The score idea evolved between 1959 and 1962, until reaching the form of a simple white card bearing a few typed lines intended to propose an object, thought or action.

The early sixties was also a period in which Brecht developed his own critique of the institutional framework and mechanisms employed in the distribution of art. His first 'Chair Events' in 1961, in which he placed a real score beside an unaltered everyday object, constituted an expression of resistance to the galleries' demands to present his work in a more formal way. From that moment on, the design of models distinct from conventional channels would become an integral part of his work. His 'Contingent Publications' were a postal address in New Jersey from which he distributed his scores and event objects. The 'Yam Festival', planned in conjunction with Robert Watts, was created as an alternative to the gallery system in that it produced art which could not be bought, spreading the notion of non-material artistic practice and at the same time organising representations or concerts of his most recent work, alongside that of other like-minded fellow artists.

This conceptual base was highly significant in the Fluxus context on the other side of the Atlantic, in which Brecht's event scores were widely known and performed. Fluxus began, in fact, in Wiesbaden (Germany) with a series of 'new music' concerts organised by George Maciunas using the radical scores created by Brecht and other artists in his circle, including Dick Higgins, Emmett Williams, Robert Filliou, Eric Andersen, Alison Knowles and Ben Vautier, among others. Maciunas published the scores and a series of transient works by this group of artists in the cheapest, most accessible form possible. The first of these multiple packages was a boxed collection of some 70 scores by Brecht, entitled Water Yam.

In 1964, shortly before travelling to Europe, Brecht proposed a new format for his work, that of the book in construction, which he called The Book of the Tumbler on Fire. According to Brecht, the title captured his perception of all his work as an 'investigation into the continuity of different things'. The core of the book is made up of an important series of events in the form of satin-covered boxes. Brecht continued producing these boxes until fairly recently and they make up, along with the chairs, paintings, scores and all kinds of diverse formats, chapters of his unending volume.

In 1965 Brecht travelled to Rome, and a little later to Villefranche-sur-mer to meet up with his friend and fellow Fluxus member, the artist Robert Filliou, and to found a 'permanent creation workshop', which they named 'La Cédille qui sourit' [=The Cedilla that Smiles]. This fertile period of joint activity may be explored in a separate section, which includes a little-known film made by the two artists.
George Brecht lives in Cologne.

source
Julia Robinson for Macba Barcelona.

Labels: **Fluxus**, **George Brecht**

posted by Nobody @ **9:58 PM**   **0 comments**

The WORD in ART - From Futurism to the present day

The word in art. 20th-century avant-garde research. From Futurism to the present day seen through Mart's collections

Academic committee: Gabriella Belli, Achille Bonito Oliva, Andreas Hapkemeyer, Nicoletta Boschiero, Paola Pettenella, Melania Gazzotti, Daniela Ferrari, Julia Trolp, Giorgio Zanchetti.

The **exhibition** has been realised in collaboration with: Museion – Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea Bolzano
Mart, Rovereto
from 10th November 2007 to 6th April 2008

Written, drawn, declaimed, thought, cancelled, the word has played a fundamental role in the experimentation of the historical avant-garde movements, and its presence has accompanied every significant change in the artistic poetics of the 20th century.
From Futurism to Dadaism and Surrealism to Fluxus and the contemporary scene, the relationship between word and image has given life to the boldest expressive forms, making an original innovative contribution both to painting and to the more traditional forms of written, poetic, literary and artistic text. With alternating fortune, now rare, now dominant, writing has appeared throughout 20th-century art, and even today the ambiguity of its relationship with the image is as never before at the centre of interest for young artists.

The word in art. 20th-century avant-garde. From Futurism to the present day seen through Mart's collections, as is the tradition with the museum's major exhibitions, explores this important relationship, opening up fresh avenues of enquiry into artistic work of the 20th century. Thanks to the presence of paintings of the highest quality, drawings, posters, manuscripts, literary works, collages and large installations, with over 800 works on show, many of which from Mart's own holdings, but also from leading international museums and collections, the exhibition provides an overview of 20th century art from a new critical stance, based not on "fine painting" so much as on "the sublime hybrid of the cross-fertilisation of the languages of art". The exhibition is divided into 11 section, in line with a thematic and chronological itinerary, planned to enable further investigation and transverse comparisons with the panorama of contemporary art generally. Following a "prologue" focusing on the first avant-garde movements of the 20th century, the exhibition presents a rich documentation of all of 20th-century art, ending with the latest experiments which find in the relationship between word and the visual arts a fertile terrain for new approaches and interpretations of the contemporary aesthetic experience.

The project for the exhibition is the result of the work of a curatorial committee, coordinated by Giorgio Zanchetti. The catalogue, published by Skira, contains contributions from Gabriella Belli, Achille Bonito Oliva, Giorgio Zanchetti, Roberto Antolini, Silvia Bignami, Nicoletta Boschiero, Domenico Cammarota, Davide Colombo, Silvia Conta, Daniela Ferrari, Melania Gazzotti, Andreas Hapkemeyer, Antonello Negri, Aleksandra Obuchova, Julia Trolp and Federico Zanoner.

THE EXHIBITION

Futurism

The exhibition opens with the first, important "literary experiments" of Futurism. From the celebrated parole in libertà ('free words') arising from the nocturnal poetic explosions of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Francesco Cangiullo and Giacomo Balla to the lyrical sounds of Fortunato Depero's onomalingua and the pictorial compositions cross-fertilised with collages by Gino Severini, Ardengo Soffici and Carlo Carrà. Also on show will be a 1910 painting by Umberto Boccioni, "Gli uomini", an early example of the artist's combination of painting and writing.

Dada and Surrealism

The inventions of Futurism in later years interweave with the linguistic and poetic Dadaist research of Raul Haussman, Francis Picabia and Tristan Tzara, and with the ready-mades and livres-objet of Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray. Kurt Schwitters is represented by a series of collages, in which paper comes into contact with the materials of the everyday to obtain a plastic, almost sculptural effect in the work. The Surrealist movement is present in the exhibition with some works by Andrè Masson, Maurice Henry, and with two drawings by René Magritte.

The Russian Avant-garde

In the 1920s, the form and composition of the word played an important role in the USSR, making use of the extraordinary work done with the Constructivist avant-garde in typographical propaganda. It is books and posters above all that became the medium most used for this experimentation. Among the most significant examples, it is worth recalling the artistic work contained in the texts of Vladimir Mayakowsky, of which 13 examples are on show in the exhibition, comprising magazines and books.

The form of the word

It is in these historical avant-garde movements that we need to find the roots of the investigation into the relationship between work and image which became firmly established in the second half of the 20th century. For the artists of concrete poetry, working in the 1950s, this investigation highlights the composition and visual possibilities offered by typographical characters, as is evident in the works of Carlo Belloli, Eugen Gomringer, Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, Heinz Gappmayr, Arrigo Lora-Totino.

Revolution in words

For the representatives of visual poetry, active from 1963 onwards and linked by their adhesion to the neo-avant-garde literary movement "Gruppo 63", the use of verbal and iconic elements originating from the mass media, conveys messages of political and social portent: works by Ketty La Rocca,

Lucia Marcucci, Eugenio Miccini, Nanni Balestrini, Lamberto Pignotti, Sarenco, Ugo Carrega, Martino Oberto will be displayed, together with a photograph by Jochen Gerz of 1990.

Words at play

Very different in nature are the operations associated with the world of mass communications by the artists of New Dada, of Pop Art and of Nouveau Réalisme, and of the experience in Italy of such as Mimmo Rotella and Mario Schifano. Plus, from the 1980s, the contribution made by Jean Michel Basquiat.
From their explorations of the universe of logos and evergreen symbols in the history of world-wide consumerism – from the "combine paintings" of Robert Rauschenberg to Warhol's series of Campbell Soups and Arman's trash assemblages – arises what has been defined the social criticism reflecting on the false morality of contemporary man. The American artists were less ideologically committed, while the European ones were more politicised.

Word and action

The transnational artistic phenomenon of Fluxus (1961) confirms the interdisciplinary nature of the languages of art, which finds it maximum expression in the assemblage of materials and words, things and signs, able to intercept the experience of daily life in its incessant flow. Many results emerge from such a broad field of investigation: from the musical cross-fertilisations of John Cage and Giuseppe Chiari to the subtle irony of the phrases painted by Ben Vautier and on to the accumulations of materials by Dieter Roth and the strongly politically connoted work of Joseph Beuys. Two works by the German artist are of particular interest: two blackboard made for his performance at Perugia in 1980, in the presence of Alberto Burri. The whole creation of the works can be followed at the exhibition thanks to a video documenting the event.

Calligraphy

Of particular interest is the section in which word, writing and painting combine in a pure manifestation of the artist's gesture, as in the works of Cy Twombly, in which the sign, writing and graffito are loaded with pictorial suggestions, and in those of Gastone Novelli, who possessed an innate sensibility for emotional painting-writing, guided by the rhythm of chromatic poetic connotations.

Word and thought

In Conceptual art, ever since the 1960s, the dialectic relationship with writing has played a fundamental role: art is no longer specific materiality but principally idea and thought. The creative action appropriates the practice of language, finding a full expression in the elaboration of ideas or in the enunciation of a method. Tautology, or the enunciation of "absolute truths", by Joseph Kosuth and the expressive rigour of Lawrence Weiner compare with the irony of Piero Manzoni, with the poetic and political zeroing of Vincenzo Agnetti, and with the calembours of Bruce Naumann, as well as with the classification of signs and words by Alighiero Boetti and with the Picture/Readings of Barbara Kruger.
The room containing the three works of Giulio Paolini "Dove", "Lo spazio" and "Qui" constitute a site-specific realisation. This space, planned in 1967, will for the first time be arranged by the artist in accordance with the original project. This section also includes a mural work by Robert Barry and a neon

text by Maurizio Nannucci.

Narration

The international artistic movement of the 1970s, "narrative art", combined photography and test, recording fragments of everyday life that actually happened or were merely imagined. The historic representatives of this current, such as Bill Beckley and Franco Vaccari, are compared in the exhibition with contemporary artists such as Sophie Calle. This last – who has represented France at the 2007 edition of the Biennale di Venezia – uses texts and photographs to recount experiences of her own or of others, playing with reality and the imagination.

The word denied

The idea of the word denied – absent although inferred, or illegible – constitutes a thread that runs throughout the varied setting of verbal and visual artistic work of the late 20th century.
The strong symbolic charge of the book has led to the result that many artists have chosen it to communicate the absence of possible narratives. The "Enciclopedia Treccani cancellata" by Emilio Isgrò will be for the first time reassembled since its presentation in 1970. This container par excellence of human knowledge is meticulously cancelled out in every part by Isgrò, with the exception of just a few words, which leap to the attention of the reader, suggesting personal interpretations.
For his part, Bruno Munari produced the "Libro illeggibile n° 12", (1951), one of his first. Created personally, the volume is made of paper of varying colour and thickness, cut by Munari, then glued and stitched, but it contains no written words.
Also present are nine "Scritture illeggibili di popoli sconosciuti", of 1975: immaginary ideograms executed on computer printouts, and created by imitating the graphic signs of Arabic and Chinese writing.

The bond between image and word seem all the stronger in contemporary artistic research.
The cross-fertilisation of genres expands in a transverse manner and affects every process of experimentation in today's avant-garde movements, without barriers, just as occurred in the first half of the last century. The exhibition documents this rich chapter with a series of significant works, placing a multitude of very different artists' experiences at the centre of the overview of the contemporary scene. For all of these artists, however, the word constitutes not a casual exercise, but a fundamental element of their very poetics: from Shirin Neshat, Ghada Amer, Thomas Hirschhorn, Raymond Pettibon and Moshekwa Langa, who use writing to highlight cultural and political problems; Tacita Dean who makes use of a poetic approach to evoke the dimension of memory and past; Tracey Emin disturbs the observer by using a shocking text to provoke emotions. On show too are three volumes of "Encyclopaedia Utopia", 1990, by Nedko Solakov, Golden Lion at the 2007 edition of the Biennale di Venezia, in which texts, drawings and photographs are ordered in accordance with an imaginary cataloguing process, combining fantasy and personal experiences.

Many of the works on show set up a dialogue with the exhibition spaces, as in the case of the 2005 work of Jenny Holzer and that of Joe Amrhein of 2002, or invite the visitor to interact with them, as in the case of the large installation produced for the Mart in 2006 by Douglas Gordon or the words "piercing" the screen by Jan Mančuška. Likewise the plays on words of Kay Rosen, and the ironic decalogue of the two Austrian artists, Fischli & Weiss, "How to work better", 1991-2007.
This particular work will appear in different zones of the Mart not destined for exhibitions: from the cafetteria to the lavatories, the garage and the offices.

It constitutes a decalogue of "recommendations for working better" with the objective of suggesting an ambiguity between exhibition and working functions within a musuem.

The word also appeals to and fascinated the latest generations of artists. Using different approaches and methods, the word is the source of inspiration and protagonist of the work of Stefano Arienti, Micol Assaël, Monica Bonvicini, Alessandra Cassinelli, Chira Dynys, Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset, Paolo Gonzato, Scott King, Salvatore Licitra, Marzia Migliora, Sabrina Mezzaqui, Ottonella Mocellin, Sandrine Nicoletta, Nicola Pellegrini, Luca Quartana, Gaston Ramirez, Albrecht Schäfer, David Shringley, Vibeke Tandberg, Enzo Umbaca.

The word in art is an exhibition tying in with the emergence of renewed interest on the part of many European museums into the study of the relationship between art and writing.
In this respect, the Mart can boast of having been the first to have been chosen, back in the mid-1990s, as venue to preserve and showcase some of the most important collections in this sector.
The aim of the exhibition is thus to promote awareness of an extraordinary chapter in artistic creativity of the 20th century.
The word in art has been made possible thanks to the loans and donations of works and archives dedicated to verbal and visual research preserved in the Mart's Archivio del '900 (20th-Century Archive), in the permanent collections and in its specialised library. These last works have arrived at the museum thanks to the generous long-term loans from Paolo Della Grazia's Archivio di Nuova Scrittura, from the Carlo Palli collection in Prato, from the Panza di Biumo collection, from the Bellora di Anna Spagna collection in Milan, from the Archivio Tullia Denza archive in Brescia, from the Fondo Sandretti of 20th-century Russian art, from the VAF-Stiftung and from the Sonnabend collection. There are other equally important loans from private collections, such as the group of works from the Calmarini collection, and from Italian and international museums.

The exhibition has been realised in collaboration with the Museion – Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea Bolzano

THE WORD IN ART. 20TH-CENTURY AVANT-GARDE. FROM FUTURISM TO THE PRESENT DAY SEEN THROUGH MART'S COLLECTIONS
MartRovereto - 10th November 2007 al 6th April 2008
Academic committee: Giorgio Zanchetti, coordinator, Gabriella Belli, Achille Bonito Oliva, Andreas Hapkemeyer, Nicoletta Boschiero, Paola Pettenella, Melania Gazzotti, Daniela Ferrari, Julia Trolp.

The exhibition has been realised in collaboration with: Museion – Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea Bolzano

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SATURDAY, JANUARY 12, 2008

INTERVIEW WITH EMMETT WILLIAMS

FLUXUS ARTIST EXTRAORDINAIRE, Judeth Hoffberg

On the occasion of an extraordinary exhibition curated by Paul Schimmel over the past eight years at the Museum of Contemporary Art entitled "Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979" and the ancillary event called "Beyond the Pink" which brought performance artists from all over the world to Los Angeles, I had the great privilege of escorting Emmett Williams, the pre-eminent poet-performer known to many through Fluxus, but who has distinguished himself throughout Europe as a visionary poet, visual artist and performance artist for a week in February. During that time, I asked him if he would be willing to sit down and have a chat, and here it is on the eve of the publication of his book: Mr. Fluxus: A Collective Portrait of George Maciunas to be published in the U.S. by Thames & Hudson in May 1998.

I told him that he has been in my vocabulary for at least 25 years, but we never sat down and talked before this very day of Friday the 13th of February.

I asked him how he got involved in Fluxus.

It was because of receiving a letter one day in Darmstadt, where I was living, from La Monte Young and he was saying he had seen some of my

writings and drawings in a German book called Movens (1959) and he wanted to know if he could use some of this material for a magazine they were preparing called Beatitude, and I said yes, and all things developed from there. I did have a letter from La Monte that there was this strange guy named Maciunas who was coming to Europe, trying to escape some bad debts, and that he would look me up and talk about performance and things like that. His letters to me are all in the Getty now because of the Jean Brown Collection. Suddenly, there came George Maciunas, and he had heard about my work, and the work of Robert Filliou, Daniel Spoerri, and Dieter Roth, who were all good friends of mine, and Jean Tingueley and so on and so on. Eventually, in September 1962, that was Wiesbaden and that was the beginning of Fluxus as performance festival. It was simply performance. And of course, there were 14 concerts in Wiesbaden and then Paris, and then Copenhagen (1962) and in early 1963 we went to Dusseldorf for a series of concerts and that was when Joseph Beuys joined the club.

What distinguished me was that I belonged to the European faction, because my friends were Europeans, and soon after Dusseldorf, George Maciunas went back to the United States and started the Fluxus thing in the United States. Alison and Dick had been visiting from Turkey and so that's how I got to know them in Wiesbaden. I remained in Europe, and Fluxus became something very important in Europe, much more so than in America, thanks to Beuys, Vostell, Ren≠ Block and other people who believed in Fluxus in a much more serious way than in the United States. These were very accomplished artists, and they were involved in Fluxus and people took note. They explained what Fluxus was, different from what I thought or what Dick thought, and it remains a very very European phenomenon. George was Lithuanian-born himself and had spent the first part of his life in Europe, shaped by these things. He was the "immigrant boy".

Was the transition in New York, in the heart of AbEx and Pop Art, the reason that Fluxus could not grab on with such competition.

No, no one called himself or herself a Fluxus artist in New York who could match a Vostell or a Beuys or a Kopke or others who remained in Europe and had an entirely different approach. People who made Fluxus created a glorious scene in Europe--Eric Anderson, Kopke, and we did not come out of nowhere, because we had been doing things. My Opera was first done in the 1950s, and so much of my work was done before Fluxus. I knew Vostell, Spoerri, Beuys, Filliou, Ben Patterson and Nam June before there was a Fluxus. I remember meeting in Milano before Fluxus went to the Biennale in the early 1990s and Gino di Maggio asked, "How did Fluxus change your work and your life?" Oh, Ben Vautier said this happened and this happened, and I just said, I saw you Ben Vautier in London before Fluxus and you were doing the same things before Fluxus and after Fluxus. When George said, Let there be Fluxus, we didn't change our ways and do something else. He gave us a forum so that we could come together and do things.

Did you come together before Fluxus?

I was very close to Spoerri and Filliou. The first performance of Opera in 1959 was with Spoerri and Klaus Bremen and myself in the Keller Club in the Castle in Darmstadt. Daniel was very active in theater at the time, he comes from ballet--the poetry that has come to be identified with me as Fluxus was all there before. It was my work that many people regard as Fluxus work that La Monte saw and that caused Maciunas to phone me and say that I'm coming over to talk about Fluxus. So many of the Americans allegedly came out of John Cage's class. The only comparable thing in Europe was the summer courses in music outside of Darmstadt where I first met these Americans like Earl Brown and John Cage. I was more interested in those days in Karlheinz Stockhausen, Bruno Maderna and Pierre Boulez--

whose ideas of notation changed the nature of my poetic work and gave me ideas of structuring my performances.

I was in Europe from 1949 - 1966 when I went to New York to become the Editor-in-Chief of the Something Else Press. My closest friendship there was with Ay-O, and we are more than brothers to this day. And there were others. And during the years when I taught at Cal Arts, Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, and the Sabitas Girl's School in Massachusetts and at Mt. Holyoke and then the culminating teaching experience in the United States was at Harvard. Ann Noel and I had the finest time at Harvard. We had marvelous students, many friends, and we did not want to stay there forever, because it was far too comfortable. In 1980, I was invited to be a guest artist in the DAAD program in Berlin, and we went to Berlin and have been there ever since. Gary, our son, is now a composer studying in Canada, and Annie and I see our old friends who are still alive and with whom I collaborate: Spoerri, Hamilton and Roth. Al Hansen finally came to Europe, but he dropped dead recently. My friends and collaborators remain European. It is significant that the only prize I ever won was the first Hannah H ch prize, given to me by Berlin, and it was so funny for an American to get this. It made me feel very comfortable. This year, Vostell got the prize. It's very interesting that this marvelous award should go first to an American, and the next year to Vostell and it is for lifetime achievement in the Arts. I'd like to think that it was given to me in Berlin by Germans.

Berlin has been very good to you, recognized your merits, given you a great studio. It's very unusual for an American to be embraced so much by this German city.

It is really very nice, and I do this not as a Fluxus artist. When I have exhibitions, I do not say I am a Fluxus artist, I say it is my work. And that makes me very comfortable. And it's nice to outlive descriptive titles like that. There are not too many people who know about my background. They come to my shows and buy the work, because they like it.

The 30th year anniversary of Fluxus seemed to stimulate the interest in Fluxus with students, curators, and art historians. It was not only in history, but with actual performances, objects, and installations.

The beginning of the anniversary in 1982, and then in 1992 had international repercussions. But many people misunderstand what Fluxus artists complain about--that is, that the museums had ignored their work, but in the beginning there was no work, there was nothing to put on the wall and nothing to look at, so it wasn't until there came to be things by Fluxus artists to put on the wall that they came to see things on the wall. In fact, what distinguishes the US Fluxus from the European is that Fluxus USA began to make boxes, and we in Europe continued in the tradition of performance. We did participate in the box program, but we didn't do boxes exclusively.

But coming to the States in 1966 to become Editor-in-Chief of Something Else Press obviously attracted you.

Well, I would never have done it on my own, but the fact is that Dick Higgins knew the French edition of Anecdoted Topography of Chance of Daniel Spoerri, and I translated and re-anecdoted that book and Dick Higgins published it as a Something Else Press book and invited me to the United States to be his editor-in-chief, and passage was paid for this translation, and there is that connection. I had no intention to come to the US for a signing party. I came because to it was to help pay for the translation.

Two years ago, in London, Atlas Press brought out an absolutely staggering new version of The Anecdoted Topography of Chance, all reworked, so that except for Robert, and Topor presented a little introduction, and we all went to work and re-anecdoted the thing again--it is much thicker and more

beautiful--and the British press just raved over it. They liked the first thing I had translated, but the Times Literary Supplement said this is the classic of its time--etc. And this time around, of course, the publisher used Fluxus. He said he personally felt that this was the most important Fluxus document ever published--From my point of view, I don't think so at all. And Daniel would certainly disagree with that, since he wasn't so hot about Fluxus when he first did that book, and the word doesn't even appear in the original book. Now it does, because it is inevitable and in the book, we debate that. Dieter Roth translated for the German edition of the book my anecdoted notation in German and re-anecdoted that, so the Dieter Roth German appears for the first time translated into English. Dieter didn't like Fluxus and didn't like George (from the Mr. Fluxus book) and Dieter has always been considered a Fluxus artist, and George Maciunas hoped and believed that he might be, but Dieter thoroughly rejected George's ideas of design, etc.

How did you pick up artists?

George said, we have this museum in Wiesbaden, let's do something. We have this church in Copenhagen and let's do something. Mind you, we paid our own way. Why did we pay our own way? Because nobody had a dime. George had a job and I had a job, but I was raising a family and we had real jobs in Germany working for the government. He was supporting Fluxus and his mother, and I was supporting my family. He paid for all of his boxes out of his own pocket. He didn't have a work ethic, because he didn't have a play ethic. It was all work.

Is Fluxus a movement?

It was enough of a movement so that Spoerri and Tingueley had a big argument about it, because Daniel and Tingueley and Yves Klein were Nouveau Realistes. When Daniel got involved in Fluxus, Tingueley, his best friend, told him to leave it alone--it's no good. You have to go in a straight line--that was Tingueley's warning. But Daniel said, I never go in a straight line, and participated in it. It didn't mean he was the great champion of Fluxus, but he joined it. As far as Christo and Jean-Claude, they were very friendly to Fluxus and proposed a thing for George, and their contribution to Mr. Fluxus was very sweet in the book. They remember him very kindly.

Then there are embarrassing things. Nam June talks about how Maciunas knew so and so and worked at Cooper Union, and George knew Oldenburg--so I wrote to Claes and asked him to tell me about his relationship with George. He answered that it wasn't like that. I have documentary proof that George and Claes didn't work together. I worked with Claes about the Store Days book in 1966, and I don't think we ever talked about Fluxus. Claes was teaching me all about Pop Art and the American scene which I had missed while I was in Europe. He did not talk about Fluxus at all.

When you were with Something Else Press, what was the distribution problems?

Dick and I tried to get a campus bookshop to get interested in the product, but they said they never got involved in the "vanity press" publications. Dick joined up with Aperture and the Small Press thing Michael Hoffman directed--and there was a meeting with the salesmen. I remember that I was so proud of the international success of a book I did with Hansjorg Mayer, Sweethearts, which Richard Hamilton loved and Duchamp loved it, and eventually Dick decided to publish it. He published it, and Duchamp was very happy to put the coeur volant on the cover. So I had to listen to a salesman, who said, well there was one book, Sweethearts, by Emmett Williams, you know it's printed back to front--how are you going to sell a book like that to a bookstore, you ought to burn the whole edition. This very thing of considering it printed back to front has generated an essay about that, placing me in a class with Jewish mystics by Jean Sellem at Lund He

sent me the outline of his essay and I told him that he was convincing me! It's nice to know that the ambiguities are there to allow critics to re-interpret the book far from the intentions of the author.

What about your Anthology of Concrete Poetry?

I supposed I was the ideal person to do it, because I was doing that before I came to New York in 1966. I had published my first book of concrete poetry with Daniel Spoerri in 1958, and published quite widely, and I knew all the poets and they had my work and I had theirs. I had brought most of it to become the core of this book (1966-67) and this was seen in America widespread for the first time in that book. With 18,000 copies sold--quite an achievement for a small press. And in Budapest, so many people there had a copy of my book. I consider some of my best work is in the German language now which is not known to those who do not have the language facility.

For those you know you only as a "concrete poet", doesn't that seem a limited view of Emmett Williams?

I am a poet, visual artist and performer--and those objects are what sells. What I'm involved in now and for the next couple of years is a project of tongue- in- cheek history of post-studio art from 1960 to the present day (there are going to be 100 of them, and I've already done 75)--and 12 ceramic pieces in Verona--learning how to do ceramics--and two of those things are going to be made into tapestries in Pakistan. It was not my decision.

I did some fascinating prints a year ago with a genius in Hanover who does these extraordinary special effects things--and people said it's some of the best work I've ever done, but it's not really me, since he did them--but I hardly take credit for them. Annie and Gary always want to bring me up to date with these machines, but I do it my way.

We've made some trips to Africa, and I've made designs of the little people I make--and decided they should go on large wheels and shields--and so these were carved by natives in Kenya (not artists) and they are large and in such bad shape (transport, etc.) and it takes weeks and weeks to get them in shape in order to paint them, and so Annie and I are working on 25 of them. And it will be smashing when they're all done. The wood has to be dried, and then we have to plane it down.

When did you think about Mr. Fluxus? Was it a long-term project?

When I was in New York--after the death of George--I had been in Harvard and came down for a weekend. And Ay-o and I decided that wouldn't it be fun to do a book about George--the dozen important people in Fluxus who had been there--called The Book of George-because we saw that after the death of George, funny things were happening. Someone released a story that "I will be in charge of Fluxus"--others said, he was nothing. Two of my friends said well there is not very much to say about George--he's an overblown figure.

So I asked certain people to give five anecdotes about George Maciunas so that we could get to know him through the anecdotes that people remember him by--from Watts, Shiomi, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Ay-o, myself, about a dozen. We thought how to do this--Ay-o went to Japan and I to Europe, and we forgot the whole thing. I mentioned occasionally that Ay-o and I had been planning to do this, and Michele Verges said I'd publish it if you gave it to me.

I started working on it again 10 years later,trying to find people. It took about 10 years to get letters, manuscripts to me to get them all together--and then

to bring it together. I wanted to do a book "from womb to tomb" in the words of other people--sometimes with anecdotes--the story of his life, of his death and how he was loved, hated and feared by all these people and their assessment of what he was--great or terrible. Out of the most devastating is that of Allan Kaprow, who zeroes in on the feud with Stockhausen.

And what about this Love-Hate situation with George Maciunas?

We were all kicked out--only two were not kicked out: Ken Friedman and Ben Vautier. We were all prima donnas--all kicked out. Vostell was never let in; George hated his guts. Beuys was never let in. George absolutely despised him, but Beuys loved him. George not only kicked me out--Kopke, Anderson our of Fluxus, but he denounced us to the Soviet press and to the world as fascist thugs--and this was a joke that Eric did: Eric was making a trip through Eastern countries and started to send letters and postcards from Moscow, etc. how we were performing Fluxus in various cities and George believed it, and we were dismissed.

Bici (Hendricks) has one of the most beautiful accounts of the dying. But it was only after he had died that we knew that it was "gossip" . We only renewed our friendship when Jean Brown brought George to an exhibition of mine at Mt. Holyoke-- and George said that maybe we can be friends again and gave me a beautiful name box--but I told him we had always been friends, but "you didn't believe it". But he never forgave Dick Higgins for Something Else Press.

There are those books which dictate Fluxus as defined only by George Maciunas. What is Mr. Fluxus about?

George does not have the last word in this book. There are some 70 people pro and con telling what they think Fluxus is and what Fluxus is not. This is not hero worship. 75% ended up in the garbage, and they could save it for their books, but not this one. And I told some contributors that I was returning stuff asking whether they could try again?

Ken ended by saying he hardly knew him. Ben Vautier loved George very much showing a maximal amount of respect for George with a poem that he wrote. Catalogs have served as amazing new data about Fluxus. Ren≠ Block's 1962 Wiesbaden Fluxus 1982 is still one of the best. The Fluxus in Germany catalog I believe is the best documentation and it's too bad it has not been translated.

Do you think that art history books in the future will give Fluxus its due?

I don't see how they can avoid Fluxus. the time hasn't quite come yet, but you have some first-rate historians such as Thomas Kellein whose small book on Fluxus published by Thames & Hudson has been translated into German, Japanese and English, and the English edition is now reprinted in a second edition.

And now that Mr. Fluxus is almost here?

Well, the jacket by Ay-O is definitely eye-catching. And I was very happy how the critics treated My Life in Fluxus with great seriousness. It was not a history of Fluxus at all, but was an attempt to show what one member of Fluxus did, what it was like to be part of Fluxus. In this regard, I had many arguments with Jon Hendricks, because he was basing the history of Fluxus on a collection that Gil Silverman was able to buy, which is not complete and not comprehensive.

Let's talk about Hanns Sohm for a minute.

Well, no Sohm, no Fluxus. The Hanns Sohm Archive was before Fluxus,

and it's all there. Fluxus fits into a large and important archive. If you want Concrete Poetry, go there; if you want Ginsberg, Beats, go there. If you want Wallace Berman, go there. The Sohm Archive gives context to all movements. I used to enjoy going to Sohms' and staying there before the collection was sold to the Stuttgart Museum. He looks at the material first, then puts it into context. I send all my material to him at his home, before it ever gets to the museum. I had my Opera performed last summer in a Castle outside Stuttgart and it lasted four hours. Sohm was there. And he's there when you're short of cash; he'll buy something to keep you going. And the museum of Stuttgart is one of the jewels of Europe, and it's wonderful that the archive is there. My letters to George and to Daniel Spoerri are at the Getty now, and it's too bad they're not in Stuttgart.

And tell us what plans you have now.

Well, Mr. Fluxus has been translated into German, Lithuanian, Japanese and English. The German translation came out first, and it was from the English original. The English edition is larger, since it has more new material in it. And we have several Fluxus books by this one publishing house in England, Thames & Hudson , including the Fluxus show at the Tate. Ben Vautier and I have done a tape of our ICA performances in London. In March, I have been invited to Australia as President of the Museum in Lodz, Poland and I plan to work with the Aborigines, as well as doing performances in Melbourne. Perhaps I will also visit the Fluxus Collection in Queensland.

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 06, 2008

Concrete Poetry and Conceptual Art: A Spectre at the Feast? Neil Powell
Concrete Poetry and Conceptual Art: A Spectre at the Feast?
Neil Powell

The fascination that language held (and still holds) for many artists associated with concrete poetry and conceptual art and to question the intentions of both movements towards language. Rather than trying to assert a visual correlation between Concrete Poetry and Conceptual Art, (which may only be symptomatic or coincidental anyway), it seems more important to try to discover any causal links that may exist to connect them.
Whilst written language is without doubt the largest common denominator connecting Concrete Poetry and Conceptual Art, the 'Spectre' at this particular feast is not a direct reference to the ghastly omnipresence of text as the unifying trait of two genres but to a suspicion that there may be other, less visible factors that intersect both movements.

Concrete poetry first emerged as a coherent movement during the 1950's and 1960's and its precepts were exemplified by a number of central figures who incorporated text as a visual element within geometric, symmetrical and occasionally pictorial arrangements. 1 The work of the early concrete poets manifested itself in a number of forms, as visual art, as written manifestos and to a lesser extent as performance and sound works. 2 One of the most influential of the first generation of visual poets was the Swiss artist Eugen

Gomringer, who, in seminal compositions such as "Silencio"(1954) made bold use of blank page space in order to highlight its potential as a metaphor for the reader's contemplative silence. 3 The whiteness of the page in Gomringer's "Silencio" is interrupted by a regimented raft of text, the image/poem gives the impression of disrupted calm. The pattern of disturbance finds further verification in the printed insistence of the word "Silencio"and we are forced to speculate that "Silencio" might be construed as a remorseless and monotonous instruction to the reader. The text-image and page space in "Silencio" are intended to be mutually definitive, but as with many other concrete poems, the effect of text as image effectively seems to disconnect the act of reading from the narrative possibilities of language. 4 "Silencio"paid direct homage to Mallarmé's typographically complex book work "Un Coup de Dés / jamais n' abolira le Hasard" ("The Dice Throw / Will Never abrogate Chance" 1914).5< The typographical exaggeration of "Un Coup de Dés...." was a calculated attempt to force the viewer to encounter blank page space as a compositional element within an illusionistic picture plane. "Un Coup de Dés...."effectively reduced the legibility of the written word to that of a typographic pattern, text is marginalised to such an extent that the viewer is forced both literally and metaphorically to read between the lines. The layout and graphic overprinting of "Un Coup de Dés..." deliberately renders text illegible as naturalistic or figural narrative and this is confirmed by Mallarmé's description of the work as a constellation or shipwreck.

The obscured word patterns of "Un Coup...." resemble a series of histograms that correspond to the visual characteristics of language but wholly disrupts any possibility of reading as a means of accumulating information.. "Un Coup de Dés..."was probably one of the first modern poetic works to utilise blank page space as a visual metaphor for interpretive silence. Mallarmé described this spatial counterpoint as "espacement de la lecture", or a contemplative space for the reader. "Un Coup de Dés..." also effaced the distinction between pictorial representation and representations made in words. Linguistic conventions became transformed into aesthetic determinants and, more crucially, the symbolic status of language became subverted as its letter forms became pressed into service as decorative typographic motifs. Mallarmé's belief that text could be manipulated as a visual special effect ran contra to many sanctioned uses of language, either as an agent for the preservation of knowledge or as a tool for enlightenment. As if to reinforce the near-heretical nature of his claims against legibility, Mallarmé is alleged to have declared: "strictly speaking I envisage reading as a hopeless exercise." 6

The development of European visual poetry at this time was not unique, and the mid 1950's also witnessed the emergence of the Brazilian 'Noigandres' group of concrete poets. 7 The 'Noigandres' were distinct both conceptually and geographically from Gomringer's loosely affiliated 'Darmstadt Circle' 8 , and from 1955 onwards, the São Paolo based group published experimental works (dubbed Poesia Concreta by Haraldo de Campos) through the auspices of their own publication 'Invençao'. The work of the 'Noigandres' group followed a tendency of imitative naturalism derived from an earlier tradition of iconic figurative verse. This tradition is perhaps best exemplified in the "Calligrammes" of Guillaume Apollinaire. 9 The Calligrammes took the form of poems whose compositions visually echoed the meaning of the words within them, in examples such as "Il Pleut"(1916), words appear to cascade down the page like raindrops on a window pane. The lyrical richness and graphic flair of Apollinaire's work persuaded the founder members of the 'Noigandres', the de Campos brothers and Decio Pignatari, to consider the possibility of allowing the reader to encounter language in much the same way as one might experience natural phenomenon. 10

The Brazilian concrete poets were further distinguished from their European counterparts by a cohesive group identity and and by their work which concerned itself explicitly with social and political comment. Issues such as

hunger and poverty were openly discussed in Haraldo de Campos' "Proem" and "Poem" from "Servidão de Passagem" (Transient Servitude) of 1961. Here, de Campos questions the necessity for poetry in circumstances of deprivation or hardship. Similarly in Pignatari's striking "Hombre, Hambre, Hembra" (Man, Hunger, Woman") of 1957 we are left in no doubt about the evident realism of the title's triangular equation, or of its far reaching implications. However, it would be inaccurate to portray the work of the Noigandres purely as social comment, and as they stated in their 'pilot plan for Concrete Poetry',11 the "ideogrammatic"picture-poem was intended as an appeal to/for non-verbal communication... and to primarily deal with communication about form, not messages".The concrete poets produced various manifestoes and protocols that were intended to characterise the production and attributes of concrete poetry, and in 1958, the group produced 'a pilot plan for Concrete Poetry', which embodied concrete poetry as: "the tension of things-words in space-time".13 An example of this can be seen in works such "Aboio, (the Cry of the Brazilian Cowboy)" by Pedro Xisto. Here Xisto investigated the ideogram as a spatial object that could utilise graphic communication whilst retaining a suggestion of paronomasia or multiple meaning in the written word. Other concrete texts of this time such as the celebrated 'City Poem' by Augusto de Campos(1957) and Decio Pignatari's 'LIFE' (1968) continued the concrete poets self-conscious drive to combine typographical and geometric appropriateness.

The work of the Darmstadt Circle, the Noigandres and others was essentially driven by shared concerns about the capacity of written language to act as an authentic proxy for ephemeral and transparent depiction. With the advent of the concrete poem, linguistic structure was merged with typographical conceit to such an extent that conventional readings were rendered not only inappropriate but nonsensical. In concrete poetry, graphic layout and phonic wordplay combined to expose the aesthetic side-effects and translucency of textual representations. Whilst accepted literary protocols such as the stanza and sonnet had traditionally been used to discipline the form of poetic language (and to test the technical adeptness of the poet), there seems little doubt that the concrete poets' persistent use of text as patterns, snares and obstacles was tantamount to a considered rejection of the conventions associated with a poetry of expression.14 Even so, at the heart of concrete poetry there seemed to exist a semantic loop that endlessly reiterated the (unanswerable) question to the viewer: 'If a picture paints a thousand words, then what does a picture constituted from words paint?' The quandary for the audience becomes clearer as he/she is forced to consider text not just as text, but as the image of text. Consequently, within concrete poetry, text frequently ceased to have any possibility of an indexical relationship to the real world as words are converted back into pictures again.15

Many of the chief exponents of concrete poetry gained notable international success and recognition, major public showings such as "Concrete Art" at the Museum of Modern Art, São Paolo (1956) first introduced concrete poetry to a wider audience, whilst a substantial exhibition at the Brighton Festival (1967) was an indicator that concrete poetry had reached the zenith of its formal and conceptual development. By incorporating text into the realm of the pictorial, the concrete poets could credibly claim to have redefined the limits of written language as being at the threshold of visuality.

Even at the height of its popularity, the potential of concrete poetry seemed to be constrained by stylistic rigidity and a tendency to produce visually formulaic works. Whereas Mallarmé had managed to construct a visual parody of communication that was determined by the structures of language, within concrete poetry, syntax was readily disfigured to accommodate an austere design sensibility as with Ernst Jandl's "Lustig" (Merry). The swift decline of Concrete poetry in the mid 1960's was further accelerated by a wider perception that the form of the visual poem was compromised in the eyes of both literary criticism and and art theory.

Sadly, despite the well-defined and authentic internationalism of Concrete poetry, its 'onomatopoetic'17 utterances of the 1950's and 60's were destined to become muffled by critical lethargy and disowned by interdisciplinarity.

Whilst the phenomenon of concrete poetry might claim to have attended a minor revolution in graphic and literary communication, the advent of conceptual art was symptomatic of a far more fundamental reexamination of political, social and cultural values. Whilst conceptual art itself effected a crisis in a particular version of Modernism, it also became a litmus for the global economic, social and moral reevaluation that seemed in evidence around much of the industrialised world.18

Conceptual art's abandonment of the modernist conventions of the frame/pedestal, meant that the form of conceptual art was politicised or at least problematized well before its contents became discernible. 'Dematerialized'19 works such as the Air Show by Art & Language offered the prospect of an elusive cycle of artistic production and audience reception that was commercially and critically unwelcome.20 Within the broader context, conceptual art manifested itself variously as 'information art', 'anti-form', 'site specific art', and 'land art' in a series of self-conscious attempts to confound the acquisitive tendencies of connoisseurs, collectors and cultural institutions. Kosuth and Art & Language mobilised the definition of art as a precondition of artistic production, and for the first time manifesto, proposal and artwork became interdependent components.

In addition, the rigour, articulacy and density of theoretical texts generated by artists such as Joseph Kosuth and Art & Language were clear attempts to counter the necessity for artist and audience to negotiate meaning/value via the interpretive parenthesis of Modernist art criticism.21 Conceptual art's ascetic assault on materiality and visuality was clearly intended as a rebuke to modernism's preoccupation with aesthetic sensibility as the primary measure of artistic achievement. Not surprisingly, this critique prompted an unequivocal rear guard action from prominent modernist critics such as Michael Fried, who, in his 1967 article "Art and Objecthood'22levelled serial accusations of 'theatricality' and 'literality' at conceptual art.

The numbers of artists who sought to present knowledge as reified information is well represented in Lucy Lippard's annotated journal of the conceptual art movement 'Six years:..', but seminal conceptual artworks such as 'Six Negatives' (1968-69) by Art & Language bore direct testimony to the corrosive effects of linguistically derived systems of classification brokered by many social and cultural institutions. In 'Six Negatives' Art & Language selectively deleted positive characteristics from excerpts of Roget's Thesaurus in an attempt to expose the potential for linguistic arbitration to be both volatile and prejudicial. In relation to this work, Ian Burn commented, "....The only attitude for viewing seems to be through recognition - recognition of the Thesaurus and what it represents....One must recognise the systems for dealing with language before one can "see" the work....."23 . Subsequent works by Art & Language, such as 'Comparative Models' (1972) and 'Flags for Organisations' (1978), demonstrate their enduring commitment to the use of textual and emblematic components which mimic the institutional use of information as a means of social control and cultural approval. For artists such as Hans Haacke the availability of a diversified range of media such as photography, montage, text offered not only the possibility of a more flexible approach to production but also the opportunity to reintegrate art into a wider cultural discourse from which Greenbergian ideas removed it /abstracted it. Works such as "Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings: A Real-Time Social System, as of May 1 1971" by Hans Haacke controversially revealed the typically invisible control surfaces of institutionalised language that had been used to define a whole range of relationships between the individual and the social.24

Questions of linguistic representation in relation to conceptual art however, extend far beyond the internalised workings and externalised production of its exponents and toward the realm of historicity itself. The term 'conceptual art' became a convenient repository for any work that exceeded the recognised parameters of other identifiable genre. Any fixety of 'conceptual art' as a term is probably attributable to an accretion of written history rather than viewer experience of symptomatic works in museums.25 Despite this, conceptual art was able to coherently differentiate itself from preceding avant garde movements by virtue of its self reflexivity and its ability to draw upon a far greater range of intellectual resources. Many of these such as philosophy, semiology and social anthropology were previously seen as being outside the of remit of artistic concern. Significant within these spheres of influence was the work of linguistic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (1921-22) did much to fuel the debate around the functions and definition of art.26

The importance of the Tractatus cannot be overestimated when looking at the structuralist turn in art and philosophy during the late 1960's. Wittgenstein's statement: "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world", is indicative of his view of language as a philosophical instrument that could be used to interrogate and define the limits of both experience and understanding. The idea of language as the ultimate means of definition found particular endorsement in works of Joseph Kosuth. Works such as Kosuth's 'Titled' (Art as Idea as Idea)[meaning]' (1967) proved to be highly influential in conceptual art's reworking of aesthetics and materiality.28 'Titled' (Art as Idea as Idea)' consists of a white on black photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of 'meaning' that is synonymous with art's own crisis of identity. 'Titled' presents object and language as a seamless entity that renders both signifier and signified inseparable from each other and highlights an interpretive predicament of meaning predicated upon language. The text in 'Titled' is important because it signifies the semantic capacity of language and not just because of what it says per se. The supposed impartiality of language is exposed in a way that makes us acutely aware of the difference between the act of reading and the act of interpretation.

In his cogent essay 'Notes on Conceptual Art and Models', Kosuth declared:"...all I make are models. The actual works of art are ideas. Rather than 'ideals' the models are a visual approximation of a particular art object I have in mind...". (This resembles Wittgenstein's Tractatus statement: "A proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it."29 From this premise, Kosuth was able to formulate a very particular perspective on the objects of art. Kosuth proclaimed art as ideas mediated ("approximated") in the form of objects, (although little aesthetic or material value was attached to these objects except for their importance as as surrogates). Kosuth was also eager to point out here that these 'models' are not ideals, Kosuth was certainly aware of the differential that frequently exists between the idealised trajectories of linguistic models and the rigours of real-time art production. The case for the precedence of ideas over form is also clearly stated in Sol LeWitt's essay 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' (and later, in 'Sentences on Conceptual Art'), where conceptualism is seen to represent a relaxation of the 'economy-of-means' sensibility exemplified by Minimalism.30

Unprecedented in the modernist era, conceptual art assumed that audiences had the ability to absorb neutralised text much faster than poetic/imagist language (even if the the meaning of the work was only retrieved by the viewer much later). Lucy Lippard confirmed that she admired "the immediacy of transmission of information with Conceptual Art" (as opposed to the "continuing word relationships formed within poetry).31 However, Lippard's characterisation of conceptual art and poetry as vehicles for linguistic representation raises questions about the viability of written and spoken language to function as an object in its own right. The

semantic and aesthetic tensions implied by Lippard's commentary were later directly refuted by Dan Graham in his statement that: "......it is not a word-object dichotomy".32

The work of artists such as Lawrence Weiner is also central to the debate concerning the potential for tension between language and object (signifier and signified). From 1968 onwards Weiner's sited statements, books, posters and records were augmented by a written 'schema' that was intended to characterise alternative options for the production and distribution of art. This 'schema' has accompanied all of the work he has made since this period.

Weiner's Schema:

1. The artist may construct the piece
2. The piece may be fabricated
3. The piece need not be built.
Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the the occasion of the receivership.
Weiner's schema bears more than a passing resemblance the the ideas outlined in Kosuth's 'Notes on Conceptual Art and Models'.

The status and tenor of Weiner's statements is left open to conjecture, texts such as 'Terminal Boundary'(1969) can be read as hypothetical description, imaginary performance or apocryphal anecdote. Perhaps surprisingly, concrete poets such as Gomringer also seemed to share Weiner's fascination with the aesthetic astringency of the litany and its potential for representation as narrative; Gomringer's 1961 work, "Snow is English", is mechanically descriptive in such a way as to defeat any sentimentalised (modernist literary) interpretation of pastoral landscape. The list of over one hundred implausible adjectives used to describe snow transcends any experience or expectation that we may have about pastoral verse, but confirms what we know about the potential for language to combine as visual 'free radical' elements to dramatic poetic effect. The meticulous attention to typographical detail that individuates concrete poets such as Gomringer also serves to promote simultaneous and conflicting readings of the text that leaves the spectator as speculator. Typically, Weiner's texts are floated speculatively as a territorial or linguistic markers that indicate not only an absence of the materials of art (apart from text) but also stand as approximate representations of ideas rather than as objects in their own right. Weiner's works are symptomatic of the idea that the consciousness of the viewer should be seen as a direct corollary of 'place', and potentially in opposition to the idea of the exteriorised pastoral 'landscape'. Support for this view might be drawn from an unexpected source in the form of Ian Hamilton Finlay, who in his 'Detached Sentences' states : "An inscription need not actually exist in the landscape; if it is in the consciousness of the viewer it is in the landscape."33

At the WBAI-FM Symposium in New York (1970), Carl Andre did not hesitate to describe Lawrence Weiner as a poet and it is perhaps in the works of Weiner and Ian Hamilton Finlay that conceptual art and concrete poetry aesthetically and momentarily intersect in their challenge to linguistic codes of representation. Ian Hamilton Finlay (b.1925) is one of concrete poetry's most enduring exponents, he is renowned for the acuteness of his critique of culture and landscape. Like Weiner, Finlay's sited texts and concrete poems have manifested themselves across a range of materials and forms as part of an ongoing commentary that is intended to expose the ambivalence of contemporary culture. Whilst appearing to have strong visual affiliations to Conceptual art, Finlay's stance as a poet is diametrically opposed to the tautological self-legitimation and anaestheticised approach to production represented by Kosuth and Weiner. Typical of his strident but good humoured critique on what he sees as the shallowness of the

information aesthetic, Finlay observed: "to try to separate the idea of art from the idea of beauty seems to me quite grotesque. It's like separating the idea of football from the idea of goals."34

This aside, one cannot take the text aesthetic at face value in the works of either Weiner or Finlay, especially given the potential of context to condition speculation about the significance of information and/or intentions of the artist. As social readers we are accustomed to the use of sited texts and signs across a whole range of public and private contexts, as an agent of state/governmental control or as an indicator of social cohesion. Signage also acts as a metaphor for commercial activity, as information or advice or is presented for moral or educative purposes. We are rarely prepared to encounter written language as a catalyst for speculative interpretation or aesthetic appreciation unless it is in the form of protest or memorial. In particular, the 'sited' texts of both Weiner and Finlay present a challenge to conventional readings in the light of localised and frequently shifting conditions.35 Text based work also allowed conceptual art and concrete poetry to exploit the visuality and processes associated with language/signage in a way that did not require a regression into a sentimentalised or expressionistic mode of representation. In looking at Weiner and Finlay there is strong evidence to support the view offered by Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden that the filter of language facilitates a world view rendered inaccessible via primary sensory apparatus.36

Within the context of conceptual art the sited text works of Lawrence Weiner, Douglas Heubler and others were intended to mobilise the potential of place and to sensitive the audience to the conditions of production for the artist at work in 'real-time'. In this 'situationist' setting, the frequently austere production values more generally associated with conceptual art demonstrated a potential to elicit a dynamic critical reception that transcended the means of production. In addition to this, in works such as Weiner's Lambert text (1970) 37 the written word allowed the kind of reader access that could be neatly adapted to accommodate emerging aspirations to democratise cultural property rights whilst expediting the idea of communication about communication. For artists such as Kosuth, Art & Language, Hanne Darboven, et al., the susceptibility of written language to become art, whether as information or textual analogue, helped form a direct challenge to the hierarchy of linguistic and cultural power that had previously been the preserve of institutions and critical commentators.

In terms of a differentiation or comparison of concrete poetry and conceptual art, one might usefully begin with Lucy Lippard's comment that: "there is a distinction between concrete poetry, where the words are made to look like something, an image, and so-called conceptual art, where the words are used only to avoid looking like something, where it doesn't make any difference how the words look on the page or anything."38

The visual differences identified by Lippard are symptomatic of far more deep rooted characteristics that serve to distinguish the two forms. Certainly, concrete poetry and conceptual art both posed severe challenges to reading, representation and interpretation by exposing language to a radical shift of context. Concrete poets such as Mathias Goeritz disrupted the conventional expectations of expressive poetry by subjecting text to the extremes of graphic composition. For the concrete poets, the sequential characteristics of reading and literary representation were superseded by the desire to create visual special effects that might transcend or augment the symbolic function of language.

As we have already established, so-called conceptual artists such as Art & Language, Joseph Kosuth were primarily interested in using language as an analytical and philosophical instrument that could stand for art's ideas, rather than the concrete poets obsession with verbovisual pyrotechnics. Through

the writings and curatorial ventures of critics such as Lippard, conceptual art rapidly became synonymous with a challenge to the visibility of art, and this was embodied in various attempts to find a dematerialised equivalent or proxy for ideas. The limits of visuality were tested by conceptualism and were found to exist at the threshold of written and spoken language, either as description or quite simply as information.

However, similarities between concrete poetry and conceptual art could be said to exist, they were certainly amongst the first visual arts movements to deploy text simultaneously as both object and narrative, as signifier and signified. This synergy of communicative means as communicated meaning ('the medium is the message') had already been broached by Marshall McLuhan in the context of the early articulations of his thesis describing an electronic 'global village'.39 If one accepts a characterisation of both conceptual art and concrete poetry as 'communication about communication', this might well be seen as a common undercurrent.

Whilst the cultural significance of concrete poetry as a movement per se may still be the subject of some inquiry, its importance to the development of other artistic forms and its precedence in wresting a share of language from the grip of the literary cognoscenti and integrating it into visual art practice seems significant. Although one cannot claim that concrete poetry was a major influence in its own right, it was certainly part of a wider mobilisation that sought to incorporate written and spoken language into the realm of the visual arts. Of the 20 th century visual art movements that embraced text, including Vorticism, de Stijl, International Spatialism, Lettrism and Fluxus, it is probably true to say that concrete poetry and conceptual art were probably the most viable and the most radical. 40

The majority of text in art was characterised by written commentaries within books or museums or as explanatory accompaniment in the form of title or material description. As we have already seen from earlier examples of concrete poetry and conceptual art, the title or caption often assumed a central importance in the work, both visually and conceptually. Within concretism and conceptualism, text became routinely deployed as the primary object of the work, whether as phonetic mantra as in the works of Mathias Goeritz and Gerald Ferguson or as disclosure as in the works of Emmett Williams and Hans Haacke. As the form of Concrete poetry had previously addressed itself to the effect of aesthetics on language, so conceptual art compounded the relationship between subject and its representation in language.

The evidence would seem to indicate that both movements were essentially self-conscious in their use of written language as an object of art, and although conceptual artists did not fetishize typography as the concrete poets had done previously, the earnest desire of conceptual art to exceed the existing predilections of art criticism became an obsession in its own right. For many of the main protagonists of both movements, language had offered the promise of cultural embourgeoisemént for an aesthetically liberated readership as well as an escape from the preoccupations of Clement Greenberg and Hugh MacDiarmid with approved aesthetic sensibility. Ironically, the various attempts of conceptual art to close down modernism's fixation with aesthetics soon emerged as a type of aesthetic in itself. For some critics the idea that written or printed language could be used as the earthly representative of a pure form of art idea began to resemble claims to legitimacy supported by the Modernist material hierarchies of visual art forms such as painting, printmaking and sculpture.

Michael Claura's essay 'Outline of a Detour', described art as an unavoidable consequence of visual language and that the immateriality and literality of picture-poems and theoretical manifestoes as being too arid to be sustainable as long term cultural strategies.41 Claura concludes this line of argument by inferring that the conventions of written language inevitably fall

into conflict with and become overtaken by the artists aesthetic obligations and an innate audience predisposition towards sensuous materialism. This was by no means an exceptional view and conceptual art and concrete poetry are frequently represented by history as evidence of irretrievable artistic folly, having failed to deliver on what now seems to be a hugely ambitious and optimistic agenda. For many critics, including Lippard, the loftiness of these ambitions was to become an indicator of the self-regarding naiveté of both movements and accusations of pretentiousness and elitism rapidly solidified into a critical force at the heels of conceptual art and concrete poetry.

The decline of concrete poetry was almost certainly precipitated by its irreversible tendency to decoration and over-elaboration. What started out as a daring mass trespass across literary conventions and alphabetic signs deteriorated into a demonstration of the elasticity of language as it became deformed by both geometric contrivance and numbing repetition. Having established itself on the borders of both the visual and literary arts, concrete poetry abandoned both discursive speech and syntactic structure in its attempt to reconcile the historical separation between pictorial representation and representations in words. By contrast, conceptual art is distinguished not only by its profound impact on postmodern thinking, but by the articulacy and scholarship of many of those directly involved with it. Conceptual art offered a revised view of the relationship between text based communication as content and the arbitrary organisation of linguistic systems as context. Conceptual artists were able for the first time to show how secularised language/information within abstract social systems often generated friction when in the face of the 'lived experience of language'. Conceptual art is also characterised by its relentless rejection of the importance of form and material to the point where this becomes a subscription to an antiform/pro-text aesthetic. So-called conceptualists crossed the divide between aesthetics and linguistics in the belief that text might allow them to transgress not only the visual, but also the semantic and the aesthetic.

Concrete poetry and conceptual art offered a challenge to the unassailability of linguistic signs by generating semiotic and aesthetic conflict to deliberate effect and perhaps one could assert that the two share a resentment of the ulterior qualities of language. Ultimately though, concrete poetry and conceptual art seem to be connected by little more than the spectre of perversity - a counter cultural sensibility that motivated poets to make pictures (and extend language beyond its limits); and visual artists to use text (as a surrogate for ideas that were essentially optimised by language).

Notes

1 The earliest antecedents of visual poetry can be clearly identified in the guise of the English pattern poet George Herbert (1593-1633)1 and the figured verses of Lewis Carroll in the 'Mouse's Tale'.

2 Theo van Doesburg, 'Numero d'Introduction du Groupe et de la Revue Art Concret ', (1930)

It is within the writings of Theo Van Doesburg (1883-1931) (a.k.a. I. K. Bonset) that we discover the first manifesto for 'Art Concret'. Van Doesburg was the founder of Netherlands Dada who distributed a series of manifestoes and typographical experiments through the magazines 'Art Concret' and 'Mecano'. In 1917 Van Doesburg founded the magazine 'de Stijl' in collaboration with Piet Mondrian, which served as a forum for the writings and poems of artists such as Kurt Schwitters, Tristan Tzara and Hans Arp. Van Doesburg's manifesto announced "A search for a universal formal language which has no relation to nature , emotional life or sensory

data, and the pursuit of works which are completely devoid of lyrical symbolism or dramatic _expression."2

This runs somewhat counter to the style of visual poetry envisaged by Apollinaire and represents a radical shift away from making imitative imagist drawings with words and characters and towards a more abstract rendering of visual language.

Se also Teddy Hultberg Ed., 'Manifesto for Concrete Poetry '(1953) reprinted in 'Literally Speaking: Sound Poetry and Text-Sound Composition', (1993 ed.) Swedish artist Öyvind Fahlström published his 'Manifest for Konkret Poesi', but its circulation was confined to Sweden. In this document, Fahlström coined the term for the movement and enumerated many of the linguistic features that were to characterize first generation Concrete poetry. Fahlström subsequently moved to New York in the early 1960's where he became a significant intermediary between the New York avant-garde and contemporary Swedish artists. In 1963 his seminal work, 'Birds in Sweden' was broadcast by Swedish Radio and received widespread critical acclaim as a watershed in the development of text/sound composition. see also the Noigandres, 'A Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry' (Sao Paolo, 1958)

3 The Bolivian born Gomringer, who had previously been employed as secretary to the concrete painter Max Bill, perceived his work to be directly descended from an established tradition of visual poetry that originated with Stephane Mallarmé and Guillaume Apollinaire.

4 Earlier, in 1951, Gomringer had also produced a collection of one-word poems, which he named 'Konstellationen' , ('Constellations', Spiral Press 1953), or 'thought-objects'. These encrypted texts were visually arranged within the space of the page to compliment the poem's narrative. Again influenced heavily by Mallarmé, Arp and Max Bill, Gomringer described the role of the reader in this equation as one of "collaborator" whose task it was to decipher and "complete" the word associations of the work.

5 Stephane Mallarmé, 'Un Coup de Dés / jamais n' abolira le Hasard', (Paris: Gallimard, 1914), published posthumously.It is widely thought that Mallarmé completed this work in 1896/97.

6 Antje Quast, 'What Does Poetry have to do with the World?'. Wilfried Dickhoff Ed., Marcel Broodthaers', 'le poids d'une oeuvre d'art', (Cologne: TINAIA, 1994)

7 see 'Noigandres, Noigandres' Ezra Pound, 'Canto XX', (New York: Exile.1927)

8 for an expanded definition and membership see Stephen Bann Ed., Introduction to 'Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology', (London: London Magazine Editions 13, 1967)

9 Guillaume Apollinaire, 'Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War', (1913-1916), translated by Anne Hyde Greet, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.)

10 Mallarmé's model of experimental typography was not the sole inspiration in this respect. The succeeding decades saw the emergence of a number of independently conceived, stylistically distinctive visual poetic forms from authors as diverse as Guillaume Apollinaire, Ezra Pound and Constructivist artist El Lissitzky.

In 1914, in England, Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis founded the Vorticist movement. through The journal 'BLAST' gave artists the opportunity to publish experimental typographic works and imagist poems. These proved to be influential among poets and artists in the immediate period post-1945.

11 Noigandres, 'A Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry' (Sao Paolo, 1958)

12 James Joyce, 'Finnegans Wake', (London: Faber & Faber, 1939)

13 The group, led by the De Campos brothers. embraced a model of Concrete poetry which intended to take advantage of the simultaneity of visual and written imagery without diminishing the three dimensional 'verbivocovisuality' of the communication. Although it seems that neither the Noigandres or Gomringer had any awareness of Fahlström's 1953 manifesto, in 1956 Noigandres and Gomringer came together in Sao Paolo, Brazil and formally agreed to promote visual/verbal practice under the collective banner of Concrete poetry.

14 Although earlier graphic movements such as Lettrisme, Vorticism and concrete art had laid claim to a constructivist legacy of poster art, nowhere had such a concerted and cohesive movement addressed itself to the contradictions of pictorial and textual communications.

15 This puzzle of language was obviously key for both Gomringer and de Campos not only in terms of their poetic works, but also in moulding their respective manifestoes which went to great lengths in laying out the defining formal characteristics of concrete poetry.

16 Whilst it is fair to say that the earliest manifestations of concrete poetry's verbal acrobatics were constricted by visual stylization and rigid typographical conceit, second generation visual poets such as Jackson MacLow, Pierre and Ilse Garnier, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Dick Higgins, Hiro Kamimura and others had no such stylistic inhibitions. It is also worth comparing this membership to Ken Friedman's list of the "founding circle of concept art" , which includes: Henry Flynt, George Macunias, Dick Higgins, Jackson MacLow, Emmett Williams, Ben Vautier and others. From this we can conclude that concrete poetry and Fluxus as the beginnings of conceptual art had at one time or another shared a number of common personnel. Fluxus itself attracted artists from a broad range of origins and backgrounds and its membership included such notables as Joseph Beuys, George Brecht and Alison Knowles. It is difficult to distinguish the contribution to conceptual art of those members of Fluxus who were second generation concretists, but Fluxus undoubtedly represented an important developmental move away from the formality of concretism towards the more expansive contextual concerns of conceptual art. Fluxist petitioning for a fusion of art and life found _expression using a whole range of 'alternative', everyday means such as mail art, happenings, demonstrations, artists books etc., Works such as 'Fluxus I' (1964), a book compilation of different artists works in envelopes with accompanying printed texts were indicative of an informality that Fluxus ultimately emphasized through interactivity and sensory experience.

17 Johanna Drucker, 'Figuring the Word', (New York: Granary Books, 1998)

18 The events surrounding the emergence and origins of conceptual art are delineated in 'Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin', (New York, 1999). Although the evidence in support of an emerging pandemic of conceptual art seems inconclusive.

19 Lucy R. Lippard, Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972...'Escape Attempts', (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997)

20 Air Show/Air Conditioning Show, Coventry, England. See also Art-Language: 'Hot Warm Cool Cold', (Coventry: Art-Language Press 1967)

21 See for example: Joseph Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy', Studio

International vol.178 (London Oct/Nov/Dec 1969). 'The Role of Language', by Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden: 'On Art', (Cologne 1974). Terry Atkinson: 'Editorial introduction to Art-Language', (Coventry, May 1969)

Sol LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', Artforum Vol.5, no. 10, Summer 1967, pp. 79-83. LeWitt came to the acerbic conclusion that the vernacular of Modernist art criticism was " part of a secret language that art critics use when communicating with each other through the medium of art magazines....".

22 Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', (Artforum, Summer, 1967)

23 Ian Burn 'Read Premiss', reprinted in 'Art & L anguage in Practice', Vol 1. (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1999) pp. 23-25

24 Jack Burnham, 'Hans Haacke's Cancelled Show at the Guggenheim', Artforum (June 1971)

25 Arguably the greatest license for critical palimpsest was granted unintentionally by Lippard's annotated journal of Conceptual art, "Six years:...". In her attempts to disclaim the idea of a dominant narrative for the development of Conceptual art, Lippard's cross referential "Six years:..." now reads as a work that lies somewhere between historical reference and narrative fiction. The very bricolage ofthe book seems to exacerbate the the problem of representing a form of art that cannot be extricated from its critical past. Lippard's sensitivities to the limits of art criticism anticipate an erosion of the meaningfulness of art for artists that seems enshrined in the legislature of Post modernism.

26 Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Tractatus Logico-Philosphicus'(New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co.,1921-22)

27 see Michel Foucault 'What is an author?' 1969, and other essays, reprinted in 'Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post Structuralist Criticism Josue.V. Harari, Ed. & Translator. (Ithaca 1979 ed.). See also commentary of Fluxist/Concretist Brion Gysin who had contributed to the discourse about semantic and linguistic authenticity/ownership somewhat more discursively.in his 'Statement on the Cutup Method and Permutated Poems",' Fluxus I, ed.: (NewYork 1965)

28 The title of the work also refers directly into Ad Reinhardt's influential essay 'Art as Art of 1962 which proposed a similarly tautologous view of art production that was both self-validating and subjectively emptied. see Ad Reinhardt, "Art as Art,"., Art International VI, no. 10, (Lugano 1962)

29 The limitations of philosophical supposition in relation to lived experience was recognized in the revised phenomenology of thinkers such as Maurice Merleau-Pont who perceived the pragmatic imperatives of visual art production as an antidote to the generality and abstraction of conceptual projection. For a fuller account, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', 'The Primacy of Perception', James M. Edie (Ed) Trans. by Carleton Dallery, (Evanston 1964 ed.)

30 Sol LeWitt, 'Art-Language', Vol.1, no. 1 , The Journal of Conceptual Art', (Coventry, May 1969) and Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', Artforum Vol.5, no. 10, Summer 1967, pp. 79-83. Whilst LeWitt was in accord with Kosuth over art's self-legitimizing 'uselessness' as an aesthetic trait, LeWitt himself was never quite drawn into the inquiry concerning the definition of art.

31 & 32 Lucy R. Lippard in conversation with Dan Graham, Douglas Heubler, Carl Andre and Jan Dibbets at the WBAI-FM symposium, New York, March 8, 1970.

33 see: Ian Hamilton Finlay, 'Detached Sentences', Robin Gillanders, 'Little Sparta', (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 1998)

34 From an Interview with Robin Gillanders, 'Little Sparta', (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 1998)

35 Compare for example: Ian Hamilton Finlay's 'Blue and Brown Poems', (1968) with Lawrence Weiner's: '10 pieces in English and German', exhibited: Aachen Zentrum fur Aktuelle Kunst (May 1970)

36 Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden, 'The Role of Language' Uber Kunst/On Art, (Cologne, 1974).

37 Lucy R. Lippard, Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972...', pp161 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997)

38 Lucy R. Lippard, Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972...', (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997)

39 Charles Harrison and Paul Wood Ed., 'Art in Theory: An Anthology of Changing Ideas', (Oxford, UK, Blackwell, 1992), pp. 798-799.

40 Lettrism was initiated in Paris after the Second World War by the Rumanian artist Isadore Isou. The aims of Lettrism were political and social: a reorganization of culture in terms of a radically reformed linguistic model.Text was only one component in the arsenal of the Lettrists who used books, film, fashion and performance to mount an aesthetic campaign against the prosaic use of language in favor of a more innovative, pictorial and cognitive approach to communication generally.

41 Michael Claura, "Outline of a Detour," Production, David Lamelas Editor (London: Nigel Greenwood Books, 1970)

reproduced from: http://www.ubu.com/papers/powell.html

posted by Nobody @ **7:47 AM**   **0 comments**

Manifesto of Letterist Poetry, Isidore Isou
MANIFESTO OF LETTERIST POETRY
A Commonplaces about Words

by Isidore Isou, 1942

Pathetic I The flourishing of bursts of energy dies beyond us.
All delirium is expansive.
All impulses escape stereotyping.
Still I An intimate experience maintains curious specifics.
Pathetic II Discharges are transmitted by notions.
What a difference between our fluctuations and the
brutality of words.
Transitions always arise between feeling and speech.
Still II The word is the first stereotype.
Pathetic III What a difference between the organism and the sources.
Notions - what an inherited dictionary. Tarzan learns
in his father's book to call tigers cats.
Naming the Unknown by the Forever.
Still III The translated word does not express.
Pathetic IV The rigidity of forms impedes their transmission.
These words are so heavy that the flow fails to carry
them. Temperaments die before arriving at the goal
(firing blanks).

No word is capable of carrying the impulses one
wants to send with it.
Still IV WORDS allow psychic alterations to disappear.
Speech resists effervescence.
Notions require expansion to equivalent formulas.
WORDS Fracture our rhythm.
by their Assassinate sensitivity.
mechanism, Thoughtlessly uniform
fossilization, tortured inspiration.
stability Twist tensions.
and aging Reveal poetic exaltations as useless.
Create politeness.
Invent diplomats.
Promote the use of analogies
Substitute for true emissions.
Pathetic V If one economizes on the riches of the soul, one dries
up the left-over along with the words.
Still V Prevent the flow from molding itself on the cosmos.
Form species in sentiments.
WORDS Destroy sinuosities.
Result from the need to determine things.
Help the elderly remember by forcing the young to forget.
Pathetic VI Every victory of the young has been a victory over words.
Every victory over words has been a fresh, young victory.
Still VI Summarize without knowing how to receive.
It is the tyranny of the simple over the long-winded.
WORDS Discern too concretely to leave room for the mind.
Forget the true measures of expression: suggestions.
Let infrarealities disappear.
Sift without restoring.
Pathetic VII One learns words as one learns good manners.
Without words and manners it is impossible to appear in
society.
It is by making progress in words that one makes progress
socially.
Still VII Kill fleeting evocations.
Slow down short-cuts and approximations.
SPEECH Is always vice-versa for not being identical.
Eliminates solitary individuals who would like to
rejoin society.
Forces men who would like to say "Otherwise" to say "Thus."
Introduces stuttering.
Pathetic VIII The carpentry of the word built to last forever obliges men
to construct according to patterns, like children.
There is no appreciation of value in a word.
Still VIII Words are the great levellers.
Pathetic IX Notions limit opening onto depths by merely standing ajar.
Still IX Words are family garments.
Poets enlarge words every year.
Words already have been mended so much they are in stitches.
Pathetic X People think it is impossible to break words.
Still X Unique feelings are so unique that they can not be
popularized. Feelings without words in the dictionary disappear.
Pathetic XI Every year thousands of feelings disappear for lack
of a concrete form.
Still XI Feelings demand living space.
How remarkable the poet's disheartened absorption in words.
Things and nothings to communicate become daily more imperious.
Pathetic XII Efforts at destruction witness to the need to rebuild.
Still XII How long will people hold out in the shrunken domain of
words?
Pathetic XIII The poet suffers indirectly:
Words remain the work of the poet, his existence, his job.

B Innovation I

Destruction of WORDS for LETTERS

ISIDORE ISOU Believes in the potential elevation beyond WORDS; wants
the development of transmissions where nothing is
lost in the process; offers a verb equal to a shock. By
the overload of expansion the forms leap up by themselves.
ISIDORE ISOU Begins the destruction of words for letters.
ISIDORE ISOU Wants letters to pull in among themselves all desires.
ISIDORE ISOU Makes people stop using foregone conclusions, words.
ISIDORE ISOU Shows another way out between WORDS and
RENUNCIATION:
LETTERS. He will create emotions against language, for the
pleasure of the tongue.
It consists of teaching that letters have a destination
other than words.
ISOU Will unmake words into their letters.
Each poet will integrate everything into Everything
Everything must be revealed by letters.
POETRY CAN NO LONGER BE REMADE.

ISIDORE ISOU IS STARTING
A NEW VEIN OF LYRICISM.
Anyone who can not leave words behind can stay back with them!

C Innovation II: The Order of Letters

This does not mean destroying words for other words.
Nor forging notions to specify their nuances.
Nor mixing terms to make them hold more meaning.
But it does mean TAKING ALL LETTERS AS A WHOLE; UNFOLDING
BEFORE DAZZLED
SPECTATORS MARVELS CREATED FROM LETTERS (DEBRIS FROM
THE DESTRUCTION);
CREATING AN ARCHITECTURE OF LETTRIC RHYTHMS;
ACCUMULATING FLUCTUATING LETTERS IN A PRECISE FRAME;
ELABORATING SPLENDIDLY THE CUSTOMARY COOING;
COAGULATING THE CRUMBS OF LETTERS FOR A REAL MEAL;
RESUSCITATING THE JUMBLE IN A DENSER ORDER;
MAKING UNDERSTANDABLE AND TANGIBLE THE
INCOMPREHENSIBLE
AND VAGUE; CONCRETIZING SILENCE;
WRITING THE NOTHINGNESS.
It is the role of the poet to advance toward subversive sources.
the obligation of the poet to advance in the black and
burdened depths of the unknown.
the craft of the poet to open one more treasure-room
door for the common man.
There will be a poet's message in new signs. The ordering of letters is
called:
LETTERISM.
It is not a poetic school, but a solitary attitude.
AT THIS MOMENT: LETTERISM = ISIDORE ISOU.
Isou is awaiting his successors in poetry!
(Do they already exist somewhere, ready to burst forth
into history through books?)

EXCUSES FOR WORDS INTRODUCED INTO LITERATURE
There are things which are existent only in the strength of their name.
there are others which exist, but lacking a name are unacknowledged.
Every idea needs a calling card to make itself known.
Ideas are known by the name of their creator.
It is more objective to name them after themselves.
LETTERISM IS AN IDEA THAT
WILL BE LAMENTED BY ITS REPUTATION
Letterics is a material that can always be demonstrated.
Letterics seeds already existing:
NONSENSE WORDS;
WORDS WITH HIDDEN MEANINGS IN THEIR LETTERS;
ONOMATOPOEIAS.
If this material existed before, it didn't have a name to recognize it by.
Letterics works will be those made entirely out of this element, but with
suitable rules and genres!
The word exists and has the right to perpetuate itself.
ISOU IS CALLING ATTENTION TO ITS EXISTENCE.
It is up to the Letterist to develop Letterism.
Letterism is offering a DIFFERENT poetry.
LETTERISM imposes a NEW POETRY.
THE LETTERIC AVALANCHE IS ANNOUNCED.
1942.

above copied from: http://www.391.org/manifestos/isidoreisou_letterist.htm

Posted by Dr. Flux at 7:13 AM 0 comments

Labels: experimental writing, Lettrism, poetry

Tuesday, December 4, 2007
lettrism
Lettrism is a French avant-garde movement, established in Paris in the mid-
1940s by Romanian immigrant Isidore Isou. In a body of work totalling
hundreds of volumes, Isou and the Lettrists have applied their theories to all
areas of art and culture, most notably in poetry, film, painting and political
theory. The movement has its theoretical roots in Dada and Surrealism. Isou
viewed his fellow countryman, Tristan Tzara, as the greatest creator and
rightful leader of the Dada movement, and dismissed most of the others as
plagiarists and falsifiers. Among the Surrealists, André Breton was a
significant influence, but Isou was dissatisfied by what he saw as the
stagnation and theoretical bankruptcy of the movement as it stood in the
1940s.

In French, the movement is called Lettrisme, from the French word for letter,
arising from the fact that many of their early works centred around letters
and other visual or spoken symbols. The Lettristes themselves prefer the
spelling 'Letterism' for the Anglicised term, and this is the form that is used
on those rare occasions when they produce or supervise English
translations of their writings: however, 'Lettrism' is at least as common in
English usage. The term, having been the original name that was first given
to the group, has lingered as a blanket term to cover all of their activities,
even as many of these have moved away from any connection to letters. But
other names have also been introduced, either for the group as a whole or
for its activities in specific domains, such as 'the Isouian movement', 'youth
uprising', 'hypergraphics', 'creatics', 'infinitesimal art' and 'excoördism'.

above quoted from: **http://wapedia.mobi/en/Lettrism**

Manefesto of Letterist poetry:

http://www.391.org/manifestos/isidoreisou_letterist.htm

for more information see:

http://www.corvalliscommunitypages.com/why_lettrism.htm

posted by Nobody @ **7:44 AM**   **0 comments**

Fluxus and postal ephemera by Michael Lumb

In USA, whilst Johnson continued to use the postal system to transport his orchestrations, Fluxus - a constantly changing, international loose group of geographically separated people,1 through Europe and North America - participated in mailart and began to widen the network of mailart through publishing and to explore the creative potential of the elements of the postal system with postcards, stamps and franking. This chapter examines the uses of these elements by Fluxus and mailartists.

Whilst much has been written on Fluxus, it has not been discussed in terms of its importance to the development of mailart. Writers on mailart on the other hand have acknowledged the importance of Fluxus to mailart. Significantly, Chuck Welch chooses to organise his book, Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology 2 with the first chapter, written by Fluxus man Ken Friedman, 'The Early Days of Mailart'3 including an account of Fluxus mailart work. It is not until the third chapter that Clive Phillpot's 'The Mailed Art of Ray Johnson' occurs, although Friedman does include writing about Johnson. (Chapter two is by John Held Jr., 'Networking: The Origin of Terminology.') Friedman perceives that it was through Fluxus that mailart:

"reached out to the public" ... "and began to make real, its potential for social change and for contributing new forms of communication to the world." 4

This is a view that I share, but note the importance of the word "began". Friedman also sees that it was Fluxus that encouraged people to find-out about each other through the mail, a means of broadening knowledge and understanding of other artists' work without having to travel and meet them.

Although Robert Atkins in his "guide" mentions mailart under Fluxus:

"Fluxus was not limited to live events. Mail (or correspondence) art - postcardlike collages or other small scale works that utilized the mail as a distribution system - were pioneered by Fluxus artists, especially Ray Johnson."5

the statement is misleading in that Johnson was never a "Fluxus artist" and given that, it was not Fluxus artists who pioneered mailart. Writing about Fluxus is frequently accompanied by reproductions of works that show Fluxus use of the mail but do not comment on them in terms of mailart, seeing them simply as Fluxus works6. John Hendrick's massive tome on Fluxus reproduces many works that used the mail, again without reference to mailart.7 In his introduction to this text, Robert Pincus-Witten describes Fluxus as an indictment of USA political and artistic (Abstract Expressionist) imperialism and a:

"campaign that subverted the inherited abstract value system - large, heroic, ambitious, and sexist - favouring an art that was intimate, ephemeral, and highly poetic."8

This is a view of Fluxus that is echoed by Hendricks in his foreword to the book and is not only applicable to Fluxus but also to my reading of mailart in the USA in the sixties and seventies.

2.2. The Conception of Fluxus.

Fluxus was conceived in 1961/1962 by George Maciunas (1931 - 1978), a Lithuanian architect and designer and part owner of the A/G gallery, 925 Madison Avenue.9 A/G got its name from the forenames of Maciunas and his partner Almus Salicus. The intention had been to exhibit abstract painting and sell ancient musical instruments but within the same year (1960) Maciunas met La Monte Young and others that were to be Fluxus artists and turned the gallery into a venue for their (including Johnson's) events that Maciunas sponsored. The gallery closed in 1961. Fluxus began outside Fine Art, with many of the people who joined Fluxus coming from non-art backgrounds working in the spaces between art forms and between art and life.10 In this way, they relate to mailartists with the participators not necessarily coming from an arts background and not signalling the importance of 'art'.

The first Fluxus manifestation was Maciunas' publication 'Fluxus' (1961) that grew out of the musical events of the people centred around John Cage. Many of those who were to become the mainstays of Fluxus11 had attended Cage's course in Musical Composition at The New School For Social Research, New York in the summer of 1958.12 In 1960, Maciunas also attended Maxfield Parish's classes in electronic music, and met La Monte Young at the same venue. La Monte Young, Fluxus man and composer organised performances at Yoko Ono's New York studio, (11 Chambers Street) from Dec. 18, 1960 to June 30th 1961 and Maciunas arranged performances in his gallery from March 14th to June 30th 1961. It was on an invitation card to three concerts in March of that year "Musica Antiqua et Nova" - "A 3 dollar contribution will help to publish Fluxus magazine." that Maciunas first used the word Fluxus.13 Johnson was one of the participants in these concerts, and so was involved in Fluxus right from the very start. La Monte Young and Maciunas were not simply connected by their involvement in Happenings14 but also their interest in publishing. Young had taken over Beatitude East magazine15 which developed, with Maciunas doing the layout and Mac Low assisting, into An Anthology (October 1961). The journal included experimental music and event scores; poetry and essays and the work of Nam June Paik; Dieter Rot; and Emmett Williams and was intended by Maciunas to be a serial publication under the banner of Fluxus but was interrupted by his moving to Germany to take-up a job with the U.S.A.F. in Germany as a freelance designer / architect. Although the move to Germany affected the intended production of the publication, it strengthened the idea of internationalism that is so clear from the nationalities of the artists involved in the Cage workshop, Fluxus in general and later in mailart. Nam June Paik (b.1932) was also in Germany at that time and Maciunas - taking advantage of his geographical location - planned an ambitious 18 months long tour of concerts, to include Paik, from Berlin in June 1961 to Tokyo in January 1964 via Moscow - a big city per month to be supported by Fluxus magazine. The reality of the locations was somewhat different to the plan - being limited to Europe - but still impressively ambitious.16 Fluxus performance and therefore Fluxus, was clearly launched.

At the start of 1963 Maciunas published the Fluxus, 'Purge Manifesto' which declared war on:"The world of bourgeois sickness, "intellectual",

professional, and commercialized culture."17 Maciunas saw Fluxus as being free of confines and able to work in any way that it wished, without concern for tradition or the need for recognition by established art critics. Whilst the publication of Fluxus works and the opening of a Fluxus shop can be read as being a critical comment on commerce - given that the goods on offer were neither functional nor falling within accepted notions of Fine Art - there is also a danger of falling into the trap of becoming part of the very establishment that is being criticised. Maciunas' criticism of 'professional (ism)' is also problematic, given the professional role that he played as the highly committed organiser of Fluxus.18

Rejection of the notion of 'Authorship' and therefore the 'Artist as Hero' was central to Maciunas' concept of Fluxus: participators were expected to sign their work - if at all - 'Fluxus.' Fluxus signalled participation, inclusivity rather than exclusivity, experimentation and creativity as being paramount and individual identity, career building and ego-feeding as being of no importance whatsoever. However, the reality was that the participators in Fluxus frequently did sign their work with their own names. Equally, mailartists usually sign their work as a principle because the spread of contacts is important to its activity. Although within mailart there is a tradition among some networkers of working anonymously by adopting pseudonyms, or 'combat names' as discussed in Chapter one, this is not the same issue as signing a work 'Fluxus' because these are individually held names and also because cynically it could be suggested that Maciunas' motive in encouraging this signing was giving Fluxus itself a higher profile than that of the individual participating artists. Whilst combat names, may well make the individual more memorable, they do not serve to promote mailart as a whole and mailart, unlike Fluxus has no intention of producing a saleable product.

Multiple Names relate to Combat Names in as much as that they do not reveal the legal name of the networker but their origins lie in the Fluxus anti-elitist, anti-artist-as-hero stance. Whilst Duchamp used pseudonyms such as R.Mutt and Rrose Selavy, these were not used to suppress his career as an artist, arguably the opposite was the case. In 1920 however, Raoul Hausmann suggested that the Berlin Dadaists should all call themselves 'Jesus Christ'. This can be considered to be a typically provocative Dadaist idea rather than a serious proposition but nevertheless, it is a multiple name proposal. Maciunas had more success with suggesting to the Fluxus artists that they should simply sign their work 'Fluxus', in a move against the perception of art as elitist behaviour and careerism. The notion of an anonymous work of art has the effect of preventing the placing of value on a work of art because of its 'brand name.'

The issue of putting a name to a work of art was subsequently explored by mailartists and the first mailart Multiple Name was created in the mid 1970s by two British mailartists, Stefan Kukowski and Adam Czarnowski who tried to persuade other networkers to adopt the name 'Klaos Oldanburgh' (sic).19 The ideology of this concept is called into question by their use of Roman Numerals after the name to differentiate the different Klaos Oldanburghs, thereby in effect drawing attention to their being different people, with identities. One year before Maciunas' death, in 1977, David Zack a Los Angeles, USA. networker proposed what he described as an "Open pop-star" name that could be used by mailartists wishing to assume the identity of a pop-star. The name, Monty Cantsin became associated specifically with Neoism and in particular with a Canadian networker, Istvan Kantor (I discuss Neoism in Chapter 4). In 1985, Stuart Home, an English networker, became interested in Multiple Names but felt, because of the specific association of Cantsin with Kantor, that a new association-free name was needed and chose that of Karen Eliot. Documentation of mailart projects occurred where all the participators' names were listed as Karen Eliot or Monty Cantisn.20 Honouring the expectation of participants to receive the addresses of all participants in many respects defeated the principle of anonymity, the printing of the individuals' addresses making the identification of the

participant possible.

2.3. Publications.

The importance to Fluxus of publishing was to be significant for mailart in that it was the start of mailartists extending their work beyond the impetus of Johnson's 'letters', to making editions and journal based work.

In 1965, the first mailart book (and what seems to be the first published accounts of mailart after Wilcock's article) was produced by Dick Higgins - a prominent member of Fluxus - with the publication of Johnson's book, The Paper Snake.21 This work consists entirely of mailart works by Johnson from 1960 to 1964 and almost entirely sent to Higgins. These are mostly text with, in many cases, some resemblance to the text works of Yoko Ono from the 1950s and 1960s, often with barbed references to specific individuals, many of them famous from all walks of life. Although Johnson's address does appear, there is neither invitation, nor indication of the possibility of participation. The work makes no attempt to reach out to the uninitiated and as such perhaps would be unapproachable to most people, but would undoubtedly have made Fluxus artists more aware of the way in which Johnson used the mail. There is a short introductory essay by the American art critic, William Wilson, sometimes described as Johnson's unofficial biographer, eulogising about the work but adding no information on Johnson or mailart (see the introduction to this thesis).

Of particular importance to the spread of mailart, Higgins also produced a newsletter in 1966, initially to present his essay on 'intermedia', it went on to disseminate mailart ideas and to be the inspiration for future network newsletters.22 Also in 1966, Ken Friedman of Fluxus West (San Diego) began to publish the annual compilations of Fluxus mailing lists which George Maciunas had produced since the early days of Fluxus as membership lists so that people could communicate directly with each other. These could seem to relate to Johnson's 'meeting' lists but differ in two important ways. Firstly, Fluxus lists were factual whereas Johnson's were, at least in part, fantasy. Secondly, Johnson did not reproduce lists of addresses with the names, to enable and encourage growing networks. Fluxus compilations grew until by 1972 the list was of more than 1400 names and addresses of people interested in communicating experimentally. The 1972 list was published in co-operation with 'Image Bank', a Toronto, Canada artists' collective which sent out bi-monthly requests to other participants, a kind of brokerage firm, based on Johnson's example of putting people in touch with each other.23 The Image Bank list, in turn, became the core of the artist's directory of File (see below) which was released in hundreds of free copies, distributed to artists, arts organisations and publishers around the world. The artist's directory published network information, addresses and project invitations, providing the first possibility of information rather than simply written versions of Chinese Whispers.

Although mailing lists per se do not appear anymore in mailart, documentation of mailart projects (discussed in Chapter 3) by tacit agreement, consists of the names and addresses of all the participants, so acting as a mailing list. Since Fluxus, there have been many mailart magazines which include name and address lists, notably Lo Straniero, the production of Neopolitan Ignazio Corsaro who refers to his list as 'The Strangers Directory', printing about 1,000 names and addresses, covering approximately five letters of the alphabet each issue.24 This magazine is published in the uniquely (for mailart) large edition of 10,000 copies, is professionally printed in Black and White and produced twice a year since

1985, initially in Broad Sheet format.25 Corsaro's magazine is a forum for discussion through letters sent to him and his reply to them, through the magazine. Other means of increasing contacts occur in some quite different journals, in England the commercially produced Artists Newsletter includes a column, compiled by London mailartist Michael Leigh, listing current mailart projects.26 Mailart newsletters vary from the highly efficient, professionally produced but visually bland Global Mail produced by Ashley Parker Owens of the U.S.A., to the visually enjoyable but slimmer, photocopied and more random quality of husband and wife Serbian Lawyers, Rorica and Dobrica Kamperlic's Open World. Global Mail developed from an initial single fold in 1992, to issue no.15, December 1996, consisting of 32 pages, stapled, with the listings under eleven categories and 2500 copies produced.27 In choosing to concentrate on the content of her visually functional journal rather than creating a very recognisable appearance, Ashley Parker Owens highlights the importance of simply being able to contact people and expand the network, over the nature of the contact, she remains impartial to how her information is used. Open World, has been published since 1985 and continued throughout the war in ex Yugoslavia, even though it was published in Beograd. The magazine consists of paste-ups of fliers for mailart projects and photographs of mailartists, with typewriter generated text. Whilst this makes it difficult to use as a reference work about current projects, unlike Global Mail, it is a much more visually seductive production, encouraging browsing and with a sense of ownership in that although Ashley Parker Owens prints entries sent, these are changed into the text, style and format of the magazine, whereas the Kamperlics simply photocopy whatever is sent. The Kamperlics also encourage the spread of the magazine by recipients photocopying it and sending copies to other mailartists. Ashley Parker Owens also uses mailartists to pass the magazine on, but by sending-on copies sent. In both cases they are using the potential of the network to distribute their magazines about the network beyond their immediate contacts. Both have their place in mailart and represent two extremes of mailart, Ashley Parker Owens being highly 'professional' (although at her own considerable expense28) and the Kamperlics enjoying the immediacy of hastily produced magazines that enabled them to produce and distribute 83 editions in the first ten years of production.

Fluxus production of magazines,29 developing from Maciunas' initial concept of a Fluxus magazine, was to become one of the mainstays of mailart, with magazines produced for a variety of reasons, from contacts and advertisers of mailart projects to publishers of visual and text based creative work. The word 'magazine' is often shortened to 'Zine', Stephen Perkins defines them as "self-produced, self-distributed, non-profit publications focusing on topics that are often ignored by the mainstream media." referring to self published, cheaply produced products with no commercial ambitions or outlets, he goes on to say that "the history of Zines can be traced back to the 1930s when science fiction fans started putting out their own slick science fiction magazines ... When those fans circulated their mimeographed writings amongst themselves, the zine was born".30

Life magazine, with the punning potential of its title, inspired a number of mailart magazines that in some cases had large print runs, received grants and reached out beyond the confines of the network.31 These magazines evolved organically in the change of title and passing of production from mailartist to mailartist. The first of these, and perhaps the first magazine to be generated through the mailart network, was produced by General Idea who began File magazine in 1971 with a grant from the Canada Council. File was printed in editions of 3-5,000 and was sold at news-stands in major USA cities, but by 1974 it had ceased to address mailart, choosing to concentrate on the general activities of General Idea, in preference to what they perceived as being the 'Quikkopy crap' that they were seeing in mailart as a response to the new availability of photocopying and the broadening out from the hand-crafted works that epitomised the early years of mailart.

File was conceived as an anagram of Life and the first issue, April 15th, was a convincing imitation of a 1948 issue of Life magazine. In 1974 Anna Banana adopted File, renaming it Vile. Banana was no newcomer to self publishing having produced ten issues of her Banana Rag since 1971. Her particular ambition was to imitate Life magazine to such an extent that it could be taken for it and by 1977 she published the fourth issue which came close to her ambition. At that point she dropped the notion of imitating Life, not least because the producers of File had lost their battle with Time / Life over the use of the similar logo.32 By then the publication was jointly produced with Bill Gaglione, in a different format and with different designs and they continued publishing it until 1981. Although mailart based, Banana and Gaglione chose to seek funding for the publication and the third issue that had included poetry and fiction was given a grant by the Co-ordinating Council of Literary Magazines making it possible to print 1000 copies. The sixth issue also received a grant from the CCLM and entitled 'Fe-Mail-Art' explored women mailartists. By complete contrast, the seventh issue was a much smaller edition and hand produced.33

A further evolution of the name of the journal was adopted by Stewart Home who in February 1984 published his first issue of Smile, 'The official organ of the Generation Positive.' This journal was to express Home's ideas on 'Positive Plagiarism' which are explored in Chapter 4. Home also encouraged others to produce copies of Smile which several did though to Home's initial disappointment the first, continuing the established tradition of punning on the title, calling it Slime & Limes. Home had intended that all magazines should be called Smile and subsequent issues conformed to that request. Smile remains open as a possibility for any networker to use the title for a magazine and from time to time networkers do publish under that title, frequently with a political agenda. Jo Klaffki for example, a German mailartist who uses the name Joki Mail Art has published a number of editions of Smile sometimes with political undertones but always with a strong sense of humour.34

The concept of common ownership of journals was not Home's original idea, this can be traced back to Fluxus. Ken Friedman of Fluxus West published the first twelve issues of The New York Correspondence School Weekly Breeder, initially 81/2" X 11" single sheets, it was begun in 1971 and in 1972 began to be passed from networker to networker for subsequent issues, spawning the idea of magazines that were owned by the network as a whole and not the egotistical province of an individual or group, reflecting the belief in anti exclusivity of Fluxus. This publication became influential not only within the network but also in Bookarts. Since Fluxus, other people have worked with the concept of common ownership and in 1977, Polish mailartist, Pawel Petasz initiated the Commonpress periodical project which encouraged other networkers to publish editions, using his/her own theme and format, following the Fluxus lead. All contributors to any edition were expected to produce their own edition, in a print run of not less than 200.35 Petasz produced the first copy and a total of sixty were produced across thirteen countries between 1977 and 1981, all co-ordinated by Petasz. At that point the political climate in Poland made it inadvisable for him to continue and he handed over the co-ordination to a Canadian networker, Gerald Jupiter-Larsen.

The principle of magazines produced by individual participants sending their contributions as ready to print artwork, took the name 'assembling' from the title of a publication by New York writer and critic, Richard Kostelantz who, between 1970 and 1981, produced 11 editions of his magazine Assembling.36 This journal was unique amongst mailart magazines in being published in editions of 1000 copies, thanks to financial support from various sources. Kostelantz requested 8 1/2" X 11" artwork and sent each contributor three copies of the complete work.

Earlier, in 1968 Ken Friedman produced the one and only issue of Amazing

Facts Magazine which established a cherished mailart principle of a journal produced from gathered material as an editorial principal.37 This was a collation assemblage of received mail which was dispatched to the participators. In Germany in the late 1960s, Thomas Niggl created Omnibus News which was the first accumulated magazine to be published in multiple editions.38 This notion was developed through the 1970s and is a very common aspect of networking today, founded on the general principle of a co-ordinator responsible for collating and distributing the finished product to the participants, the number of participants dictating the number of copies that each contributor is required to send to the co-ordinator. Typically, numbers have ranged from twelve, twenty, fifty and sometimes 100. Co-oridnator/originators also state the dimensions required although these have usually been given as a maximum so that the final assembled work is frequently a hotchpotch of work on different types of paper and other supports as well as varying in thickness and dimension this means that the visual appearance alone of assembling zines instantly separates them from commercial magazines. Central to this notion of publishing is the decision to exercise no editorial control, as in the practice of no juries for mailart shows. This inevitably has meant that the content and 'quality' in the critical sense have often been questionable because the importance of these zines lies in the inclusion of material, without editorial control, of work from a wide cultural and geographic background where the taking part is of supreme importance.

2.4. Postal Elements.

For Fluxus, unlike mailart, production of objects was for an intended sale. Central to the production of Fluxus material was the mail order warehouse and shop which Maciunas had opened, with the Flux-Hall for Performances, at 359 Canal Street, on his return to New York after the Fluxus tour. The warehouse advertised many items, mostly made by Maciunas though few existed in advance of orders. Although Fluxus was keen to sell its products, 70% of them were given away rather than sold.

The recognition by Fluxus of the postal system as a means of keeping in touch with each other, and as a system for selling their work, led to Fluxus people seeing it as a medium and vehicle for their work. Paik operated through the mail, although not using his own stamps. 'The Monthly Review of the University for Avant-Garde Hinduism.'(Plate 16), taking Johnson's fascination for bizarre names, was a series of works that Paik mailed out in 1963.

"To the subscriber of the Monthly Review of the University for Avant-Garde Hinduism sometimes comes something by mail. once, or twice, or thrice, you will find a tiny 1 cent coin in a white envelope. or ..."39

It is not clear how many Paik sent although there may be some clues given in his deliberately unlikely suggestions as to what he would send, including "arm-pit hair of a chicagoan negro prostitute". There is little interest shown in the appearance of the envelope although the use of his own rubber stamp should be noted.

Although mailart was not of primary importance to Fluxus, it is interesting to note how central a part it made of the postal system in a parody of marketing systems. Fluxus, taking the postal system seriously as a medium, (that is to say seriously from an often humorous point of view as was their wont) went so far as to produce a:

" Fluxus Postal Kit, prepared in 1966 complete with a Fluxpost cancellation mark, permitting an entire, Fluxus-controlled postal exchange to take place."... " By the end of the 1960s, a number of Fluxus people had begun to view mail art as a medium offering unique potentials and challenges. They saw beyond the basic issue of art through the mail, and began to explore the reaches and media of correspondence and mail themselves." 40

'Flux-post kit 7', 1968 (Plate 17) shows the range of postal ephemera that Fluxus was involved in but it also shows - with its box container - how these objects were very much seen - at least by Maciunas - as commodities rather than explorations of the mail. For Maciunas there was little difference between Flux Tattoos, as an artwork / commodity and Flux Postal ephemera, in that both were produced to be sold and collected.

Although these objects were to add to the correspondence aspect of mailart that Johnson had begun, for mailartists, it is the interaction through the mail that is important. It is not insignificant in the consideration of mailart that every communication received, and sent, will have the marks of the postal system (postage stamps and franking) of, at least, its country of origin. These in themselves can lead to, both a better understanding between two countries and the simple though not to be devalued pleasure of an appreciation of the aesthetic qualities and charm of stamps and frankings of other countries. It is therefore apparent that irrespective of the networker's contribution and intervention, any mailart communication, in order to comply with the postal system, has intrinsic interest. For Fluxus and mailartists, there was also the possibility of adding their own faux-stamps and faux-frankings.Faux-stamps were to become known as Artistamps.41

Historically, the first recorded non official stamps are understood to have been made long before Fluxus, by Karl Schwesig.42 As with the history of most things however, earlier examples come to light and this is no less the case with artistamps. Artistamp News, in 1991 (1/2) published a brief article on rubberstamp produced stamps by Michael V. Hitrovo from 1914. A subsequent article in Artistamp News 2/1 1992 describes an even earlier example from the last century.43 More recently, an American, Donald Evans, looked to stamps as a format for artwork, though not a mailartist, he made one-off stamps. Evans began making stamps in 1957 when he was twelve years old and continued making them until his untimely death in a fire in 1977. Evans' water-colour stamps from imaginary kingdoms were exhibited in galleries and sold by him, thereby distancing him from the practice of networkers. None of these historical precedents relate to mailart in that they were not part of an exchange within a network and serve only to demonstrate that unofficial stamps had been produced before networkers began to make them.

The earliest stamps made as part of mailart activity were those of the prolific Fluxus member Robert Watts who in 1962 printed 'Safe Post / K.U.K. Feldpost / Jokpost.' (Plate 18) These stamps were subversive in that whilst they imitated commercial stamps in their borders, the central images were taken from photographs of naked women. The 1963 'Yamflug/5 Post 5'44 (Plate 19) also suggest commercial stamps with their traditional borders but are confusing to the viewer because of their evident non-commercial heads. Watts continued to make artistamps, as part of his Fluxus activity, until his death in 1988. In a further parody of the postal system Watts in 1963 produced his own stamp dispenser, an altered readymade, taking his own stamps. Fluxus stamps, with the word 'Post', inclusion of numerical 'values' and frequent use of heads as subject matter, very clearly indicate a wish to produce something that relates very strongly to officially produced stamps. This is an imitation of a formal system which Watts, with references to Fluxus on his stamps, clearly situated in Fluxus production. It was an offshoot of the considerable structure that Maciunas attempted to set-up, in

that with its own shop and publishing, stamps were a logical development. Maciunas, as well as producing finished artwork and producing many of the multiples designed by other Fluxus people, also designed his own stamps, for example, 'Fluxpost (Smiles)' (Plate20). These stamps relate to his Flux Smile Machine and as such situate them firmly within Fluxus products rather than for mailart usage.

By 1974 artiststamps had become well established as a mailart medium, with thirty-five networkers from nine countries participating in the first "Artists' Stamp and Stamp Images" exhibition, which was held in Canada.45 In 1984, Michael Bidner of Canada, held an exhibition in Ontario, combining his passions of art and stamp collecting.46 This show exhibited stamps by over 1000 networkers from almost 50 countries. Artistamps were totally to dominate Bidner's life with his mission to document the production of artistamps and to produce a catalogue.47 The documentation and entire collection of over 10,000 images was given to the 'Artpool' Archive of Julia and Gyorgy Galantai in Hungary, after Bidner anticipating his death, failed to persuade any Canadian Museum to take them.

As James Felter, a Canadian mailartist, recognised in an introductory essay to a Seattle Artistamp exhibition,48 that postage stamps give a universal message of authority, functioning in a manner that is instantly understood throughout the world.

"One symbol they (mailartists) have found is the postage stamp, or rather the postage stamp format. This is one of the few existing symbols of officialdom, of authority, and of low economic value that is recognised in every nook and cranny of the globe. It is a universal symbol of a means of communication and a carrier of an unlimited variety of 'authorized' messages in the form of words, numbers, and images (or any combination thereof). It is a symbol that is used everyday and collected throughout the world. The artists of the global village have adopted this symbol and named it 'Artistamp.'"The use of this old symbol as a carrier of new symbols, new visual messages and new aesthetic discoveries lends an aura of authenticity to the creative efforts of the artists of the global village and legitamizes their imagination with the international society." 49

Stamps are also a very low cost item carrying an endless variety of images and texts that can be seen as miniature, multiple artworks. The imitation of postage stamps by mailartists is a logical decision, giving their enormous potential for the use of text and image in miniature and relevance to the activity of postal art. In spite of this, only a small number of mailartists produce artistamps, presumably because they perceive them to be too difficult and /or expensive to produce. Some of those who do produce artistamps on the other hand, go to great lengths to create postal systems which at times even include fake countries, languages and even Royalty. Robert Rudine, a USA. mailartist, using the combat name, Dogfish or the King of Tui Tui produces Philatelic Bulletins to accompany every new issue of stamps for his 'country': these are accompanied by a glossary for those not familiar with the language of Tui Tui in which some of the text is written. Working with artistamps and systems can become a fantasy life in which the creator escapes to his/her land of his/her dreams that s/he can be in complete control of, a way of escaping from the mundanity of everyday life, which in a sense mailart is, every time the post deliverer arrives. Equally it ridicules the seriousness of officialdom, a comment on the artificiality of established systems, the ease with which they can be constructed and the shallowness that can be their underpinning.

There is an established precedent for non-postage stamp stamps, namely in what are called Cinderellas, that is to say the commercially produced stamps with no postal value, used as part of an advertising or promotional

campaign.

"...the stamp format was widely used as an advertising medium throughout Europe and America from 1900 through 1940, as one of the only affordable means advertisers could use to circulate full colour reproductions of their products or facilities. After 1940 the medium died out quickly when technologies of colour and black and white printing were integrated, and colour advertising in the context of magazines, became available." 50

The design considerations for Cinderellas are the same as for most aspects of postage stamps and are also appropriate to artistamps. Whilst affordable to business, commercial printing is of course not affordable by the average networker and so whilst Cinderellas remain as a precedent, they do not indicate a standard method of production. Similarly, the production designing of postage stamps by artists is not related to mailart quite simply because postage stamps are the mark of authority. Whilst artistamps do not necessarily seek to subvert or mock the authority, they exist alongside it as a personal statement or mark.

In contrast to the hand produced works of Schwesig and Evans, the usual medium for artistamps has become the photocopier, hence the considerable increase in the production of artistamps since the widespread availability of photomechanical reproduction, especially the colour-copier. Other stamps are hand printed, silk screen for example and many are produced by rubber-stamping or designed and produced on computers. These images if hand produced may well be unique stamps and the printed stamps may be produced in editions of any number or unlimited.

Fluxus work whilst at times poking fun at and parodying the establishment, tended to achieve their aim through humour, some artistamp makers on the other hand have taken risks by subverting the official postage due. The simplest form is simply to send mail with no stamp, but that runs the risk of the recipient having to pay, which at least in the case of mailartists from countries where incomes are relatively low, is not an acceptable risk. Simply using an artistamp is another possibility. Famously (although not part of mailart networking) Yves Klein made his IKB stamps in 1958 to send out on the envelopes of his invitations to the exhibition Le Vide. Reputedly, these were the only stamps on the envelopes and successfully reached their destinations without surcharges being added.51 More provocatively, in 1970, USA. mailartist, William Farley's USXX stamp of a rear view of a head with a pony tail in an early US design, imitating a Lincoln stamp was used by a friend of his in place of an official stamp. The stamp was traced back to Farley and resulted in him being forced to surrender all the remaining stamps to the Secret Service. Totally undetected however was the production and use by an anonymous American artist of a facsimile of the '10c US. Air Mail' stamp.52 Subversive activity has not been limited to stamps but has included franking with the production of fake franking and specifically fake wartime "Utility" marks, producing a strange time-warp for any handler of the envelope recognising the franking.

The simplest form of artistamps is to work with the official stamps, this can be for aesthetic, subversive reasons or purely for fun. The more stamps that are placed on the envelope, the more possibilities there are of aesthetics, with choice of colour, placing and relative positioning. An example of this is to use the lowest denomination stamp and to totally cover the envelope with the stamps, thereby making a minimal work of art. This kind of 'game' is not unique to mailartists at all, and is often played by friends who have never heard of mailart. Subversively, inverting the Queen's head demonstrates disrespect, if not a treasonable offence and placing the stamp in an attempt to avoid franking so that it can be reused by the recipient are all strategies that mailartists use. Actually working on the stamps and altering them is

another possibility that has been explored by an English mailartist who limits his introductions to his combat name of Red Herring who in 1988 over painted a stamp of Wellington, giving him a Donald Duck bill. Whilst this work is humorous and subversive, it is interesting to consider that it is so subtle that it could easily be sent to a mailartist who does not archive and so not noticing the altered stamp could have thrown away the envelope without ever being aware of Herring's labours. Requiring a similar amount of detailed effort is the attempt to remove any franking marks on the stamp, without damaging the original image so that it can be reused, the amount of time involved for what is a relatively small financial saving suggests that the importance to the perpetrator is in subverting the system rather than in saving money. In doing this as with Herring's stamp, the motivation is one that is primarily personal satisfaction and amusement at beating the system.

Rubber Stamps, or Rubberstamps as they have come to be known by mailartists, were invented by businessmen in the mid to late nineteenth century and by the late 50s and early 60s were widely used by both Fluxus and Nouveau Realists as a medium for producing artworks.

The combination of the mundanity and power of rubberstamps gives

"a symbol of power - their role is to validate or invalidate something. There are many symbols of power and we are frequently confronted by them. But none is as common and petty as the rubber-stamp. Their lack of sophistication and glamour seems to contradict the enormous power conveyed by them."53

This is particularly evident in oppressed countries where, as discussed later, received mail has usually born the mark of the censor. Rubberstamps fall into several categories, the official stamp is associated with authority and validation of, for example, licenses, certificates and passports: these actions and documents acknowledge and approve us. The very medium or carrier of mailart, the Royal Mail, validates our messages with rubber-stamps and officialdom in general uses them to number our documents. Fluxus used faux frankings, for example Ken Friedman's 'Fluxpost West 1964 - 1974' and many mailartists since have used their own versions of frankings. Similarly, mailartists have often used date stamps or numbering stamps, of for example their envelopes, partly to broadcast their prowess at having produced so much mailart but also to give spurious authority to their sending, in a play on officialdom. The reliving of childhood pleasures of 'playing Post Offices' with Post Office Sets, should not be underrated, the simple pleasure of using the paraphernalia and the sense of importance that accompanies the use of the stamp.

Domestically there is a formal but far less official use as a convenient method of producing letter heads and 'sender' address stamps for the back of envelopes. These were used by Fluxus and Johnson and are used by most mailartists today, partly for convenience. Name stamps have also been used for fake institutions, such as, as already stated, Paik's 'University of Avant-garde Hinduism' and often by Johnson for a wide variety of his fake institutions although he did not always use rubberstamps to validate them, often preferring to hand write or type the names. Johnson also used rubberstamps with text such as 'Ray Johnson Evaporations', 'Collage by Ray Johnson', or even 'Collage by Joseph Cornell.54

The use of rubberstamps as cheap movable type has long had an attraction for children with 'John Bull' printing sets, allowing them to play at typesetting. It is this element of play that many mailartists find attractive, with the hand-crafted appearance of something that is close to a commercial graphic process but with the visual attraction of its imperfections, so much loved by Warhol in his early 1960s photo silk-screen prints. Although most type for

Fluxus work was generated by letterpress, (by Maciunas usually) Vautier for example enjoyed the use of rubber stamp type.

In 1974 Herve Fischer, a French artist, published rubber-stamp images55 and in 1978 the first Rubberstamp Album was produced in America by Joni Miller and Lowry Thompson who subsequently edited the massive bimonthly journal Rubberstampmadness begun in 1979 and still running commercially (currently 92 pages). The 1970s also saw a proliferation of companies, particularly in the USA., offering a wide range of ready made decorative rubberstamps and a bespoke service giving an enormous range of creative possibilities. This, coupled with mailartists beginning to carve their own rubberstamps led to a considerable increase in the use of rubberstamps in mailart.

The use of the rubberstamp by networkers varies considerably in intention and effect from networker to networker. For some, at times as humorous pastiche and at others to make critical comment: this impression can only be created with the blandness of commercially produced rubberstamps. Hand cut rubberstamps however, created usually with a scalpel from an eraser, inevitably present an entirely different image, lacking the authority of precision but with the visual attraction that goes with hand-crafted work. Equally, with Rubberstampmadness giving examples of how to create complete pictures in multi colours purely from rubberstamps, the creative possibilities are considerable. Whilst the latter suggests more of a craft-hobbyist approach, the experimental nature of mailartists has resulted in very imaginative rubberstamps and uses for them, whether commercially or hand produced. In an age in which for many networkers, making contact with people is more important than laboured hand produced creativity, the rubberstamp offers a very quick, accessible and immediate medium with considerable potential: expediency and pragmatism dominating ideology.

2.5. Postcards.

The beginnings of handmade and commercially produced picture postcards, in England, date from 1894: until that time postcards could only be made by the government. Hand decorated postcards are as old as postcards themselves and as an art form are not confined to the network, exhibitions of postcard art having been held since the late 1970s. For the networker, they provide a simple and direct medium with all the process (accumulated ephemera of postmarks etc.) of its transition, from sender to recipient, unavoidably evident. Whilst the importance of mailart lies in bringing people together, the postcard, having no protective packaging, is prey to the ravages of its journey through the post. The postcard, therefore, is the most pure form of mailart. Ideologically, it truly functions as mailart by being open to be 'read' by all the postal workers who handle it and any casual passers-by who may see it on the door mat before it is received by the 'intended' recipient as I go on to discuss in Chapter 5.

Whilst the sending of Picture Postcards by mailartists to each other as mailart is probably usually because of a wish to share the image, because of its beauty, humour, personal relevance or any one of a number of reasons, it could be seen to indicate either a lack of concern for any attempt at considering the communication as art or on the contrary, possibly the consideration of the chosen postcard as a ready-made in the Duchampian sense. Fluxus members often sent messages to each other on postcards but it was Ben Vautier who used the postcard as a creative vehicle in itself. In 1965, he made what was probably the first pure conceptual mailart work - 'The Postman's Choice'56 (Plate 21) in which he produced a double-sided postcard, inviting the postman to decide which side s/he wished to select to

determine the recipient. Whilst being an admirable work in terms of conceptual process, Ben's57 postcard lacks an interest in interchange and therefore remains outside mailart networking. Further, Maciunas' request, "can I reprint 1000 of them! and sell for 10 c each?"58 indicates very clearly that for Maciunas at least they were perceived as a commodity to be sold and used by others rather than as a conceptual usage of the post by the artist.

Artist's Postcards became so popular as a medium for mailart exchange that by 1971, two Canadian networkers, Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov in Vancouver, Canada, were able to stage a show devoted solely to networkers' postcards.59 This exhibition was documented with an album of postcards and greatly helped to promote the idea of working in this medium as well as furthering the concept of creating an exhibition from mailart material, discussed in the following chapter.

2.6. Conclusion.

Maciunas' need to control and organise Fluxus extended to thorough documentation of Fluxus activities and archiving Fluxus material. Whilst the habit of documenting and archiving work is one that has been adopted by many mailartists, unilateral control is both alien to mailart and not possible, given the vast numbers and disparity of its adherents. Although Johnson was a figurehead of mailart, at least in the late fifties and early sixties, he was nevertheless, keen to encourage exchange that went beyond his control. Maciunas' willingness to devote himself to the cause of Fluxus and his generosity in giving work away are however, very much a fundamental part of mailart attitudes.

Fluxus was highly influential on mailart with its, philosophies, attitudes and internationalism. Of particular importance was its usage of postal elements; stamps and postcards and especially with the publishing of address lists which greatly enlarged the number of participants. This was partly responsible for mailart taking on a much broader geographical and cultural spread than it had been possible to achieve simply with the efforts of one man - Johnson. Mailart became a union of two elements, the orchestration and interchange through the mail as practised by Johnson and the playing with the elements of the postal system which - whilst not generally used as mailart - were demonstrated by Fluxus.

Where Fluxus failed was in its attempt to rid itself of authorship by the simple tactic of requiring the participants to sign themselves 'Fluxus', had this happened, it would have changed the way in which the work has been commodified, particularly given the illustrious careers that many of the Fluxus artists went on to have - without names, the historian looses interest. The anonymity of mailart is something that was to become central to its operation and it is with the theories of authorship and art that Fluxus man Joseph Beuys - building on Fluxus ideas - was to propound, that mailart was to develop its rationale, as I debate in the final chapter.

It was natural with the anti-establishment idealism and optimism of the late sixties and early seventies that mailart should grow beyond the life and parameters of Fluxus and Johnson. The burgeoning of mailart reflected the tremendous interest that grew at the time in the seventies of exploring and setting-up new and alternative systems, which in mailart was to be centred on MAPs (Mail Art Projects), their exhibiting and documentation.

1 The seven original members, George Maciunas; Dick Higgins; Emmett Williams; Alison Knowles; Nam June Paik; Ben Patterson and Wolf Vostell were soon joined by George Brecht; Philip Corner; Toshi Ichijanagi; Ben Vautier; Jackson Mac Low; Yoko Ono; La Monte Young; Charlote Moorman; Daniel Spoerri; Josef Beuys and Robert Filliou, the last three being peripheral members.

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http://www.fortunecity.com/victorian/palace/62/fluxus.html

This is part of a larger project by Lamb, MAIL ART 1955 to 1995 Democratic art as social sculpture, You can see the whole thesis at:
http://www.fortunecity.com/victorian/palace/62/

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SATURDAY, JANUARY 05, 2008

The Context of a Vanguard: Toward a Definition of Concrete Poetry, Jon M. Tolman
The Context of a Vanguard: Toward a Definition of Concrete Poetry
Jon M. Tolman

Poetics Today, Vol. 3, No.3, Poetics of the Avant-Garde. (Summer, 1982), pp. 149-166.

This essay represents an attempt to define Brazilian concrete poetry (and the world-wide movement it headed) within the context of contemporary vanguard movements. It is my intention to demonstrate that concrete poetry developed into the first truly classical literary movement of modern times. It achieved this breakthrough by rejecting the effort of neo- classical restoration groups to establish a contemporary poetic movement by disinterring the past. Concrete poetry will be shown to be essentially anti-romantic in sensibility and technique. Whether an isolated phenomenon or the first manifestation of a new spirit, its psychological, social and literary profile will be seen to be undeniably classical. As a pioneering movement it necessarily employs a number of strategies developed by earlier, romantic avant-gardes, but the theoretical writing of the movement clearly demonstrates that this use of the past is not anachronistic but rather that the recognition that certain achievements of the past have made possible a new aesthetic awareness. The concrete poets possess a well-defined sense of culmination or supplantation in which they do not worship or imitate the past, but build upon it.

Before undertaking my demonstration of these theories, I shall begin with a brief historical presentation in order to locate the Brazilian movement within its immediate literary tradition. Brazilian literature entered the twentieth century twenty years behind the times, having been kidnapped by a Parnassian movement which dominated Brazil as it never dominated France. Its domain was so pervasive, in fact, that Symbolism was almost stillborn, reduced in impact and relegated to distinct minority status until 1922, when it was rescued from oblivion by a revolutionary generation that used it as a weapon against a moribund Parnassian establishment. What happened in 1922 was the Modern Art Week, which ushered in an eight-year spree known in Brazil as Modernism, and which under the banner of innovation, brought Brazil into line with Europe. Iconoclastic, destructive and intensely nationalistic, Modernism was basically expressionist in orientation, but only certain elements of the European avant-garde were imported into Brazil. There was marked indifference to imagism, Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism (in sharp contrast with Spanish America, where Surrealism, even today, has a profound influence). However, certain attitudes universally

shared by avant-garde movements were accepted. Among them were a rejection of traditional poetics, with its formalistic emphasis on rhyme and meter; a gleeful spirit of épater le bourgeois; a search for a national language, a national identity. By 1930 Modernism had worn itself out and gave way to a more constructive spirit which maintained its formal iconoclasm even while turning away from it thematically. Nationalism was abandoned as poets turned inward searching for individual identity, thereby anticipating the alienation which would be the dominant attitude in the literature of postwar Europe and America. In prose, the poetic nationalism of the previous period crystallized into the novel of the Brazilian Northeast, neo-realistic in technique and reformist or revolutionary in its social message.

In the late forties a growing dissatisfaction with the formlessness of the previous aesthetic began to manifest itself in poetry through a return to traditional poetics. The first traditional form to reappear was the sonnet, to be followed by the ode and other long-abandoned devices. In prose a similar reaction took place. In fact the entire evolution of postwar Brazilian literature may be said to have been dominated by formalism and formalistic experimentation. In poetry this formalistic preoccupation coalesced into what would be called the Generation of 1945, later to be accused of being neo-Parnassian. The most important poet of this period, João Cabral de Melo Neto, collaborated only briefly with the "Orpheus Group," as they called themselves, before pulling away from them to develop his own formalistic aesthetic under the influence of Paul Valéry.[1] While the poetics of the Orpheus Group more nearly resembles that of Rilke or T. S. Eliot, Cabral's poetic theories--after coming into contact with Valéry, and incorporating local influences of two of Modernism's greatest voices, Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Murilo Mendes--developed along the lines of an anti-rhetoric, a negative poetics exalting an extreme, ascetic formalism.

The aegis of the Generation of 1945 was short-lived. A small group of young men in São Paulo, restive under the constraints of what they perceived as literary anachronism, published their first work in Orpheus periodicals, but as they gained confidence and knowledge, they launched a fulminating attack on their elders. The Generation of 1945, repudiated in their moment of dominance, never recovered. What was surprising was the sudden development of the Noigandres Group (initially Augusto and Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari) and their movement which they called concrete poetry. It was in the early fifties when they took the country by storm and succeeded briefly in dominating the literary scene. By the early sixties, in spite of continued influence among certain young poets, concrete had lost its hegemony over contemporary poetry. The following period in Brazilian literature seems marked by eclecticism with no really definable trends, or at least by no trends with any large following. Concrete continues to exert considerable influence, and the concrete poets continue to be active, but there is widespread hostility to the group, the result of the polemics which marked its birth and development. Internationally, however, the Noigandres group still has prestige, and as a dynamic element of the concrete movement of the fifties which had worldwide ramifications, it continues to be prominent.[2]

Two concepts underlie the essay which follows. The first is that romanticism is less a movement than an all-embracing state of mind and culture spanning two centuries, with its beginnings in the late eighteenth century and extending to the present. The second is that romanticism and classicism are poles between which Occidental art has always oscillated. Critics and literary historians as diverse as Mario Praz and Hiram Haydn have contributed to these concepts, while such modern theoreticians as Murray Krieger and Morse Peckham have been instrumental in applying them to postwar literary phenomena. It may be helpful in the present context for me to define, in the broadest possible terms, what I mean by classical and romantic. For that purpose, Haydn's epistemological definition is admirably suited. Eschewing an attempt to list "characteristics," always vitiated or

completely nullified when one goes to the work itself, he strikes at the heart of the matter by examining the differing attitudes of romanticism and classicism to that most basic of human problems: the gap between the real and the ideal:

The only definition of the Classicist that I have found possible to apply with equal validity to Plato and Pope, to Racine and Dante, to Addison and AEschylus, is that the Classicist is a man and artist who finds it possible to accept without misgivings the authority and discipline of a fixed order and rules because he believes in the essential congruence and relatedness of the ideal and the empirically actual--that which should be and that which is. Whether the actual is but an imperfect extension of the ideal, as with Plato; whether it is an ordained and limited part of the creation effected by the ideal (in Christian terminology, God), as in Pope's and Addison's version of the Great Chain of Being; whether, as in the concept of "immatered form" of Aristotle's mature philosophy, which recognizes the usefulness and relatedness of intellectual concept and empirical observation, it is a question of rooting the ideal in the actual, and motivating the actual by the ideal--in any case, the Classicist recognizes the relation as a direct and certain one, and fixes upon that recognition his aesthetic as well as his moral, philosophical or religious creed.

The Romanticist, on the other hand, is that man or artist who, moved by the discrepancy he finds between the ideal and the empirically actual, cannot reconcile the two. As a result, he may, like Keats, yearn more and more nostalgically for an escape to, and a complete immersion in, the world of the ideal--which becomes increasingly, and perhaps even exclusively, real to him. [...] On the other hand, like Shelley, the Romantic may dream of effecting a reconciliation between the two by the ultimate imposition of the ideal upon the empirical actuality in the distant and improbable future. [...] Still again, with Wordsworth, he may find the ideal in simple and primitive nature, and in those closest to her. [...]

But whether the particular Romantic's form of rebellion is escape or reform, passive or active, he is always a rebel against the established order and skeptical about the validity of the value of fixed laws. [...] He does not accept the established relatedness of the ideal and the actual, and he refuses to abide by rules derived from this central premise, whether aesthetic ones or ones pertaining to the conduct of life (Haydn 1950:15).

It should be borne in mind that Haydn's study involves Elizabethan literature (in spite of the nineteenth-century references in the quote), not "Romanticism" in the limited historical sense of the word. According to these concepts, it is possible to postulate the essential romantic identity of movements as diverse as Symbolism and Surrealism, the essentially romantic nature of apparently anti-romantic movements such as Realism and Naturalism. Further, if the modern age in art has been essentially romantic, it is possible to postulate the eventual exhaustion of that great impulse and its replacement by its antipode, classicism.

But if romanticism triumphed in artistic milieux in the mid-nineteenth century and then proceeded to develop a tradition which can be traced through Baudelaire to Verlaine and Rimbaud and to the Symbolists and thence to avant-garde movements such as Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism, it did not triumph socially until recently. It was romanticism's long struggle with public taste that shaped its development. The public in the Western world has always taken "for its ideals, or idols, what may be called, if not classicism, at least the traditional or the academic" (Poggioli 1973:50). In the first third of this century this basic divergence in taste was exacerbated by a growing alienation of the avant-garde artist from society. His alienation, according to Poggioli, took several avenues of expression; antagonism, in which the artist deliberately affronts public morality and etiquette, and attacks (usually his predecessors) in violent polemical jargon; nihilism, in

which the artist reaches "a point of extreme tension toward the public and tradition" (p. 64), which culminates in a destructive impulse capable of annihilating all cultural values; agonism, in which the artist, convinced of the impending end of civilization, acts suicidally in an attempt to bequeath something of value to the future; and Futurism, in which the artist has an acute sense of being in a state of transition, perceiving himself as a precursor of future developments. Important in contemporary nihilism have been two factors, the commercialization and vulgarization of art, and the increasing tendency to regard the relationship between an artist and his work as a private one, negating the social value of art in favor of art as private fantasy.

Poggioli convincingly argues that only modern bourgeois societies create conditions in which avant-garde art may flourish, nurturing a counter culture which despises its source. The bête noir opposed by contemporary avant-gardes has been mass culture, in all its forms. In technological urban societies there has been a radical and permanent separation between popular and avant-garde culture, accentuated by a homogenizing process in which ethnic and folk elements are lost under the pressures of mass media and other forces. "By means of specialization and technology, modern society has broken all the links between artisan and artist, destroyed all the forms of folklore and ethnic culture; it has even transformed the very concept of 'the people,' now a synonym for the quite different concept of 'the masses'" (p. 122). Poggioli sees the attempts of such modern artists as Eliot to recreate or restore a lost sense of craftsmanship as doomed from the start. I shall return to this point later.

In his epilogue Poggioli summarizes the evolution of the avant-garde, divided into four moments or phases. The culmination of this development in our time is the triumph of the avant-garde spirit and its ramification into all artistic spheres. But Poggioli does not perceive that this success extends even to society, which has become impervious to shock, permissive to extremes, willing to tolerate and reward the most outrageous artistic extravagances. Avant-garde has become chic, not merely among the elites, but among a vast bourgeois audience which has at last been weaned away from academicism. There remains a sullen residue which opposes all such decadence, but the numbers of adherents have been vastly swollen by affluence and the public education it has fostered. This success has put the avant-garde into crisis, undermining the alienation necessary to its survival. Harold Rosenberg has aptly summarized this situation in Discovering the Present (1973: X-X:):

The cultural revolution of the past hundred years has petered out. Only conservatives believe that subversion is still being carried on in the arts and that society is being shaken by it. Today's aesthetic vanguardism is being sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, by state art councils, by museums, by industrial and banking organizations. Foundation grants are made to underground film and magazines, to little-review contributors, to producers of happenings and electronic music, to the Merce Cunningham dance group. The art-historical media have become thoroughly blended with the mass media and with commercial gesign and decoration under the slogan of community art programs. Reciprocally, commercial movies, thrillers, even TV advertising spots have become so daringly experimental in the formal sense as to elicit not the comprehension of a message but the immediate total response of a work of art.

By and large, the contemporary artistic scene demonstrates that the boast of the Dadaists that they had done it all was true. There is a kind of desperation in the most extreme manifestations of contemporary avant-garde art of the now traditional left. It is besieged by a sense of déjà vu. Literally everything has already been tried. According to Rosenberg:

In art, "conservative" and "radical" ought to be abandoned and attention

concentrated on déjà vu. The purpose of education is to keep a culture from being drowned in senseless repetitions, each of which claims to offer a new insight. In America an almost total absence of genuine education in modernist creations and attitudes of the past hundred years is responsible for wave after wave of déjà vu novelties. The dejavunik exploits his audience's lack of education by appealing to its desire to be advanced and its expectation of being repelled by new work. Today, cultural professionals can count on avant-garde déjà vu to arouse the enthusiasm of undergraduate movie makers, post-art aesthetes, far-out curators, and collector-dealers for whatever makes the grade as Time-Newsweek shock (p. xi).

These quotes suggest that the romantic age as I have defined it may be ending. It is too early to determine such a hypothesis objectively, but there is mounting evidence that something of the sort may be happening. I refer to the prevalence of a neo-classical revival during the last forty years. It can be stated without exaggeration that the most powerful literary impulses of contemporary culture have come from artists basically hostile to romanticism. I refer to Eliot, Pound and Valéry. It remains to be seen, however, whether this "anti-romanticism" is any more authentic than preceding manifestations in the nineteenth century. T. E. Hulme's prediction of a new classical spirit, although widely assumed to have been futile, did have serious repercussions in its effects on Eliot and Pound.3 Poggioli takes up this question and dismisses the possibility of a new classicism, at least as it is exemplified in Eliot, largely because Eliot's impulse is nostalgic. Poggioli does admit that recently the dynamism seems to have gone out of avant-garde, manifested in increasingly rare appearances of new movements, but attributes this lack of intensity to a broadening of the avant-garde spirit in its contemporary triumph:

In modern poetry and art, classicism can operate only as a retrospective utopia, as a logical counterbalance to the futuristic utopia. In any case, the frequency within the recent avant-garde of positions such as Eliot's along with the rehabilitation and renewal of the very concept of tradition, has certainly contributed to making new movements and manifestoes more rare and scarce. Thus the appearance of a series of new poetics, neoclassical on the surtace, has devaluated experiment as an end in itself (p. 223).
It is significant that Haroldo de Campos's rejection of the poetics of the Generation of 1945 is couched in quite similar phraseology. I refer to the essay entitled "Poetry and Paradise Lost." It is precisely a "retrospective utopia" which is repugnant to the concrete poets:

Anodyne and anonymous lyricism, and love of conventional patterns of vagueness lie, for instance, behind the "rediscovery" of the sonnet in the manner of a "dernier cri." These are the well-known manifestations of Sunday-Park art, a backwater where poetry is perfectly codified in little metric rules, adjusted to a serene formal elegance and equipped with a stock of metaphors prudently controlled in all their petite bourgeois self-sufficiency by a curiously repressing policy: the so-called "atmosphere" (climate) of the poem (1975:25).
Other passages from the Theory of Concrete Poetry (Teori a de Poesia Concreta) demonstrate that for concrete, the poetry of the previous generation was doubly damned: it looked backward in attempting the restoration of clichéd poetic forms, and it was romantic in its sensibility, alienation and sentimentality. While the apparent neoclassicism of the Generation of '45 and other postwar groups might thus be disposed of as a kind of cloying anachronism, the poetics of Valéry and Pound offered sterner resistance, and it was only after deliberation that the concrete poets concluded that they must push beyond them.

Beyond its rejection of nostalgic anachronism, how is concrete poetry's classical protile delineated? Brietly, concrete poetry is not alienated, not agonistic, not nihilistic, not Futuristic. It subscribes to a theory of Zeitgeist,

conceived in Russian formalist terms. It rejects subjectivism in all its forms, even the detached subjective role of the artist in the work as conceived by Valéry or Pound. It rejects the idea that art and society are inimical, and in fact attempts a conscious rapprochement with the public. It embraces modern technology and scientism, and is fascinated by communication theory.4 It totally rejects the cult of the metaphor which has characterized contemporary art, and refuses to accept a favorite avant-garde dictum that legitimate art is exceptional.

Concrete's rejection of alienation is profound. It rejects the whole subjective-romantic emphasis on the subconscious, on correspondence, on the poet as mystic or seer. In fact, it overwhelmingly rejects what Hannah Arendt has called the "deep-structure fallacy": the idea that surface is superficial or frivolous and that what matters, what is essential, is what is hidden from view. Concrete affirms the thingness of things, accepting the phenomenological reality of surface. It is therefore opposed to the oneiricism of the Surrealists, proposing instead the maximalization of lucidity. Poggioli has analyzed the Schopenhauerian conception of will as an irrational, unconscious, automatic vital cosmic force. It is this conception (which lies behind avant-garde theories of automatism) that is specifically rejected by the concrete poets, for whom even chance and intuition are subject to rigid control. Décio Pignatari speaks of "the chronomicrometering of chance," and "the most lucid intellectual work for the clearest intuition" ("newpoetry: concrete," 1975:41). He later elaborates these ideas in "Chance, Choice, Shots," where he speaks of chance shaped by mathematical theories of probability. Concrete does not flee from technology, but rather embraces its empiricism and functionalism.

The ingenuous or academic notions that someone might have about mathematics are also not important. Mathematics cannot be opposed to art to the point of conferring to intuition that traditional absolute value, which betrays an idealistic education prisoner to the apparently infinite field of the Arbitrary. Those who ignore principles through the panicked belief that they limit or restrict (one knows not what ... inspiration, perhaps) is compelled to justify "post factum" his work. He can only do this by using dubious articulations or subjective sub-levers. Right was always on the side of those who had reasons instead of mere justifications (1975:147-148).
In this statement, Pignatari redefines intuition in biological terms which do not permit the slightest idealization of the process: "A [...] physiological, psycho-cultural perception mechanism [...] at the root of elementary feedback circuits and high-grade options, stimulating experimental actions." For concrete, creativity is not a process of blind subjection to the unconscious justified post factum as art, but the a priori determination of an aesthetic problem to be solved in a specific and straight-forward manner. In his essay "From the Phenomenology of Composition to the Mathematics of Composition," Haroldo de Campos makes this plain.

Concrete poetry is moving toward the rejection of organic structure in favor of a mathematical or quasi-mathematical one. In the poem of the word-after-word type, structure results from the interaction of words or fragments of words produced in the spatial field, with each new word implying something like a structural option. Such an option solicits a marked intervention of chance and intuitional readiness. Concrete poetry instead seeks a mathematical structure planned before the word. The solution of the structural problem will therefore require that words be used under the control of the thematic number. The definition of structure which fits the poem will be the exact moment of the creative option. From that point on the intervention of a disciplining and critical intelligence will be effected with greatest intensity. The structure selected will rigorously determine the elements of play and their relative positions in an almost mathematical way. We seek a planned verbal structure, "as precise as possible," as neat as "symbolic logic," as exact as the "visible ideas" of a concrete painter (1975:91-93).

Haroldo de Campos's theory of a "thematic number" conclusively refutes a common criticism of concrete poetry that it represents nothing more than a kind of automatism where isolated words are arbitrarily thrown together as in one of Tristan Tzara's games. Two examples follow, from different moments in the movement's evolution. Even as early as 1953, concrete had moved away from extrinsical, "shaped" poems à la Apollinaire. This is evident in the Poet-Minus series by Augusto de Campos. In this series, Augusto worked with color and words, seeking to reproduce in poetry some equivalent to Webern's musical theories of Klangfarbenmelodie (it is unfortunate that this presentation is limited to the printed word, since the spoken-musical version of the following poem is essential to its Gestalt, to its verbi-voco-visual wholeness):

It is clear in "Here are the Lovers" that we have words arranged by an aprioristic but open-minded/receptive creative mentality which allows full play to what Pignatari calls "factors of proximity and likeness." It should be equally obvious that this is no mere word-picture poem. The juxtaposed words resonate together, setting off refractions of meaning that scintillate around the columns and contribute to its Gestalt. The experience is in some ways akin to synesthesia, where one sensation evokes a response in another sense area. In this case, what the poem manages to evoke/provoke in the receptive reader is a sensual response that goes far beyond the usual intellectual titillation essential to love poetry.

Haroldo de Campos's "Poemandala" from his Lacunae series (1971) exhibits an ethereal grace, managing to evoke the oriental (concrete's fascination with the ideogram can be traced to Pound and pervades the movement's theory) while teasing the mind with its haiku-like columns of words. As insubstantial as a shadow, as permanent as the symbol that forms its core, the poem seems almost like the image left on the retina when one blinks after seeing a strong light. It is a perfect demonstration of what can be achieved with "minimal means," with "a planned verbal structure" that nevertheless is neither clumsy nor pedestrian (as might be assumed by the mathematical formulations of the theory):

Concrete's rejection of subjectivism, the romantic cult of personality, is carried to the extreme of excluding from the poem all traces of the author's presence. This quality is amply demonstrated in the two poems that precede this paragraph. In this effacement the concrete poets go far beyond the craftsmanship of Valéry, Pound or Eliot, where, for all their formal discipline, the authors maintain a persona, a mediator between author, work and reader. It was Eliot, in fact, who revived the Renaissance theories of persona in his attempt to reestablish distance between author and work and eliminate the romantic tendency to blur the distinction between maker and speaker. In the concrete poem there is simply no speaker. To the extent that the reader and the author make contact they do so in the poem itself, not outside it. The concrete poem makes great demands on the reader, since the raw materials of the poem are presented to him, along with certain instructions, and it is he who must realize the poem. This act of faith on the part of the concrete poet reflects his belief in Gestalt, in the validity of the concept that 2 + 2 can equal 5 in art. But the problem is that in the concrete work, the Gestalt is not presented pre-digested by a persona but left only as a potential. This quality is demonstrated in Augusto's "Eis os amantes" where the reader re-creates/re-experiences the copulation that forms the poem's experiential foundation. For another convincing demonstration of this dynamism in concrete poetry, the reader is referred to Haroldo's "Si-len-cio"(1956). An equally convincing demonstration of the direct, experiential qualities of concrete may be found in Décio Pignatari's "beba coca cola," in which the poet expresses a profound existential nausea. This is a protest

poem with a difference: the reader is invited to participate in an experience that begins with a slogan, "Drink Coca Cola" and culminates in an explosion of rage/ nausea/expulsion (as in excretion). Once again, to listen to the aleatoric vision of this poem in a recording is to materially increase the intensity of the experience. Even more than in traditional word-after-word poetry, concrete is dependent for complete impact on complete experience:

A striking feature of the concrete movement is its attempt to rejoin the severed relations between poetry and public. Concrete theory attempts to demystify art, advocating a kind of Functionalism in which the poem is treated as an object, not an objet d'art to be carefully preserved and saved in a museum case, but an object like a piece of bread or a newspaper. Rather than emphasize craftsmanship in an attempt to valorize the artist's creative effort, concrete poets emphasize creativity as a process akin to industrial design, in which the designer's creative efforts go into conceiving a prototype. Such a prototype is anonymous and capable of infinite reproduction. The test of its efficacy is not the personal taste of an elite collector, but whether the object functions and satisfies the needs of the public. As a consequence, concrete poetry strives to present itself without mystery directly to the consumer. The intellectual elitism involved in the modern cult of the metaphor is also avoided, along with the entire rhetorical-discursive apparatus of traditional lyric poetry. Décio Pignatari says:

The now classic postulation, "form follows function," involving the notion of useful, utilitarian beauty, means an awareness on the part of the artist, both artistically and economically, of the new world of assemblyline industrial production. In this world, "et pour cause," craftsmanship is put out of circulation as anti-economic, anachronistic, incompatible and incommunicable with that impersonal, collective and rational world that comes to depend entirely on planning on all levels and meanings.

The contradictions between industrial production and individual artistic craftsmanship opened a chasm between art and the public. In the face of these divergencies, it became necessary to join beauty with utility in order to attend to the needs of a new type of consumer, a "consumer of physical design," in the words of Neutra ("Form, Function and General Project," Campos and Pignatari 1975:107-108).
Lest anyone mistake his meaning, assuming that concrete seeks to commercialize art, Pignatari adds that these consumer goods lie "in the realm of thought and sensitivity, not convertible into mere utilitarian values." This is n ot to say that commercialization and art are necessarily inimical. Pignatari himself established a successful ad agency in Sa o Paulo for a number of years, and one of his ads is usually included in concrete anthologies. In his "Disenfo rmio" (an anti-diarrheal medicine) the letters of the product invade and consume the "intestinal disturbance." The ad is a t once a highly effective commercial message (part of whose effectiveness is subliminal) and a demonstration that what works has artistic value.

The concrete poets showed an early interest in the media and in communication theory, and the use of concrete graphic techniques by ad agencies and television are seen by them as proof of the validity of their theoretical position. The modern urban consumer, accustomed by television and the newspaper to headlines and simplified syntax, has been conditioned to high speed communication. In the concrete aesthetic what functions, what communicates, possesses artistic value. In the words of Haroldo de Campos:

Concrete poetry is language fit for the contemporary creative mind. It permits high-speed communication. It prefigures for the poem a re-integration in daily life similar to that which the Bauhaus achieved for visual arts: whether as a vehicle of commercial advertising (newspapers, signs, TV, movies, etc.), or as an object in itself (functioning in architecture, for

example) with a field of possibilities analogous to both industrial design and painting. It substitutes the magical, the mystical and the "maudit" for the useful (1975:46).

Concrete's rapprochement with mass culture may be partially explained by the specific Brazilian situation, which in some ways resembles that of Russia in the time of the Formalists. In both cases a technologically oriented, innovating avant-garde reacts to a stratified literary tradition it identifies with a colonialist mentality. In such a situation, the avant-garde may regard a mass-oriented aesthetic favorably rather than adopt the hostile attitude typical of the avant-garde in more advanced countries. In this instance there is a confluence of specific local conditions and generalized cultural ones which produces an avant-garde movement quite unique in contemporary art. It is the '45 Generation's traditional elitist sociopsychological orientation that sets off the concrete movement's mass-accepting intransigence.

Beyond concrete's non-alienated orientation to society and art, there are other characterisitics which identify the movement as classical. The most prominent is perhaps the movement's historicism. As Poggioli has noted, classical movements have a well-defined sense of being a culmination as opposed to the agonistic sense of transition which besets the romantic avant-garde. Concrete regards itself as the fruition of a half century of vanguard efforts, and its Theory is replete with analyses of the movements which preceded it. These analyses emphasize the failures of Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism and of such figures as Apollinaire even while conceding their contribution to the concretist aesthetic. For example, in the essay "Aspects of Concrete Poetry," Haroldo de Campos (1975:94-106) analyzes the contributions of Mallarmé, Pound, Apollinaire, the Futurists, Dadaists and others to concrete poetry. In spite of his respect for their contributions, he rejects the contemporary validity of these precursors, accepting their innovations only in the spirit of an inheritor, saying that "the cinematic descriptiveness, the frenetic subjectivity and the ultraromanticism of the futurists hypostatized in their characteristic machine made their compositions barren of constructive organization." Similarly, Augusto de Campos rejects Apollinaire, after recognizing his contributions, in the following terms: "Apollinaire condemns the poetic ideogram to the mere figurative representation of theme. [...] This removes most of the vigor and physiognomic richness which the calligrammes might have had, in spite of the grace and visual 'humor' with which Apollinaire almost always 'draws' them" (1975:19). Pound himself, the direct aesthetic forbear of the concrete poets, is ultimately rejected for his attachment to craftsmanship and the individualistic, subjective relationship between maker and poem that this attitude implies. It should be evident from the foregoing remarks that I have used the term "precursor" advisedly. Perhaps the only way in which a previous author can be a "precursor" is in the literal sense, of a forerunner, a contributor to one's aesthetic, and even then only when the formulator of such a statement has a classicist mentality, perceiving himself as a culmination.

While concrete poetry shares with other avant-garde movements a love of the experimental, it has developed a radical new conception of the theme-form equation which deserves analysis as it relates to classicism and romanticism. Standard avant-gardism's cult of the new presumes a feverish search for new forms of expression and their abandonment when they become generalized or vulgarized through mass acceptance. In other words, what commonly characterizes avant-garde movements is their abhorrence of stereotype. On the other hand, traditional classicism has taken the view that certain artistic forms are virtually immutable, defining originality in terms of surpassing models. To some extent this orientation explains the failures of neo-classical movements in modern literature, obsessed with restoring modes of expression anathematized by the romantic avant-gardes. This constitutes the central dilemma of the modern classical vision: the inability to invent a form adequate to express that vision in non-anachronistic terms. Instead, modern exponents of classicism have

attempted the restoration of a lost paradise, and in so doing, have demonstrated that they continue trapped in the romantic ethos they abhor. The problem has been that the power of the Greco-Roman model was such that in spite of increasing distance in time it exercised (and continues to exercise) a fatal fascination for would-be followers of the classical way. In reality, only the exuberant optimism of the Renaissance prevented, and then only temporarily, an awareness of the incongruity of resurrecting a long-dead cultural model to express fourteenth- and fifteenth-century aesthetic and philosophical needs. As Hiram Haydn has demonstrated, the Baroque age was the first romantic period of modern time, one in which the paradoxical possibilities of the Greco-Roman model were fully explored. The eighteenth century's attempt to reassert the model foundered, at least partially, on anachronistic incongruity and ushered in the modern romantic age. The genius of concrete poetry lies in its freedom from the past and its invention of a form adequate to the expression of a twentieth-century classicism.

In its development of a new formal theory in harmony with the contemporary period, concrete poetry has abandoned classicism's traditional insistence that theme and form are separate entities. At best, classicism of the Greco-Roman mold will admit only that certain forms, such as the sonnet, are uniquely adapted to the expression of certain themes. Concrete poetry resolves the theme-form binomial in favor of a new synthesis in which form is theme (isomorphism) in which the structure and physical arrangement of words in a poem are determined in each case by the internal demands of the Gestalt created by the "factors of proximity and likeness" at play. Form is not imposed on the words from without, is not programmatic, is not extrinsic. This conception confronts the poet with a radical new creative option each time he begins a poem. In traditional poetry, a writer conquers a style and evolves thematically within it, content to innovate only in a relative sense. Even when the poet adheres to a new movement, for example, he simply takes over the new style, makes it his own and tinkers. For the concrete poet each new poem is a leap in the dark.

It should be evident from the foregoing that concrete poetry also has made a radical new formulation in the concept of originality. Leaving behind both traditional classicism's effort at surpassing models and romanticism's cult of the new, the concrete poet confronts each new creative moment armed only with his readiness to allow the words to shape themselves into an idea, which, once expressed, is relatively unique. At most a new idea will lead to a limited series of poems that exhaust its potentiality. The creative attitude of the concrete poet is one of patient awareness.

The related concepts of form and originality are themselves important in their relationship with another traditional shibboleth: that of "national" literature. Isolated behind very real walls of distance and time, modern Occidental literatures developed concepts of nationalism that seemed both logical and inevitable. The traditional artist, protected behind these arbitrary walls, was free to imitate, often rather closely, the efforts of contemporaries in other countries, and the product of his labor was assured a place in the intellectual market of his country. The concrete poet, operating in an age when communication is virtually instantaneous and travel is relatively so, fully accepts the impossibility in such a situation of any appeal to relativity or uniqueness. Concrete poetry developed internationally in such a way that limitations of language and culture were minimized within a tacit consensus that imitation or duplication from one country to another was impossible practically and illicit creatively.

In this essay I have attempted to demonstrate the possibility that concrete poetry is an avant-garde movement of classicist tendencies rather than romantic ones. For the purposes of example, parting from an epistemological basis, I have explored the various ways it rejects alienation, the predominant characteristic of modern romantic avant- garde

movements. Beyond the movement's intrinsic merits as an approach to contemporary aesthetics, the intriguing possibility of its classicist nature especially recommends it to those interested in contemporary literary typology. Indeed, if concrete is classicist and avant-garde then a whole series of assumptions about vanguardism and aesthetics must be reconsidered, since vanguardism has been universally assumed to be a romantic phenomenon. If romanticism, after a two-hundred-year reign, has reached a point of inanition, a classicist revolt will assume certain characteristics of the avant-garde as a matter of dynamics inherent in the situation. This may also explain why contemporary neo-classical movements such as the Generation of 1945 in Brazil failed to generate impact. The possibilities of a technically formalist moderating reaction within romanticism were exhausted by such nineteenth-century movements as Parnassianism. Concrete has shown that formal tinkering within a romantic aesthetic is no longer viable. For formalism to work in the contemporary period, a radical psychological amputation is necessary. The affirmative, optimistic mentality of concrete, allied with its acceptance of avant-garde aesthetics makes it clear that we have in reality two apparently similar but radically different movements which contemplate each other across an unbridgeable gulf.

FOOTNOTES

1. João Cabral de Melo Neto is reasonably well known in the United States and elsewhere. His poetry may be consulted in various anthologies, including The Literary Review (Winter issue, 1978), and Elizabeth Bishop's An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry (1972). These anthologies may also be consulted for the other Brazilian poets mentioned.

2. A kind of unofficial Brazilian blockade of concrete works was broken a few years ago, and the intervening period had seen the commercial publication of several important works. Prior to that time, within Brazil, all concrete works, including Invenção and Noigandres were privately financed and published. In 1973, a second edition of the Teoria da Poesia Concreta was published by the São Paulo publisher, Duas Cidades. In the same year, Augusto de Campos privately printed his retrospective Caixa Preta (Black Box), together with designer Julio Plaza. In 1977 Haroldo de Campos's Xadrez de Estrelas (Chessboard of Stars) (poetry and prose) was published in Sa o Paulo by Perspectiva. In the same year, Décio Pignatari's Poesia Pois E Poesia (Poetry? Damn Right!) was published by Duas Cidades. Finally, in 1979, Haroldo published his Signantia Quase Coelum, a collection of poetic fragments with a Dantean foundation, also with Perspectiva. These retrospective editions have for th e first time provided readers in Brazil and abroad with access to almost the entire corpus of concrete poetry.

In addition, the author of this essay recently finished translating the Theory of Concrete Poetry. It is possible that the Theory will become available to the English-speaking community in the near future. (All translations in this study are taken from that text.) The poems themselves are available in translation in a number of anthologies, most notably Mary Ellen Solt's Concrete Poetry: A World View (1970) and Emmett Williams's An Anthology of Concrete Poetry (1967).

3. See the essay entitled "Romanticism and Classicism" in Hulme (1936:113-140). The romanticism of the New Critics, Hulme's inheritors, is expounded by Richard Foster (1962: 30-44).

4. The movement's preoccupation with communication theory led it, in later stages, toward semiotics. The movement may be justly regarded as a pioneering semiotically oriented effort. See the Teoria da Poesia Concreta or the Anthology of Concrete Poetry (Williams 1967) for examples of semiotic poems. The Theory, with its phenomenological orientation, abounds in pre-semiotic discoveries.

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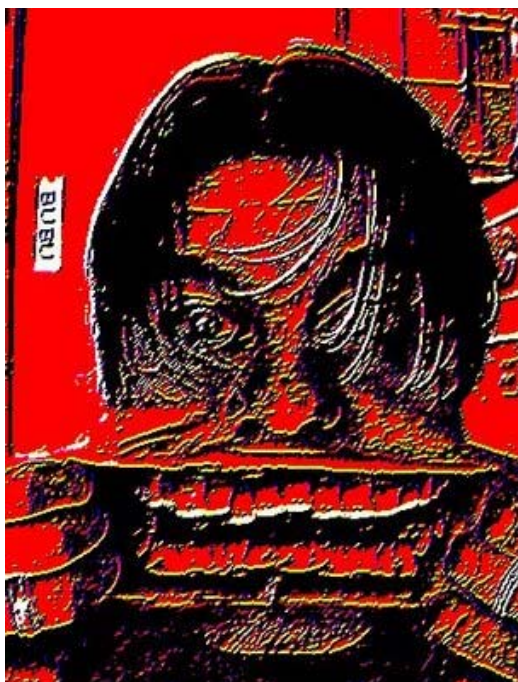Williams, Emmet, 1967. An Anthology of Concrete Poetry (New York: Something Else Press).

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FRIDAY, JANUARY 04, 2008

Fluxus surprise and a red scary smile

Happy New Year, money, health and good Fluxus ideas!
Scary smile as a Fluxus surprise for 2008
Mit bestem Dank an Bubu in Berlin

Labels: **Bubu**, **Nobody's Flux**, **scary smile**

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What is the difference between Fluxussoldier # 32 & # 33

Fluxussoldier # 33

Fluxussoldier # 32

Labels: **Fluxus**, **Fluxussoldier**, **visual poem by Litsa Spathi**

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Fluxus-Brautpaar in spe # 0= Victory der Verlobung

Feelings and aesthetic in writing Fluxus poetry

Labels: **Brautpaar**, **Fluxus**, **Fluxus Poetry**, **Litsa Spathi**, **victory**

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Fluxus-Brautpaar in spe = Victory der Verlobung

Feelings and aesthetic in writing Fluxus poetry

Labels: **Brautpaar**, **Fluxus**, **Fluxus Poetry**, **Litsa Spathi**, **victory**

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