

Re:Flux – Interpretation and Event in Fluxus Performance Scores (Co-written with Ana Benlloch)

Originally published in festival publication FLUX-FEST, 2008. Vivid (Ed.), Birmingham.

In the Fluxconcert Re:Flux, artists have been invited to reinterpret original Fluxus performance scores, and write their own for others to realise. This fluidity of authorship, this sharing of responsibility is at odds with the idea of the artist as brand, but completely in keeping with the history of Fluxus – itself shifting and open to interpretation.

Several pundits suggest that Fluxfestivals initially started as a means to publicise the first edition of Fluxus – an anthology of works by various artists – and consequently the art group came about more or less by accident. Fluxus certainly were prolific and experimental in their publishing ventures, mostly driven by George Maciunas, who the gallery system focuses on as a charismatic leader and producer of commodities, in what Cynthia McCabe refers to as a ‘great person theory’ of history (McCabe, 1984 p. 64). However, his sole leadership is contested in histories written by surviving Fluxus artists. Dick Higgins says in his essay Fluxus: Theory and Reception that

“Fluxus was not a movement; it has no stated, consistent programme or manifesto which the work must match, and it did not propose to move art or our awareness of art from point A to point B. The very name, Fluxus, suggests change, being in a state of flux.” (Higgins, 1998 p. 221)

Indeed, Owen Smith’s description of Fluxus 1 is reminiscent of the performance prompts that jazz musician and composer John Zorn uses with his compositions; The way an image, object, or colour can be used as an intensive ‘associative tool’ from which the performer can move through a new, molecular, becoming. (Smith, 1998 p.14)

This becoming does not aim at finality, at closure, it is an ongoing state, which may be explored in performances, but can expand beyond them into a changed way of experiencing the world. David Doris, in his essay on Fluxus, Zen Vaudeville, discusses the intimate relationship between a specifically Zen form of Buddhism and many of the operations of Fluxus. The proposition is that Fluxus performances were, in many cases, written to encourage a conscious casting aside of preconceptions “in order that the things of this world be allowed to manifest themselves as such, as they present themselves in their fullness of being”, and “Further, the operations of the individual are themselves revealed through this unfolding; one becomes an actively perceiving, infinitely mutable organ of response, not differentiated from nature” (Doris, 1998 p.93). The idea therefore is for the work to bring the audience into a direct perception of the duration and context of the event rather than a circumscribed, reproduction of an experience.

Many of the early Fluxus festivals experimented with composition, producing new ways of thinking about music, however George Brecht became “‘increasingly dissatisfied with an emphasis on the purely aural qualities of a situation’, and so began to call his work, ‘Events’. This word, he claims, ‘seemed closer to describing the total, multi-sensory experience I was interested in than any other...’” (Doris, 1998 p.97). For Brecht, the aim was to create works that opened up a sense of a duration within which every sound,

every breath, every movement became a part of the event of the work, and so subjectivity becomes the context of the art event and the event becomes a means for exploring or producing subjectivities.

This points towards a type of performance where the audience create the artwork themselves as they experience it: they become participants. Even attempts to resist this, to passively consume, show choices that means they have engaged with the work. This involvement is a responsibility as much as a gift, many people have a fear of 'audience participation' being coerced into doing something they are not comfortable with, and it is up to the initiator of such involvement to present options, possibilities and openings rather than just a more subtle form of control. One way this Fluxconcert addresses this issue, is by each participating artist handing their own scores over to others and taking instructions from others in turn. In 'For a Fluxus Concert' Ben Vautier reminds us that 'Fluxus is supposed to be amusing' and warns against 'primadonas (sic) hanging on to the stage as long as possible' (Vautier, 1997). Performances at Re:Flux overlap, no-one is centre stage, chance and play are as important as the given text.

In his discussion of the Fluxus event form, Craig Saper speaks of the way Fluxus moved away from "the notion of passing some unadulterated information from the mind of an author, an artist, or a teacher directly to the eyes and ears of a spectator. Instead, participants interact with ideas, playing through possibilities rather than deciding on the meaning of a work once and for all" (Saper, 1998 p.137), placing them in a direct contact with the specificity of this event in this space at this time.

References

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Accessed 22/05/08