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intermedia



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The Dick Higgins Collections at UMBC

Lisa Moren



media

with an essay by **Hannah Higgins** and contributions by **Ina Blom, Ken Friedman,**
Marina Grzanic, Piotr Gwiazda, Timothy Nohe, Kathy O'Dell, Owen Smith, Chris Thompson

Albin O. Kuhn
Library & Gallery
University of Maryland
Baltimore County
2003

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FRONT COVER PHOTOS

*Selection from Piano Album:
Short Pieces 1962–1984*
Dick Higgins
1980

Luxo (detail)
Augusto de Campos
1965

BACK COVER PHOTO

Bean Reading Kit
Alison Knowles
1981

FRONT & BACK ILLUSTRATION

Intermedia Chart
Dick Higgins
Original 1995
Transcribed by Guenet Abraham
2003

INSIDE BACK COVER

i refuse to produce multiples
From *Fluxus Virus Box "Fluxus-mini-museum"*
Dick Higgins
1992

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Lisa Moren

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In 1999, the Visual Arts Department acquired a remarkable collection from the private studio of Dick Higgins for the Special Collections Department at the Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery at University of Maryland, Baltimore County, UMBC. This acquisition inspired Chief Curator Tom Beck to extend a curatorial invitation for an exhibition of this collection residing in the intermedia among sculpture, prints, performance, poetry, and music. This document, along with our public events, includes both Fluxus artists and a new generation of Fluxus, intermedia and interdisciplinary scholars.

We are fortunate to receive funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), whose generous support enabled us to pursue a project of this breadth and scale. We are especially grateful to David Bankcroft, Museum Specialist of the NEA, for his careful guidance and assistance throughout our grant application. Additional support has been provided by the Maryland State Arts Council, the Baltimore County Commission on Arts & Sciences, and the Friends of the Library & Gallery.

We are also grateful for UMBC support from the Dean of Arts & Sciences, the Department of Visual Arts, the Graduate School, and the Humanities Forum.

The enormous task of researching and documenting the contents of this collection making this project possible is thankful to the Dean of the Graduate School Scott Bass and the Designated Research Initiative Funds (DRIF) for their support. I also wish to acknowledge the passion and skill of Cyriaco Lopes Pierera, who photographed and helped organize the on-line archive segment of this project.

We are grateful that the shape of this publication took place under the guidance of Hannah Higgins, Kathy O'Dell, Eugenie

acknowledg-
ments]

Nable, and Rosemary Klein. Rosemary's thoughtful and broad editorial work shaped the content and direction of this publication. For the contents of the exhibition, I wish to acknowledge the energy and counseling of Alison Knowles, Jessica Higgins, Sara Seagull, Larry Miller, Geoffrey Hendricks, Ken Friedman, Barbara Moore, and the Robert Watts Archive.

I wish to thank my many colleagues whose on-going support made this project viable and enjoyable at its many stages: primarily, Vin Grabill and Kathy O'Dell whose blind trust supported the unusual circumstances in which we acquired this collection; John Sturgeon, Franc Nunoo-Quarco, Larry Wilt, and Steve Bradley whose faith continuously backed this project through its many phases, and Guenet Abraham, whose expertise applied to the design of this catalog was both valuable and invaluable. I also appreciate the guidance of my colleagues Tim Sparklin, Alex Nathan, and especially Peggy Re for her advice throughout many project phases, particularly in navigating funding procedures. Tom Moore has graciously offered enthusiastic support and ideas throughout the project, especially introducing it to a wide audience. Timothy Nohe has generously supported this project in many ways, especially offering his conceptual and technical skills in the audio portion of the exhibition. This project is grateful to be enriched by Art Johnson, Provost. Thanks to Jack Protsko, and the many people in their respective offices, for the Freshman Year Seminar initiative, which among other things, makes the opportunity possible for our students to participate in an unforgettable live performance presentation of historical Fluxus events. I also wish to thank Melissa Parris for her extraordinary professional level of performance and dedication, and I thank the on-going generosity of John Beck and the skills of Drew Alfgren and all the students and staff of the Special Collections Department and Library Gallery. Finally, I wish to thank Tom Beck for his faith and invitation that allowed me to expand the boundaries of my own research into this subject and curatorial platform, and I wish to highlight the energy of Cynthia Wayne, Curator of the Albin O. Kuhn Library Gallery. Cynthia facilitated each stage of this project, ensuring superb organization. Her experience provided knowledgeable guidance that was imperative at every stage for a successful outcome. In her true positive spirit, Cynthia never ceased to support this endeavor, even in its most expansive moments, and she at all times dedicatedly established a professional atmosphere both creative and enjoyable.

Most significantly, I wish to thank the soul of this project,

Alison Knowles, who invited me to work on an acquisition of her recently deceased husband. Through Alison, I have learned that her everyday life, her work, and her generosity are a single gesture. Rarely do artists today embody their ideas so fully into their personal lives. She has taught me the distinction between those who have learned conceptual art through training and those who have bravely fought for its definition and acceptance. Through Alison, I hope this project will inspire future generations to understand that the meaning of art is truly inseparable from life.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to Dick Higgins. He was a man who gave more to inspire the people and the institutions

Tom Beck

Enter[Inter]Media

On a sunny fall afternoon in 1999, Assistant Professor Lisa Moren, newly arrived the previous year at UMBC, invited Dr. Larry Wilt, Director of the Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery, to view a collection of Dick Higgins and Fluxus materials. Dr. Wilt agreed and asked me to join him, and we soon entered a Fine Arts Building classroom where many prints, publications, objects, concrete poems, music scores, and other materials were spread across tables. Moren had brought the material on behalf of Alison Knowles, widow of Higgins, to explore the possibility of a UMBC acquisition. Excited by the extraordinary collection, we immediately supported the acquisition that has since been generally referred to as the "Higgins Collection."

Acquisition of the Higgins Collection was not the first time that materials that transgressed art forms had been accessioned into Special Collections. The 1976 Library Gallery exhibition titled *Eye Music* provided the opportunity to acquire material that was described by guest curator Stuart Smith as "musical scores that functioned not only as musical notation, but also as visual art."¹ Scores such as those by John Cage (one of Dick Higgins's mentors) and Herbert Brün were included in the exhibition, and several of Brün's scores were purchased for Special Collections.² These works are complex graphics primarily based on spirals, vortexes, and patterns, but, most of all, they are traces left by a process rather than a result in themselves. Cage and Brün share with Higgins an equal regard for structured sound as well as noise, and silence, characteristics that were evident in the performance of Higgins's works at UMBC in 1980. Higgins visited UMBC to present a poetry reading and to witness a performance of three of his piano compositions by Paul Hoffmann.³

preface]

1. Stuart Smith, *Eye Music* (Maryland: Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, 1976).

2. The Brün scores held in Special Col-

lections are: *There, Two, Both,* and *All*.

3. The program *Music UMBC* was performed in the Fine Arts Recital Hall on Wednes-

day, May 7, 1980 at 8:00 p.m. Included were a poetry reading by Higgins and the performance by Paul Hoffmann of three Higgins's piano compositions, including *Sparks for Piano*, *Piano Sonata #1*, and *Haydn in the Forest*.

As can be seen, a long-standing and solid basis existed for the Higgins Collection to enter into Special Collections holdings; in addition, in a larger perspective, having and displaying the Higgins Collection recognizes the radical transformations occurring in the arts from the 1950s onward. Artists chafing under the limitations of tradition preferred unfettered exploration of temporality and performance as well as experimentation with new forms and materials. Many would say that art was redirected from the production of consumer objects toward being an entirely new means for conveying ideas.

INTERMEDIA: The Dick Higgins Collection is the result of the efforts of many, but it would not have been possible without the initiatives taken by Assistant Professor Lisa Moren. Not only did she facilitate the acquisition of the collection, but she also conceived the project and convinced us to undertake it in the Library Gallery. Her dedication and insight, creativity and enthusiasm, and devotion and energy have brought new focus on the world of Higgins, Fluxus, and Something Else Press. The curatorial selection and the arrangement of the exhibition and this magnificent publication attest to her sensitivity and knowledge as an artist and scholar of art and media.

We are very thankful for the support given to this project from diverse sources. Our profound gratitude is extended to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for awarding a generous grant to the project. The NEA also supported our exhibition and publication *Typographically Speaking: The Art Of Matthew Carter* last year, so having an NEA grant for the Higgins project expresses great confidence in our ability to produce miracles two years in a row.

The Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) has our great appreciation for its continuous support of our projects. The programs of the Library Gallery are supported in part by an arts program grant from MSAC, an agency of the State of Maryland and the NEA. We especially appreciate the assistance of Carla Dunlap, MSAC's Visual Arts Program Director; she has given us untiring and friendly advice regarding our grant applications. We are also grateful to the Friends of the Library & Gallery for their strong support of the Library Gallery, to Dr. G. Rickey Welch, Dean, College of Arts & Sciences, for ongoing support of this project, and to Franc Nunoo-Quarco, Chair, Department of Visual Arts, for his many contributions to the exhibitions and programs of the Library Gallery. Thanks go to Dr. Larry Wilt for his continuous and unyielding support and for his vision of the Gallery as an integral part of the institution; to John Sturgeon, former Chair of the Visual Arts Department, for supporting the significant research effort that went into this project; and to Vin Grabill, former Interim Chair of the Visual Arts Department, for supporting the acquisition of the Higgins Collection. Generous support has also come from the Humanities Forum. Thank you also to John Beck, Drew Alfgren, Hieu Truong, and Miho Kashima of our Special Collections staff.

We are especially proud of the accompanying publication which we anticipate will fill a significant gap in the literature of intermedia. The contribution of the writers whose essays appear in this publication are especially appreciated. We also extend our

thanks to our editor Rosemary Klein, whose insightfulness on the topic of intermedia and inexhaustible attention to every detail has added a valuable dimension to the book. Finally, we thank Guenet Abraham, Assistant Professor of the Visual Arts Department, who has successfully conveyed a very unwieldy topic through her elegant design. Her graceful, captivating typographical design grabs us and leads us through a fascinating, memorable intermedia journey.

Thanks also go to Cynthia Wayne, Curator of Exhibitions, who has through her dedication, devotion, and skills ensured the magic that keeps the Library Gallery and its programs happening and to Melissa Parris, her gallery assistant, whose skilled assistance and enthusiastic dedication are invaluable to the gallery's accomplishments.

Finally, I would like to express our gratitude to Alison Knowles, whose involvement with this project at all stages has been enthusiastic and supportive and whose generosity in bringing the Dick Higgins Collection to UMBC has made this exciting project *INTERMEDIA* a reality.

Tom Beck *Chief Curator*

“The Wind is a Medium of the Sky”

Higgins is a big man with big ideas. I told him once ‘you’re setting out to recapitulate the whole of history,’ and damned if he hasn’t nearly done it. He has produced a mass of works and unnamables. They and he spill into each other; they step on toes. He can get away with leading a crowd of artists in health exercises to the tune of a 1910 scratchy record; he can give a lecture at a picnic; he can shave his head as a concert piece — and make us believe in it, absolutely... Higgins’s talent is his irreverence. — Allan Kaprow¹

Richard Carter Higgins (1938-1998) coined the term “intermedia” to describe an emerging international and interdisciplinary direction in art in his landmark essay of the same name published in the first issue of his *Something Else Newsletter*. “I would like to suggest that the use of intermedia is more or less universal throughout the fine arts, since continuity rather than categorization is the hallmark of our new mentality.”²

Dick Higgins was already well known as a major force in the defining of Fluxus during its lively years (1962-1965) when that group professed that change was the only constant and that the highest form of experience was the merging of art with ordinary life. Intermedia, however, was something else. Intermedia referred to art that fell conceptually between established media and that used materials and methods at the service of an idea. Intermedia included works of which Higgins had first-hand experience, such as Happenings, environmental pieces, installation, performance, and Fluxus. Within a year of Higgins’s “Intermedia” article, this term that proposed a radical new way for transforming the categories of traditional art was adopted as a title and organizing princi-

1. Dick Higgins, *Jefferson’s Birthday/Postface* (New York: Something Else Press, 1964), liner notes, dust jacket.

2. Dick Higgins, “Intermedia,” *Something Else Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (February 1966): 3.

ple by academic programs and government art agencies, such as New York State Council on the Arts.³ Much later, in 1999, Martha Wilson noted that “ [T]he term ‘intermedia’...popularized time-based performance, video, film, installation and published multiple forms that artists and the public take for granted today.”⁴

From Origin to Contemporary

Higgins found the term in an essay “Lecture III: On Spenser” by Samuel Coleridge (1812). Coleridge writes that “Narrative allegory is distinguished from mythology as reality from symbol; it is, in short, the proper intermedium between person and personification.”⁵

Coleridge constructs the word “intermedium” to compare Edmund Spenser’s (16th century) traditional use of medieval allegory with William Shakespeare’s (17th century) superior sense of timelessness in his work.⁶

Intermedium itself is likely the compound of intermediate and medium. Archaically, medium refers to the influencing or intervening agencies of the environment. “The wind is a medium of the sky.”⁷ Later, medium was used to describe a means or instrument by which something is conveyed or accomplished (words are a medium of expression). Today, of course, medium additionally is used to mean a tool or material for artistic expression or a means of mass communication, such as radio, television, journalism, or the Internet. Media, the plural form of medium, began in the 1920s to be used as a single collective noun, and that use included the introduction of the plural term medias.⁸

Intermediate as an adjective refers to a position between two points, persons, or things; the term is related to an intermediary, who acts between two people. An intermediate agent in chemistry is a temporary substance derived during a natural action or chemical process. Thus, it is not surprising that we find by 1610 the term intermedium used by chemists (and since 1611 by theaters to describe the interval between the acts of a play or musical).⁹ In 1756, for example, C. Lucas used the compound term when he wrote: “Oils [are] insoluble in water, without some proper intermedium.”¹⁰ Given Coleridge’s interests, it is not a stretch to introduce the chemical etymology of intermedium to this discussion. Coleridge was quite good friends with the famous chemist and lecturer Sir Humphry Davy; together they had planned to set up a chemical laboratory. Also, Coleridge claimed that to renew his stock of metaphors he attended Davy’s lectures.¹¹

Within the last decade, the term intermedia has expanded internationally to refer to programs on and works in new media, site-specific art, interactive art, installation, new genres, and

3. Alison Knowles, in discussion with the author, August 10, 2003.

4. Ken Friedman and others, “FLUXLIST,” <http://www.fluxus.org/FLUXLIST/fa>

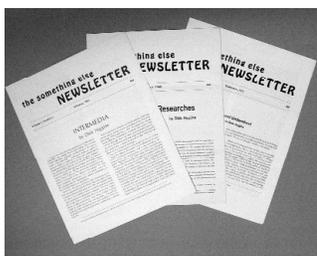
q.htm. This site officially appeared on April 19, 1996 with Dick Higgins as one of its launchers.

5. Thomas Middleton Rayson ed., *Co-*

leridge’s Miscellaneous Criticism (London: Constable & Co., 1936), 33.

6. *Ibid.*, 32.

7. *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, 2nd Edition, Stuart Berg Flexner, ed. (New York:



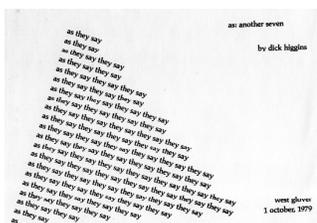
[2] 1

The Something Else Newsletter



[2] 2

LUXO
Augusto de Campos
1965



[2] 3

as they say
Dick Higgins
Print
From *Le Point d'Ironie n.5*
1979

performance art. Currently, there is a particular emphasis on the media affix, due to the popularity of sonic, video, and computer media in the arts. In North America, there are over a dozen colleges and universities that offer a BFA and/or MFA in Intermedia, including University of Florida, Arizona State University, University of North Carolina, Mills College, Pacific Northwest College of Art (PCA), and the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design. It is no accident that intermedia is used in Central and Eastern Europe, including former Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, and Budapest, Hungary, for contemporary projects and programs. During the emergence of Fluxus, performance art, conceptual art, and intermedial concepts, these countries experienced a short-lived, relatively free opportunity to explore contemporary art. With the appearance of free democratic governments in the 1990s, the artists of these countries returned to the previous avant-garde for points from which to proceed. For instance, during the Hungarian revolution of 1989, students at the Hungarian Art Academy revolted against the rigid, outdated academy backed by politically appointed professors and that led to the founding of a rudimentary media department named Intermedia by Peternák Miklós and Janos Sugar. Miklós, also Director of C3, backed by the Soros Center for Contemporary Art, has collaborated with Hull Time Based Arts, United Kingdom and ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany.¹² He used "Intermedia" as the title for his in-depth program that described the contemporary moment of Hungarian art through on-going conference series, exhibitions, and catalogs.¹³

Appropriately, intermedia has been linked both with conceptual art and made distinct from it. For instance, the University of California, Berkeley, The Walker Art Center; Getty Research Institute; Franklin Furnace; and others have collaborated to produce "Conceptual and Intermedia Arts Online," a project which addresses the challenges of documenting and preserving non-traditional collections of art.¹⁴ The reference to intermedia within the digital and electronic art community represents a dichotomy of thought that exists within that community. On the one hand, there are hardware and software projects that are liberally technical and require high levels of programming and electronic craft. Within this category, works often refer to the language, history, and theory within either the digital or the scientific realm, and artists, such as Eduardo Kac or Lynn Hershman, may or may not employ the technical skill themselves. On the other hand, there are artists whose methods may or may not employ a highly technical component but whose context and form fuses with other media, such as performance, poetry, drawing, installation, sound art, etc. This category would include a range from @rtmark and Nina Katchadourian to Critical Art Ensemble of conceptual artists, who are working intermedi-

Random House, 1993).

8. Ibid.

9. Oxford University Press, "Oxford English Dictionary On-line," <http://oed.com/>.

10. Ibid.

11. David Knight, *Humphry Davy: Science and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 53.

12. Intermedia Department of the Hungarian Academy of Fine Art, <http://www.heise.de/tp/deutsch/pop/topi>

c_0/4015/g1.html.

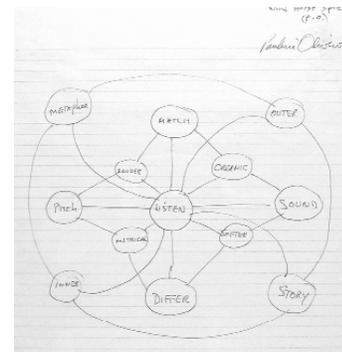
13. Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts Intermedia Department, <http://intermedia.c3.hu>.

14. Richard Rinehart, "Conceptual and Intermedia Arts Online: The Challenge of Documenting and Presenting

ally with technology. Furthermore, thousands of contemporary artists have adopted the term intermedia to refer to their own working methodology, especially when they produce works that have a digital or mass media component. The reason these artists have adopted the term intermedia is precisely due to the fact that many contemporary artists are working conceptually and often, though not exclusively, with digital tools. An example is Critical Art Ensemble's Nomadmedia in which the term intermedial art describes their work that fuses performance, biology, and corporate tools.¹⁵

However, problems arise when artists whose output is strictly within the digital box, such as artists working in hypertext¹⁶ or hypermedia, assert that their research is within an intermedia framework. In 1965, philosopher and visionary Ted Nelson coined the terms "hypertext" (hypertext was later adopted by Tim Berners-Lee of CERN when that company implemented a coding language for the World Wide Web) and "hypermedia." Hypertext referred to non-sequential writing, which Nelson believed was closer to human thought than linear writing. Nelson's vision was to manifest a deeply interconnected literary source database. His primary inspiration came from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan," cited as the most intertextual poem in the history of literature.¹⁷ Nelson imagined that all of thought was "intertwined" and that, perhaps, all of literature could be hypertextually linked through a database network similar to an endless footnoting system. "Let me introduce the word hypertext to mean a body of written or pictorial material interconnected in such a complex way that it could not conveniently be presented or represented on paper."¹⁸ Although Higgins and Nelson both advocated a similar new conceptual space and both were inspired by Coleridge, neither were aware that their theories were simultaneously coming into being.¹⁹

Hypertext pertains to multiple gestures that are interconnected, while the use of intermedia concerns a single gesture conceptually existing between medias. Active contributors to digital conferences, such as SIGGRAPH and International Society on Electronics Arts (ISEA)²⁰ and journals such as *Leonardo* (MIT Press), argue for a "digital intermedia [that] is the high-level process that corresponds to the low-level truism: all media is data, a single substance."²¹ This synesthesia concept differs significantly from Higgins's proposal because media is reduced to a single digital paradigm. Even digitizing analog medias, such as drawing, sound, and video performance, exist for the intermedia purists as an interpretation that is more multi-media than intermedia. Furthermore, this interpretation seems to negate what Higgins advocated as the conceptual structures between medias, a view which is quite distinct from the craft of programming structures used in digital media. It is little wonder than that Simon Penney argues for a more



[1] 4
Wind Horse Spiel
Pauline Oliveros
Ink on paper
n.d.

15. Rebecca Schneider, "The Critical Art Ensemble Nomadmedia," *The Drama Review* 44:4 T168 (Winter 2000), <http://mitpress.mit.edu/journals/DRAM/44-4/abs/Schneider.html>.
16. WebnoX Corporation, "HyperDictionary," <http://HyperDictionary.com/>. This on-line dictionary defines intermedia as a "hypertext system developed by a research group at IRIS (Brown University)."
17. Dr. James C. McKusick (Coleridge scholar and former English Department chair, UMBC), in discussion with the

in-depth understanding of intermedial works by artists working in technology:

A vast untapped knowledge base for the development of interactive media exists in the corpus of Happening, Environment, Installation, Performance, Fluxus artwork of the last thirty years. These radical, experimental genres took the user interface and interaction as their subject matter before anyone thought in such terms....Not only is the cognitive science/computer science community generally unaware of this knowledge base, but the general tendency for art research to preempt technological problems remains largely unremarked.²²

Paradigms and Publishing

Higgins developed the foundation for the concepts he held throughout his life in the late 1950s after studying literature at Yale and Columbia and becoming a pioneering voice in the emerging performance scene. He wrote highly experimental plays, such as *Stacked Deck*, and performed in Allan Kaprow's first Happening - *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*.²³ (Happenings were "things that happened" with performers creating a collage of visual events.) In 1957-9, John Cage's influential experimental composition class at the New School for Social Research in New York brought individuals together who became a seminal force in the evolution of performance art. Artist Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, composer Richard Maxfield, chemist George Brecht, painter Larry Poons, and poet Jackson Mac Low all met in Cage's class and were exposed to his use of chance operation methods (rolling the dice or counting traffic patterns), the I-Ching, and indeterminacy when composing music. With this approach, the composer's taste could be abolished, thus liberating music from the artist's ego in favor of a more universal music. One of the outcomes of this course is what became known as the "event score." These were simple text-based directions prompting an action on the part of a reader or performer. From Higgins's *Danger Music* series, the May 1962 event score *Danger Music Number 17* reads simply:

Scream! Scream!
Scream! Scream!
Scream! Scream!

The significance of Cage's influence on his students was precisely due to the fact that they were not exclusively musical but came from a variety of disciplines. These students applied Cage's composition techniques, such as chance operations and indeterminacy, to their particular disciplines, especially once they began working in publishing, gallery, and performance venues. Higgins saw that these techniques offered "independence"²⁴ from the traditions of modern art, if they were extended and expanded in order to create a systemic theory of art. Higgins recognized that the



[1] 5

The Store
From *Store Days*
Claes Oldenburg
Something Else Press
1968
In 1961-2 pop artist Claes Oldenburg ran a lower east side of Manhattan store, which included a performance space named Ray Gun Theater.

18. Ted Nelson, "Project Xanadu," <http://xanadu.com/>.
19. Ted Nelson, e-mail message to author, June 2001.

20. SIGGRAPH is an annual computer and animation conference with an attendance of thirty to forty thousand corporate vendors and computer re-

searchers. The International Society on Electronic Arts (ISEA) is a smaller annual conference that focuses on fine art researchers.

21. Jack Hertz, "Synesthesia" (conference notes from SIGGRAPH 2001).
22. Simon Penny, *Critical Issues in Electronic Media* (New

innovative significance was in constructing the paradigm and not in the execution of the ready-made structure or event. This would be the foundation for his own intermedial work. For Higgins, intermedia intermingles ideas and inquiries and alters meaning by the exchange of paradigms from one media to another. For instance, when does a theatrical event “act” like a musical composition or a poem “act” like a painting? *Haydn in the Forest* by Dick Higgins (see fig. 6) suggests that the graphical image of trees on the score might be treated as silences or a combination of chords, silences, tempos, etc. During these altered silences, we demand both the silent moments between the audible experience of the piano and the graphical experience of the trees in order to mentally leap into imagining a real forest’s sights and sounds. In one way, *Haydn in the Forest* is an analysis of a musical score, and in another way, it is a graphical piece. But for the artist as the provider of theory, these fusions are of a moment, an obvious space outside both music and graphics. For Higgins specifically, these fusions are not the gentle cross-sensories of synesthesia. Rather, his fusions clash into each other and alarm our sense of boundaries with vivid simplicity.

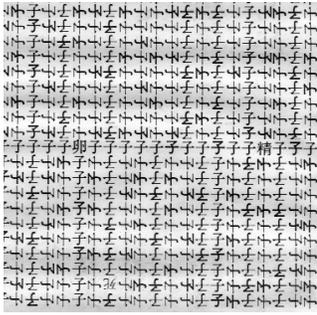
Higgins’s own publishing ventures began with a falling out between Higgins and Fluxus organizer George Maciunas. When Higgins founded the Something Else Press (SEP) in 1964, SEP truly was something other than Fluxus. Prior to his Fluxus collaborations, Higgins had forged a synthesis of art concepts, and when he formed his own press, he mandated that it was always to publish what was not the “going thing”²⁵ and was continuously to publish something else. Similar to Fluxus, the nature of “something else” would always be in transition. Most significantly, in conjunction with his use of the term intermedia, Higgins would through his establishment of a gallery and his publication of books, newsletters, and pamphlets espouse and promote a theory for a long-term, worldwide direction in art. In publishing archival trade books by artists, Higgins initiated a concept that even today is unprecedented. With cutting-edge source material that included experimental content and layouts, SEP books ensured that, among the shelves of popular trade books, the intermedial voices of artists, composers, choreographers, poets, and theorists would be not only accessible but ordinary. Higgins further framed his mission within history by republishing influential forces that had helped shape his theories, including six obscure and out-of-print works by Gertrude Stein and *Dada Almanach* by Richard Huelsenbeck.

Chance and Concepts

By 1965, Fluxus affiliate Henry Flynt had already

24. Ibid., *Jefferson’s Birthday/Postface*, 51. | Something Else Press, but he states a clear position of the work he will support.

25. Ibid., 24-27. Higgins’s reference to the “going thing” predates



IN 6

Individual
Seiichi Niikuni
Pen and ink
Signed "For Dick the great"
1976

coined the term "concept art" and Higgins had, in the period of a decade, become well-versed in the international movements of Nouveau Réaliste (France and Italy), Gruppe Zaj (Spain), DéColl/age (Germany), Happenings (USA), Gutai Group (Japan), Viennese Actionism (Switzerland), and Fluxus (Germany, Scandinavia, New York and later Fluxus West). At the time that these international concept artists were emerging and working across mediums and disciplines, Higgins wrote his seminal article "Intermedia," describing and defining the interdisciplinary protocol of a new direction in art that delineated a theoretical and material break with the recent past. Higgins saw the interconnectedness among these emerging forms as allowing a unique central expression between gesture and thought, without favoring a specific art medium. While previous art movements had been based on abstraction, expressionism, the release of the unconscious, and a genius's intuition, by the 1960s, many artists had abandoned these theories, while others had translated these notions into life-like formats of ordinary procedures that were concrete, scientific, and minimal, including methods based upon Zen influences that anyone could perform or produce. This elevated a perception of a natural world where art objects and materials emerged as resonant artifacts and where the artist's persona was subdued within that world. Owen Smith explains:

In the pamphlet *Chance-Imagery*, Fluxus artist George Brecht uses the word "chance" as an intermedium when he describes Jackson Pollock's material evidence of the unconscious

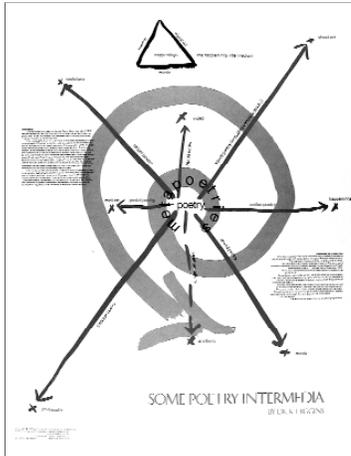
The study of Zen...had taught Cage that rationality gives a false impression of the world as static, for Zen holds that the world is a united web of interrelationships that are in a state of constant flux and change...Zen metaphysics also extends to notions of the self and led Cage to a critique of the notion of the artist as genius. Zen looks at the individual not as an isolated entity, but as parts of an essentially integrated whole.²⁶

expressed through the utilization of automatic methods. Brecht views Pollack's paintings as "...much less manifestations of one of a group of techniques for releasing the unconscious...than...of a single, integrated use of chance as a means of unlocking the deepest possible grasp of nature in its broadest sense."²⁷ Here the method of chance becomes the intermedium between the personification of an allegorical Pollack and the corporeal work of the post-Cagean artists. This relates to Brecht's grasp of chance (borrowed from Cage and Pollack) as a technique which puts ordinary artists in the service of nature's phenomena.

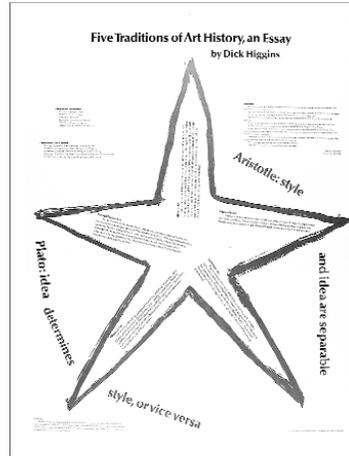
Higgins explained that Coleridge used the term intermedium "in its exact contemporary sense."²⁸ He says that "you can see its constituent parts hopefully adding up and fusing into an ar-

26. Owen F. Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* (San Diego, CA: San Diego State University Press, 1998).

27. George Brecht, *Chance-Imagery* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), 6.



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[1] 8

ticulate whole... you can use an intermedial approach to an unfamiliar work of art ... and you don't have to be puzzled by it."²⁹ In Higgins's poster essay *5 Traditions of Art History*, he utilizes the five points of a star as an example of an intermedial approach in which an art work may be understood by any of five analytical entry points he offers: expressive, exemplativist (referring to paradigms), mimetic, pragmatic, and subjective. However, a spectator's intermedial analysis is distinct from creating an intermedial work of art. Higgins explains, "The artist can set out to do something that is intermedial or you can use it as a spectator."³⁰

Therefore, intermedium is a tool, and intermedia is a theoretical position. As a theoretical position, intermedia articulates points between, among, and above the genres, rigid categories, and tools solidified by the institutions of culture. Both Coleridge and Higgins fused visual and sonic methods to position their work outside the conventions of their literary canons. In Samuel Coleridge's handwritten works, he often visually highlighted handwritten letters to emphasize their phonetic rhythm. In the onomatopoeic Coleridge line "I skimmed the smooth thin stone along thy breast," James McKusick notes that "we can see how "the repetition of 'S' sounds echoes the skipping of the stone, while the words 'smooth thin stone' (three long syllables) serve to slow the line and thus to mimic the way the stone lingers on the surface of the water, refusing to sink."³¹ When describing twentieth-century poetry, Higgins experiences this type of visual-sonic-literary form as intermedial in his event score *Danger Music Number 17* (Scream!). The piercing sound of the long "e" in the words screech, shriek, and scream seem audibly coupled to the ambiguously endless syllable of the word cry (cri in French). In fact, scream, screech, shriek are all imitative forms of the Old English "skrei" (and krei) a word echoing the sound of a number of birds, including the crow and raven. Before giving a

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Some Poetry Intermedia
Dick Higgins
Offset print
1976

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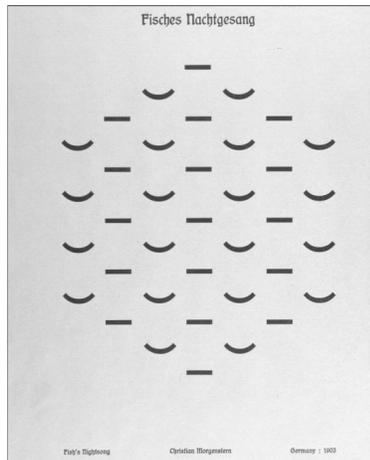
Five Traditions of Art History
Dick Higgins
Offset print
1976

28. Dick Higgins, *Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 23.

29. Larry Miller, *Interview with Dick Higgins*, © Larry Miller 1992/2003, video, Hi8 format, 2:25 min.

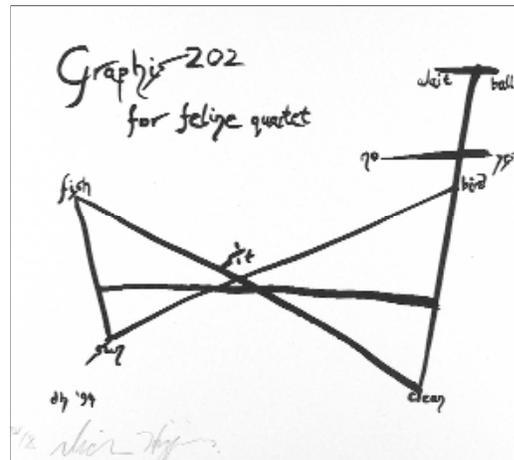
30. Ibid.

31. James C. McKusick, "Singing of Mount Abora: Coleridge's Quest for Linguistic Origins" in *Critical Essays on Samuel Taylor Coleridge*,



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[1] 9
Fisches Nachtgesang
(Fish's Night Song)
 Christian Morgenstern
 1903
 Reproduction by Glenn
 Todd
 From *Shaped Poetry*
 The Arion Press
 1981



[1] 10

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Graphis 202 for feline quartet
 Dick Higgins
 Artist proof IV/X
 1997

[1] "The Wind is a Medium of the Sky"

scholarly examination of *Danger Music Number 17*, Hannah Higgins delightfully portrays the primitive experience of her father's performance when she describes witnessing *Danger Music Number 17* as a five-year-old girl: "The screams have no words, yet we know he can speak...The sound weakens as he exhausts himself, giving way to intermittent hisses, squeaks, and occasional rusty screams...The animals, like the people in that room, wait and wonder when the peace will be disturbed again."³²

With his broad knowledge of the humanities, Higgins consistently applied a diachronic analysis to the work of his Fluxus, Happening, and Intermedia colleagues. He also identified avant-garde elements in classical literature that seemed to foretell modern techniques. Higgins suggests that the term media refers to genres or categories of the arts that emerged during the Renaissance. However, it is romantic as well as utopian to envision a pre-categorical humanistic moment when ideas were an "intertwined" Tower of Babel, or an ancient shriek of crows and cry of ravens. These institutional categories have always existed. They have always been in flux, and the use of intermedia has always been possible — and has always been shifting. It is precisely at the moment that any genres cease to communicate their inquiries with each other that the possibility arises for the use of the intermedia. Intermedia does not judge the quality of an artwork; it is an opportunity for a way of working that has always existed. Intermedia happens to be a central tendency in the later half of the twentieth century.

What we've done, I hope, is that in the last part of this century we've made a revolution in the subject matter as profound as the revolution in form in the beginning of the century. By that I don't mean simply using unusual subjects, I mean we've come to give them different roles within the art that we're using.³³

32. Hannah B. Higgins, "Critical Refluxions or Fluxscribnotes by the daughter of Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles" in *The New*

Art Examiner March, 1994, 18-19.
 33. *Ibid.*, Miller, *Interview*.

Eleven Snapshots of Dick Higgins

I suppose I'm part Emerson or Thoreau, and part Davey Crockett. For all my delight in other cultures and languages, my pleasure in digging gold nuggets out of bypassed selves, I'm still a cracker barrel yankee at heart. I've whored, seduced and gambled. I've been a precocious brat and a sedate businessman. I've been insane and sick. I've had enough fancy dinners to know that the best food is food for thought. I've worked in factories and universities enough to know that there's really precious little difference between them. I've tried to be a saint and found that wasn't me. — Dick Higgins ¹

We called him Pa or sometimes Pui (pronounced Poo-ee), Puter (an adaptation of the German Mutter), or Dick. As children, my twin sister Jessica and I (b. 1964) heard stories about our father's life that might shed some light on Dick Higgins, the apparently self-contradictory artist. In addition to those stories, I have relied on conversations with Dick's sister Lisa Null and my mother Alison Knowles as well as his unpublished autobiography to fill in the details that he thought were either too insignificant to mention or that had been forgotten in the decades since then. This essay is not written as an art historian, though I am one. My expert's view of Fluxus can be found in my other books and articles on Fluxus. The context offered here seemed to be an occasion that required something else – something more lifelike, more conversational, more in the spirit of the day-to-day man that I knew as my father. These snapshots suggest some of the many dimensions of this man as we move forward and back in time.

As I knew him, he was 6' 2" tall and about 220 lbs., a large man by any standard. He sweated a lot, wore high-water pants (often white), and usually had some form of bauble around his neck. In the 1960s and '70s, these changed from neckties to

| 1. Dick Higgins, *A Life* (unpublished autobiographical manuscript), 1980, The Estate of Dick Higgins, 242.

wooden or turquoise necklaces and finally to those leather neckties with metal tips and a single bead worn by American cowboys. He smelled of garlic most of the time, even after a good slug of Listerine, but he was always clean. He often wore a moustache. His lips were full, and his table manners impeccable, except that he could clean a plate in a minute. The family was merciless about this last habit for good reason. He had stomach ulcers for the last twenty-five years of his life. He claimed he picked up the gobbling habit at boarding school, which brings us to the beginning.

I: The Family

In the 1920s and '30s, the Higgins homestead was a mansion surrounded by flowers and especially rose beds. These were prizewinning with the honors bestowed upon the home's mistress Clara Higgins. Each day she picked off the aphids and dropped them gingerly into a jar of kerosene. Manners were formal. Remnants of Victorianism clung fast to high society in the bustling New England manufacturing town of Worcester, Massachusetts, where the Higgins family was based. Clara's life was busy: a profound sense of social responsibility demanded her time as a volunteer as did carefully orchestrated social obligations, and her roses and horticulture.

Dick would recall a Friday afternoon concert of the nearby Boston Symphony, which he attended with his grandmother in about 1945, when he was seven. "There were surely twenty ... aging, black-dressed dowagers, their eyes closed, being ravished by the music...breasts heaving...I decided then and there that I was for eyes-open music."² A small child in a scratchy suit, he sat, bewildered, beside them in his grandmother's universe. In later life, he loved to imitate them. Closing his eyes, sighing wistfully, and cocking his head, he'd gasp in feigned ecstasy and laugh.

But this caricature mightn't have been quite fair. This Clara Higgins, "who wanted to live a life from the old southern gentry," in Dick's words, also "studied piano with a student of Franz Liszt, and some of my earliest memories are of her playing Mozart."³ She was, in fact, quite accomplished as a lay musician, studying throughout her life. In addition, having suffered post-partum depression, she developed an active interest in modern psychiatry, so much so that she would be chosen as Sigmund Freud's dinner partner when he came to Clark University on his one trip to the United States. No mere socialite, she was also an effective advocate and trustee at the Worcester Center for Crafts, where people of all stations had access to art education and was, likewise, very active in the Garden Club of America and at the nearby Silver Hill psychiatric hospital.

| 2. Ibid., 8
3. Ibid., 2

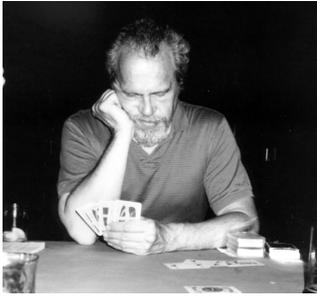
The Higgins family owned and operated a steel plant named Worchester Pressed Steel. The company held the patent on press-molded metal that could be used for tank parts, helmets and mess kits, as it was in World Wars I and II. Unlike other industrialists during the Great Depression and at great personal cost, the owner of the company, Dick's grandfather John Woodman Higgins did not release workers to stem the flow of assets out of the company coffers. Of similarly social consciousness, John's son (Dick's father) Carter Chapin Higgins would later strike with workers against the family, as he was learning his way through the company.

The family traced its roots back to an Englishman Richard Higgins, who had come to the United States in 1633 and after whom Dick was named. The family genealogy *Richard Higgins and his Descendants* includes amazing details of the lives of the family, making due note of its unorthodox strain, like the "sailor Yankee cousin who ... shipwrecked near Mauritius, became a devout Muslim and founded a mudresseh."⁴ John Woodman Higgins was likewise prone to such marvelous idiosyncrasy. In 1931, he built a glass and steel museum adjacent to the factory. The building's form resembled a medieval castle with sheer walls and narrow windows. This modern medieval castle the Worchester Pressed Steel Museum was later renamed the Higgins Armory Museum and held the largest private collection of armor in America. John Woodman Higgins could be found sometimes in full armor, distributing candy to children or simply walking about on the street near the museum or near his home, which housed a significant part of the collection. He was a kind of living exhibit extended into the streets of Worchester.

Dick's father Carter, on the other hand, had wanted to be an architectural designer of prefabricated housing but instead studied economics at Yale and Cambridge and returned to Worchester to run the family business in 1939. He was a deeply religious and socially conscious man, a deacon in the church, and a pacifist who registered as a conscientious objector until Pearl Harbor. His eye for art was excellent, and he built up a small but fine collection that included a Georges Roualt and, in the 1950s, Leon Feininger and Franz Klein. Carter would introduce Dick to much modern music in his own failed attempts to understand it. Put briefly, this was a society family, but one with some fascinating quirks. Grandfather might be found strolling the streets of Worchester in full body armor, while Clara, his wife, hosted a proper tea one day and volunteered her time the next, and the son invested in extremely modern culture.

Dickie, as his parents called him, was born in Jesus Pieces, England, on the ides of March, 1938. His parents Katherine Bigelow Higgins and Carter Chapin Higgins spent a year there before returning to the family homestead in Worchester. The Bigelows

| 4. Ibid., 4.



[2] 1

Bridge

Photograph by Jessica Higgins

c. 1994

Courtesy Jessica Higgins

were a literary family of Calvinist ministers and missionaries. Katherine's mother Elisabeth MacDonald Bigelow, a.k.a. "Granán," ran a series of theatre schools in New York City and frequently sang concerts in New York. Sinclair Lewis had once proposed marriage to this fascinating career woman. Katherine, or Kitsy as she was often called, was deeply intellectual as well; she regularly wrote poetry and read it to her son. The family was convinced Dick was a prodigy. As he was fond of saying, his first word was "hypotenuse."

II: Youth

The maternal grandmother Granán played a formative role in Dick's early life during her frequent visits to Worcester. Most importantly, she generated in him a love of theatre and the arts as a vocation, not an avocation, as well as a transcendentalist sense of "nature as the hand of god."⁵ Upon her death, she left Dick a bible with a quote in it from the 119th Psalm that read "The word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."⁶ I think he took this quite literally. He remained close to the Episcopal Church throughout his life, periodically contributing to discussions at St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church in local Barrytown, New York, where he attended Sunday service in the last decades of his life. In later life he would say he'd have liked to have been a minister. I'm not sure he had the patience for that, although I think he loved using the bible to ask and answer moral and social questions. In his autobiographical notes, Dick wrote, "If I have to pray for help, I do not pray to some favorite saint, I pray to Granán."⁷ She would die in Worcester of cancer in 1946.

Given the intellectual commitment of Granán, perhaps it was predictable that Katherine Bigelow would find life in Worcester among the roses stifling. She and Carter divorced in 1948, when Dick was ten. Nana, as my sister and I called her, would raise a second family with a Hungarian lawyer Nicholas Doman in New York City, providing Dick with two half-brothers, Danny (b. 1953) and Alex (b. 1955). Her studies continued throughout her life. She donated endless time and resources to the American Museum of Natural History and remained a strong intellectual presence for and confidant to Dick until her death in 1991.

Carter remarried as well. His second wife Mary Bechold was a survivor of Auschwitz and Dachau and told stories of concentration camp life that Dick described as both "terrible and strangely beautiful when some act of incredible bravery or generosity was remembered...I decided then and there that I loved the Jewish people as no other besides my own."⁸ Mary's experience exerted an enormous influence on her stepchildren. Dick would give my sister and me the Jewish names of Hannah and Jessica

5. I loved this description when it came up in a fact-finding conversation with Lisa Null on July 24, 2003. It is consistent with my sense of how Dick understood nature.

6. Higgins, *A Life*, 12.

7. *Ibid.*, 12.

when we twins were born in 1964. His sister Lisa (b. 1942) described feeling socially alienated from Worcester society since she saw in their moderate anti-Semitism “the things that had created Auschwitz.”⁹ After having worked for Albert Schweitzer, Dick’s brother Mark (b.1940) died in the Congolese War of Independence in 1960, while he was on his way to Israel to work on a kibbutz.

In summary, all three of Kitsy and Carter’s children were very close to Mary, even though she was “wildly manic-depressive. She could let you in and then turn on you in a rage.”¹⁰ She would commit suicide using sleeping pills in 1965.

III: A Schoolboy’s Laments

The first references to Dick’s complex sexuality appear on the first pages of his unpublished autobiographical notes, when he was five or six years old. He wrote “We played doctor in curious ‘grunt houses,’ piles of furniture piled with blankets and rugs...I found that I liked the girls better than boys as people, mostly, but that the boys’ bodies interested me more.”¹¹ By Dick’s account, he was therefore shipped off to weekly sessions with a child psychologist in Boston. By Lisa’s account, however, the situation was quite a bit more complex than this. He was having trouble at the Bancroft School in Worcester, where he was bored as an early reader and, therefore, prone to outbursts, rages, and disappearances. His parents were informed that he suffered “gender identification” problems; they responded by hiring “male helpers”¹² for their summer vacations in Gloucester, where it was clear that these attendants were there to role model male behavior for the young man. Later, Dick would decide that he was sexually gay, for the most part, but enjoyed women as companions and even, occasionally, sexual partners. But that’s later in our story.

Katherine looked hard for a school that could nurture her precocious and difficult son, who was already writing music and poetry. At eight, Dick was shipped off to Hickory Ridge School in Putney, Vermont. While the separation from his mother, Lisa, and Mark was painful at first, Hickory Ridge became the most congenial educational experience of his childhood. This little school was progressive in the extreme; teachers and students were known to skinny dip for exercise, read together by the fire at night as an English class, and hunt in the woods for living science specimens. Sexual experimentation among the students was tolerated, not punished. Dick would return to Vermont as an adult in 1971 in an effort, I believe, to recapture these times.

Among his friends at the school were Aubie Breton, daughter of the Surrealist poet Andre Breton, who educated him on

| 8. Ibid., 23.
9. Conversation with Null, ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Higgins, *A Life*, 6.
12. Ibid., 18

the life of her father and on Surrealism in New York and Paris. Happy as Dick was to “have friendships that were based on interests in common,” Hickory Ridge lacked discipline, as Carter’s new wife Mary would have it. Dick was removed from the school before eighth grade and sent to Saint Paul’s School, a conservative Episcopal boarding school of appropriately crusty pedigree in Concord, New Hampshire. In this school inhabited by “God’s Frozen People,”¹³ Dick “was proud to be a weirdo.”¹⁴ It was here that he began to write passionately and publicly across disciplines in a manner consistent with his future practice as an artist. Modernist poems in German and English, experimental plays, and literary and musical reviews appeared in *Horae Scholasticae*, the school newspaper, for which he was an editor.

Once, he and a friend wanted to run away. They needed money, and his “weirdo’s” nose for rare books was fine enough for him to seek out good ones from the Saint Paul’s Library, peel off the school markings, and sell them to a rare book dealer in southern New Hampshire. He was expelled and attended Worcester High School, where he had “one of the richest six months of my life. Here I wasn’t a weirdo anymore – I was a brain, instead.”¹⁵ After six months and, according to Dick, a stint in a local, gay motorcycle gang, he returned to St. Paul’s. He graduated in 1955 and after not getting into Harvard begrudgingly started his studies at Yale. Carter had been a football star there in his day as well as a member of the Whiffenpoof singers. Whether real or imagined, Dick felt his family expected the same of him.

IV: Thick Skin

Dick described Yale as “An education annex to a country club.”¹⁶ He simply didn’t feel a part of the social order of that school but not for lack of effort. In addition to a full course load, he was active in the Dramatic Association, which attracted a few gay students, joined summer stock theatre, and hosted a radio program of new music that aired John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Virgil Thompson, and others. This extraordinary level of activity taxed Dick psychologically and physically. In 1957, he “triggered an escape mechanism,” stole some books, and tried to peddle them as he had at St. Paul’s.

He was caught. Carter was notified and, rightly reading the symptoms of a nervous breakdown, took him to Silver Hill, the psychiatric hospital in New Canaan, Connecticut, where Clara was an active advocate for the mentally ill. Dick remained there for the winter of 1957-8. On that first visit, he described the depression like this: “My skin, I can remember, seemed thick like parchment. I imagined that I was very, very old in a world filled with laughing and

| 13. *Ibid.*, 40.
14. *Ibid.*, 41

| 15. *Ibid.*, 45.
16. *Ibid.*, 60.

sardonic puppets.”¹⁷

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V: Cage, Cowell and The Beat Scene

Declining an invitation to reenter Yale following his departure from Silver Hill in 1958, Dick graduated from Columbia School of General Studies with an English major and a music minor in 1960. The Columbia years were happy ones, for the most part, as Dick immersed himself in the art world. He lived with his mother, stepfather, and their young sons on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. In 1958-9, he studied music with the modern composers Henry Cowell at Columbia and John Cage at the New School for Social Research. Both were important experiences. Cowell composed using “tone clusters” and taught the first known courses on world music, an important collection of which Dick would amass and which would be donated to Williams College after his death.¹⁸ Dick took Cage’s now legendary Course in Experimental Composition. That course, more of an exchange among peers directed by Cage’s expert knowledge, was a hotbed of experimental art activity.

In the Cage class, compositional works using chance operations and other compositional experiments took the form of music, theatre, and poetry and were performed on whatever instruments or objects could be found in a little closet adjacent to the classroom. Many artists associated with this class would become participants in Fluxus. In particular, the chemist George Brecht invented the Event type of performance that subsequently would be associated with Fluxus. Events are minimal, pared-down actions that make possible an aesthetic experience of everyday life. Among Dick’s early Events was *Danger Music Number Seventeen* (May 1962), which reads “Scream! Scream! Scream! Scream! Scream! Scream!”¹⁹

Following one of the frequent, heated arguments at his mother’s apartment between Kitsy and Nicholas, Dick punched his stepfather in the nose. It was determined that he should move, which he did, to Christopher Street in Greenwich Village. At about the same time (in 1958), fellow Cage-class student Al Hansen and Dick co-founded the New York Audio-Visual Group. This duo took the experimental attitude of the Cage class to Greenwich Village coffee shops and the street. The most important of these coffee shops was the E-pit-o-me Coffee Shop and Art Gallery, which was run by (among others) Lawrence (Larry) Poons, later of op-art fame, on then burgeoning Bleecker Street. The New York Audio-Visual Group would perform at E-pit-o-me with the Beat poets, and Dick’s first professional appearance in print was in the now legendary *The Beat Scene* magazine.

In 1959 at the E-pit-o-me Coffee Shop, Dick met the

17. Ibid., 68.

18. At the time of his death, Dick was assembling a collection of Cowell’s writings that has been published

posthumously. *Henry Cowell, Essential Cowell: Selected Writing on Music by Henry Cowell*, ed. Dick Higgins, (Kingston, NY: Documentext/McPherson and Company,

2001).

19. A full list of these Events can be found in *Dick Higgins, A Dick Higgins Sampler*, ed. Jeff Abell (Chicago, IL: Columbia College Center for the Book and Paper Arts, 2000), 9.

collagist and mail artist Ray Johnson, after mistaking him for Jasper Johns. They “often wandered together through the Lower East Side, where he lived like a Troll under the Brooklyn Bridge investigating strange cheeses in jars or fishes in barrels.”²⁰ Dick would go on to enjoy years of mail art exchanges with this founder of the New York Correspondence School and would publish Johnson’s *Paper Snake* many years later.

VI: Love Knots

In 1960, Ray Johnson’s friend Dorothy Podber introduced my mother and father to each other. Dorothy brought Alison to a party “of mostly gay guys” at Dick’s studio apartment on Christopher Street.²¹ The party was running too loud and late, so Dick called the police on himself and hid under his bed until his apartment cleared out. Alison found him there, crawled under the bed with him, and stayed for three days. Expressing a love unbound by time, he symbolically tossed an alarm clock out the window. Just like that. Dick described his first sexual encounter with a woman this way: “Dorothy Podber had told her I was gay, but this didn’t seem to bother her any. I decided to concern myself with the girl behind the eyes, and to let the plumbing take care of itself in its own way. So I lost my virginity with a woman, and, finding how much I cared for her, there didn’t seem to be much point in going back.”²² She gave him her address and number and invited him to her industrial loft at 423 Broadway at Canal Street; there since 1959, she may well have been the first artist living in what would become Soho. They were married in 1960, divorced in 1970, recommitted to their relationship in about 1974, and remarried in 1984.

Following the first divorce, Dick had two significant, gay relationships. Both were with alienated young men, whom Dick mentored. As far as I am aware, he never initiated a relationship with a man who could be called a peer, although in the later years at least one of his lovers certainly became one.

The first was Eugene Williams, the son of his good friend Emmett Williams. Dick and Eugene drove to Alaska together in 1971, and Eugene lived with us for a time in Vermont following that journey. Dick felt deeply for him. From my perspective, the relationship ran roughshod over Dick’s parental responsibilities during this otherwise “strange and idyllic” period. That relationship would end (mercifully for Jess and me) in 1973 when Eugene married and had a daughter and Dick suffered a breakdown.

In 1983, Dick developed a committed relationship with a wispy and cerebral young poet Bryan McHue. Bryan would later run a small press called Left Hand Books, which produced exquisitely

20. Higgins, *A Life*, 78.

21. Alison Knowles, in discussion with the author, July 24, 2003.

22. Higgins, *A Life*, 94.

crafted and designed books by both of my parents and by several interesting poets local to the Hudson Valley in Upstate New York. Bryan became very much a peer of Dick's and a part of the family, residing in a small apartment adjacent to the house until Dick's death in 1998.

For the family, this was Dick's most successful gay relationship, as it was a friendship able to allow for Dick's extremely deep feelings for and dedication to Alison, who was a close friend of Bryan's as well. In 1982, Dick wrote, "I've slept with sufficient men and women to know that love's more important than sex or gender."²³ The relative domestic harmony and clarity of commitments that characterized the last decades of Dick's life model that principle.

VII: Happenings, or ThereAbout

Just prior to Dick and Alison's first wedding in 1960, Dick failed his military exams. Dick and Alison plotted that failure in what sounds, ultimately, like a parody of a Happening. Knowing he'd be nervous enough to vomit during the interview, Dick consumed several quarts of strawberries just before going to the recruiting center. These produced the desired volume of vomit upon his arrival. As he related the story to us, he said that he also was so nervous that he urinated each time he was asked a question, which must have been quite a sight in the long straight line of naked, would-be soldiers. As if this weren't enough, he was then removed to a side room and asked to write a few paragraphs on his relationship to his mother. After three hours of steady writing the pile of pages was still growing. They took away the pencil and sent him home to Alison classified 3-F, "draftable only in case of a dire emergency."²⁴

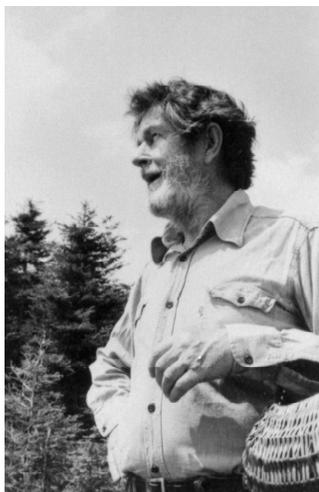
Performance and Happenings as well as the burgeoning experimental music scene had been going full force after 1958. Dick and Happenings artist Allan Kaprow had met and become friends in the Cage class, with Dick performing in Kaprow's first Happening by the name *18 Happenings in Six Parts* in 1958. By 1960, Claes Oldenburg and James Dine had arrived from Chicago and were performing Happenings with Kaprow and the New York Audio-Visual Group duo Hansen and Higgins. The resulting collaboration called the *Ray Gun Specs* series at Judson Church, host of much experimental work at the time including the famous Judson Dance group, was a huge success. Dine performed his famous *Smiling Workman*, which climaxed with a bucket of orange paint being tossed over his head. Popular success aside, Dick felt that his comparatively ascetic work was out of place with the Happenings format such that "fond as we might be of the individual artists...we refused to participate in further shows or performances with my



[2] 2

Newspaper Music
Alison Knowles
Unknown photographer
Stuttgart Festival
1961 (corrected from printed book)
Courtesy Alison Knowles

| 23. *Ibid.*, 242
24. *Ibid.*, 96.



[2] 3

John Cage Hunting Mushrooms
 Dick Higgins
 Hariman State Park
 1960
 Courtesy Alison Knowles

Happenings brothers – now cousins.”²⁵

For some reason, the same wouldn't be true of Dick's performing relationship to Meredith Monk. After Meredith performed in several Happenings with Dick and Alison at the Café au Go Go in 1964, Dick invited her to perform in his *Celestials* at the Sunnyside Boxing Arena. This “visual canon of activities” was, according to Monk, “one of the most beautiful works I ever encountered.”²⁶ They later worked together on Eric Satie's *Relache*, where she was “a human wheelbarrow with Dick piling books on my back.” Perhaps most memorably, however, Monk describes *Juice* (1969) at the Guggenheim Museum: “The image of Dick painted red from head to toe dancing in large red combat boots remains indelible in my mind. That wonderful, generous body and extraordinary voice flowing with energy and commitment... with Dick anything was possible.”²⁷

VIII: Fluxus

Perhaps the most fortuitous event of 1960 was when the composer and Cage-class participant Richard Maxfield introduced a “cryptophilic designer” named George Maciunas to Dick and others in that social circle. Maciunas had “an art gallery and lots of ambition.”²⁸ This Lithuanian-Georgian intended to introduce the Upper East Side to avant-garde work through his gallery called AG on Madison Avenue. He hosted shows by Yo ko Ono and others and performances by LaMonte Young, Ray Johnson, Henry Flynt, Richard Maxfield, Joseph Byrd (of later rock fame), and my father. The gallery failed a year later, but the voluntary alliance that would later become Fluxus had begun to form self-consciously for many of the artists.

After the collapse of the gallery, Maciunas collected notations for *Beattitude East*, a special issue of the West Coast magazine called *Beattitude*. Jackson Mac Low and LaMonte Young later published these as *An Anthology* (1961), which contained scores by virtually everyone associated with Fluxus in the United States and abroad. The collection of new musical formats, performance, concrete poetry, and other experimental art might well be described as the first Fluxus collection and publication. Materials continued to arrive at Maciunas's doorstep, however. To address the volume, Maciunas “would issue a series of yearbooks as a periodical called *Fluxus*,”²⁹ and so it was that the artists already associating with each other in New York came to be called Fluxus artists. These would include, but not be limited to, Brecht, Hansen, Mac Low, Ono, Young, and my mother and father from the greater context of the Cage class, as well as Joe Jones and Philip Corner.

25. *Ibid.*, 105

26. Meredith Monk to the family, December 1998. Copy in my archive.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Higgins, *A Life*, 110.

Indeed, Maciunas would go on to be the most gifted organizer and designer of Fluxus activities and objects and would, thereby, be recorded erroneously in history as its founder. His significant role in co-founding Fluxus should not, however, be completely denied. Fleeing the U.S. because of debts incurred in relationship to his gallery, Maciunas headed to Europe, where he organized most of the relevant early Fluxus concerts, beginning with a series at the Wiesbaden Museum in Germany. These concerts established much of the content later used in Fluxus performance festivals and brought together Fluxus artists who had long admired each other's work but had never met. In addition to Maciunas, Brecht, and my mother and father, these concerts included Ben Patterson, Emmett Williams, and Nam June Paik. These were followed by concerts at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, where Joseph Beuys met the artists, and in Paris and London, where the artists met French artist Ben Vautier and Danish artist Addi Kørpcke. In November 1962, another Dane, the debonair and minimalist Fluxus artist Eric Andersen, who would remain among Dick's closest, lifelong friends, organized the first of the now famous Fluxus concerts in the seventeenth-century Nikolajkirke in Copenhagen. Among the works performed at these festivals were several Events called *Danger Music* that Dick began writing in 1961. These were intended to place the performer at psychological or physical risk. For example, *Danger Music Number Nine* (for Nam June Paik) (1962) reads, "Volunteer to have your spine removed." Such an action is impossible and strangely violent. However, there are gentler ones as well, such as *Number Fifteen*, "Work with butter and eggs for a time," which results in squishy butter snakes and egg and butter flatulence.³⁰

The most famous of these - *Danger Music Number Twelve* (1962) "Write a thousand symphonies" - resulted in a graphic work *The Thousand Symphonies* in 1968.³¹ To produce the latter work, Fluxus artist Geoffrey Hendricks arranged to have a captain from the South Brunswick, New Jersey Police Department fire a 9mm MP40 Schmeisser submachine gun through pristine sheets of music paper. The hole-bitten sheets were then laid over one another and sprayed through with paint. The resulting dots and holes could be played, which they were in a concert at Rutgers University by Fluxus composer Philip Corner on December 9, 1968. Although Dick continued to produce the painted versions of them periodically, no new sheets of paper were fired through after the original "shooting."

It is relevant that this piece was written during the Vietnam era and suggests something of the other uses far from those merely destructive to which a gun might be put. Dick wrote of the *Symphonies* that "[at] that time the USA police seemed to have

29. Ibid. 112.

30. Abell, *Dick Higgins*, 9.

31. Dick Higgins "The Thousand

Symphonies: Their Story" in *Critical Mass: Happenings, Fluxus and Performance Intermedia* at Rutgers

University 1958-1972, ed. Geoffrey Hendricks (New Brunswick, NJ: Mason Gross Art Galleries/Rutgers University Press, 2003), 102.

nothing better to do than to chase down teenagers for possessing miniscule amounts of marijuana and throwing them in jail, thus ruining their lives...I decided it could be more worthy if one could set all the policemen in the USA to composing symphonies themselves."³²

IX: Intermedia and the Something Else Press

In 1960, Dick and Alison attended the Manhattan School of Printing. There he honed the skills he had picked up as a school newspaper editor, skills that very much would come in handy in the future. He got a job at Harding and Harding, a bank stationery and check production company on Prince Street. At that job, among other things, he designed checks for Elvis Presley. By 1963, Dick had developed an interest in publishing his own work as well as that of his friends in and around Fluxus. That year he founded the Something Else Press (SEP). It was incorporated in 1964.

The story of its naming has become something of a legend. Frustrated with Maciunas's slow progress in publishing a collection of Dick's writing called *Jefferson's Birthday*, Dick arrived home one evening to Alison and said, "We've started a press." She replied, "Oh, really? What's it called?" Prone to romantic visions of working-class life and communal culture, he answered "Shirt-sleeves Press." "That is a terrible name," she said, "Call it something else." He did. The Something Else Press published short works by many artists, including my mother, as pamphlets called Great Bear after the water dispenser by the front door of their 22nd Street house in Chelsea, where Dick had been standing when he decided to publish such works. There would also be a newsletter and gallery given the name Something Else.

The following year, in 1965, Dick published an essay called "Intermedia" in the first issue of the *Something Else Newsletter*. Dick's revival of that term - originated by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in an 1812 essay - quickly filled a terminological void in the art world. Used to describe art that falls between media or between art and life, "intermedia" spread rapidly into use, since it could function as an umbrella term for much of the most interesting art of the period. "Much of the best work being done today seems to fall between media," he wrote, "This is no accident. The concept of the separation between media arose in the Renaissance."³³ Franconia College in New Hampshire designed an Intermedia Program, the New York State Council on the Arts established Intermedia grants, and Intermedia festivals were held around the globe. Today the term refers primarily to artists working with technology, multi-media, and, sometimes, mass media, yet even its current use has its origins in Dick's essay.

In the next nine years, SEP published first books by Mac Low, Oldenburg, my father, and others. It also published major books by Cage, Merce Cunningham, Robert Filliou, Ray Johnson, Jerome Rothenberg, Marshall McLuhan, and Daniel Spoerri, to name a few art world icons. The Press published several reissues of work then largely lost to the vicissitudes of time. Among these were the last known graphic work by Marcel Duchamp *Flying Hearts* (1968), which was executed by Knowles, as well as Gertrude Stein's *Making of Americans* and Richard Huelsenbeck's *Dada Almanach*. All SEP publications were intended for mass consumption, and all hard-cover publications were printed on and bound with the highest quality materials, including acid-free paper stock. Significantly, most were used, and those left undisturbed are still in perfect shape. The *Great Bear Pamphlets* occasionally even found their way into supermarkets, such as the Co-op in Berkeley, California.

In 1971, Dick and Alison were invited by their friend and Happenings cohort Allan Kaprow and by Paul Brach to teach at a new art school called Cal Arts in Burbank, California. We moved, press and all, to Newhall, California. Dick and Alison separated, and we girls moved in with him. Cal Arts was just getting on its feet, and for most of the faculty, who were excited about starting a school and rethinking creative art pedagogy, morale was quite high. Perhaps it was the freewheeling atmosphere of hippies, the endless banter of faculty meetings, or the increasing visibility of his art world peers in the commercial sphere, in any case, Dick quickly became unhappy there and was probably looking for a reason to leave. Fortunately, one materialized. Early one morning, Dick astounded by the sudden silence of the birds awakened and sat up. At that moment, his huge bookcase crashed onto the bed where he'd been sleeping (it could have killed him). A major earthquake was occurring. He swooped into our room and grabbed Jess and me in each arm, and we made our way to the swimming pool exit. There, as Dick later described it, we were astounded: "The water in the swimming pool...was standing on end, like a frozen sculpture about eight feet tall in the middle of the pool."³⁴ This description is consistent with how I remember our very own, private tidal wave. In 1972, Dick moved the Something Else Press as well as the family (sans Alison) to West Glover, Vermont.

The Press, whether in New York, California, or, after 1972, Vermont, was funded handsomely by Dick's inheritance from the Higgins fortune in 1964. In a cultural context that was actively hostile to experimental intermedia, this publishing venture stood alone in its brazen support of new and intermedia work. Through the Press, Dick gambled on the public interest in this work, faithfully relying on the public ability to know a good thing. He lost the gamble, spending nearly every cent of his part of the family fortune,

33. Dick Higgins, "Intermedia," *Something Else Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1966), 1; reprinted in *Dick Hig-*

gins, Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 18-21.

34. Higgins, *A Life*, 159.

and in 1973 suddenly withdrew his financial support for SEP, following which the Press was placed in the hands of editors who were understandably hamstrung without Dick's deep pockets and managerial authority. Not surprisingly, the Press collapsed in bankruptcy in 1974.

Perhaps the greatest loss associated with this collapse was that of Dick's closest friendship at the time, Fluxus artist, poet, humorist, and one of its best performers, Emmett Williams, who had moved his own family to Vermont to work for the Press. Williams had been the editor at the Press from 1966 until 1972, and his "fine hand," as Dick called it, can be felt in the books published during these years, the Press's most prolific. Indeed, much of its success is directly attributable to this one-time editor of the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper. In particular, the *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, the Press's bestseller at 18,000, was edited by Williams and established the genre in the United States. In the early '70s as Dick declined into alcoholism and bankruptcy, it was this gentle humorist and Flux-poet who was left holding the bag, so to speak. In an inexcusable act of belligerence, Dick foreclosed on his obligations and effectively evicted this close friend from his life and home.

The brash provocateur and innovator, fully funded and financially secure for the future, had lost his steam as a public persona. His next publishing venture would be cooperative, with each author raising his or her own publication costs through grants and good will. This enterprise existed from 1972-85; initially called Unpublished Editions, in 1978 it was renamed Printed Editions, and it included on its board many of the most distinguished intermedial artists of that generation and many of the authors associated with the Something Else Press.

X: Arcadia

In Vermont, Dick tried to find the "god in nature" that he had so loved at Hickory Ridge School. He went back to the land, as it was called, hooking up with a network of communes that were very much in the tradition of his beloved school. He belonged to the tradition of American naturalism associated with some of his favorite writers, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Not coincidentally, Dick's former teacher John Cage likewise admired Thoreau and came north periodically for visits, as did Ray Johnson, Wolf Vostell, and Meredith Monk. Emmett Williams had relocated to Vermont in 1972 and moved into a log cabin up the hill from Dick's rambling farmhouse and barns that sat on a beautiful and remote piece of land in a part of Vermont, called the Northeast Kingdom. Dick dreamed of raising American bison on the huge swath of field

that was our front and backyard. Instead he built a graphic studio, geodesic guest and dog domes, and an enormous addition that would serve as his office and library.

Beginning on July 7, 1973, Dick launched a major graphic series of unique prints based on chance operations. Completed in 1975 and consisting of perhaps a thousand prints, the 7.7.73 series brought together representations of nature's flora and fauna, with the chance operations of Cage's and Dick's experiments in the visual effects of language. The format would remain largely unchanged when Dick transitioned into painting, which would dominate his artistic practice for the last two decades of his life. Element, color and placement were determined by a throw of the dice, and the world could be alternately quite spare or imagistically dense. His description is worth repeating here: "My intention was to parallel pop art, which is usually urban, using rural materials and, in doing so, to imply a cycle of Arcadian life which I hoped to live. The cycle is organized into five seasons, each using materials that are somehow appropriate to them – summer, autumn, winter, spring and, between these two last, mud."³⁵

In 1973, Dick, for a two-year period, suffered his second nervous breakdown, following the collapse of his financial fortunes and a bout of binge drinking during which he could "become quite belligerent."³⁶ As he described the beginning of the breakdown, one day when he woke up: "strange paisley patterns were all around me [and] what was even more frightening was the sound that I was hearing terrible, deep organ-like sounds that seemed like tuned earthquakes. I staggered to the window and looked out. Through the curtain of moving paisley insects I could see a cloud, and the cloud had a voice, the voice of Meredith Monk, whom I had not seen in years"³⁷ He spent a year and a half at Silver Hill being treated for alcoholism, returning to Vermont to build an indoor Olympic size pool that virtually bankrupted him, and then returning to Silver Hill to be treated for depression. "I felt that I was dead, or that I should be."³⁸ During these years, Dick took refuge in his relationship to my mother, "dear Alison," from whom he'd been divorced for four years and who would remain his love and anchor for the remainder of his life.

XI: Home on the Hudson

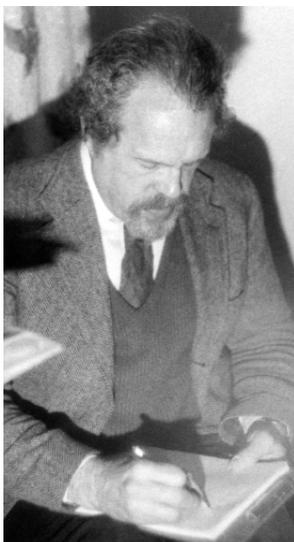
After the 1974 collapse of Something Else Press and his ensuing breakdown, Dick returned to academic life and New York City. In 1975, we moved in next door to Alison, who had a loft at 122 Spring Street, "not far from our old haunts at Broadway and Canal, in what is now called Soho and which, mysteriously, had

35. Dick Higgins, archival notes regarding each series of work produced during his lifetime, Special Collections, Northwestern University Library.

36. Higgins, *A Life*, 184.

37. *Ibid.*, 186.

38. *Ibid.*, 192.



[2] 4

Student House
 Unknown photographer
 1987
 Courtesy Jessica Higgins

become quite chic.”³⁹ In a gesture that realized a fantasy held by many children of divorced parents, the family was effectively reunited as a social unit, even if the parents had separate sleeping quarters. The big house in Vermont that had housed permanent residents, an enormous camera lab, and the SEP offices was sold off, and a small cabin up the hill from the press became Dick’s respite from urban life.

Having spent his fortune running the Something Else Press, Dick was primarily interested in developing a means of earning a living. From 1975-79, Dick fought hard for advanced degrees from the conservative English Department at New York University. He received his Master’s Degree there in 1977, but in 1979, he dropped out in protest after failing the comprehensive exams. This act of defiance cost him the PhD, and it was a bitter loss – he was more accomplished than many of the professors. By 1979, he had published 146 articles and twenty-two volumes as a solo author, composer, or artist and had been written up in dozens of reviews, articles and books.

At the same time, Dick became disillusioned with the business enterprise that the art world had become in New York in the 1960s and ‘70s. He came to see galleries as “emporia for the fashion industry’s visual art adjuncts”⁴⁰ and felt himself unable to connect to the community of likeminded people that had once made the city tolerable for him. In a way, his presence was no longer necessary to that world, and he had lost his stature as pioneer. He briefly tried to relocate again to Vermont, but this put him too far from Alison, Jess and me. At the suggestion of his friend George Quasha, who owned and operated the Station Hill Press with his wife Susan in Barrytown, New York, Dick purchased a small, white church and small house with green shutters near Bard College in the Hudson Valley in 1979.

The area offered him a combination of rural pleasures and intellectual outlets, “nearer New York without being in the whirl of Lilliputians.”⁴¹ The Station Hill Press was right down the street, and it had around it a circle of interesting poets, performance people, composers, and free spirits, many of whom Dick already knew. “Pauline Oliveros, one of my favorite composers,” moved in nearby and remained among Dick’s closest artistic and personal friends for the rest of his life. Unlike Vermont, however, Dick describes that “this time the idyll was unmarred. My relationships were real, not wishful thinking, as was the social and financial underpinning of my scene (in Vermont). Alison was there as often or as little as she chose, and that made for a more peaceful scene...”⁴²

Perhaps most surprising to his friends, however, he began painting in earnest. His interests in historic, modern, and

| 39. *Ibid.*, 197.
 40. *Ibid.*, 120.
 41. *Ibid.*, 238.

contemporary intermedial art forms found an unlikely, if appropriate, stage on canvas. While these paintings constitute Dick's single most concerted effort in materials and time, this work is virtually unknown. The work occurred in six cycles that addressed choreographic movement, cartographical history (how we represent the physical space of the world to ourselves), magic, religious and evolutionary history, and music theory and that took the form and title respectively of *Arrows*, *Maps*, *Brown Paintings*, *Cosmologies*, *Natural Histories*, and *Music*. It is a mistake to see the paintings as a repudiation of some imagined "critical" stance that he held before. Rather, they are explorations in paint of concerns that had long occupied him.

Not surprisingly, the art world, with its predilections for strictly stylistic categories, was unconvinced, and Dick had an almost impossible time showing and selling these later pieces. This caused him no small degree of anxiety and frustration. Relying on his reputation from the 1960s and '70s, Dick was able to lead workshops in colleges and art schools periodically until his death in 1998. Unlike Dick's, Alison's individual art career advanced at that time. Nevertheless, his books continued to appear containing new poetry, plays, graphic musical notation, and art theory. These years also saw his greatest scholarly endeavors realized, such as his watershed collection of ancient to modern visual poetry called *Pattern Poetry: Guide to an Unknown Literature* and a translation with Charles Doria of Giordano Bruno's *On the Composition of Images, Signs and Ideas*.⁴³

Imperfect as these years may have been from a professional and financial standpoint, they were important in other ways. Dick's relationship with Bryan McHue was a great solace to him. The family, including Bryan, enjoyed time together as adults playing bridge, scrabble, watching foreign films, and listening to Dick's wonderful record collection. Bryan's Left Hand Books publishing company kept a steady stream of new and innovative published material in the house, which took up some of Dick's interest in that end of things.

All this ended in the fall of 1997, however, when, on Station Hill Road, an oncoming car hit the car in which Dick, Alison, and Jessica rode. Alison went into the windshield, Jessica suffered a serious concussion, and Dick broke his leg in several places. Confined to bed for many months with pins and a halo, Dick then spent about six months in a wheelchair. A depression set in that seemed strangely justified. This lifted somewhat when he was invited by Richard Martel to participate in his Inter festival in Quebec, Canada. As the name suggests, the festival had its basis in the intermedia concept.

In Quebec, Dick had a high old time. On October 25,

| 42. Ibid., 240.

| 43. Dick Higgins, *Pattern Poetry: Guide to an Unknown Literature* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987) Giordano Bruno,

| *On the Composition of Images, Signs and Ideas*, trans. by Charles Doria, edited and annotated by Higgins (New York: Willis, Locker and Owen, 1991).

1998, he was interviewed about Intermedia and was honored, and he conversed with young people and contemporaries alike. I've seen the interview. It is haunting – he looked gray, like wet plaster, but seemed to be enjoying the conversation. That night he smoked the cigarettes that let off steam for him, since he couldn't drink socially anymore. He complained of feeling tired and went home early. The next morning he failed to show up for breakfast at the local diner. That was unlike him. His friend Fluxus artist Larry Miller, who had been with him the day before, took off that morning to find him. He found him dead from a heart attack. Dick had been getting ready for bed. He was found nude on the floor, with a book about General Lee at his side. It was a great, if early, death that was commemorated in many venues, among them the Whitney Museum and the Judson Church. In August 2000, his ashes were laid to rest in Sag Harbor, Long Island, in the Knowles family plot. With children and grandchildren in tow, his family sang his favorite songs and put his favorite vanilla ice cream in with the ashes. My sister's husband Josh Selman had been wearing Dick's watch since his death. He spontaneously threw it in too. My youngest daughter Zoë, five at the time, spontaneously picked up a shovel and began the formal burial. It was perfect, as Dick would have wanted.

As Dick put it, "It's hard to say where a life begins (or ends)."⁴⁴ Dick's most engaged years with the art world occurred between 1958 and 1970, but in many of these years he was functioning as a publisher, which isn't how he ultimately saw himself. Then again, one might look to his most productive years of making his own art, which would pre- and post-date the Press, a sort of doughnut that doesn't really make sense either. If we're talking about painting, then the life really begins in 1979, when Dick was 41 years old. We might trace an arc, a story of a life that ebbed and flowed in and around the arts. And then there's a quiet sense of order that people seldom find with themselves and with others. Perhaps he found that, and then it was over. Or his life may still be in occurrence, as publications, exhibitions, and collections continue to express the vitality of his work. Who knows or cares, really. What matters is that he had one, and it was a great one.

Intermedia

Much of the best work being produced today seems to fall between media. This is no accident. The concept of the separation between media arose in the renaissance. The idea that a painting is made of paint on canvas or that a sculpture should not be painted seems characteristic of the kind of social thought-categorizing and dividing society into nobility with its various subdivisions, untitled gentry, artisans, serfs and landless workers-which we call the feudal conception of the Great Chain of Being. This essentially mechanistic approach continued to be relevant throughout the first two industrial revolutions, just concluded, and into the present era of automation, which constitutes, in fact, a third industrial revolution.

However, the social problems that characterize our time, as opposed to the political ones, no longer allow a compartmentalized approach. We are approaching the dawn of a classless society, to which separation into rigid categories is absolutely irrelevant. This shift does not relate more to East than West or vice-versa. Castro works in the cane fields. New York's Mayor Lindsay walks to work during the subway strike. The millionaires eat their lunches at Horn and Hardart's. This sort of populism is a growing tendency rather than a shrinking one.

We sense this in viewing art which seems to belong unnecessarily rigidly to one or another form. We view

paintings. What are they, after all? Expensive, handmade objects, intended to ornament the walls of the rich or, through their (or their government's) munificence, to be shared with the large numbers of people and give them a sense of grandeur. But they do not allow of any sense of dialogue.

Pop art? How could it play a part in the art of the future? It is bland. It is pure. It uses elements of common life without comment, and so, by accepting the misery of this life and its aridity so mutely, it condones them. Pop and Op are both dead, however, because they confine themselves, through the media which they employ, to the older functions of art, of decorating and suggesting grandeur, whatever their detailed content or their artists' intentions. None of the ingenious theories of the Mr. Ivan Geldoway combined can prevent them from being colossally boring and irrelevant. Milord runs his Mad Avenue gallery, in which he displays his pretty wares. He is protected by a handful of rude footmen who seem to feel that this is the way Life will always be. At his beck and call is Sir Fretful Callous, a moderately well-informed high priest, who apparently despises the Flame he is supposed to tend and therefore prefers anything which titillates him. However, Milord needs his services, since he, poor thing, hasn't the time or the energy to contribute more than his name and perhaps his dollars; getting information and finding out what's going on are simply tooooooo exhausting. So, well protected and advised, he goes blissfully through the streets in proper Louis XIV style.

This scene is not just characteristic of the painting world as an institution, however. It is absolutely natural to (and inevitable in) the concept of the pure medium, the painting or precious object of any kind. That is the way such objects are marketed since that is the world to which they belong and to which they relate. The sense of "I am the state," however, will shortly be replaced by "After me the deluge," and, in fact, if the High Art world were better informed, it would realize that the deluge has already begun.

Who knows when it began? There is no reason for us to go into history in any detail. Part of the reason that Duchamp's objects are fascinating while Picasso's voice is fading is that the Duchamp pieces are truly between media, between sculpture and something else, while Picasso is readily classifiable as a painted ornament. Similarly, by invading the land between collage and photography, the German John Heartfield produced what are probably the

greatest graphics of our century, surely the most powerful political art that has been done to date.

The ready-made or found object, in a sense an intermedium since it was not intended to conform to the pure medium, usually suggests this, and therefore suggests a location in the field between the general area of art media and those of life media. However, at this time, the locations of this sort are relatively unexplored, as compared with media between the arts. I cannot, for example, name work which has consciously been placed in the intermedium between painting and shoes. The closest thing would seem to be the sculpture of Claes Oldenburg, which falls between sculpture and hamburgers or Eskimo Pies, yet it is not the sources of these images which his sculpture resembles so much as the images themselves. An Oldenburg Eskimo Pie may look something like an Eskimo Pie, yet it is neither edible nor cold. There is still a great deal to be done in this direction in the way of opening up aesthetically rewarding possibilities.

In the middle 1950's many painters began to realize the fundamental irrelevance of Abstract Expressionism, which was the dominant mode at the time. Such painters as Allan Kaprow and Robert Rauschenberg in the United States and Wolf Vostell in Germany to collage or, in the latter's case, de-collage in the sense of making work by adding or removing, replacing and substituting or altering components of a visual work. They began to include increasingly incongruous objects in their work. Rauschenberg called his constructions "combines" and went so far as to place a stuffed goat-spattered with paint and with a rubber tire around its neck-onto one. Kaprow, more philosophical and restless, meditated on the relationship of the spectator and the work. He put mirrors into his things so the spectator could feel included in them. That wasn't physical enough, so he made enveloping collages which surrounded the spectator. These he called "environments." Finally, in the Spring of 1958, he began to include live people as part of the collage, and this he called a "happening."

The proscenium theater is the outgrowth of seventeenth century ideals of social order. Yet there is remarkably little structural difference between the dramas of D'Avenant and those of Edward Albee, certainly nothing comparable to the difference in pump construction or means of mass transportation. It would seem that the technological and social implications of the first two industrial

revolutions have been evaded completely. The drama is still mechanistically divided: there are performers, production people, a separate audience and an explicit script. Once started, like Frankenstein's monster, the course of affairs is un-alterable, perhaps damned by its inability to reflect its surroundings. With our populist mentality today, it is difficult to attach importance – other than what we have been taught to attach-to this traditional theater. Nor do minor innovations do more than provide dinner conversation: this theater is round instead of square, in that one the stage revolves, here the play is relatively senseless and whimsical (Pinter is, after all, our modern J. M. Barrie – unless the honor belongs more properly to Beckett). Every year fewer attend the professional Broadway theaters. The shows get sillier and sillier, showing the producers' estimate of our mentality (or is it their own that is revealed?). Even the best of the traditional theater is no longer found on Broadway but at the Judson Memorial Church, some miles away. Yet our theater schools grind out thousands on thousands of performing and production personnel, for whom jobs will simply not exist in twenty years. Can we blame the unions? Or rents and real estate taxes? Of course not. The subsidized productions, sponsored at such museums as New York's Lincoln Center, are not building up a new audience so much as re-cultivating an old one, since the medium of such drama seems weird and artificial in our new social milieu. We need more portability and flexibility, and this the traditional theater cannot provide. It was made for Versailles and for the sedentary Milords, not for motorized life-demons, who travel six hundred miles a week. Versailles no longer speaks very loudly to us, since we think at eighty-five miles an hour.

In the other direction, starting from the idea of theater itself, others such as myself declared war on the script as a set of sequential events. Improvisation was no help: performers merely acted in imitation of a script. So I began to work as if time and sequence could be utterly suspended, not by ignoring them (which would simply be illogical) but by systematically replacing them as structural elements with change. Lack of change would cause my pieces to stop. In 1958 I wrote a piece, *Stacked Deck*, in which any event can take place at any time, as long as its cue appears. The cues are produced by colored lights. Since the colored lights could be used wherever they were put and audience reactions were also cuing situations, the per-

former-audience separation was removed and a happening situation was established, though less visually-oriented in its use of its environment and imagery. At the same time, Al Hansen moved into the area from graphic notation experiments, and Nam June Paik and Benjamin Patterson (both in Germany at the time) moved in from varieties of music in which specifically musical events were frequently replaced by non-musical actions.

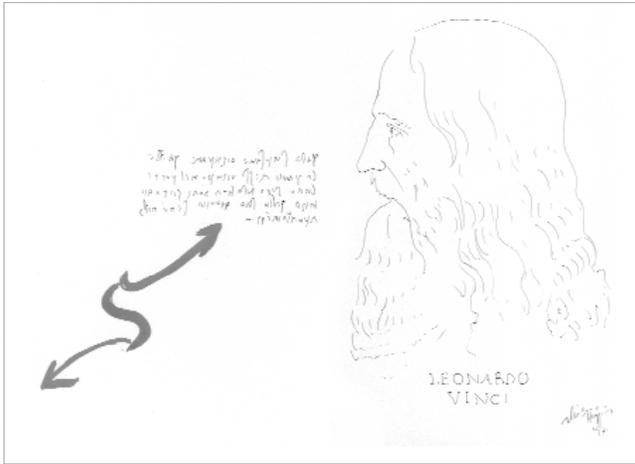
Thus the happening developed as an intermedium, an uncharted land that lies between collage, music and the theater. It is not governed by rules; each work determines its own medium and form according to its needs. The concept itself is better understood by what it is not, rather than what it is. Approaching it, we are pioneers again, and shall continue to be so as long as there's plenty of elbow room and no neighbors around for a few miles. Of course a concept like this is very disturbing to those whose mentality is compartmentalized. Time, Life and the High Priests have been announcing the death of happenings regularly since the movement gained momentum in the late fifties, but this says more about the accuracy of their information than about the liveliness of the movement.

We have noted the intermedia in the theater and in the visual arts, the happening and certain varieties of physical constructions. For reasons of space we cannot take up here the intermedia between other areas. However, I would like to suggest that the use of intermedia is more or less universal throughout the fine arts, since continuity rather than categorization is the hallmark of our new mentality. There are parallels to the happening in music, for example, in the work of such composers as Philip Corner and John Cage, who explore the intermedia between music and philosophy or Joe Jones, whose self-playing musical instruments fall into the intermedium between music and sculpture. The constructed poems of Emmett Williams and Robert Filliou certainly constitute an intermedium between poetry and sculpture. Is it possible to speak of the use of intermedia as a huge and inclusive movement of which Dada, Futurism and Surrealism are early phases preceding the huge ground-swell that is taking place now? Or is it more reasonable to regard the use of intermedia instead of traditional compartments as an inevitable and irreversible historical innovation, more comparable, for example, to the development of instrumental music than, for example, to the development of Romanticism?

This essay was published in *Something Else Newsletter* (February 1966). It has been reprinted with the permission of the Dick Higgins Estate.
© Dick Higgins, 1966

The Art of Dick Higgins

“Chaos, in a work of art, should shimmer through the veil of order,” said Novalis. There is a recognizable element of the romantic in Dick Higgins’s oeuvre, though he would probably laugh at this characterization. Still, it is no accident that Higgins translated the German poet’s *Hymns to the Night* in the mid-1970s, long after he had established himself as one of the most iconoclastic figures of postwar avant-garde—a poet, composer, painter, scholar, editor, publisher, and untiring advocate of new methods of artistic expression. Throughout his life Higgins produced a vast variety of ground-breaking, conceptually challenging works that demonstrate art does not necessarily have to “mean” or even “be.” The intersection of chaos and order is, for Higgins, the very *materia poetica* the artist should grasp at, hold for a few moments, and let go; this is how, for Higgins, art truly comes to life. In his theoretical writings Higgins decries the conventional ideas of form, genre, and craft, suggesting that art at its most vital transcends rigidly compartmentalized approaches and startles us from our habitual ways of thinking. Art, in Higgins’s impatient handling, cannot be named, pigeonholed, or packaged; it cannot be commodified and marketed in the way so many works, including avant-garde works, inevitably have been. This is why Higgins’s manner of working with both chaos and order, his ceaseless search for new ways of looking at



[4] 1
Leonardo Vinci
Dick Higgins
Ink drawing
1997

things, for new ways of naming things, most often elicits in the audience that most genuine form of response – surprise.

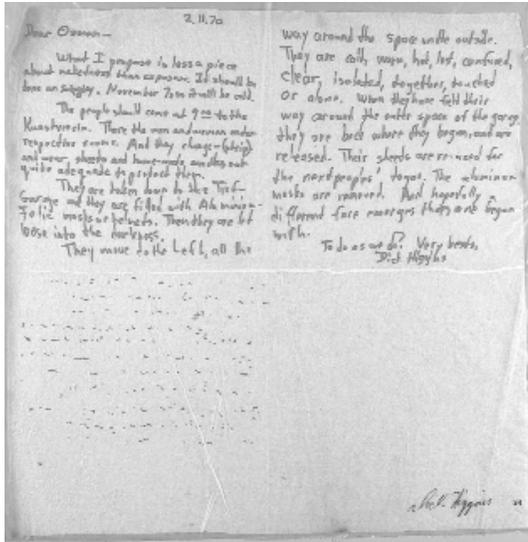
Are we on the verge of the Higgins moment? Higgins embodies the same experimental principles that characterized the artists of, well, a hundred years ago—Duchamp, Stein, and others—and whose legacy, as the foremost scholar of twentieth-century avant-garde Marjorie Perloff suggests in a recent book, is only now being properly appreciated and understood. There is no question that Higgins is among the inheritors of those early revolutionary movements. Today the avant-garde is alive and well, both in the United States and around the world, thanks to his abundant and wide-ranging legacy. He once said in an interview that he had never felt quite complete unless he was “doing” all the arts—visual, musical, and literary. As a young man he wanted to be a composer; then he turned to images, signs, words, language; but even those, after a while, proved too narrow for his creative aspirations, so he continued to expand the boundaries of what can be said (and done) through his pioneering experimentations with visual poetry, performance pieces, and mixed media. As the inventor of the term “intermedia,” Higgins reconfigured, for all times, the potentialities of artistic expression. His work challenges, transforms, and enlivens the language of art. It also offers the kind of seriousness that springs from the conception of artistic production as something more than just entertainment—the idea of art as a means to (and here is another token of his romantic temperament) spiritual emancipation. Higgins’s art constantly leads us, lures us, toward “something else.”

Boredom as Technique

“Boredom was, until recently, one of the qualities an artist tried most to avoid. Yet today it appears that artists are deliberately trying to make their work boring.” This is the opening statement of the 1966 essay “Boredom and Danger” – a text that upon first reading struck me as the most original and important of all the texts written by Dick Higgins during the 1960s.

Rereading it today (after having left aside the topics it raised for a number of years), I’m not really surprised to find that my opinion of it has not changed much. In fact, few other texts of the time have formulated the specificity of the early Fluxus-related art practices with the same degree of clarity and precision. Boredom is, of course, not a topic specific to Fluxus or to the 1960s: it is one of the central themes of modernity. In Baudelaire, boredom signifies no less than the withholding of assent to existence in its entirety, a state of mind or a flip in one’s perspective that transforms the brilliant material tangibility of a world of modern objects into waste and excess, capitalism’s “things” transformed, as it were, into nothing. Warhol’s seriality is but a variation on this theme, as his repetition of the repetitions of the modern production line produces a blurring that erases the ontological distinctness of objects - art objects included.

Higgins’s take on boredom is, however, a different one. In his context, boredom is no longer a signifier of modernity, no longer a theme. Instead it becomes a technique – a practical accessing of a psychological mechanism that is now appreciated for its ability to actually shift the focus of aesthetics from the realm of



[5] 1

Dear Osman
Dick Higgins
Silk-screen on napkin
Limited edition of 54
November 2, 1970

works to the less tangible realm of experience. What was at stake in adopting this technique was, above all, a radicalized notion of art as an all-enveloping environment. The earlier tendency to resort to various forms of built or staged environments seemed, in the long run, unsatisfactory, since such environments did not, per se, guarantee that the ideal of immersion into the situation be fulfilled. Participants could easily remain in the old position of audience, and the work could remain a spectacle. The technique of boredom might transform your mindset completely – to suck you into a situation where what is initially just “boring” in a mundane sense soon becomes a mechanism that alters your perception of the boundaries between self and environment. But it could equally well keep you out, since the phenomena you were confronted with (what Higgins called “blank structures”) could easily be rejected as “nothing” or “nothing much.” And this risk of rejection or disappearance is itself part of the game. In fact, the technique of boredom indicates a particular take on the famous desire to sublimate art into life. “Life,” here, is not something that art can simply access by denouncing or re-naming the traditional frameworks of aesthetics. Immersive experiences may, however, draw you into a situation that has certain structural parallels with a particular notion of reality, for such experiences constitute a space where causes and consequences are played out (hence the emphasis on “danger”).

More succinctly, the experiential space of boredom, as described by Higgins, is also a space where the continually shifting frameworks of attention make you question the very notion of a “grasp” of the real itself.

**Robert Filliou's Am ple Food for
St upid Th ough t**

Once art becomes art historical, it becomes easy to feel embarrassed about posing the kinds of simple questions about artworks that often in the first place were an integral part of their conception, construction, and reception. The dynamic, delightfully confusing dialogical relationship between the simple and the profound that has always been crucial to Fluxus works is easily elided in critical discourse. It comes to seem like the only good questions are the ones that advertise their sophistication with that imposing learned ring that either shows that you're in the know or don't betray the fact that you're still trying to be.

isn't art a remarkable thing?¹

What about the stupid questions? It sounds like this is itself a stupid question, but it's the right one to ask if the encounter with Robert Filliou's *Am ple Food for St upid Th ough t* (1965) is to be something other than an intellectual exercise or a knowing flip through an art historical relic ("Good! Now there's another important Fluxus work I can check off the to-see list!"). A few years after the publication of *Am ple Food* – his first work in English – Filliou offered a hilarious and poignant challenge to an imaginary ethnographer and, by implication, to all practitioners of that discipline: "Hey, instead of studying us, why not come over here and have a drink with us?"² This picks up the message that is served up with loving care in *Am ple Food*: you can be a smartypants if you want to, but you'll miss all the fun.

1. Passages in bold are quotes from *Am ple Food*.

2. Robert Filliou ['and the READER, if he wishes'], *Teaching and Learn-*

ing as Performing Arts, ed., Kasper König (Köln and New York: Verlag Gebr. König, 1970).

aren't you forgetting the essential?

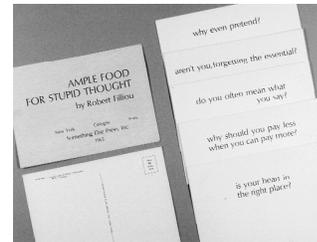
In *Ample Food's* amalgamation of introductory passages,³ Filliou's friend Jackson Mac Low asks him: "Why 'for *stupid* thought'?" Filliou replied: "Because... whenever I ask questions—no matter how serious—I usually get stupid answers. It's like hitting my head against a stone wall."⁴ Mac Low was one of the contributors to the collection, and even he didn't know the point of the collection until he asked.

**is everybody in
the same boat?**

Mac Low's introductory question is auspicious because it reminds us: (1) that it's perfectly fine, indeed sometimes it's essential and consistent with the spirit of the work, to ask a question that could sound stupid; (2) that whether a question is stupid or not also has to do with who is asking and who is answering, with what kind of answer is given, and with what the answer's results are. Does it kill the discussion and send everyone home angry? Does it lead to better questions or a few more stupid questions (maybe over drinks) in a spirit of teaching and learning?; (3) that (speaking art historically now) this Fluxus business, at its best, is not about who is in and who is out. Dick Higgins's notion of "intermedia" is an essential tool for understanding the kinds of formal and situational experiments undertaken by Fluxus artists; Fluxus continued to exemplify what could be called an "interpersonal intermedia": an ethical fabric woven by individuals continuing to find and invent new ways to live and work together despite personal or political or artistic differences for over four decades and counting. *Ample Food* gathers a few of the fragments of this extraordinary interaction, plucking out bits of conversations, like ingredients, revising and adding to them, spicing things up. So *Ample Food* isn't about producing stupidity. As Filliou suggested, there's enough of that in the world already. It's about nourishing the stupid.

**what makes this the land
of the free and the home
of the brave?**

Still hungry.



[6] 1
Ample Food for Stupid Thought
Robert Filliou
96 Postcards
Something Else Press
1965

3. The collection begins with Filliou's note: "These friendly introductions are introduced by my friend Daniel Spoerri, who suggested them," and includes in-

troductory offerings from, in addition to Mac Low and Spoerri, Arman, Kikha Batichoff, George Brecht, William Burroughs, Christo, Diane di Prima, Brion Gysin, Dick Higgins,

Allan Kaprow, Ray Johnson, Joe Jones, Alison Knowles, John Herbert McDowell, Jackson Mac Low, Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson, Dieter Roth and James Waring.

4. Why a stone wall?

In her folio notes for *Cena per Otto* (1985) – a set of eight photo-silkscreen prints, each picturing an assortment of ordinary objects on a dinner plate – Alison Knowles reveals that “the objects arranged here for a dinner viewing are found together on each plate by virtue of a common color and shared time in a recent performance or installation. It is to say “*grazie e arrivederci.*”

I close my eyes and imagine Alison in Italy eighteen years ago, preparing to bid farewell to her hosts, who had invited her there to produce a performance and an installation, the folio notes suggest, and a series of prints.

I imagine Alison sitting in a studio, about to embark on the fabrication of what would become *Cena per Otto (Dinner for Eight)*. I imagine her surveying the northern Italian countryside through a window, or examining the faces of her new Italian friends, her studio assistants, or inspecting the objects she had used in a recent performance, arranged beside her on a workbench. I imagine her recalling the sounds she had produced in the performance by manipulating these objects: a tightly wound toy, pinched between her fingertips, flipping and flapping with decreasing vigor; a handful of beans, tossed into a container and shaken with increasing vigor; an ordinary hole punch, clenched and unclenched slowly, clicking and clacking; a pair of old eyeglasses with hopelessly loose hinges, dangling from her index finger, becoming a tiny jangling mobile.

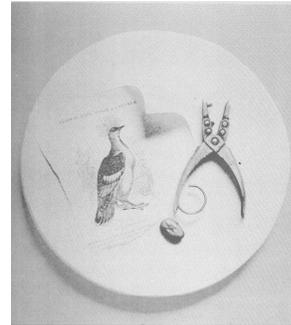
Whether any of these things actually happened is

questionable. But as I view the prints in *Cena per Otto* and reflect on the times I have seen Alison perform, my imaginings seem plausible. Alison, like so many Fluxus artists inspired by the composer John Cage, values the myriad meanings inherent in an everyday object and the oxymoronic meaning of “noisy silence.” (As Cage pointed out, the act of standing alone in an anechoic chamber does not even assure silence, for one’s own heartbeat is still audible.) I have seen Alison end a performance by holding up each previously manipulated object, one by one, letting each rest inactive between her fingertips for several moments, on display for the audience to view and ponder, before she sets it down gently between herself and the viewers. Alison’s distinctive performance coda features each object as a visual-aural mnemonic, delivering back to the viewer the sounds just heard in relation to the object viewed.

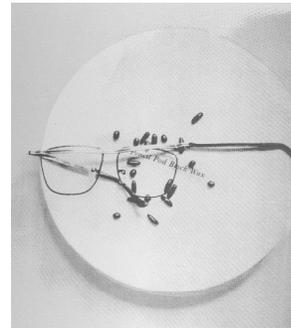
To produce *Cena per Otto*, Alison arranged the objects I listed, plus others, on eight round dinner plates and photographed each one in black and white from above. When the prints are hung on a wall, the dinner plates appear at a 90-degree angle to their customary horizontal position on a table and the “food” looks like it could slide right off onto the floor. It will not, of course. These are only pictures. Or are they? Once you have seen – or even imagined – Alison manipulating the pictured objects in a performance, teasing the latent sounds out of their “silence,” displaying them to trigger aural memories, there is no turning back. *Cena per Otto* becomes more than a set of pictures. It becomes a musical score, performed once and performable again, by virtue of these photo-silkscreen prints: each object pictured functions as a note; the arrangement on each plate functions as a chord; all together, they form a visual and musical composition.

Finally, I imagine Alison bestowing one of the *Cena per Otto* folios upon her Italian hosts, opening her arms and encircling each person in an embrace. The circular shape of each of the eight dinner plates symbolizes the circular shape of a hug – eight hugs for Alison’s newest friends. I imagine Alison arriving home in New York and bestowing one of the *Cena per Otto* folios (the very one in this exhibition) upon her husband Dick Higgins, who duly enters it into his collection. The sound latent in the eight displays of objects on the plates, if I look and listen closely enough, poignantly evokes the sound of kisses – eight kisses for Alison’s oldest friend.

Eight prints.
Eight plates.
Eight hugs good-bye.
Eight kisses hello.



[7] 1



[7] 2

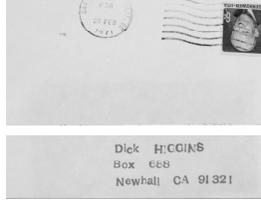
[7] 1-2

Cena Per Otto
Alison Knowles
2 of 8 photo silkscreens in cloth-bound folio
Cavriago, Italy: Pari & Dispari
1985

After Lisa Moren invited me to write about *Friedmanswerk*, I looked at pictures on the UMBC Intermedia Web site. The experience reminded me of visiting the archeological site of a medieval settlement preserved in the core of a modern building. The images stirred a torrent of reflections from a time more than thirty years in the past. In struggling with this short essay, I discovered that I had far too much or far too little to say on these works, the people who made them, and what they came to mean. In 1970, I was working extensively with social networks and exchange projects. It seemed natural to construct an exchange project for *Friedmanswerk*. Two items from the exchange caught my eye. One is a set of envelopes sent to Dick Higgins. Dick contributed them to *Friedmanswerk*. The other item is a tube of sparkling vitamin C tablets from Germany, together with a water glass to drink them in and a tray to serve the glass on. In 1970, Dick moved Something Else Press to California where he took up a post on the founding faculty of California Institute of the Arts. Dick hired me to serve as general manager of the Press. He located the Press in Newhall, where he acquired a sprawling, single-story hacienda that typified the working ranches and farms in the area. While looking for a house of my own, I lived with Dick and his two daughters Hannah and Jessie. We ate together most days, and I worked in the Press office in a garage next door to the main house. At breakfast one day, Dick introduced me to vitamin C in the form of sparkling tablets that resembled Alka Seltzer. These struck me as quite



[8] 1



[8] 2



[8] 3

marvelous. The Press did not remain in Newhall. Following the 1971 earthquake, Dick decided to head back East and I headed back to San Francisco State University to finish my degrees. The envelopes are a reminder of Dick's role as one of the most interesting – and important – figures in twentieth-century art. Like Erasmus in an earlier time, he exerted much of his influence through a rich network of correspondence and publications. Like Erasmus, he had a playful side, and Dick's collection of sealed envelopes may be taken in many ways. They may be a quiet comment on the eternal network, or they may offer hermeneutical reflection on closure and silence. The sparkling tablets remind me of an interesting time working with Dick, and the many times we worked together before and since. A tube of tablets, a glass to drink them in, and a tray for serving the glass can be unpacked in many ways. One is to see them as an exemplar toast to a man who once said, "Let's chase down an art that clucks and fills our guts."

[8] 1-3

Selections from *Friedmanswerk*
Ken Friedman, plus 13 contributors
Edition 24/36
Ken Friedman, Fluxus West
1971

Joe Jones's Solar Music Hot House

The Dick Higgins Collection contains a remarkable set of audiocassette recordings titled *FLUXUS Anthology: 1962-1992 - Sound Events*.¹ Included in this collection is a work by Joe Jones, composer and creator of *Music Machines*, which remains vital fifteen years after its recording. *Solar Music Hot House* traces a number of continuing and often confluent streams in contemporary music: aleatoric and iterative procedures, drone cycles, minimalism, industrial music, autonomous performance systems, etc. Jones's work also implicitly acknowledges and is informed by a rich history of music machines from clockwork automata to steam-driven calliopes.

A brief text score and a schematic computer drawing by Jones introduce the work, which was originally installed in 1988 at Ars Electronica in Linz, Austria.

SOLAR MUSIC HOT HOUSE

SOLAR MUSIC ORCHESTRA

THE SUN RISES...SOLAR ORCHESTRA STARTS TO PLAY...BUILDING IN VOLUME...

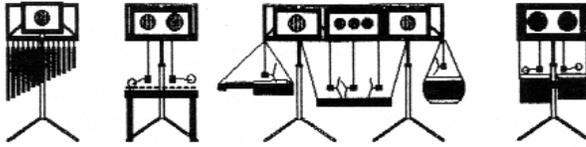
...AS THE SUN GETS STRONGER...CHANGING...BEING PLAYED

BY THE CLOUDS...UNTIL...THE SUN SETS...OR SITS QUIETLY IN ITS SHELTER DURING RAIN²

In the recording, cycles of rhythm rose and fell as solar energy-powered motors were driven by the luminance of the sun. Drifting patterns and colors of percussive sound were beat on Latin chimes, xylophone, mandolin, zither, Chinese drum, and bongo drums, tracing the transit of clouds. In a 1992 interview with

| 1. Jan van Toorn, ed., *FLUXUS Anthology: 30th Anniversary 1962-1992 — Sound Events* (Mertenbosch,

Holland: Slowscan Editions, 1993).
2. Ibid.



musicologist Shin Nakagawa, Jones described his machines in touchingly organic terms:

NAKAGAWA: Are the mechanics of your machines always the same? With small motors...

JONES: Yeah, rubber bands, or elastic, or balls. Since the beginning I've tried to keep it simple, I don't want it to get complicated. The simpler the better to my mind. I don't want to make elaborate complications. I think it's better natural. Like little butterflies. Like a little animal, or bird, playing the music.³

Jones originally studied the Schillinger System of musical composition, a system entirely based upon mathematics, and was introduced to chance elements by John Cage and Earle Brown. This combination of rational mathematical and aleatoric approaches found graceful synthesis and expression in Jones's *Solar Music Hot House*, which is performed by the little "butterflies," animals, and birds of Jones's mechanical orchestra. The *Music Machines* revealed chaotic mathematical patterns in nature as elegantly as the abstractions of cream in a coffee cup, a Mandelbrot Set, or the Golden Section.

The meditative ease or disinterested detachment discovered in the work of LaMonte Young may also emerge when one is set adrift in the patterns and time cycles of *Solar Music Hot House*. From the Nakagawa/Jones interview:

NAKAGAWA: How is your music related to meditation?

JONES: I use it for myself that way. Even if no one is there, just to do it outside in a good space. In the country somewhere, or by the water. And then I do writing and listen to it, or just dream. Or think. And a lot of people have the same feeling, if they're not in a hurry. That's why it has to be in a quiet place, so there are no distractions. Somewhere where there are no automobiles if possible.⁴

A quieted and unhurried approach to Jones's work rewards us over time with the recognition of emergent patterns in nature and music. An encounter with *Solar Music Hot House* may be experienced as gracious, simple, and profoundly lovely, like watching clouds billow and drift on a lazy summer's day.

[9] 1

Solar Music Hot House (detail)
Score, drawing
Arts Electronica Festival
Linz, Austria
1988

3. Shin Nakagawa, "Fluxing Music: Interview with Joe Jones," Wiesbaden, Germany, July 13, 1992. Jones passed away six months after this interview took place at

his home studio. The complete interview may be found at <http://www.sukothai.com/X.SA.07/X7.Jones.fl.html>.
4. Ibid.

Jefferson's Birthday/Postface published in 1964 was the first of numerous publications issued by Something Else Press (SEP) under the editorship and direction of Dick Higgins. Between its rather unassuming covers are a wonderful myriad of works, ideas, philosophies, and historical notations. This book contains two separate but related texts bound recto-verso: *Jefferson's Birthday* (JB), a collection of works done over the course of a year or, as the jacket states, a collection of "...all the things Dick Higgins wrote, composed or invented between April 13th, 1962 and April 13th, 1963..."¹ and *Postface*, a historical and philosophical treatise on the origins, directions, and possibilities of new and important work then being done by Higgins himself and others of a similar inclination, many of whom were associated with the Fluxus group. Although much could be written about the book itself and its contents, what to me is intriguing is how this book demarks two separate but parallel tracks taken by artists associated with the Fluxus attitude: a participation in alternative distribution mechanisms for traditional print-based materials and a direct exploration of alternative modes of production, especially the multiple, as a means of questioning the nature and function of art.

From 1961 through 1963, Higgins had played a central role in the creation of Fluxus, which had started as a magazine to publish and distribute the good things being done and had developed into a performance sensibility, a series of festivals, and plans for several book-length anthologies of writings, scores,

| 1. Dick Higgins, *Jefferson's Birthday and/or Postface* (New York: Something Else Press, 1964).

images, and the like as well as individual collections of works by a diverse collection of international artists. The slow pace of actual production of Fluxus projects and George Maciunas's seeming indifference to Higgins's own work (which would eventually become the *Jefferson's Birthday* portion of the book under discussion) to be published by Fluxus frustrated Higgins and eventually caused him to start his own press SEP. The full story of the creation of SEP has been repeated numerous times, but there are two versions of how the name was chosen – the more often repeated version, a version which Higgins himself told many times, was that in frustration with Maciunas's slowness Higgins told Alison Knowles that he was founding a press and it was going to be named Shirtsleeves Press, and she replied that he should call it something else, and so he did. The less repeated version of the story is that Higgins told Knowles that the press was going to be called Original Fluxus and she replied that this was too aggressive and that it should be called something else.

What is being expressed in this second version is Higgins's own belief that there was a specific function and mission that needed to be accomplished if not by Fluxus then by "something else." What was at issue for Higgins was a crucial concern for dissemination and distribution of the significant work being done, what he felt had always been at the core of his own interest in Fluxus. As Fluxus moved farther toward multiples and experimental production as well as began to stand for a specific conceptual approach, it seemed simultaneously to abandon the more traditional printing processes and the role of a press as the distributor of ideas. Thus, the aim of SEP and JB was to return to what Fluxus had initially set itself to be, a rostrum to be used for the new arts. As Higgins himself put it in a 1967 letter: "The reason that my press has been founded is that I originally wanted to do what Fluxus had been founded to do, namely to propagandize and provide a rostrum for a certain body of material that was 1., experimenting with form . . . and 2., exploring the boundaries between arts and other fields, such as politics, psychology, philosophy, etc. In the early 1960's there were few performance possibilities and even fewer publications open to this very world wide interest."² As the first book published by SEP, *Jefferson's Birthday* stands in a significant position as both an expression of Higgins's hope for future artistic engagements made possible through the establishment of the press and as a provisional cessation, although not a final nor conceptual end, of Higgins's central role in the formation and development of Fluxus.



[10] 1-2

Jefferson's Birthday/Postface
Dick Higgins
Dust jacket
Something Else Press
1964

| 2. Dick Higgins to Tjeena Deelstra,
13 March 1967, Collection Archiv
Sohm, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart.

**A Special Line of Reading Within the
Collection: The Fluxus Challenge!**

One of the important moments that can be detected within the Collection is the line of different Fluxus works. One possible view of reorganizing the Collection is, therefore, an approach toward diachronical presentation of Fluxus works. This would include a historical overview of the works in the collection belonging to the Fluxus period. Another view would establish a synchronically based interpretation; with this I mean that, while rethinking the Fluxus influence in the Collection, a specific politics of imagination and perception has to be developed. The logic of such presentation can be summarized under the title of one of the posters

in the Collection: *Fluxus: 25 Years*, Yang/Zieselman, designers, 1987. The motto of such a synchronical Fluxus presentation can be seen, therefore, as a movement of arts "without borders," presentation in which linking of art works is not bound to national borders but, instead, is grounded in the experience of art as political practice, questioning the whole idea of globalization. The idea within the Collection is to give form to art works that are revealed through a certain perception of time. A new story, thus, obviously links a whole specter of works.

Specific Fluxus productions are focused on as a diversification and extension of the space in-between technology of realization and as a social movement, both of which Fluxus is in the end. Such a move would make it pos-

sible to explain the Collection's path into diversity of the real, giving a view into "mystery" and a challenge to truth. Also, a frame would be established to draw on the sphere of the irrational and instinctive through exploring the nature of memories and historical data. This move is seen as a gesture of recapturing of a special archive from the past that is heading completely into the future. An interpretational space is produced where we have something to communicate to the public and users of the Collection, but also to ourselves, the thinking "machines." In such a way, on one side, an interpretational move can be spread between internationalization and fictionalization and, on the other, territorial realities and corporeal differences. The point is to develop a trait within the Collection as a specifically organized time but without a radical finitude. Even more we can think here of an open project in the space similar to an open source (of reading). This amounts to an active transformation of the art field, where a distinction is to be made between an art community on one side and what exceeds this community, on the other; in the long term, this can be seen as the analysis of the process of the Collection's (self-) formation. This responds to a certain task of taking time and difference in esthetics, communication, and art engagement extremely seriously. A distinction is given between art history and the art works within the Collection; art works seen as remainders of an act of freedom and challenge within art.

A productive opposition between the eternal and transitory and transcendental and empirical can be put forward in rereading the Collection with what I term the Fluxus challenge.



[11] 1

Fluxus Virus Box "Fluxus-Mini-Museum"

Ken Friedman, ed.
Edition X/ XXII, signed
Artists edition
Köln
1992

checklist

The objects in this checklist are organized by category and alphabetically. All works are from The Dick Higgins Collection at UMBC.

SOMETHING ELSE

PRESS

The Something Else Press, Inc., New York, Paris, Cologne

BOOKS (44)

Great Bear Pamphlets(19)
(19) Something Else Newsletters (3)

INDIVIDUAL

EXHIBITION

WORKS

- Alain Arian-Mission
Typewriter
1967
- George Brecht
Direction (Water Yam)
Offset prints
1961/1963
- John Cage
(9) Empty Words; Part iii
Artist book
Publisher: Ediciones ± 491
Edition 307/700
1992 (1975 originally)

Notations for A. K.
Printed matter
1992
- Merce Cunningham
Changes: Notes on Choreography
Frances Star, ed.
Dust jacket
New York: Something Else Press
1967
- Peter Frank
Something Else Press: An annotated bibliography
1983
New Paltz: McPherson & Company
- Ken Friedman, ed.
The Fluxus Performance Workbook; El Djarida
Trondheim, Norway: Guttorm Nor
1990
- Dick Higgins
Act This Out
Silk-screen
1978

Dear Osman
Drawing on napkin
Limited edition of 54
1970

Emmett Williams' s Ear
Cavriago: Pari & Dispari
Edition XV of XXX, signed
1977

Five Traditions of Art History

Offset print
1976

Leonardo Vinci
Ink drawing
1997

Graphis 202 for Feline Quartet
Silk-screen
Artist proof IV/X
1997

Piano Album: Short Pieces 1962-1984

Artist book
New York: Printed Editions
1980

Some Poetry Intermedia
Offset print
1976

The Thousand Symphonies
Offset print
1967

The Thousand Symphonies
Twelve score sheets
(color photocopies)
1991

Untitled
Hand typeset on embedded rice paper
Edition 40/150
1978

- Allan Kaprow
(8) Happenings
Artist book
Ediciones
Edition 392/700
1966/1992

- Alison Knowles
Bean Reading Kit
Limited edition
New York: Printed Editions
1981

Bread and Water
Artist book
Barry town, New York:
Left Hand Books
1995

Journal of the Identical Lunch
Artist book
San Francisco: Nova Broadcast Press
1971

Indigo Island
Artist book
Saarbrücken: Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken
1995

Spoken Text
Artist book
Barry town, New York: Left Hand Books
1993

- Seiichi Niikuni
Rain
Camera-ready artwork
New York: Something
Else Press
1967
- Individual*
Pen and ink with collage
1976
- Albert Oehlen and Martin
Kippenberger
No Problem no problème
Artist book
Stuttgart, Germany: Patricia
Schwartz, Galerie Kubinski
1986
- Pauline Oliveros
Wind Horse Spiel
Ink on legal pad paper
n.d.
- Décio Pignatari
LIFE
Noigandres no.4
1958
- Gertrude Stein
Lucy Church Amiably
Camera-ready artwork
New York: Something Else Press
1969
- Robert Watts
FLUXPOST
Limited edition of 54
1964
- Emmett Williams
*Faust Zeich Nungen (Nachdruck der
ersten Ausgabe)*
Berlin: Rainer Verlag
1983
- Musica Muta*
Graphite drawing and collage
1988
- Jonathan Williams
Aposiopeses
Silk-screen
Signed edition: 61/100 (165 total)
n.d.
- FOLIOS**
- Dana Atchley, ed.
Notebook 1
Lithographic prints
Edition 226/242
Victoria, B.C: Ace Space Company
1970
- ARTISTS EXHIBITED:
Dana Atchley, George Brecht, Ant
Farm, Robert Filliou, Dick Higgins,
Bivi Hendricks (Bici Forbes),
Geoffrey Hendricks, Ray Johnson,
Jackson Mac Low, Ben Patterson,
- Paul Sharits, Daniel Spoerri,
and Topo
- Julien Blaine, Betty Danon, Philip
Gallo, Scott Helmes, Dick Higgins,
Steve McCaffery, Marilyn R.
Rosenberg
*7 Poets/7 Poems: A portfolio of
visual poems*
Minneapolis: Hermetic Press, 1995
- ARTISTS EXHIBITED:
Scott Helmes, Steve McCaffery, and
Marilyn R. Rosenberg
- Ken Friedman, ed.
*Fluxus Virus Box "Fluxus-Mini-
Museum"*
Signed artists edition
Edition X/XXII
Köln
1992
- ARTISTS EXHIBITED:
Eric Andersen, Henning Chris-
tiansen, Jean Dupuy, Al Hansen, Ge-
offrey Hendricks, Dick Higgins, Joe
Jones, Milan Knizak, Alison
Knowles, Jackson Mac Low, Larry
Miller, Ben Patterson, Takako Saito,
Serge Ill, Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi,
Anne Tardos, and Yoshimasa Wada
- FRIEDMANSWERK*
Edition 24/36
Ken Friedman, Fluxus West
1971
- ARTISTS EXHIBITED:
Joseph Beuys, Fletcher Copp, Ken
Friedman, Dick Higgins, Alison
Knowles, Amy de Neergaard, and
Jiri Valoch
- Ian Gardner and
Jonathan Williams
Pairidaeza: Jargon 80
Dendale, Columbia: Jargon Society
1975
- Dietrich Mahlow and
Josua Reichart
Westoestliche Kalligraphie
Folio of ten lithographic prints
Frankfurt: Typos-Verlag
1962
- Alison Knowles
Cena Per Otto
Eight photo silk-screens in cloth-
bound folio
Cavriago, Italy: Pari & Dispari
1985
- Nam June Paik
Electronic Art
New York: Galeria Bonino
1965
- RÄ, ed.
Le Point d'Ironie n.5
Edition 16/100

- Riede, Switzerland
1980
- ARTISTS EXHIBITED:
Vittore Baroni, Robin Crozier,
Sera Fin, Dick Higgins, and Opal
L. Nations
- Glenn Todd
Shaped Poetry
San Francisco: The Arion Press
1981
- ARTISTS EXHIBITED:
Robert Angot, Guillaume
Apollinaire, Augusto de Campos,
Lewis Carroll, E. E. Cummings,
Eugene Gomringer, Stéphané
Mallarmé, F.T. Marinetti (Filippo
Tommaso), Christian Morgenstern,
Man Ray, Simias, and Gertrude
Stein
- Jan van Toorn, ed.
*Fluxus Anthology: 30th
Anniversary 1962-1992 – Sound
Events*
Edition 60/200
Mertenbosch, Holland: Slowscan
Editions
1993
- ARTISTS EXHIBITED:
Marcel Alocco, Eric Andersen ,
Henning Christiansen, Albrecht D.,
Jean Dupuy, Robert Filliou, Ken
Friedman, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins,
Joe Jones, Takehisa Kosugi, Milan
Knizak, Alison Knowles, Bob Lens,
George Maciunas, Richard
Maxfield, Larry Miller, Carolee
Schneemann, Paul Sharits, Mieko
(Chieko) Shiomi, Wolf Vostell, and
Robert Watts
- Wolf Vostell, ed.
DéCollage 5 "Happenings"
Edition 257/500
Köln
1966
- ARTISTS EXHIBITED:
Henning Christiansen, Dick Higgins,
and Ben Patterson
- REFLUX
EDITIONS**
- George Brecht
Direction
1963/1983
- Games & Puzzles: Bead Puzzle*
1964/1983
- Albert M. Fine
Piece for Fluxorchestra
1966/1988
- Piece for Fluxorchestra with 24
Performers*
1966/1988
-
- Ken Friedman
A Flux Corsage
1966/2002
- Garnisht Kigele*
1966/1983
- Open and Shut Case*
1966/1987
- Milan Knizak
Flux-Snakes
1976/1990
- Flux White Meditation*
1968/2002
- Fredrick Lieberman
Divertevents One
c. 1973/2002
- George Maciunas
Burglary Fluxkit
1970/1988
- New Flux Year*
n.d./1983
- Larry Miller
Orifice Flux Plugs
Larry Miller & ReFlux Edition
1976/1993
- Yo ko Ono
A Box of Smile
1971/1984
- William de Ridder
Paper Fluxwork
1973/1990
- James Riddle
DOP
1966/2002
- Paul Sharits
Wall Poem
1967/2002
- Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi
*Fluxfilm No. 4: Disappearing
Music for Face*
1964/2002
- Spatial Poem No. 2*
1966/n.d.
- Water Music*
1964/1991
- Ben Vautier
Dirty Water
1964/2002
- Flux Holes*
1963/1981
- Bob Watts
Hospital Events
1963/1983

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- Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Foundation, 2002.
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- . *Poems Plain & Fancy*. Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1986.
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SELECT ARCHIVES

OF HIGGINS (exclusive of books and bookworks)

ESTATE PAPERS AND HOLDINGS

The Dick Higgins Collection, Special Collections, Deering Art Library, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

MUSEUM HOLDINGS

Berlinische Galerie, Berlin, Germany; Gallery of Modern Art (in Sammlung Hahn), Vienna, Austria; Sonja Henie-Niels Onstad Foundation, Oslo-Høvikodden, Norway; Museu de Arte contemporânea, São Paulo, Brazil; Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, Denmark; Neue Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany; Museo Vostell, Cáceres, Extramadura, Spain.

OTHER MAJOR HOLDINGS

Jean Brown Archive; John Paul Getty Art Center, Los Angeles, California; Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Visual Poetry, Miami Beach, Florida; Archiv Hanns Sohm, Neue Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany.

OTHER PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

Bengt and Katarina af Klintberg, Stockholm, Sweden; Lawrence Alloway, New York; René Block, Berlin, Germany; Hermann Braun, Remscheid, Germany; Francesco Conz, Verona, Italy; Gino di Maggio, Milano, Italy; Nicholas and Katharine Doman, New York; Marcel Fleiss, Paris; Dr. Kenneth Friedman, New York; Emily Harvey, New York; Carl Loeffler, San Francisco, California; N. O. Mustill, San Francisco, California; Heinz Ohff, Berlin, Germany; Michael Ruepp, Remscheid, Germany; Gilbert Silverman, Southfield, Michigan; Jan van der marck, Detroit, Michigan; Gil Williams, Binghamton, New York; and numerous less prominent collections.

Ina Blom is associate professor at the Department of Art History, University of Oslo, Norway. A former music critic and DJ and a sometime curator, she has written extensively on contemporary and avant-garde art, in particular issues related to Fluxus and Intermedia. In 1995, she organized a retrospective exhibition of the work of Dick Higgins.

Ken Friedman is associate professor of leadership and strategic design at the Norwegian School of Management and associate professor of design theory at Denmark's Design School. He is also visiting professor of art and design at Staffordshire University.

Piotr Gwiazda is an assistant professor of twentieth-century poetry in the English Department at UMBC.

Marina Grzanic works as a researcher at the Institute of Philosophy, ZRC-SAZU, Ljubljana, Slovenia, and as a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. Her latest book is *Fiction Reconstructed* (edition selene, Vienna, 2000). Presently, she is working as the program co-director of the Kyoto Biennale 2003.

Hannah Higgins is associate professor of art history at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She has produced numerous essays on Fluxus, including her recent book *Fluxus Experience* (University of California Press, 2002). She is a twin daughter of Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles.

Lisa Moren is an artist who creates small gestures in installation, streaming media, and electronic media and exhibits her work internationally. She is guest curator of *INTERMEDIA: The Dick Higgins Collection* and an assistant professor of visual arts at UMBC.

Timothy Nohe is an artist engaging traditional and electronic media in public life and public places. His recent work has been realized in electro-acoustic sound, video, hypertext, drawing, and sculpture. Nohe is currently an associate professor of visual arts at UMBC.

Kathy O'Dell is associate dean of arts and sciences and associate professor of visual arts at UMBC. She is a founder of *Link: A Critical Journal on the Arts in Baltimore and the World* and the author of *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970s* (University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

Owen F. Smith is a historian and artist who is interested in all things Fluxus. His book *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* was published in 1998, and in 2002 he co-edited an issue of *Performance Research* on Fluxus. He currently teaches new media at the University of Maine.

Chris Thompson is an art historian, teacher, and critic in Portland, Maine. In his doctoral dissertation for his recently completed PhD from Goldsmiths College, University of London, he examined the 1982 meeting between Joseph Beuys and H. H., the XIV Dalai Lama of Tibet. He never met Robert Filliou but is working on a book about him anyway.

biographies