

Architecture and efficiency

George Maciunas and the economy of art

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1. The great frauds of architecture

In the first prospectus of the contents of Fluxus magazine, of February 1962, George Maciunas announced that he intended to publish an essay titled "The Grand Fakers of Architecture: M. v. d. Rohe, Saarinen, Buschaft, F. L. Wright."¹ This was, in fact, one of the very few original projects for *Fluxus* magazine that were finally included in the edition of the *Fluxus 1* "yearbook" in 1964.² In retrospect, this document is one of the best vantage points from which to understand the economic rationale behind George Maciunas's anti-art.

In "The Grand Frauds of Architecture," George Maciunas intended to critically demolish some of the masterworks of American postwar architecture: Mies Van der Rohe's Lake Shore Drive Apartments in Chicago (1949–1951); Eero Saarinen's MIT Auditorium (1952–1955); Gordon Bushaft's Lever House (1952); and, of course, Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum (1957). Behaving like the district attorney before the tribunal of reason, Maciunas accused the Masters of the modern canon of having cheated their clients and, worse, betrayed their own principles. To give an example, in the Lake Shore Apartments, Mies had been asked to make sure his buildings were fire-proof. According to Maciunas, the cheapest and most beautiful solution would have been to employ fire-proof concrete for the structure. Instead, Mies had chosen some "'efficient' looking exposed steel columns," which

were less resistant to fire and even less beautiful. As for the Guggenheim Museum, Lloyd Wright ought to have devised a more intelligent enclosure to ensure that the paintings of the museum's collections were properly illuminated. Instead, propelled by his obsession with arranging the museum around a spiral ramp, he had perimeter windows installed all around the building, which made light fall exactly at the eye level of the spectators, interfering with their appreciation of the art works. In each of these cases, Maciunas denounced a "preconceived" stylistic goal that hampered the fulfillment of the building's aims, increasing the costs of its construction and day-to-day operation. Maciunas quoted Mies van der Rohe with utmost irony:

"Alone," he says, "logic will not make beauty inevitable. But with *logic*, a building shines."

These innovations are accepted matter-of-factly by Mies. "In our work," he says, "we don't have a grand idea, a dream, and then try to glue it together. . . . We just *solve problems*."³

But the "Great Frauds" took architecture as the starting point for a discussion of a more general kind, an exposition of Maciunas's axiology. Trying to leave his mark as a social theoretician, he composed a series of diagrams that summarized the relation between his theory of anti-art and a certain economy of values. Dictionary at hand, Maciunas dictated: *Value* is a "universal objective—'something to be desired.'" According to Maciunas there were at least four "universal values" that encompassed all forms of desire:

in art	value of experience, beauty
in industry	value of productivity
in finance	value of money
in science	value of knowledge

This enumeration was, to be sure, something like a schematization of modern social purposes, and the recognizable "modern" element of these values relies on their apparent lack of hierarchical or structural bond.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

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1. Jon Hendricks, ed., *Fluxus Codex*. Introduction by Robert Pincus-Witten. New York: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection in association with Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1988, pp. 104–107.

2. George Maciunas, "The Grand Frauds of Architecture: Mies van der Rohe, Saarinen, Buschaft, Frank Lloyd Wright." *Fluxus 1* (1964):4. Maciunas held the piece in such esteem that he republished it in 1966: *Underground Magazine* 1:7 (Wednesday, December 28, 1966):9. In this essay I quote from the original edition.

More importantly, perhaps, Maciunas conceived these human drives as governed by an unlimited ambition. According to Maciunas, the needs fulfilled by those four "values" were impossible to satiate in themselves. For humans, Maciunas argued, "the higher the value and the more of it, the better."

It would be useful to examine this scheme as a rendition of a certain form of economic mentality. As Gary Cross argues, all through the first half of the twentieth century most social arguments concerning labor and leisure are framed under a "modern moral economy of needs"; i.e., the continuation of the classical stoic distinction between natural needs "and those unnatural wants which seemed to undermine community and rational use of free time." Most leftist, conservative, or sociological discourses tended to assess the relations between work, leisure, and time on the assumption that real human needs were limited. On that basis, social reformers and activists believed that the increase in productivity in industry opened the possibility of obtaining reductions of working time, whereas technocrats and employers constantly worried about the seeming incapacity of the market to absorb the overproduction brought by technological advances. Save for Marginalist economists, the notion of "limitless consumption" was a concept foreign to social discourses. Even Samuel Taylor's methods of "scientific management" were promoted with the idea that surplus would eventually be large enough that workers and managers would find it "unnecessary to quarrel over how it should be divided."⁴

Maciunas's economic reasoning was a variation of such an early modern rationale. He not only felt that the desires of the modern subject were bottomless, but also that his unlimited demand would if unfettered lead to permanent scarcity: "Money, time, energy, ability is limited in quantity," he argued, while "desire for more and great value is not limited." As a consequence, a secondary value had to be put in place to avoid the economic crisis involved in such excess of want. This "2nd objective" was a form of economic reason: "attainment of greater value for less is desirable," leading therefore, Maciunas explained, to the need to develop an "ECONOMY" that introduced a measure mediating between humankind's voracious impulses. This was nothing other than the value of "EFFICIENCY."

4. Gary Cross, *Time and Money. The Making of Consumer Culture*. London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 15–45. Taylor quoted in p. 19.

ECONOMY

economy without loss of value.

economy of time, money, energy, ability, materials.

to attain more and greater values is possible with

EFFICIENCY

efficiency eliminates waste of energy, materials, time, money, etc. and increases their effectiveness.⁵

This document might offer us the key to what George Maciunas used to describe by the mid 1960s as the "Fluxus way of life."⁶ It was an attempt at an administration of desire that hoped to achieve the ideal of an "economy without loss of value." The outcome of such reasoning was, in fact, anti-art. Maciunas reasoned that while three of the first basic human purposes he had outlined were developmental—knowledge, money, and productivity—in that they helped work to increase production, "beauty" was an obstacle to progress.

Departing from his critiques of contemporary architecture, Maciunas compared the economic rationality of art and architecture. In art, he argued, given that art materials are normally of very low importance in the calculation of the art work's cost, about 90 percent of the costs of production are derived from the "artist's attainment." On the contrary, in architecture the 90 percent of the final costs were spent in materials and energy, and only one tenth was employed in designing and planning. Logically, the two disciplines had an opposite economic behavior. In architecture it was perfectly logical to spend more time and energy on the architect's labor, i.e., design. A higher "logical deliberation," no matter how strenuous or costly, would eventually pay back by saving an enormous amount of material resources. On the contrary, art could only be made cheaper by furthering the artist's "dexterity." In the long term art was incapable of progress: while the history of architecture showed a "continuous development of efficiency in use of materials," since its know-how can be "objectively shared and communicated producing historical

5. Maciunas, "The Grand Frauds of Architecture," op. cit., p. 1.

6. For instance, in a letter by Maciunas to Tomas Schmit written in early 1964: "Fluxus way of life is 9 am to 5 pm working socially constructive and useful work—earning your own living, 5 pm to 10 pm. spending time on propagandizing *your* way of life among other idle artist & art collectors and fighting them, 12 pm to 8 a.m. sleeping (8 hours is enough)" (George Maciunas, Letter to Tomas Schmit, November 8, 1963. Silverman Collection, New York. Partly reproduced by Jon Hendricks in *Fluxus etc./Addenda II. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection*. Pasadena: Baxter Art Gallery, California Institute of Technology, 1983, pp. 166–167).

continuity," a painter could only increase his output by speeding his manual operations.

However, Maciunas concluded that the improvement of artistic dexterity had biological limits: art was produced by an "ART-OCCURRING ORGANISM," namely the human body, which was incapable of progress. In other words, the artist's *tekné* was never to become a *technology*:

History of each artist displays continuous development of efficiency in use of his time-increased dexterity since efficiency is in the subjective occurrence, it cannot be easily shared and therefore does not produce historical continuity.⁷

Luckily for Maciunas, architecture had exactly the opposite economic logic: its profits could be increased by a "curtailment of the necessary labour-time," that is in "direct proportion to the productivity of labour." A certain accumulation of work in terms of technology made it more efficient.⁸ Had Maciunas been a proper Marxist, his argument could have developed in terms of reading this difference between art and architecture as part of the history of the transition from craft to industry, which could have led him to interpret fine art as a form of economic resistance working against the logic of the increase of profit. But Maciunas was clearly not interested in criticizing material progress as the result of coercion.

It is more likely that the roots of Maciunas's economic thought lie in the doctrines of modern architecture. Even late in his life, "functionalism" remained a concept close to the center of Maciunas's speculations. He in fact understood it very much like "concretism," for it involved the coincidence between the "truth" of an object and its sensible appearance. Functionalism involved that unity of content and form which he had been pursuing throughout his anti-artistic pursuits:

George Maciunas: (. . .) functionalism. (. . .) That's when the piece that you are doing has an inherent connection with the form (. . .) we did the whole series of aprons (. . .) A non-functional apron would be to print some flowers on it. Okay? Now that has nothing to do with the fact that (. . .) you are wearing [it] on top of your stomach. (. . .) I came and designed (. . .) [an] apron [with an] image of a stomach right on top of your stomach. (. . .) we did a series of stationery (. . .) The envelopes were like gloves and the

letters were like hands. (. . .) an envelope and a glove—same function: the glove encloses the hand, right? (. . .)

You see, the reason I am so concerned with that is that that's architect training (. . .) that's the way an architect thinks, he thinks functionalism, otherwise he's not an architect, he's a sculptor or stage designer.⁹

This was, of course, a rather reductive interpretation of the assumptions of modern architecture. As Larry L. Lingo has argued, "function" remained a complex and polyvalent notion in modern architectural theory, one that encompasses both emotional effects on the viewers and users, expression of purportedly "universal" values, or a specific cultural epoch's understanding of time and space.¹⁰ Notwithstanding, "functionalism" tended to be conceived under a more "restricted" and "naked" view.¹¹ Frequently, the notion of "functionalism" involved understanding modernism as a call for an architecture entirely based on requirements of use, the satisfaction of physical and biological needs, and the pursuit of the efficient management of labor and materials in edification. This "strict functionalism," "the idea that good architecture is produced automatically by strict attention to utility, economy, and other purely practical considerations," carried an aesthetic regulation.¹² Walter Gropius's dictum "form follows function" seemed to be able to replace any kind of decisions of taste by a principle of "structural articulation," understood as "the revelation, in design, of a building's structural materials and methods," or more precisely, "the articulation in a building's exterior of the various areas of activity which are contained within it."¹³ By all appearances, Maciunas had been trained under these views of the modern architectonic strictures. His obsession with finding a way to restore the identity of the concept and the perception of the thing corresponded to the view that architectonic functionalism consisted in the complete coherence among material, purpose, form, and cause in the design

9. Larry Miller, "Transcript of the Videotaped Interview with George Maciunas," in Jon Hendricks ed. *Fluxus etc./Addenda I. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection*, ed. Jon Hendricks. New York: Ink &, 1983, pp. 23–24.

10. Larry L. Lingo, *The Concept of Function in Twentieth-Century Architectural Criticism*. Ann Arbor–London: UMI Research Press, 1984, p. 5.

11. Peter Blundell Jones, "Functionalism," in *Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner. 34 v. New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 1996, vol. 11, pp. 839–842; Lingo, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–12.

12. J. M. Richards, *An Introduction to Modern Architecture*. Baltimore, 1940, p. 37. Quoted by Lingo, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

7. Maciunas, "The Grand Frauds of Architecture," *op. cit.*, p. 1.

8. Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*. 3 vols. Introduction by Ernst Mandel, trans. Ben Fowkes. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1976, vol. 1, pp. 319, 432–437.

of any kind of building, to be achieved thanks to modern economic and technical developments.¹⁴

In fact, George Maciunas had reason to assume that the doctrines of functionalism involved a reconciliation of modernity and desire. Gropius's attempt to reestablish the guilds that would have made the cathedrals of the future was wrapped in an argument that wanted to abolish aesthetic and social alienation, by identifying once again the useful and the beautiful:

Every object is determined by its essence; in order to construct it so that it functions properly, one must ascertain what the essence is, for we must make it serve its purpose perfectly, i.e. fulfill its practical function and be durable, cheap and "beautiful." (. . .)

The "work of art" has to "function," in both the intellectual and material sense, like something produced by an engineer, such as an aeroplane, the obvious purpose of which is to fly.¹⁵

It goes without saying that there is plenty of evidence that artists/theorists like Gropius and Le Corbusier never entirely surrendered their designs to merely pragmatic intentions. Despite his calls to follow the engineers in their pursuit of rational simple forms governed by economic and mathematical principles, Le Corbusier distinguished the roles of the two professions, in arguing that architects needed to go "beyond utilitarian needs," for architecture was "a plastic thing" whose "business" was to establish "emotional relationships" with the aid of the new raw materials of engineering.¹⁶

Nonetheless, the fact that modern architecture was frequently understood as campaigning for a strict utilitarian aesthetics prevailed in many architecture schools all around the world, for it promised that all kinds of collective needs and desires could be achieved by means of an application of economic rationality. This thought at many points suggested an attack on art as an

autonomous practice.¹⁷ The more modern architectural practice identified with a revolutionary Marxist model, the more it adopted a strict functionalist rationale. While Le Corbusier hoped that modern architecture could help to prevent the extension of Bolshevism in Europe, reconciling the workers with the industrial forces,¹⁸ those who sided with the socialist revolution, like Hanes Mayer, defended the view that if architecture had to adjust to the pure rule of efficiency and utility it would sacrifice any kind of aesthetic concerns for the sake of better fulfilling its economic functions:

All things of this world are products of the formula: function and economy. All works of art are compositions and therefore, not suitable. Life, however, is functional and therefore, not artistic. . . . To build is not a process of aesthetics but a biological process.¹⁹

Maciunas's need to condemn all of those architects who had merely become "stage designers," such as Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright, carried the implications of such early modernist polemic. In a certain way, he was right in sensing that buildings such as the Guggenheim Museum signaled the crisis of the functionalist paradigm of modern architecture, for they implicitly recorded the changes that the Western capitalist economy was undergoing at the end of the 1950s. Seen in this perspective, Maciunas's anti-art ought to be read as a desperate attempt to contain the changes that architectural and design values were suffering under the pressures of contemporary capitalism. His fears that the desire of beauty carried with it implicitly an economy of unlimited demand might well be an eccentric reading of the emergence of consumerist society.

2. The question of consumerism

Back in 1929, some members of the technocratic elite in the West started to realize that the shortage of demand that threatened capitalism was to be merely a

14. That modernity would be able to justify the disruption caused by the industrial revolution and the nineteenth century is precisely what Giedion would want architecture to do in reconciling human needs with technological means, by taking into consideration that "in following its material urge, industry unconsciously creates new powers of expression and new possibilities of experience." (Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture. The Growth of a New Tradition*. Cambridge, Mass. and London UK: The Harvard University Press. Geoffrey Cumberlege Oxford University Press, 1946. pp. 99–101.

15. Walter Gropius, *Bauhausbauten Dessau*, Fulda 1930, pp. 8–9, in Hanno-Walter Kfruft, *A History of Architectural Theory. From Vitruvius to the Present*, trans. Ronald Taylor, Elsie Callander, and Antony Wood. London–New York: Zwemmer & Princeton Architectural Press, 1994, pp. 386.

16. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (1923), trans. Frederick Etchells. London: The Architectural Press, 1946, pp. 7, 10.

17. This explains that even architect theoreticians such as Siegfried Giedion devoted sections of their writings to the question "Do We Need Artists?" (Giedion, op. cit., p. 350).

18. "The machinery of Society, profoundly *out of gear*, oscillates between an amelioration, of historical importance, and a catastrophe. (. . .) The various classes of workers in society to-day *no longer have dwellings adapted to their needs; neither the artisan nor the intellectual*. It is a question of building which is at the root of the social unrest of to-day: architecture or revolution." Le Corbusier, op. cit., p. 14.

19. Hanes Mayer, statement in a publication by the Bauhaus, 1929. Quoted in Lingo, op. cit., p. 13.

temporary problem of market society. The Committee on Recent Economic Changes of Roosevelt's presidency foresaw that if consumption could be induced, it was possible to manage capitalism so as to contain economic crisis:

(. . .) wants are almost insatiable; that one want satisfied makes way for another. . . . By advertising and other promotional devices, by scientific fact finding, and by carefully predeveloped consumption, a measurable pull on production . . . has been created.²⁰

Sociologist Gary Cross has eloquently argued that with this new economic outlook "came the discovery of the disciplinary potential of free time and high wages." In the next two decades the moral economy of the early twentieth century was replaced by a new view that ruled out the idea that limited consumer desires posed a threat to the expansion of the market economy. By 1958, the theorists of the so-called affluent society started to claim that "The concept of satiation has very little standing in economics. It is held to be neither useful nor scientific to speculate on the comparative cravings of the stomach and the mind."²¹ To use John K. Galbraith's metaphor, the new consumer began to behave like a "museum" that accumulated "without diminishing the urgency of his wants."²²

With the arrival of the new consumerist society, capitalism left efficiency to the factory floor and public finances, and started demanding its subjects indulge in abundance, waste, luxury, grandiosity, and fancy in order to keep a constant level of market demand. The aestheticization of the commodity world—of which the new architecture George Maciunas so much despised—gave capitalism the tools for enforcing labor discipline and keeping the demand levels that assured its productive superiority. As Jean Baudrillard so well described it, mass consumption, as needed by the increased productivity of industrialism, turned into social labor and thus, paradoxically, was subjected to a similar process of instrumentation and rationalizing past labor. This time, however, the pressure was not only to create the subjective conditions of a theoretically unlimited level of production, but also a theoretically unlimited force of acquisition:

(. . .) the current indoctrination into systematic and organized consumption is *the equivalent and the extension,*

in the twentieth century, of the great indoctrination of the nineteenth century. The same process of rationalization of productive forces, which took place in the nineteenth century in the sector of *production*, is accomplished, in the twentieth century, in the sector of *consumption*. Having socialized the masses into a labor force, the industrial system had to (. . .) socialize the masses (that is, to control them) into a force of consumption. The small investors or the sporadic consumers of the pre-war era, who were free to consume or not, no longer had a place in the system.²³

If one thing characterizes the shortcomings of Maciunas's aesthetic-political outlook it is precisely his inability to understand the importance that prestige and symbolic value, and their expression in the design of commodities and urban spaces, acquired for the *functionality* of the social order of the "post-industrial" economy. But not being able to understand or theorize a historical situation is not the same as being able to ignore it. Maciunas's rejection of the emerging material culture of his age went hand in hand with his hatred of European culture. They were the result of his despair when he discovered around 1962 that life in Western Europe was already as commodified as in North America. His fantasies about the nature of the Eastern Bloc were in great part determined by the hope of finding a society where consumption would not define the members of society. More than a pursuit of social justice, there was one thing that Maciunas valued most about the way the Soviet Bloc was ruled. It seemed to him that real socialism was the last refuge of the rationality of efficiency, while the rest of the developed world was instead more and more subjected to artificial needs induced by decadent capitalism:

Maybe in a few years I will try to settle in East Europe. People here [are] just like in U.S., like pigs stuffing themselves with all kinds of garbage, food, goods, automobiles, bad art, till they are ready to burst. It makes one sick to look at them. It must be Western decadence or something, or I must be seeing visions of pigs everywhere.²⁴

His overt concern with loss and the irrationality of consumption sheds light on the internal differences in Fluxus. Maciunas pictured Wolf Vostell as the paradigm of this "Western decadence." This condemnation was in fact the result of his outrage when, during the

20. Quoted in Gary Cross, op. cit., p. 41.

21. John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (1958), 4th ed. London: Penguin Books, 1987, p. 119.

22. Ibid., p. 123.

23. Jean Baudrillard, "Consumer Society" (1970) in *Selected Writings*, ed. and int. by Mark Poster. London: Polity Press, 1988, p. 50.

24. George Maciunas, Letter to Dick Higgins, ca. January 18 1962. Getty Research Center, Special Collections, Los Angeles, Calif.

Wiesbaden Festival, Vostell had interpreted his *Dé-collage musique* titled *Kleenex* by throwing cake and smearing it against a glass pane located between him and the audience. Similarly, Dick Higgins's "Danger music no. 15" advised the performer to "Work with butter and eggs for a time," so as to make an inedible waste instead of an omelette.²⁵ Maciunas loathed the symbolic waste involved in such action:

I think it *immoral* to destroy food. That is one reason we never performed (after Wiesbaden) Dick Higgins' danger music with eggs & butter.²⁶ That's also the reason I am very hesitant about Vostell's *décollage Kleenex* cake throwing, unless he comes up with variation.²⁷

It is obvious that Higgins's and Vostell's actions were in great part metaphoric readings of the then most striking novelty in the life of Western societies: the abundance of commodities and supplies. But, to what extent can we actually relate their kind of actions and object operations to actual reflections on the new economic structure? In Vostell's case there is little room for doubt. His environments and "Happenings" pretended to transform the audience's experience of their environment, but they tended to succeed when they were obsessive enactments of the troubled discovery of material and visual abundance as experienced by the Europeans in the late 1950s. The images that attracted Vostell, and that he wanted his audience to register, were those derived from the inundation of consumer products and the imperative nature of advertisement as they were colonizing the urban setting:

8—100 washing machines suddenly appear on a square
9—automobiles are covered with black cloth (. . .)
11—the windows of a streetcar are studded with nails
12—policemen give information about their past
13—daily newspapers are completely blank (. . .)
15—blood flows constantly down the wall of a house²⁸

Vostell's *Dé-collage* actions tended to identify the bombardment of images and commodities with the still

25. Cfr. Dick Higgins, *Foew&ombwhnw*. New York—Barton—Cologne: Something Else Press, 1969, p. 18; and *Postface* (1963–1965, 1970) in Dick Higgins et. al., *The Word and Beyond. Four Literary Cosmologists*. New York City, The Smith, 1982, p. 64.

26. Maciunas refers to the first Fluxus Festivals in Wiesbaden, Germany, in September 1962.

27. Maciunas, Letter to Nam June Paik, ca. late January 1963, Tate Gallery Archive, London, United Kingdom. (David Mayor and the Fluxshow Archive): 815.2.1.1.25; and Letter to Robert Watts, before March 11 1963, in Hendricks, *Fluxus etc./Addenda II*, p. 150.

28. Wolf Vostell, "Skeleton. A changing of the environment *dé-collage* theater Wuppertal 1954," in Wolf Vostell, *Dé-collage Happenings*. New York: Something Else Press, 1967, p. 9.

fresh war experiences of the consumers. In "YOU," a happening presented in New York in 1964, the audience was invited to wear gas masks while watching a three-minute program on TV sets burning on top of beds until the monitors exploded, just after having witnessed a parody of concentration camp killings enacted with pigments in an empty swimming pool.²⁹ In one of his best actions, "Television *Dé-collage* for millions 1959," Vostell invited the audience to participate in or react against a series of commands which were nothing but exalted moments of consumption:

hold a fish in your mouth (. . .)
change your clothes rapidly several times in a row
switch to the following channels rapidly one after the other
212321276931234312345917 (. . .)
hold your naked stomach in front of the screen and drink a coca-cola while thinking about pepsi-cola ads (. . .)
turn on all the household appliances and wrap up your tv set with barbed wire
feed the television set a tv dinner
open a current magazine ad and find a whiskey ad
tear the bottle out of the ad
hold the ad with the hole in it over the tv screen (. . .)
shout loudly *economic miracle*
tie your body to a vacuum cleaner and sweep the earth
(. . .)
take the next plane without asking the destination.³⁰

In the light of such imagery it is easier to understand both why Vostell related to the American Fluxus/Happening artistic practices reacting to similar historical phenomena, and why he clashed with Maciunas's defense of the outmoded logic of functionalist aesthetics. The two of them despaired about the current change of social values, but while Vostell denounced it with mimetic exaggeration Maciunas used new arts as a demonstration of an alternative to consumer culture.

3. On the Socialist planning of use-values

The Fluxus leader's compositions tried to demonstrate the possibility of naked object relationships and the routines of efficiency and rationality. Of all the random patterns Maciunas used for creating action music, the most successful and enduring consisted in taking an

29. Wolf Vostell, "YOU: A DECOLLAGE HAPPENING FOR BOB AND RHETT BROWN. King's Point, N.Y., April 19 1964." In Allan Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966, pp. 257–258.

30. "Television *dé-collage* for millions 1959," in Vostell, *Dé-collage Happenings*, pp. 12–14.

“old adding machine tape” to interpret it as the score of an *Homage to Adriano Olivetti* (1962).³¹ To perform the numbers of those found calculations, interpreting each number as a cue for a performer’s action, in strict chronological succession marked by the metronome, appears as an allegory of serial production, subjecting human life to the accountancy of value and efficiency. In works like his *Homage to Olivetti* Maciunas played an imaginary battle against the economics of what he and Henry Flynt called “forced consumption,” i.e., the waste and luxury involved in the seduction of commodity design. For the two *Kulturbolcheviken* “style” was nothing but the market-oriented formula of aesthetic enchantment able to sabotage the practical nature of the Soviet way of life:

To increase labor productivity in the “applied arts,” public ownership is necessary, particularly to escape the forced consumption, the deliberately wasteful stylism [sic] required by the capitalist economy (. . .) But the experience of the Soviet Union shows that these economic prerequisites do not ensure efficient design. The Soviet Union is needlessly backward in the design of automobiles, appliances, furniture, graphics and clothes. (. . .) the efficient design has to be chosen over the stylized design.³²

Their position was not merely a reassertion of modernist anti-decorativism, but an attempt to surpass the strictures of any form of pursuit of a modern style. “An efficient artifact—they claimed—is not a modernistic styled artifact, or even a conventional artifact minus familiar stylization or decoration.” “Efficient” meant providing the highest performance at the lowest cost, a standard achieved “*through complete disregard of artistic, national, and stylistic traditions*” for it ought to be a mere result of “extensive thought analysis” and the use of the latest scientific advances. Professionalism was upheld by Maciunas and Flynt at the cost of any populist or proletarian aesthetical inclination. For the pursuit of this highest industrial standard even gender differences seemed unjustified and eminently reactionary:

The oppressed, the poor and illiterate masses as such have nothing to contribute to engineering in the “applied arts”;

there can be no proletarian design. “Folk handcrafts” (. . .) must be replaced by mass production. (. . .)

As for clothes, their design is complicated by their sexual decorative function. However, attractive sports clothes are often efficient, when they are designed to meet the physical requirements of the sport. The Soviet decision to copy the freakish Paris fashion industry (. . .) exemplifies the reactionary tendency in Soviet “applied arts.”³³

With hindsight it is remarkable how this, by then, radical revolutionary project, was in fact closely following the developing social trends that turned, for instance, “sport” clothes into one of the dominant styles of life in late capitalism. What Flynt and Maciunas could not force was, in fact, the way in which those bygone merely “functional” attires were to be charged with sexualized import, and how their minute differences were turned into devices of social differentiation through fashion as effective as the extreme stylization of bourgeois clothes of the 1950s.

This proposal of what Henry Flynt has described as “the socialist planning of use-values”³⁴ found its foremost expression in George Maciunas’s design of a mass-produced prefabricated system conceived as a contribution to the single sector that even the Soviet authorities acknowledged as the weakest spot in the purportedly unstoppable socialist productive machine: the provision of housing for Russian citizens. In the early 1960s the Soviet state tried to remedy the situation by erecting thousands of prefabricated apartment blocks, which despite their reduced size and rudimentary comforts were a radical improvement for the families that were lucky enough to be allocated to them. Maciunas admired their eminently functionalist design, and of course the industrial method of their production that, according to the official statistics, had allowed the Soviet Union to produce more than three million dwelling units in 1960 alone.³⁵ George Maciunas believed, however, that he could improve the Soviet model, which despite its merits he felt was still too “stylized,” heavy, and lacking in structural flexibility. Maciunas designed an ingenious prefabricated building system composed of only nine mass-produced components, most to be produced in modern plastic

33. Ibid.

34. Henry Flynt, “George Maciunas und meine Zusammenarbeit mit ihm,” in *1962 Wiesbaden Fluxus 1982*, ed. René Block. Wiesbaden, Kassel, Berlin: Harlekin Art. Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD, 1983, p. 106.

35. Maciunas, “Statistics on Housing in the U.S.S.R., U.S.A. and Western European Countries,” Sohm Archive, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart; Flynt, *Communists*, Appendix 1.

31. This and other Fluxus scores are reproduced in *The Fluxus Performance Workbook*, ed. Ken Friedman. Trondheim, Norway: El Djarida, 1990.

32. Henry Flynt, *Communist Must Give Revolutionary Leadership in Culture*. New York: Worldview Publishers, 1966, p. 1. Reproduced in *Fluxus etc./Addenda I. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection*, ed. Jon Hendricks. New York, Ink &, 1983, pp. 38–43.

materials. Except for a "Service Cubicle" that integrated kitchen, bathroom, and heating facilities, the system allowed its user a maximum of flexibility and functional adaptation, from private homes to offices and public buildings, and was always easy to expand, contract, or reshape. So although his system was in fact slightly more expensive than the Russian original prefab housing model it was a remarkable attempt to create something close to a general architectonic equivalent. While modernist functionalism posited the pursuit of architectonic solutions to specific social needs, Maciunas's housing project was presented as the latest in "adaptability" to climate, function, and even the "special needs and habits" of its dwellers. While the Russian flats all had the same square window openings in the front, in Maciunas's flats one would have been able to open windows by merely choosing between transparent or opaque versions of the non-structural exterior walls, or to control climate by merely choosing between different exterior covers. Mounted on precast concrete piles, provided with sliding doors of Japanese inspiration, Maciunas's "prefab" could grow practically indefinitely, although limited to single-story houses, which probably made it unsuitable for the high-density, overpopulated urban centers. It potentially could cover the whole earth, impervious as it would be to heat, cold, hurricanes, earthquakes, corrosion, termites, and vandalism.³⁶ His disregard for cultural, social, or natural particularities, his distrust for aesthetic values and subjective peculiarities, were aptly summarized in this architectonic utopia based on the hope of developing a universal object of pure use-value.

4. In face of the allure of commodities

Taken as a whole, and despite the diversity of their economic models, the different Fluxus strategies can be seen as part of cultural attempts to respond to the swift changes that the rise of the "consumerist economy" brought to the phenomenology of objects and images in Western societies. Such is, in fact, the common ground that links the early 60s aesthetic revolutions, including of course Pop Art and *Nouveau Réalisme*. Certainly these responses to the aesthetic profusion of the new phase of market capitalism varied enormously, putting into disarray the modernist tactics of refusal and differentiation in regard to the aesthetics of the commodity world. But unlike Pop Art or *Nouveau*

Réalisme, the artists in Fluxus did not evolve along the lines of an affirmation or ironic emulation of consumer culture.³⁷ While the early British Pop Artists longed for the "popular-transient-expandable-cheap-mass produced-sexy" aesthetic of the new commodities,³⁸ Andy Warhol explored the fears and desires of the homogenized souls of mass audiences,³⁹ and Pierre Restany construed the "direct appropriation of reality" of the *Nouveau Réalistes* as a constitution of "a modern fetishism of the object" most appropriate for the "contemporary, industrial, mechanic, publicitary" nature of Western societies,⁴⁰ Fluxus (and the Happening movement to a certain extent) was defined by the desperate attempt to find an alternative model of object and image interaction. Its artists shared a sense of discomfort or open rejection of the new objectivity of commodity relations of the early 1960s. The apparent free floating diversity of their conceptual and aesthetic strategies was less as a matter of pluralism, than as a result of their inability to find a single compelling alternative to the new aesthetic conditions of the contemporary economy. Their failure to project such an applicable heterodoxy testifies to the objective difficulty of challenging the new aesthetics of the commodity brought by the consumerist world.

Maciunas's anti-art propositions were based on the assumption that a total disenchantment of object relations would deal a mortal blow to the new Western economic order. Cognitive and rationally defined modes of usage would replace the last remaining forms of the old artistic culture, both for the sake of dealings with reality based on the notion of truth and the furthering of the economic output of the socialist world.

The reasons for Fluxus's failure to contain the commodity aesthetics of its age in the realms of

37. The complexity of the relative reconciliation of mass culture and high art as realized by Pop Art has been explored, among others, by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art: 1956-1966," in *Andy Warhol. A Retrospective*, ed. Kynaston McShine, preface by Richard E. Oldenburg. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989, pp. 39-64.

38. Richard Hamilton, "Letter to Peter and Alison Smithson" (1957), in *Pop Art. A Critical History*, ed. Steven Henry Madoff, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1997, pp. 5-6.

39. See his famous statements to G. R. Swenson: "Someone said that Brecht wanted everybody to think alike. I want everybody to think alike. But Brecht wanted to do it through Communism (. . .) It's happening here all by itself (. . .) so if it's working without trying, why can't it work without being Communist?" *Ibid.*, pp. 103-105.

40. Pierre Restany, "La réalité dépasse la fiction" (June 1961) in *Les Nouveaux Réalistes*, ed. Bernadette Contensou. Paris: Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1986, p. 267.

36. Flynt and Maciunas, *Communist Must*, App. 1 and 2; Hendricks, *Fluxus etc./Addenda I*, pp. 40-42.

architecture and design may be similar to those of Pop Art's cultural success. Given the identification between commodities and their *images*, and the way "design" had infused consumer society with the historicity of art "styles," preaching an absolute opposition to art on the basis of the bygone bourgeois set of utilitarian values had more of a denial about it than of a clarification of the new historical situation.⁴¹ Fluxus, and in particular Maciunas, attest to the aporias of "alternative culture" in terms of its inability to provide an immanent criticism of modern civilization. His endorsement of the modern technological society and the assumptions of technocratic socialism, assumed a standard of rationality which was the least suitable for a deployment of an actual political alternative. In fact, it was implicitly complicit with labor exploitation.

5. Fluxus and the productive

How to describe the tension between Maciunas and his early associates, if not by acknowledging that all of them were implicated, in one or another way, in the structure of economic questions that ruled their failed leader's views? In fact, it well may be that Fluxus is defined by the way several of its artists shared some of the economic concerns Maciunas posed when thinking the relation between art and productivity. Their utopianism, although more amicable than that of Maciunas, somehow was similarly unable to define a workable alternative to the function that contemporary capitalism established for aesthetics in the commodity world.

In 1969 Dick Higgins and Wolf Vostell co-edited an anthology titled *Fantastic Architecture*, published in German with the more commercial title of *Pop Architektur*.⁴² The book, as Vostell put it, compiled the "new methods and processes" introduced by Fluxus, Happening, and Pop Art that posed a "demand for new patterns of behaviour" and "new un-consumed environments."⁴³ This pursuit of novelty was, in part, triggered by the desire to experience something other than what already was made available by the market, but it was also an attempt to claim a certain sense of avant-gardeism. The notion that new art forecast the future conditions of architecture, by developing new

ideas that were waiting to be applied by the professional architects and society at large, was the rewriting of the notion of avant-garde that coalesced most of the 1960s Fluxus-related artists, especially those who were close to the Happening branch of the movement, and in particular to Vostell, Higgins, and Alan Kaprow. In the pursuit of a new model for a relationship between society and art, they aspired to the status of becoming futurist visionaries. Higgins argued that the "artist-researchers" of the anthology were called to "restore a spirit of aesthetic research to architecture"; to correct the mismatch between architectonic practice and "contemporary needs." In his view, the "economics of building" were responsible for "an aridity in our experience," which was in great part due to the architects' unwillingness to incorporate the discoveries of the avant-garde into their projects. This waste of the potentialities locked in contemporary art was particularly prevalent in the architectonic views of the left:

Architecture, (. . .) is the last art still in a primitive state. Virtually none of the aesthetic revolutions of the 20th century has touched it. We cannot speak of Dada architecture, Tachist architecture, even collage architecture. The main innovations have been structural, and (. . .) introducing new materials. (. . .) This is the equivalent, in painting, of introducing a new shade of (. . .) gilt paint, and continuing to make the same old Secessionist (. . .) commodity. (. . .) The perception of space, the use of space (. . .) has been allowed to remain quagmired in 19th century or pseudo-Marxist or even narodnik assumptions. (. . .) architects (. . .) have only begun to escape from the drawing board mentality, (. . .) architecture as process is only being dreamed of.⁴⁴

Those attacks, of course, were not shot randomly, but directly aimed at and provoked by George Maciunas. Late in 1966, Higgins tried unsuccessfully to invite the Fluxus chairman to contribute to the volume. Maciunas's reluctance provoked a small debate that opposed the two artists' views on the dichotomies between need and dream, function and form, art and design, and reason or imagination. Their epistolary exchange could be turned into a little comedy on the encounter of the Soviet administrator and the hippie dreamer:

*George Maciunas: Re: your project of fantastic (unreal . . . made without reference to reality, truth etc.,—Webster's) architecture—I am afraid there is no such animal. It's a contradiction of terms. Maybe you mean fantastic large sculpture.*⁴⁵

44. Dick Higgins, "Introduction," *ibid.*, p. 11.

45. Maciunas, Letter to Dick Higgins, ca. early January 1967. Tate Gallery Archive: 815.2.1.1.24.

41. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books, 1994, pp. 16, 29.

42. Wolf Vostell & Dick Higgins, *Fantastic Architecture*. New York: Something Else Press, 1969. s.p. published in Düsseldorf, Germany by Droste Verlag GmbH.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Dick Higgins: "Suggestion: assign yourself very difficult, specific construction problem (. . .). Solve problem in fantastic manner.⁴⁶ (. . .) Fantastic also means of or pertaining to the fantasy (i.e. imagination), also conceived or having the appearance of being conceived by wild and unrestrained fantasy."⁴⁷

GM: The only worthwhile work I do now is product design (inc. architecture as an industrial product).⁴⁸

DH: May we include the architecture article you had in the COMMUNIST MUST GIVE REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP IN CULTURE (. . .)? It is perfect for it.

GM: I wrote on this subject in the past (. . .) architecture (. . .) becomes sculpture if it's fantastic & if it's architecture it's not fantastic but realistic—my prefab system is very realistic (. . .) it was conceived not by fancy but a rational approach—like a mathematical problem. I don't believe in Gaudy [sic], F. L. W. or other stage designers. My architectural ideal is an engineer such as Maillart, Candela, B. Fuller, Le Corbu—etc.⁴⁹

DH: Fantastic! Who would have thought you'd be so disturbed by the word "fantastic." (. . .) Maybe it isn't the best title. (. . .) the name of the book (. . .) is intended to attract readers who will be confronted by our views and, hopefully, convinced by them.⁵⁰

The perfect symmetry between the two positions speaks volumes about their mutual implication. As we will see in detail later, their main disagreement referred to the issues of the definition and limits of the notion of art. Maciunas insisted on drawing a contrast between architecture's bond with purposes and sculpture's fancy. Vostell and Higgins, on the contrary, proclaimed that there was no difference any more between those two types of activity: "*Action is architecture! Everything is architecture!*" That loss of specification was in fact what they considered their central contribution to be. But the conceptual grid inside which they made their discussion of the art/non-art character of architecture was the same: An issue about utility and function. Ultimately, the question needed to be posed as a matter of the structural opposition of art and production, efficiency and waste:

46. Ibid.

47. Dick Higgins, Letter to George Maciunas, January 23, 1967. Tate Gallery Archive: 815.2.1.1.19

48. Postcard to Alison Knowles, ca. February 1967. Tate Gallery Archive: 815.2.1.1.24.

49. Dick Higgins, Letter to George Maciunas, including George Maciunas's answer. September 30, 1968. Tate Gallery Archive: 815.2.1.1.19

50. Dick Higgins, Letter to George Maciunas. October 7, 1968. Tate Gallery Archive: 815.2.1.1.19

Architecture, art and non-art—a sculpture to sit on? A chair. A chair understood as sculpture? A sculpture. Art is as art does. To the workman, building Oldenburg toilet floats on the Thames would be a job no different from building a bridge, a little more exotic maybe, but along the lines of industrial display. (. . .) to the project of Tinguely, Spoerri (. . .) might a workman be appalled by the inefficiency of the structure? Or might he be amused at the obvious waste of effort?⁵¹

Maciunas and Higgins shared the same issues; the bond that kept them related all through the Fluxus years was the perfect reciprocity of their disagreement. There are, however, few doubts as to who set up the agenda of this dialogical structure. It was Maciunas, who structured Vostell and Higgins's position by reaffirming the orthodoxy of the division of the modern faculties.

On the other hand, Higgins's moderate reformulation of the notion of fantasy shows clearly the extent to which their postures were far from involving manifest surrealist-like defiance of modern rationality. A good deal of the architectonic "dreams" Higgins and Vostell collected confirmed Maciunas's fears that their approach would only lead to the repackaging of art works as if they had architectonic intentions. Claes Oldenburg's gigantic everyday object monuments; land-art interventions like Michael Heizer's *Dissipate* line-traces on the sand of the Black Rock Desert, Nevada (1968); or Dennis Oppenheim's wheatfield drawings could only be included in the anthology by taking them out of their sculpture context. It was only among the artists of the Fluxus group that the visionary model of the future architectonics was taken with some earnestness. To offer one of the best examples, Robert Filliou proposed planning cities in order to realize the flaneur's assumption that the streets were a spectacle. Museums and galleries, he proposed, ought to be abolished so all art works and performances would replace the merchandise in the store windows on street level. Filliou's proposal merely extended a trend that was already implicit in the new functioning of urban spaces and markets, acknowledging how interchangeable art had become with standard commodities: "Why fill store windows with things that can be seen by entering the shop anyway?" The transgressive mode of Filliou's utopias mirror the routines of consumerist pleasures:

Another thing to develop is what I call "the Erotic Sidewalk 2." Through some electronic device embedded in the sidewalk, men and women can get sexual gratification

51. Higgins and Vostell, *Fantastic Architecture*, "Caption 6," p. 75.

when they see women or men they fancy walk by. Think also of the facial expressions, and physical contortions, that would follow. What a show for these who are resting between orgasms!⁵²

How different were these climaxes from shopping? For instead of a critique of the specification of architectonic agency in modernity, or a reading of the politics of spaces, markets, and types of artistic intervention, this “avant-garde” verged on futurist naiveté. Even Raoul Haussman, the ex-dadaist, who contributed a manifesto titled “An Appeal for Fantasy,” abandoned his disrespect for the ideology of progress by projecting “non-gravitational” dwellings for the inhabitants of the space-travel era.⁵³ Surely, *Fantastic Architecture* did not pretend to be a critique of the social system, but rather, frequently risked turning into a technocratic wild dream, not altogether far from John Cage’s mid-1960s belief in the possibility of reaching anarchism through the global success of multinational corporations. Vostell’s and Higgins’s idea of radical art consisted in believing that artistic creation would accelerate industrial development, by shortcutting the process of technological improvement:

Technology—to apply successfully one’s material knowledge to any given problem. Simply to use complex techniques? Heck, half the time, what a waste. Artists and builders mostly using electron microscopes as fly swatters and computers as adding machines. In the early 19th century the technology of steam was well known and had been for a hundred years, but it was only after this very long time that such men as Morey and Fulton “bothered” to make a steamboat. We cannot afford the luxury of such a time lag today. There are too many of us competing for space and for the world’s material resources.⁵⁴

Higgins’s reflections are rather unsatisfactory as an architectural critical discourse. One would feel that by avoiding any discussion of what Maciunas called the “stage designer” kind of architect, i.e., the whole branch of modernist/early postmodernist architecture that had tried to develop an aesthetic revaluation against hard-core functionalism, *Fantastic Architecture* failed to engage in an actual discussion of the fate of architecture in its age. By the 1960s there was already an internal critique of modernist architecture about which an entirely external provocation coming from fantasy had

very little to contribute. Paradoxically, Maciunas’s belated functionalism had more awareness of the social tensions involved in the social history of design than did the neo-avant-garde gesture of his Fluxus foes.

Nonetheless, their positions seem made one for the other—conflicting views of the same unsolved problem. For despite its aesthetic divisions, personal animosities, philosophical misunderstandings, and political conflicts, the discourse of Fluxus is always a debate about economic development. It is neither a renunciation nor a radical critique of this development’s consequences. Rather, it is an anguished attempt to find a place for art despite, or even while secretly agreeing with, the almost absolute consensus that, beyond ideologies and social systems, was established in the 1960s around the goal of economic development. Fluxus is a collection of artistic experiments and aesthetic speculations about the fate of art under development, about the relationship between aesthetics, production, knowledge, and leisure, entertainment and material culture, the balance of satisfaction and purpose, rest and activity. More precisely, these arguments revolve around the necessary antinomy between development and satisfaction, a tension that, despite its presence in the mere thought of work, acquires special relevance for art given the affluent society’s social discovery that no matter how successfully developed an economy would be, it needed to enforce perpetual dissatisfaction. One of the best ways to identify a Fluxus artist, and to describe his or her place in the culture of the time, consists of determining who tirelessly tried to find a peremptory solution to the unsatisfactory character of development, and the seeming uselessness of art, and the transformations that contemporary capitalism was bringing to the balance of work and leisure of modernity. Robert Filliou, who became a poet after obtaining a Ph.D. in economics, and who worked in the economic reconstruction of South Korea in the early 1950s, explored this kind of concern in his attempt to develop a poetic economy.⁵⁵ In totally different ways than those of Maciunas, he also reflected the unsettling realization that abundance need not lead to justice, nor to fulfillment, least of all to an expansion of leisure:

There exists a very large number of people, throughout the world, who work hard, and remain poor. (. . .) There exists also a class of people (artists) who work hard and remain destitute. (. . .) In New York I came across an ad:

52. Robert Filliou, Letter to Dick Higgins and Wolf Vostell, October 10, 1968, *ibid.*, p. 136.

53. Raoul Haussman, “An Appeal for Fantasy,” (1967). *Ibid.*, pp. 170–171.

54. Higgins and Vostell, “Caption 3,” *ibid.*, p. 37.

55. Pierre Tilman, “The Four Lives of Robert Filliou,” *Artpress* 238 (March 1998):39.

FIGHT POVERTY THE AMERICAN WAY: WORK

The first question to be asked, then, is whether artists should be working or not, that is to say, whether they should have a side job bringing them an income, so that their art is created in their spare time, and becomes the alternative to going to a bar for a drink or chasing girls (. . .) A form of socialism where the avowed goal is to make artists out of everyone. Thus there would exist an ever-growing group whose income is according to need, and whose contribution is according to ability, technology being used to create leisure, and art to indicate ways to use (consume) it. When all works of art will have no value, they will be beautiful.⁵⁶

To be part of Fluxus consisted of exploring the antinomies of production and desire within developmental societies of the 1960s. Even its interest in Zen buddhism was colored by such a perspective. One simply needs to read the ironic Zen questions that Nam June Paik posed in March 1963 for his "Exposition of Experimental Television" in Wuppertal to confirm it. In the very first show in which Paik manipulated TV monitors as an art form, by distorting live-transmission signals ("the most variable optical and semantic event in the Nineteen-sixties"), changing the internal circuits of the receptors, and experimenting with waves produced by generators, tape-recorders, and radios, Paik questioned the validity of the reception of Zen in the West. But instead of stressing a relativist defense of cultural specificity, he challenged Zen's coherence with the state of dissatisfaction which was at the base of the economic superiority of the West:

Now let me talk about Zen, although I avoid it usually, not to become the salesman of "OUR" culture like Daisetsu Suzuki, because (. . .) the self-propaganda of Zen (the doctrine of the self-abandonment) must be the stupid suicide of Zen.

(. . .) Zen is anti-avant-garde, anti-frontier spirit, anti-Kennedy, Zen is responsible for asian poverty.

How can I justify Zen, without justifying asian poverty?
(. . .)

Anyway, if you see my TV, please, see it more than 30 minutes. (. . .)

The perpetual Unsatisfaction is the perpetual evolution. It is the merit of my experimental TV.⁵⁷

56. Robert Filliou, *Lehren un Lernen als Aufuehrungskuenste. Teaching and Learning as Performance Arts*. New York: Verlab Gebr. Koenig, 1970 (from notebook, ca. 1962), p. 75.

57. Nam June Paik, "Afterlude to the EXPOSITION of EXPERIMENTAL TELEVISION 1963, March, Galerie Parnass," in *fLuxus cc fiVe ThReE*, Fluxus newspaper no. 4, June 1964, p. 1.

We keep on encountering the same themes, and probably the same mixture of prophetic disillusion: Fluxus is a collection of failed, and in that sense underdeveloped, alternative aesthetics confronting the enormous development obtained by capitalism through the success of its aestheticized commodity world. What made Fluxus different from the two mainstream expressions of the same phenomena (Pop Art and *Nouveau Réalisme*) was that the Fluxus artists wished to confront, rather than merely reflect or explore, the new aesthetic status of the commodity and environment. They were trapped in an ambivalent attitude with regard to the new stage of modernization: they would have liked to discover a new formula of aesthetic discomfort, while at the same time they wished to transform art so that it would become a productive force.