

DÉCOLL/AGE. BULLETIN AKTUELLER IDEEN:
A MANUAL FOR NAVIGATING THE INTERSTITIAL SPACES
BETWEEN SURVIVING AND LIVING

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Subtitled ‘Bulletin aktueller Ideen’, the first issue of *décoll/age* was published in Cologne in June 1962. In contrast to the sparse design of the cover, upon which the names of its contributing artists are horizontally listed, the layout of the magazine and its typographic identity appear visually diverse and heterogeneous. Encompassing an array of typefaces, text layouts, colour densities, line lengths and orientations, the arrangement of the material and the sequence of one work to the next are clearly delineated in the inaugural issue: pages are bound together conventionally, with each artist featured on a separate fold-out sheet. All the works are reproduced in black and white, which highlights the predominantly textual and language-based character of many of the works reprinted in *décoll/age 1*.

Halfway through the issue can be seen a contribution by its editor, West German artist Wolf Vostell: an untitled work consisting of serially arranged photographs of a mostly gruesome or sexualized nature, a reproduction of a lacerated poster tersely titled *Dé Collage* (figure 1) and two crudely pasted photographic images with the caption *Verwischung* (‘Blurring’ or ‘Erasure’). Towards the very end of the magazine can be seen another ambiguity added by the editor: an unrefined collection of documents and newspaper clippings reporting on the amusing activities of an urban wanderer in the city of Cologne (figure 2). This visual disjuncture within the first issue of the magazine was perhaps an early indication of the aesthetic divergences, and in some instances lasting tensions, between Vostell and the artists invited to contribute to this first issue of his magazine.

With the exception of the visual poet Pera, the rest of the contributors – Benjamin Patterson, George Maciunas, Nam June Paik, Arthur Köpcke, the composer La Monte Young and Vostell himself – were soon after identified with the international collective known as Fluxus. The publication of the



Figure 1 Wolf Vostell, *De collage*, 1962, *décoll/age 1* (June 1962). Black offset on white paper, 26 cm × 42 cm. Archivo Happening Vostell, Museo Vostell Malpartida, Junta de Extremadura, Spain. © DACS 2016.



Figure 2 Wolf Vostell, *No title* (Clippings on Dr. Braun), *décoll/age* 1. Black offset on white paper, 26 cm × 42 cm. Archivo Happening Vostell, Museo Vostell Malpartida, Junta de Extremadura, Spain. © DACS 2016.

first issue coincided with the *Kleines Sommerfest Après John Cage* (Wuppertal) and *Neo Dada in der Musik* (Düsseldorf). These two events announced the soon-to-be Fluxus artists to the West German audience as a comedic musical ensemble. In their fusion of Zen Buddhism, Cagean pedagogy and (neo-) Dada nihilism, these 1962 events reverberated through West Germany's art scene over the next decade.¹

Vostell's first editorial venture preceded (in its distribution) two further, seminal Fluxus publications. The first, titled *An Anthology*, showcased experimental music, concrete poetry, notational works and theoretical essays. Compiled by La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low in 1961, and designed by Maciunas, it was eventually published in New York in late 1963. The second was *Fluxus 1*, devised by Maciunas as part of seven yearbooks to be released between 1962 and 1965. Although the first issue, dedicated to American experimental and new art, was originally intended to be published in Wiesbaden in late 1962, the project did not come to fruition until 1964, once Maciunas had relocated to New York. Both publications brought forth a set of aesthetic principles that remained central to Fluxus. *An Anthology* evidenced the impact of new methods of musical composition and notation – among them the employment of chance operations and indeterminacy –

on a broad range of art forms.² *Fluxus 1* was the first in a series of multiples and collective publications that challenged accepted notions of authorship and engaged the viewer in diverse cognitive and sensory activities and experiences.³

Décoll/age nevertheless remains, if only accidentally, the first Fluxus-affiliated publication both within and beyond Europe, a point that is often overlooked in related scholarship.⁴ Spanning from 1962 to 1969, with a total of seven issues, *décoll/age* documents an array of performance and action-based international practices of the decade. If the magazine merits critical attention however, then it does so for reasons other than its chronological precedence. This article argues that an examination of the first issue of *décoll/age* allows us to reconsider the ways in which Fluxus artists understood their role within society and, by extension, their relationship to an audience, as part of a renewed engagement with the quotidian and the commonplace as legitimate areas of artistic production and aesthetic experience. Importantly, such exploration was invested with a belief in the emancipatory possibilities emanating from the eventual ‘elimination of the audience’, to cite Allan Kaprow’s famous phrase from 1966, and the concurrent ‘death of the author’, as pronounced by Roland Barthes in 1967.⁵

Importantly, the medium of the magazine provided at this historical juncture a unique perspective into the shifting positions of artists and audience. During the 1960s and 1970s the magazine became, in Gwen Allen’s words, an ‘alternative exhibition space’, an unconventional ‘site’ for the production, distribution and reception of art.⁶ Publishing played a pivotal role in the formation of Fluxus, which was initially conceived by Maciunas as a typographic vehicle for the work of like-minded artists. Publications remained a constant part of Fluxus production and contributed significantly to the international make-up and expansion of the group. Scholars have noted how periodicals were formative in shaping the Fluxus community and have analyzed the ways in which they were distributed across borders, offering, in the words of Jessica Santone, ‘an expression of global commonality’.⁷

Décoll/age, however, occupies a rather marginal position within the Fluxus periodicals, as it remained attached to Vostell’s own practice rather than to the production of the group as a whole. In subsequent issues, Vostell invited artists belonging to the competing factions of Happenings and Fluxus, and his affinity to both has been the subject of sustained interest.⁸ These loose

affiliations make the magazine less of a mainstream Fluxus manifesto in intent. Nonetheless, the first issue of *décoll/age* provides us with the opportunity to examine a fundamental, if ill-defined, aspect of the production of artists' magazines: their intended readership. To be sure, Vostell refrains from any such editorial comments in the first issue. My aim, however, is to identify the role, and historical specificity, of the reader as positioned by the magazine.

Décoll/age 1 is emphatically geared to the 'unskilled' reader, and consolidates the idea of the deliberately deskilled artist devoted to the democratisation or even 'collectivisation' of cultural production. Drawing upon the content of the magazine and looking at the formative ideological underpinnings of Fluxus, in what follows I will describe *décoll/age* as a 'manual' that can be seen as a counter-educational project aimed at transforming the ways in which its readers experienced their living context. Paying particular attention to the title – and conceptual guiding principle – of the magazine, I also argue that the first issue traces the correspondence between *décollage*, as an emancipatory act of participation in the public sphere, and the intermediary, 'do-it-yourself' aesthetics of Fluxus. In the first two sections I offer a short introduction to Vostell's practice of *décollage* and his affinity to the work of the French *affichistes*, followed by a visual analysis of the Fluxus pieces in the first issue. In the third and final part, I analyze the notion of skill and craft both in the context of Fluxus production and within the wider setting of the Cold War.

From *décollage* to *décoll/age*

In 1949, French artists Jacques Villeglé and Raymond Hains removed the torn posters displayed on a hoarding located in Paris, and mounted them onto a large-scale canvas, henceforth titled *Ach Alma Manetro. Décollage*, Hannah Feldman writes, 'was born in these short, mythic moments of "la découverte", "le choix", and "le geste appropriative"' – that is, of discovery, selection, and appropriating gesture.⁹ Vostell's early works from 1954, also produced in Paris, appear indistinguishable from the *décollage* pieces of the French *affichistes*. However, his *décollage* practice, as the artist has persistently insisted, was born in another mythic moment of discovery: his chance reading of an article reporting a plane crash, printed in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* on 6 September 1954, under the title of 'Peu après son décollage' ('Right after taking off'). This report later appeared on the cover of the sixth issue of *décoll/age*, published in 1967.¹⁰

In an altogether contradictory account, Vostell contended that he started to use the term in 1958, after finding it listed in a French-German dictionary.¹¹ By the early 1960s, Vostell had fragmented the word into dé/coll-age, now consisting of two prefixes and the word 'age'. This version, essentially a collision of different languages, appeared on the cover of the third issue of his journal and implied the polysemy, ambiguity, and potential internationality of the term. Combining up-to-date and *Fraktur* ('Gothic type') typefaces, the word also suggests overlapping temporalities of past and present, as well as modes of destruction and creation. In Vostell's *décollage*, notes Richard Langston in reference to his practice, 'the incorporation of crashing in taking off, applied just as equally to German and European history as it did to quotidian experience in the post-war present'.¹²

Despite this tactical, and essentially linguistic, dissociation from the French *affichistes*, Vostell's *décollage* practice was grounded in the shared experience of an urban, post-war space – a space marked by recent destruction, but also gradually colonized by posters and advertisements, colourful and sensational images bearing the promise of an affluent future – and the material traces of collective acts of vandalism and discontent. Accumulating lacerated posters, the French *affichistes*, as commentators such as Benjamin Buchloh and Yve-Alain Bois have agreed, eliminated their personal signature and authorial choice.¹³ In contrast to the relational composition of *collage* – and here Buchloh asserts Villeglé's and Hains's disillusionment with the revolutionary potential of pre-war avant-gardes – *décollage* denies any internal relationship, whether pictorial or textual.¹⁴ Their work, Bois notes, witnesses the collapse of human communication as such. In the multi-layered collisions of word and image any information turns, in his words, into 'undifferentiated noise'.¹⁵

Nevertheless, as Feldman convincingly demonstrates, Villeglé and Hains did not limit their comment to an exclusive critique of spectacle culture, merely indulging in an idle contemplation of language's disintegration under the conditions of advanced capitalism.¹⁶ Feldman brings attention to Hains's 1961 exhibition *La France déchirée* ('France torn-apart'), mostly made out of mounted and torn political posters advertising the electoral campaign that took place during the French-Algerian War. The critical potential of the exhibition lay in the act of naming and exposing this collection of vandalized material in the space of *La France déchirée*. The exhibition offered an alternative public realm, potentially opening up what Hannah Arendt described as a

‘space of appearance’.¹⁷ It was precisely by rendering visible these unnoticed acts of intervention in the urban space that the exhibition permeated the possibility of political recognition beyond the hegemonic realms of print media and advertising.¹⁸

1961 also marked a shift in Vostell’s work. He organized *Cityrama 1*, his first German happenings in the streets of Cologne, and produced the *décollage* composition *Ihr Kandidat* (‘Your Candidate’). Transposing the lessons of the French *affichistes* into the realm of collective action, Vostell guided the participants of *Cityrama* through sites colonized by campaign advertising. Following instruction-based scores, the participants turned themselves into flâneurs. In their subject matter both works questioned the possibilities of political representation and participation in the public realm, in the manner of *La France déchirée*.

That same year Vostell produced his first ‘Verwischungen’ after participating in Benjamin Patterson’s operatic performance ‘Lemons’. This early collaboration precluded Vostell’s participation and continuous engagement with Fluxus. The persistence of *décollage* throughout the issues of his magazine deserves attention. The first issue suggested a particular amalgamation of Fluxus and *décollage* principles, embodied in the figure of Dr. Braun. Vostell interpolated into the magazine a series of clippings, dating back to 1952–1953 and taken from local Cologne newspapers. These report that Braun was an urban wanderer who was detained 165 times for vandalising posters placed on advertising pillars. Accompanying photographs depict Braun ‘disseminating through speech and writing his views on the affairs of public life’ in the midst of a square, surrounded by passersby. Rather than Vostell’s self-creation, Dr. Braun is a real, ready-made alter ego. Asserting the double origins of *décollage* in the commercialized space of the post-war city and the print-mediated public sphere, Vostell reinstates his partnership with the everyman *affichiste*. He brings into visibility the anonymous creator; an alliance-turned-identification with the everyman, and the non-artist, that emerges as the underlying principle of *décoll/age 1*.

Fluxus artists in *décoll/age*

The works featured in *décoll/age 1* conflate the boundaries between the textual, the musical, the visual, and the performative. Fluxus artist Dick Higgins described such works in 1966 as ‘intermedia’ – works which, as

in his oft-quoted phrase, ‘fall between media’.¹⁹ Referring primarily to Fluxus and Happenings, Higgins contended that intermedia responded to ‘the social problems that characterize our time’.²⁰ Artistic adherence to the confines of specific media and genres evidenced and perpetuated social divisions. A growing populism would render medium specificity obsolete. ‘We are approaching’, Higgins wrote, ‘the dawn of a classless society, to which separation into rigid categories is absolutely irrelevant’.²¹ Higgins propounded the close correspondence between intermedia and societal change in his foreword to the collaborative Fluxus publication *The Four Suits* of 1965, in which he states: ‘But the fact that these new media exist because of subject matter, because of the specifics and needs of the work, implies, as I have already pointed out, forms that are themselves derived from subject matter specifically social’.²²

Intermediality, even if not named as such, was announced as a programmatic Fluxus principle already in Wuppertal in 1962 during the concert *Après John Cage* (9 June). In his introduction to the concert, Arthus C. Caspari read from Maciunas’s ‘Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art’. ‘Neo-Dada’, wrote Maciunas, ‘ranges from “time” arts to “space” arts’.²³ These border-crossing art practices embodied in Maciunas’s view the principle of concretism, which in its pure form equalled ‘non-art, anti-art, nature, reality’.²⁴ Attacking the professional status of the artist, Maciunas called for a socially-relevant art that would eventually dissolve into general cultural production and life.

The aforementioned statement indicates that Fluxus artists understood themselves as mediators between the aesthetic and social spheres, and thus conceived of their role as transitional and transitory. This intricate relation between artist, society and artistic media is at the core of the Fluxus project. Taking *décoll/age* as my case study, I wish to examine some of the conditions that compelled Fluxus artists to turn away from medium-specific practices in the early 1960s. Paying particular attention to the ways in which Fluxus artists selected and modelled their material, I will argue that these novel reconfigurations of artistic media reflected a utopian belief in the coming of an egalitarian society.

The works featured in *décoll/age* are in many respects typical of Fluxus production, particularly with respect to the emphasis placed on the sonority of everyday life. Three of the contributions in the magazine point towards this entanglement of the sonorous and the commonplace. La Monte Young

presented eleven of his collectively known *Compositions 1960*, the majority of which came in the form of simple verbal instructions. Created under the influence of Cage's course on Experimental Composition, these works, as Liz Kotz notes, 'came out of an expanded sense of "music" and an expanded sense of medium'.²⁵ Importantly, they evoke one of the main principles of Cagean composition: the notion of indeterminacy. Rather than representing an already predetermined musical composition, the verbal notation of the pieces allowed for multiple realizations imbued with contingency.²⁶

Of the eleven pieces, *Composition #10* (1960), or rather, one of its many re-enactments, is now considered a seminal event in the history of Fluxus. It was performed by Nam June Paik during the *Fluxus International Festspiele Neuster Musik* in Wiesbaden on August 9, 1962, and retitled *Zen for Head*. Dragging his head along the length of a 13-foot-long sheet of paper, Paik's was one of the most memorable and amusing critiques of the grandiose artistic gesture as exemplified by American post-war painting, whilst also standing as an equally apparent, if unusually liberal and unbridled, act of 're-authoring' Young's work.²⁷

This double accomplishment – the absurd denunciation of modernist predilections, and the aggressive usurpation of authorship – was also evident in Paik's own contribution to *décoll/age*. Titled *Entwicklungshilfe* ('Development Aid') the piece asked the reader to interrupt an operatic performance by leaping over the audience. In contradistinction to the detailed verbal instructions, however, the accompanying visual component of the piece bears almost no imprint of the artist's hand, with the exception of an arrow drawn across it (figure 3). This is an *objet trouvé* – an actual concert hall plan – reanimated as a score that if realized redirects the audience's attention from the stage to the uproarious choreography occurring in the seating area. Aiming at disrupting and reversing the hierarchy between spectators and artists/performers, the piece furthermore suggests in its title the entanglement of barbarism and high culture.

Maciunas's contributions, a series of compositions written in 1962, demonstrated a similar defiance of the musical and social conventions of the concert hall. His compositions in *décoll/age*, like *Solo for Violin*, display Maciunas's distinct combination of efficiency with slapstick humor, as absurd, comical instructions are arranged in a grid. Maciunas had experimented with this compositional format already in his 1961 *Music for Everyman*, an

Name June Paik

OPERNHAUS DER STÄDTISCHEN BÜHNEN

Die Abonnenten werden rechtzeitig benachrichtigt, damit sie für die kommende Spielzeit ihr Abonnement erneuern können

Neue Interessenten werden gebeten, ihre Anschrift dem Platzmietenbüro der Bühnen – im Opernhaus, Ruf... – mitzuteilen

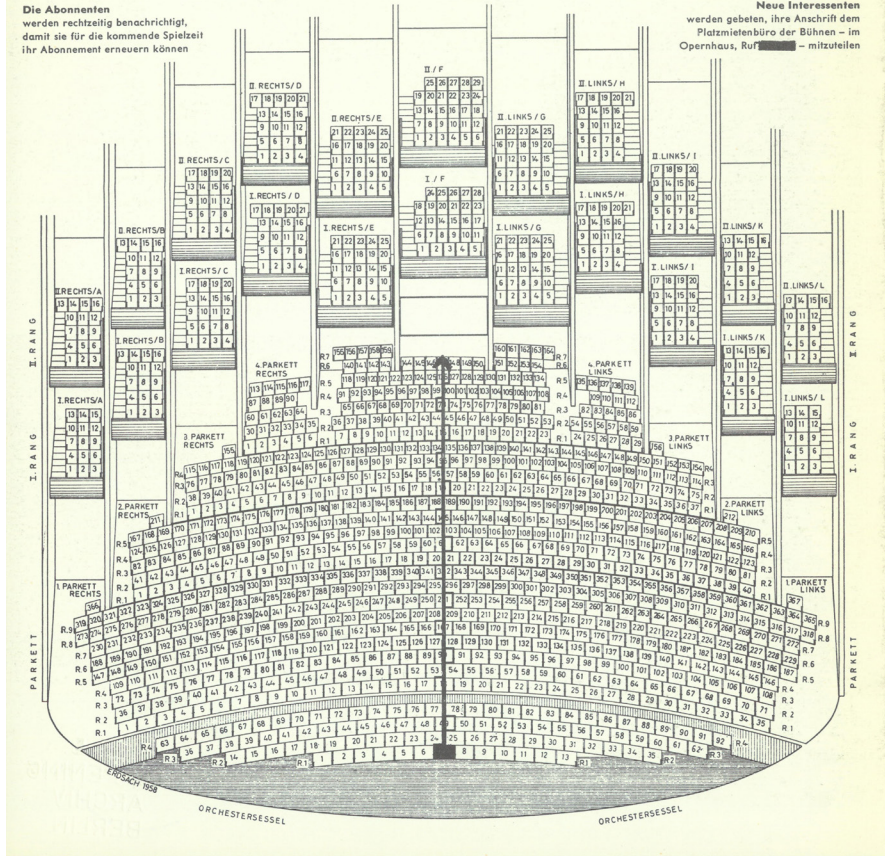


Figure 3 Nam June Paik, *Entwicklungshilfe*, 1962, *décoll/age* 1. Black offset on white paper, 26 cm (high) × 20.1 cm. Archivo Happening Vostell, Museo Vostell Malpartida, Junta de Extremadura, Spain. © Nam June Paik Estate.

instructional composition arranged in long, subdivided grids. Requiring no musical instruments, the piece suggests a long series of nonsensical activities that can be performed with domestic props and anticipates his *Fluxmanifesto on Fluxamusement*, in which he called for the replacement of art by amusement. This ‘art-amusement’ as he called it would be ‘unlimited, obtainable by all and eventually produced by all’.²⁸

Not only Maciunas’s conception of ‘art-amusement’, but importantly the whole output of Fluxus periodicals, including *décoll/age*, indicated the collectivization of cultural production through the private, and consequently dispersed performative activity of reading. In their contributions, Arthur Köpcke and Benjamin Patterson mobilized this tension by turning to mass image forms circulating in the print media of the time and consumed in the private sphere of the home. Köpcke’s work, a series of word puzzles in the form of solved crosswords, suggested the semantic instabilities of language. In his *Methods and Processes* (1962, figure 4) Benjamin Patterson engaged with the evocative and semantic operations of the photographic image, as found, contextually framed and recycled through the printing press. Two cut out

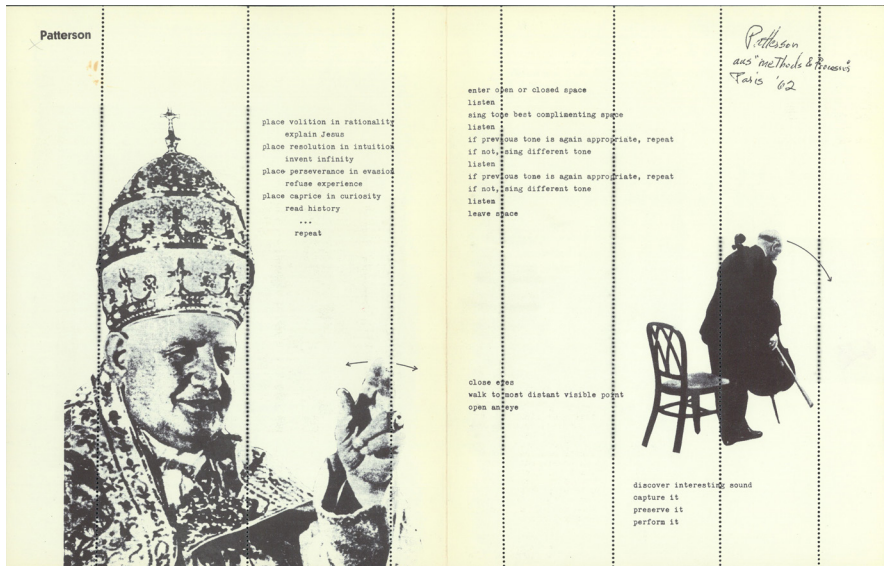


Figure 4 Benjamin Patterson, *Methods and Processes*, 1962, *décoll/age* 1. Black offset on white paper, 26 cm × 42 cm. Archivo Happening Vostell, Museo Vostell Malpartida, Junta de Extremadura, Spain. © Benjamin Patterson.

photographs of Pope Saint John XXIII and a cello player are pasted next to short typeset poems. These retain in their subject matter a rudimentary, yet de-familiarizing, relation to the images – the piece asks, for example, that the readers ‘place volition in rationality, explain Jesus’ or ‘discover an interesting sound’. Furthermore, the piece implies a functional correspondence between the imperative mode of the verse and the interpolated arrows next to the images. The arrows animate the still image and compel the reader to re-enact ready-made gestures of religious and cultural authority.

Patterson’s second contribution, *Collected Poem No. 35* (1960, figure 5), is part of a series of predominantly visual works comprising of found imagery. The two photographs occupying the space of a perforated, fold-out sheet of paper appear to have been retrieved from ethnographic and historical archives – the first depicts a collective tribal activity, the other a group of white men and women in turn-of-the-century clothing. The unsystematic juxtaposition of these two images, as well as the accompanying one-verse poem, ‘Aus Liebe zur Ordnung’ (‘Out of love for order’), implies an ambiguous relation between text and image, and the inherent instability of photographic meaning. The short instructions at the end of the poem – ‘tear along perforations, shuffle pieces, reassemble’ – call for a sensory, material and performative engagement with these images that further destabilizes their interpretive frame.

The above-mentioned pieces aimed at the ‘activation of the spectator’, as West German poet Jürgen Becker described in *Happenings, Fluxus, Pop art, Nouveau Réalisme*, a volume he co-edited with Vostell in 1965.²⁹ Such works, as composer Ramón Barce argued in the same volume, did not merely propagate wider accessibility to culture: at stake here was ‘not an art for all, but rather from all’.³⁰ Indeed, the notion of ‘openness’, suggesting the inherent semantic instabilities and contingencies of creation and interpretation, were pivotal in the inception of do-it-yourself artworks and the emergence of spectator participation in the art of the 1960s more broadly, and in Fluxus particularly. Structurally, as Anna Dezeuze notes, do-it-yourself artworks shared ‘with scientific experimental protocols a concern with maintaining a balance between limited variables and an openness to a range of results, including unexpected ones’.³¹

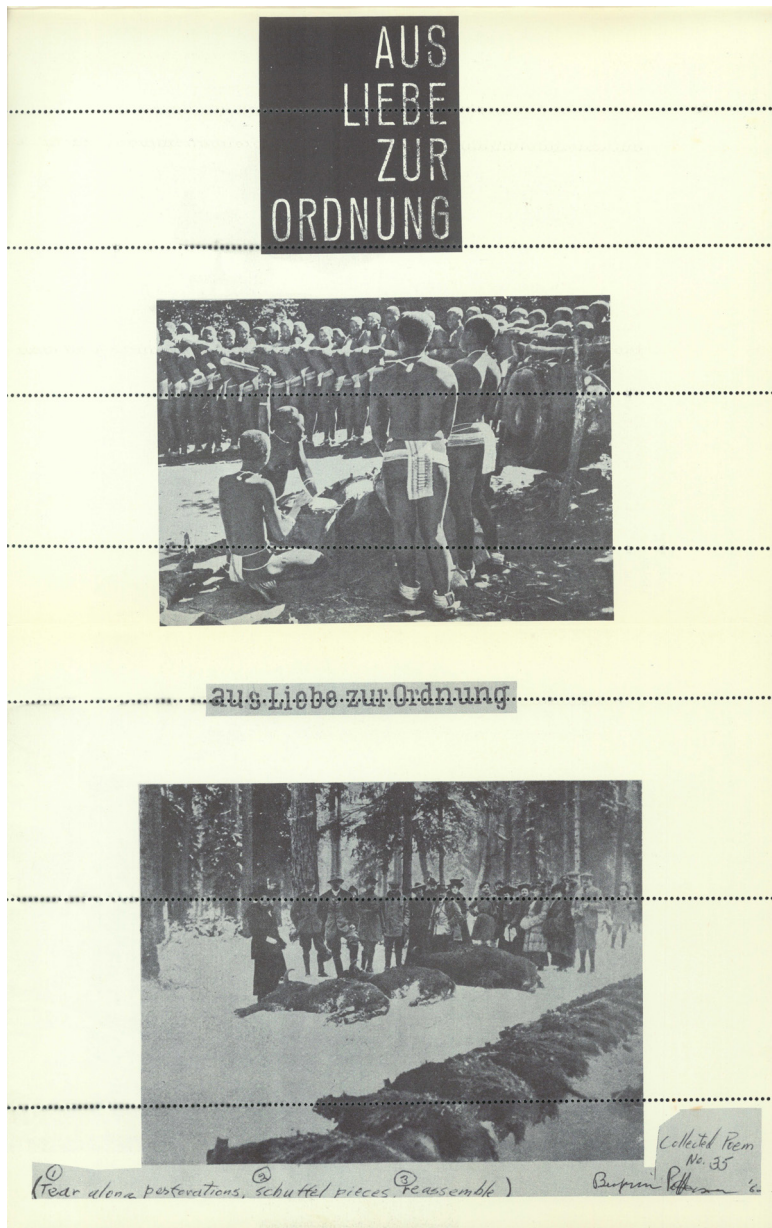


Figure 5 Benjamin Patterson, *Collected Poem No. 35*, 1960, *décoll/age I*. Black offset on white paper, 26 cm × 42 cm. Archivo Happening Vostell, Museo Vostell Malpartida, Junta de Extremadura, Spain. © Benjamin Patterson.

Deskilled artists, unskilled readers

It was everyday life, in all its mundane manifestations, from mass-consumed objects to uneventful situations, which became the prime matter of these Fluxus works, and the subject of their creative reconfigurations. Do-it-yourself artworks can be assembled and de-assembled accordingly, offering new and potentially innumerable ways of conceiving and conducting one's life. They are designed, writes Julia Robinson in relation to Fluxus event scores, 'to mediate a moment of the spectator's existence'.³² They offer, adds Hannah Higgins, 'diverse primary experiences and interactions with reality, plain and simple'.³³ Focusing on the experiential core of Fluxus practices and tracing their correspondence to contemporaneous and internationally circulating ideas – from Zen Buddhism to existential phenomenology – scholars have stressed the ways in which Fluxus artists rearticulated and subverted through their work the established duality between subject and object.³⁴

Such accounts emphasize the displacement of traditional modes of aesthetic appreciation by the category of the 'concrete', understood in this context as empirical and experiential, situational and quotidian. Furthermore, they assert that this structural transformation of spectatorship in the early 1960s was contingent upon the artist's self-induced dissolution. In the historiography of Fluxus, Cage admittedly exemplified this shift. Elevating indeterminacy and chance as compositional methods, he undermined any divisions between an aesthetic and an extra-aesthetic realm. However, I suggest that Fluxus might better be understood through the category of 'skill'. On the one hand, Fluxus arrives at a moment of critical reassessment of the pre-war avant-gardes, and particularly of the Duchampian legacy. As John Roberts has convincingly demonstrated, Duchamp's tactical appropriation of the industrially produced object in the ready-made should be understood as 'essentially a discourse on the diffusion of authorship through the social division of labour'.³⁵ That is, the ready-made, as the end product of a process of deskilling, not only questions 'the metaphysics of the [artist's] hand' but also evidences the alignment between artistic and productive labour.³⁶ On the other hand, Fluxus practices develop at a juncture when incompetence is elevated into a critical, aesthetic principle.

Seeming to make a virtue out of Dieter Roth's most unflattering assessment of the group, 'who' as he claimed 'made a verbal virtue out

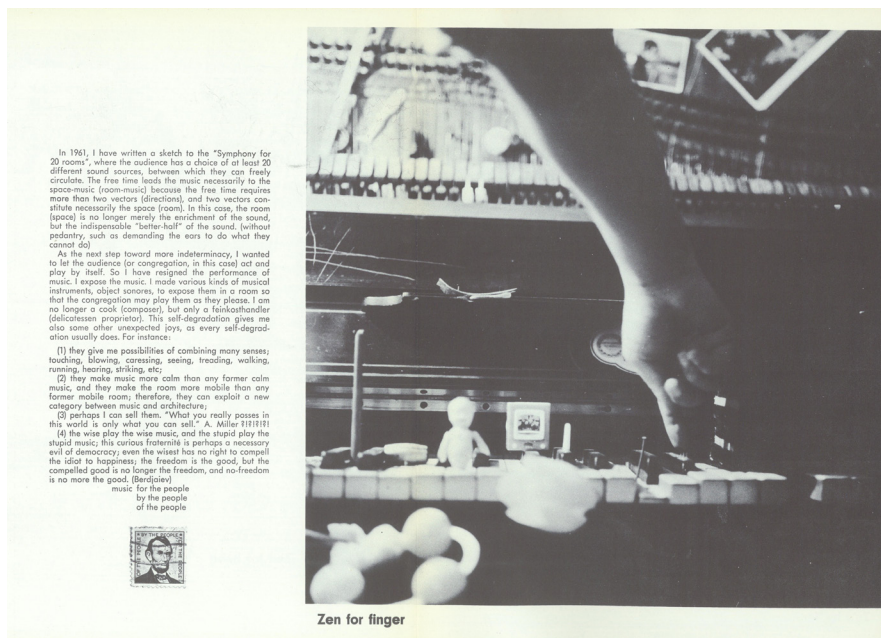


Figure 6 Nam June Paik, *Zen for Finger*, 1961. Photo: Henry Maitek, *décoll/age* 3 (December 1962). Black offset on white paper, 27 cm (high) × 40 cm. Archivo Happening Vostell, Museo Vostell Malpartida, Junta de Extremadura, Spain. © Nam June Paik Estate, © Henry Maitek.

of their lack of talent so that nobody could say they had no talent', this propensity for ineptitude was not only verbally affirmed but also visually and playfully exposed and documented.³⁷ This is particularly evident in a series of photographs taken by Cologne-based photographer Henry Maitek during Nam June Paik's exhibition 'Exposition of Music' (Wuppertal, 1963). Capturing Paik's performance *Instruments for Zen Exercises*, Maitek offers close-up views of the artist's hands, head and feet. The documentation of one of the exercises, 'Zen for finger', is a photograph of Paik's hand clumsily and gracelessly touching the keyboard of a 'prepared' piano (figure 6). Skilfully shot, the photograph exposes Paik's hand as lacking in dexterity and virtuosity – a double attack on both the artist in the studio and the musician in the concert hall.

Fluxus artists were compelled first and foremost to negotiate the fate and place of the hand in artistic and non-artistic production, and their works can



Figure 7 Robert Filliou, *Hand Show*, 1967. 24 black & white silkscreen prints in a wooden box with a printed slide lid, 30.1 × 24.1 × 4 cm. Edition of 150, with Ed. Saba Studio. Courtesy of the Estate of Robert Filliou and Peter Freeman, Inc. Photo: Florian Kleinfenn. © Estate of Robert Filliou.

often be read as reflections or concealed comments on skill and craft. Robert Filliou's *Hand Show* (1967, figure 7) exemplifies the ways in which Fluxus artists understood the hand as the material index of social division. 'It has occurred to me', wrote Filliou on the poster announcing his exhibition, 'that the key to art may well consist in learning the significance or meaning of each part, line, marking and shape of the artists' hands'.³⁸ The exhibition showcased photographs of the hands of five artists in the display window of Tiffany's in New York. Filliou's was a tactical move that aimed at demystifying the artist's subjectivity, supposedly inscribed on his or her hand, while exposing the rarefied conditions of artistic labour.

From here it is easy to see how Duchamp's ready-made, or rather, its rediscovery by a young generation of artists in the early 1960s, was central to such a trajectory. Duchamp offered one of the most succinct critiques of artistic subjectivity echoed in Fluxus artists' anti-subjective and anti-expressionist work. Often dismissed as apolitical, it was his understanding of artistic labour that nevertheless resonated with Fluxus production. Following Robert's main line of argument, Duchamp's unassisted ready-mades bring into

view the entwinement and interdependence of artistic technique and general social technique, announcing a major qualitative shift that compelled artists after him to rethink the relation between their labour and the heteronomous labour of others.

Tracing the trajectory from the ready-made to Conceptual art, Roberts argues that practices of deskilling indicate the artist's mimetic identification with the worker under the social division of labour.³⁹ This process of deskilling, he adds, is dialectically entangled with the reskilling of the artist, with the enhancement and transformation of artistic skill. Roberts abstains from including Fluxus and do-it-yourself artworks in his account. Such an understanding of skill however is intricately linked to the group's broader, but also often ill-defined, social and political claims, for their do-it-yourself Fluxus artworks evidence the interrelationship between the self-degradation of the artist and the self-transformation of the spectator. Skill, in this context, becomes the missing link between artists and non-artists.

Maciunas's own anachronistic and, for some Fluxus members, notoriously authoritative, views on the artist's social role, brings the concepts of 'skill' and 'deskilling' into sharper focus.⁴⁰ In a series of letters dating to early 1964, Maciunas began propagating his belief that the Soviet Union offered the ideal context for the development and transformation of the Fluxus project. In a much-quoted letter to West German artist Tomas Schmit, Maciunas writes:

Fluxus objectives are social (not aesthetic). They are connected to the group of the LEF group of 1929 [sic] in Soviet Union (ideologically) and concern itself with: Gradual elimination of fine arts. [. . .] This is motivated by desire to stop the waste of material and human resources (like yourself) and divert it to socially constructive ends.⁴¹

In the same letter, Maciunas encouraged Schmit to follow a daily routine, divided into 'socially constructive and useful work'. Maciunas's recourse to Russian Productivism was replete with contradictions and antinomies. As Cuauhtémoc Medina notes, his intention was to present Fluxus to the Soviet regime as an affirmative (and not nihilist) practice that could be exercised by the workers in the after-work hours so as 'to convince [them] of the 'beauty' of labor'.⁴² And as Mari Dumett persuasively demonstrates, Maciunas conceived Fluxus in the image of a multinational cooperation. His

appropriation of the bureaucratic functions of the advanced capitalist system and his embrace of routine bore striking similarities to the operations of the Taylorized workplace. 'He was performing the system', Dumett notes, 'as much as he was performed by it'.⁴³

This resemblance to the Taylorist model is not exhausted by Maciunas's conception of the group or even limited to his own practice. Rather, the Taylorist mode of production is reflected in the very structure of Fluxus works. One of the first studies to examine in detail the labour process under conditions of advanced capitalism was Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, published in 1974. Here Braverman examines the ways in which Taylorism effectively resulted in a total loss of skill from the factory to the office space. Propagating time and movement efficiency, Taylorism devised ways of breaking down the processes involved in the making of a single product. Labour, instead of a fulfilling, intact human endeavour, has been bracketed into standardized, fragmented and infinitely repeatable tasks, removed from the control of the worker who is reduced to the status of 'an animated tool for management'.⁴⁴ A series of guidelines given by an office manager to a clerical worker, as reproduced in Braverman's book, could be easily misconstrued for an event score. It reads: 'get up from chair – sit down in chair – turn in swivel chair – move in chair to adjoining desk or file'.⁴⁵ Similarly, action in *décoll/age* is punctuated by the linguistic registers of the event-score, by myriads of verbs that denote finite motions of the hands, the feet, the ears and the eyes: 'place, repeat, enter, listen' (Patterson), 'draw, follow' (Young), 'scrape, strike, drill' (Maciunas).

Yet, the do-it-yourself artwork intersected with at least two other, entwined domains of action in the Cold War years, those of domestic life and civil defence. Both were central to the definition of the Cold War home. Following the monumentalization of public space in the fascist years, a 'distinctive post fascist aestheticization of everyday life' was underway since the early 1950s in West Germany.⁴⁶ It coincided with the implementation of exhibition strategies aiming at educating citizens on the values and codes of the new post-war household. Such exhibitions did not merely showcase household objects, but rather staged everyday life itself. In the exhibited domestic interiors actors and actresses demonstrated their use while carrying out mundane activities.⁴⁷ While advancing time-saving efficiency, such

practices produced nevertheless a residue of domestic labour, an excess of instruction-based, standardized and automatic movements. The political capital invested in the home in the Cold War years was thus not limited to the reconfiguration and technological modernization of the domestic interior.⁴⁸ Rather it was entangled from the outset with the management and co-ordination of its inhabitants – and of their bodily gestures.

By the early 1960s the logic of standardization had rendered the boundaries between domestic work and recreation nearly obsolete. At this particular moment, when the labour force experienced a sweeping degradation of their skill, the notion of craftsmanship gathered momentum and entered the sphere of free time.⁴⁹ ‘Every second West German citizen’, *Der Spiegel* reported in a special issue on leisure economy in 1965, ‘does it himself’.⁵⁰ Workers in car centres, building manuals, and special TV programs on domestic carpentry instructed citizens on constructive leisure activities. As a ‘do-it-yourself’ economy was booming, the menacing connotations of such activities were still evident. ‘Do-it-yourself’ shelter policies were fiercely promoted both in the USA and West Germany since the early 1950s, with the aim of providing basic survival skills to the population.⁵¹

From the home to the nuclear industry, the catchphrase ‘do-it-yourself’ was often associated with the public discourse of national security. In May 1959, *Der Spiegel* reported on a British-American treaty that allowed nuclear weapons parts to be exported from the USA and reassembled in Great Britain. It was possible now, the journalist wrote, to make weapons on a ‘do-it-yourself’ basis. An accompanying caricature portraying children reaching for toy bombs acutely captured the absurd entanglement of play and threat in the Cold War years and expressed perhaps a deeper anxiety over the control of weaponry of mass destruction, since its production was now not only fragmented but also dispersed across geopolitical borders. Elaborate and technologically advanced defence policies, the image appeared to suggest, were nothing but the sum of precipitous decisions.⁵²

The Cold War, Andreas Huyssen contends, realized ‘the insidious dialectic of mere accident and total rational control’ and Fluxus through the production of ‘open works’ aesthetically exposed ‘the dialectical closeness of chance and determination’.⁵³ Beyond this abstract proximity, Fluxus, as I have been arguing, was steeped in a concrete Cold War economy of homogenized gestures, tasks and skills. Such crossovers became explicit in the collaborative



Figure 8 Extract from a West German civil defense manual (*Zivilschutzfibel*), Bundesminister des Innen, Bonn, 1964. © BBK.

volume *Happenings, Fluxus, Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme* (1965). The first section, entitled 'Realities' consisted of press photographs and facsimiles taken from a 1964 *Zivilschutzfibel*, a civil-defence manual produced and disseminated by the West German Ministry of Interior Affairs.⁵⁴ Indeed, in the manual – a product of collaborative, anonymous labour – any separation between art and life, artificiality and reality, collapses.

A photographic image of food products exemplifies the distinct visual identity of the manual (figure 8). Carefully arranged, the objects acquire an almost auratic, voluminous, tactile presence, accentuated by the shadows cast upon the surface on which they rest. The superimposition of colour on the black and white photograph transforms these consumer products that would otherwise appear in glossy advertisements into the objects of a hovering catastrophe. In the context of an art historical volume like the one mentioned above, this survival kit would have been indistinguishable from any other *objet trouvé*. Comprising of domestic material, diagrammatic representations of survival techniques and graphic depictions of the body under nuclear attack, this manual transforms the domestic interior into the ultimate 'do-it-yourself' project.

In this essay I have attempted to demonstrate how *décoll/age* acts as though a manual for the absurd choreography of Cold War life, by encouraging the reader to reimagine and reconfigure his or her living surroundings through assembling and de-assembling its pages. In place of a bourgeois appreciation of art, the inaugural issue propounds this administration of tactile knowledge as disseminated through the format of the instruction manual. What is more, the issue acts as a vehicle for Vostell to consolidate his own practice, to redraw and reimagine his own trajectory from 1954 to 1962 – from his early *décollage* pieces to Fluxus. Such strategies evidence the artist's intention to subvert any hierarchical relations to the audience through processes of deskilling. Vostell mobilizes Dr. Braun – a non-artist unintentionally contributing to an artists' magazine – to establish this link. Indeed, in the magazine the reproduction of the retrieved lacerated poster stands as the only material reminder of the spontaneous, autonomous gesture. And Dr. Braun, devoted to his idle pursuits, is the (free) subject excluded from the labour process. In a sort of hierarchical reversal, it is the artist who succumbs to and re-enacts the operations of the social division of labour.

Fluxus artists developed methods of performative identification with their audience by appropriating and reassembling the myriad of fragmented gestures that the latter were compelled to perform daily at home and at work. Their recourse to these gestural routines marked a double critique of the artwork and the artist. 'The [art] object's investment with artistic subjectivity', writes Mary Kelly, 'is secured by gesture [. . .] his person, his image, his gestures'.⁵⁵ In equal measure the attack on the bourgeois conventions of the concert hall was first and foremost directed against the gestures of musicians and audience members that supposedly expressed and perpetuated the values of high culture. The inaugural issue of *décoll/age* brings into sharp relief this renewed ideological investment in the abolition of the talented and skilful artist in the early 1960s. And it signifies a double identification on his or her part with the culturally unassimilated and socially excluded, as embodied in Dr. Braun – 'his person, his image, his gestures'.

Notes

I would like to thank my supervisor, Sarah James, for her invaluable advice and feedback. I wish also to thank Frederic Schwartz and Mechthild Fend for their suggestions and comments during my upgrade presentation, on

which this paper is based. I am grateful to the following institutions and individuals for providing image permissions for this paper: the Museo Vostell Malpartida, the Nam June Paik Estate, Mrs. Barbro Patterson, Mrs. Schoschana Maitek-Drzevitzky, the Estate of Robert Filliou and the Bundesamt für Bevölkerungsschutz und Katastrophenhilfe. Finally, I would like to thank the Onassis Foundation for funding my research.

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