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# The indeterminate influence of Fluxus on contemporary curriculum and pedagogy

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## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to re-evaluate the pedagogical and curricular influence of Fluxus artists who have been under addressed in curriculum studies scholarship. Between the late 1950s and early 1970s this group of avant-garde artist-pedagogues experimented with new ways to think about curriculum and pedagogy in institutes of higher education and in their artistic practices. We argue that a Fluxus approach to curriculum and pedagogy can be understood through the concepts of class as art, multiples and intermedia. We draw on interviews with contemporary artist-pedagogues from a research-creation project to illustrate the ways in which the influence of Fluxus is ongoing in contemporary post-secondary settings.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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*To be a teacher is my greatest work of art* – Joseph Beuys

*To learn about Fluxus is to do Fluxus* – Owen Smith

Curriculum reform in the field of curriculum studies is often traced back to progressive educators at the turn of the century, and critical pedagogues from the 1960s onwards (see Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). In postsecondary art institutions, the 1960s marked a parallel moment when curricular change and innovative pedagogies were mobilized by artist-pedagogues. Specifically, the group of anti-establishment artists known as Fluxus were instrumental in significantly altering the curriculum and pedagogical landscape of higher education in the arts (Higgins, 2002; Krstich, 2016). Fluxus was an international network of poets, artists and composers who worked across different media, and who sought to integrate art into everyday life. Fluxus artists produced concerts and performances, as well as instructional works, ready-made objects, and printed editions. Many Fluxus artists produced and distributed printed matter and other multiples (such as posters, booklets and games) as documents of radical pedagogy. Fluxus artists, frustrated by dogmatic curriculum and teaching practices governed by formal aesthetics and apprenticeship models, used their artistic practices to create new curricular models and even start their own schools. However, much of Fluxus curriculum and pedagogical contributions have remained hidden in art education and education more broadly, with a larger historical focus on their artistic events, happenings, and performances (Higgins, 2002). Some of the reasons that their educational contributions have been over shadowed or ignored include disciplinary value that places more importance on art outputs over teaching ones; the nature of the archives

in art museums versus art schools; and the ephemerality of much of the archival material rendering it elusive and difficult to document.

This paper examines a multi-year archival research project into Fluxus teaching archives, alongside empirical case studies of classrooms in postsecondary education to examine how Fluxus continues to influence current art education classrooms in higher education. The implications of this research are significant in that it provides insight into the ways in which Fluxus concepts and practices are relevant for educators working today. More broadly this research reveals how radical pedagogies and interdisciplinarity continue to be key components for an anti-racist, anti-colonial, and feminist praxis that seeks to disrupt and reimagine higher education.

In the first section of the paper, we explain the methodological approach of this research project and situate ourselves as researchers. We then examine Fluxus and how it articulated a vision for art, education, and life. We then outline how Fluxus artist-pedagogues developed their approach to curriculum and pedagogy. Finally, we analyze how Fluxus pedagogy continues to influence the classroom practices of current artist-pedagogues who participated in our study. In our analysis of the data we focus on two core concepts of the Fluxus approach to education: the understanding of 'Class as Art;' and the influence of multiples and intermedia (or what might be called interdisciplinarity). While the empirical case studies were grounded in post-secondary art education, our analysis demonstrates how interdisciplinarity and challenging the structures/spaces of institutions are key components for an anti-racist, anti-colonial, and feminist praxis that seeks to disrupt and reimagine higher education.

## The "how" of research

The research examined in this paper is part of a large research-creation project on socially-engaged art and pedagogy called *The Pedagogical Impulse* [<https://thepedagogicalimpulse.com/>]. One of the threads of the larger project included the examination of Fluxus teaching archives (see Springgay & Truman, 2017; Springgay, Truman, & Maclean, 2019). To understand how Fluxus concepts continue to resurface in contemporary pedagogical practices, we initiated a multi-year qualitative research project that examined postsecondary artist-pedagogues teaching practices. We invited artists who teach in postsecondary institutions to share their teaching practice with us over the course of one term. Our methods included collecting and reviewing course syllabi, conducting open-ended interviews with the artists, informal skype conversations with the students in the class, and asking artists to create a course blog where student work and reflections during the term could be documented visually. Each of the class blogs are unique and offer different visual and textual information on classroom activities and student work (see <https://thepedagogicalimpulse.com/category/art-school/>). These methods – combined together – create what we refer to as a research-creation practice, or a Fluxus inspired approach to *doing* artistic research (Springgay & Truman 2018b, 2019).<sup>1</sup>

To select the case studies, we sent out 200 emails to teaching faculty in postsecondary art programs in Canada and the United States asking them to respond to a survey about their teaching practice. After reviewing the responses to the short survey, six participants were selected (four in Canada, two in the US). The participants were all artist-pedagogues teaching at institutes of higher education. Some were full time tenure track, and some worked as adjunct faculty. As the classes were located across a wide geographic area of Canada and the United States conducting ethnographic research in person was not possible. In response, the research team developed a method where the instructor and the students of each class would write (and upload images) ongoing blog posts so that the researchers could "see inside the classroom" on a weekly basis. This research practice enabled us to have rich 'data' on the classroom experiences despite not being physically present. The research team also conducted interviews via Skype with instructors at the beginning and at the end of the term, and with the students in the class

at the end of the course. These methods enabled the research team to have a critical and embodied approach despite the distance of the classrooms. Our guiding interest was the information generated from interviewing the instructors about their teaching practices including their teaching philosophy, influences, and how they worked within neoliberal institutions. The blog posts assisted in creating more intimate and specific interview questions because we could refer to particular moments that happened in the class. The interviews were transcribed and for this paper, we analyzed them based on two Fluxus themes: Class as Art, and multiples and intermedia. There are many additional concepts that appear in Fluxus pedagogy, so we are by no means limiting their work to just these two. The themes were not known prior to conducting the interviews nor in our initial analysis of the interview transcripts. The themes emerged from our readings about Fluxus and our work in Fluxus archives. The themes emerged within the event of the research process. For the sake of length and focus we have selected these two themes.

The research project was led by Stephanie Springgay, who has been working on the relationship between contemporary art and pedagogy and artistic methodologies for more than a decade. In addition, the research project this paper is based on was managed through a collaborative team or 'laboratory' approach that consisted of a number of graduate student research assistants including James Miles. Research assistants were responsible for assisting the teacher artists to set up their class blog websites and conducting interviews with the instructors and students. Miles was also responsible for analyzing the Fluxus archive in relation to the curriculum reform of the 1960s. In the next two sections of the paper we unpack the curricular and pedagogical innovations of Fluxus artists at the time. Following this we will turn to the case studies.

### **The Fluxus spirit: a loud fart**

Fluxus remains a difficult movement or art practice to define in part because, as Hannah Higgins (2002) writes, "Fluxus artists never seem to agree on anything" (p. xiii). In fact, even calling Fluxus a movement is misleading as many individuals associated with Fluxus rarely understood themselves to be part of a common project or programme. As Smith (1993) writes, it might be more helpful to consider Fluxus as an "alternative attitude toward artmaking, culture and life" (p. 24). The experimental and playful spirit of Fluxus is what should be remembered as opposed to any art objects or performances that were produced. Fluxus artists were defiantly anti-establishment and anti-capitalist. In particular Fluxus was resisting the commercialization of the art world. During the 1960s and 1970s Fluxus artists took radical political stances and were involved in social and civil rights movements but in this paper we are interested primarily in how Fluxus radically reimagined art education.<sup>2</sup> Fluxus understood art as an in-between space made up of movement, space, silences and holes (Sholtz, 2018a). Fluxus was, and is, a radical departure from traditional conceptions of art, with key members understanding their practice to be social and participatory rather than aesthetic. As Friedman (1998) later reflected on Fluxus' relationship to the art world, "the irreverent Fluxus attitude stood out like a loud fart in a small elevator" (p. 249). Importantly, Fluxus artists made artwork and art events as curricular materials and as pedagogical scores for their classrooms. There is a distinct blurring between curriculum, pedagogy, and art in the Fluxus movement, and it is this "intermedia" practice, that we'll discuss below, that is central to their influence on the current art education field.

A key architect, organizer and central figure of Fluxus was George Maciunas who coined the term, which he took from the Latin word *fluere* meaning to flow, or to be in a state of flux (Schmidt-Burkhardt, 2003).<sup>3</sup> Maciunas first planned for Fluxus to be used as a name for a magazine, but it quickly came to represent a larger artistic vision and eventually an international network of avant-garde artists. These artists moved both in and out of their association and alignment with Fluxus, with the number of associated artists ranging from 30 to 350 over the

years (Higgins, 2002). For Maciunas, Fluxus was not to be seen as a 'new wave' of artists, or a new art theory or style, but rather an international art 'stream' that challenged the traditional art world and blurred the lines between art and life.

Though multiple dates have been suggested as the birth of Fluxus, such as 1961 with the publication of Maciunas' Fluxus magazine, a key point of origin was a class in musical composition offered by experimental composer John Cage at the New School for Social Research in New York (Higgins, 2002). Among Cage's students between the years 1957 and 1959 were key members of what would become Fluxus, including George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Allan Kaprow, and Florence Tarlow.<sup>4</sup> Cage's approach to pedagogy that would become so influential for Fluxus was not interested in imparting a body of knowledge, but rather Cage's students "conducted experiments using chance operations in a variety of formats including music, performance and poetry" (Higgins, 2002, p. 2). Pedagogical innovations used in this class included understanding everyday actions as framed minimalistic performances, an approach that would become an important aspect of Fluxus' practices. These experiments alongside other chance events, scores, and happenings would become the basis for much of the Fluxus approach. Cage's influence along with other New York artists such as La Monte Young, Yoko Ono, Henry Flynt and Toshi Ichiyanagi set the grounds for the birth of Fluxus as an international movement (Smith, 1993).

One of the most explicitly articulated visions of the Fluxus philosophy can be found in the *Fluxus Manifesto* written by Maciunas in 1962. The *Manifesto* defined three key words that Maciunas believed were essential for promoting and clarifying the intentions of Fluxus: purge, tide, and fuse (Philpot, 2011). The *Manifesto* was essentially a one-page collage of dictionary definitions of these three terms, with the addition of Maciunas' commentary beneath each. Maciunas' comments added that the intent of Fluxus was to "purge the world of bourgeois sickness, "intellectual," professional and commercialized culture. Purge the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art" (Maciunas, 1963). This was followed by the Fluxus desire to promote "a revolutionary flood and tide in art" that emphasized "living art, anti-art... to be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals." Finally fuse involved the fusion of cultural, political and social revolutionaries into a united front. The revolutionary nature of the Fluxus *Manifesto* should not to be dismissed. Key Fluxus members understood their art, curriculum, and teaching practice to be a radically new approach not just to art, but to life. Central to Fluxus beliefs was to experience the everyday as 'art.'

Maciunas' first Fluxus project began as a proposed anthology series, or yearbooks, that would contain essays and printed art pieces. This led to Flux editions such as George Brecht's *Water Yam* (1963), a cardboard box housing an assortment of printed cards in various sizes that contain abbreviated, haiku-like prompts called 'event scores.' These open-ended instructions invited participants to enact everyday actions or contemplate impossible scenarios. This eventually morphed into what became known as *Fluxkits*, which often included a wide range of objects and provocations created by Fluxus artists often contained within a suitcase or box. Fluxkits were produced in multiple editions, as part of anthologies, and for distribution via mail order.<sup>5</sup>

Fluxkits and Flux editions were often presented to students and audiences during Fluxus performances. What was consistent across the Fluxkits and Fluxus performances was that each had a sense of immediacy and both were created with "rationally defined parameters" in mind (Smith, 1993). This is not to suggest that Fluxkits or Fluxus events were rigidly choreographed, but rather that enabling constraints were put in place to guide the indeterminacy and chance in an event or happening. For example, a famous 1962 piano performance created by Philip Corner called *Piano Activities* included 'event scores' for nine possible roles (Corner, 1962). The score for *Piano Activities* contained minimal instructions that could be interpreted by the performers in multiple ways such as "playing the piano in an orthodox manner, dropping objects on the strings, acting on the strings with objects such as hammers or drum sticks, and "acting in any way on the underside of the piano" (Corner, 1962). One of the most notorious and controversial performances of *Piano Activities* ended with the "players" dismantling the piano with a saw and

auctioning off the pieces (Smith, 1993). This type of performance is emblematic of the Fluxus approach that both represented clearly defined parameters alongside also ephemerality and indeterminacy. The performance was not well received at first, because as Sholtz (2018b) states, “no one knew how to react because the affect that was introduced was the indeterminate itself; as such, it opened up an interval between the phenomenal experience and the immanent space of its appearance” (p. 251). Indeterminacy was central to Fluxus work and enacted a “form of resistance ... resistance to a prevailing arts culture based on commodification, resistance to prevailing art forms, resistance to social normalisation, resistance to perceptual habitualisation, in essence, resistance to its present” (Sholtz, 2018, p. 251). These forms of resistance are what continue to make Fluxus’ use of indeterminacy powerful for artist-pedagogues today.

The objects, performances and events associated with and produced by Fluxus members are often understood through the concept of *intermedia*. Dick Higgins in particular used the term *intermedia* to describe how Fluxus was at the intersection of multiple forms of representation and could simultaneously include visual art, music, performance, dance and literature (Schmidt-Burkhardt, 2003). *Intermedia* was a significant concept for Fluxus as it blurred boundaries between disciplined art forms which was essential for the larger Fluxus project of blurring boundaries between art and life. The Fluxus understanding of *intermedia* drew on a wide range of thinkers including Marshall McLuhan and his 1964 book *Understanding Media*, in which he argued that blurring the distinctions between art and life could disrupt or “break up habitualized forms of perception” (Schröter, 2012, p. 17). In discussing Fluxus *intermedia*, Friedman (1998) asks us to imagine what an art form would be like if it “is comprised 10% of music, 25% of architecture, 12% of drawing, 18% of shoemaking, 30% of painting and 5% of smell” (p. 247). This is related to a curricular and pedagogical notion of interdisciplinarity in which knowledge is not restricted to rigid disciplines but instead flows across boundaries. An *intermedia* approach meant that Fluxus works evoke a between-ness or liminal state that create new zones of participation, interaction, and understanding.

## Fluxus visions of curriculum and pedagogy

Understanding Fluxus as a pedagogical movement as much as an artistic movement has been a key concern for a number of scholars (Higgins, 2002; Saper, 1992; Smith, 1993), and as Krstich (2016) has argued the playfulness that was found in the Fluxus movement led to notions of chance and experimentation in curriculum and alternative schooling. Exploring this attitude is essential for understanding anything that might be called a Fluxus pedagogy. As Smith (2005) has argued, Fluxus explicitly rejected two dominant aspects of the traditional art world. First, that the artist is special (or a genius) and second that the art object is intrinsically valuable. Instead Fluxus understood art, curriculum, and pedagogy to be grounded in social connections and interactions in which participation by many people was celebrated. Furthermore, the Fluxus attitude rejected the veneration and commodification of art objects, seeing such a belief as antithetical to the equation of art as life. This meant that any placement of Fluxkits or Fluxus performances scores in galleries, archives, and museums would fail to understand the purpose of the Fluxus practice.

This view of artistic practice has great curricular and pedagogical implications. Hannah Higgins (2002), who herself is the daughter of Fluxus artists Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles, has argued that Fluxus artists understood *their teaching as an artistic practice in of itself*. Inspired by Dewey and others who advocated ‘hands-on’ learning in real life environments, artists associated with Fluxus like Joseph Beuys, Robert Filliou, Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts developed pedagogical practices and curricula that were not separated or fragmented from their artistic practice. Their radical visions for education included open ended, experimental, collaborative and interdisciplinary inquiries that took Dewey’s progressive educational philosophy into new

territories. Notions of chance, indeterminacy, and to use Cage's expression "purposeless play" were central to the learning and teaching process.

Fluxus artists, and those associated with the group, began to develop more clearly articulated curriculum plans towards the end of the 1960s that adopted key characteristics of the Fluxus spirit such as playfulness, experimentation, intermedia and chance. Krstich (2016) explains that Fluxus artists-pedagogues began to outline or describe their visions for education in the period between 1966 and 1972. Filliou's (1970) *Teaching and Learning as Performance Art*, Kaprow's (1972/1993) *The Education of the Un-Artist*, and a collection of essays written by Maciunas and Robert Watts amongst others published under the title *Proposals for Art Education from a Year Long Study* (Carpenter, Cornford, Simon, & Watts (1970))<sup>6</sup> all offered ideas on how to reform or revolutionize art education, but also higher education writ large. The common theme stretching across these publications was that an intermedia approach to education that encouraged play, experimentation and choice was desirable while simultaneously rejecting what was seen as rigid and stifling disciplinarity in existing institutional structures.

Maciunas' (1970) proposal was primarily concerned with the inefficiency of existing higher education models which he argued led to premature specialization and fragmentation of knowledge. To correct this problem, he offered his "learning machines" in which information could be stored and shared using three-dimensional graphic charts. These learning machines were a direct critique of what Maciunas called slow, linear methods of information dissemination like books, lectures and films (Schmidt-Burkhardt, 2004). In the place of these so-called linear methods, Maciunas imagined and developed graphic representations of interdisciplinary information on paper that could be folded providing different dimensions in which learners could move between areas of knowledge quickly saving time and providing an unfragmented and integrated understanding of different topics.

Alternative visions of curriculum were also being implemented by artist-pedagogues during this period. Maciunas developed a playful vision of curriculum in his 1970 *Curriculum Plan*. The *Curriculum Plan* took the form of a pseudo board game with multiple pathways and objectives for students to follow. Similarly, in 1971 artist-pedagogue Roy Ascott, then the new president of the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, replaced the course calendar with a set of Tarot Cards before eventually being fired (Krstich, 2016). At the California Institute for the Arts (Cal Arts), Fluxus artists Dick Higgins, Allan Kaprow, Alison Knowles and Nam June Paik took up faculty positions and radically re-imagined the school's course offerings, rejecting any set curriculum in their classes (Springgay & Truman, 2019). Kaprow, as associate dean of the art school, had a particularly powerful influence. As Alison Knowles later explained "Kaprow was the thinking behind the school as far as I'm concerned ... [He] had the vision of a school based on what artists wanted to do rather than what the school wanted them to do" (as cited in Sarbanes, 2012). Though these innovations and interventions on official curricula had perhaps a limited impact on formal art education, they did encourage a rethinking of how curriculum and pedagogy might be conceived that would continue to have ripple effects into the present day.

## Ripples and flux in contemporary art pedagogy

We argue that contemporary artist-pedagogues continue to be influenced by the ideas and innovations of Fluxus and other artists from the 1960s. Often this influence is not direct, or even acknowledged. Instead Fluxus ideas of curriculum and pedagogy have rippled or meandered their way through a wide array of artists, ideas, and teachers. We also add that this continual emergence of Fluxus also builds from the work of intersectional thinkers and artists who also began experimenting with different ways to envision art and pedagogy such as Corita Kent and Adrian Piper. While these artists and the Fluxus movement did not invent curriculum and pedagogies of playfulness and experimentation we argue they did help conceptualize the notion of



the educational and pedagogical event *as a social and artistic practice* and strategically used these ideas to challenge and rupture disciplinary boundaries and conventional models of teaching in higher education. In turn these radical pedagogies also aimed to challenge the power structures of the institutes of higher education and the art world more generally.

In the next section of the paper we explore how two core concepts from Fluxus pedagogy continues to shape contemporary artist-pedagogues today: the creation of 'Class as Art;' and the influence of multiples and intermedia (or what might be called interdisciplinarity).

### ***Class as art***

A core concept for Fluxus was to turn the everyday and social practices into art. This attitude blurred lines between life and art and was a direct critique on the traditional art world. Fluxus artists have also continually reaffirmed that the Fluxus movement was not exclusive and sought to include as many people as possible. Higgins (1998) has stated that Fluxus was always "open for new people to join, all they had to do was produce works that were in some way similar to the Fluxus ideal or spirit" (p. 221). As many Fluxus projects were performances or works that were designed to be experienced collaboratively by large groups of people it is not surprising to make the leap to seeing Fluxus art as a pedagogical practice. The Fluxus artists not only understood teaching as an art, but saw the classroom experience and the interactions between students as part of a social practice. This concept has echoes of Dewey's earlier work on aesthetics. When writing about the relationship between artists and their audiences, Dewey (1934) argued that "we [the audience] become artists ourselves as ... our own experience is reoriented" (p. 348). In this way an engagement in art, in which art becomes a pedagogical and social practice, creates new possibilities for thinking, perceiving and acting in educational spaces.

In thinking through what pedagogical openings are created by seeing a class as art, it is helpful to consider what most Fluxus works shared. Along with an emphasis on collaboration and social interaction, Fluxus art encouraged experimentation, play, and chance. Yet at the same time Fluxus projects were not designed to lead to meaningless or random chaos. Each set of provocations found in a performance score, or collection of objects placed in a Fluxkit, were designed to establish the enabling constraints in which learning, and experimentation could take place. Smith (2005) has explained, the Fluxus pedagogy "is neither just fun and games nor silly and pointless provocations" (p. 234). Smith points us to the work of founding Fluxus member Ben Patterson who wrote in 1965:

I require that the central function of the artist be a duality of discoverer and educator:discoverer of the varying possibilities for selecting from environmental stimuli, specific percepts and organizing these into significant perceptions, and concurrently as an educator, training a public in the ability to perceive in newly discovered patterns. (Smith, 2005, p. 234)

Additionally, much like a classroom, the objective of Fluxus art was not what physical objects were left behind when the event was finished, but the interactions that occurred and the experiences and new understandings participants/students took away with them. In conceiving of 'class as art' it is important to move away from a representational frame (Springgay & Rotas, 2015). A class does not become art because it has art objects represented or exhibited in it. Rather, class as art reflects the core elements of Fluxus art and pedagogy – experimentation, collaboration, innovation, and social justice. This conception of what class is continues to resonate in the practices of the artist-pedagogues we worked with in this study.

For example, Zoe Kreye, a Vancouver-based artist, who teaches at Emily Carr University of Art and Design, in Vancouver, discusses how rather than teaching *about* social practice art (e.g. the history of this practice), her class becomes a social practice art work. She states: "I was interested in doing social practice rather than talking about it." Social practice is a term used to describe artwork that focuses on human interaction, social discourse, and creative action as an artistic



practice. In the context of Kreye's class, issues relating to the new Emily Carr campus emerged, in terms of the corporatization of the university, gentrification, and the housing and real estate crisis in Vancouver. Many of the weekly exercises inside and outside of the classroom, and students' final course projects, intervened into the lived experiences of the campus structure and the physical environment. Shannon Gerard an associate professor at OCAD University in Toronto creates similar conditions by which her class functions as social practice art. For example, for the class *Pressing Issues*<sup>7</sup> the syllabus consisted of one statement: "Make a Public" (Springgay & Truman, 2019). To do this, over the duration of the semester, students engaged in numerous smaller projects, readings, field trips, and events, which then culminated in a public-ation. The entire semester-long class function as a 'work of art.'

For Kreye, having the class function as a work of art becomes an embodied experience. Using somatic exercises Kreye allowed for student emotions to be present in the class. Like the Fluxus artists who sought to disrupt regulated institutional spaces, Kreye's somatic work "infiltrated the academic setting." In part, this attention to the body and emotions is influenced by the artist Lygia Clarke (1920–1988), a Brazilian artist who created participatory work that enabled viewers to gain a heightened sensory perception, not only of the art work, but also their relationship to the work and the surrounding environment. Kreye notes that not only does she value participation, relationality, and corporeality in her teaching, she understands art and pedagogy as a kind of healing process. Recognizing that healing is not conventionally addressed in institutions and in contemporary art, Kreye's class as art facilitates an 'unlearning practice' – "lessons that one could do that might help unlearn the ingrained ways of being in school". Kreye notes that pedagogically she tries to keep the classroom open to varying situations and group dynamics; to how things evolve and shift, as opposed to a pre-planned curriculum and syllabus. Somatic, sensory, and haptic perceptions were important components to Fluxus work that challenged conventional ocularcentrism in art. Central to Fluxus work was the sense of touch – not just physical touching and manipulating of objects and materials – but also a felt or affective experience. The incorporation of touch – of affect – as Sholtz (2018) claims "evidences the commitment of Fluxus to a contingent, unknowable future, and gives us hope that the future is possible, but only if we are able to find a way to resist or disrupt the present" (p. 252).

In another example, Jorge Lucero, an associate professor at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, went so far as to name his class blog, *Class Not A Class*,<sup>8</sup> stating:

This is not a class. It is an artwork. Even when it appears to have all the characteristics of a class (e.g. students, a teacher, a meeting time, a syllabus, assignments, a classroom space, grades, course credit, teaching and learning, etc.) it will never be a class. Much like René Magritte's famous *The Treachery of Images*—where the viewers perception of a pipe is immediately rerouted to the obviousness of its being a mere picture of pipe—so will the participants of this class-not-a-class consistently oscillate between the appearance of a class and the pliable materiality of being in a class, at a specific time in history, in a location, focused on a specific topic, alongside a once-in-a-lifetime set of individuals. What this means is that this "class" is merely a set of materials and we—the participants—now need to decide what to do with that material.

In *Class Not A Class* Lucero sought to rupture normative expectation of what a class could be and open up the space for different kinds of experimentation. A starting place for Lucero is the syllabus, which he says needs to reflect generosity, openness, and emergence. Rather than a pre-scribed plan of action, the syllabus, sets "up the triggers that make everything else go off." These parameters, or enabling constraints, Lucero notes, are not connected to expectations: what is set in motion has no expected result. Speaking to the indeterminacy of *Class Not A Class*, Lucero states: "I just kind of wanted to see where the raft would go. I wanted to see where it was being carried." Allan Kaprow (1966/2010) noted that chance and indeterminacy breaks up "knots of 'knowables,' of groupings, relationships and larger structures which have become obsolete and habitual through over-use" (p. 57). In this sense, Lucero's syllabus becomes an invitation to imagine class otherwise, but also a call to think politically about institutionalisms and

accountability. The indeterminacy, for Lucero, is grounded in a particular ‘ethos,’ of care and generosity where like many Fluxus performances, he is both the artist directing the work, and a participant who yields to the collective efforts of the group, or what he calls “a horizontal exchange.” He continues: “What I’m most interested about in John Cage’s work is the way that he was able to set up the work so that it functioned in a way that he could also be a member of its audience.”

Fluxus artists continually played with notions of art as an event rather than an object. A fascination with duration and ephemerality was a constant throughout Fluxus projects, which perhaps can be traced back to the notion of the ‘happenings,’ first staged by Kaprow in the Voorhees Chapel at Rutgers University in 1958 (Higgins, 1998). In reimagining art as an interactive engagement with chance and indeterminacy at play (or to use a Cagean term ‘an immersion’), the passage and marking of time became more of an interest for the Fluxus artists. Posed as a series of questions: If art is a social practice that blurs the boundaries with social life, does it begin and end? And, does it occupy a limited or constrained space or is it ever expansive?

Like many Fluxus and social practice artists moving inside and outside of traditional classroom spaces is important, and a component of creating *Class as Art*. Lucero’s class repurposed a storage room, while Kreye’s class used movement exercises, shared meals, happenings, and group reading exercises to unhinge the typical function of a post-secondary classroom. Likewise, Allyson Mitchell, from York University in Toronto, challenges the boundaries between public and private space. In addition to holding an academic position, Mitchell curates and organizes events out of the *Feminist Art Gallery* (FAG), a gallery and collective co-founded by Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue, which is run out of a garage on their private property. Mitchell talks about the blurred or seamless demarcations between her ‘teaching’ and ‘work’ that takes place on campus and in FAG. As a queer space, she notes, it breaks down boundaries between studio, gallery, classroom, private property and home. In a move away from singular, artistic authorship, private and commodified gallery spaces, FAG insists on polyvocal contributions, where “something private can be lived in a public way.”

In summary, the interviews reveal the ways that Fluxus attitudes towards anti-institutionalism are still present in classrooms today. Current post-secondary instructors recognize the importance of rupturing rigid boundaries of what it means to learn in higher education. Further, there is an emphasis on embodied and haptic modes of learning that emphasize student material bodies, affect, and relations of care. In an increasing neoliberal model of education that focuses on accountability, linear assessment, and visible impact these post-secondary instructors are working to prioritize aesthetic, ephemeral and indeterminate pedagogical practices grounded in queer, feminist, anti-racist and decolonial praxis.

### ***Multiples and intermedia***

Multiples are identical artworks that are produced in large numbers with an intent to make art accessible and engage a wider audience. Fluxus members often worked with and created multiples as it aligned closely with their approach to art. For example, Maciunas’ early Flux-kits were produced and sold in multiples in his short-lived Fluxshop on Canal Street in New York (Williams & Noël, 1998). The idea of multiples was a core concept for Fluxus because multiples symbolized the importance of what a work of art can do or provoke in different contexts, as opposed to what an original or authentic art object can represent in a gallery or museum. As Smith (2005) writes, “Fluxus works can never claim to be completely original or distinct entities because their meaning and significance change in relation to the context in which they are experienced” (p. 226). Furthermore, Fluxus multiples were designed to be experienced materially by those who engaged with them. They were not meant to be precious or admired art objects. As Higgins (1998) argued “a masterpiece in this context was a work that made a strong statement rather

than a work that would last throughout the ages in some treasure vault" (p. 225). Higgins goes on to argue that most Fluxworks could easily be duplicated explaining that "if a Flux object is damaged... it is often easier to remake it rather than repair it" (p. 235). In some ways Fluxus objects and performances were designed specifically as pedagogical tools, ones that would provoke and engage an audience, drawing them into the artistic practice.

Influenced by Fluxkits, multiples, and artist-produced publications, contemporary artist-pedagogues often create syllabi and course materials that become works of art in their own right. For example, Shannon Gerard taught a course called *Nano Publishing*. For this course she would make the syllabus, for each student, as a small zine "that folded out in three different ways and all the assignments were these little art multiples and students had to slide open a match box or untie a string; and it was all printed on acetate." For another course Gerard made a Fluxkit in a cigar box as the syllabus. In other classes she made a course reader with the students. Everyone printed the course readings in a zine-like format and then they sewed them together into little annotated folded zines. Gerard talked about the importance of multiples in terms of their resilience; their ability to transform learning over time. Further, the multiples invited students to enter into each class through tactile, embodied, and multiple means.

Fluxus artists emphasized how ephemerality and change defined their work. The ephemeral quality of Fluxus performances that were staged briefly and with no or little documentation is obvious, but many Fluxus pieces were designed with the intention of changing over time. This involved compositions that took days or weeks and performances that were designed to be enacted in segments over decades (Friedman, 1998). For Fluxus objects that were made in multiples the hope was that these objects would change over time. As Higgins (1998) explained Fluxus always wanted to incorporate and highlight change and ephemerality in their work by using materials such as paper and light plastics that would become altered, damaged, or be destroyed over time.

The multiples function as an iterative process, where the ideas of repeatability, circulation, and touch become central components to an art and pedagogical practice. Jorge Lucero notes the importance of touch for Fluxus materials including their circulation, "produced en masse, are not precious, and function in the same way that mail works, or in the same way that, a memo, or a document or a board game." Things, he comments, you might find in your house. In museums, he notes, displayed as archival work, multiples lose their original intention. So for him, creating work for and with his students, as part of an artistic pedagogy includes the tactile, embodied way of making anti-art. Significantly, he states, "school is anti-art."

This politicality is also reflected in Gerard's use of publications (as multiples) in teaching. She states that "publications have a kind of inherent political reach to them." Here she references histories such as LGBTQ rights, where publication has had a strong role in the movement - as a platform for marginalized voices. She continues her arguments, stating that "it doesn't even necessarily matter what you're making a publication about; if you produce something in multiple it implies a distribution system" that takes the work to other people. Multiples, she contends, have an urgent political momentum.

Quite different from the above examples, is Lisa Myers an Indigenous artist, curator, and scholar who teaches at York University, in Toronto, use of blueberries in her art and in her pedagogy, primarily because it does not directly draw on the history of Fluxus, but instead Indigenous knowledges, and personal narratives and experiences. The blueberries are a multiple - in that they are iterative, sensory, and generative. Myers shares blueberries with audiences/students using small wooden spoons. People eat the berries with the spoons, which subsequently become stained. The spoons become a trace of absorption - stories, food, things we learn and witness. In one iteration of this work Myers shared blueberries with audience participants who gathered at OCADU for a 4-h reading of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015) Calls to Action. As people read aloud the Calls to Action, Myers invited people to share berries. She states: "We're hearing all of these things which could trigger people, bring up a lot of things for

different people depending on who the audience is... the berries were a way to help people in that moment." The berries brought people together. After sharing the berries, Myers collects the spoons and invites participants to sew them onto fabric along with beading. This she says becomes a different way to document the event. In her classes she also shares blueberries with her students. "I'll share berries with the students and tell them a story about why berries are significant to me. And then so in the act of sharing berries I would tell the story of my grandfather running away from residential school, and following a train track to get back home while only living off of blueberries." Blueberries – as multiple – become more than the act of eating together, but about "teaching through storytelling. It's about sharing something that could change the way someone thinks, or change the ways that someone relates to the broader narrative of residential schools." This she notes is,

an important gesture. It acknowledges feeding someone a thing, beyond yourself. It actually is a part of ceremony that is very important for Anishinaabe people. I'm not proposing that I am doing a ceremony when I am doing it, but it is a gesture that brings people together and I like that part.

Another central component to Fluxus pedagogy was the disruption of conventional curriculum materials including course syllabi and their interest in intermedia. This included Maciunas' learning machines and Stein and Miller's (1970) *Blueprint for Counter Education*. The artists we worked with made similar interventions into the curriculum. For example, Jorge Lucero's *Class Not a Class* was originally a permanent course (albeit with a different course name) that had been previously taught by a different instructor. The content, Lucero noted, "was troubling in that there were 27 readings assigned and 26 of them were written by men, and all 27 of them were written by white scholars." The homogeneity in the source material did not reflect the courses' aims in art and cultural theory. Lucero introduced an online bibliography with over 200 citations written by people of colour, women, and queer scholars. He states:

It was a simple gesture, but a move I think we needed to make, to destabilize the sort of sedimentation that has occurred around this particular kind of study. And so the syllabus was written like that, it was written in a kind of open way that invited the students to think about the curriculum as something you make along the way.

For Allyson Mitchell even Fluxus have become part of a normalized canon. She notes that what gets archived, or what gets canonized and written about, erases other histories. It's these subcultural movements, that don't typically get taught that become significant for her art and teaching. She states: "There's lots of other pockets of stuff [beside Fluxus] that has existed but that doesn't get canonized and made as the referential point. So, in terms of queer and feminist citational practices I would cite other things." For example, Will Munro introduced her to a group of queer performers from the UK:

They would live together in England in these collaborative households and they would do drag and costume making. Their art practices encompassed their whole ideology, life, everything. I found that very influential because it was also, definitely not funded, definitely not formally educated – it was queer, it was politicized, it was queer worldmaking.

Mitchell centers feminist and queer art histories, or what she calls "feeling queer about feminist art." This requires not just a re-writing of a syllabus, but thinking about how different people "access information, like through sound or touch." This includes a disability and accessibility focus to how art works, exhibitions, and classroom spaces are accessed and used, but also how knowledge is accessed. In the classroom she does not use toxic chemicals or strong smells and approaches the physical and material space of the classroom from a critical disability perspective. This she states is about being "queer and/or LGBTQI2SA responsible."

Lisa Myers similarly addressed erased knowledges and histories by centering Indigenous thought and practice. For example, teaching a course on food, land and culture, Myers used the *Dish with One Spoon Treaty*<sup>9</sup> to discuss, from an Anishinaabe perspective, the importance of agreements between humans and nonhumans. This framework, Myers states, lays the

groundwork, for how to examine food, land, and culture as interconnected. Further, she notes that she is trying “to create a foundation around indigenous art practice and its place and representation within institutions.”

Syllabi play an important role in curriculum. What the interviews revealed was the need to challenge disciplinary canons and provide resources, citations, and references that reflect queer, trans, Black, Indigenous and people of colour. Presenting curricular materials as multiples and in alternative formats, was not simply a move to aestheticize the learning space. Rather intermedia aimed to create networks of transdisciplinary scholarship with the goal to foreground the social, cultural and political contexts of knowledge systems. The rendering of curricular materials *as art* is about making the curriculum accountable and responsible to an ethics and politics of who and what matters (Ahmed, 2013; Haraway, 2016).

### What happens when nothing happens: a Fluxus anti-Conclusion

Fluxus artists sought to destroy boundaries of time and space when thinking about an event, yet also made time a central focus of their work. Fluxus artists Higgins and Brecht were particularly interested in the concept of boredom, which they wanted to rethink as a positive term in relation to art. Blom (1998) explained that Brecht and Higgins wanted to embrace boring art because it had the potential to create an apparent lack of stimuli which would necessitate involving the surroundings of the art in ways that are obscured when exciting stimuli are present. Blom (1998) sums this up stating “boredom destroys the boundaries that keep the surge of intensities within the fenced-off space of the work” (p. 65). An example of this play with boredom and duration is Brecht’s 1961 performance score *Time Table Event*. In this performance any railway station is chosen, and a duration is chosen using the railway timetable. The performance includes anything that happens within that duration. By playing with boredom and duration these artists draw our attention to the potential of boredom and duration of classroom experiences. By raising the questions of productive radical boredom, Fluxus helps pedagogues rethink when teaching is occurring and not occurring by complicating how we associate exciting stimuli with immersion in any pedagogical experience.

Sholtz (2018) similarly notes that Cage’s exploration of silence enabled him to disrupt the structure of composition. Silence is often understood as the opposite of sound; a space-time or duration. In creating chance compositions of silence, Cage intensified not nothingness – no sound – but rather all sounds, ambient sounds, unpredictable sounds. Sholtz (2018) writes that silence is not a void or empty space, instead silence “is an affect that holds open a space for the unintentional, ambient sounds that pre-exist us, that compose us, that exceed our activities ... Therefore, silence is a filled space, a space of plenitude” (p. 250). For Cage the composition emerges out of silence, much like art emerged out of boredom.

For contemporary artist-pedagogues experimentation with duration, boredom, the marking of time, ephemerality and chance continue to resurface in their classroom practices. In some cases, this unfolds as simply a closer attention to how time is used and thought about in educational spaces. The artists also draw attention to the ways in which schools and institutions structure time for learning and how they push back against those boundaries in their artistic and pedagogical practices by creating Class as Art and by attending to multiples and intermedia.

We argue the history of Fluxus curriculum and pedagogy and its ongoing impact on post-secondary education is significant for education scholars working within art education, and more broadly. Traditionally post-secondary art education has adhered to a method of teaching grounded in skill development and the execution of individual formulated assignments, where instructor’s artwork did not happen in the context of the classroom. Artist-pedagogues saw teaching as an activity they undertook in addition to artistic work, as something that existed

outside and separate from their personal artistic practice, and as a didactic process. We contend that the shift in how artists teach, towards a collaborative, social-practice model has increased, yet is under examined, and poorly documented and archived. The consequences of this teaching-as-art practice are significant in that it: (i) challenges traditional art curricula and assessment models (ii) impacts how future artists conceive of individual authorship and of making work with participants outside of a commercial art context, (iii) challenges university programs to consider new modes of supporting alternative teaching and course structures. Beyond art education, the importance of these core concepts for a reimagining curriculum and pedagogy in classrooms, and as scholarly field, are important in an era of mass standardization, authoritarian assessment models, increased neoliberalism, corporate institutionalism, and the privileging of rigid disciplinary boundaries.

## Notes

1. Research-creation is the interrelated practices of art, theory, and research (Springgay & Rotas, 2015). As a methodology research-creation is critically distinguished from the otherwise known area of arts-based research, and is committed to queer feminist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial frameworks and practices (Springgay & Truman, 2019). While many arts-based approaches to qualitative research use the arts as a way of *representing* research findings, in research-creation the process of creative practice is understood as an empirical and theoretical practice itself. In research-creation we prime our practices through propositional thought, speculative middles, and (in)tensions (Springgay & Truman, 2017, 2018a, 2018b). Speculative middles insist that methods are not procedural or pre-determined (e.g. chronological) but open to temporalities that are thick, felt, and in and of the event, much like a Fluxus event. (In)tensions refer to the ethical and political response-abilities that we bring to research questions, research practices, and to the communities we do research with. Research-creation moves away from procedural driven methods that assume that data can be mined or collected.
2. Fluxus was one of many groups of artists that were socially and politically engaged during the 1960s and 1970s. In this paper we have chosen to focus on Fluxus because they directly had an interest and impact on education.
3. The use of the Latin *fleure* bears some resemblance to Pinar's et al. (1975) notion of *currere*. Both concepts aim to shift the focus away from a static object (of art or curriculum) to a reflective process or movement.
4. Other artists affiliated with Fluxus included Philip Corner, Robert Filliou, Arthur Köpcke, Alison Knowles, Shigeko Kubota, George Maciunas, Jackson Mac Low, Shiomi Mieko, Yoko Ono, Ben Patterson, Nam June Paik, Dieter Roth, Takako Saito, Tomas Schmit, Daniel Spoerri, Ben Vautier, and Wolf Vostell.
5. As part of our larger research project on Fluxus pedagogy we have created *Instant Class Kit*, which is inspired by the format and multisensory nature of Fluxkits. Rather than curating an exhibition where similar materials would be encased in vitrines or available for manipulation within the confines of a library or special collection, *Instant Class Kit* was conceived to circulate, and its curriculum materials to be handled, anywhere. The instructions are open-ended so as to allow participants to collectively decide how to interpret, manipulate and activate the multiples housed inside. Fourteen contemporary artists have contributed to *Instant Class Kit*. The contemporary artists strive to deliver a curriculum based on the values of critical democratic pedagogy, anti-racist and anti-colonial logics, and social justice, as well as continuing the experimental and inventive collaboration that defined Fluxus. The lessons, syllabi and classroom activities produced by this new generation of artists address topics and methodologies including queer subjectivities and Indigenous epistemologies, social movements and collective protest, immigration, technology, and ecology. A full inventory of works is available on the website: <https://thepedagogicalimpulse.com/category/instantclasskit/>.
6. This publication was funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and included five essays including proposals from Maciunas and Watts. It also collected quotes and interview excerpts with a wide range of art educators, artists, scholars and college students.
7. A description and images from the *Pressing Issues* course is available on the website: <https://thepedagogicalimpulse.com/pressing-issues/>
8. A description and images from *Class Not a Class* is available on the website: <https://thepedagogicalimpulse.com/class-not-a-class/>
9. The Dish with One Spoon Treaty is an agreement between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee that binds them to share and protect the land that is now considered an area of southern Ontario.



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