

“Between representation and social interaction: Fluxus intermedia and dialogic form on the Internet.”

Carol-Ann Braun, painter and multimedia artist.

Enrolled at the Ecole Doctorale des Arts du Spectacle et Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication, Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, France.

carol-ann.braun@wanadoo.fr

Annie Gentès, Associate Professor, Media Studies

Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Télécommunications, Paris, France.

gentes@enst.fr

dedicated to Bertrand Clavez and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe

Abstract:

This paper will discuss the appropriateness of the word “intermedia” as it applies to art on Internet. Our approach is grounded in art history and in the social sciences. First popularized by members of the art movement Fluxus, intermedia questions the procedural and conceptual barriers between medium, genre and media practices. In so doing it breaks down the roles traditionally attributed to author, object and spectator in the production and the reception of works of art. We argue that Fluxus aesthetics set the stage for today’s web artists.

The word intermedia, however, resists being applied to a single, networked medium. To understand the contradictory pre-digital and digital uses of the term, we proceed in inter-related steps. We compare the initial context for intermedia with the material parameters that structure art on the Internet. Several examples help understand emerging dialogic forms of representation, which include networks of “wreaders” acting on and authoring shared texts. Thus, we discern the premises for a new post-photographic aesthetic situated at the junction of representation and social interaction.

Introduction

“Intermedia” is an interesting alternative to the word “multimedia,” implying more than the juxtaposition of materials and art forms within a single work. The term was first used to describe artistic experiments led by a loose-knit group of artists from Europe and America who called themselves “Fluxus.” At its beginnings primarily oriented towards music, intermedia quickly includes literary, theatrical, and visual elements, evolving into what are known today as “Events” and “Aktions.”

Dick Higgins, one of the founding members of Fluxus, first used the term intermedia in the early sixties. He was adamant about the innovative nature of the term. In a more recent interview, Higgins compares multimedia and intermedia: “To me the difference between intermedia and multimedia is that with intermedia there is a conceptual fusion, and you can’t really separate out the different media in an integral way.” (*Art, Performance, Media*, 201) Unlike opera, where music, text and décor can be identified separately, the elements contributing to an intermedial

work are inseparable, fused at their very inception. Higgins cites the work of Philip Corner and John Cage, “intermedium between music and philosophy”; or Joe Jones’s self-playing instruments, “intermedium between music and sculptures”; or the constructed poems of Emmett Williams and Robert Filliou “intermedium between poetry and sculpture.” (*Foew&ombwhnw* 29) Intermedia—open, in “flux,” and dead-set against the well-known “isms” of the history of art—melds aspects of different disciplines and media. In so doing, intermedia breaks down the roles traditionally attributed to author, object, and spectator in the production and the reception of works of art.

At first, the term intermedia does seem to apply to the medley of interactive forms co-existing on the web: photographs, paintings, music, and videos all share a common digital matrix. But is this “matrix” a medium or a combination of media? For that matter, what is a “digital” medium? On a computer, for example, what we call a digital photograph is not truly a photograph. It is the coded image of a photograph. Nothing can guarantee that it is the product of a single “click of the shutter” and transfer of light onto film. It floats behind a screen, independently of chemistry, paper, surface, and grain. The repercussions of this shift are fundamental. What we continue to call a photograph is in fact just an image, difficult to distinguish from any other image. It is likely to have been assembled seamlessly from scanned fragments “processed” with a software package—the very same software package used to touch up, imperceptibly, various other image-renderings. Photography has been gutted of its material and procedural specificity. It has, to quote Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, been “re-mediated” and it must be understood in an entirely new context of production and reception.

In order to understand this complex overlapping of past and present media practices, we will proceed in three steps. First, we will define intermedia in its original art historical context. Next, we will relate the term to the Internet’s coded sign-systems via detailed analyses of websites that address issues raised by Fluxus. Indeed, the word requires clarifying—as do the terms at its root, “inter” and “media,” both problematic when applied to networked, digital representations on the Internet. Third, we will analyze the new “dialogic forms” which emerge from the cross between representation and social interaction, so characteristic of the Internet today.

Fluxus: the medium/genre/media dynamic

“I want to locate much of the social implications of what is being done in the arts within the larger, social flow,” writes Higgins (*Postface*, preamble ii). The questions raised by intermedia concern how works are made, seen, and transmitted. Intermedia addresses the expectations people bring to representation as a whole, addressing issues of audience, distribution, and content in the wake of mass media. Naim June Paik’s *TV Clock* (1963) consists of twenty-four TV monitors lined up on a gallery floor; each contains images compressed into a single line; each line is rotated to suggest the hands of a clock representing each hour of the day. Here, Paik parodies the idea of distributed content, grouping devices usually seen individually. He upsets the public’s expected reception of a given technology and its standard use. By treating television as a plastic medium, Paik imposes a strictly formal, abstract manner of looking at communication. Higgins qualifies this recombination of media and related practices as the creation of a “super-ordinaire genre.” Intermedia stretches beyond “ordinary” limitations imposed by any single genre in any given medium.

Temporal and spatial dislocations of traditional modes of representation are not new to the art world. When photography first imposed itself as a medium, it not only challenged established notions of "truth" and "beauty," it also compelled artists to wonder about how to paint and how to sculpt. However thick the brushwork, the impressionist "moment" is influenced by the photographic click of the shutter. More extreme, Jackson Pollock's drip paintings are one continuous "roll," blending painterly process and cinematographic temporality. And when the sculptor Richard Serra throws molten lead against the wall of his studio, his "imprinted forms" blend the painterly, the sculptural and the photographic, all in one. Much twentieth-century art combines the roles and procedures of several artistic disciplines within the same given work.

In its most extreme form, however, Fluxus intermediality is both unprecedented and difficult to grasp. Strictly speaking, medium and genre are not comparable. A sonnet is not a paper page; a sitcom is not a TV set. Conflating the two means jumbling the factors traditionally associated with the production of any work of art and the factors associated with its distribution and reception. Fluxus brings a priori unrelated notions of gesture, gaze, and process to bear on each other. In an article entitled "What is . . . ?," Eric Andersen writes: "Inter Media rejects art and communication as production ." (par. 4) Here, process is not limited to formal and material considerations. On the contrary, it is predicated on the existence of an ideational space independent of any material incarnation. Fluxus intermediality is "supra-medial."

Systems, scores, and the world at large

A Fluxus event begins with a set of instructions inscribed on paper. The principle is borrowed from music: Fluxus artists write a "score," to be interpreted; the resulting event is fleeting, impermanent, limited to the length of an "event". Scores—not bound by specific material constraints—allow for the blending of real, imaginary, and symbolic registers. For example, in *Tablet 3* from *Gloss for an Unknown Language* (Notebooks 1958), the sculptor George Brecht proposes an "image formed by a moving object for the duration of one breath." (qtd in Antin, par. 2). Here, the artist refrains from any "willful imposition of details" (*Foew&ombwhn* 47). What sort of object? Moving in what direction? And according to whose breath? "The real innovation lies in the emphasis on the creation of a system," adds Higgins (*Foew&ombwhnw* 48). The system, both precise in its structure but open to interpretation, situates itself above any specific material incarnation. "It cannot by definition be categorized as a thing, only as methods." (Anderson, par 4) In effect, a Fluxus art work is a process caught between "two radical extremes, where the extremity of one position, i.e., the extreme generality of an instruction for an event, by necessity pushes into the opposite position i.e., the extreme specificity of the realization of the instruction" (Ina Blom, qtd. in Clavez 242). Indeed, Fluxus score is both sufficient unto itself yet incomplete, explicitly open to input by the participants of the ensuing event.

Surely conscious of the effect of his words at a time when American formalism was at its peak, Higgins writes that "the specificity which is of value, then, is whatever most efficiently defines the artist's intentions in as many ways as possible" (*Foew&ombwhnw* 69). Here, the keyword is "intent." Intent does not spring whole from the mind of the artist, to be immortalized in bronze. Intent is suspended, floating, indeterminate until performed. With Fluxus, reception is a form of

production. Not only is interpretation “active” in the Bakhtinian sense, but it places the spectator center stage, virtually elevating him to the status of co-author. John Cage’s 4’33” of silence in the presence of a piano relies on what Higgins’ called “the creative abilities of the participants to fill in the blanks” (Higgins, qtd. in Clavez 52) And as George Brecht wrote in 1959, “for the virtuoso listener, all sound may be music” (qtd. in Clavez 123). Recalling the pragmatics of theater, a score is open to interpretation by a wide variety of individual participants using any combination of media.

Often referred to as a “dynamic,” Fluxus distributes authorship among all those who participate in bringing to life a score/event. “I want to locate much of the social implications of what is being done in the arts within the larger, social flow,” writes Higgins (*Postface*, Preamble i). Fluxus stretches the aura of the text to include elements quite foreign to it, weaving an unprecedented heteroglossia that includes bodies as well as signs, material processes as well as social forms. In this, Fluxus is very much in the lineage of Duchamp. In his first *Some/thing Else* newsletter, on the subject of Duchamp’s ready-mades, Higgins writes, “The ready-made or found object, in a sense an intermedium since it wasn’t intended to conform the pure medium, (...) suggests a location in the field between the general area of art media and those of life media.” (*Feow&ombwhnw* 12). In addition to the spectator (become an author/actor), this includes a whole array of social actors: art dealers, Flux-friends, critics, historians, collectors. The Fluxus dynamic is, at its essence, a network. “We are in open circuits,” writes Naim June Paik (qtd in Clavez 349). “We” is author, “we” is past, present and future spectator, “we” is collector, art historian. The “open circuit” is not only a constellation of media; it is an intangible web linking dialogically situated subjects. It is not just inter-textual, it is multi-polar and multi-modal. As Craig Saper notes, “Fluxus’s most important contribution [is] making networking situations into artworks” (xv).

By disjoining the physical link between author, gesture, object, use, and medium, the “system” opens up the artwork to what lies outside of art, to the linguistic matrix of the world itself. Higgins speculate about a kind of art “consciously . . . placed in the intermedium between painting and shoes” (*Feow&ombwhnw* 13). One is tempted to say that Fluxus “transforms the world into discourse,” as Christian Metz once wrote on the subject of cinema (*Problems of Denotation*, Rosen, 40). If the immersive and virtual aspects of Fluxus aesthetics bring to mind film theory, however, Fluxus artists are at liberty to throw away lens and celluloid and call the shots with brackets of real life. Higgins’ score for *Stacked Deck*, “in which any event can take place at any time, as long as its cue appears”, is a case in point. (*Feow&ombwhnw* 16). In its most extreme manifestations, Fluxian intermediality dispenses with media. For Fluxus, reality is the medium, experience the utensil, and language the means of distribution.

Internet: code/sign and gesture/use

In order to determine if (or how much of) intermedia applies to various forms of representation on the Internet, one needs to take into account the specific constraints imposed by the digital sign.

On the Internet, form is largely a function of code, used to create signs that simulate familiar ways of accessing information. Human-computer interface design draws from established modes

of producing, distributing and receiving information, re-creating old forms all while mixing its metaphors, so to speak. The Internet offers a new horizon for the convergence of media—in symbolic terms (Fagerjord 294). The material world doesn't disappear, of course; it is linked, prosthetically, to a virtual world where both surface and depth are illusion. But on the Internet, media survive only as representations of their former selves. Media have disappeared, and yet they linger—in one vast, coded “mono-medium.” On the Internet, code, performance, and event all happen in the same medium and at the same “mediated” time. No emancipation from code is possible here. Whether machine code, programming language, or interactive icon, code is not first “written” in one medium, then performed later in clever intermedial combinations. A coded-sign “runs,” filling the Fluxian gap between intent and gesture, providing a single digital matrix for the Fluxus dynamic.

In France, Yves Jeanneret and Emmanuel Souchier were among the first to define the specificity of the Internet medium from the perspective of the hyper-linked sign. In a seminal article entitled “Les écrits d'Écran,” they coined the term “*signes passeurs*.” Hyper-linked signs not only have symbolic value subject to interpretation (like an arrow) but use value as well, transforming them into tools (like what it takes to turn a page). They are signs, messengers, and hinges, to be looked at and to be looked through, simultaneously. What was once considered as separate, i.e., “you don't have to know how to read in order to turn a page,” is now conjoined: in a way, *signes passeurs* are where hardware and sign-systems meet. They are by nature hybrid. Half-visible, half-hidden, sandwiched between code and gesture, hyper-linked signs determine function, choice and movement. This *signes passeurs* is at the heart of the Internet medium and potentially, through code, the agent of choice among many genres. Like two sides of the same coin, its back-end is also its front end. Medium and genre exist, through the *signes passeurs*, as a continuum. It is as if the Internet contained the seeds of intermedial aesthetics at its very core.

Assembled into complex interfaces, these *signes passeurs* stage interactions among people and representations, giving shape to a converging set of rhetorical practices. They impose gestures and rhetoric associated with previous genres and media practices. Hinges between types of activities which they illustrate and organize, both interface and “control panel” to quote Lev Manovich (91), coded representations float between intent and use. They harbor form as well as activity. The relations between author and spectator, production and reception, use and intent, already dismantled by Fluxus forty years ago, are re-mantled within a medium open to endless hybridizations.

Can Fluxus aesthetics survive this re-mediation? *A priori*, a Fluxus artist would say, “Yes.” Fluxus can use the Internet as it uses any other medium. Conversely, any Internet artist can draw inspiration from past art forms, including Fluxus. The question is not one of imitation but of procedure and attitude: does Fluxus' dismantling of established media use and expectations prefigure the production/reception characteristic of different forms of representation on the Internet?

Intermedia intra-medium

[Trois fils](#), a website by Luc Dall'Armellina, includes a scan of a photograph of Rimbaud, programmed to respond, pixel by pixel, to the movements of the cursor. The chain of events triggered by each movement changes the perception of the photograph as a whole. As viewers,

we are not staring fixedly at a still photographic image, nor are we swept up in a kinetic narrative. Hovering at the juncture of pixel and code, our cursor compels parts of the image to move when we move. Every click and roll-over confronts hidden code and pragmatic (mediated) gesture, simultaneously recalling and denying our experience of previous media. Moreover, these coded pixels create an imaginary foil against which we project a relation to Rimbaud's portrait, whose expression changes depending on what we do. The effect is quite surprising. At first our gestures seem aggressive, like a breach with respect for the image of the author. We then enter into a game of exchanged "gazes" between several different kinds of representations: an absent photograph of an absent, long gone Rimbaud and us, present "in the image" by virtue of our cursor. The experience is eerily intimate and reciprocal, embodied in very different forms that co-exist on the screen and through our gestures.

Code intrudes on performance by guiding our hand; at the same time, we intrude on the image by shuffling its components. Emancipation from medium or genre is not the issue here. Articulating a unique combination of media-references and genres is, however. A coded-sign links up to the spectator's gestures, and, in the process, attributes intent to the image being explored.

In Agnes de Cailleux's [*Your Projection*](#), the coded-sign structures "inter-actions" on another rhetorical level. The wreader has to stroke the window, as if it were skin, in order to conjure up, bit by bit, fragments of images and sounds. The wreader's relation to this coded-interface is not one of deployment but of a slow, erotic unearthing of potential meaning. Again, the website engages the wreader in an imaginary form of reciprocity, this time not on the scale of pixels buried within a single image, but on the scale of a hidden tree-structure orchestrating facets of multimedia content. Code links author to wreader, who in turn gives form to code and reveals what the author programmed the device to show. On one hand, authorial intent is explicitly mediated by code; on the other hand, the wreader's gestures give shape to the author's hidden intent. Code—instrument—also instrumentalizes the wreader, who then "performs" the code.

A close analysis of comprehension in digital and networked media shows that meaning springs from a program that is both anticipated by the producer and actualized by the wreader (Davallon et al. 47). One might go so far as to say that the artist is present—in a symbolic, deferred, and virtual sense, of course—to the wreader via a programmed interface and various diverse prosthetic devices which make up for gaps in time and space. The author anticipates, the wreader actualizes, and code is the mechanism that gives shape to this joining of projections and gestures, "open" to each other. In this sense, code resembles the Fluxus "score," also incomplete until performed and acknowledged by the spectator, become "spect-actor" (Weissberg 118).

The dialogic flows contained within digital interfaces, however, remain circumscribed by a single, unifying set of instructions bound to the medium. By comparison, a Fluxus score is much more open to interpretation than any website. It leaves room for what Fluxus artists called "play,"—i.e., jokes, games, and gags, but also free association, leading far a field from pre-scripted paths. Even though code can be written to run random sequences, randomness is not equivalent to freedom of choice—in particular the freedom to mix and match mediums. Code may be indifferent to content, but it does pre-format how a wreader both reads and writes in response to it.

Web-artists have been tempted to de-mystify the buried aspects of code and unveil the languages hidden “intra-medium.” The Whitney Museum’s [Codedoc](#), for example, places the back end of a website on the same level as the work’s front end. It shows how code works behind the “work,” focusing on internal semantic differences among types of computer-code. To disjoin code from its actualization, however, is to neutralize code, to display a simulacrum stripped of its operating value. Indeed, the intelligibility of computer code is in part a function of use. A programmer reading his or her own code is not reading it as s/he would a novel, but in terms of an anticipated presence of another “reader/writer.” S/he has to judge code through the imagined gestures and rhetorical expectations of the eventual wreader of his or her program. S/he’s looking through code to something else which code allows—a mix of medium, genre and media practices woven from assembled hyper-linked signs.

To this extent, the Internet allows for unprecedented independence from established publishing and distribution systems, including of course, those of the art establishment. Artists create, publish, and advertise all within the same medium, without having to negotiate terms with middle-men. There is no better example of this than the [website](#) of Fluxus artist Ben Vautier, otherwise known for white hand-written messages on walls, tee-shirts, posters, and other media, as well as his “living sculpture project,” a boutique in Nice crammed with paraphernalia. His website invites us to explore different facets of his world : “*poésie, art, politique, ragots, etc. . . . à vous de faire et refaire votre menu.*” His menu: “Disinformation,” “the City of Nice,” “for sale,” “Ben is angry,” “scratch me here” and other menu items mimic the paraphernalia in his boutique. If one scratches where Ben itches, up pops a story by a friend of his, Gibertie. The website is not just about Ben, it is also about his world of friends, his network. Ben the web-artist dons several hats. He’s an artist, a business man, an art historian, an editor, a friend, a publisher, and curator all in one. True, this is not equivalent to Fluxus polyphony. Ben is an actor on his own stage, quoting friends, impersonating a selection of genre, media, and identities within a single medium. But he does address the Fluxus idea that a given art is a constellation of interactions that include explicitly non-artistic activities. And he forces us to shift gears right along with him. As he changes his role, we change ours: when he is an art dealer, we are his clients; when he is a critic, we are his engaged readers, no longer simply perusing menus. In each instance we read/write differently.

[Natural Selection](#), by Mongrel, a group of British artists, is a more violent parody of genre, use and hyper-link, bringing each user’s “intent” to bear on the content of the website. *Natural Selection* is a search engine, mimicking Yahoo, waiting for the user to type a query that will in turn provide a unique constellation of leads. But here the *signe passeur* is used to subvert social code and break the link between anticipation and actualization. For one, the user’s queries don’t match up with expected results. Innocent key words such as “art” yield pornographic or fascist content. Moreover, by activating these key words, the unsuspecting user is confronted with her share of responsibility for bringing despicable material onto the screen. Third, targeted algorithms, also written by the author of the website, alter the pornographic content into “randomized, prejudiced-packed drivel,” to quote the website’s “about” menu. Again, computer code sabotages social code—behind the screen—and the pornographic genre takes a beating. Although the pictures aren’t scrambled, the text is, and the context completely skewed as a result. Is porn still porn when all the wreader’s expectations can’t put the genre back together again?

Dialogic form on the Internet: practical considerations and prototypes

The Fluxus dynamic, however, is not only about multi-modality, it is also about the synergy of a network of people over time.

In this lineage, and with implicit reference to Fluxus mail art, Marc Amerika explores the potential literary forms contained within e-mail exchanges: “. . . you have an instantaneously delivered multi-linear thread of narrative-potential being practiced as a form of social networking. Is this the story? Is it conceptual? Literary? Performative? What happens when the conversants agree to let the dialogues go public? Is this an activist recording or archiving of an ultra-contemporary art scene that defies categorization? Who owns it? Who buys it? Perhaps it's a kind of creative mindshare. . .” (*p0es1s*). Indeed, e-mail exchanges among individuals are a unique form of communication. The “medium/media” is not simply meant to transmit a message and to disappear in the background once its mission has been accomplished. The dialogues are typographic, archived on servers, organized into folders. Dialogic threads weave a collectively authored “digital text,” accumulated in time and materially embodied in many different layers of written code.

This brings us back to Fluxus and Peter Frank’s “grand-scale orchestration of giving and receiving” (Clavez 290) accelerated and magnified by the Internet. Here, not only is the space for intermedial play quite vast, so is the potential “virtuoso” audience. Fluxus artist Ben Vautier sends off a weekly e-mails to his appointed audience. “*Ca y est, encore une newsletter-poème de Ben*” straddles an intermedium between news and poetry. This much said, insofar as it sends out a message with no intent of receiving an answer, Ben’s poetic newsletter matches conventional press more than poetry. It sets an agenda, imposing what is or is not newsworthy. It does not depend on audience participation in order to exist. At stake, a type of reciprocity, which—in real time—oscillates between production and reception. Indeed, by merging both communication and representation, the Internet’s peer-to-peer applications have as yet untapped potential. To quote Saper once again: “When aesthetic and poetic decisions embodied in artworks lead to a heightened or changed social situation, one needs to describe these forms as sociopoetic rather than as artworks within particular social contexts. The social situation is part of a sociopoetic experiment” (xiii). Unless it is a shared experiment, a current event is neither “current” nor an “event” in Fluxus terms, no matter how poetic its content.

To the examples presented above, we would like to add two prototypes of our own. Dick Higgins’ complaint that “paintings do not allow any sense of dialogue . . .” (*Foew&ombwhnw* 11) is at the core of our research. Behind the screen, object, space, surface, and co-presence all have the same status. All are “representations.” How, in such circumstances, do different points of view fragment virtual space? How can one imagine who is looking at what at any given time? On the Internet, articulating the ways in which representation and dialogue overlap requires placing people’s avatars center-stage. Only then is it possible to begin to organize information according to shared interests and affinities.

[*City Paradigms*](#) is constructed around a linear, accordion-like sound track, punctuated by animated icons over which float the names of all the site’s visitors. One is not “alone” on this

website: at a glance, one can spot a crowd and decide to join it. Unlike the instant feedback characteristic of video, however, the screen is not a mirror of self, but a representation of a relationship. *City Paradigms* articulates representations of people in relation to the texts being read. It is also a platform for an “event” to happen. If two or more people are interacting with the same animation, a figurine at the bottom of the screen offers them space to chat. The “event” is what people see, do and say together, “sociopoetically.”

Sandscript is another prototype developed with students at the *Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Télécommunications*, Paris. It is an augmented chat space embedded in a graphic environment that evokes a windswept, barren landscape. In contrast to most chat spaces, *Sandscript* is an interesting exercise in opacity, as close a mix of dialogue and painting that we could muster. Each chatter’s pseudonym is associated with a sound, so that, like crickets in a field, the group creates a shared presence, audible to all. Pre-scripted poetic content is also woven into the spontaneous, real-time dialogue of chatters. Two hundred or so “keywords” lie dormant and inactive until a chatter inadvertently types one in, triggering the appearance of a character or a change in the graphic environment. Each bit of information thus revealed is in turn interactive: simulated dialogs among fictional characters lead to blogs which develop the characters at greater length; animations in the sand lead to fragments of Morse Code or images; bit by bit, facets of a hidden intrigue emerge from the sand. Here dialog is a backbone around which information reveals itself according to what wreaders are discussing among themselves. Instead of an “object” center-stage, dialogue is the backbone of the work. Content is not revealed by a “gaze,” but unearthed from a hidden database by means of the typed exchanges among chatters.

Most theatricized chat spaces—however technically innovative—create very conventional representations of real or imaginary worlds; they are not intent on upsetting reception. They seek to make the device as transparent as possible, i.e., apt for use rather than contemplation. *Sandscript*, however, hangs in the balance between dialogue and fiction. The wreader is indeed reader, writer, and interlocutor, torn between the urge to express herself, plunge into the narrative and exchange banter with fellow wreaders. In an article entitled “Dialogue: a hyper-link to multimedia content,” we discuss how the wreader of *Sandscript* oscillates between two different postures: on the one hand, the artistic posture of “looking at;” and on the other hand, the tool-oriented stance which “looks through.” *Sandscript*’s strength lies in this shifting duality, presenting a pictorial space that is both self-sufficient and open to the chatter’s playful banter.

At issue in this collective context is the nature of the *signe passeur*, now meant to manage the field between representation and social interaction. As we have seen, the digital hyper-linked sign straddles several functions: it is a text, a pointer, and a hinge that brings to the screen another text. Pre-programmed, the digital sign anticipates its use, re-casting traditional relations between gesture and intent, shared among author and wreader via code. In the context of an application such as *Sandscript*, however, the wreader is being asked to do more than participate in revealing intent via a *signe passeur*. Half of the stage is covered, the other half left “blank,” open to the public. The only way to “fill in the blanks” is to chat, to produce a text that will be projected on the screen, and thus “received” by either another wreader or a program, ready to respond in kind.

Here, authorial intent is revealed through the wreader's ability to communicate with a mix of real-time interlocutors and fictional characters. More or less aware of this situation, the chatter in *Sandscript* is—in a single symbolic field—expressing herself in “life” (mediated by the device, of course) all while coaxing “art” from a pre-programmed environment (with the very same device). A new dialogic form is at the heart of this website, closed in by rules and open to play. The over-all effect is an odd mix of opacity and transparency meant to enrich networked representation, transformed into an event as well as a dynamic. Presented at a conference entitled “*Le Temps à l'œuvre*,” at the ENST, Paris, on the occasion of Fluxus's 40-year anniversary, *Sandscript* will soon be adapted to the needs of specific communities and live on as a socio-poetic experiment of its own.

Conclusion:

As we have seen, Fluxus's plunge into “life” jumbled the distribution of roles traditionally attributed to author, art-object, and spectator in the production and the reception of works of art. In so doing, Fluxus paved the way for the rapid appropriation of the Internet by a new generation of artists. Today, web-art has a pre-digital challenge to meet for which it is particularly well-suited: representation within an explicitly dialogic context. Far from an easy task.

In an article re-published for Fluxus's 40-year reunion, Ken Friedman warns that “. . . the tendency of the artist to focus on technical solutions rather philosophical implications [has] rendered the work both spectacular and shallow . . . A failure of philosophy is the problem. Too many artists are entranced with the physical qualities of media and unconscious about ideas. Art is burdened by attention to physical media and plagued by a failure to consider the potential of intermedia.” (Friedman, 1.3, par 26). The question is, however, not whether artists are clever enough with new media, but whether a happening is a happening if it's been programmed and takes place on-line? If its audience is scattered in space and can't smell or feel the “Aktion”? If the event is pre-scripted by code while its audience is free to multi-task? Today, pre-determined formalisms structure every gesture, every decision . . . on a micro as well as a macro level. The change is philosophical in scope. Put bluntly, it's as if the Fluxus shoe were turned into a painting by Van Gogh and Fluxus's bold link to the outside world severed in the process. With the Internet, the circuit is media, medium and content at the same time.

In sum, Dick Higgins's original concept of intermedia calls for reformulation. Opposition between art and life just doesn't have the same impact today as it once did. Retrospectively, one might argue that twentieth-century art has succeeded in fusing the two, starting with futurism and culminating in Fluxus “events.” That paradigm is now over. For intermedia to become a fertile ground for experimentation today, it must free itself of past aesthetic oppositions and situate itself elsewhere, in the field between image-signs, machine code and bodies. In this range of «inter- mediations,” the real space of the wreaders and the fictional space of representations merge, joined by prosthetic devices such as screens, cursors and keyboards. For some, these changes are unwelcome and hamper creativity. For others, they enable new, shared forms of representation and presence, woven, by gesture, in real time and in symbolic space.

Websites Analyzed:

Luc Dall'Armellina, *Trois fils*, June 2001, < http://lucdall.free.fr/disposit/trois_fil.html>

Agnès de Cailleux, *Your projection*, 2004, < <http://www.not2be.net>>

Whitney Museum *Codedoc*, Whitney Artport, lauched September 2002,

<<http://www.whitney.org/artport/commissions/codedoc/>>

Ben Vautier, *Le site de Ben Vautier*, 27/04/2004, <<http://ben-vautier.com>>

Mongrel.org's *Natural Selection*, 2003, < <http://www.mongrelx.org.uk/>>

Marc Amerika (among others!), Poetics of Digital Texts, 27-30 September, 2001,

<<http://www.poes1s.net/poetics/>>

Carol-Ann Braun, *City Paradigms*, January 2000, < <http://www.cityparadigms.timsoft.com>>

Carol-Ann Braun, *Sandscript*, June 2002, <<http://www.sandscript.timsoft.com>>

Timsoft, the company behind augmented chat software: <http://www.timsoft.com/>

And... some websites on Fluxus:

<<http://www.fluxus.org/>>

<<http://www.4t.fluxus.net/>>

<<http://www.artnotart.com/fluxus>>

<<http://www.ben-vautier.com/fluxus>>

<<http://www.nutscape.com/fluxus/homepage/>>

<<http://www.artlex.com/ArtLex/f/fluxus.html>>

<<http://www.mouvement.net>>

<<http://www.thecentreofattention.org/exhibitions/>>

<<http://www.ephilosopher.org/>>

Works Cited

- Andersen, Eric. "What is...? »...3Rd International Performance Festival Odense (Program), Odense, 2001, pp 8-15, < <http://performance-festival-odense.dk/pfo01/whatis.html>>
And <http://www.4t.fluxus.net/Textes%20d%27artistes.htm>
- Antin, David., Jerome Rothenberg. "Excerpts from Gloss For An Unknown Language, by George Brecht." *Some/thing Else No. 2*, 1965.
- Artaud, Antonin. *Le Théâtre et son Double*. Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1964.
- Aumont, Jacques. *L'Image*. Fernand Nathan, Paris, 1990.
- Barton, David, Mary Hamilton, Roz Ivanic. *Situated Literacies, Reading and Writing in Context*. Routledge, London, 2000.
- Becker, Howard. *Art Worlds*. University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1982.
- Bolter, Jay David, Richard Grusin, *Remediation, Understanding New Media*. MIT Press, Cambridge, 2000.
- Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Formes de vie, L'art et l'Invention de Soi*. Denoël. Paris, 1999.
- Braun, Carol-Ann. "Dialogic Form", *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Information and Communication Technologies*, Computer Science Press. Trinity College, Dublin, 2003.
- Braun, Carol-Ann, Annie Gentes. "Dialogue: a Hyper-Link to Multimedia Content." *Journal of Computer Mediation*, www.media-culture.org.au, September, 2004.
- Clavez, Bertrand. *Fluxus, l'Histoire, La Théorie, Pour Une Histoire des Événements Quelconques*. Université de Paris 10, Nanterre, 2003.
- Davallon, Jacques, Nathalie Noël-Cadet, Danièle Brochu. "L'Usage dans le Texte : les Traces

d'Usage du site Gallica ." *Lire, Ecrire, Récrire. Objets, Signes et Pratiques des Médias Informatisés.* ed. Jeanneret, Y., Souchier, E , Le Marec, J., B.P.I., Paris, 2003.

Fagerjord, Anders. "Rhetorical Convergence, Studying Web Media." *In Digital Media Revisited, The*
MIT Press, Cambridge, 2003.

Frank, Peter, Ken Friedman, *The Fluxus Years*, (manuscript in the possession of the author, commissioned de Oy Wäertsiliä ab Arabia) Helsinki, 1987.

<www.4t.fluxus.net/BibliographieFluxusOA.pdf>

Friedman, Ken. *Forty Years of Fluxus, Texts about Fluxus*, art/notart, last updated 18 JUN 03,

<<http://www.artnotart.com/fluxus/kfriedman-fourtyyears.html>>

An early version of the following was first published in 1989 in as "Fluxus and Company" (published by Emily Harvey Gallery) and later appeared in 1998 in The Fluxus Reader.

A Spanish version was recently published in Fluxus y Fluxfilms, 1962-2002 (published by Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia).

Gentes, Annie. "Am I an author too? Or interactivity as a source of hope and despair on The Internet," *Internet Research 3.0 Net /work/ theory*, Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers, (AOIR), Maastricht, 2002.

Higgins, Dick. *Foew&ombwhnw, a grammar of the mind and a phenomenology of love and a science of the arts as seen by a stalker of the wild mushroom*, Something Else Press, New York, 1969.

Many of the same ideas can be found in "Synesthesia and Intersenses: Intermedia, written in 1965, originally published in *Something Else Newsletter 1, No 1* (Something else

- Press, 1967). Also published as a chapter in *Horizons, the Poetics and theory of the Intermedia* (Carbondale, IL , Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1984).
- Higgins, Dick. *Postface*. Something Else Press, New York, Nice, Cologne, 1964
- Higgins, Dick. “Intermedia”, *The Something Else Press Newsletter*, 1966, vol 1, no1, New York.
- Higgins, Hannah. *Fluxus Experience*, University of California Press, California, 2002.
- Jeanneret, Yves, Emmanuel Souchier. “Pour Une Poétique de l’Ecrit d’Ecran.” In *Xoanna*, No 6,, Paris. 1999.
- Krauss, Rosalind. “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America.” In *October Magazine*, Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York, 1977.
- Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, Boston, 2001.
- Metz, Christian. “ Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film .” In *Narrative, Apparatus and Ideology, A film theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen, Columbia University Press, New York, 1986
- Saper Craig. *Networked Art*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis., 2001.
- Weissberg, Jean-Louis. “L’Auteur en Collectif, Entre l’Individu et l’Indivis,” *Les Cahiers du Numérique, Hermès*, Vol 1. No 9, Paris, 2002.
- Zurbrugg, Nicolas. *Art, Performance, Media, 31 Interviews*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2004.