



YAM FESTIVAL

PART 5

DELIVERY EVENT

by subscription

R. WATTS and/or G. BRECHT
will assemble a work
and arrange delivery
to you
or an addressee of your choice

upon receipt of either

(A) \$1 2 3 5 8 13 21 34 55 etc.

or

(B) a number of \$ equal to the date of the month
on which the work is subscribed to multiplied by
the number of food items consumed by the sub-
scriber on that day.

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Armin Hochdörfer and Susanne Neuberger, eds., *Konzept Aktion Sprache / Concept Action Language* (Vienna: Museum of Modern Art/Foundation Ludwig, 2010) German and English.

Liz Kotz

Object, Action and Ephemera

*„I am for an art that embroils itself with the everyday crap & still comes out on top.“
Claes Oldenburg, „I am for an art“ (1961)*

In 1962, as part of the ongoing *Yam Festival* of happenings, events and exhibitions, the American artists George Brecht and Robert Watts sent out a folded card: „DELIVERY EVENT,“ it announced, „by subscription.“ Upon receipt of a small sum to be checked off on the card, „R. WATTS and G. BRECHT will assemble a work and arrange delivery to you or an addressee of your choice.“ Above this text appears a photograph of a man pushing an office cart laden with numbered boxes, amidst what appears to be a warehouse or storage facility, with receding rows of wooden shelving filled with containers and objects. The object is not singular or special, the image suggests, but part of a vast archive of serially produced things subsumed into a larger organizational system.¹

While this card is often taken to be an early mail-art piece, the idiosyncratic work proposes much more than that: a set of more or less randomly chosen common objects will be assembled and delivered to specific recipients, via a rather arcane mail order subscription process, employing an arbitrary system of pricing.² It condenses a textual description, a means of advertising, a relationship of exchange, and a delivery system into one rather hermetic printed card. Perhaps more than any other of the myriad event scores, card pieces or performance operations associated with the moment of early 1960s proto-Fluxus, Brecht and Watts' *Delivery Event* addresses the dynamic structures organizing the distribution, exhibition and exchange of material objects, including art objects, in the postwar era.

If, as Julia Robinson claims, the larger Yam Festival „operated as an alternative to the gallery system, producing ‘art’ that could not be bought,“³ the *Delivery Event* proposed instead a ludic mocking of commercial exchange: unspecified „works“ that could be bought by anyone for a nominal and random fee, that would be delivered to the purchaser or their chosen recipient.⁴ How many people took the artists up on their offer is unknown, and the very fact that the cards have been retained as a collectible work suggests that they were rarely used, since ordering a delivery would of course entail mailing the subscription card back.⁵

The work presents a curious proposition—one that crystallizes two crucial trajectories that emerge almost simultaneously around 1960, trajectories that I will outline as the object/edition/store, and the performance/instruction/score. In the first, a new form of „object“ becomes available in art practice—an object that both is and is not understandable as sculpture, an object whose frame of reference is to the everyday consumer object, to the cheap, mundane and nearly ephemeral stuff of daily life, and not to any overt figurative, commemorative or hieratic sculptural model. Of course, the precursor for this object is the Duchampian readymade, and yet, this new type of object, as it emerges across the accumulations of Nouveau Realism, the boxes and kits of Fluxus, and the new Pop objects and multiples of Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol and others, is also something else. This object emerges linked both to new models of artistic production—chiefly the newly-inaugurated form of editions known as the „multiple“—and to new models for the display and presentation of artworks modeled, quite consciously, on the store (of course, this proliferating commercial site takes multiple forms, from the supermarket to the restaurant to the mail-order catalogue). Rather than disguising or dismissing the commercial underpinnings of the rapidly expanding art system and art market, artists of the late 1950s and early 1960s instead radically foreground this context and content, and integrate it into the structure of their object production and dissemination: the object is not only formally-modeled on mass-produced consumer goods, but it is reproducible, on display, and for sale.⁶

In the second trajectory, a new model of „performance“ enters art practice, one that derives chiefly from experimental music and that reconstructs artmaking as modes of action and temporal or durational enactment. In the hands of Fluxus artists informed by the compositions and performances of John Cage, David Tudor and La Monte Young, these anti-theatrical art performances were usually realized in relation to a written notation or score, or performed through following series of written instructions.⁷ Linked to this performance/instruction/score trajectory are, for instance, the art lectures of Robert Morris and Henry Flynt, the manic self-presentations of Ben Vautier, and the myriad art protests staged in the mid-

1960s, as well as the burgeoning later-1960s practices of Conceptual art, art by instruction, and performative practices that attain a public life as circulated documentation.

These two trajectories are seemingly distinct, and formally and structurally separate. Yet they arise at same moment, around 1960, and are often produced by same people. Thus in his crucial early work, Daniel Spoerri not only kicks off the modern multiple with his Editions MAT in 1959/1960, and exhibits grocery store objects unaltered except for a stamp reading „Caution, Work of Art,“ but also organizes poetry readings and performances, and produces his „tableaux-pieges“ that trap the chance detritus of a meal into permanently-preserved forms.⁸ Likewise Oldenburg’s generative early installations, *The Street* (1960) and *The Store* (1961-62), not only inaugurate the store model in the U.S. context, but also host countless performances, while his obsessive collecting of *Ray Guns* reorganized the found object into a kind of ongoing temporal action. And, under the aegis of George Maciunas, Fluxus is known precisely for its curiously joined projects of concert-like assemblages of events and performances – many of which involved the manipulation of objects and props –and its endless proliferation of Flux Boxes, FluxKits, catalogues, and editions-many of which, in their potential for interaction, implicitly present themselves as a type of performance, albeit a private one.⁹ Other intersections of performance and store abound, from Ben Vautier’s *Magasin* (Nice, 1961) and *Gallery One* (London, 1962) to George Brecht and Robert Filliou’s shop *La Cédille qui sourit* (Villefranche-sur-Mer, 1965-68).

Part of what strikes me as prescient about Brecht and Watts’ *Delivery Event* is that it understands that the consumer good and the system of distribution are mutually implicated forms-historically, modern industrial mass production emerges simultaneously with mass distribution, as the factory presupposes both the railroad and the department store. Taking the form of a printed card sent through the mail, *Delivery Event* also understands that in the post-World War II era, flows of mass-produced objects have become increasingly intertwined with the mass media and with models of communication. Consumer goods are not only advertised in the media, they are themselves messages. This is, after all, precisely the era of postwar prosperity when, as Jean Baudrillard has proposed, the object becomes a *sign*-as an industrial logic of „exchange value“ is increasingly supplanted by a post-industrial semiotic logic of „sign-exchange value.“

Curiously, Brecht and Watts propose to distribute works of art via *subscription*, a business model historically associated with magazines and newspapers. Rather than representing a one-time sale, a subscription usually entails ongoing periodic delivery or access. Yet to „subscribe“ is not simply to pledge a sum of money, but also to sign a document, authorize a statement or give consent, to „under-write“ something. A subscription is a contract,

and to subscribe to something is not simply to buy a discrete object but to enter into a larger system of exchange and distribution, one organized linguistically and legally as well as commercially. The subscription card is a record of this transaction, and the means of putting it into play. In Brecht and Watt's hands, the artwork is not simply an object or an action, but a work of reproductive media and verbal inscription that precedes both action and object—a work we generally encounter as a small printed piece of ephemera.

Indeed, as an array of 1960s art practices demonstrate and embody, object production becomes intensely destabilized and dispersed, as it crosses paths with a host of new models of publication, replication and collection that embed objects into larger discursive systems and into implicitly temporal and iterative forms of production, reproduction and performance. From the assembled heterogeneous materials of La Monte Young's legendary *An Anthology* (1961/1963, itself a compilation of materials linked to loft concerts and downtown performances) to the constantly-changing compendiums and ephemeral contents of Maciunas's *Fluxus I* (1964-1978) editions and *Fluxkits*, to Oldenburg's vast archive of collected objects and photographs mounted as the *Ray Gun Wing* (1961-1977), object and performance practices become linked around new forms of collection, replication and iterability marked not so much by industrial models of standardization and rationalized production, as by instability, obsession and precariousness. The very split or continued dates of many of these projects indicate something essential about them: their ongoing production, combination and variation over time, subject to the whims of the maker and also to the shifting vagaries of materials and economic resources.¹⁰

If artistic production circa 1960 becomes reorganized around new models of object/edition/store and performance/instruction/score, how do we understand the relation between these two trajectories? What deeper structural logics connect them? To understand the emergence of these trajectories requires situating them not solely within histories of twentieth-century art practice and its internal paradigm shifts, or even in the growth and restructuring of art markets in the postwar period. Instead, the larger stakes of these questions lie in the structural transformation of object experience in postwar industrialized societies, at a moment when the machine-made object world of industrial modernity and the accelerated consumer cultures of postwar American and Western European capitalism produced not only a new world of abundance and obsolescence but a greatly altered temporal and procedural relation to materiality.

Despite the countless manifesto-like statements against „art“ or commerce, the new forms of artistic production that emerge in the late 1950s and early 1960s are by no means simply resistant to commodification, the market, or the gallery system. Instead, as evi-

denced in Oldenburg's *Store*, the Bianchini Gallery's *The American Supermarket* or Maciunas's downtown New York *FluxShop*, these efforts represent a complex and ambivalent relation to the market and the commodity as inescapable conditions of late-twentieth century life.¹¹ As such, the new instability of the „art object“ makes manifest the repressed instability and crisis of the intact, integral commodity „object.“ For all its apparent and continued success, this new commodity object was already in crisis and undergoing profound transformation-as, in the context of advanced industrial production, objects become subsumed into larger and increasingly immaterial systems, and, in the context of consumption, the object becomes volatilized as a sign.

A sense of the larger historical context is essential here. If, in the 1920s, artists sought to integrate themselves into the new forms of industrial production, they did so in the service of a new unity of art and design understood as a project of „radical democratic aestheticization.“ Like Soviet Productivism in a radically different context, the Bauhaus project entailed not simply the design of new objects for use and consumption, but the radical transformation of everyday life and object experience.¹² As Benjamin Buchloh notes, „In its promise to revolutionize the experience of the everyday not only through the universal legibility of technological forms but also through the collective availability made possible by industrial mass production, the Bauhaus aimed to remake the everyday according to the laws of function and efficiency.“¹³ While both Productivism and the Bauhaus have been lionized as „heroic failures,“ the crises they encountered represent not merely historically contingent circumstances – of destroyed industrial infrastructure, political crisis and economic collapse – but larger symptomatic forces at work within advanced industrial production.

Among the crucial unresolved conflicts confronting this earlier moment of modernity was the fact that the intact, integral, discrete commodity object was being eroded from within, by the very forms and forces of industrial production. Not only was the object already becoming sign, but the „thing“ itself was being dissolved within increasingly immaterial networks and circuits. The instability of this object is manifested in its peculiar temporarily, as a newly disposable commodity becomes merely detritus, to be consumed in an instant and tossed away.

In ways reminiscent of *Lef* group artists and writers of the 1920s, 1960s artists at times sought to restore the „thingness“ of the thing, its materiality and singularity, in the face of the relentless abstraction of the objects under capitalism; even the abstracting forces of accumulation and exchange could themselves become artistic materials.¹⁴ If industrial production takes the form of a complex of processes, like a net or network, diffuse and

unlocalizable, the position of artists as object-makers in relation to this system becomes increasingly precarious. Maria Gough proposes, that in the 1920s, the object's disappearance already became „a central paradox ... of mass production: the more technologically advanced the process of the object's production, the less corporeal, tangible and object-like that object, in fact, becomes.“¹⁵ *Lef* theorist Nikolai Tarabukin observed how, despite its relentless proliferation of objects, „mass production cancels out the ... conception of the object; it brings about an extreme reduction of the period of its utilization to a single act of consumption.“¹⁶ As it is transformed into „ephemera,“ the object loses its fundamental character. And perhaps more crucially, the object becomes super-ceded by the system.

This reformulation of the problem of production as „dematerializing process rather than integral product“¹⁷ prefigures the 1960s' shift from models of static objecthood to procedural operations and perpetual transformations focused on symbolic and semiotic materials. After all, in his classic analyses of the emergence of the modern „object“ – a thing that is no longer just a product or commodity, but a sign in a quasi-linguistic system of social status and circulation – Baudrillard identified the Bauhaus as the avatar of the world made sign, the transformation of everyday life into a „universal semiotic.“¹⁸

As 1960s' artists confront the consumer object, seemingly opposed strategies – of extreme singularization and re-auratization on the one hand, and of uninflected serial repetition on the other – achieve their legibility against a horizon of homogenization and standardization. If Walter Gropius famously viewed rationalization, mechanization, and the division of labor as „seemingly irrevocable steps in industrial evolution,“¹⁹ postwar artists often sought to undo these moves step-by-step. As Gropius notes, by the 1920s, the new standardized object was not only simplified and streamlined, but shorn of personal touch and idiosyncrasies: „A standard may be defined as that simplified practical exemplar of anything in general use which embodies a fusion of the best of its anterior forms – a fusion preceded by the elimination of the personal content of their designers and all otherwise ungeneric or non-essential features. Such an impersonal standard is called a 'norm.'“²⁰ It is precisely this new depersonalized standardized object that Baudrillard termed the „serial object“ in his 1968 polemic *Le Systeme des objets*. In what he terms the „model/series distinction,“ he decries the fact that „the broad strata of our society do in fact live among serially produced objects that refer formally and psychologically to models which only a small minority can enjoy.“²¹

While in the U.S., Baudrillard's theoretical arguments have more frequently been applied to 1980s „Neo-Geo“ art and postmodernism, the historical context of his key early texts is precisely the postwar reorganization of object experience that propels the turn, within 1960s art,

to seriality, performance and linguistic materials. Despite his sensitivity to Warhol and other Pop figures, Baudrillard's diagnosis is far more dire: „Of all the servitudes visited upon the serial object, the most obvious concerns its durability and its technical quality ... The first effect of all the innovations and all the vagaries of fashion is to render objects more shoddy and ephemeral.“²² Citing American critiques of the planned obsolescence of function, quality, and desirability, Baudrillard lambasts the „style deficits“ and „psychological shortfall“ associated with the serial object, „designed not to last.“²³

Rather than being solid, stable, and durable, the object-world is now a transient flow of passing signs, flotsam and jetsam, that temporarily inhabit our lives and life-spaces. As such, the object's degradation, impermanence and ephemeral replaceability marks the dissolution of a more stable, bounded subjectivity: „For centuries, generations of people succeeded one another in an unchanging décor of objects which were longer-lived than they, whereas now many generations of objects will follow upon one another at an ever-accelerating pace during a single human lifetime.“²⁴ In his influential joining of Marxist political economy with structural linguistics, Baudrillard famously analyzed consumption as „a logic of significations,“ in which the empirical object as such has been displaced or outpaced by dynamic systems of exchange in which it is merely a temporary element or placeholder: „The object is nothing. It is nothing but the different types of relations and significations that converge, contradict themselves, and twist around it.“²⁵

How then does the artist operate in this transformed object world? The conventional production of art objects no longer seems an adequate response to a world marked by the over-proliferation and ceaseless circulation of stuff. Meaning, no longer located in the object, becomes generated instead by its circulation, variation and substitution – by the actions, circuits and quasi-linguistic protocols that produce objects and orchestrate their dissemination. If, in his 1960 exhibition, *The Street*, Oldenburg minted fake currency that would allow viewers to buy bits and pieces of his carefully scavenged „junk,“ it reflects an understanding that the object had become an activity, an ephemeral element in a larger system or ritual of exchange. Likewise, in the Bianchini Gallery *American Supermarket* and the 1967 *Museum of Merchandise*, the store-like exhibition is staged as a theatrical experience, a total environment, in which viewers become performers enacting the curious rituals of American shopping.

As the anthropologist and cultural theorist Arjun Appadurai proposes, „The diversion of commodities from specified paths is always a sign of creativity or crisis, whether aesthetic or economic.“²⁶ Working from „the conceit that commodities, like persons, have social lives,“ Appadurai has proposed that focusing on the things that are exchanged – in their

materiality and specificity – makes it possible to elucidate how social relations create links between exchange and value.²⁷ Indeed, as he proposes, the readymade hardly disrupts the larger commodity system; instead, practices like the reframing of found objects or the collection of otherwise valueless materials represent „examples of commoditization by diversion, where value, in the art or fashion market, is accelerated or enhanced by placing objects and things in unlikely contexts“; „such diversion,“ he concludes, „is not only an instrument of decommodification of the object but also of the (potential) intensification of commoditization by the enhancement of value.“²⁸

Since artistic projects sought to come to terms with these conditions, it is not surprising that they would increasingly turn their efforts to these underlying systems of distribution and dissemination, understanding such systems not as external to the art object but as a crucial determinant and feature of it. As Nam June Paik remarked in a 1978 interview, part of the crucial innovation of Fluxus was its attention to distribution as an artistic site and form. In his idiosyncratic English, Paik proposes: „Marx gave much thought about the dialectics of production and the production medium. He had thought rather simply that if workers (producers) OWNED the production’s medium, everything would be fine. He did not give creative room to the DISTRIBUTION system. The problem of the art world in the ‘60s and ‘70s is that although the artist owns the production’s medium, such as paint and brush, even sometimes a printing press, they are excluded from the highly centralized DISTRIBUTION system of the art world... George Maciunas’ Genius is the early detection of this post-Marxist situation, and he tried to seize *not only* the production’s medium *but also* the DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM of the art world.“²⁹

Thus in Maciunas’s beautiful, artisanally-produced edition *Fluxus 1* (1964–1978), we encounter large manila envelopes, carefully bolted together with oversized hardware, containing all manner of subsidiary art works-cards, records, folded sheets, audiotapes, photographs, and documentation – that we can take out and examine. These envelopes (a curious meeting point of the container and the flat page) are themselves interlaced with printed pages containing reproductions of other works. The entire work is enclosed in a stenciled wooden box that serves as its mailing container. If, in theory, the edition makes objects make objects non-commodifiable, since it undermines their status as precious unique objects, the very relic-like preciousness and fetish-quality of Fluxus object production curiously re-auratizes them precisely as objects in dispersion. Among their most interesting features is their capacity for dissemination, travel, and transportability, and the way this has been incorporated into their form. The box, after all, is not just a creative form but a container for collecting, storing and shipping. It also stages the object as a displaced

performance, for, in Benjamin Buchloh's words, the box operates as „an alternative presentational device, an accumulation of activating ready-made objects, releasing the performative potential of the Ready-made.“³⁰

In a 1990 essay on Watts, Buchloh contrasted Fluxus with Pop art with respect to their „different attitudes toward the production and distributions of artistic objects,“ describing the relation between the „the self-imposed hermetic opacity of Fluxus on the one hand and the self-propelling strategic lucidity of Pop art on the other“ as a historical dialectic.³¹ Examining projects like *Delivery Event*, he traced how Fluxus „mimicked the strategies of products marginalized in other monopolistically controlled markets: the mail-order catalogue, direct distribution, and ritualistic subscription practices.“³² In a related vein, in what theorist John Roberts terms the „secondary Productivism“ of the 1960s, the „use of the concept of production in art is detached from the realm of productive labour to cover all forms of material and symbolic transformation The use-values of art, their productiveness, lie in the multiple ways in which they might intervene in and across a multitude of social and political sites.“³³

These models, I think, help to elucidate some of the vicissitudes not only of Fluxus but of the larger field of production represented by *Concept. Action. Language*, in its innovative intermingling of works associated with Pop, Fluxus and Conceptual art movements. These diverse efforts to multiply or dematerialize the art object, and to disperse the stable intact object into a multitude of forms and operations, are not the result of changing art practices alone. Instead, these moves reflect and respond to a destabilization and dispersal of the object immanent to advanced forms of industrial production. Mass produced, repeatable, and thus eminently replaceable, the object becomes empty, a placeholder or position in a larger system of recombination and transformation that one can indeed understand in quasi-linguistic terms. Understood this way, the emblematic 1960s shift from minimal sculpture to postminimal performative processes and conceptual linguistic operations no longer seems so vast. Instead it simply foregrounds the extent to which the serially-produced object exists among a chain of substitutions, a series of series. The discrete material object becomes a momentary formation in a larger productivity that constantly replaces and replenishes it with copies, replicas and variations.

My deep thanks to Susanne Neuburger and Achim Hochdörfer for their generosity in sharing and discussing these materials with me, and to Michelle Kuo, Mark So and James Hoff for their insights and assistance.

- 1 George Brecht and Robert Watts, *Delivery Event* (Metuchen/NJ: Yam Festival, [1963]), folded subscription card. For descriptions of the Yam Festival and related projects, see George Brecht and Robert Watts, *Newes Papayer* (New York: Yam Festival Press, 1962), Robert Watts, "Yam Lecture: Oakland Version," 1963, Robert Watts Papers, Getty Research Institute), and Simon Anderson, "Living in Multiple Dimensions: George Brecht and Robert Watts, 1953–1963," and Kristine Stiles, "Battle of the Yams," in Joan Marter (ed.), *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde 1957–1963* (Newark/NJ: The Newark Museum/Rutgers University Press, 1999), as well as Michelle Kuo's essay in this publication.
- 2 For instance, in "The Mail Art Exhibition: Personal Worlds to Cultural Strategies," John Held Jr. reads the *Delivery Event* as a sort of precursor to the more sustained Mail Art of Ray Johnson and others; in Annmarie Chandler, Norie Neumark (eds.), *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet* (Cambridge/MA: MIT Press, 2005): 94. Hannah Higgins relates the *Delivery Event*'s arbitrary pricing, quasi-bureaucratic procedures and paradoxical distribution strategies to Brecht, Watts and Alison Knowles' 1963 project *The Scissors Brothers Warehouse Sale (Blink)*; in Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley/CA: University of California Press, 2002) 140–141.
- 3 Julia Robinson, "In the Event of George Brecht," *George Brecht: Events / A Heterospective* (Cologne: Museum Ludwig/Walther Koenig Verlag, 2006): 68.
- 4 The 1962 *Delivery Event* emerged out of ongoing activities by both Brecht and Watts that involved mailing materials—initially printed scores or instruction cards, and later objects—to friends and others. The materials delivered ranged from mundane household objects to more esoteric, art-like items, including postcards, puzzles, printed pencils, editioned stamps and instruction cards; see Anderson, "Living in Multiple Dimensions" (102), and Kuo, "Applied Research" (tk). As Kuo elucidates, many of the objects were stamped with the word "YAM," "YAM FESTIVAL" or similar variants, a characteristic signing or branding that Brecht and Watts used to designate diverse found or fabricated materials as part of their larger project.
- 5 As I have suggested elsewhere, the form of the event score or card introduces a crucial ambiguity about what constitutes the "work": an event score is inseparably both words to be read and actions to be performed. See my "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the 'Event' Score," *October* 95 (Winter, 2001): 54–89, and *Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge/MA: MIT Press, 2007).
- 6 As Oldenburg famously remarked, "Assuming that I could create some thing what would that thing be? Just a thing, an object. Art would not enter into it... These things are displayed in galleries, but that is not the place for them. A store would be better (Store – place for objects)." Claes Oldenburg, "I Am for an Art ...," in *Environments, Situations, Spaces* (New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1961), reprinted in Oldenburg, Emmett Williams (eds.), *Store Days: Documents from The Store (1961) and Ray Gun Theater (1962)* (New York: Something Else Press, 1983): 39–42.
- 7 George Maciunas notes the structuring role of text in the American performance work, writing to Brecht, in the fall of 1962, that European performers like Wolf Vostell and Daniel Spoerri "do not write down their happenings but improve them on the spot." Maciunas, Letter to George Brecht, c. September/October, 1962; Jean Brown Papers, Getty Research Library.
- 8 On Edition MAT, see Katerina Vatsella, *Edition MAT: Daniel Spoerri, Karl Gerstner und das Multiple: Die Entstehung einer Kunstform* (Bremen: Verlag H. M. Hauschild, 1998). Regarding his October 1961 *Grocery Store* at the Galerie Koepecke in Copenhagen, Spoerri notes, "groceries were recognized as individual works of art without being incorporated into an assemblage. They were stamped 'Caution, Work of Art,' and bore my certifying signature. Nothing else about them was changed, and the price was the current market price of each article." Spoerri, "Development of the Snare-picture," *Daniel Spoerri* (Zürich: Gallery Bruno Bischofberger, 1966): 4.
- 9 On the imbrication of performance, publication and object-production models in Fluxus, see Owen F. Smith, "Fluxus: A Brief History," and Simon Anderson, "Fluxus Publicus," in Elizabeth Armstrong, Joan Rothfuss (ed.), *In the Spirit of Fluxus* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993).
- 10 Here I wish to acknowledge Natilee Harren's current dissertation, "Objects without Object: The Artwork in Flux, 1958–1969" (UCLA, in progress), which examines projects by Maciunas, Brecht and Robert Filliou as examples of a new type of object production characterized by the perpetual transformation and recombination of material forms.
- 11 A key site of this ambivalence is the "multiple," as a product of the expansion of the art market by the late 1950s, and the emergence of a more middle class art buying public; yet at the same time, representing a resistance to the demands of the market by cheapening and degrading the art object with the attributes of mass production. See, among others, Rene Block (ed.), *Multiples: An Attempt to Present the Development of the Object Edition* (Berlin: Neuen Berliner Kunstverein, 1974), Felix Zdenik (ed.), *Das Jahrhundert des Multiples: Von Duchamp bis zur Gegenwart* (Hamburg: Oktagon Verlag, 1994), Constance W. Glenn, *The Great American Pop Art Store: Multiples of the 1960s* (Santa Monica/CA: Smart Art Press, 1997), and Friedrich Tietjen, "The Multiple as Label," in Peter Weibel (ed.), *Kunst ohne Unikate* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1998), reprinted online at http://www.xcult.org/texte/tietjen/multiple_e.html. (May 26, 2010).
- 12 See Christina Kjaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge/MA: MIT Press, 2005), and Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley/CA: University of California Press, 2005).
- 13 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Joseph Hartwig Chess Sets, 1922–24," in Barry Bergdoll, Leah Dickerman (eds.), *Bauhaus: Workshops for Modernity 1919–1933* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009): 146.
- 14 See Gough, *The Artist as Producer* (see note 12): 143. As Gough details, already in 1923, the Russian critic Nikolai Tarabukin sought to address the "increasing intangibility or incorporeality of economic life" as represented by modern systems of finance capital (142), protesting that "Capital is abstract ... it transforms objects and money from concrete entities into abstract functions."

- 15 Ibid.: 146. She notes two main factors in this disappearance: that “the integral object ‘disappears’ because of the way mass production is organized” (146), and that accelerated consumption itself volatilized the object, introducing “a new principle—that of rapid obsolescence—by which the object loses altogether any resistance to temporal finitude that it once may have had” (147).
- 16 Nikolai Tarabukin (1923), cited in Gough, *ibid.*: 147.
- 17 Ibid.: 149.
- 18 Jean Baudrillard, “Design and Environment” (1971), in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (New York: Telos Press, 1981): 185.
- 19 Walter Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus* (Cambridge/MA: MIT Press, 1936/1965): 33.
- 20 Ibid.: 34.
- 21 Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (1968), trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996): 138.
- 22 Ibid., 145.
- 23 While, “overall, the system of manipulated personalization is experienced by the vast majority of consumers as freedom” (Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* 153), this merely disguises a new form of serf-like servitude, in which we buy on credit objects that wear out before they are even paid for. Ever perverse, for today’s objects, “Their consumption precedes their production” (155). In addition, the capitalist logic of constant novelty merely masks profound political stasis and entrapment: “Everything is in movement, everything shifts before our eyes, everything is continually being transformed—yet nothing really changes... For all its increased productivity, our society does not open the door to one single structural change” (155).
- 24 Ibid.: 159.
- 25 “The Ideological Genesis of Needs” (1969), in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (see note 18): 63.
- 26 Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge/London: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 26.
- 27 Ibid.: 3.
- 28 Ibid.: 28. To account for such practices, he proposes that art, like luxury goods, belongs to a special “register” of consumption. The attributes of this register include: “restriction, either by price or law, to elites”; “complexity of acquisition,” and manufactured scarcity; “semiotic virtuosity, ... the capacity to signal fairly complex social messages”; specialized knowledge as a prerequisite for their ‘appropriate’ consumption”; and “a high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person and personality” (38).
- 29 Nam June Paik, “George Maciunas and Fluxus,” in *Flash Art*, no. 84–85 (October–November 1978): 48.
- 30 Benjamin Buchloh, “Cryptic Watts,” *Robert Watts* (New York: Castelli Gallery, 1990): 6.
- 31 Ibid.: 5.
- 32 Ibid.: 6. Buchloh thus concludes: “The industrialization of esoteric artistic activity was one of the utopian goals of the Fluxus artists. They operated in the guise of the ephemeral strategies of commercial distribution and attempted to bypass the institutions of both high art and of the culture of consumption (the museum and the market). Yet paradoxically because of their insistence on a non-mediated experience of playful particularity these acts of liberation became extremely privatized and the objects defined programmatically outside the parameters of the culture industry reintroduced reification by turning inescapably into the private gadget” (ibid.: 6–7).
- 33 John Roberts, “Productivism and its Contradictions,” in *Third Text* 23, no. 5 (2009): 533.