




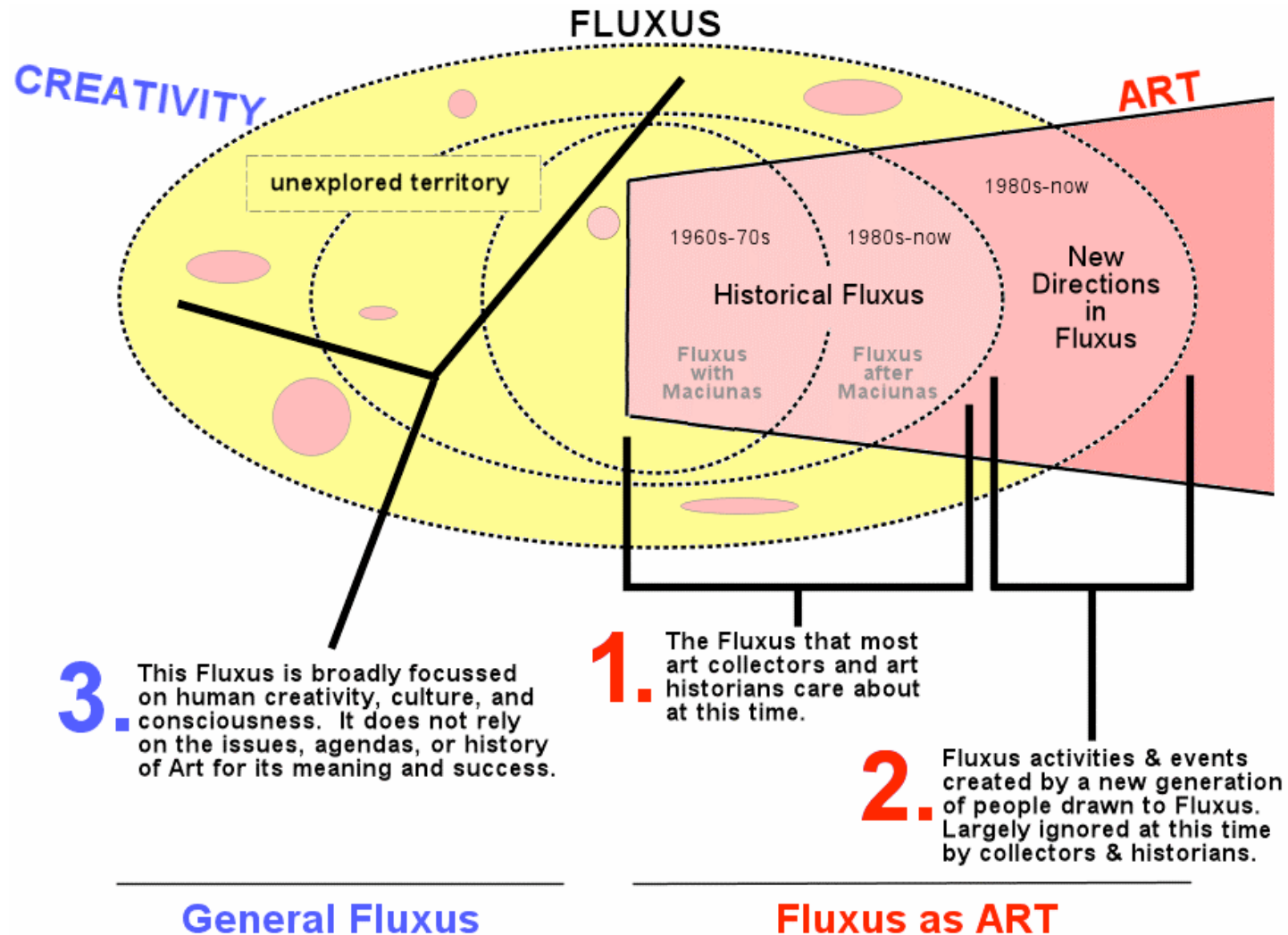
VM503
AESTHETICS AND HISTORY
OF NEW MEDIA

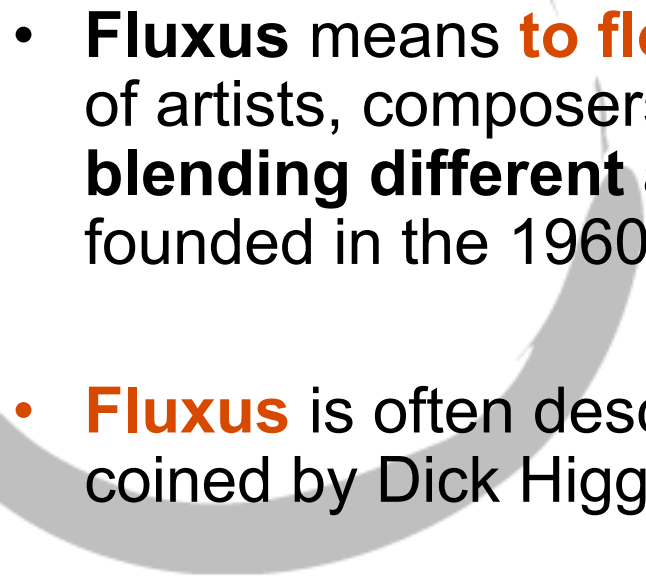
WEEK 2 CLASS 2

Jo-Anne Green, Emerson College



What is Fluxus?




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- **Fluxus** means **to flow**. It is an international network of artists, composers and designers noted for **blending different artistic media and disciplines** founded in the 1960s.
 - **Fluxus** is often described as **Intermedia**, a term coined by Dick Higgins in a 1966 essay.
 - Higgins said that the most interesting tendencies in art were practices that **crossed the boundaries of recognized media or fused the boundaries of art with media that had not previously been considered art forms, including computers.**



Pre-Fluxus Conceptual Developments and Generative Influences

From Fluxus: The History of an Attitude
by Owen F. Smith

Jo-Anne Green, Emerson College



Modernism

<p>Impressionism Post-Impressionism Cubism Expressionism</p>	<p>Futurism Dadaism Surrealism (the avant-garde)</p>
<p>Existentialist emphasis on the Individual + Amplification of artistic autonomy = separation of art from social praxis</p>	<p>Social + self-critical = challenged the status quo. A critique of art institutions rather than other modern art. Alter world history not art history</p>
<p>Socially progressive, competitive, utopian, rational, representational, static</p>	<p>Dynamic, active, indeterminate, immediate, open, impersonal (chance)</p>
<p>Formal/Pure Art (Abstract Expressionism and Post-Painterly Abstraction, art-for-art's-sake)</p>	<p>Fluxus (Happenings, Mail Art), Situationists, Performance Art (reflective of the flux of reality)</p>
<p>Modernism disrupts or even shatters illusion, and digs deeper into the science of reality because of scientific and technological advances/ discoveries.</p>	

The Avant-Garde asked:

- Is an artist someone whose special talents make him or her better than other people?
- Is a work of art intrinsically valuable?
- For there to be a work of art, does an artist have to make something?
- Does a work of art have to be an object?

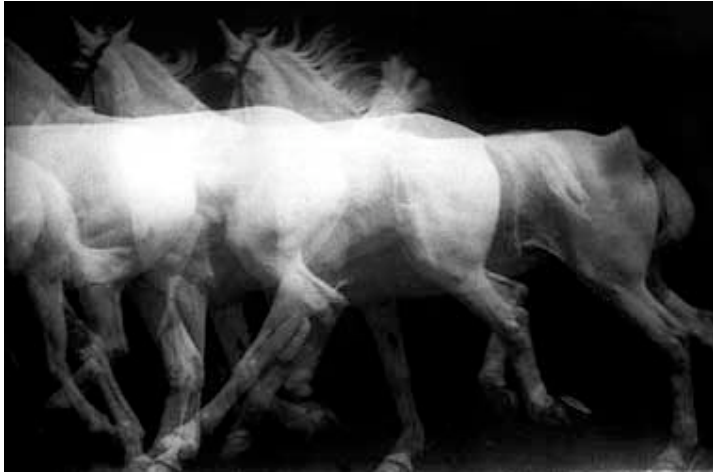
The Goals of the Avant-Garde were to:

- Break down culturally determined (**artificial**) **distinctions between art and life.**
- To **critique the institutional function of art** as mirror of bourgeois egoism, materialism, and passivity.
- To use artistic structures to challenge bourgeois culture, thereby **changing world history not art history.**

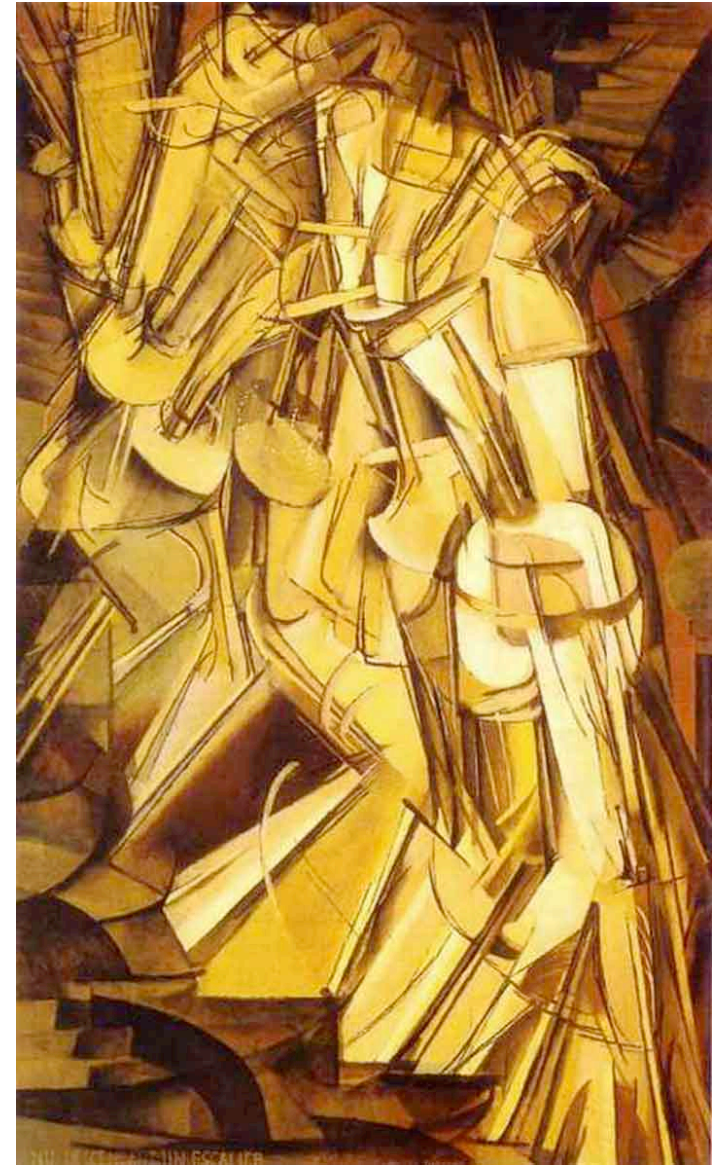
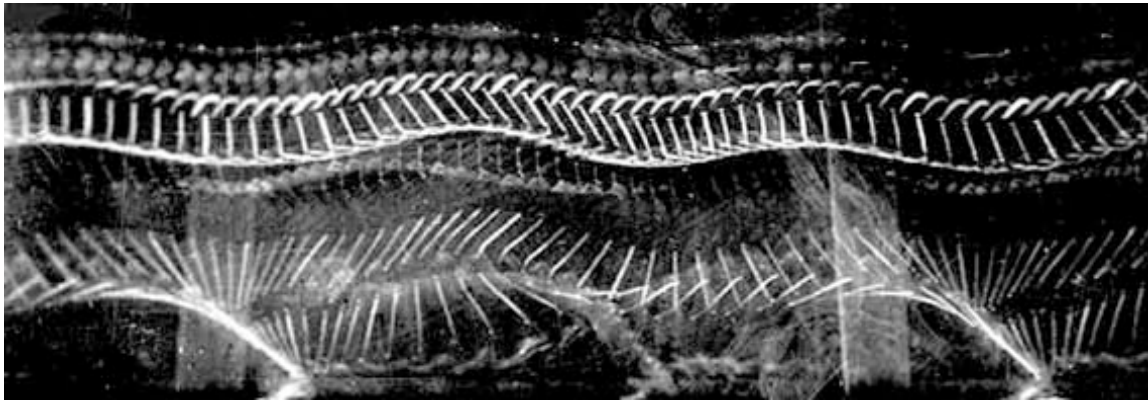
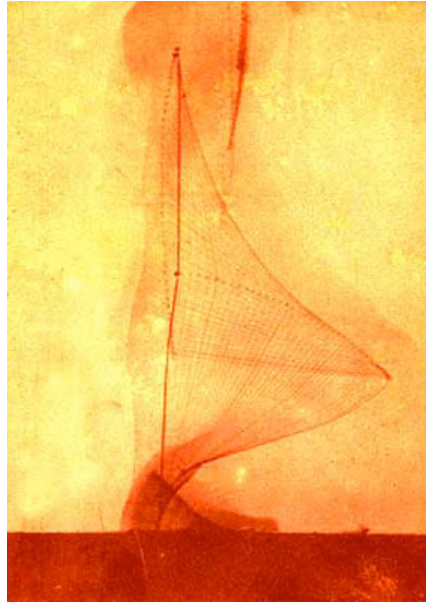
Futurists

Their focus on **dynamism** and **change** drew from **Henri Bergson's** contention that what *reason* tells us about the ultimate nature of reality is wrong because the *reasoning* process is an analytical progression towards essences or conclusions about *being* ... There are no basic, solid constituent units of reality.

Matter is constantly changing and in a state of flux: everything is always in a state of becoming something else ... Apprehension of flux requires intuition ... an experience of nature as process.



Etienne-Jules Marey



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Thus, the Futurists:

- Emphasized **change, flux** and **indeterminacy**.
- Believed the artist should break free from conventions and **become agents of change**.
- Created performative works that were more **immediate** and reflective of the flux of reality, and sought to shorten the distance between artists, their audiences, and life.

Dada and Surrealism

Dada:

- Western culture was limited by its underlying philosophical constructs of rational thought.
- The potential of art lay in its potential for altering the practices of ordinary daily-life experiences, which included irrationality, chance and contradiction.
- Art objects were not important, only a means of **communication**.

Surrealism:

- Introduced the unconscious (super-reality) into the mix.

Marcel Duchamp

- Duchamp was against “retinal” art, i.e. too much emphasis on the physical attributes of the sign.
- He wanted to put art back “in the service of the mind” (does this seem antithetical to the Dadaist goal of bringing art closer to the audience and daily-life experiences?).
- Taste, itself an act of creation, is cultivated (by elites).

Duchamp continued ...

- Artists can become a kind of **machine**, copying themselves to produce works that possessed individual qualities recognized by cultural institutions and art buyers.
- Artists are **craftsmen**, *no different from other people who make things*. Thus, he undermined the perception of artist as **genius**.
- He attempted to remove the role of the ego by using **chance** techniques.

Duchamp continued ...

- **Readymades:** art created from the undisguised, but often modified, use of objects that are not normally considered art, often because they already have a non-art function.

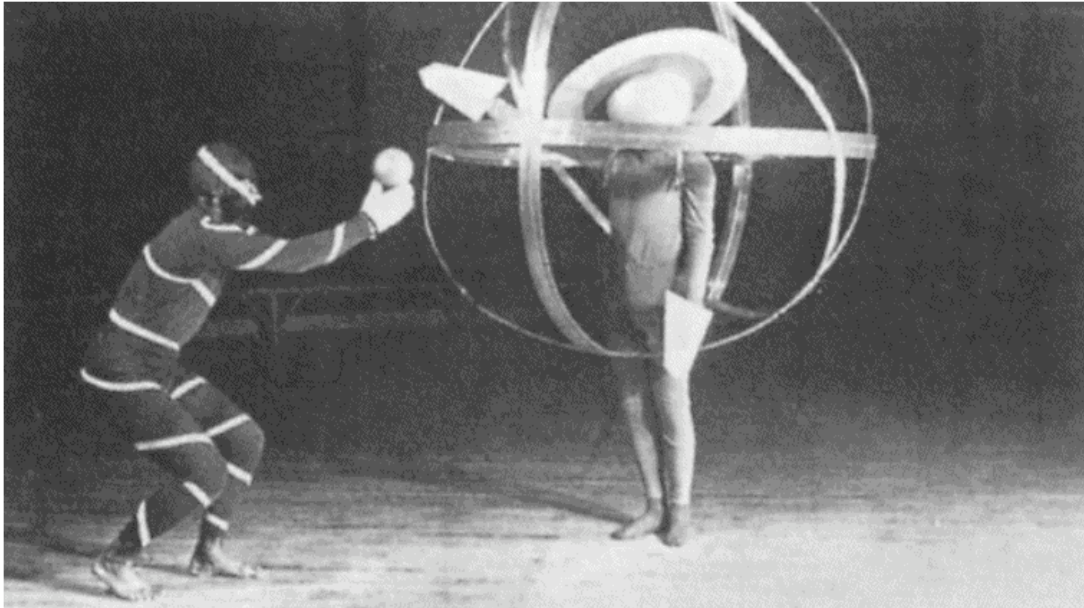


John Cage

- Fluxus artists, many of whom studied with Cage at the New School in the late 1950s, continued his investigations of **indeterminateness** and **depersonalization**.
- Cage studied **Zen** in the 1940s which teaches that the world is a united **web of interrelationships** that are in a state of constant **flux** and **change**. In Zen metaphysics, there are **no natural hierarchies**: thus, for Cage, artistic and ordinary experiences were equivalent.
- The individual is not an isolated entity (genius) but an essential part of the integrated whole. Chance liberates the artist from habit/ego.

John Cage continued...

- He believed that musical performance was a kind of theater, **a theater of life**, and should engage both the **eye and the ear**. His earliest **multimedia** performance took place at Black Mountain in 1952.



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How do these developments in early to mid-20th century art relate to New Media?

See my notes below.