

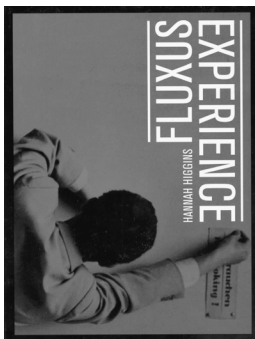
people of color. An angry Brian Freeman (“When We Were Warriors”) challenges his black community: “Why do we *other* each other so in a community of others?” (250). Randy Gener (“The Kids Stay in the Picture, or, Toward a New Queer Theater”) offers hope with School’s OUT, a public program in New York City that brings together queer teenagers of color with theatre professionals to “explore the thistly themes in their lives—coming out, race, loneliness, sex, dreams and fears of the future, homophobia, racism, and AIDS—through art” (255).

Another key tension running through the volume concerns the functions of queer theatre. Whereas coauthors David Román and Tim Miller (“‘Preaching to the Converted’”) attest to its power to forge community amid political struggle, David Savran (“Queer Theater and the Disarticulation of Identity”) emphasizes its capacity to destabilize and disarticulate identity. Savran claims that “the necessity of multiple identifications and desires that theatre authorizes—across genders, sexualities, races, classes—renders it both the most utopian form of cultural production and the queerest” (164). So, Savran asks, why not include John Guare, Mac Wellman, and Suzan Lori-Parks among queer theatre’s luminaries? His query prompts another, one not pursued in the volume’s modern and contemporary coverage: What about the community-building and disarticulating operations of queerness and same-sex desire in ostensibly “straight,” more conventionally canonical theatre?

But when it comes to defining the lubricious boundaries of queer theatre, the volume only deserves credit for raising more questions than it answers. The critical point, made powerfully by all the essays, is that scholars and practitioners of queer theatre must continue to collaborate. In a moving endnote, Carmelita Tropicana evokes the memory of Frank Maya, an actor dying of AIDS backstage at the closing festivities of the 1995 conference. The special ephemerality and perilousness of queer existence on- and offstage make this volume’s excellently rendered project of documentation through performance, writing, and publication not only admirable and necessary but urgent.

—Kim Marra

*Kim Marra is Associate Professor of Theater Arts and American Studies at the University of Iowa. Her books include Passing Performances: Queer Readings of Leading Players in American Theater History and its sequel, Staging Desire (University of Michigan Press, 1998 and 2002), both coedited with Robert A. Schanke; and the forthcoming Gay and Lesbian Theatrical Legacy: A Biographical Dictionary of Major Figures of the American Stage in the Pre-Stonewall Era, co-edited with Schanke and Billy J. Harbin (University of Michigan Press).*



**Fluxus Experience.** By Hannah Higgins. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002; 274 pp. \$29.95 paper.

Fluxkit, Fluxfilm, Fluxwork, Fluxpost, Fluxus Virus, Fluxclinic, Fluxhall, Fluxeum, Fluxshop, Fluxpop... Even though here limited to the already existing and documented words, a hypothetical Fluxus lexicon is potentially inexhaustible because the phoneme “flux(us)” is not limited only to adjectival function. It does not only label art made by Fluxus artists, but actually enacts it. Much like Deleuze’s nonsense word, it performs a donation of sense. Understood in this way, “nonsense does not have any particular sense, but is opposed to the absence of sense rather than to the sense that it produces in

excess” (Deleuze 1990:71). In her book *Fluxus Experience* Hannah Higgins persuasively demonstrates that Fluxkit and Event, those paradigmatic Fluxus art forms, effectively establish this relation between artwork and its beholder. Fluxkit is nonsensical without being absurd: the randomness of objects in a box does not follow the existing taxonomies of sense, but instead incessantly produces new meanings. Similarly, in her important distinction between the Fluxus Event and much of performance art (including early Happenings) Higgins rightly emphasizes the “aleatory and nonspecific” form of the former (49).

True revisions are rare because their impact has to be tectonic. In its theoretical scope, rigor, and daring, *Fluxus Experience* is certainly one of those rare works. Hannah Higgins takes upon herself the unenviable task of reconsidering the entire Fluxus project. She takes the notion of experience as the central organizing principle of her book, and in doing so upsets the art historiographic assumption of an unlimited availability and stability of the art object. Higgins is quite open about the sources of her subjective approach to art criticism: first, her lifelong exposure to the art of her parents, Fluxus artists Alison Knowles and Dick Higgins; and second, Owen F. Smith’s idea of the “non-hierarchical density of experience” evoked by Fluxus art (Smith 1998:11).

Early on, art critics recognized the importance of the spatial and geographical dimensions of this art movement that spanned from Japan to Czechoslovakia and from Germany to California, but rarely did anyone pay any attention to its temporal dimension. The notions such as “experience” or “attitude” bring out the importance of the undocumented and the undocumentable in art. This ahistoricity is not the “murmur” against which Foucault so vigorously and rightfully argued. It is related to the very nature of the artistic process which, on a certain level, can be understood and transmitted only through experience. The experiential approach to art history and criticism does not abandon its subject at the museum’s doorstep. Following one of Fluxus’s central attitudes, it sees art as a part of life. (Bracken Hendricks, an urban planner and son of the Fluxus artist Geoffrey Hendricks: “One thing I got [...] growing up with my father was how to think with my hands” [in Kaplan 2000:16]). Higgins argues that “the meaning of Fluxus experiences lies in their simultaneous engagement with and withdrawal from everyday life, in their substitution of art and anti-art with life (as art)” (103). With the energy and conviction of a manifesto writer rarely seen in academic writing, she proclaims that “it is time for the experiential mode to be reinjected into interpretation of the art of the 1960s” (104). There is no reason it should remain limited to the Fluxus-related art of the ’60s. In fact, this methodology clearly has the potential to make significant contributions to other fields, such as performance historiography, or theory of the avantgarde, currently in deep hibernation. One of the main advantages of the “experiential mode” is that it elucidates the affirmative nature of alternative art. Writing about Fluxus, Higgins pierces the iron cloud of negativity that shrouded all avantgarde, alternative, experimental, or subversive art from Renato Poggioli’s *Theory of the Avant Garde* onward.

The freshness of Higgins’s thinking about Fluxus comes not only from her personal investment in the movement, but also from her liberal use of a surprising variety of theoretical sources. For instance, her notion of “experience” is not based on the once fashionable French existentialism, but on the ideas of the American philosopher John Dewey. For the most part, this connection works very well. This cannot be said of the connection with the Darwinian art historian Ellen Dissanayake. In the pairings of art and anthropology, the latter discourse often imposes on the former its fixation on survival, and therefore utility. Ultimately, they tend to end in unnecessary justifications of art and its “usefulness.” What in the first chapter of Higgins’s book figures as one of several elucidations of the notion of experience in relation to Fluxus, reemerges

as the main argument of the final chapter. In a sharp turn, her revisionism seems to exceed the limits of the established case study, and turns into an argument for *use* of the Fluxus experience in education. While, on the one hand, it demonstrates the relevance of Fluxus's ideas for one of those social issues that are never addressed effectively, namely the culture of testing and the methodologies used in pedagogy today, on the other hand, it obscures one of Fluxus's central lessons: that art does not have to have a purpose, and that doing useless things is an integral part of being human.

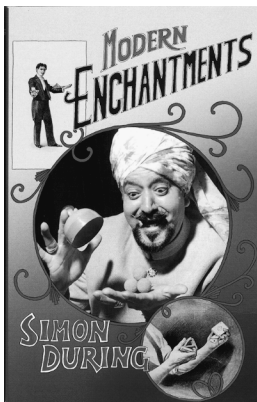
In a simultaneous interview with two Fluxus artists (Alison Knowles and Geoffrey Hendricks) and their children (Hannah Higgins and Bracken Hendricks), Janet A. Kaplan posed the unavoidable question: "How does a Flux kid rebel against parental authority?" (2000:14). Higgins extended the question to the broader plane by asking "how does the art world rebel in a post-Fluxus era?" (16). Her book clearly suggests that the point is not to out-rebel the rebels, but to responsibly dismantle the received ideas about art.

—Branislav Jakovljevic

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**Branislav Jakovljevic** is Assistant Professor at the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance, University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, and specializes in modernist theatre and the avantgarde. He completed his undergraduate studies in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and his graduate studies at the Department of Performance Studies/NYU, where he also taught in the Drama Department. His articles have been published in the United States (TDR, PAJ, Theater) and abroad (Yugoslavia, Spain, England).



**Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic.** By Simon During. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002; 336 pages; 14 illustrations. \$35.00 cloth; \$18.95 paper.

The first sentence of Simon During's *Modern Enchantments* announces: "This book is devoted to the deceptively simple proposition that magic has helped shape modern culture" (1). This sentence points toward both the outstanding achievements and the sometimes tantalizing argument of During's undertaking. *Modern Enchantments* is indeed a remarkable study of magic since the 18th century in England and France, and to a lesser degree other parts of the world. During's book contains fascinating discussions of intellectual history, of early cinema, and of a range of literary figures from Poe to Raymond Roussel. Foremost, however, *Modern Enchantments* is an important addition to the history of popular entertainment and mass culture. Its focus falls on a central feature of urban—especially London's—entertainment culture from the 18th century to the advent of film: the magic show.