

**NO  
MORE  
ART!**

**DEMOLISH  
SERIOUS  
CULTURE**

**DEMOLISH  
LINCOLN  
CENTER**



**DOWN  
WITH  
ART!**

**by:  
HENRY  
FLYNT**



## DOWN WITH ART

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Cover photo by Diane Wakoski

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## ART or BREND? by Henry Flynt

1. Perhaps the most diseased justification the artist can give of his profession is to say that it is somehow scientific. LaMonte Young, Milton Babbitt, and Stockhausen are exponents of this sort of justification.

The law which relates the mass of a body to its velocity has predictive value and is an outstanding scientific law. Is the work of art such a law? The experiment which shows that the speed of light is independent of the motion of its source is a measurement of a phenomenon crucial to the confirmation of a scientific hypothesis; it is an outstanding scientific experiment. Is the work of art such a measurement? The invention of the vacuum tube was an outstanding technological advance. Is the work of art such a technological advance? Differential geometry is a deductive analysis of abstract relations and an outstanding mathematical theory. Is the work of art such an analysis?

The motives behind the "scientific" justification of art are utterly sinister. Perhaps LaMonte Young is merely rationalizing because he wants an academic job. But Babbitt is out to reduce music to a pedantic pseudo-science. And Stockhausen, with his "scientific music", intends nothing less than the suppression of the culture of "lower classes" and "lower races".

It is the creative personality himself who has the most reason to object to the "scientific" justification of art. Again and again, the decisive step in artistic development has come when an artist produces a work that shatters all existing "scientific" laws of art, and yet is more important to the audience than all the works that "obey" the laws.

2. The artist or entertainer cannot exist without urging his product on other people. In fact, after developing his product, the artist goes out and tries to win public acceptance for it, to advertise and promote it, to sell it, to force it on people. If the public doesn't accept it at first, he is disappointed. He doesn't drop it, but repeatedly urges the product on them.

People have every reason, then, to ask the artist: *Is your product good for me even if I don't like or enjoy it?* This question really lays art open. One of the distinguishing features of art has always been that it is very difficult to defend art without referring to people's liking or enjoying it. (Functions of art such as making money or glorifying the social order are real enough, but they are rarely cited in defense of art. Let us put them aside.) When one artist shows his latest production to another, all he can usually ask is "Do you like it?" Once the "scientific" justification of art is discredited, the artist usually has to admit: If you don't like or enjoy my product, there's no reason why you should "consume" it.

There are exceptions. Art sometimes becomes the sole channel for political dissent, the sole arena in which oppressive social relations can be transcended. Even so, subjectivity of value remains a feature which *distinguishes* art and entertainment from other activities. Thus art is historically a leisure activity.

3. But there is a fundamental contradiction here. Consider the object which one person produces for the liking, the enjoyment of another. The value of the object is supposed to be that you just like it. It supposedly has a value which is entirely subjective and entirely within you, is a part of you. Yet—the object can exist without you, is completely outside you, is not you or your valuing, and has no inherent connection with you or your valuing. The product is not personal to you.

Such is the contradiction in much art and entertainment. It is unfortunate that it has to be stated so abstractly, but the discussion is about something so personal that there can be no interpersonal examples of it. Perhaps it will help to say that in appreciating or consuming art, you are always aware that it is not you, your valuing—yet your liking it, your valuing it is usually the only thing that can justify it.

In art and entertainment, objects are produced having no inherent connection with people's liking, yet the artist expects the objects to find their value in people's liking them. To be totally successful, the object would have to give you an experience in which the object is as personal to you as your valuing of it. Yet you remain aware that the object is another's product, separable from your liking of it. The artist tries to "be oneself" for other people, to "express oneself" for them.

4. There *are* experiences for each person which accomplish what art and entertainment fail to. The purpose of this essay is to make you aware of these experiences, by comparing and contrasting them with art. I have coined the term "brend" for these experiences.

Consider all of your doings, what you already do. Exclude the gratifying of physiological needs, physically harmful activities, and competitive activities. Concentrate on spontaneous self-amusement or play. That is, concentrate on everything you do just because you like it, because you just like it as you do it.

Actually, these doings should be referred to as your *just-likings*. In saying that somebody likes an art exhibit, it is appropriate to distinguish the art exhibit from his liking of it. But in the case of your just-likings, it is not appropriate to distinguish the objects valued from your valuing, and the single term that covers both should be used.

When you write with a pencil, you are rarely *attentive* to the fact that the pencil was produced by somebody other than yourself. You can use something produced by somebody else without thinking about it. In your just-likings, you *never* notice that things are not produced by you.

The essence of a just-liking is that in it, you are not aware that the object you value is less personal to you than your very valuing.

These just-likings are your "brend". Some of your dreams are brend; and some children's play is brend (but formal children's games aren't). In a sense, though, the attempt to give interpersonal examples of brend is futile, because the end result is neutral things or actions, cut off from the valuing which gives them their only significance; and because the end result suggests that brend is a deliberate activity like carrying out orders. The only examples for you are your just-likings, and you have to guess them by directly applying the abstract definition.

Even though brend is defined exclusively in terms of what you like, it is not necessarily solitary. The definition simply recognizes that valuing is an act of individuals; that to counterpose the likes of the community to the likes of the individuals who make it up is an ideological deception.

5. It is now possible to say that much art and entertainment are pseudo-brend; that your brend is the total originality beyond art; that your brend is the absolute self-expression and the absolute enjoyment beyond art. Can brend, then, replace art, can it expand to fill the space now occupied by art and entertainment? To ask this question is to ask when utopia will arrive, when the barrier between work and leisure will be broken down,

when work will be abolished. Rather than holding out utopian promises, it is better to give whoever can grasp it the realization that the experience beyond art already occurs in his life—but is totally suppressed by the general repressiveness of society.

Note: The avant-garde artist may raise a final question. Can't art or entertainment compensate for its impersonality by having sheer newness as a value? Can't the very foreignness of the impersonal object be entertaining? Doesn't this happen with *Mock Risk Games*, for example? The answer is that entertainment newness is also subjective. What is entertainingly strange to one person is incomprehensible, annoying, or irrelevant to another. The only difference between foreignness and other entertainment values is that brend does not have more foreignness than conventional entertainment does.

As for objective newness, or the objective value of *Mock Risk Games*, these issues are so difficult that I have been unable to reach final conclusions about them.



letter from Terry Riley, Paris, to Henry Flynt, Cambridge, Mass., dated 11/8/62

One day a little boy got up and looked at his toys, appraised them and decided they were of no value to him so he did them in. Seeing that others were blindly and blissfully enjoying theirs he offered them a long and "radical new theory" of "pure recreation" for their enjoyment *but* before he let them in for this highly secret and "revolutionary theory" they should follow his example and partake of a little 20th C. iconoclasm. From those that balked he removed the label "avant-garde" and attached the label "traditionalist" or if they were already labeled "traditionalist" he added one more star. If they accepted they got a "hip" rating with gold cluster and if they comprehended the worth of his theory well enough to destroy their own art they would be awarded assignments to destroy those works whose designers were no longer around to speak out in their behalf.

Now about this hip radical new theory of pure recreation. —Well-alor! its simply what people do anyway but don't realize it but it seems that what people "do anyway and don't realize it" will not be fully appreciated until "what people do in the name of art" is eliminated. If art can be relegated to obscurity, if some one can get John Coltrane to stop blowing, if someone can smash up all the old Art tatum records as well as all the existing pianos, if someone can get all that stuff out of those museums, if someone can only burn down all those concert halls, movie houses, small galleries as well as rooms in private houses that contain signs of art, if someone can do in all the cathedrals and monuments bridges etc, if someone can get rid of the sun, moon, stars, ocean, desert trees birds, bushes mountains, rivers, joy, sadness inspiration or any other natural phenomenon that reminds us of the *ugly scourge art* that has preoccupied and plagued man since he can remember *then yes then at last* Henry Flynt, sorry!

Henry Flynt

will show us how to really enjoy ourselves. Whoopeeee  
*Terry Riley's spelling etc. carefully preserved.*

# B

letter from Bob Morris to Henry Flynt, dated 8/13/62

Dear Henry,  
perhaps the desirability of certain kinds of experience in art is not important. The problem has been for some time one of ideas—those most admired are the ones with the biggest, most incisive ideas (e.g. Cage & Duchamp). The mere exertion in the direction of finding "new" ideas has not shown too much more than that it has become established as a traditional method; not much fruit has appeared on this vine. Also it can't be avoided that this is an academic approach which presupposes a history to react against—what I mean here is the kind of continuity one is aware of when involved in this activity: it just seems academic (if the term can somehow be used without so much emotion attached to it). The difficulty with new ideas is that they are too hard to manufacture. Even the best have only had a few good ones. (I suppose none of this is very clear and I can't seem to get in the mood to do any more than put it down in an off-hand way—but what I mean by "new ideas" is not only what you might call "Concept Art" but rather effecting changes in the structures of art forms more than any specific content or forms) Once one is committed to attempt these efforts—and tries it for a while—one becomes aware that if one wants "experience" one must repeat himself until other new things occur: a position difficult if not impossible to accept with large "idea" ambitions. So one remains idle, repeats things, or finds some form of concentration and duration outside the art—jazz, chess, whatever. I think that today art is a form of art history.

I don't think entertainment solves the problem presented by avant gard art since entertainment has mostly to do with replacing that part of art which is now hard to get—i.e. experience. It seems to me that to be concerned with "just liked" things as you present it is to avoid such things as tradition in art (some body of stuff to react against—to be thought of as opponent or memory or however). As I said before, I for one am not so self-sufficient and when avoiding "given" structures, e.g. art, or even the most tedious and decorous forms of social intercourse, I am bored. If I need concentration, which I do, I can't think of anything on my own as good as chess. One accepts language, one accepts logic.

Best regards,  
Bob Morris

# 4

## FROM "CULTURE" TO VERAMUSEMENT

Boston—New York

PRESS RELEASE: for March-April, 1963

Henry Flynt, Tony Conrad, and Jack Smith braved the cold to demonstrate against Serious Culture (and art) on Wednesday, February 27. They began at the Museum of Modern Art at 1:30 p.m., picketing with signs bearing the slogans DEMOLISH SERIOUS CULTURE!/DESTROY ART!/ DEMOLISH ART MUSEUMS!/ NO MORE ART!/ DEMOLISH CONCERT HALLS!/ DEMOLISH LINCOLN

CENTER!; and handing out announcements of Flynt's lecture the next evening. Benjamin Patterson came up to give encouragement. There was much spontaneous interest among people around and in the Museum. At about 1:50, a corpulent, richly dressed Museum official came out and imperiously told the pickets that he was going to straighten them out, that the Museum had never been picketed, that it could not be picketed without its permission, that it owned the sidewalk, and that the pickets would have to go elsewhere. The picket who had obtained police permission for the demonstration was immediately dispatched to call the police about the matter, while the other two stood aside. It was found that the Museum official had not told the truth; and the picketing was resumed. People who care about the rights of pickets generally should recognize the viciousness of, and oppose, the notion that picketing can only be at the permission of the establishment being picketed. (As for previous picketing of the Museum, it is a matter of record.) Interest in the demonstration increased; people stopped to ask questions and talk. There was a much greater demand for announcements than could be supplied. Some people indicated their sympathy with the demonstrators. The demonstrators then went on to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Because of the unexpected requirement of a permit to picket on a park street, they had to picket on Lexington Avenue, crossing 82nd Street. As a result they were far from the fools lined up to worship the *Mona Lisa*, but there was still interest. Finally, they went to Philharmonic Hall. Because of the time, not many people were there, but still there was interest; people stopped to talk and wanted more announcements than were available. The demonstrations ended at 3:45 p.m. Photos of the pickets were taken at all three places.

On Thursday evening, February 28, at Walter DeMaria's loft, Henry Flynt gave a long lecture expounding the doctrine the Wednesday demonstrations were based on. On entering the lecture room, the visitor found himself stepping in the face of a *Mona Lisa* print placed as the doormat. To one side was an exhibition of demonstration photos and so forth. Behind the lecturer was a large picture of Vladimir Mayakovsky, while on either side were the signs used in the demonstrations, together with one saying VERAMUSEMENT—NOT CULTURE. About 20 people came to the lecture. The lecturer showed first the suffering caused by Serious-Cultural snobbery, by its attempts to force individuals in line with things supposed to have objective validity, but actually representing only alien subjective tastes sanctioned by tradition. He then showed that artistic *categories* have disintegrated, and that their retention has become obscurantist. (He showed that the purpose of didactic art is better served by documentaries.) Finally, in the most intellectually sophisticated part of the lecture, he showed the superiority of each individual's veramusement (partially defined on the lecture announcement) to institutionalized amusement activities (which impose foreign tastes on the individual) and indeed to all "culture" the lecture was concerned with. After the lecture, Flynt told how his doctrine was anticipated by little known ideas of Mayakovsky, Dziga Vertov, and their group, as related in Ilya Ehrenburg's memoirs and elsewhere. He touched on the Wednesday demonstrations. He spoke of George Maciunas' FLUXUS, with which all this is connected. Several people at the lecture congratulated Flynt on the clarity of the presentation and logicity of the arguments. Photos were taken.

# 5

## Statement of November 1963

Back in March 1963, I sent the first FCTB PRESS RELEASE, about FCTB's February picketing and lecture, to all the communications media, including the *New Yorker*. It is so good that the *New Yorker* wanted to use it, but they didn't want to give FCTB any free publicity; so they finally published an inept parody of it, in the October 12, 1963 issue, pp. 49-51. They changed my last name to Mackie, changed February 27 to September 25, the Museum of Modern Art to a church, changed our slogans to particularly idiotic ones (although they got in 'NO MORE ART/CULTURE' later on), and added incidents; but the general outlines, and the phrases lifted verbatim from the FCTB RELEASE, make the relationship clear.—Henry Flynt

# 6

3/6/63

Henry,  
Received your note this morning. I had written down a few things about the lecture the very night I got home but decided they were not very clear so I didn't send them. Don't know if I can make it any clearer...actually I keep thinking that I must have overlooked something because the objection I have to make seems too obvious. You spend much time and effort locating Veramusement, stating clearly what it is not, and stating that it is, if I get it, of the essence of an awareness, rather memory, of an experience which cannot be predicted and therefore cannot be located or focused by external activities. And, in fact, as you said, may cut across, or "intersect" one or another or several activities. You have discredited activities—like art, competitive games—as pseudo work or unsatisfactory recreation by employing arguments which are external to "experiencing" these activities (e.g. chess is bad because why agree to some arbitrary standard of performance which doesn't fit you)...well it seems to me that Veramusement could never replace any cultural form because it has no external "edges" but rather by definition can occur anywhere anytime anyplace (By the way I want to say here that its existence as a past tense or memory I find objectionable—but I can't at the moment really say why.) It seems that you have these two things going: Veramusement, that has to do with experience, and art, work, entertainment, that have to do with society and I don't think that the exposition of how the two things are related has been very clear. George Herbert Mead, an early Pragmatist (don't shudder at that word, but I can see you throwing up your hands in despair) talked about this relation as a kind of double aspect of the personality (which he called the "me" and the "I"...can't remember his book, something like *Mind, Self, and Society*).

I thought you presented the lecture very well, but towards the end I was getting too tired to listen very carefully and I am sorry because this was the newest writing. I would like very much to read this part, i.e. that which dealt with the evolution of work, automation and the liberation from drudgery—send me a copy if you can.

Best regards,  
Bob Morris

# 7

3/12/1963

Henry  
Jazz Cage "Folk Music" Communism (anti-art?)  
-----  
(communism)

I've been along this road too.  
Yes I certainly do see the harmfulness of serious culture.  
My favorite movies are plain documentaries.

"Veramusement"  
questions: the way you set it up it sound like veramusement is IT. Some kind of Absolute good state or activity.  
—ie) ATHLETICS are out.

—now my brother is a healthy athelete—he enjoys nothing so much as swimming or playing tennis all day (he likes to use his body—and he likes the form—competition)

Is this "wrong"

Should he stop.—

or wouldn't your "creep theory" which lets each person be himself and relish in himself—by extention from this—shouldn't the atheletic person be allowed to be himself?—  
—too.

I think you were opening up the world to the people at the lecture—

making them move free—

" " ready to be themselves

I think you were right in not giving examples!

however

your *absolute*—statements and "come on"—and blend with the communist ideas—(My mind was pretty tired by then and I didn't follow how the veramusement—was tied to communism)—this IT kind of talk.—can only shoo people off—and let them wait for the next revision or explication.

Walter DeMaria

# 8

March 18, 1963

Dear Henry,  
As I said before, my main reactions to yr lecture & ideas is that I'm for Henry Flynt but not for his ideas. I think the spirit you show in carrying on yr crusade is admirable and exciting. However, I am not against art and think that any artist who would say that he is or think that he is would be masochistic enough to need psychiatric care. Since you make no claims to being an artist this does not refer to you. However, I do call myself a poet and do think of myself as one. I like art, culture, etc. and do not yet feel that I am being screwed by it. Until I do, I will not need to turn to anti-art movements.

All best wishes.

Yours,  
Diane Wakoski

# 9

"Dear Mr. Flynt...Since I may be depending on organized culture for my loot & livelihood I can wish you only a limited success in your movement....Cornelius Cardew"  
from a post card of June 7, 1963

# BEN ABANDONNE L'ART

(Suite de la 1<sup>re</sup> page)

## IL NOUS A DECLARE :

Si tout est art, il doit être possible de remplacer le mot **TOUT** par n'importe quel autre mot sans altérer le sens de la phrase. C'est comme si l'art éclatait et se multipliait en des millions de définitions différentes dont aucune ne serait ni plus ni moins vraie qu'une autre. En voici quelques-unes : Tout est Art, la Vérité est Art, le non Art, Tout est Prétention, l'Art est n'importe quoi, ETC. est Art.

L'une des premières réalisations de la notion **TOUT EST ART** a pris corps dans le ready made de Marcel Duchamp. N'importe quel objet devenait œuvre d'art, il suffisait d'y ajouter

## l'INTENTION.

Pourtant, l'œuvre de Duchamp reste conventionnelle et se différencie peu d'une œuvre classique, dans la mesure où il s'agit d'une pièce physique, accompagnée d'une signature, d'une date, d'une prétention d'artiste. (Le pop art, le nouveau réalisme, etc., sont l'hédonisation et la vulgarisation du ready made, je n'en parlerai donc pas).

## LA VIE EST ART :

Elargissement et définition défendus par John Cage et ses disciples, mais ici, au départ, la situation est fautive, car dans la réalisation on ne peut séparer les mobiles de l'artiste, de l'œuvre qui se veut **VIE**. Si la vie est **ART**, la prétention de l'artiste à vouloir le montrer est art aussi. Et si cette prétention n'existe pas dans l'œuvre communiquée, ce n'est pas la **VIE** que nous montre l'artiste mais uniquement le reflet de son ambition artistique. Je dirai même que la prétention, l'agressivité, l'ambition, sont, par rapport à l'œuvre, beaucoup plus vivantes. Ainsi, lorsque j'effectue une partition de Cage ou que je regarde **DRIP MUSIC** de G. Brecht, je ne peux m'empêcher d'y penser en tant qu'œuvre d'artiste et non pas en tant que **VIE**.

En fait, l'art n'est pas la vie à moins que cette **VIE** soit vérité.

## LA VERITE EST ART :

C'est la divulgation en tant qu'œuvre des mobiles que l'artiste a pour créer. C'est-à-dire une

introspection et une communication de son état vrai devant le geste de la création. C'est la réponse qu'il donne à la question « Pourquoi est-ce que je crée ? ». Je conçois par exemple, la réalisation de **LA VERITE EST ART** par une pièce de théâtre dans laquelle l'auteur viendrait sur scène donner les raisons pour lesquelles il fait du théâtre, non pas les raisons superficielles mais les raisons profondes, c'est-à-dire « pour la gloire », etc. Ce qui est important est que **LA VERITE EST ART** change l'art, car la notion de création pour certains s'accompagne souvent de justifications inutiles et fausses (l'art pour l'art, l'harmonie, le beau, etc.).

## LE NON ART :

C'est l'attitude actuelle de Marcel Duchamp et de quelques autres qui, après le « ready made », ne pouvant revenir à l'esthétique et à l'hédonisme de l'objet, mais toujours à la recherche du nouveau pour satisfaire leur prétention, leur égo, ont pensé qu'il serait nouveau de déclarer que la création artistique ne les intéresse plus ou pas. En réalité ils s'y intéressent beaucoup et surtout pour établir leur Ego dans le domaine du **NON ART** (encore du style).

## L'ART EST PRETENTION :

Est une attitude moins hypocrite que le **NON ART**. C'est prendre conscience que la prétention est l'élément moteur de base de tout acte de création, et c'est assurer pleinement et jusqu'au bout cette Prétention. C'est-à-dire jusqu'à refuser d'accoupler cette prétention à une œuvre physique. (la prétention suffit à elle-même). Je citerai comme exemple ma pièce « Regardez-moi cela suffit ». La démarche de la **PRETENTION** est très proche de celle de **LA VERITE EST ART**.

## L'ART EST N'IMPORTE QUOI :

Il y a aussi ceux qui, tout en admettant que **TOUT EST ART** ne rejettent pas leur statut d'artistes mais adoptent une attitude fataliste envers l'œuvre d'art. Ils choisiront par exemple une forme quelconque, un rond, et décideront de ne faire que des ronds, car cela ou autre chose revient au même. C'est le cas d'après moi du travail d'Olivier Mosset et de certains minimal artistes.

## LA MORT EST ART :

C'est à ce résultat qu'est arrivé, après 10 ans de réflexions esthétiques, Ion Guiyot. Dix ans pendant lesquels il a systématiquement écarté toutes les formes d'art. Aucune écrivait-il, ne peut atteindre son but. Ion Guiyot a été trouvé mort, le 10 juillet 1949, à **CHIMARA**, en Albanie. La veille, il avait écrit la phrase suivante « **LA MORT EST ART A CONDITION QU'ON MEURE** ».

## L'ART EST INUTILE :

Lorsque Henry Flynt manifeste devant le Musée d'Art Moderne de New York, en portant un écriteau « Démolish serious art » il s'agit d'une prise de position politique contre l'art bourgeois. Lorsque par contre, je manifeste en disant que **L'ART EST INUTILE** avec des affiches, à la Fondation Maeght, c'est le résultat de la réflexion suivante : **SI TOUT EST ART, ET SI L'ART DOIT ETRE TOUJOURS NOUVEAU, COMBATTRE L'ART N'AYANT PAS ETE FAIT, JE LE COMBATS EN TANT QU'ŒUVRE D'ART. MON ATTITUDE EST DONC ART.**

## CONCLUSION :

Si Cage dit « **LA VIE EST ART** », si Duchamp dit « **LA COMPETITION ARTISTIQUE NE M'INTERESSE PLUS** », si Flynt dit « **IL FAUT LUTTER CONTRE L'ART** », si je dis **L'ART C'EST LA VERITE**, toutes ces déclarations et réalisations existent uniquement parce que leurs créateurs (égoïstes comme tous les artistes) cherchent du neuf pour jouer le jeu de l'art. (Etre différents des autres).

Mais pour trouver du neuf dans les circonstances actuelles où tout est art, ces créateurs remettent en cause la règle du jeu. C'est comme si le jeu de l'art acceptait tous les coups y compris celui de permettre aux joueurs d'essayer d'arrêter le jeu.

C'est le cas de **LA VERITE EST ART**, **LA PRETENTION EST ART**, le **NON ART**, **L'ART ANONYME**, **L'ART EST PASTICHE**.

Mais le suicide de l'art est-il possible ? Il y a aussi ceux qui ne font pas de l'art. Mon marchand de vin qui vend des porte-bouteilles, l'épicier qui a marié sa fille, l'agent immobilier du troisième qui est mort.

# BEN DOUTE DE TOUT

