The Music and Writings of Henry Flynt

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Recommended Citation
Tice, Preston Zak, "The Music and Writings of Henry Flynt" (2020). Senior Projects Fall 2020. 5.
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The Music and Writings of Henry Flynt

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
Preston Tice

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
December 2020
Beginning

Midnight passes. Windows open, freshly fallen leaves rustling, the river mirroring dimly lit houses from across the waterway in tandem with the dark mountain silhouettes against the aegean sky. As a train goes by the ground shakes, returns to silence, and soft country blues makes its way faintly through the car speakers. Who’s playing on the radio? Henry Flynt- and what an incredible place to hear his voice. Flynt’s music is distinctly characterized by a soft feeling of country blues that could make the most horrendous of suburbanite’s long for a country life. In my case, instead of a North Carolina home with a wrap around front porch, the local train tracks became center stage for Flynt’s piece “Graduation.” Recorded between 1975 and 1979 the piece combines electric guitar and voice for which Flynt coined the term “Hillbilly avant-garde.” Listening to the piece the listener can pick out sounds of Flynt’s North Carolina spirit with his new founded home in New York City’s avant-garde underground.
Introduction

A self described nerd\textsuperscript{1} born in Greensboro South Carolina. Henry Flynt grew into an artist that would help shape the New York city Fluxus movement for years to come with art, philosophy, mathematics, and music. Growing up in the south during the 1940s Flynt studied classical violin graduating at age 17 to attend Harvard. After dropping out he quickly became involved with La Monte Young in the New York City avant-guard. Following his political beliefs he moved to New York City in 1963 to take a job as a messenger while he created music and wrote influential essays\textsuperscript{2} Throughout the 1960’s Flynt gave a series of lectures with Young, Conrad and Yoko Ono presenting his essays and new theories on \textit{brend} (will be defined below) and concept art. Throughout the 70s Flynt began to dive into music and make recordings that would later be released in the 80s and 2000s.

The first part of Flynt’s career remains evident today mostly in the form of his writings. Throughout his time at Harvard and the following several years, Flynt wrote a repertoire of essays that would give impetus to the rest of his career. Notable topics included politics, concept art, “just likings”, valuation of newness, and of course, brend. Each of these topics had their own effect on Flynt’s life. For example, just likings stimulated the creation of brend which gave direction to the majority of his creations. Brend being the idea of things you do because you just like them paved a path for Flynt to spend time creating art and music intrinsically different and unique. His music leads to his discussion on “newness” and how it should not be valued in art. Flynt argues that “newness” often becomes the sole value to an artwork instead of its actual

\textsuperscript{1} Marcus Boon, “Henry Flynt: American Gothic”

\textsuperscript{2} Benjamin Piekut, “Demolish Serious Culture!,” in Experimentalism Otherwise, p. 90.
content. He uses the examples of productions where artists will redesign an art work to make it “new.” He then describes that this type of art is trying to be new, different, and complex when it has anything but those qualities.

In the midst of creating brend, concept art was born as a new medium in which the concept was important. As Flynt writes, “music is sound;” concept art takes aim at traditional art values and was rejected by some saying it isn't “real art.” Regardless, many artists eventually picked up concept art and began showing it publicly. One example of an early work of concept art is Young's 1960 word pieces published in the Anthology. Flynt became interested in Young’s Word Pieces which were short instructions meant to be read and conceptualized. For example, Young wrote a word piece for Terry Riley instructing him to push his piano against the wall. He was instructed to keep pushing even if it went through the wall, and only to stop when he got tired of pushing. Although some of these pieces were never even performed, they were widely accepted as music.

Passing the 60s and into the 70s Flynt began to get involved in performative music. He began to take violin lessons with Young in his New York City apartment, and made a large number of recordings that were left unpublished until the early 2000s with the exception of Celestial Power and You are my Ever Lovin’ which were released in the early 1980s. These recordings embodied Flynt’s new style of music influenced by ethnic cultural music such as blues, jazz, Indian, and hillbilly. Flynt used these styles in different combinations, sometimes in combination and other times highlighting only one genre, to create a unique style of music never before heard. The instrumentation for these recordings came from a variety of then-new technologies such as overdubbing, electric violin, new recording technologies, electronic organ
and more. All of the recordings from the album *Graduation* use a mix of these instruments and techniques to create a unique listening experience.

Lastly, parallels can be drawn by examining Flynt’s politics and his music aesthetic. Through various writings such as his 1965 manifesto, a foreshadow of his future music can be seen over ten years in advance. Furthermore, his political beliefs account for a large part of the reason he chose to move to New York City. After moving there Flynt participated with a number of well known artists in protests against high-brow art. When viewing his politics after analyzing his artistic career it becomes obvious how influential his beliefs were in shaping his most significant theories such as brend and concept art.
History

Henry Flynt (born 1940) grew up in Greensboro South Carolina spending his youth studying classical violin.³ Flynt’s classical education included almost none of the surrounding cultural music such as bluegrass, country, or blues. Although Flynt grew up in the south, he writes in his paper *The Meaning of My Avant-Garde Hillbilly and Blues Music* that many of his relatives were hillbillies, however none of them were musical.⁴ Although growing up a musician, this life seemed to come to a halt at age 17 when Flynt attended Harvard to pursue a degree in mathematics, alongside fellow musician Tony Conrad. Despite pursuing math Flynt remained passionate in just about all things art and became well rounded in the music arts. In college he was also very interested in philosophy leading to the completion of his *Philosophy Proper* in 1961 later published in 1975. Flynt was primarily exposed to a larger repertoire of music by Tony Conrad and other classmates. Larger repertoire of music included jazz, John Cage and other new American composers that had not penetrated his original classical teaching. With this new knowledge Flynt began to seriously test the waters in modern composition through imitation of newer trends. After 2 and a half years, Flynt dropped out of Harvard and to join the New York avant-garde movement.⁵

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With the help of Tony Conrad, Henry Flynt made acquaintance to La Monte Young in 1959 which turned to be the start of his new life in New York City. Flynt’s grades in Harvard were poor, and his biography by John Berndt at his direction describes him as using “Harvard as an opportunity to sample the most formidable offerings rather than to build an acceptable academic record.” Now on academic probation, Flynt saw no reason to stay at Harvard and committed to leading a more creative life. Flynt now began to write his first work in Philosophy, *Philosophy proper*, which refuted prior philosophical norms. Philosophy Proper holds the initial development of the term “Cognitive Nihilism” which would become central to all of Flynt’s work in music, art, philosophy and activism. In 1960 Flynt had finished his first draft of *Philosophy Proper* and traveled to New York City in late December where he officially met La Monte Young. The following year of 1961 became pivotal to Flynt as he constantly redefined his self-image.

Now in New York City, Flynt began his career as a musician and political activist through a series of performances. A number of these performances were with musician and filmmaker Yoko Ono, who presented performances organized by La Monte Young. Later he also returned to Harvard in 1961 to present an avant-garde concert which was attended by Young, Richard Maxfield and others. Although there are no recordings from this time, Flynt was heavily interested in not only modern composition but also country blues, saxophone and piano-based gospel music and Indian Classical music. These styles were mostly introduced to Flynt under Young’s influence. Near this time Flynt also completed the final version of his Philosophy Proper which would later be published in 1975. Flynt arranged a private lecture at Young’s apartment

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6 John Berndt, “About Henry Flynt”
and argued that a work cannot have “newness” as its primary attraction. As said in his biography, Flynt later that month “...coined the term concept art to refer to ‘an art of which the material is concepts, as the material of for ex. music is sound.’”7 the passage then goes on to describe concept art as follows:

“[The idea] devolved from cognitive nihilism, from insights about the vulnerabilities of logic and mathematics. Drawing on an exclusively syntactical paradigm of logic and mathematics, concept art was meant jointly to supersede mathematics and the formalistic music then current in serious music circles. Therefore, to merit the label concept art, a work had to be an object-critique of logic or mathematics or objective structure.”8

It is crucial to understand the idea of concept art, as it became an important focal point for most of his work. The term “concept art” was mistakenly propagated by various works as synonymous with “word pieces” such as produced by La Monte Young’s. This is too restrictive because the term has many applications beyond word pieces. At the end of 1961, Flynt came to the decision that ethnic music would be his primary focus in composition and performance.

Beginning in 1962 Flynt recorded a number of pieces with Young which I have unfortunately been unable to track down. These recordings were duets with Young in new ethnic violin music influenced by Young’s piano playing during their rehearsals. It’s unfortunate that these recordings are unobtainable because they’re the last before Flynt shifted into an anti recording mindset towards music. It was this time during 1962 that Flynt began to openly and

7 John Berndt, “About Henry Flynt”
8 John Berndt, “About Henry Flynt”
publicly criticize the commodification of music because of the subjectivity of taste. The idea of anti-commodification with the justification of absolute subjective taste is very “Theodor Adorno-esque” and it’s hard to imagine there isn’t influence from Adorno’s writings (specifically Adorno’s theory on listener regression).

For reference, Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) was a German philosopher who became important following World War II. His accomplishments include many works on a variety of topics including music. One of his writings talks about the theory of listener regression. Taking an anti-commodification standpoint, Adorno argues that people only like commodified music because everyone else does. Adorno continues to explain that liking music has become synonymous with “recognizing it”. In an important section he writes, “If one seeks to find out who ‘likes’ a commercial piece, one cannot avoid the suspicion that liking and disliking are inappropriate to the situation”9 What Adorno is trying to say, is that the listener has regressed in taste and is being told by the market what they should like. This is very similar to what Flynt writes when he argues to replace art with brend (something you just like), devalue newness as a quality, and to abolish high brow art.

Cage and Christian Wolff were first to the call for an end to art; however, Cage and Wolff changed positions later as Flynt began to pull full steam ahead with the idea. Flynt began a series of well-attended lectures during 1962 that described his position on art and his justification for it. Flynt proposed that art be replaced with “‘general acognitive culture,’ later ‘veramusement,’

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finally ‘brend.’” 10 “Brend”, also coined by Flynt, is the idea of your “just likings.” This is somewhat an abstract concept Flynt writes about in a number of essays. He even comments how unfortunate that the idea of “brend” has to be described in such an abstract way. I will fully expand later the full meaning of Brend, but for now its important to know that your brend is anything you do just because you like it. The action of your brend has no meaning beyond you “just liking it because you do.” Flynt gives some examples such as child's play, or other mindless and spontaneous actions done for one’s self enjoyment.

Unfortunately this stance had a depressive effect on Flynt’s career. As described in his biography, Flynt’s life led into an increasing isolation which he describes in a few articles he circulated at the time. Having a time of self realization, Flynt began to look for a way out in the study of the Marxist left. Many of Flynt’s theories such as brend, and his stance on the commodification, Though the offered support for his unpopular ideas, fit nicely into the framework of a Marxist utopia. Flynt now set on a new path publicly aiming his resentment towards the commercialization of art. Back in New York City, Flynt participated in various picketing protests outside of art museums with Conrad. The campaign Flynt and Conrad participated in was launched as a pilot in an effort to dismiss mainstream art as a whole. Non exclusive to the sonic form, any rendering of art created for the purpose of sale was to be abolished.11 Flynt believed that art was produced for a purpose of its commercial value to one’s own benefit. Thereby art becomes something to consume and acquires a monetary value rather than being something made for the sole purpose of self enjoyment. Flynt’s picketing event was

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10 John Berndt, “About Henry Flynt”

11 John Berndt, “About Henry Flynt”
followed by a lecture the next day in which he announced that his own art had to be destroyed. According to his biography, Berndt acknowledges in retrospect Flynt regrets destroying his own work. This became one of the first choices in Flynt’s activism that lead to the blank spaces, or in other words, parts of his career where work was produced but no longer exists to examine.

Moving to May of 1963, Flynt officially moved to New York City, fully committing himself to leftist activism following the WWP (Workers World Party). Flynt’s activism was focused in different sectors such as Africa while also exploring his own interests in academics. Flynt ended up publishing a book called Anthology that included a collection of his work, and wrote separate essays exploring philosophy and mathematics. These papers, Published between 1963 and 1966, are all available today and later sections will focus more closely on their content. Interestingly, Flynt’s stance began to change as the left’s policy towards culture became, in his view, corrupted. He took a particularly strong stance against “official communisms devaluation of African American music.”

12 Flynt participated in demonstrations against Stockhausen alongside other notable figures who held separate demonstrations. Flynt was publicly against Stockhausen because he believed that Stockhausen “articulated a vision of music that only included his own in dialog with that of other avant-garde European composers.”

13 The majority of Flynt’s career was spent writing ethnically based music which he believed to be superior. This is outlined in his 1965 published manifesto “Communists Must Give Revolutionary Leadership in Culture.” written along side George Maciunas. A short piece, it is archived at the MoMA and on display through their website. A larger version of the manifesto is discussed on page 49,

12 John Berndt, “About Henry Flynt”

13 Benjamin Piekut, “Demolish Serious Culture!,” in Experimentalism Otherwise, p. 95.
however for contextual purposes I have attached the relevant area on the beginning of the following page.

“…in general, the music of the Communists, particularly Anglo-American popular music, is simply hopeless. It is a cultural expression of “white”-chauvinism and racism. It is ‘dead’ and on the way out.”14

As visible in the manifesto, he took a new appreciation towards American ethnically based music. Flynt’s combination of cultural styles gave him a substantial base for composing music through the years. Following his protest against dominant western composure, Flynt began to make new recordings of himself playing solo violin. Similar work followed for the next few years until 1966 when he was offered to temporarily stand in for John Cale with the Velvet Underground. 15

For another year and a half Flynt continued with working small jobs, and came to the realization that he wanted to re-enter academia. Berndt explains this shift as less of an ideal action. The idea was to make himself more steadily employable rather than working “pick up jobs.” In 1967 Flynt applied and was accepted to NYU to finish school.16 This time around he graduated in 1970 after finishing his junior and senior year as a transfer student. Having a college degree made Flynt eligible for working a full time job and was soon hired as an economic consultant in New York. Following a short time, Flynt entered school again, this time as a graduate student in economic studies through the New School. Flynt spent eight years at the


15 John Berndt, “About Henry Flynt”

16 John Berndt, “About Henry Flynt”
New School and began to critically question his past beliefs. Although his previous stance regarding art may have been possible through Marxist ideology, he began to wonder if a full Marxist Utopia was economically possible. Finished in 1978, Flynt’s PhD dissertation focused on the topic of economic reallocation, and he studied under Michael Hudson, who is now a researcher through Bard College’s Levy Economic Institute. It’s important to note that when Flynt re-entered academics in 1967, he was drawn by tactical reasoning rather than his own interest to go back. In other words, he would have rather not re-entered academics but he forced himself to manage it because it was necessary.  

Though leaving academia, Flynt did not leave the music world while engaging in his studies. Flynt continued to meet with La Monte Young for private lessons, and through Young Flynt met Catherine Christer Hennix. Hennix, a Swedish musician, philosopher, mathematician and visual artist, later becomes a close friend to Flynt aiding in the completion his future accomplishments. For example, Berndt accredits Hennix for pushing Flynt back into concept art during the later 80s and early 90s. Berndt also explains that in October Flynt traveled to Stockholm to present one of his philosophical works, finalizing his new interest and study into meta-technology. Flynt wrote many essays using meta-technology as a base, and these articles became later published in the early to late 1990’s. Examples include, *Meta-Technology: An Analytical Sketch, The Crystallization of Concept Art in 1961*, and others which will be discussed in later sections. These essays ranged in topic from mathematics, philosophy and the arts. Lastly, although he was at the time still interested in more academic works, the seventies remains Flynt’s

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17 John Berndt, “About Henry Flynt”

18 John Berndt, “About Henry Flynt”
most active years in music along side Young and Hennix. Most of the recordings that have been released today are from these years, including *Graduation*.

In the 1980s Flynt remained mostly inactive, except for the publication of select recordings made in the 70s. He began to critically study into mathematics and science, and he remain in regular contact with Hennix with whom he had formed a great relationship. Hennix, now living in Woodstock NY, helped form Flynt into a mode in which became skeptical of common forms of science and math. There are writings explaining his positions such as the writing “That 1 = 2” published in 1997. The very first line of this essay remains one of my favorites, and it reads “The sole purpose of this argument is to cause trouble. To exhibit a non-affirming debacle regarding plurality.”\(^{19}\) I think this statement is self explanatory about how he views the sciences. Flynt didn’t necessarily disregard math and science, only point out that there are debatable issues in some of the core functions of it. Later in the 80’s Flynt decided with Hennix to revive concept art and later joined the Fluxus-focused Emily Harvey Gallery in New York City. Flynt produced many showings of his art such as “The Logically Impossible Space”, and a viewing of his photographic work through the Donguy Gallery in the early 1990’s.\(^{20}\) Flynt continued through the present with continuously questioning the modern reality of math, science and art through his own extremism. Lastly, by this time Flynt had almost entirely left his devotion to Marxism and still today remains critical of its principals and function. His work now


\(^{20}\) John Berndt, “About Henry Flynt”
primarily focuses on the questioning of principals we take for granted in everyday academics through art and writing.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{21} John Berndt, “About Henry Flynt”
A quick search of Henry Flynt will show his occupation listed as *Philosopher*, and while this is true, he contributed to a variety of studies. With areas of interest including Mathematics, Economics, Science, Psychology, studio arts, and music he published a variety of works all of which are available free to the public. Since I am focusing on the music, I won’t spend too much time diving into Flynt’s publications. Superficially his writings may seem unimportant to his art (music and otherwise), but his publications offer a looking glass into each mentality shift he experienced in life. Each shift represented a different period of beliefs Flynt held which ended in the production of different styles of art, while also contributing to his overarching objective in the arts. It should be acknowledged that Flynt insists on the interrelatedness among all of his writings. Most of his writings build off of the prior one, and your understanding of any one essay is contingent on your understanding of its predecessors. Flynt develops new concepts and theories in all his essays which he builds upon in later papers, somewhat analogously to a tree branch. The central stem of the branch is his core beliefs, and each leaf along the way is a concept feeding into the central idea. In the following section, I will identify and dissect key published works of Henry Flynt to reveal his own identity during different time periods in order to better understand the art and music he subsequently produced.

The first major work constructed by Flynt was his paper *Philosophy Proper* written in 1960. The 1960 version became one of two that would emerge over the course of a year, with the third and final version being completed in 1961.\textsuperscript{22} The focus of this paper became an attack on the traditional concept of analytical philosophy. Attacking cultural norms became the focus of his

\textsuperscript{22} John Berndt, “About Henry Flynt”
many areas of interest. For example, his paper “That 1 = 2” argues a fallacy in math where one can equal two, in combination with other projects to refute and dispose of common mathematical beliefs. Moving back to *Philosophy Proper*, the third version completed in 1961 was left unpublished until 1975 where it appeared in his book *Blue Print for a Higher Civilization*. With *Philosophy Proper* Flynt announced his dedication to “cognitive nihilism” which would meld into the rest of his work. Although it can be difficult to pin a direct definition of “cognitive nihilism,” Kaitlyn Creasy, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at California State University, San Bernardino describes the term in her book *Cognitive Nihilism, Affective Nihilism, and Their Interplay*:

> “Cognitive nihilism is an intellectual stance involving a number of characteristic beliefs and judgments about the meaninglessness or worthlessness of life. ... More specifically, the cognitive nihilist judges life, this-worldly existence, and humanity to be meaningless and without value.”

Throughout Henry Flynt’s career, the idea of cognitive nihilism becomes a central perspective on which he bases many of his beliefs. A great example of this is his stance against what some might call “higher art.” I realize this term is ambiguous, but with respect to Flynt I will use “high art” to describe anything made for entertainment, profit, or mass consumption. During the early 1960s, Flynt engaged in many protests against the mass consumption style of art which overly dominated the market. Flynt believed that this type of art was part of conformism, and offered no value other than the value someone else imposes. Henry Flynt uses the example of a painter.

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inevitably having to ask the critic, “Do you like it?” and the answer to that question being the conclusion of whether the painter values their own piece of work. In other words, an art that is not personal to you is meaningless.  

Moving on from Philosophy Proper and onto a larger work, Flynt’s Blueprint for a Higher Civilization, a greater understanding of Flynt’s early personal life can be seen in his own review of his essay Creep. Personally, this is one of my favorites and combines Flynt’s wit with logical thought. Through this section of the book between pages 182 and 186 Flynt recounts a number of personal experiences and situations in retrospect that made up his personality. (These experiences again all trickle down into his music, which will be discussed in Section 7.) Flynt begins this section of his book with an anecdote:

“When Helen Lefkowitz said I was "such a creep" at Interlochen in 1956, her remark epitomized the feeling that females have always had about me. My attempts to understand why females rejected me and to decide what to do about it resulted in years of confusion”

Considering Helen Lefkowitz is now a highly regarded Harvard graduate historian, one can only imagine the circumstance in which she would call Flynt a creep. Regardless, we should all be grateful she did because it stimulated a great piece of writing on an original subject- Creep Theory. Flynt goes on in this section of the book to explain “creep theory”, and what exactly


makes a creep. Again, this all connects with the overarching theme of Flynt’s writings. He describes a creep of one of involuntary celibacy, one who is childish and awkward; one who is different. Flynt presented his Creep lecture at Harvard on May 15th of 1962. Tony Conrad attended and took a photo of the event which prefaces the section. After reading it becomes easy to cross-reference the ideas built upon cognitive nihilism and his stance regarding the value of art. Throughout Creep he categorizes a creep as someone who is without connection to conformative culture. They achieve this state by living without traits most people gain at maturity, through isolation occurring due to a lack of belonging. Flynt describes that in isolation, the creep is free of conformity and can become an individual through a sort of true self-growth of character. Creep Theory becomes a prelude to the essay My New Concept of General Acognitive Culture written in May of 1962.

General Acognitive Culture became the first step three to eliminate art. The working order to eliminate art was first become General Acognitive Culture, next “veramusement,” and then finally “brend.” Flynt recognized and admitted that the population could never accept the total abolishment of serious culture. He writes that humans are likely to fear the abolishment of art without anything taking its place, which stems his three-step system of the gradual mutation of art into your “just likings.” Flynt first illustrates this idea in the thesis of his essay My New Concept of General Acognitive Culture, “Now this chapter will be first, an analysis of the concept of entertainment, recreation, of doing things just liked, which will criticize the activities

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26 Henry Flynt, “Creep”, pp. 182-186

27 Henry Flynt, “MY NEW CONCEPT OF GENERAL ACOGNITIVE CULTURE”
even as just entertainment.”

So what is a “just-liking”? Flynt explains this new concept later in the essay here:

“Naively, a worker has a job, job hours, an occupation, does work (which produces material wealth), to obtain his means of consumption. His job is a "means"; even though he may like it he is pretty much forced to do it. This can be extended to apply to the whole area of his responsibilities to society. Then he has after-hours, time when he doesn't have to do anything, and does what he does more as an end, in itself, "for fun," because he likes it.”

The idea of engaging only with your “just likings” is original to Flynt and becomes essential to the development of his academic work and in the manifestation of his music and art. He incorporates into the beginning of this essay the idea of a creep and draws parallels between the two pieces. One assumes after reading both, isolation is where one can be themselves, and create as one wants, not as others want. Through this process, your art may become something created because you just like it, be entirely personal, and not hold any value outside of your own amusement.

If we again look back to Flynt’s Blue Print for a Higher Civilization, he recounts a few instances of himself acting as “the creep.” in isolation. Flynt writes, “During, the period when I developed the creep theory, I was spending almost all of my time alone in my room, thinking and writing. This fact should make the positive creep values more understandable.”

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28 Henry Flynt, “MY NEW CONCEPT OF GENERAL ACOGNITIVE CULTURE”
29 Henry Flynt, “MY NEW CONCEPT OF GENERAL ACOGNITIVE CULTURE”
30 Henry Flynt, “Creep”, pp. 182-186
describes that “because of his isolation, the creep has a qualitatively higher sense of identity. He has a sense of the boundaries of his personality, and a control of what goes on within those boundaries” 31 I wonder the effect that this had on Flynt beyond the writing of this essay. Before 1963 Flynt spent a large amount of time in isolation that and he began searching for a way out through Marxist thought. There were a number of essays from this time that solidified his thinking, however, none of these essays are in circulation and are said to have been destroyed. It’s unfortunate that this period of his life remains somewhat of a mystery because it was so pivotal. He realized that the Marxist Utopia was the only place where his theories of art could survive. 32 As said earlier, one is bound by work and social interaction which inhibits the creation of just likings. However, at this point undiscouraged, Flynt began to write his way into the final stage and created “Brend.”

In 1968 Flynt published his essay ART or BREN D? In conjunction with his position of totally abolishing common art. The word “brend” was coined by Flynt and became the final evolution to his original term “just likings.” Again, as in other pieces by Flynt, this term becomes used in later publications. Out of all his writings brend is arguably the most important term to understand, as it embodies his entire view of the art world. Secondly, this term becomes the core idea to his writings and action. Defining “brend” is a challenge because it's something that just is, and the term is completely individualistic to everyone who reads it. To define and analyze this term, I will use Flynt’s own words as well as my own analysis. Once this term is understood, much of Flynt’s actions in the early 1960s become obvious.

31 Henry Flynt, “Creep”, pp. 182-186
32 John Berndt, “About Henry Flynt”
ART or BRENDB? is one of Flynt’s usual eccentric essays. Instead of explaining what brend means, he instead provides a list of conditions that will determine whether or not a piece is art, or brend. In a numbered list, he begins to sketch out the conditions that make up brend. In number two we begin to see the direction he is heading:

“The artist or entertainer cannot exist without urging his or her product on other people. In fact, after developing his or her 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 as first, he or she is disappointed. He or she doesn't drop it, but repeatedly urges the project on them.”

Influenced by his political beliefs in the early to mid 1960s, Flynt becomes strongly against all art that has been “commodified.” In many cultures throughout history, art has been cultivated for sale and profit. One could argue as we move on in time, all types of art become more and more commodified. Many would define commodified art, as Flynt begins to outline, as any work that holds a monetary or social value. The argument against art commodification is not specific to studio practices such as sculpture, painting or photography. Although these are common areas to attack because of, most likely due to museums and collectors, music has also become a key area of interest. Receiving an equal amount of scrutiny there have been numerous books and articles outlining the commodification of the musical arts. Timothy D. Taylor, a music-focused social scientist, sums up music commodification as “Once upon a time, everyone made music for themselves. Then along came the phonograph, and they stopped making music and started

buying it instead.”

Flynt’s problem with the commodification of the arts is not the basic fact that it has a monetary value, but rather the effects on culture after it becomes commodified. In music, for example, once the phonograph was introduced music became subjected to all the conditions of any other marketed product. Music became something influenced by popular interest. Instead of music being passed down through family and friends, it would be performed, recorded, and sold. After a few years the market shifts when something new evolves, and the previous piece becomes “old”. Across a number of essays Flynt commonly defends against art having “newness” as a primary value.

Reading down to the third condition listed in ART or BREND? Flynt continues to work towards an abstract definition of brend by addressing the contradiction in commodified art. When art is commodified, the artist must take into account the opinion of others. Flynt writes:

“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 [...] Yet--the object can exist without you, is completely outside you, is not your or your valuing, and has no inherent connection with you or your valuing. The product is not personal to you.”

Art lacking personal connection seems to be the largest issue Flynt has with commodified art. In his eyes, art should never be impersonal to you, but rather personal to only you. In his eyes the consumer affected but also the artist. Flynt explains later in the next paragraph that “The artist

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35 Henry Flynt, "ART or BREND?"
tries to "be oneself" for other people, to "express oneself" for them." These specific aspects about commodified art make up the majority of his argument that art is problematic to its core, and why it must be replaced.

In the forth point of ART or BREN? We finally get a basic structure to what “brend actually is. He writes,

“There are experiences for each person which accomplish what art and entertainment fail to. [...] 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 because you like it, because you just like it as you do it.”

As talked about in previous essays, these make up what Flynt would regard as “just likings.” Flynt fails to give any examples of just likings, but has addressed that examples aren’t possible because they’re so personally specific. Flynt would probably argue that this is the entire point of brend, in that it can’t be shared. We do get one clarification using a pencil as the object to be liked. Flynt explains that when you use a pencil, you rarely (if ever) consider to yourself that the pencil was not made by you, and has no connection to you whatsoever. In other words, you like the pencil because you just like it. He then explains that in your just likings you rarely notice that the object (physical, or sonic) is not entirely personal to you. In Flynt’s own words, “[In regards to] your just-likings, you never notice that things are not produced by you. The essence of a just-

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36 Henry Flynt, “ART or BREN?"  
37 Henry Flynt, “ART or BREN?"
liking is that in it, you are not aware that the object you value is less personal to you than your very valuing.” These individual experiences together make up “brend”, or, your brend. Brend is not a singular term, but rather embodies everything you like for nothing less than your complete individual value to it; It is entirely personal to you. The question remains, is it possible to reach this state of absolute satisfaction?

Concluding the essay, section 5 answers the question of how a final state of brend can be obtained. Flynt writes that brend is something of a utopia, and that it's probably unreasonable to assume this utopia will ever come to fruition. As Flynt describes it, asking when brend will takeover is essentially asking “when the barrier between work and leisure will be broken down, when work will be abolished.” It’s obviously hard to say if this will ever happen, and even if it did what would happen. We know from other texts that Flynt eventually gave up his Marxist ideology as it became more and more impractical. For example, Flynt observed communist countries and how their governments suppressed art instead of promoting the self expression he advocates. However, I don't want to totally discredit brend because Flynt does acknowledge that it’s is more than an absolute state. In reality, brend is already here. Later in the paragraph he mentions that “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 or her life--but is totally suppressed by the general repressiveness of society.” It becomes clear that Flynt is not necessarily arguing for a society of complete brend, but rather using this essay to make the reader

38 Henry Flynt, “ART or BREND?”
39 Henry Flynt, “ART or BREND?”
40 Henry Flynt, “ART or BREND?”
aware of these specific experiences. Maybe the next time you do something you like, you can take it to a higher level of personal expression for the sole purpose of you like to do it, without any influence or need for outside acceptance and gratification.

Now that Brend is understood it becomes a lens of which we can look into Flynt’s life with a closer understanding of everything he’s created. Suddenly his essays such as *Creep* make sense and why they were attractive to Flynt. If we use *Creep* as an example, the creep is completely isolated and able to create expression without the need for society's acceptance of it. I suspect that this idea of creation for personal satisfaction became Flynt’s path in the 1960s and fueled his anti recording stance to music. As someone who’s attempting to look into Flynt’s life this can be endlessly frustrating. As mentioned in the introduction, Flynt felt so strongly about his ideology that it drove him to destroy past works because they were corrupted. Moving forward he created and performed music that were left unrecorded and therefore we’re unable to look back and analyze it. It wasn't until the year 2000 that Flynt published recordings for sale. The recordings published in 2000 make up the majority of what we have today and were almost all recorded in the 1970s. However, most (if not all) work from the 1960s is left in the dark. It could be suspected that La Monte Young may have some recordings, but if this is true, he’s kept them undisclosed. The remains of the 1960s significance are held in Flynt’s creation of “concept art” of which survived through preserved pieces and writing. Through the lens of brend, concept art can be explained and understood and how it became an attack on the general culture of music and studio arts. Concept art, coined in 1961, became Flynt's primary interest through the 1990’s.

To conclude this section, it’s important to take a look into Flynt’s concept art and Word Pieces. To preface this analysis, it must be included that concept art stretches beyond word
pieces. Flynt continued with concept art all the way to the 1990s, however the term is best understood looking at its creation in the 1960s. The term concept art was originally coined by Flynt around 1961, and became a style of art where the concept of the art is more important than the product. The product can take many forms, again, not limited to word pieces.

The term concept art, coined by Flynt, is described in the essay *The Crystalization of Concept Art in 1961*. Concept art was still in its infancy at the time, but Flynt had intended the idea to “replace all of mathematics with an endeavor which involved a Rorschach-blot semantics; and which did not claim to be cognitive…” Flynt later states that Concept art was rejected by some claiming it wasn’t “real” art. Going to Flynt’s original essay on concept art, he does take that into account, and clarifies that concept art does not belong in traditional artistic categories. To define the term, Sol Lewitt describes concept art as:

“[T]he idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair.”

Later in the Essay *Crystalization of Concept Art in 1961*, Flynt mentions some notable examples and includes Young’s word pieces. A number of these pieces were published in Young’s 1960 Anthology, and appear to be instructions. A couple of examples follow.

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42 Henry Flynt, “The Crystallization of Concept Art in 1961”

La Monte Young Word Piece, Composition 1960 #5

La Monte Young Piano Piece for Terry Riley #1


45 La Monte Young Piano Piece for Terry Riley #1, photograph, MoMA (New York, NY), MoMA, accessed December 7, 2020, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/127639
The first word piece outlines a scenario where a butterfly, or a group of them, are let loose in a theater. The concept of this action is the resulting sound it produces. As Flynt writes in his essay on concept art, “music is sound.” Equally interesting, the second piece describes a scenario in which Terry Riley is to push a piano through a wall. One can begin to see how some might be skeptical, but these pieces were ultimately considered music even though many of them do not instruct the creation of sound.46

As concept art progressed, a number of artists began to catch on and create works of Conceptual Art in new unexplored areas. To finish this section I want to include an examples of concept art that are not word pieces. On the next page is a piece from 1965 created by Joseph Kosuth.

Joseph Kosuth, One and Three Chairs. 1965.47

In this exhibit there is a chair, a photograph of the chair, and the definition of a chair. What’s interesting is that Kosuth didn't make the chair, take the photo of it, or write the definition. It’s debated whether or not this is really really art, however, under concept art it certainly is.

46 Henry Flynt, “The Crystallization of Concept Art in 1961”

Concept art as an initial idea boils down to Flynt’s desire to break free from high culture. As Piekut writes in *Experimentalism Otherwise*,

“Concept art and brend were attempts to think about aesthetics without the ordainments of high culture or conventional performance expectations, and when composers and artists continued to rely upon these conventions—even composers in the avant-garde such as Stockhausen—Flynt regarded them as philosophically dishonest and politically reactionary.”

To give more context, Piekut also makes an argument that between the years of 1961 and 1964, there was a real possibility that traditional art was going to completely dissolve. Coincidentally, these were the most formative years for Flynt as he was just leaving school to pursue art in New York City with La Monte Young. Flynt got most of his ideas for brend and concept art, which shaped the rest of his life, from Young’s inner circle. Looking back it becomes apparent why Flynt’s early ideas such as Brend are so important and influential. These beginning theories (including concept art) shaped the rest of his career as an artist through the 1990s. Although Flynt ultimately moved on from New York City, Catherine Christer Hennix became his new role model pushing him towards reviving concept art. In the late 80s, Flynt decided to show his art work at the Fluxus devoted Emily Harvey Gallery. From here on he was a career artist and made a number of new conceptual artworks. At this point in Flynt’s life most of his work was documented, and I’d like to include two examples of his own concept art shown in New York City during the early 90s.

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48 Benjamin Piekut, “Demolish Serious Culture!,” in *Experimentalism Otherwise*, p. 86.

49 Benjamin Piekut, “Demolish Serious Culture!,” in *Experimentalism Otherwise*, p. 86
“One True Sentence” Wall paper created in 1989. For the installation of this work, the paper was posted on a large wall four columns wide and about 90 lines tall (about two stories).\(^5\)

1989 show at Emily Harvey Gallery: Installation, northeast corner. This project take’s up the entire corner of a room and features the ceiling design “Which way is Up?” that can be found in a hand out below\(^6\)


Henry Flynt, Challenge to Conceptual Artists, Advertisement (1990) calls for artists to revive 1961 concept art. The paper features a challenge asking artists to reconfigure the 7 sticks in a different orientation than Flynt's\textsuperscript{52}

**Henry Flynt - Select Recordings**

Throughout the 1970s and early ‘80s Flynt began to produce recordings of his music. The overwhelming majority of these pieces were left unpublished until the beginning of the 21st century. There were two exceptions, *Celestial Power* and *You Are my Everlovin’*, which were published in 1980-81. As we know in the ‘60s Flynt was musically active; however, the 1970s still account for the bulk of his performance years. Throughout the 1960s Flynt had developed his own style of music that became “New American Ethnic Music.” His idea was to fuse Hillbilly music with avant-garde to create his own unique sound. Across most of the recordings Flynt can be heard playing either Violin or Guitar for anywhere between 12-45 minutes. Flynt once commented that modern music was too short with not enough time to enjoy it. As a result, the majority of his songs are over 10 minutes with some nearing an hour in length. Over the following section I will explore a selection of recordings that were produced throughout the 1970s and into the early 80s.

1 - *Celestial Power*

Originally released in 1986 on cassette, *Celestial Power* features a live recording of Flynt performing in his Manhattan loft. Throughout the piece the listener can make subtle but clear allusions to many genres of music such as Indian, blues, jazz and fiddle. The cassette begins with a pre-recorded solo for tambura (a guitar shaped string instrument found in Indian music) splaying a alternating staccato pattern between G and A. I'm hesitant to call the tambura solo a melodic ostinato, because while it is repeating, the solo feels improvisatory and is shaped accordingly throughout the 45 minute performance. After the first eighteen seconds Flynt jumps in with an electronic violin using double stops and varied harmonics. The double stops, often
played in the lower G and D strings, create a contrast to the harmonics which force the violin into its highest registers. The first few minutes consist of mostly fast paced notes that shift between these double stops and harmonics, not remaining on either for more than 6-7 seconds. As the piece continues, slower sections arrive to juxtapose the beginning. Flynt does this by using longer double stops accompanied by glissandos that stride upwards into the harmonics instead of suddenly jumping. Although the piece doesn't present a clearly articulated structure, Flynt’s violin does retain a constant but abstract, linear melodic form. This loose melody continues until the piece ends with the violin going into its highest register, ultimately fading out.

_Celestial Power_ is more of an abstract piece. In many of Flynt’s writings he rejects “structural art.” For example, a Fugue uses very strict structure with the prominent use of Dux et Comes. Flynt would argue this type of music is boring and the music only serves as a vehicle to showcase the structure. He would say that because the music serves only as the vehicle, a fugue lacks any true musical value. It is the structure that’s important, and the structure at best is basic and uninteresting. Listening to _Celestial Power_ Flynt’s view on structure becomes apparent. While one could listen to it and reduce it to a loose pattern, that isn’t the point of this performance. The absence of any obvious structure, oscillating high to low registers, and tambura accompaniment, create a sound that slowly melds into a drone over the course of 45 minutes. The music doesn't physically morph into a drone, rather, its constant presence over a long period of time causes the mind to perceive the instrumental parts as one sound. Once this happens the music has a psychedelic effect that causes the mind to travel beyond the music. Flynt briefly explains in the albums linear notes that, “The electric violin timbre is crucial; it allows me to crush the diverse styles into a unity. I imagined the genre as open, radiant improvisation … an
open plain that could absorb anything.’’ This begs the question: did he successfully join the contrasting Indian, jazz, blues and fiddle styles? I think he did. By that measurement the piece is a success, but it still remains a very different kind of music that isn’t for everyone.

2 - You Are my Everlovin’

Also released in 1986, You Are my Everlovin’ was paired with Celestial power to create a two song album with each song being 45 minutes long. The recording begins with an Indian style drone based on C, G and another C an octave up. The drone carries through the entire piece without ever changing, and is once again pre recorded. Flynt plays over the drone with electric violin in a style similar to Celestial Power by moving through double stops and harmonics. You Are my Everlovin’ is a slower piece, with the bulk of the violin harmonized to the drone in long strokes of double stops that carry a blues-like tune. Following the double stops Flynt moves upwards into the harmonics creating the essence of a sitar, reminiscent of Ravi Shankar. When in the harmonics Flynt plays quickly moving up and down the upper octaves of the piece before coming back down to the drone which inherits a tonic quality. Towards the end of the piece the rock influence becomes apparent as the violin gains more aggressive overpowering the drone in a simple repeating rhythm of two notes a perfect 5th apart, and a with upper note that jumps in. The piece ends abruptly on the two notes creating a perfect fifth between C and G.

There is a big contrast between Celestial Power and You Are My Everlovin’. Although they feature similar instruments and styles, You Are My Everlovin’ feels more exotic and centered. The addition of the drone tonic adds a base the violin builds off before eventually returning back to join the perfect 5th “home.” The drone also has a distinct Indian feel that harmonizes with the violin well especially in the lower register. The lower register also give
sFlynt an opportunity to bring in a “bluesy” feel that motivates the listener while eliciting emotion. As a subjective opinion, *You Are My Everlovin’* was more successful at interwinding various ethnic music cultures than *Celestial Power*. Not only is the piece more intelligible to the ear, but the clearly recognizable styles create a great listening experience.

**3 - Graduation**

*Graduation* begins with Flynt playing a bluesy electric guitar solo accompanied by a lap steel guitar. After the long introduction a singer in the style of hillbilly music joins to create an interesting contrast between two styles. The lyrics in the song tell a story of “our” graduation although it’s still unclear what the lyrics are describing, and who’s graduation it is. The song begins:

“Our whole high school **class** left on the train this **morning**

Bound for our **graduation**

Where we’ll bury our **fathers body**

One side of the passenger car is **open**

And the guys all almost fall head on the **curb**

When we get to the city we take a **trolly**

And stop at a public **building**”

It’s unclear whether or not the words of the lyrics add value to the music, or their purpose is to primarily add a hillbilly feel through voice without attention to lyrical meaning. Flynt creates a country feel by elongating the last word of each phrase (these words have been bolded), and

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53 *Graduation* (New York, NY, n.d.).
creating a simple melodic pattern by lowering or raising the pitch of the last word. The pattern can be visualized in this model:

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class / left on the train this
        our fathers
“Our whole high school
morning / bound for our graduation / Where we’ll bury
body
```

Reading from left to right, each height level represents a constant pitch. The first four words are in one pitch, in this case an E, and then slides “class” upwards to a C# in the same octave. The following five words remain on this E before a glissando back down on “morning.” This pattern remains fairly stable throughout 12 minute composition. The lyrics continue unrepeated throughout the composition with percussion and electric guitar accompaniment. As the song continues Flynt describes a number of topics such as an explosion, communist countries cremating bodies instead of embalming them, and other situations involving corpses.

Like many of Flynt’s songs, Graduation represents a unique sound when compared to other pieces from the same album. For example, Graduation has prominent hillbilly characteristics, such as voice cracking, which are not found in the rest of the album. Depending on which style he highlights very different songs are created giving the album the feeling of disconnection. To be clear, this is neither a good or bad quality, but rather offers insight to how he created the compositions. From the album and song name being the same one would expect Graduation to set the mood for the rest of the album, but it does not. Using existing evidence this makes sense and one can infer the pieces were never made to form a set. A music artist today may record eight or nine songs as a set for their album, but Flynt recorded these pieces over several years and then waited over twenty years to release them. Therefore, while the first song
and album are titled “Graduation,” the following pieces have no clear connecting theme or quality. Each song has its own style and strategy, adding variety and a sense of surprise when the next song plays.

4 - Double Spindizzy

Continuing with the blues theme, Double Spindizzy begins with an electric violin playing in a continuous, short, oscillating loop. After a few seconds the violin is accompanied by a string bass and electric guitar at a moderate to fast tempo. Just over six minutes in length, the song lacks any percussion, but violin loops act as a “stand in” beat for the bass and electric guitar to follow. To someone listening with headphones the song creates an interesting atmosphere because the violin loops play differently to each ear. Although it sounds like the same violin at times, there are multiple points where it becomes clear Flynt is using 2 separate violins that are playing in unison. The resulting effect is a fascinating timbre because each violin naturally sounds slightly different. The violins break away from each other at times, but only for isolated and short solos. The violins then come back into unison returning the melody to the electric guitar and bass.

Out of the entire Graduation album Double Spindizzy creates the most noticeable “bluesy” rhythm and sound quality. The guitar and bass are both highlighted with classic blues rhythm and tone giving the feeling of being in a Chicago underground club during the 1970s. Listening to the recording, it’s hard not to close your eyes, see a crowd of people around small tables, hear drinks being shaken, and smell the thick tobacco smoke as Flynt jams away. The only reminiscence of hillbilly is found in the violin, which fades away from the foreground after the first minute. The listener’s attention is near immediately focused on the guitar and bass
making it difficult to realize a traditional band isn’t playing. In reality what you’re hearing is a Harvard/NYU New York City avant-garde musician from the south. In its own way, that aspect embodies what Flynt’s style is about, and adds to the listening experience of his music.

5 - No Rights

_No Rights_ begins with an electronic keyboard playing with another moderate to fast rhythm in the percussion. It is the first time in the album the listener hears a keyboard. Similarly, the keyboard and percussion give the song a very 1970’s TV program-like beginning; however, I doubt this was intentional. The electronic keyboard and percussion sound is often associated with 1970/80s pop TV and music culture from a modern point of view and is not necessarily something someone would notice at the time of recording. Shortly after the beginning the electric violin comes in playing a melody. Here is a transcription of the violin melody.

![Violin Melody](image)

Repeating twice, this melody starts on G and goes down a perfect 5th to C. The important notes in the melody are the two Bb’s that create suspension. In beat one, the Bb resolves down to the G, and the following Bb on beat three resolves up to the C. Combined with the rhythm, this melody sets the mood for the entire song. As the music develops the violin begins to open up in variety expanding in register with slides into the first and last note of each phrase. As the violin continues to develop into an improvised sound, it returns to a short rhythmic pattern double stop that’s put into conversation with the keyboard. Towards the last minute of the song the violin begins to drastically disassemble in structure. Flynt begins to use all registers and sounds on the
violin while the bass and keyboard stay relatively tame and constant. Flynt uses heavy slides, harmonics, slow to fast pace rhythm, “scrubbing” the bow, and double stops to play unisons all within the last minute.

To describe *No Rights* in a single word, “jam” is the first that comes to mind. The violin part appears improved in the most fantastic sense of the word. Stylistically, the song sounds most influenced by 1970s black music culture. Jazz, Blue’s and other musics come to mind in both rhythm and sound. The music is full of spirit as Flynt wisps up and down the fingerboard picking elements from different genres of music. Shown in the transcribed melody above, the rhythm and sound create one culture, while the slides and violin represent fiddle playing in early America. Overall the piece is lively, wild, and energetically pulsing with 1970’s American beat.

**6 - A Portrait**

Departing from blues, *A Portrait* showcases Flynt’s ability to play the fiddle alongside accompanying instruments over eleven minutes. The song begins with a short tune played by Flynt on the fiddle. The tune is catchy, ending on A with a fast paced folk dance quality. It develops further into double stops going up an octave, sliding into the A multiple times as the piano harmonizes. Moving all over the fingerboard, an electric guitar joins the ensemble to play alongside the the violin. At the four minute mark the fiddle playing starts to get experimental as Flynt pushes the limits of the instrument. He moves so high into the upper register that it becomes unclear wether he’s playing a regular note, or moving the bow behind the bridge on the E string forcing the violin to make an extremely high screech. He makes the sound again thirty seconds later this time by using extreme vibrato on a G5 before sliding all the way up to a G7 and beyond, playing several similar harmonics, and finally sliding back down into normally used
pitches. He doesn't remain here long, and frequently jumps between these extreme pitches to the
violins G string with a simultaneous pizzicato bow playing mix. As in No Rights, Flynt also
employs use of “scrubbing the bow” on the strings to create a scratchy timbre and spontaneous
sets of bow bouncing. This passage is followed by a slower passage quickly alluding to the
beginning melody which is shortly interrupted by another verse of fast playing. Moving into the
final minute, Flynt returns to the starting melody repeated twice ending on a new, but familiar
tune, transcribed here:

It takes a certain kind of musician to end a piece with Shave and a Haircut, and a great
one to make it work. The song’s tonic is an A and so is Shave and a Haircut. Essentially, as much
as it is a joke, it’s also effective and serious. The tune ultimately sums up the piece, and one can
only imagine the laugh it gave Flynt after playing it for the recording. The comic effect is
fantastic and a great nudge at high brow music.

7- Virginia Trance -

Beginning with an electric guitar Virginia Trance quickly moves into a different style
than A Portrait. While A Portrait showcases the ability of the fiddle, Virginia Trance is almost
entirely electric guitar with a drum set and bass accompaniment. At a moderate tempo Flynt
begins the piece by playing a short catchy repetition of two notes quickly joined by the bass and
percussion. After the percussion begins Flynt breaks off with a very 1970s classic guitar solo that
periodically interacts rhythmically with the percussion and bass accompaniment. In the
background the drumming features lots of brass sound from the cymbals to give the piece an airy classic band sound quality. As the piece continues Flynt keeps mostly tame in comparison to his other songs, and creates variety through a freestyle tune that never repeats with a varied rhythm. He does use the whammy bar, but minimally.

8 - Conga -

Out of the entire album, Conga feels the most out of place. This song in particular doesn't have very much in common other than some basic stylistic qualities. The piece begins with cymbals playing in a fast constant rhythm establishing the beat. After a few moments the cymbals are joined by a saxophone coming in on a held C6 which remains for several beats. After subsiding in a slide downwards the saxophone drops out leaving the electric guitar and percussion moving at a fast tempo. Again, this is a piece that must be listened to with headphones to catch all the small nuances. Under close listening multiple trumpets can be heard playing melodies individually, at the same time in unison, or simultaneous contrasting melodies. Equally interesting, the Saxophones sound as if they are different distances from the recording microphone. With headphones in particular this creates a perceived spacial atmosphere where musicians are playing. Flynt creates this by fading in the saxophones underneath the dominant sound from the electric guitar. The saxophones will sometimes come out above the percussion and guitar for a short time before fading back out. Despite this, the saxophone is the star of the song, not the percussion and bass, which remain in a constant sound and rhythmic pattern.

Conga has to be one of Flynt’s most innovative pieces. The spacial quality to the music is outstanding. Similar to Double Spindizzy, Conga is another song where the listener can close their eyes and picture the atmosphere. The saxophones playing at different levels behind the
percussion and guitar create the illusion of a single band playing while other musicians are practicing in other rooms. The different saxophone melodies include sounds outside a usual scale such as screeches and chirps that give the piece a jazzy characteristic. If one could imagine themselves in a jazz house with musicians playing in their practice rooms, this piece presents the sounds you might hear.

9 - Lonesome Train Dreams

To complete this list, Lonesome Train Dreams includes a few different Flynt styles including country with hints of jazz and blues. The piece begins with Flynt on the electric violin playing a rhythmic and melodic ostinato between A and D. The violin slides up to the A then drops to the D in what sounds like an old time, or hoedown, bowing rhythm of long-short-short-long. Using this rhythm in the beginning is very effective at creating a country atmosphere that continues throughout the piece even as the ostinato becomes lost in the background. As the piece develops, new voices appear from as a lap steel guitar takes the melody accompanied by electric guitar, bass, and drums keeping the rhythm. While the lap steel creates the majority of the melodies, the electric guitar often repeats the lap steel complementing its sound. Like Virginia Trance, this piece remains relatively consistent without much flare. There are no wild solos, sounds, or extreme registers, and the sound remains relatively tame. Around six and a half minutes in Flynt includes some non chordal notes that stand out, but this section only lasts for a short period. The section comes back shortly at the end followed by the instruments fading out one by one, with the lap steel playing the final note in a slide downwards while fading out.

Lonesome Train dreams represents a classic example of real country music on the album. With variety a variety of instruments such as the lap steel and electric violin, the result is a new
sound that becomes Flynt’s characteristic style. Although this piece is similar in style to *A Portrait*, the addition of the lap steel lead gives the song an element that completely sets it apart.
The Relationship Between Flynt’s Music and Writing

One of the most fascinating things about Flynt’s well rounded career is his ability to draw parallels between written arts, performance arts, and studio arts. Throughout his essays and books Flynt indirectly gives a background and behind-the-scenes look into the creation of his art and how it was shaped. For example, in his book Against “Participation.” Chapter 9: Newness as Sole Value describes his disdain for the value of “newness.” The next section will examine various essays and chapters by Flynt to discover different periods in his life, and how these periods shaped his artistic product.

I. The Valuation of Newness

One of the most important convictions Flynt held was that art should never be valued by consumers for the sole quality of newness. He draws distinctions, such that everything is “new,” but not everything is necessarily appreciated for that quality. The idea of newness as a sole value was published in his book Against “Participation” which features chapters aimed at reconstructing his argument from 1964 (An argument that disbaraged common art and entertainment on behalf of Brend.54). In chapter 9l. Newness as Sole Value, the reader is presented with a philosophical argument against the quality of newness. The chapter begins:

“Quite apart from Serious Culture, metaphysics, Serious-Cultural Neoism; in "culture" a production is sometimes said to be "new." A production is sometimes

said to be (positively) valuable because it is “new.”...There are controversies over whether "newness" is good or bad."55

In this first section Flynt begins to lay out the argument of what newness is, and what characteristics it can be defined by. By continuing in the chapter it becomes clear that he doesn't perceive all “newness” as bad. In fact, he believes it’s a thing good to be new and not a traditionalist. As seen in all of Flynt’s music, especially the pieces discussed in the preceding section, Flynt’s entire music career was based off of creating a new and unique style of music. Flynt does this by fusing styles of music from all backgrounds such as jazz, blues, and country even including some found outside America. The type of newness that is associated with all creations, however, is not what Flynt is describing.

Moving on in the chapter Flynt introduces the types of newness that can be found in art. He describes a scenario of how artists may create a production, only to reinvent something already made. He describes it well in these two sentences:

“A few "culture" producers, taking this existing vague valuational notion of "newness" for granted, try to produce ‘culture’ which is primarily ‘new,’ is ‘new,’ ‘different’ as such; without any thought of other value, irrespective of its other characteristics. In their attempt, one thing they do is the intellectualistic, consciously experimental rearrangement of the elements of productions or an activity just to obtain a ‘different’ production. One can play this little game indefinitely.”56


56 Henry Flynt, “AGAINST ‘PARTICIPATION”
As the reader, a number of works that fit this criteria come to mind. One can understand Flynt’s frustration because it’s seldom realized that a lot of entertainment we consume is nothing but a re-invention of previously successful work. Flynt argues that if you were to make a production, re-arrange it, and then republish it, a lot of people will value it for being new and not because of any other qualities. He lists a great example of a ball rolling across the table:

“An example was my own rolling a ball across the floor, supposedly in the context of no activity or purpose. Then, they try to think up arbitrary new purposes, new activities. An example was my attempt, when I first conceived it, to develop a percussion-sounds ritual which would magically make a toy car roll across a desk.”

He first identifies newness as “anything” that is trying to do the very next thing, therefore “anything” is new. The problem is, when you try to do “anything,” it will almost always be something that is completely arbitrary and without meaning. Going back to the rolling ball example, his next step was to create a new and meaningless purpose for the ball. He ended up creating a percussion ritual that would appear to roll the ball across the table. In completion, Flynt decided to use a toy car instead, however, that’s beside the point. What Flynt realized during this process is that newness makes its appearance though purposiveness and complexity. What he clarifies is that these are perceived qualities, not intrinsic to the manifestation of the action. He writes that artists “although confining their aim to doing something ‘new,’ try to make

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57 Henry Flynt, “AGAINST ‘PARTICIPATION”

58 Henry Flynt, “AGAINST ‘PARTICIPATION”
their productions appear to have complexity and purposiveness." In the rolling car example, the reader can visualize the action and how it might be perceived that the car magically rolls across the desk. In reality, there's nothing complex or clever about the action, and its only real attraction is its novelty.

Next in the chapter Flynt outlines a few examples of “new” that are not valuational. It’s important to understand two of these examples because they are not a bad quality, rather, they are something that is unavoidable in the creation of art. The first example Flynt describes is a temporal successor. Flynt characterizes a temporal successor as anything that is quite literally new just because something has been done before it. Of course, this form is completely avoidable because everything done will be after something else. The second important example is the concept of “different.” Once again, many things may be considered new just because they're different from something already done. Although this is true, Flynt describes this as being non valuational. Separating these non valuational qualities we end up with Flynt’s conclusion. There are many performances which carry the sole value of being “new” from the last, and these performance hold no other value except this quality. He explains that, yes of course, everything is new, “but the connotation of the notions of principal interest here is that only selected things ‘really’ deserve to be said to be ‘new’—one speaks of "real newness." This brings us to the question of, “what is real newness? how can something be differently new?” Surprisingly, Flynt

59 Henry Flynt, “AGAINST ‘PARTICIPATION”

60 Henry Flynt, “AGAINST ‘PARTICIPATION”

61 Henry Flynt, “AGAINST ‘PARTICIPATION”
answers this in a very straightforward manner. As complex and mind wrapping his ideas are, real newness is simple. His definition concludes the writing:

“The best explication for the term (really) new' here is that one applies 'new' approvingly to a thing one is encountering for the first time, which one finds has some major value quite irrespective of "newness," quite irrespective of whether it is "new." The "newness" of interest here is best explicated as not a "primary" value or characteristic of a thing, but rather an extra, "accidental," "secondary" characteristic a thing, which has some major value quite irrespective of "newness," can have: the characteristic of being encountered for the first time.”

Flynt’s music is intended to be enjoyed because of the complexity and true innovativeness of the arrangement. Moreover, his music should be enjoyed because listener finds major personal value in its content. In Flynt’s own words from his 1980 essay, The Meaning of My Avant-Garde Hillbilly and Blues Music he writes,

“For me, innovation does not consist in composing European and academic music with inserted ‘folk’ references. It consists in appropriating academic or technical devices and subordinating them to my purposes as a ‘folk creature.’”

Finally everything comes together as Flynt begins to give an indirect context to the process behind his personal creation of art. The intentions behind his music are not to create something new like anyone else. Instead, he wants the listener to enjoy his music for what it is rather than

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62 Henry Flynt, “AGAINST ‘PARTICIPATION,”

because it is a new fusion between cultural styles never before done. Yes, it is new, but that is not why it matters.

II. Flynt’s Music and Communism

Flynt’s politics became central to his musical development through both writing and protest. Most of Flynt’s later accomplishments can be traced back to several events in the early 1960’s. In the book Experimentalism Otherwise, author Benjamin Piekut attaches an excerpt from Flynt’s essay The Politics of Native or Ethnic Music. Flynt writes, the the dismissal of ethnic music as primitive “has to be interpreted as a political act, as an integral part of the ‘white man’s burden’ doctrine invented to justify European colonialism in Asia and Africa.”

Throughout the early 1960s Flynt was strongly critical of Western music. He viewed it as oppressive and dying out, as he later explains in his 1965 Manifesto “Communists Must Give Revolutionary Leadership in Culture.” He also believed that Western music was nothing but a “cultural mentality of the social-climbing snobs.” Most of this rhetoric was fostered through the WWP (Workers World Party) where Flynt devoted most of his political beliefs. During this time period and into the ‘70s one of the WWP’s main issues was fighting racism and standing against suppression by Western Elites. During the early ‘60s Flynt was getting into ethnically based music that he discovered in Cambridge, and so the only rational choice became fighting back against Western music to align with the WWP. According to Piekut, Flynt heard a broadcast on a New York radio station given by WWP that resonated with him in the summer of 1962. It was

64 Benjamin Piekut, “Demolish Serious Culture!,” in Experimentalism Otherwise, p. 92
65 Benjamin Piekut, “Demolish Serious Culture!,” in Experimentalism Otherwise, p. 91
after this broadcast that in 1963 Flynt officially moved to New York City to pursue his activities and music.\textsuperscript{66}

Oddly, the best source for analyzing his beliefs in music comes from his published manifesto “Communists Must Give Revolutionary Leadership in Culture” written in connection with George Maciunas. The full manifesto is on public display though the MoMA for online viewing, but for the purpose of this section only one page will be attached. The article begins:

“The following is the best possibility in culture for the present period. It is important to remember that implementation of the best possibility by a communist government can only be in stages”\textsuperscript{67}

The purpose of this manifesto was to outline a strategic departure for communist countries to preserve music culture within their system. As known, it’s common for communist countries to censor and discourage music that does not appeal to the common public. As Flynt will argue next, that can be extremely detrimental to music cultures. Inherently, when you create a system of total rule, something is going to snuffed out in a form of suppression. In music culture, it is almost always cultural music that’s dissuaded. Flynt describes here in his manifesto:

“For revolutionary leadership,[culturally black] music must be the point of departure. Now there is no nonsense about bringing this music to the masses, because they created it. The almost insuperable problem is to bring [culturally black] music to the communists…When people who listen to [culturally black]

\textsuperscript{66} Benjamin Piekut, “Demolish Serious Culture!,” in Experimentalism Otherwise, p. 89-90

music become Communists, they sense a hostile and embarrassed reaction from their comrades.”

It becomes clear after this section that what Flynt’s really interested in is the many genres of culturally black music. Flynt lumps them all together for analytical purposes, but the intentions are clear. During the 1960s it’s well established that Flynt considered himself a devout communist. Even as far as writing his dissertation on communist economics, he put total faith in the only system that could carry his artistic values. As talked about, Marxism was probably the only system with the capability to bring his ideas to fruition. Flynt’s problem was that communist governments have historically turned their back to low-brow cultural music. It’s unknown why this is, other than it’s seen as low-brow, but Flynt continues:

[The Communists] idea of popular music is European popular music…They will fabricate the most tortuous sophistry to prove that [culturally black] music is ‘bourgeois corruption’— but that of course Beethoven’s Solemn Mass in D Major is not.”

This passage is somewhat comic in its truth; communists put value into something arguably repressive. Flynt had a great disdain for European music, and went out of his way to condemn it. In practice this is seen in the form of public protest, writing, and the music he produced. Looking at all his music, his repertoire is made up of folk music, not re-creations of traditionally western classical music. Flynt describes in the passage that somehow culturally black music has been labeled as “bourgeois corruption.” Like Flynt, I find that classification troubling. If anything I

68 Henry Flynt and George Maciunas, “(Music, Dancing/Poetry) pp. 1-1.
69 Henry Flynt and George Maciunas, “(Music, Dancing/Poetry) pp. 1-1.
would think it’s as a reactionary product that bypasses the bourgeois, not a bourgeois corruption. It’s backwards in logic, and Flynt is right- choosing only European popular music is an act of communist cultural suppression. That leaves us with the conclusion of his passage,

“…in general, the music of the Communists, particularly Anglo-American popular music, is simply hopeless. It is a cultural expression of “white”-chauvinism and racism. It is ‘dead’ and on the way out. As I suggested, [culturally black] music is already replaying it among the white masses, wherever they accept rock ’n’ roll, bembé or the like.”

In Flynt’s context, again, he has a valuable point. It would be interesting to have his opinion today, as culturally black music has become widely popular among all cultures, specifically from the United States which is consumed world wide. One point to disagree with, or amend, is that classical music is “hopeless” and “dead on the way.” It can be a common assumption that this is the case, but Western classical music has its way of adapting and coming back time and time again. Does that make it a candidate for being the sole music forced upon the populace? No. But that doesn't mean it shouldn't be heard. In today’s world a lot of Western music is heard by the populace through mediums such as cinema. That being said I don’t want to discredit Flynt, because his idea overall is compelling.

A relationship from this manifesto can be drawn to the cultural styles Flynt chooses to create his music. Piekut offers the following analysis on the manifesto:

“Flynt set out three conditions that he thought revolutionary culture must meet:

first, increase the productivity of labor; second, promote the equality of all.

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70 Henry Flynt and George Maciunas, “(Music, Dancing/Poetry) pp. 1-1.
workers and reduce the stratification of labor by nationality or other categories of false consciousness; and third, bring workers to grips with reality and eliminate escapism in culture”71

The third condition, escapism in culture, is the part which this section is concerned with. Flynt’s politics, which inform this manifesto, created his taste in music. Piekut goes on to refer to the article, saying that Flynt’s categorization of culturally black music includes all music except Anglo-American. “In a swipe towards folk festivals and the like,”72 Flynt clarifies that his categorization is not folk art. What Piekut also recognizes later in the paragraph, is that the manifesto sheds light on Flynt’s music. Flynt’s new categorization of music includes genres with new instruments and techniques. Piekut lists advanced instruments such as electric guitars, electric organs, and new technology like reverb and overdubbing.73 These techniques are probably sounding familiar, and it’s because almost all of these tools were used throughout Flynt’s album *Graduation, Celestial Power / You Are My Everlovin’* and others recorded over ten years after the manifesto was published. In essence, the manifesto foreshadows work Flynt would eventually create, record, and distribute.

71 Benjamin Piekut, “Demolish Serious Culture!,” in Experimentalism Otherwise, p. 95.
72 Benjamin Piekut, “Demolish Serious Culture!,” in Experimentalism Otherwise, p. 96.
73 Benjamin Piekut, “Demolish Serious Culture!,” in Experimentalism Otherwise, p. 96.
Conclusion

A self described nerd born in Greensboro South Carolina. Henry Flynt grew into an artist that would help shape the New York city Fluxus movement for years to come with art, philosophy, mathematics, and music. Growing up in the south during the 1940s Flynt studied classical violin graduating at age 17 to attend Harvard. After dropping out he quickly became involved with La Monte Young in the New York City avant-guard. Following his political beliefs he moved to New York City in 1963 to take a job as a messenger while he created music and wrote influential essays. Throughout the 1960s Flynt wrote many essays on subject such as art, mathematics, economics, philosophy and music. Later in the 70s he became seriously involved in music performance with Young and Christer Hennix. Creating music through the fusion of jazz, blues, and country Flynt created his own unique style with the help of modern technology. He produced many recordings during this time that were later released in the early 2000s.

Throughout all of Flynt’s work, parallels can be drawn to discover how and why Flynt created his music. From various essays and books, he offers a new lens for us to look deeper into his artistic style. His political writings, for example, offer insight to how he chose ethnically based music to create his own compositions. In all Henry Flynt’s life is something like a magnificent puzzle that can be endlessly dissected and put together in order to draw parallels and make discoveries about both his life and the Fluxus movement in the 1960s. Unfortunately much of Flynt’s work is unobtainable. He, like others, went through a transitional period and chose to destroy much of his work in the early 60s. Although this is tragic for the musicologist, just

74 Marcus Boon, “Henry Flynt: American Gothic”

75 Benjamin Piekut, “Demolish Serious Culture!,” in Experimentalism Otherwise, p. 90.
enough remains of his music and writings for information to be drawn, cross-examined and pieced together to create a full story of who Flynt was, and why. There is much of Henry Flynt’s story that remains to be discovered and told, but hopefully time will be rewarding to this southern avant-guard composer who can play the blues.
Discography

Celestial Power
- Released: 1986
- Format: Cassette
- Label: Hundertmark
- Recorded: 1980
- Album: Celestial Power/You Are My Everlovin’

You Are My Everlovin’
- Released: 1986
- Format: Cassette
- Label: Hundertmark
- Recorded: 1981
- Album: Celestial Power/You Are My Everlovin’

Graduation
- Released: 2001
- Format: CD
- Label: Ampersand
- Recorded: 1975-1979
- Album: Graduation

A Portrait
- Released: 2001
- Format: CD
- Label: Ampersand
- Recorded: 1975-1979
- Album: Graduation

Lonesome Train Dreams
- Released: 2001
- Format: CD
- Label: Ampersand
- Recorded: 1975-1979
- Album: Graduation

Double Spindizzy
- Released: 2001
- Format: CD
- Label: Ampersand
- Recorded: 1975-1979
- Album: Graduation
No Rights
- Released: 2001
- Format: CD
- Label: Ampersand
- Recorded: 1975-1979
- Album: Graduation

Virginia Trance
- Released: 2001
- Format: CD
- Label: Ampersand
- Recorded: 1975-1979
- Album: Graduation

Conga
- Released: 2001
- Format: CD
- Label: Ampersand
- Recorded: 1975-1979
- Album: Graduation

Other Albums by Flynt

C Tune
- Released: 2002
- Format: Casette
- Label: Locust Music

Raga Electric
- Released: 2002
- Format: Casette
- Label: Locust Music

Back Porch Hillbilly Blues Volume 1
- Released: 2002
- Format: CD
- Label: Ampersand

Back Porch Hillbilly Blues Volume 2
- Released: 2002
- Format: CD
- Label: Ampersand
New American Ethnic Music Volume 2: Spindizzy
- Released: 2003
- Format: CD
- Label: Recorded

New American Ethnic Music Volume 3: Hillbilly Tape Music
- Released: 2003
- Format: CD
- Label: Ampersand

Back Porch Hillbilly Blues Volumes 1&2
- Released: 2004
- Format: CD
- Label: Bo’Weavil Recordings

Henry Flynt & Nova’Billy - Nova’Billy
- Released: 2007
- Format: CD
- Label: Locust Music

New American Ethnic Music Volume 4: Ascent To The Sun
- Released: 2007
- Format: CD
- Label: Recorded

Henry Flynt / C. C. Hennix - Dharma/Warriors
- Released: 2008
- Format: CD
- Label: Locust Music

Glissando No.1
- Released: 2011
- Format: CD
- Label: Recorded

Henry Flynt & Nova’Billy - Nova’Billy
- Released: 2013
- Format: CD
- Label: Ampersand
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Special acknowledgment to Kyle Gann and all my music professors at Bard College. I’ve learned so much as both a musician- and a person. Thank you for an amazing four years.