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“A book, in its purest form, is a phenomenon of space and time and dimensionality that is unique unto itself. Every time we turn the page, the previous page passes into our past and we are confronted by a new world.” —from “A Book” by Dick Higgins

INTERMEDIA, FLUXUS and the SOMETHING ELSE PRESS: SELECTED WRITINGS BY DICK HIGGINS

edited by Steve Clay and Ken Friedman

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There are few art-world figures as influential—and as little known—as Dick Higgins (1938-1998), co-founder of Fluxus, “polyartist,” poet, scholar, theorist, composer, performer and, not least, the publisher of the Something Else Press. In 1965 he restored the term “intermedia” to the English language, giving it new dimension to recognize the dissolution of boundaries, the expansion of liminal spaces between traditional modes of art making, and the open field for new forms that cannot be compartmentalized. His own contributions to intermedia are many—as a participant and instigator of Happenings, as writer and composer straddling traditional and vanguard forms, among others—but it was the Something Else Press (1963-1974) that redefined how “the book” could inhabit that energized, in-between space.

Often compared with John Cage and Marcel Duchamp, Dick Higgins’s contributions to twentieth century culture and the avant-garde are numerous, not least of which is his commitment to the space of the book as a site for experimentation. Something Else Press was as much a critical statement and radical experiment as it was a collection of books by some of the most luminary artists and writers of the twentieth century: Gertrude Stein, John Cage, Ray Johnson, Dieter Roth, Bern Porter, Emmett Williams, Robert Filliou, George Brecht, among many others. Along with his Great Bear pamphlet series and the Something Else Press newsletter, Higgins exploited and subverted conventional book production and marketing strategies to get unconventional and avant-garde works into the hands of new and often unsuspecting readers.

Edited by Granary Books publisher Steve Clay and Fluxus artist Ken Friedman, this judiciously curated and indispensable compendium of essays, theoretical writings and narrative prose by Higgins dives deep into the ever-influential ideas that he explored in theory and practice. Clay and Friedman have chosen works that illuminate his voracious intellectual appetite, encyclopedic body of knowledge, and playful yet rigorous experimentation (which is mirrored in a substantial index). Along with a wide-ranging selection that includes many writings long out-of-print or difficult to find, the book includes a highly illustrated section devoted to the Something Else Press with a complete checklist accompanied by Higgins’s writings about each book he published.

From the introduction by Steve Clay:

Dick Higgins was born in 1938 and by the time he was twenty-seven, he had co-invented Happenings, co-founded Fluxus, named, practiced, and theorized the concept of intermedia and founded the Something Else Press. He was the quintessential proto-hyphenated artist: poet-writer-painter-performer-composer-editor-filmmaker-designer-typographer-publisher-critic-scholar—and more. Coming of age at exactly the

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right time and place—New York City in the late fifties and early sixties—Higgins incited, nurtured, and chronicled an emerging complex of cultural tendencies that have influenced the experimental art of the past half century. In 1998, he died of a heart attack at the age of sixty following a performance in Quebec City, Canada, but the projects and processes he set in motion reverberate today.

Intermedia, Fluxus and the Something Else Press is a long-overdue survey of Higgins's theoretical writings from throughout his prolific career. Our intention is to inspire and renew interest in Higgins's insights, attitudes, and methods—not simply as historical example (although that's important)—but as a model of inquiry and expression for immediate use . . .

Dick Higgins was an intermedia artist of and for his time, on the proverbial cutting edge of new paradigms within and between poetry, painting, performance, and more. In a 1991 interview he described the publication list of the Something Else Press as “love letters to the future.” We offer the current selection to another future, particularly to young artists, poets, and publishers, that through the works of Dick Higgins they might find new possibilities for their own.

Quoted in the afterword “Eleven Snapshots of Dick Higgins” by Hannah Higgins:

I suppose I'm part Emerson or Thoreau, and part Davey Crockett. For all my delight in other cultures and languages, my pleasure in digging gold nuggets out of bypassed selves, I'm still a crackerbarrel yankee at heart. I've whored, seduced, and gambled. I've been a precocious brat and a sedate businessman. I've been insane and sick. I've had enough fancy dinners to know that the best food is food for thought. I've worked in factories and universities enough to know that there's really precious little difference between them. I've tried to be a saint and found that wasn't me.* —Dick Higgins

* Dick Higgins, *A Life* (unpublished autobiographical manuscript), 1980, the Estate of Dick Higgins, 242.

About the editors:

Steve Clay is the publisher of Granary Books, as well as an editor, curator, and archivist specializing in literature and art of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. He is the author or editor of several volumes including *A Book of the Book: Some Works & Projections about the Book & Writing* with Jerome Rothenberg and *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing 1960-1980*, with Rodney Phillips.

Ken Friedman is the youngest member of the Fluxus group, the former manager of the Something Else Press, and editor of *The Fluxus Reader*, the first comprehensive scholarly overview of Fluxus. He is Chair Professor of Design Innovation Studies at the College of Design and Innovation at Tongji University in Shanghai and also Professor Emeritus and former Dean of the Faculty of Design at Swinburne University in Melbourne, Australia as well as co-editor of the MIT Press series *Design Thinking, Design Theory*.



The Something Else Press and Dick Higgins has had an enormous influence on Siglio and its mission, and we've been honored to reprint one of his first Something Else Press titles, *The Paper Snake* by Ray Johnson, as well as model our complete edition of *Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)* by John Cage on his Great Bear Pamphlet publication of Part III. Siglio's ephemera series is also inspired, in part, by the Great Bear Pamphlets and other Fluxus printed matter. Siglio has also published work by Alison Knowles (who, when Higgins proposed the name “Shirtsleeves Press,” said: “That's no good. Why don't you call it something else.”). Knowles's “A House of Dust” appears as an excerpt in *It Is Almost That: A Collection of Image+Text Work by Women Artists and Writers*, and the complete text is included in the *It Is Almost That (Box)*.

In 2018 Siglio is celebrating its tenth year of fiercely independent publishing, driven by its feminist ethos and its commitment to artists and writers who obey no boundaries, pay no fealty to trends and invite readers to see the world anew by reading word and image in provocative, unfamiliar ways. Since its inception, Siglio has seen publishing itself as an act of resistance to the literal, the authoritarian and the facile, publishing cross-disciplinary, hybrid and often unwieldy works. **We continue this mission in 2018 with a rigorously eclectic list by Mirtha Dermisache, Ellie Ga, Karen Green and Dick Higgins**, artists and writers who resist categorical distinctions, envisioning image, language and the space of the book in expansive and utterly imaginative ways.

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