

metadramas

by Dick Higgins

Statement about my "metadramas"

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One of the main genres of Fluxus pieces of the 1960s is and was "events." These were first done before Fluxus, and came to be conceptually framed as a sort of cognate of happenings, which were new at the time-that is, intermedial, free-form pieces which lay conceptually among the bounds of music, theater and visual art. Events differed from happenings in that they were always as compressed as possible, minimal statements that would provide a mental or emotional impact. But, of course, they were highly abstract. I did them, George Brecht did them, and others of the Fluxus artists did them also though, for the most part, somewhat later than 1958 when George, I, Al Hansen and others studied with John Cage in his class at the New School for Social Research in New York, a story which has been told, more or less, to death.

However, events made their point and the genre became well defined over the years, through Fluxus concerts and individual performances and works by, quite literally, hundreds of artists. In the sixties, when purely formal explorations seemed essential to sweep away the overly personal baggage of the 1960s, this was a positive thing. However, in the 1980s, when personal expression has been minimized, and when art performances, the heirs in some respect of happenings, often celebrate boredom and almost always deal essentially with technical and formal concerns, it seems more desirable to do pieces which are mainly minimal emotional statements or narrative ones, complete with characterizations in most cases. I had done a few such pieces previously, but not so consciously as now. I call them "metadramas" because they must be dramatic in order to satisfy the criterion, and, the "meta-" part suggests that they are "next to" or "about" what they relate to-that is, some are dramas about the drama, while others simply don't pretend to be dramas but do point in that direction. I wrote about sixty of them in the summer of 1985, destroyed most of them, and then noticed that they seemed to define a genre to which the earlier events belong, though

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