"The Black Power Mixtape" + Christopher D'Arcangelo + Fluxus

Revolution! Anarchy! Retrospectives! Three shows look back at politics in art

By Martha Schwendener
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Some absurdism in a box for you: George Maciunas's *Burglary Fluxkit*, 1971

Details:

The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975
Third Streaming
10 Greene Street
646-370-3877, thirdstreaming.com

Anarchism Without Adjectives: On the Work of Christopher D'Arcangelo (1975-1979)
Artists Space
38 Greene Street
212-226-3970, artistsspace.org

Fluxus and the Essential

It has been said that the '60s were about revolution and the '70s about anarchy. You could make the case for this, based on British pop songs—say, the Beatles' "Revolution" (1968) and the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the U.K." (1976). But politics aren't so easily generalized. Hannah Arendt's *On Revolution* and George Woodcock's seminal *Anarchism* were both published in 1962, and Gil Scott-Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" appeared in 1970.

Radical politics are kind of a favored subject in the art world, however. And as Arab Spring wanes and fall hits New York, there seems to be an uptick of shows that sift through the '60s and '70s, suggesting, perhaps, some parallels with our own shaky moment.

On the revolution front, the exhibition "The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975" at Third Streaming started with a film (currently showing at Lincoln Plaza and IFC) of the same title, made with footage discovered in the archives of the Swedish National Broadcast Company. The film includes a scorching interview with Angela Davis in California State Prison, Stokely Carmichael on a speaking tour in Europe, and a weird scene on a Swedish tour bus driving through Harlem. The exhibition includes FBI film clips, more Swedish footage, and ephemera such as Swedish-language versions of Angela Davis's 1974 autobiography (*Självbiografi*) and Carmichael's

Questions of Life
Grey Art Gallery
100 Washington Square East
212-998-6780, nyu.edu/greyart

and Charles Hamilton's 1967 *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (a/k/a *Svartmakt*).

Why would the Swedes take an interest in the black power movement—aside from charges of exoticism or cultural voyeurism? Part of it is the pan-Western youth-revolution spirit of the '60s. But Sweden was also a haven for political dissidents and disaffected jazzmen escaping racism, and it opposed the Vietnam War so vehemently that the U.S. froze diplomatic ties with Sweden in 1972. Both the film and the installation at Third Streaming offer versions of how revolution went viral in the '60s, creating surprising sympathies and alliances.

Anarchy is on the roster at Artists Space, though it's confined to the art world. In 1975, Christopher D'Arcangelo chained himself to the front door of the Whitney Museum with a message written on his back in magic marker: "When I state that I am an anarchist, I must also state that I am not an anarchist in order to be in keeping with the (_ _ _ _) idea of anarchism. Long live anarchism."

The exhibition is suitably anarchistic, in an inside-art kind of way. There are no objects, only video interviews with artists including Daniel Buren (D'Arcangelo was his assistant), Lawrence Weiner, Ben Kinmont, and Peter Nadin, and art historian Benjamin Buchloh. The speakers hold up photos and documents and describe D'Arcangelo's work, which includes anything from the Whitney action to artful records of his day job renovating downtown lofts.

The catalog has a quotation from Brian O'Doherty's famous tract "Inside the White Cube" (1976) that sums up the reception of D'Arcangelo's career: "Anarchic gestures in America do not do well. They tend to refute the official optimism born of hope. Accumulating below the threshold of good form and acceptable style, they tend to be forgotten." Except that O'Doherty is a little like Karl Marx, who imagined capitalism would collapse without foreseeing how outsourcing cheap labor would extend it into the next millennium.

In the art world, if you're in the right company to start with, you have a good chance of being remembered. D'Arcangelo worked at John Weber Gallery with Jeffrey Deitch, longtime Soho gallerist and now director of MoCA in L.A., and he was included in a 1978 show at Artists Space curated by Metro Pictures' Janelle Reiring. So, anarchy with an asterisk: confined to art and renamed Institutional Critique. (Although D'Arcangelo's "career" itself feels somewhat anarchistic: Active only a few years, he committed suicide at the age of 24.)

Fluxus, which is being celebrated all over the New York region on the 50th anniversary of its first New York event, eschewed distinct political alliances or exhortations. But the catalog for the Grey Art Gallery show links Fluxus with Duchamp's idea of the "anartist," which carries obvious anarchist overtones.

Duchamp's stamp is all over the objects and non-objects here, particularly the absurdist boxes that recall his portable mini-museum, *Boîte-en-valise* (1935-1941). Standouts include Fluxus principal George Maciunas's *Burglary Fluxkit* (1971) with keys and *Excreta Fluxorum* (1973) with various types of animal shit cataloged in little compartments; Larry Miller's *Orifice Flux Plugs* (1974), with glass eyeball, crayon, and corncob pipe; and Ben Vautier's *A Flux Suicide Kit* (1963), with razor blade, fish hook, and rope (shades of D'Arcangelo, who's in an adjunct exhibition downstairs).

More menacing objects recall *Black Power Mixtape*, as Angela Davis's interview was framed around the question of violence. The most striking example here is the actual door from Maciunas's Soho loft, which has huge metal cutting blades bolted to its surface. It evokes safe houses and hideouts but also recent work by artists such as Claire Fontaine or the Invisible Committee's incendiary 2007 text *The Coming Insurrection*, which was embraced by some art-world types and influenced contemporary anarchist groups.

Which raises the question: What does this mean for the contemporary moment? Some writers describe anarchy as the consequence of revolution. And despite Arab Spring, popular rhetoric in this country leans more toward anarchy: pulp TV shows such as *Sons of Anarchy* or an upcoming exhibition at the Whitney, "David Smith: Cubes and Anarchy." (Some have suggested the Tea Party as a right-wing anarchist movement.)

Or maybe, like the simultaneous appearance of Arendt's and Woodcock's books—or Marx and Mikhail Bakunin—revolution and anarchy can coexist. In the art world, where theory and practice get blurred—along with reality and fantasy, past and present, and a few other things—this is a distinct possibility.