The German artist Wolf Vostell launched Fluxus Zug in 1981. While Vostell understood the artwork to be a travelling happening and an unconventional academy, I will present Fluxus Zug additionally to have been a conceptual, albeit temporary, museum that signified the changing cultural conceptions of history, as well as an alternative, conceptual archive, which Vostell manipulated with the aim of reviving and commenting on the troubled relationship between history, memory, and the Archive.

### The Container Cars of Fluxus Zug

Fluxus Zug comprised nine shipping containers — two supplied by the Deutsche Bundesbahn (DB) and seven by the Hamburg-based shipping firm CONTRANS — that Vostell filled with multi-sensorial environments and documentation. The train traveled by flatbed railcars to sixteen cities in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) between May 1 and September 29, 1981. Fluxus Zug was open to the public for five days in each city, and was either parked in a train station or in a public square or park. Vostell travelled to the cities by car, where he held press conferences and discussions with visitors. NRW’s cultural ministry financed the project, while consultant Dagmar von Gottberg and CONTRANS public relations officer Peter Kruse oversaw logistics and marketing. A person designated for every city organized local cultural activities to correspond with the schedule of Fluxus Zug. Student volunteers assisted the approximately 60,000 people who visited the mobile project during its tour.¹

Vostell began planning Fluxus Zug in 1979 after Gottberg and Kruse proposed circulating contemporary art throughout West Germany in CONTRANS containers. For Gottberg and Kruse, the novel idea enhanced the marketing of CONTRANS and its support of artists. For Vostell, Fluxus Zug offered an opportunity to revisit his earlier idea for an ideal academy, which he had conceived in early 1969. Vostell’s model for an ideal academy embodied the era’s collective, utopian spirit, as well as the trend in art away from objects towards concepts. Vostell did not realize his concept for an ideal academy at the time, but the idea is preserved in an interview and drawing published in 1969 in the second issue of the journal Interfunktionen. When Vostell resurrected this model from his archive ten years later, the revolutionary fervor of 1968 had abated and object-based art, particularly painting, had taken the market by storm. I want to suggest that Vostell echoed these shifts in the market and in art itself by creating Fluxus Zug, thereby transforming his original, concept for an ideal academy into a spectacularly visual and experiential reality. Before further analyzing the conceptual origins of Fluxus Zug and how I believe it raised questions related to the archive, let me describe what visitors encountered once inside Fluxus Zug.

The public entered through the Video Library/Communication Car (Videothek/Kommunikationswagen), which contained print materials about the project, and video and slides documenting Vostell’s past work and artistic philosophy. Visitors then proceeded through the remaining containers, which were connected end-to-end. The second container was lined with eight large paintings depicting human figures copulating with angels, some of which are represented wearing gas masks. Vostell attached actual plastic objects in the form of meat, or steaks, to the painted canvases sardonically underscoring the environment’s title, The Angels or My Sweet Feast for the Eyes (Die Engel oder meine süsse Augenweide). In car three, visitors encountered the theme: The Rivers or Every Person is an Artwork (Die Flüsse oder jeder Mensch ist ein Kunstwerk). Entering a long dark and narrow corridor, one could press the seventeen doorbell buttons on the walls and hear distorted excerpts of Giovanni Battista Pergolesi’s Stabat Mater, sung by Spanish mezzo-soprano Teresa Berganza. This strange sound played through hidden tape recorders, and eerily suggested traces of the millions transported to and killed in concentration camps.² The next car was better lit, but exuded a feeling of postwar isolation. Enigmatically titled The Dances or Human Rights are Artworks (Die Tänze oder die Menschenrechte sind Kunstwerke), car four featured a living room setting ominously coated in concrete, the hard, intractable materiality of which transformed an intimate space for leisure into a coldly hostile environment suggestive of the site where the fundamental rights of humanity were equivocated in the family home. It equally referred to the Berlin Wall, which delineated the divide...
between two different political systems and attitudes towards citizens’ rights.

A Mercedes-Benz car filled the fifth container. A color television embedded in the car’s grill played “moving electronic portraits” of the visitors as they entered the container, their images captured on a video camera installed on the car’s dashboard. Twenty smaller TV monitors set in the hood, roof, and trunk played static, the sound corresponding to and commenting on the environment’s title, *The Winds or the Media (Die Winde oder die Medien).* Mirrors on the ceiling reflected images of the upturned TVs. Artificial fireplace logs glowed in the car’s backseat and a limbless female mannequin, connected to a monitor by a plastic tube, lay behind the vehicle on the coal-covered floor. Visitors tracked coal dust into car six, titled *The Stones or the Ancestry of People (Die Steine oder die Herkunft des Menschen).* It featured two round tables holding telephones with the bones of animals replacing or attached to many of the phone receivers; some of the phone cords connected to empty burlap coal sacks hanging on the walls.

Car seven exuded the feeling of death and the difficulty of communication already suggested in car six, *The Stones,* where the stones, bones, and empty coal sacks were mute. Entitled *The Clouds, or the Iron Curtain (Die Wolken oder der eiserne Vorhang),* the environment of car seven featured ears protruding from its walls and eight mannequins lying on eight beds staggered along the walls such that visitors had to squeeze around them. Lead covered everything, and mannequins, lying in the beds and also covered with lead, were wired to move mechanically, banging against their encasements. The scene suggested a hospital triage room, a morgue, or a collective coffin in which the walls literally had listened even to death. *The Clouds* referred to Cold War espionage and spying, not only by governments but also by the populace, and even families, listening to and reporting on each other. The ears also called attention to how what has been said and heard is altered, forgotten, and lost over time, as Jacques Derrida pointed out about the ontology of the archive whose “traces...record only what is written and processed, not what is said and thought.” After the lead-shrouded bodies of container seven, visitors confronted, in car eight, seven taxidermied dogs displayed lying on red, aromatic, Spanish paprika, which covered the floor. Vostell called this car *The Fires or My Combs are Made of Sugar (Die Feuer oder meine Kämme sind aus Zucker).* He added dried pepper pods hanging on strings from the ceiling and knives extending upwards from the dogs’ bodies. The ninth, and final car contained enlarged black and white photographs of works that Vostell had previously realized in or designed for NRW.

### The Ideal Academy

Vostell described *Fluxus Zug* as a mobile art academy where people could share their experiences and reflections with him. Topics of conversation would not be restricted to the subject of art, but art was to be the catalyst for discussion and learning. As Vostell explained to a group of visitors in Dortmund, “I know that it is not beautiful. I present us with questions, about our relationship to life, to materials, to the spiritual, to nature. I try to render psychic (seelische) events sensible.” He later compared the environments to “modern fairytale,” layered with meaning. Thus did Vostell give abstract problems physically perceivable form in *Fluxus Zug,* challenging visitors to unravel their significance in order to revive and re-experience history, thereby recreating the conceptual Archive. Together through open dialogue, visitors and artist were to formulate tentative responses to the questions Vostell had visualized. In the process, they would collaboratively generate new knowledge and questions about their own conditions of being, as well as belonging and responsibility to the states of collective social being. In this way, *Fluxus Zug* would realize an alternative academy’s overall pedagogical mission.

Learning through democratic communication and interaction was crucial for Vostell’s earlier proposed ideal academy. Vostell explained to Friedrich (“Fritz”) Heubach, in an interview in January 1969, that the ideal academy was to be an ongoing series of artistic and political interventions into everyday life in the form of a yearlong happening. Approximately twenty advisors (*Berater*) from disciplines ranging from the arts to the sciences would travel via automobiles or train to different cities in West Germany and initiate ephemeral “learning events” (*Lehreignisse*) with the public in factories, movie theaters, and banks. Vostell’s concept of the academy imagined that it would have its own doctor, sexual advisor, psychologist, electrical engineer, political scientist, and sociologist; and it would offer seminars where the public could ask any and all questions and receive answers from a variety of advisors and specialists. This, in stark contrast to the practices of traditional academies. In addition, a twenty-four-hour television and radio station would allow the public and advisors to be in constant contact, regardless of their physical proximity. After one or two years, the advisors would change and the academy could adopt a new form and communication technologies to meet the changing needs of the period and the community.

The diversity of advisors that Vostell suggested for the first year underscores his broad, interdisciplinary approach to education, and his belief in art as “an egalitarian social practice grounded on the principles of dialogue, democracy, and shared creation.” The advisors included such happenings and Fluxus artists as Jean-Jacques Lebel, Allan Kaprow, Milan Knízák, Gábor Altorjay, George Maciunas, Dick Higgins, Ben Vautier, and Henry Flynt. Appropriate to the aims of Vostell’s ideal academy, these artists de-emphasized aesthetics and the art object, but instead stressed ideas, interactivity, and provoking questions. They presented everyday actions and materials as art, and created text-based scores that could be interpreted and realized in numerous ways by anyone, depending on the breadth and invention of one’s imagination. Vostell also suggested as advisors the musicians Mauricio Kagel and Frank Zappa; Beat poet Allan Ginsberg; *Interfunktionen* founder Fritz Heubach; philosopher Peter Gorsen; psychoanalyst Alexander
Mitscherlich; radiologist Joachim Gasch; and electrical engineer Peter Saage. Additionally, Vostell chose two political activists to be advisors: Fritz Teufel and Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Notably, Cohn-Bendit, a leader of the student movement in France, also advocated for educational reform and the creation of an alternative academy:

We must launch a university ourselves, on a completely new basis, even if it only lasts a few weeks....In all faculties we shall open seminars—not lecture courses, obviously—on the problems of the workers' movement, on the use of technology in the interests of man, on the possibilities opened up by automation. And all this not from a theoretical viewpoint..., but by posing concrete problems.9

Cohn-Bendit's and Vostell's institutional models are similar in that both proposed emphasizing seminars, collaboration, action, and technology, and both were conceived as temporary. While Cohn-Bendit emphasized politics, Vostell framed his academy within the context of art, which a drawing he created as an appendix to his ideal academy interview highlights.

Titled “THE IDEAL ACADEMY”: AN AUTOBAHN AND HIGH-SPEED TRAIN HAPPENING! (“DIE IDEALE AKADEMIE”: EIN AUTOBAHN UND D-ZUG HAPPENING!), the two-page drawing was printed in Interfunktionen following Vostell's interview. The central image (printed on the left-hand page) is a map of West Germany's autobahn network from December 1967. To the left of the map is a handwritten list of cities, each with an arrow pointing to the map, suggesting where the academy would stop during the year. Four sweeping arrows lead from the map to instructions for actions written on the opposing page. A capital "H" enclosed in a dotted line lies between the map and instructions, the symbol Vostell used to signify the site of a happening. The broken circle around the "H" suggests that while a happening is distinct from everyday life, it is not entirely separate from it, as the boundary between the two must be porous.10

A combination of theater and the visual arts, happenings were also conceptual, blurring the boundaries between artist and audience. Occurring in multiple locations, happenings involved elements of chance, and were non-linear and non-hierarchical. Allan Kaprow, who coined the term “happening” in 1959, wrote in 1961 that happenings must also be considered “a moral act.”11 For Vostell, happenings were also pedagogical in that they contributed to the full development of participants’ conscience by suggesting and provoking myriad...
associations across time and space, often related to life, death, and violence, as the instructions on Vostell’s ideal academy drawing attest.¹² Notated on the drawing’s right-hand page, Vostell wrote:

REST STOP HELMSTEDT: CLEAN 99 door handles from 99 CARS!
ON THE SIDE OF WIESBADEN 4KM SPOON
SCULPTURE
between Cologne and Düsseldorf throw gold coins
out of moving car into the landscape.
62 KM south of Stuttgart—lay out 1 KM of bread next
to the guardrail¹³

The succinctness of these prompts belie the complex web of memories, experiences, and meanings that each elicits, particularly within the context of postwar West Germany.

For example, the town of Helmstedt (where people were to clean ninety-nine car door handles at the rest stop) was the site of Checkpoint Alpha, a major border crossing between West and East Germany, from the end of World War II until the fall of the Berlin Wall. Travelers who stopped there would have been visually confronted with Germany’s East/West divide and the continued presence of the Allied and Soviet militaries. Focusing on the car through the act of polishing may have triggered memories of West Germany’s so-called economic miracle of the 1950s, when cars became “not so much a matter of luxury or prestige, but what might be classified as ‘necessary consumption.’”¹⁴ Cars were also emblematic of Germany’s Nazi past, as Hitler had promoted the construction of national highways and aimed to provide an affordable car for every family: the Volkswagen, literally the “people’s car,” with Volk connoting racially pure Germans. Notably, Helmstedt is near Wolfsburg, the site of a large Volkswagen factory. Volkswagen was one of the first German companies to use Soviet prisoners of war for forced labor during WWII, starting in 1941; and, beginning in 1942, it used Eastern workers, or civilians deported to Germany from the German-occupied Soviet territories for slave labor.¹⁵ By the late 1960s, however, Volkswagen vehicles had become popular among members of the counterculture. Thus, cleaning car door handles—whether done physically or conceptually—would have generated a variety of memories, ranging from the forced labor camps and Hitler’s role in developing Germany’s transportation systems to the different postwar economic paths of the FRG and DDR, the two Germanys.

The “four kilometer spoon sculpture,” to be realized in Wiesbaden, similarly relates both to West Germany’s present and its Nazi past. It also referred to the arts. The idea of creating a sculpture of spoons suggests a celebration of the readymade and the ordinary as art, in keeping with the aesthetics of Fluxus, officially founded at the “Fluxus International Festival of New Music,” which took place in Wiesbaden in September 1962, and which Vostell helped to organize. Yet, the spoons could also be connected to the Nazis’ confiscation of everyday goods from those it arrested, from Jews and Roma to leftist intellectuals, artists, and homosexuals, before transporting them all to concentration work and death camps. Recalling the masses of identical objects found at Auschwitz and elsewhere and, by the late 1960s on public display, the spoon sculpture could have symbolized the visual trace of the millions who perished in the Holocaust. Germany’s fascist past was of central concern in the 1960s, as former Nazi leaders were publicly put on trial, as West German youth rebelled against their parents’ real or perceived complicity with Nazi politics, and as West German politicians implemented emergency laws in May 1968 that granted the government more authority, which some interpreted as a return to fascism.

The Cologne and Düsseldorf actions also evoke the psychological and physical devastation of WWII and its aftermath, as well as West Germany’s contemporary art scene. The two cities on the Rhine River were largely destroyed during WWII bombing campaigns, but they had become relatively wealthy avant-garde and commercial art centers in the postwar period. Cologne was home to Mauricio Kagel’s Ensemble for New Music, Karlheinz Stockhausen’s WDR Studio for Electronic Music, prominent galleries, and the annual Cologne Art Market, which began operation in 1967. Düsseldorf was known for its Art Academy and controversial artist/professor Joseph Beuys, whose activities had inspired Heubach to publish the ideal academy issue of Interfunktionen. Although both Vostell and Beuys exhibited in galleries and profited from their art, they protested the commodification of art and the exclusion of happenings, actions, and conceptual art from such venues as the Cologne Art Market. Throwing gold, the standard of monetary exchange, into the landscape between the two cities could be interpreted as a demonstration against capitalism, as much as a conceptual curative offering precious metal to heal the Deutsche Heimat.

Likewise, setting bread alongside the guardrail south of Stuttgart could be considered a material offering highlighting the dialectical juxtaposition of life and death. Placed on the side of the road, the bread could have conjured thoughts of the thousands who died in accidents on the autobahn.¹⁶ The bread, a nutritional staple, could also have summoned memories of dietary rations. Vostell similarly referred to rations in 1966 in Yellow Pages or an Action Page, a work that combined a page from the New York Yellow Pages with a 1947 German ration card advising the public to follow the ration stipulations for one month. In sticking to the rations one was asked to “enter into both the physiological conditions and mental spaces of the average German citizen” in the immediate postwar years.¹⁷

The ideal academy’s bread action could equally have called attention to hunger in Third World countries, as the media’s coverage of famines, especially in West Germany at the time, made them part of the collective consciousness and conscience. To wit, Vostell was criticized by some West Germans for wasting large amounts of foodstuffs in his art. Kym Lanzetta has argued that Vostell wanted to incite strong reactions, as he impelled people
to confront the excesses and wastefulness of modern daily life through his art.18 Using bread as an artistic material, he challenged the public to conceptualize the conditions that allowed for bread, a staple food, to be treated as an expendable surplus, and to reflect upon their own wasteful actions.

Vostell acknowledged that his 1969 ideal academy was a model for Fluxus Zug in the catalog to Fluxus Zug. There he reproduced half of the Interfunktionen drawing that I just discussed, the page with the autobahn map, and the entire interview. His intentional omission of the drawing’s second page and placement of the drawing before, rather than after, the interview highlights a primary difference between the two academies: the one he conceptualized for Interfunktionen and the one he realized in Fluxus Zug. The former consisted primarily of immaterial experiences and conceptual actions, while the latter was comprised of the nine environment-filled shipping containers with which an actual public could and did interact. As noted above, this shift reflected the resurgence of the art object in art in the 1980s. What is more, by reintroducing his ideal academy model to the public in Fluxus Zug, twenty years after the original concept appeared in Interfunktionen, Vostell signaled how he altered cultural conceptions of history and of the archive.

The Archive

The term “archive” often evokes the image of a repository of documents and records, materials conceived as the externalization of internal memories and traces of events from which history is written and on which education is based. The archive is also considered to represent the material artifacts that constitute collective cultural memory.19 Vostell began building such a collection in the mid-1950s, and in 1971, he established the Happening Archive Berlin (HAB) in his West Berlin flat.20 Consisting of all manner of material, from copious records of his own and other artists’ work to drawings, photographs, and ephemera, Vostell transformed his private collection into a public Archive, uniting the personal with the historic, or even recollected, a fracture is created in the archive.

Yet, it is precisely at these sites of discontinuity that the archive can be entered and an interpretation can be leveraged. One such point of disjuncture can be found in the Fluxus Zug catalog where the ideal academy interview and drawing were reproduced in an altered form from the original Interfunktionen publication. Vostell’s deletion of the second page of the ideal academy drawing from the Fluxus Zug catalog may be understood as a selective manipulation of the archive and as an attempt to rewrite the historical record. Only 250 copies of the ideal academy issue of Interfunktionen were published in 1969, so relatively few have seen Vostell’s complete drawing, printed after his interview. In comparison, while it is unknown how many of the approximately 60,000 visitors to Fluxus Zug looked through or purchased a Fluxus Zug catalog, the number was likely greater than 250. This means the altered ideal academy drawing and interview are better known than the original.

The Fluxus Zug catalog does not simply register the creation of another fissure in the archive or even the reinterpretation of a historical document; it also underscores a shift from historical to geographic thinking, a shift that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari articulated in “Rhizome,” an essay that appeared in West Germany in 1977. Drawing metaphors and models from nature and contemporary artists’ practices (especially from artists involved with happenings, Fluxus, and conceptual art, such as Vostell and the artists he named as advisors for the ideal academy), Deleuze and Guattari introduced ‘concepts like ‘nomadic,’ the model of the ‘tuber’ rather than the root, of ‘proliferation’ rather than growth, of the ‘rhizome’ rather than the tree model and a new relationship of individual and collective in a ‘rhizomatic practice.” They also challenged the need to show linear historical development.24 Instead of family trees, depicting a hierarchical chain of progress, maps, which are dynamic, non-hierarchical, and have myriad starting points, were viewed as a more appropriate way of representing genealogies.

Thus, when Vostell repositioned the map of his ideal academy before the interview text in the 1981 catalog, he signaled a rhizomatic, geographical conception of history. The ideal academy from 1969 was a model for Fluxus Zug, but it was not the only model. There was no single, linear narrative that ran from the ideal academy to Fluxus Zug, just as the ideal academy map visualized how there was no single route that the academy could have traveled around West Germany. In this regard, I would argue that the Fluxus Zug catalog provides a metaphorical map of the journey Vostell embarked on in creating his mobile academy. In addition to the ideal academy drawing and interview, there are numerous images of artworks by Vostell and other artists that incorporated trains, images of artworks by Vostell that included maps or various communication technologies, and fragments of erotic imagery from ancient Greece. There are also photographs of trains and train tracks taken during both World Wars and the Cold War. Their presence in the catalog suggests that they were all starting points for different aspects of Fluxus Zug. Indeed, there are traces of them in the environments that comprised Fluxus Zug, as well as in the project’s overall design.

Additional images in Vostell’s archive further highlight the proliferation of imagery that he drew upon. For example, the mannequin behind the car in Die Winde
refers to the cover image of the April 13, 1981 issue of Der Spiegel, depicting Gudrun Ensslin being force-fed for a story about whether it was torture to force-feed captured members of the left-wing Red Army Faction (or Baader-Meinhof Gang). For the organization of the “bodies” in Die Wolken, Vostell was inspired by a photograph of a police investigator photographing individuals in a New York morgue. The specificity of the images did not necessarily concern Vostell. Rather, he used them as archival images for the construction of environments that conjured memories of the millions tortured and killed across temporal and geographical boundaries, their deaths leaving traumatic voids in the archive. In such evocations, Vostell encouraged Fluxus Zug visitors to arrive at their own associations among experimental art, German history, and contemporary politics. In addition, in the context of archival research, he asked viewers to consider how such archival material itself contributes to troubling the archive and the writing of history.

In both his ideal academy and Fluxus Zug, Vostell constructed and orchestrated unexpected juxtapositions of imagery and concepts that weld history together in new configurations, and open interpretation out to the continuities of otherwise apparently disconnected histories. By conceiving of both academies as nomadic and temporary, Vostell called attention to how history and knowledge are in a state of constant flux and themselves constitute fluid concepts to be manipulated and reformed.
ENDNOTES

1 Bertram Müller, “Das Happening und seine Erben,” Rheinische Post (Leverkusen) (September 25, 1981); and Stefan Klute, interview with the author, December 3, 2010.
3 According to Klute, the TVs were meant to play distorted television programs. Due to technological problems, they mostly played static. Interview with the author.
12 José Antonio Agúndez García, 10 Happenings von Wolf Vostell, trans. Helmtrud Rumpf (Mérida: Junta de Extremadura, 2002), 63.
16 There were approximately 8,000 traffic fatalities annually in the early 1950s, 12,800 by 1956, and 190,000 in 1972. Thomas Zeller, Driving Germany: The Landscape of the German Autobahn, 1930-1970 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 196.
20 Today the HAB, now called the Archivo Happening Vostell, is in the Museo Vostell Malpartida, Spain.
22 Derrida, Archive Fever.
23 Ibid., 16.