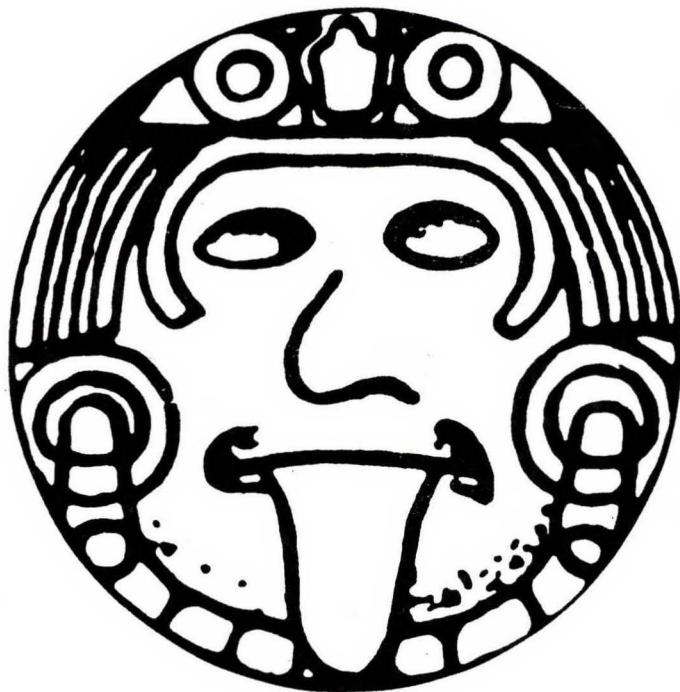

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FLUXUS RESEARCH



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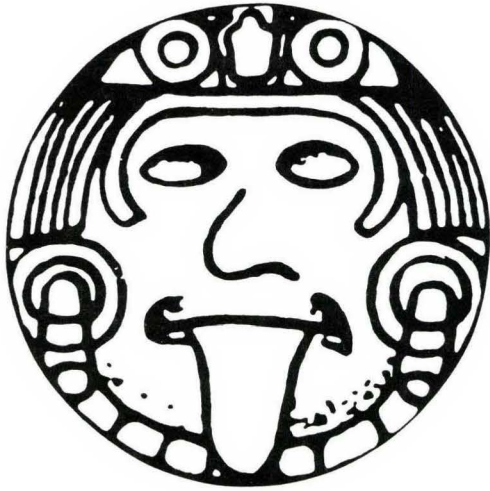
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FLUXUS RESEARCH



FLUXUS RESEARCH

AS THE 30th anniversary of Fluxus approaches, it is topic of increasing interest for research. Fluxus has made lasting contributions to our thinking about art and culture. In art, at its edges, and in a wider frame of reference, concepts pioneered by Fluxus have had enduring value.

Many ideas have been initiated and developed by Fluxus artists. Often, the innovations were described in terms they devised to articulate ideas that hadn't existed before. The fields that Fluxus pioneered include *concept art* (Henry Flynt), *intermedia* (Dick Higgins), *events* and *event structures* (George Brecht, Yoko Ono, Ken Friedman), *scores* (John Cage, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, George Brecht, George Maciunas, Arthur K pcke), *happenings* (Allan Kaprow, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, Wolf Vostell, Milan Knizak), *The Eternal Network* (Robert Filliou, George Brecht), *video* (Nam June Paik, Wolf Vostell), *exemplativism* (Dick Higgins), *performance art* (Alison Knowles, Geoff Hendricks, Jean Dupuy), *social sculpture* (Joseph Beuys), *multiples* (Daniel Spoerri, Dieter Roth, George Maciunas, Joseph Beuys), *magic theater* (Bengt af Klintberg, Willem de Ridder), *concept music* (La Monte Young, Henry Flynt), *artists' books* and *artists' publishing* (Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, George Maciunas, Philip Corner, Milan Knizak, Robert Filliou, Eric Andersen, Ben Vautier, Ken Friedman, Per Kirkeby, David Mayor, Felipe Ehrenberg, Bengt af Klintberg), *total art* and *total art theater* (Ben Vautier), *artists' records* (Yoshimasa Wada, Joseph Beuys, Maurizio Nannucci, Milan Knizak, Richard Maxfield), *broken music* (Milan Knizak), the *book object* (Alison Knowles), *theater of the object* (Ken Friedman), *ontology of new music* (Nam June Paik), and many more.

Some of these terms indicate ideas, some indicate media, some indicate specific art forms or kinds of objects. While the broadest – such as video, intermedia and concept art – have changed the face of art as we know it, all have had an

effect. It is impossible to do serious research in any of the contemporary arts today without finding important traces of Fluxus. Before 1980, that was absolutely true of experimental media, though not of painting and sculpture. Since 1980, with the decisive influence of Joseph Beuys on many of the most influential artists of our time, it has also been true of painting and sculpture. Indeed, when Dutch critic and gallerist Harry Ruhé termed Fluxus “the most radical and experimental art movement of the 1960s,” he suggested that the very radical nature of the Fluxus experiment grew from the fact that it did not propose works of art to which artists must respond, but that it proposed ways of thinking about art and life from which other ideas and approaches could grow.

One profound way of teaching is to create models. Ken Friedman has stressed this aspect of Fluxus, Fluxus as a laboratory. In the 1970s, Friedman often used the term *research art*, art as a form of research. True to the idea of research, one of the goals of Fluxus has been to create ways of making art and thinking about art that others can adapt and use. The Fluxus experiments were designed to be reproducible, in effect, from experimental notes and proposals, much as research and experiments were intended in science. Fluxus experiments were created to put tools in the hand of other artists. Perhaps the best example of this is Nam June Paik’s creation of video – video, the medium itself, as an idea, as a process, as a tool. That invention is as important as any of Paik’s own video works. And if Paik, like other Fluxus artists, says it is possible for younger artists to become Fluxus artists, he also points out that there’s no reason to do so: the tools exist as tools, and with those tools, they can create their own kinds of art, their own ideas about art, their own ways of approaching art and life.

René Block coined the term *fluxism* to stress Fluxus as a philosophy, an approach, a way of dealing with art and life that exists, in its own right, as distinct from the participants in the historical Fluxus group. When Addi Kjøpcke said that the only true Fluxus was that form of Fluxus that could be carried out at a distance, working from a score, that is what he meant. Fluxus was an attitude, an approach not restricted to the objects or relics that embodied specific moments in physical form.

That’s also what Dick Higgins meant when he wrote that “Fluxus is not a moment in history or an art movement. Fluxus is a way of doing things, a tradition, and a way of life and death.”

My involvement in Fluxus began in the late 1960s. In the early 1970s, I organized an experimental art laboratory in Lund called Galerie S:t Petri. During the 70s, we presented

exhibitions of work by many Fluxus artists, including exhibitions and projects by Eric Andersen, Bengt af Klintberg, J.O. Mallander, Dick Higgins, Ken Friedman, Henning Christiansen, Joseph Beuys, Per Kirkeby and Alison Knowles. We also devoted an exhibition to the artist books of Beau Geste Press, David Mayor and Felipe Ehrenberg, the first exhibition of artists books in Sweden.

We presented many artists close to the Fluxus spirit, including Antony McCall, Joan Mathews, Jaroslaw Kozlowsky, Michael Crane, Christian Boltanski and Annette Messenger.

Last year, I came to Norway to see the Fluxus exhibition at the Henie Onstad Art Center. I met Ken Friedman there. It was a total surprise. We had never met before, but we had worked together long distance, so it was the renewal of an old friendship, and it was the beginning of a new dialogue.

For me, Ken Friedman is the leading theorist and philosopher on Fluxus today. No one has written with greater clarity and elegance on the meaning and nuances of this complex and astonishing phenomenon. Friedman himself defers to Dick Higgins, whom he regards as his mentor and Fluxus's major thinker, but during the last decade, Higgins has written relatively little on Fluxus.

In 1990, *Lund Art Press* published Friedman's "Fluxus and Company," together with an interview that drew the largest response we have ever received. As a result, we decided to anticipate 1992 with an issue aimed at Fluxus research.

The University of Lund is a major Scandinavian research facility, so we began by interviewing the Fluxus artists still active in Scandinavia. We interviewed Eric Andersen. We conducted a major interview with Bengt af Klintberg, the first he has given on Fluxus. We obtained a text from Geoffrey Hendricks, a Norwegian-American artist who travels often to Scandinavia. And we collected the questions and the responses to Friedman's last interview as the basis of a new discussion. We weren't able to interview Henning Christiansen, Bjørn Nørgård or Per Kirkeby, but we hope that will be possible in the future. Just prior to publication, we were able to interview Knud Pedersen, an important interview we will publish in another issue.

Our interviews led to several articles – one of them being the first publication of Dick Higgin's monograph, *Fluxus: Theory and Reception*, written in 1982 and revised in 1985. We invited articles from old S:t Petri colleagues Michael Crane and Felipe Ehrenberg. And we commissioned articles by *Lund Art Press* contributors Robert Morgan and Matthew Rose. During this process, my close friend and colleague at

the School of Architecture of the University of Lund, professor Janne Ahlin, has given advice and suggestions. Our discussions led to my own look at Fluxus in the context of the global mass media situation, and it led me to a sharper focus on issues of research in experimental aesthetics.

The University of Lund is not the only place where Fluxus studies are being done. Alternative Traditions in the Contemporary Arts of the University of Iowa maintains a major research facility under the direction of Estera Milman. Significant work is under way there. The Getty Institute in Los Angeles has acquired a major Fluxus collection. The Tate Gallery is organizing and preparing its Fluxus collection. And a consortium of museums has begun the process of sharing research, publications and exhibitions. The Henie Onstad has taken the lead in forming the consortium. Iowa takes part, as do the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, Archiv Sohm at Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, the Pori Art Museum in Finland, Nordjylands Kunstmuseum in Denmark, The Reykavik Art Museum in Iceland and now the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

Fluxus research at the doctoral level began in the 1970s. The first doctoral dissertation on Fluxus was written by Marilyn Ekdahl Ravicz in 1974 at the Department of Anthropology, University of California at Los Angeles. Dissertations and theses have been finished since then by scholars in several nations – Klaus Groh and Edith Decker in Germany, Giorgio Zanchetti in Italy, Michel Oren and Owen Smith in the United States, Simon Anderson in Great Britain and Marianne Bech in Denmark.

Before that time, almost all the writing and thinking on Fluxus was done by people active in the Fluxus circle: the artists themselves, their publishers and gallerists. Within Fluxus, Henry Flynt, Dick Higgins, George Brecht, Ben Vautier, Ken Friedman, Wolf Vostell and Robert Filliou wrote essays, books and articles on many topics. Critics such as Peter Frank and Henry Martin wrote often on Fluxus. Publishers and organizers such as René Block, Harry Ruhé, Armin Hundermark and Peter van Beveren created dozens of exhibitions, projects, pamphlets, catalogues and multiples. Two collectors, Hanns Sohm and Jean Brown, developed major archives that became central information and research facilities. One was the Jean Brown Archive of the Tyringham Institute, in the Berkshire Mountains of Western Massachusetts, a marvelous collection going back to Dada and Surrealism, housed in an old seed house built by the Shakers in the 1830s. Brown began to work on Fluxus in 1972. By the late 1970s she had a major collection housed in a special room with furniture designed by George Maciunas. Hanns Sohm, a dentist, began his collection in the late 1950s. By the

mid-1960s, it was already a major world archive on experimental art, a pilgrim point for anyone doing serious research in fields from concrete poetry and underground press to conceptual architecture and conceptual art. Brown's collection is now at the Getty Institute in Los Angeles, and Sohm's is at Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

Two New Yorkers have made major contributions to Fluxus research. In the mid-70s Barbara Moore and Jon Hendricks established a bookstore and artifact shop called Backworks to concentrate on the avant-garde and experimental art of the 1960s. Both had a long relationship to the avant-garde: Moore had worked at Something Else Press, Hendricks was a key figure in the Guerilla Art Action Group. After Backworks closed, Moore and Hendricks moved on to other ventures. Moore opened a new company called Bound and Unbound, pursuing many of the same ideas as Backworks, also organizing important exhibitions of avant-garde and experimental art, at her own shop and for centers like Franklin Furnace. Hendricks became a specialist in Fluxus as curator of the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection. The Silverman Collection, now an independent foundation, is one of the world's largest Fluxus collections and the central collection on the work and projects of George Maciunas. The foundation has sponsored many exhibitions, projects and publications. Hendricks's many catalogues have become a basic research tool for research on Fluxus. The 1989 volume, *Fluxus Codex*, is the definitive catalogue of George Maciunas's publishing program and the New York based Fluxus editions that he produced.

Today, we see a new wave of Fluxus scholarship developing. It is distinct for several reasons. Even though the new scholars are interested in Fluxus and knowledgeable, they approach their work with an objectivity that is impossible for the enthusiast-scholars and the archivist-scholars of the past. Drawing on the resources of many universities and museums, using the full range of research tools – including interview, research request and all existing primary and secondary sources – a very different view of Fluxus must emerge. It will be marked by individual vision, but it will not be distorted by the sometimes unavoidable mistakes of scholars who identify Fluxus with the artist whose work they like best or the built-in tendency to see Fluxus as bounded by the decision to focus a collection on one aspect of Fluxus.

The scholars come from many places around the world: Owen Smith of the University of Maine, who has just finished his doctoral work on Fluxus at the University of Washington; Karen Moss of the University of Southern California; Hannah B Higgins at the University of Chicago;

Ina Blom at the University of Oslo; Birgitte Hesselund at the Randers Kunstmuseum; James Lewes of the University of Iowa; these and a dozen more are exploring Fluxus from viewpoint that wouldn't have been possible even five years ago.

The time has arrived for serious research on Fluxus. Here, at the University of Lund, *Lund Art Press* is a clearing-house for information on experimental art and æsthetics, including Fluxus. We welcome articles, debates, notes on research in progress, and we intend to publish as much as possible on topics such as these.

Fluxus now has the weight of history, but research on Fluxus is far from complete. As Higgins points out in his essay, writings on Fluxus tend to cover the broad outlines of the Fluxus story, often from a national viewpoint. Individual artists and deeper aspects of the history have gone without discussion. A great many significant chronologies, bibliographies and catalogues raisonn  remain to be prepared, as well as essays and monographs on individual artists and specific aspects of Fluxus work.

It is still possible to interview living artists, and to work directly with them. It is necessary to study the relationship of Fluxus to other artists and their work. In the past, it has been simply noted that Fluxus has influenced one artist or another, one medium or another: now it is time to examine the Fluxus contribution from the viewpoint of those artists and their work, looking at the work, rather than using the work as a footnote to Fluxus. (This idea has already begun, conceptually, with the approach taken by Susan Hapgood and Cornelia Lauf in their exhibition, *FluxAttitudes*.) The relationship of Fluxus to the specific fields where Fluxus artists have been pioneers is worth exploring. How have these fields developed? What contributions did Fluxus make? What has happened since that time? What have the results been?

This research is not merely a matter of enthusiasm. Fluxus has played an influential role in the art and culture of our time. It is worth learning more about that role and its meaning. Fluxus is often compared with Zen, difficult to study, much as Zen is. But Zen studies since the 17th century have contributed to philosophy, architecture, æsthetics, psychology, literature and poetry, as well as to practical fields such as design, engineering and military strategy. So, too, Fluxus has a wide-reaching value, a value based on its fluidity and its engagement with the world. Unlike most art movements, Fluxus has not been restricted to art, and if Pop Art or the New Expressionism had a more immediate impact on the art world (and a more swift visibility, created by the art market), Fluxus may have more enduring influence. Francesco Conz,

in his interview, suggests as much when he points to the way that Fluxus artists have erased the boundary between art and life, looking for a deeper value than simple artistic paradigms allow. That, he feels, is the basis of Fluxus's historical value.

I want to thank the persons who made this issue possible, the artists and authors, the editorial committee, and Prof. Janne Ahlin, Prof. Anna Christensen, Prof. Reinhold Fahlbeck, Prof. Robert Goldsmith, Prof. Mats Nyström, and Gotthard Osbeck, retired Administrative Director of the University of Lund, who have supported my work and research for many years.

This issue marks a first for *Lund Art Press*. We began as a small journal published at the University of Lund. As we grew, we developed a wide range of international affiliations from our base in Sweden. Now, we are developing a strong base of Nordic colleagues. Contributors across the Nordic Union have helped to develop our Fluxus issue: Bengt af Klintberg and Janne Ahlin from Sweden; Eric Andersen and Knud Pedersen from Denmark; Per Hovdenakk, Guttorm Nordø and Ken Friedman from Norway; Jan Olof Mallander from Finland; Ingolfur Arnarsson from Iceland. The five Nordic nations form a unique geographical unit, culturally diverse and intellectually similar. *Lund Art Press* looks forward to greater Nordic cooperation on future projects.

Lund Art Press is the only independent journal on art and aesthetics published at a university in Nordic Europe. Here at the Department of Theoretical and Applied aesthetics, we view things in a wide perspective. Architecture is engaged in the world, and we study aesthetics in both their experimental and applied form. For *Lund Art Press*, Fluxus represents both values. Research on Fluxus sheds light on many issues that are central to human development in our time.

JEAN SELLEM



George Maciunas, Fluxus Manifesto, 1962.

FLUXUSSOMETHING? IS THERE A RENAISSANCE IN FLUXUS OR JUST BOREDOM WITH EVERYTHING ELSE?

A SURVEY OF FLUXUS IN AMERICA.

by Matthew Rose

Matthew Rose is an art critic and writer who studies the New York art scene. After writing on Ray Johnson and mail art, he is now examining the work of George Maciunas and its meaning to the artists active in Fluxus.

FEW ART MOVEMENTS have been as resistant to death as Fluxus. When its idiosyncratic architect, George Maciunas, died in 1978, many of the formalities passed with him. "Membership" became the subject of debate, but while the collective ceased, the work continued even in death. When Bob Watts, a Fluxus member and one of the few teachers of Fluxus thinking, died in 1987, he left this world escorted by a Flux funeral, *Fluxlux* at Watts's farm in Pennsylvania. In a performance largely of his own design, fellow Fluxus artists reenacted some of Watts's work, others came with their own work (*Blue Lips Prints*, *Death Cleans Up*), while still others called up from overseas and spoke over a loudspeaker. Takako Saito's little wooden fish arrived by mail from Düsseldorf and those attending wrote their names on them and dropped the fish into the pond, where after a somber procession across the farm, Watt's ashes were strewn into an a pond and followed by a 21-gun and airplane banner salute (*Moon*, by Eric Andersen). The well attended and widely-publicized funeral proved an enduring example of the lesson Fluxus taught about life and art.

"I think interest in Fluxus comes in waves," said Dick Higgins, one of the original Fluxus members. His response, left on my answering machine, seemed to suggest we are about to crest. The mother of all movements of the last 30 years is now perhaps mature enough to withstand museum-oriented scrutiny and increasing market value. The once inexpensive multiples – the Fluxkits, Fluxboxes – and the inventive "score" are finding higher ground and with regard to the art world, higher prices. At the same time, the schools Fluxus set in motion – minimalism, conceptualism, performance art, happenings, mail and correspondance art – have gained wide acceptance. Younger artists finding themselves working in a Fluxus manner, are discovering the roots of their activities. More attention is being paid to Fluxus "Chairman" (in Dick Higgins's words) George Maciunas, who now, in spite of his own desires, has become something of a cult figure.

"I wouldn't say there's a renaissance of Fluxus in America, but rather a discovery of it," says Emily Harvey, whom many acknowledge as the most active individual

dealer in Fluxus material, new and old, in the US. Her gallery at 537 Broadway in Manhattan, is perhaps the most visible and dynamic of Maciunas' famous fluxboxes: It was once his own living loft.

Harvey began showing Fluxus work because Jean Dupuy, the last artist to officially join Fluxus (1977, a year before Maciunas's death), saw the blank walls and asked to install a show. That was 1981. It wasn't much later that Harvey, who had up until then been selling landscapes to corporations, "couldn't avoid the atmosphere" and began dealing Fluxus work, eking out a living. But these days, says Harvey, the climate is changing and she lives off sales of the work. "People are buying, but still not Americans," she says. "Europeans are, however, buying new work, mainly pieces and not full installations. Americans are curious, and continue to come to the gallery in larger numbers."

The show that began the 90s, Harvey's *Fluxus & Company*, served to update the artworld on the several generations of Fluxus and its friends, and there were many, from John Cage to the younger (but non-Fluxus) sculptor Vik Muniz. Muniz, in fact, curated – with Harvey's help – *Fluxus Moment and Continuum*, a more commercial venture, at Stux gallery in the spring of 1989.

Within the last three years there has been a rash of Fluxus exhibitions, publications and performances in the U.S. The publication of the *Fluxus Codex*, a mammoth tribute to the Maciunas-designed Fluxus work, collected and owned by Gilbert and Lila Silverman, is more a catalogue raisonné than an art book. In 1988 the Museum of Modern Art exhibited selections from the Silverman collection and in 1989, The Whitney Museum mounted a Yoko Ono show. Also in 1989, The Alternative Museum (NY) presented *Theater of the Object 1958-1972*. More

recently, there was *Fluxus Closing In*, a wide-ranging survey show at Salvatore Ala in October 1990. And at Hall Walls in Buffalo, New York, there was *FluxAttitudes*, co-curated by Cornelia Lauf and Susan Hapgood, which tried to reach to other artists to tap the Fluxus influence they've felt.

Come 1993, The Walker Art Center will debut its own 500-piece collection, tentatively titled, *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, which will tour the U.S. and Europe. Curated by Elizabeth Armstrong, plans are for a big catalogue with a large historical overview, putting the movement in full context. "It's problematic to show the material in a museum," says Joan Rothfuss, curatorial associate at the Walker, "because Fluxus is all about the unity of art and life. But we will have objects remade and opened up so the curious can touch and interact." The collection, purchased two years ago from a West Coast dealer, includes quite a few Flux-us works as defined by the *Codex*. It will be augmented by live performances by Fluxus artists and films.

But what is interesting and to some mildly irritating about many of the Fluxus shows is the continuing debate about whether Fluxus is dead or not; whether after Fluxus co-founder George Maciunas died, Fluxus itself continued to live. Other debates continue on which work is to be considered Fluxus work with the same degree of authenticity as the Maciunas-designed multiples, what works are made by a Fluxus artist but are not Fluxus work or whether there is such a thing as Fluxus work made by a non-Fluxus artist.

According to some collectors, the Maciunas-designed work is the most central and authentic reflection of Fluxus. Part of this is the fact that this work clearly emanates from a certain period in the historical past, now safely sealed off by the death of George

Maciunas. The other reason for the emphasis on Fluxus boxes and artifacts of the Maciunas period is that in their charm, they have come to represent Fluxus in the minds of collectors. Indeed, what has been called the “gewgaws and games” often get the most ink.

“There’s certainly interest in it as an historical movement, but many of the artists themselves don’t want to look at it historically,” says Bruce Altschuler, author of one of the *FluxAttitudes* catalogue essays. “Much of the new interest is commercial,” he concedes. “With certain collaborators, credibility comes with prices. There’s rising interest in the material and a dynamic relationship with market, but the irony of the whole thing is that Fluxus was not a movement of objects, but a movement of performances”

With Maciunas’s publication and multiples, Fluxus began to be seen as a movement of objects, and these are the artifacts of an era currently being chased down by museum and collectors. “Part of the (commercial) interest is the reaction from the gross phenomenon of contemporary prices, but Maciunas’s intention was to create affordable things.” In spite of that, reports Altschuler, work that sold cheap is now quite dear. He mentions George Brecht’s Flux-boxes, one of which originally sold for \$10 and is now selling for upwards of \$10,000 !

“Values of Fluxus pieces are certainly going up and there is a radical questioning again of the way art is made, presented and defined,” says Hapgood. “In the mid-80s there was a re-examination of the artwork as a commodity [Koons, Kruger] and that could precipitate a re-examination of the art object today, in different terms. In addition, I think there is a reinvestigation of the 1960s right now. Pop, minimalism and conceptual art has had a strong effect on current artists and that includes 60s Fluxus. People are realizing

that a lot of thing that happened in the 60s had their roots in Fluxus... because Fluxus was and wanted to be marginalized.”

“There is definitely a renewed interest in assemblage, conceptual work, found objects, plus a new supposed political art,” says Altschuler, “– all in the air in reaction to the 80s financial orientation. This has probably lent interest in Fluxus. But what happens once the market is interested in something pure like Fluxus, art that was never sold for anything, is more a phenomenon than a cabal. Anything can be sold – that’s the lesson of the art world...”

But it is complex lesson for Fluxus-oriented artists and curators, who seek to defy confines of museums and galleries with exhibits. Don’t blame the effort though. Hapgood and Lauf, in co-curating *FluxAttitudes*, invited Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanijia to install the exhibition, in an attempt to thwart their roles as curators. “Fluxus wanted to examine and debunk all the instructions of art. Thank God both artists picked up our intentions,” says Hapgood. “Rirkrit decided that the people who attended the opening would install the show and that’s exactly what they did.” Along with original Fluxus members, contemporary artists (post-Fluxus) included Guillaume Bijl, John Dagg, Brian Eno, Mike Kelley, Martin Kippenberger, Liz Larner, Jackie McAllister, Jill McArthur, Christian Marclay, Cady Noland, Laura Stein and Nancy Dwyer, who is producing the catalogue as an artist’s book. According to Hapgood, Dwyer will overlay the essayists’ text with her own phrases that will “heckle” the text beneath it.

But for many, the first step toward the future of Fluxus is back to the past. Alison Knowles, an original Fluxus member and performance artist, believes Fluxus pieces, “have the most impact if they’re done in a vintage style, in the context of the period

they were created in.” Knowles has recently seen a number of non-vintage style Fluxus performances, attributes the interest to the somewhat disappointing foray into painting during the last decade. Fluxus, she argues, never did get put to rest and adds that artists need to examine the older material. “It prevents repetition of this work. I’m always meeting people who are grappling with the problem of wanting to perform these works,” says Knowles. “They do rest with the person who perform them, but there is an implication of how to do them in the way they’re written. It’s unspoken but it’s there. To be engaged in Fluxus is to know what has happened.” Some would disagree, if ever so slightly, that pure engagement in Fluxus is fully possible

Yoshi Wada, another Fluxus member, who currently works on his own in sound installations, believes that “the Fluxus period is over. There is some group Fluxus activity, but to me, most of the experimental group is over.” It is clear however that the experiment itself continues in different ways and individual members like Ben Vautier, Daniel Spoerri, Nam June Paik and Joseph Beuys have gained worldwide fame and attention through a combination of both Fluxus and Fluxus-inspired work. And yet Fluxus, still map-happy, yearns for charts, time lines and its own idiosyncratic set of rules.

Ken Friedman recently published his “Twelve Criteria of Fluxus” in response to Dick Higgins’s *Nine Criteria of Fluxus*. One wonders if one can follow them like Fluxus score to create a true Fluxus work, but Friedman says “they indicate a way of thinking about work, rather than serving as a specific score for the creation of Fluxus works.”

Who is to say what is truly Fluxus if not the artists who have been part of the group? Should it be the collectors? The curators?

The critics? The art market? Or should it be a large, diffuse community of all those who have – and have had – an interest in Fluxus: artists, critics, collectors, art historians, curators, cooks, dancers, composers – all the artistic and non-artistic friends and fellow-travellers who have gathered around Fluxus or gathered at Fluxfests, Fluxconcerts, Flux-projects and in Fluxhouses, Fluxcenters and Fluxmobiles over the years. This wide interest and its broader community have given birth to new terms, such as René Block’s coinage, *Fluxism*, and phrases such as the all-encompassing “...in the spirit of Fluxus,” or the more modest “Fluxattitudes.” These phrases serve to cement the ever-present seams. Bob Watts seemed to anticipate the subject when he said, “The most important thing about Fluxus is that nobody knows what it is.”

Can there be Fluxus today? “Well, how do *you* define the term?” say Jon Hendricks, author of the *Fluxus Codex* and curator of the Silverman Collection. “I’ve had this discussion with Ken Friedman and lots of other people for years – people are calling something Fluxus which to me appears the opposite of what they were attempting to do in earlier times. The *Fluxus Codex* is only one part of the story. It only deals with objects, physical things, as opposed to performance work and other events. But what we did do with the *Codex* is take as criteria, the objects announced in Maciunas’s newsletters and any ads for objects. What fell into it seemed to be Fluxus and what didn’t was not.”

Hendricks sees Fluxus, like most art movements, as having a nuclear half-life and at some point, losing essential usefulness, much like painting Cubist work today. “If you read the manifestos which people [members] agreed to, Fluxus always had a particular bent. People think it’s a quality judgement. It has nothing to do with quality, though there’s a lot of stuff now being called Fluxus.

It has to do with defining a particular idea. One could talk on and on about it... I can understand why someone would want to use the word *Fluxus* to provoke a response from the public. Dada did the same thing; and there you have the case where Robert Motherwell wrote a book on the subject and ignored a whole group of Dadaists from Germany.”

As Hendricks point out, many of the Fluxus artists take a different view than his own. Everyone seems to agree that Hendricks has developed a clear, articulate rationale for what can definitely be included in Fluxus – but they feel he draws his circle too tight. Dutch Fluxus historian Harry Ruhé is one. Ruhé’s 1979 anthology, *Fluxus: the Most Experimental and Radical Art Movement of the 1960s*, became the first widely circulated book on Fluxus as a whole, and it is still regarded as one of the key documents. Ruhé takes a much broader view than Hendricks, and he has said that “*The Fluxus Codex* is an important catalogue raisonné of the Fluxus multiples, but not of all Fluxus works, and not of the many unique objects and pieces.” Important Fluxus editions were published by Edition Hundertmark, by René Block, by Something Else Press and others. Many important Fluxus artists simply didn’t work closely with George Maciunas – Joseph Beuys, Wolf Vostell, Thomas Schmit, and Dick Higgins weren’t represented in Maciunas’s projects, and even Alison Knowles was represented by only one major piece.

Many of the artists point out that the famous manifestoes thought of as “Fluxus manifestoes” were actually only *proposals*. They weren’t signed by the artists or agreed to. Maciunas, in his enthusiasm, published broadsheets which represented the manifestoes on one part of the sheet and bore the artists names elsewhere on the same sheet, but these were not signatures. One Flux-artist puts it this way, “If I wrote a statement condemning vegetables and tinfoil, and published it on the same page with the names of Norman Mailer, Jon Hendricks and Muhammad Ali because I admire their work, it wouldn’t mean that they agreed to my statement.”

Fluxus’s impact on a generation of artists and activists is, however, being decidedly felt, even if it’s not recognized as such. “Fluxus had a very strong influence on the politically inclined groups such as Act Up and Gran Fury, which confront attitudes, institutions, prejudices... and that’s what Fluxus was very good at,” say Hendricks. “But it doesn’t mean that they themselves are Fluxus.”

While Fluxus works have yet to surface at the New York auction houses – a phone call to the press department at Sotheby’s yielded a puzzled response: “What’s a Fluxus?” – there continues to be evidence of fluxus-something artists working in and around Manhattan and the United States.



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Poster for Beau Geste Press exhibition at Galerie S:t Petri, 1976,
the first exhibition of artist's books in Sweden.

FLUXUS HAS ALWAYS SEEMED TO ME TO HAVE BEEN ABOUT COINCIDENCE

By Felipe Ehrenberg

Felipe Ehrenberg is an artist, publisher and community organizer from Mexico. He was a central figure in the Fluxshoe that toured England in the early 1970s. He was one of the leaders of Beau Geste Press, a pioneering experimental artist-owned publishing venture that helped introduce the concept of artists' books and book objects to the international art scene.

THE OPPORTUNITY to write down some of my **flux** memories coincides all too precisely with a wish to remember: I'd written Estera Milman in Iowa, a week before, saying so. It had been more than 20 years ago when by pure coincidence I **fluxed** into David Mayor, in London.

England's capital, to the eyes of the newly arrived, energetic iconoclast from Mexico (me) was quite the most exciting, stimulating and democratic place. A deep involvement in the Student Revolt of '68 and a deeper concern for my family's and my own welfare had forced me to join the 10,000 or so other Mexicans who became unwilling exiles in other lands. Painful as that departure may have been, leaving home was probably easier for me than for many other less lucky ones. For one, I had been feeling gradually more constrained by a very stifling and incestuous art scene, one which wouldn't tolerate anybody arting differently than the way things were being arted at the time. I was already a disobedient artist and my incipient unorthodoxy required an urgent change of scene. On the other hand, Matha and I were young, and on looking back, we both appear to have been quite courageous: we flew off in worried haste with two little kids and barely 200 dollars in our pockets.

Artist, wife and two kids arrived then, luggage in hand, at Victoria Station one golden summer dusk full of hippies and proceeded to search for a roof. Several weeks later we had installed ourselves in a funky basement flat in Islington, just around the corner from the Angel Tube Station, and I faced the Old World as the newest thing possible, the only solid plan being a commitment to hold a solo show at some unknown gallery in New York (and we all know what *that* implies).

Once back in London, after the harrowing experience, I hastened to gather my wits; coincidence would involve me with a motley crew of mavericks, many of whom were – coincidentally again – celebrating the *Destruction in Art Symposium* that had been organized by Alec Trocchi (NY) and Gustav Metzger (UK), Stuart Brisley, Bernard Kelly, Peter Fuller (RIP) and a cast of 30 or more loonies encouraged me to give shape to a slew of unformed ideas I'd had hovering on the edge of consciousness: I forthwith relinquished paint and brushes and declared myself A Work of Art (barely escaping arrest in a masked attempt to enter the Tate as such. I proceeded to purchase a duplicator and to mail all manner of mimeographed thingamajiggies all over the world. I coincided with Richard Hamilton in mutilating certain

postcards. I watched Martha try to save our endangered marriage. I sold nothing at all and nearly starved the family. I filled diaries with notes on art. I made all manner of great friends.

London had been viciously stricken by a dustmen's strike. It was soiled and worried, it reeked and stank and generally felt (I thought) like Cairo, so Austrian Conceptualist Richard Kriesche (who can be found to this day living in Graz), Mexican Rodolfo Alcaraz (a theatre soul then acting as a photographer) and myself (alive and well in the largest, dirtiest city on earth) artfully decided to look into what happens when a system such as the one that collects the shit breaks down. In other words, we were deeply concerned with the state of aesthetics.

After weeks of keeping close track of certain rubbish piles and taping intense conversations ("it's packaging that creates most garbage... art flows thanks to packaging"... that kind of thing), and photographing and filming, the three of us decided to found the **Polygonal Workshop**, a short-lived but very intense experience in group art. We then convinced Sigi Krauss to allow us to perform our first conclusions at his frameshop-cum-gallery, in the heart of Covent Garden. (Sigi's was one of the few spots in London where people could do things they were unable to do in other places). PW's non-art show was called "*The Seventh Day Chicken.*"

Strangely enough, it got very good reviews and attracted a surprising amount of people, among them David Mayor, then a student – of math, I believe – at Exeter University. For some unreasonable reason, Dave had been doing research on something called **Fluxus** and saw, or thought he saw, similarities between that and the PW's doings. Soon thereafter Richard and I accepted Dave's invitation to do something in Exeter

and so we travelled all the way south and did something quite polygonal.

One thing led to another and early in 1970 I decided to move to the West Country (which effectively marked PW's demise).

Devon was a marvelous land, full of high tea afternoons and winding hedges, folk festivals and fascinating eccentrics who studied ley lines or surrealism or concrete poetry and who lived in stone cottages. The natives didn't seem to mind coloureds like us and we soon moved, kids, cats, non-art works. Beau Geste (the groovy Gestetner) and all, into Langford Court, the beautiful, thatched mansion that had sat, overlooking the tiny hamlet of Clyst Hydon near Cullompton, since the 14th Century. Though the rent was cheap we still found it necessary to share. Cartoonist Chris Welch and his girlfriend, Madeleine, joined us soon thereafter and, not much later, so did David.

The stage was set for the birth of **Beau Geste Press**, and Dave's project to gather all his **flux** documents into a travelling show proved to be just the mechanism that triggered the Press into being. The idea was to help all-thumbs Dave get the thing going. But the little group's dynamics being what they were, things got out of hand and the now famed **FLUXshoe** grew into something much more than originally intended. Cunningly redesigned by Martha to be shown on collapsible cardboard cubes, accompanied by a great-looking catalogue for which an enthusiastic prologue had been written by Kyosan Bajin no less (me), it was crammed into a second hand van and hit the road full of even greater plans. Funds were solicited and somehow received and we were able to invite live **Flux** and **fluxlike** artists to join us and the press's presses and talent were put to the chronicling a year of events. The result was the *Addenda* .

Beau Geste Press went on to publish more **Fluxus** and **fluxlike** things, including works like Ken Friedman's conscientious *The Aesthetics*, Takako Saito's wondrous productions and Ulises Carrion's sensational *Arguments*. We produced my own and David's works, those of Opal L. Nations, Michael Nyman, Carolee Schneemann (*Parts of a BodyHouse Book*), Genesis P. Orridge, Milan Knizak, and many, many others. We even produced Sitting Dog's methane gas producing manual which sold especially well.

It may have been thanks to the patience I had learned from Mexican craftspeople, but our little productions soon boasted of a high labour-intensive manufacturing process, long before terms such as "book-objects" or "artists' books" were coined. We, of course, hadn't the foggiest notion we were breaking ground. We simply opened our doors to a very select and creative few, helped many of them print and jointly hustled to make the **Beau Geste Press** self-sufficient. At first, of course, our little **fluxpress** got little if any attention. Our first 'proper' reviews began appearing in *Arts & Artists*, when Colin Naylor directed the mag. Clive Phillpot (now a convinced New Yorker) can remember those days well, thank God. Soon more and more people began paying attention to us, in the UK and abroad.

Probably our best known publication was *Schmuck*, the anthological magazine that chained David to his portable typewriter and which offered singular overviews of work produced by nonconforming artists from Japan and Hungary, Iceland and France, Czechoslovakia and Germany. A Latin American *Schmuck* was also programmed, of course, and we began receiving some fantastic material. Unfortunately, the project was interrupted early in 1974 by my leaving England for good, and the material was put on hold while I restructured my life in Mexoco. I had bought a small coffee farm in

Xico, rebuilt its large stone house and settled in it with my two children. I then began my rediscovery of Mexico.

The problem I faced was complex and in truth, if it hadn't been for the nonchalance I had aquired as a **fluxer** I'm not sure I could have visualized any solutions. The fact is that, standing in that misty landscape filled by banana plants and pepper trees, in love again, watching my neighbour dowsing for water and on the brink of comprehending a magical world of timelessness, I found myself completely unable to relate to the mathematics of European logic or Eurocentric culture. This may be hard to understand for most of my friends, even those have visited India or Tumbuktu for greater lengths of time. What now surrounding me was – and is – no vacation land. It was – and is – home. And Europe had to be exorcised away from my soul if I hoped at all to reflect my universe.

First I did something unforgiveable and painful: I stopped corresponding with all my friends abroad. Then I stowed away or burnt all the books and magazines and every-thing I had from abroad. Then I began re-reading our history, focusing primarily on two moments: late PreHispanic days and our Revolution of 1910, attempting to translate, brushes and colours in hand, Mexico's ambiguous relationships with the developed world (were we dumber for being underdeveloped?). I had returned to painting (not quite retinal art) and gathered the first results in a suite of anamorphic portraits of General Emiliano Zapata.

Nevertheless, much spilled over from the immediate past that had to be attended to. Thanks in part to a Guggenheim award, it became finally possible to convert the Latin-american material I had filed away into an impressive shown which was shown at the Carrillo Gil Museum, in Mexico City. And the catalogue, which would have been the

missing *Schmuck*, was produced – by one of those flukes of life – in an edition of no less than 260,000 copies! Quite a **flux**achievement, I declare. One could safely affirm that that was when **Fluxus** took root in the Latin turfs of America's soil.

Since then, I've **fluxed** my way around life, creating a truly voluminous amount of occurrences, most of them hopelessly irretrievable in the best **Fluxus** spirit, even to the point of being forgotten. Ken – persistent Ken – never stopped writing however, asking, demanding, begging for documents, chronicles, memories, whatever. To tell the truth, his demands implied too much work delving into closed files stored in boxes, into folded letters and whatnot, somehow like prying into my own past. Besides, everyday

life has always pressed to closely on my every day, and art (my art at least) follows very closely day to day circumstances. I'm now thankfully what some call middle-aged (aren't we all?) and have just embarked on another trip into the past/future both imperfects: in 1992 *all* of us Americans will be commemorating – not celebrating, just remembering – 500 years of the giant encounter between three, not two, magnificent cultures. Perhaps artists – some artists willing to do so – can achieve the impossible dream of reconciliation. If so, surely the **flux**gesture of forgetting in order to reinvent will now come in very handy.

Tepito, DF

2.15 am, 3rd of January, 1990.

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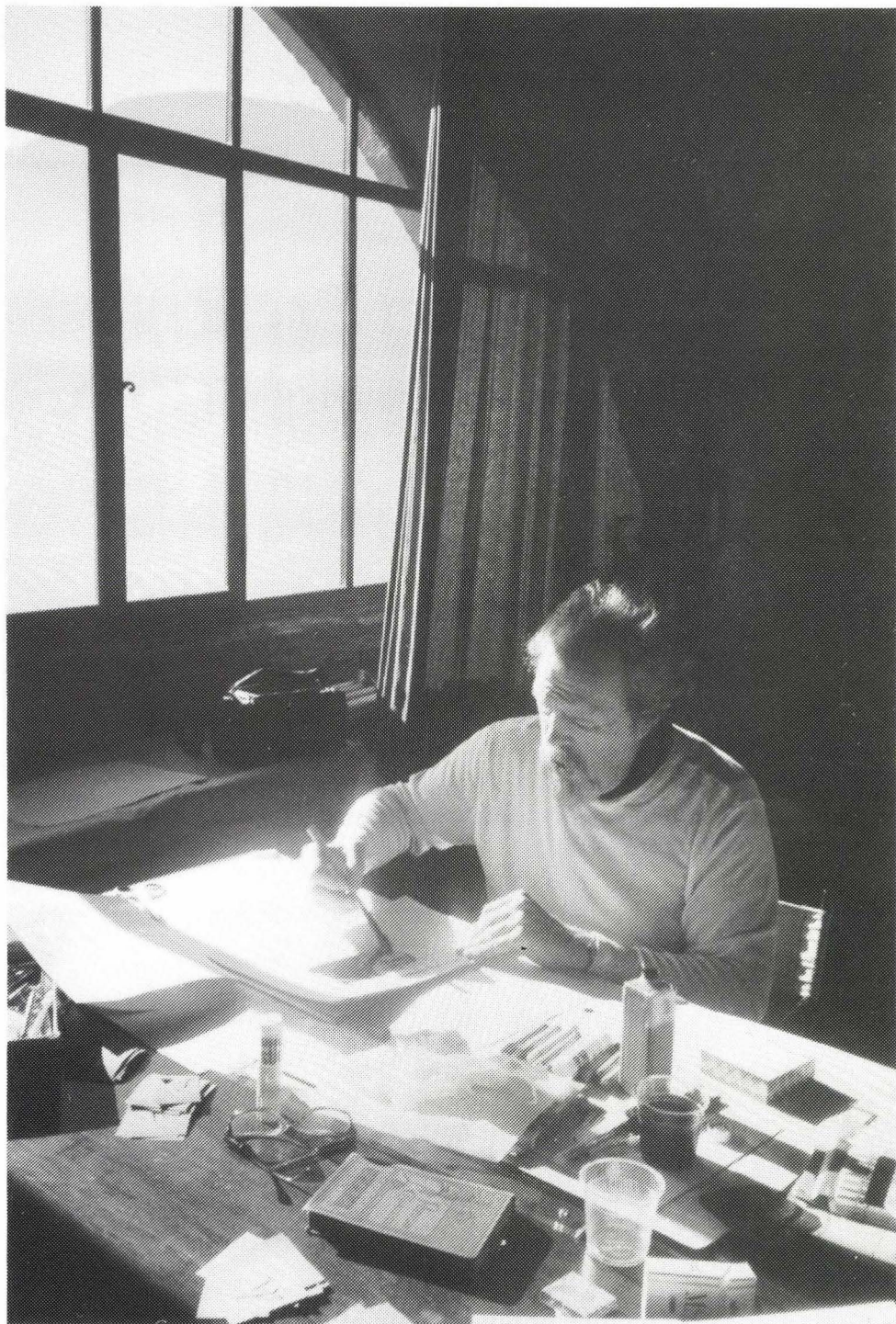


Photo: Francesco Conz

Dick Higgins working at the Brunnenburg castle near Meran
(residence of the family of Ezra Pound) Meran 1989.

FLUXUS: THEORY AND RECEPTION

by Dick Higgins

For over three decades, Dick Higgins has been a major figure in the experimental art of Europe and the United States. As an artist-theorist, Higgins is considered by many to rank with Marcel Duchamp and John Cage. Duchamp was central to the development of art in the first third of the century, Cage in the second, and Higgins in the last third. As an inventor of art forms, as a theorist, as writer, and as a focal point for the experimental circles around Fluxus and the Something Else Press, Higgins has been a profound source of ideas and energy.

Dick Higgins became active as an artist in the 1950s. As a youngster, he met and knew many of the Dada and Surrealists. He studied composition with John Cage and Henry Cowell. By the late 50s, he was active in music, performance, painting and experimental film. He took part in Cage's seminal classes at the New York School, with artists such as George Brecht, Alison Knowles, Al Hansen and Allan Kaprow. Higgins became known as Cage's most energetic and prolific student.

By the early 1960s, Higgins had begun a systematic examination of art – its purposes, its problematics, its meanings. Through the essays that he wrote, and through the imaginative works he developed, he helped to generate many of the key art concepts of the 1960s. He became a founding figure of several of the important movements that characterized the era: co-founding happenings with Kaprow and Oldenburg, pioneering concrete poetry and visual poetry with Williams and Gomringer, and co-founding Fluxus with Maciunas, Paik, Vautier and the others.

In 1964, Higgins established the Something Else Press, the publishing house that was a central forum for the arts of the new mentality. As publisher of artists from George Brecht and Wolf Vostell to Robert Filliou and Ian Hamilton Finlay, Something Else Press set out the program for much of the best experimentation of the decade – and set up the explorations that would become significant in the decades after. Through the Press, Fluxus found its first wide visibility. Through the Press, artists like Ray Johnson and Al Hansen moved from cult status to public recognition. And, in 1966, through the *Something Else Newsletter*, Higgins developed the first modern theory of *intermedia*, creating a revolution in the way we have considered the arts ever since.

Today, Dick Higgins lives in Barrytown, New York, where he works in an old church converted into a studio. His main focus is on the paintings he has created during the last decade – paintings that grew from his interest in visual poetry, maps and the theory of intermedia. Recent solo exhibitions at Emily Harvey Gallery in New York and at Galerie Schüppenhauer in Köln, and major Fluxus exhibitions in Vienna and New York and at the Venice Biennale demonstrate the depth and visionary power of Dick Higgins and his work.

THIS IS NOT an introductory text on Fluxus. To explain what Fluxus is and was and where it came from is not my primary purpose at this time, having already done so in my long essay *Postface* (1962) and my short one, "A Child's History of Fluxus," among other pieces as well. Others have done so too, of course, each in his or her own way. My concern here is, rather, to try to deal with some aspects and questions in Fluxus – what do we experience when we experience a Fluxus work? Why is it what it is? Is there anything unique about it? And so on.

In other words, this is an essay which is intended for the thoughtful person who already knows some Fluxus materials, who has perhaps thought about Fluxus in relation to Dada and Surrealism and the other iconoclastic art movements of our century, who may have attended a Fluxus performance, who may have reservations about Fluxus works in one way or another, but who, at any rate, already has some ideas on the subject. Perhaps even when such a reader has read some of my books, he or she will still have reservations – I am not a religious revivalist, am not attempting to convert anybody to anything. I want to frame some questions and pose some answers. With any luck, the whole inquiry should have an erotic, that is, a pleasure principle, one of its own.

On one hand, Fluxus appears to be an iconoclastic art movement, somewhat in the lineage of the other such movements in our century – Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, etc. And, indeed, the relationship with these is a real and valid one. Let us look at these in relation to Fluxus.

Futurism was the earliest such movement. It was founded by Marinetti in the first decade of the century, was proclaimed on the front page of the *Figaro Littéraire* and elsewhere, and it developed a group character which was sustained from its early years until World

War II. This means it lasted at least thirty-plus years

Marinetti was its leader, though not in a totally dictatorial sense. Its members were supposed to follow along pretty much with what he said, but he forgave them when they didn't. He proclaimed *parole in libertà* ("words at liberty," a form of visual poetry), teatro sintetico ("synthetic theater," that is, performance pieces which were synthesized out of extremely raw-seeming materials, similar to the *musique concrète* of the post-World War II era), simultaneity, a time-related form of Cubism, music of noises, and many such formal innovations or unconventional arts which are still fresh to consider. If, however, one hears the existing recordings of, for example, the music of Luigi Russolo, one of the main Futurist composers, one finds something far more conventional than what one might have expected from reading his famous *Arte de rumori* ("Art of noises") manifesto. One hears, to be sure, amazing noises being made over a loudspeaker – roars, scraping sounds and such-like. But one hears these superimposed over rather crudely harmonized scales. If one goes into the content of Marinetti's writings, one finds him a very old fashioned daddy-type, rather hard on women, celebrating war as an expression of masculine virtue, and so on. Even the visual art, in the works of Balla and others, being the summit of Futurist fine art, is rather conventional with regard to its formal structures and implications, – it is certainly rather conservative when compared to the innovative cubism of France at the same time. In other words, Futurism is a goddess, nineteenth century style, with one leg on the future and one in the conventional past and not too much on the present. Considering that the two legs are moving in opposite directions, it is no wonder that Futurism falls a little flat in the evolution of modern sensibility. Of course it is of great technical and historical interest, as a starter

and a precursor, but its works have only moderate intrinsic interest as works.

Dada, when one looks at it in isolation, seems more unique than it is. But most of the Dada artists and writers came out of Expressionism, and if one compares the Dada materials with those of their immediate antecedents, they are less unique than one might have imagined. Perhaps an anecdote is appropriate here. In the 1950s and 60s, the journalistic image of Dada had become so extreme, so far from the reality of the work, that Dada was considered to be the limit of the extremely crazy in art – as wild as possible, as droll as possible, simply inexpressibly “far-out,” to cite the slang of the time. Thus, early Happenings and Fluxus (like the works of Rauschenberg and Johns) were often dismissed as “neo-Dada.” This was, of course, extremely annoying and embarrassing to those of us who knew what Dada was or had been. For example, I knew several of the old Dadaists, had been raised on their work, and there was no doubt in my mind that what we Happenings and Fluxus people were doing had rather little to do with Dada. Well, returning to my story, in due course I became the director of Something Else Press, a small publishing firm. I knew that, before the split between the French and German Dadaists, Richard Huelsenbeck had published an anthology of Dada materials, the *Dada Almanach*, I therefore got his permission to reissue it in facsimile. The response to it was very revealing: I was told that this was “not real Dada!” The material seemed too conservative, far too close to the expressionism of the pre-World I years to gibe with the image that my 1960s friends and colleagues had built up in their mind as to what Dada was. Yet Huelsenbeck was not, at the time he did the *Dada Almanach*, a conservative at all. He had published a wildly leftist booklet, *Deutschland Muß Untergehen!* (“Germany Must Perish!”) and he saw no difference between political and cultural innovational

and revolutionary thinking. His poems were as experimental as those of the other Dadaists, Raoul Hausmann for example. In other words, the journalistic myth had come to replace the substance to such an extent that the substance was overwhelmed.

Surrealism is, of course, an outgrowth of Dada, historically. It was, quite self-consciously, a “movement,” unlike Dada, which was more unruly, spontaneous perhaps, and undirected. Surrealism was presided over by the relatively benevolent Trotskyite *littérateur*, André Breton. Breton was much given to café politics, to reading people out of his movement or claiming them for it, proclaiming them and disowning them according to their conformance or non-conformance with the theoretical positions which he built up analogously to Marxist theorizing in his various Surrealist manifestos. Ideology may have masked personal feeling in many cases – as if to say, “if you hate me, you must be ideologically incorrect.” The commonplace about Surrealism is that it is of two sorts, historical and popular. Historical Surrealism usually refers to what was going on in Breton’s circle from the mid-1920s until the late 1930s in Paris (or in Europe as a whole), usually involving the transformation of social, aesthetic, scientific and philosophical values by means of the liberation of the subconscious. This led, of course, to a kind of art in which fantastic visions were depicted extremely literally. A concern with the subconscious was, of course, typical of the time, and the story is told of that great liberator of the subconscious, Sigmund Freud, that someone asked him about surrealist art. His reply? Normally, he said, in art he looked to see the unconscious meaning of a work, but in surrealist art he looked to see if there was a conscious one. Well, to return to my main concerns, with the passage of time and of the entry of Surrealism into popular awareness, “surrealist” came to be more of less synony-

mous with “fantastic” or “dreamy” in art. Popular Surrealism, then, has little to do with historical Surrealism, although careless critics tend to equate the two.

However, historical Surrealism has a far fuller history than our usual image of it. Breton lived into the 1960s, and as long as he lived, “Surrealism” as a self-conscious, self-constricted movement continued, with new people joining and old members being obliged to withdraw. During the years of World War II and immediately after, Breton and many of the Surrealists lived in the United States, and their impact is not sufficiently understood either in Europe or America. They became the most interesting presence in the American art world. Magazines such as *VVV* and *View* were the most exciting art magazines of the time. The Surrealists constituted the nucleus of the avant garde. Some of us who later did Fluxus works were very conscious of this. I, for example, attended school with Breton’s daughter Aubée (“Obie,” to us) and, being curious what her father wrote, acquired a couple of his books – that was my entrée into Surrealism as a place to visit. Furthermore, from time to time there would be Surrealist “manifestations,” and some of these were similar to the “environments” out of which Happenings developed. These were, in any case, locked into our sensibility, as points of reference in considering our earlier art experiences, and Surrealism was absolutely the prototypical Art Movement, as such, for Americans at the time. We shall return to this, but I would like to consider a few points along the way.

1) Fluxus *seems* to be a series of separate and discrete formal experiments, with rather little to tie them together. In this way it seems to resemble Futurism. This is a point which I will answer when presently address the actual ontology of Fluxus.

2) Fluxus *seems* to be like Dada – at least like the popular image of Dada – in being, well, crazy, iconoclastic, essentially a negative tendency rejecting all its precedents, and so on. In fact, there *is* some truth to this; but it is oblique. Fluxus was never so undirected as Dada, never so close to its historical precedents. Dada was, in fact, a point of discussion on those long nights at Ehlhaltenam-Taunus, during the first Fluxus Festival at Wiesbaden in 1962, when George Maciunas, myself, Alison Knowles and, occasionally, others would talk into the wee hours of the morning, trying to determine what would be the theoretical nature of this tendency to which we were giving birth, which we found ourselves participating in. Maciunas was intensely aware of the rivalry between the French and German Dadaists; we wanted to keep our group together and avoid such splits as best we could. What could we do to prevent this fissioning? The answer was to avoid having too tight an ideological line. Maciunas proposed a manifesto during that 1962 festival – it is sometimes printed as a “Fluxus manifesto.” But nobody was willing to sign it. We did not want to confine tomorrow’s possibilities by what we thought today. That manifesto is Maciunas’s manifesto, not a manifesto of Fluxus.

3) Surrealism lasted more or less forty years as a viable tendency and, among other things, spun off a popular version, as I have said, lower-case surrealism. This seemed like a fine model for the Fluxus people. But how could we make Surrealism a model for Fluxus?

One must, here, bear in mind that Fluxus was something which happened more or less by chance. In the late 1950s there were the Fluxus artists, sometimes thinking of themselves as a group, doing the work that later became known as Fluxus. But the work and the group had no name. We did not consciously present ourselves *to the public* as a

group until Maciunas organized his festival at Wiesbaden, intended originally as publicity for the series of publications he intended to issue which were to be called *Fluxus*. The festival caused great notoriety, was on German television and was repeated in various cities beside Wiesbaden, which is well documented elsewhere and need not concern us here. The point I am getting at here is that in connection with these festival the newspapers and media began to refer to us as “die Fluxus Leute” (“the Fluxus people”), and so here we were, people from very different backgrounds ... Knowles, Vostell and Brecht originally painters, Watts a sculptor, Patterson, myself and Paik composers, Williams, myself and Mac Low writers, and so on – here we were, being told we were the Fluxus people. What *should* that mean? If we were to be identified publicly as a group, should we become one? What did we have in common?

Thus the concept arose of constituting ourselves as some kind of “collective.” Maciunas was particularly pleased by that idea, since he had a leftist background and, instinctively, a goodly portion of his approach to organizing us and our festivals had at least a metaphorical relationship with leftist ideology and forms. The collective clearly needed a spokesman, to be what a commissar was supposed to be in the USSR but seldom was. Maciunas was not really an artist but a graphic designer (1), and, as editor of the magazine, he seemed the best suited of us to be the commissar of Fluxus, which role he assumed and held until his dying day. In this there was a parallel to the role of André Breton in Surrealism – less monolithic and more ceremonial, of course. We never accepted Maciunas’s right to “read

people out of the movement,” as Breton did. (Besides, it wasn’t really a movement, but more of that later.) Occasionally he tried to do this, but the others did not follow him here – we would continue to work with the artist who was banned by Maciunas until, eventually, Maciunas usually got over his own impulse to ban and accepted the artist back into the group. Surrealism without Breton is inconceivable, but, valuable though Maciunas’s contributions were, Fluxus can and did and does exist without him, in one or another sense.

Thus, to sum up this part of the discussion, we saw Futurism as important, but as having no strong or direct relationship with us in any direct sense. Dada works we admired, but the negative side of it – its rejections and the social dynamic of its members, splitting and feuding, – we did not wish to emulate. Surrealism had, perhaps, minimal influence on us so far as form, style and content were concerned, but its group dynamic seemed suitable for our use, subject only to the limitations on Maciunas’s authority which lay in our nature as having already been a group with some aspects of our work in common before Maciunas ever arrived on the scene.

Fluxus was (and is) therefore:

- a) a series of publications produced and designed by George Maciunas;
- b) the name of our group of artists;
- c) the kind of works associated with these publications, artists and performances which we did (and do) together;

1. George Maciunas was educated in architecture and industrial design. He also studied art history. He worked as an architect, holding many patents on pre-fabricated housing. He later worked in graphic design and advertising design. See Jon Hendricks’s *Fluxus Codex* for a brief biography of George Maciunas. (– ed.)

and –

d) any other activities which were in the lineage or tradition which was built up, over a period of time, that is associated with the publications, artists or performances (such as Flux-feasts).

Fluxus was not a movement; it has no stated, consistent program or manifesto which the work must match, and it did not propose to move art or our awareness of art from point A to point B. The very name, “*F l u x u s*,” suggests change, being in a state of flux. The idea was that it would always reflect the most exciting avant-garde tendencies of a given time or moment – the *fluxattitude* – and it would always be open for new people to “join.” All they had to do was to produce works which were in some way similar to what other Fluxus artists were doing. Thus, the original core group expanded to include, in its second wave (after Wiesbaden), Ben Vautier, Eric Andersen, Tomas Schmit and Willem de Ridder, in the third wave (by 1966) Geoffrey Hendricks and Ken Friedman, and, in the later waves (after 1970), Yoshimasa Wada, Jean Dupuy, Larry Miller and others. It was thought of as something which would exist parallel to other developments, providing a rostrum for its members and a purist model for the most technically innovative and spiritually challenging work of its changing time(s). Theoretically, therefore, even though Maciunas died years ago, a new artist could become a Fluxus artist even today, according to that formula. Why he or she might want to or not want to is a different matter, of course, but theoretically it could happen. It would simply require assent among all who were concerned – the other Fluxus artists and the new artist.

Before we leave this matter of antecedents and basic definition, it would be well to mention some individual artists who are

sometime reckoned among the forefathers of Fluxus, and a few of those who are thought of as Fluxus but who are not.

When Ben Vautier speaks of Fluxus, he usually evokes the names of John Cage and Marcel Duchamp so repeatedly that one might well wonder if he had ever heard of any other artists at all. Nor is he the only person of whom this is true.

Well, the fact is, both Cage and Duchamp *are* much admired by us Fluxus artists. Duchamp is admired largely for the interpenetration of art and life in his corpus of works; the “art/life dichotomy,” as we used to call it in the early 1960s, is resolved in his works by the interpenetration of the one into the other. In 1919, as is well-known, Duchamp exhibited a men’s urinal as an art work, – a simple, white and pristine object, classical in form, when one separates it from its traditional function. Since many Fluxus pieces, most notably the performance ones, are often characterized by their taking of a very ordinary event from daily life, and their being framed as art by being presented on a stage in a performance situation, there is a clear connection between such Fluxus pieces and Duchamp’s urinal. For example, one often performed Fluxus piece is Mieko [formely “Chieko”] Shiomi’s “Disappearing Event,” in which the performer (s) come on stage and smile, gradually relaxing their faces until the smile disappears. This is something which happens often in daily life, and it is somehow refreshing to think of an art performance which is both daily, unisolated from one’s diurnal, non-art existence, unlike most art works. Nevertheless, apart from a handful of musical experiments, Duchamp never did a performance work, nor did he have any great interest in them. At Allan Kaprow’s seminal *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, the first Happening presented in New York (in which I performed, and which has some oblique relationship with Fluxus), he

was in the audience and I watched him; he seemed quite uninterested in what he was seeing, and I do not recall that he even stayed through the entire performance. It seems doubtful that he saw any particular connection between the performance that he was watching and his own work. Nor, later, when he knew some of us and our work, did he see such a connection then either. It was always his effort to make life visually elegant; we, on the other hand, chose to leave life alone, to observe it as a biological phenomenon, to watch it come and recede again, and to comment on it and enrich it in or with our works. When one sees a Duchamp work, one knows whether it is sculpture or painting or whatever; with a Fluxus work, there is a conceptual fusion – “intermedia” is the term I chose for such fusions, picking it up from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who had used it in 1812. Virtually all Fluxus works are inter-medial by their very nature – visual poetry, poetic visions, action music and musical actions, Happenings and events which are bounded, conceptually, by music, literature and visual art, and whose heart lies in the mid-ground among these. Duchamp was an extreme purist; we were not, are not. He therefore makes an awkward ancestor for us, much as we may admire his integrity and his *geste*.

Cage is rather a different matter. Some of us (myself, Brecht, Maxfield, Hansen and others) had studied with Cage. But in his case, like Duchamp, he strove towards “nobility.” This, for him, meant the impersonal or the transpersonal – often obtained by means of systems employing chance, in order to transcend his own taste. Mac Low, Brecht, Maxfield and myself used chance systems – “aleatoric structures” – but few of the other Fluxus artists did, at least with any frequency. As for Cage, he seemed to find Fluxus works simplistic when he first saw them. They did (and do) often employ some extreme minimalism which was not one of

his concerns. Too, Fluxus pieces can be quite personal, and this would place them beyond Cage’s pale. His own work is seldom inter-medial. Though he writes poems and composes music, one tends to know which is which. They are multi-medial, like operas.

Cage and Duchamp should therefore be thought of more as uncles of Fluxus rather than as direct progenitors or father figures. Fluxus, it seems, is a mongrel art, with no distinct parentage or pedigree. There is a relationship to Cage and to Duchamp, but it is mostly by affinity and the example of integrity, rather than that Fluxus developed out of their work in any specific way.

The way I like to sum up this part of the history of “it all” is as follows:

- 1) Once upon a time there was collage, a technique. Collage could be used in art, not just in visual art.
- 2) When collage began to project off the two-dimensional surface, it became the combine (Rauschenberg’s term?).
- 3) When the combine began to envelop the spectator it became the environment. I don’t know who coined that term, but it is still a current one.
- 4) When the environment began to include live performance, it became the Happening (Allan Kaprow’s term, usually capitalized in order to distinguish it from just *anything* that happens).
- 5) When Happenings were broken up into their minimal constituent parts, they became events. I first heard that term from Henry Cowell, a composer with whom both John Cage and, many years later, I myself studied. Any art work can be looked at as a collation of events, but for works which tend to fissure and split into atomized elements, this ap-

proach by event seems particularly appropriate.

6) When events were minimal, but had maximum implications, they became one of the key things which Fluxus artists typically did (and do) in their performances. That is, I think, the real lineage of Fluxus.

A further digression into language seems in order here. In Fluxus one often speaks of Fluxfestivals, Fluxconcerts, Fluxpeople, Fluxartists, Fluxevents... I'm afraid I'm to blame for that one. Maciunas was very much interested in the odd by-ways of baroque art. I told him about the work of the German baroque poet, Quirinus Kühlmann (1644-88), who was a messianic sort who was eventually burnt at the stake in Moscow, where he had gone in an effort to persuade the Tsar that he was a reincarnation of Christ. Kühlmann wrote various exciting books of poetry using "proteus" forms and other unconventional means, among which is the *Kühlpsalter*. This includes Kühlpsalms, evidently to be performed on Kühldays by Kühlpeople, and so on. Maciunas was delighted by this, and thenceforth made parallel constructions of his own that were based on it, - as mentioned, "Fluxfests" or "Fluxfestivals," to be performed by "Fluxfriends" who were also "Fluxartists," wearing "Flux-clothes" and eating "Fluxfood," etc. This dissociated such artists, festivals, etc., from regular ones - one was not an "artist" or even an "anti-artist" (as many observers accused us of being) but a "Flux-artist," which was something presumably quite different.

But, to summarize the discussion so far, the better one knows the Fluxworks, the less they resemble Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, Duchamp or Cage.

* * *

I began this essay by observing that I was trying to write theory here, not to give a basic history or critical discussion. The difference, as I see it, is that criticism attempts to provide an understanding of individual works, to explain why and how they work, or why and how they fail to do so. Theory, on the other hand, attempts to provide the underlying assumptions and policies of those works and of the criticism of them, if such criticism is to be appropriate. If one were to undertake both criticism *and* theory, one would have to describe a great many works, and this essay would become hopelessly cumbersome and lengthy. Therefore, at the risk of frustrating the reader, I will concentrate on the theory and only bring up the individual works where it is necessary to provide examples. This means I will not necessarily mention or discuss works by all the main Fluxus artists, even, but will concentrate on works which make good examples, assuming that the reader has some familiarity with at least some of the works which are alluded to, or with some of the artists.

* * *

Is there a Fluxus program?

I have already argued that Fluxus is not a movement, and this is, I feel, the case. Nonetheless, if Fluxus is to be a useful category for considering work, it must have more of a meaning than simply as the name of Maciunas's proposed publications or the artists associated with it. That is to say, there must be certain points in common among each work in a body of works; they must hang together by more than mere Zeitgeist. This means that the works will have some aspects of a movement, though not all of them.

Usually a movement in the arts begins with a group of artists coming together with some common feeling that something needs doing, that, as I put it a while ago, the arts have to be moved from point A to point B. A kind of imagery has been neglected and needs to be introduced: Pop Art. Art has become too cold and it must be warmed up, with an appeal to the transrational: romanticism. In other words, there is a program, whether or not that program is ever actually written out in a prescriptive manifesto, describing what is to be done and by whom and how, or whether or not the discovery is made by a critic that certain artists have something in common and constitute a group of some sort. Naturally, the world is full of pseudo-movements – works with something or other in common, which some ambitious critic then claims as a movement or tendency in the hopes of earning professional credits – brownie points, one might say – for having discovered movements. But if these points are too artificial, if there is no natural grouping which enforces the feeling that these works belong together, it will soon be forgotten as a grouping.

But with a real movement, the life of the movement continues to take place until the program has been achieved; at that point the movement dies a natural death, and the artists if they are still active, go on to do something else.

Fluxus had (and has) no prescriptive program. Its constituent works were never intended to change the world of cultural artifacts which surrounded them, though it might affect how they were to be seen.

Fluxus did not so much attack its surrounding art context as ignore it.

Nevertheless, there are some points in common among most Fluxworks:

- 1) internationalism,
- 2) experimentalism and iconoclasm,
- 3) intermedia,
- 4) minimalism or concentration,
- 5) an attempted resolution of the art/life dichotomy,
- 6) implicativeness,
- 7) play or gags,
- 8) ephemerality, and –
- 9) specificity.

These nine points – really, they are almost criteria – can be taken up one by one.(2)

Fluxus arose more or less spontaneously in various countries. In Europe there were, in the beginning (others joined shortly afterwards) Wolf Vostell, Nam June Paik, Emmett Williams and Ben Patterson, among others. In the United States there were, besides myself, Alison Knowles, George Brecht, Robert Watts, and the others I have already named, also La Monte Young, Philip Corner, Ay-O and still others. In Japan there were Takehisa Kosugi and Mieko Shiomi and more. Probably there were about two dozen

2. In 1990, Ken Friedman expanded on Higgins's "Nine Criteria." These were published as "The Twelve Criteria of Fluxus" in Friedman's catalogue essay *Fluxus and Company* for Emily Harvey Gallery and in *Lund Art Press* (vol.I, No 4). The essay was reprinted in the catalogues of *Ubi Fluxus*, *Ibi Motus* and *Fluxus Subjektiv*. Friedman sees his additional criteria as an articulation of distinctions implicit, but not fully elucidated, in Higgins's text. Higgins acknowledges and agrees with most of Friedman's views. (– ed.)

of us in six countries, with little besides our intentions in common (for one thing, not all of us had studied with Cage). Thus, Fluxus was not, for example, the creature of the New York art scene, the West German art scene, the Parisian one or anything else of that sort. It was, from its outset, *international*. At one point Maciunas tried, in structuring his proposed Fluxus collections, to re-nationalize it, but it simply did not work.

It was a coming together of *experimental* artists, that is, or artists who were not interested in doing what all the other artists were doing at the time; they mostly took an iconoclastic attitude towards the conventions of the art establishments of their various countries, and many have since paid the price of doing so, which is obscurity and poverty. No matter: they have their integrity intact. This experimentalism took the form in all cases, however, of formal experimentalism rather than of content as such. There was the assumption that new content requires new forms, that new forms enable works to have new content and to lead to new experiences.

In many cases this experimentalism led the artists into *intermedia* – to visual poetry, some varieties of Happenings, sound poetry and so on. At the time we called these “hybrid art forms,” but that term disappeared in favor of “intermedia.”

In order to state such forms in a very concentrated way, a great measure of purity was necessary, so that the nature of the form would be clear. One could not have too many extraneous or diverse elements in a work. This led, inevitably, to a stress on brevity, since there would, by keeping a work short or small, be less time for extraneous elements to enter in and to interfere. This brevity constituted a specific sort of *minimalism*, with as much concentration in a work as possible. La Monte Young wrote a musical piece which could last forever, using

just two pitches. Wolf Vostell has recently (1982) composed a Fluxus opera using just three words from the Bible for his libretto. George Brecht wrote many Fluxus events in his *Water Yam* series, using just a very few words – three in one event, twenty in another, two in a third, and so on.

Working so close to the minimum possible made the Fluxus artists intensely conscious of the possibility that what they did would not be art at all in any acceptable sense. Yet there was also the sense that most art work was unsatisfying anyway, that life was far more interesting. Thus there was a great deal of attention given to the resolutions of the *art/life dichotomy*, which has already been mentioned.

There was a sense that working with these materials implied an avoidance of the personal expression which was so characteristic of the arts in the period just before Fluxus began, in the early and middle 1950s. But the personal, as a genre, was by no means rejected out of hand in Fluxus if it could be presented in a way that was not overly subjective, which would be limited in relevance. Thus, Alison Knowles performed with her infant daughter, for example.

There was also the danger that working with such minimal material would lead to facile meanderings, to Fluxartists grinding out endless mountains of minimalist pieces which had no real *raison d'être*. Thus a very important criterion for avoiding this danger came to be the notion that a Fluxpiece, whether an object or a performance, should be as *implicative* as possible, that it should imply a maximum of intellectual, sensuous or emotional content within its minimum of material.

In the period just before Fluxus began, the dominant style in visual art had been abstract expressionism and in music had been post-

Webernite serialism. Both of these were apt to be extremely solemn and tendentious affairs indeed, and, in fact, seriousness tended to be equated with solemnity. Fluxus tended often to react against this by moving in the direction of humor and gags, introducing a much-needed *spirit of play* into the arts. This also fitted well with the iconoclastic side of Fluxus.

There was also the sense that if Fluxus were to incorporate some element of ongoing change, flux, that the individual works should change. Many of the Fluxus objects therefore were made of rather *ephemeral* materials, such as paper or light plastic, so that as time went by the work would either disappear or would physically alter itself. A masterpiece in this context was a work which made a strong statement rather than a work which would last throughout the ages in some treasure vault. Also, most of the Fluxus artists were (and are) very poor, and so they could not afford to work with fine and costly materials. Many of Robert Filliou's works have disappeared into the air, for example, though other Fluxworks are, in fact, made of standard materials and will perhaps last (e.g., works by Vostell or myself).

Maciunas's background, as I already mentioned, was in graphic and industrial design. The design approach is usually to design *specific* solutions to specific problems. Designers characteristically distrust universals and vague generalities. Generalizations are used in Fluxus works only when they are handled with all the precision of specific categories and necessities. They must not be vague. This was, typically, Maciunas's approach and it remains typical for us now that he is gone.

Clearly not every work is likely to reflect all nine of these characteristics or criteria, but the more of them a work reflects, the more typically and characteristically Fluxus it is.

Similarity, not every work by a Fluxartist is a Fluxwork; typically Fluxartists do other sorts of work as well, just as a collagist might also print, or a composer of piano music might try his hand at writing something for an orchestra. In this way also Fluxus differs from music. *All* the work of a surrealist was expected to be surrealistic. An abstract expressionist would be unlikely to produce a hard-edged geometrical abstraction. But a Vostell would do such a performance piece as "Kleenex" (1962), which he performed at many of the early festivals, while at the same time he was also making his "dé-coll/age" paintings and happenings, which had nothing to do with his Fluxus work except for their frequent intermedial nature. Maciunas used to like to call Fluxus not a movement but a *tendency*; the term is apt here, when one is relating a kind of work to its historical matrix.

Returning to intermedia, not all intermedial works are Fluxus, of course. The large-scale happenings of Kaprow (or Vostell) are not Fluxworks. Nor are most sound or concrete poems. These usually have *only* their intermedial nature in common with Fluxworks, and Fluxus was certainly not the beginning of intermedia. Consider, for example, the concrete poetry intermedium of the 1950s and 60s: it was an immediate predecessor of Fluxus. Furthermore, the visual impulse in poetry is usually present, even if only subtly. Nevertheless visual poems have been made, that is, poems which are both visual and literary art, since at least the second millennium before Christ, and they are found in Chinese, Vietnamese, Sanskrit, Gujarati, Hindi, Tamil, Turkish, Greek, Latin, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Spanish, Portuguese, French, English, Welsh and a dozen or so other literatures. These pieces existed well before 1912 when Apollinaire made his caligrammes and so focussed the eyes of the poetry world on the potentials of this intermedium. But, with concentration enough

– and the other criteria I have mentioned – a visual poem could indeed be a Fluxwork.

Similarly, many intermedial performance works existed before Fluxus. For example, in his anthology, *Technicians of the Sacred*, Jerome Rothenberg presented an enormous number of rituals and “performance poems” from the so-called primitive people which, when taken out of their usually sacred context, are so close to Fluxus pieces as to be nearly indistinguishable from them. Even had there been no immediate precedent of Futurist performance pieces, no Dada or Surrealism, Fluxus might still have developed out of the materials of folklore. This point was not lost on Rothenberg, who included several examples of Fluxus performance pieces in his book.

Also, in the nineteenth century, there was a tradition of parlor games which are sometimes very close to Fluxus. My Something Else Press, a publishing project which was in some respect a Fluxus enterprise, published a collection of such games by one William Brisbane Dick, *Dick's One Hundred Amusements* (note, please, it is the author's last name that is referred to in the title, not my first one). Fluxus might well have developed out of this popular culture tradition as well. In fact, a few of the pieces from both the Rothenberg and Dick collections have been included in Fluxperformances with no noticeable incongruity.(3)

So, supposing one sees a work and wants to know if it is Fluxus or not (whether or not it happens to be by a Fluxartist is not the issue here), all one need do is match it against the nine criteria. The more it matches, the more Fluxus it is, logically enough. Perhaps there are other such criteria, but these nine are sufficient.

Every so often there is a new upsurge of interest in Fluxus. At such times who were not in the original Fluxus group will present themselves as Fluxusartists. The best way of verifying their claims is, of course, to match them against the criteria. The more criteria they match, the more right they have to be included as Fluxartists in projects. This is a much better method of evaluating their claims than simply matching them against a master list of, let us say, everyone whom Maciunas published in his lifetime. In any case, Maciunas published other works besides pure Fluxus ones, even in that most quintessential of Fluxupublications, the occasional newspaper *CC V TRE*, so such a list would not be very useful except as a beginning. New artists, even those who have never heard of Fluxus or Maciunas may very well do Fluxworks inadvertently if they match the nine criteria.

And if the works in question do *not* match the criteria, then they are not Fluxworks even if the artist claims they are. What they do may be very interesting, of course. But it is not Fluxus. For example, some museum shows of Fluxus include pieces which do not reflect these criteria. The pieces tend to look rather incongruous in context, and they reflect ill upon the museum director's intelligence more than anything else. The inclusion of big names may be good for the attendance at a show, but it tends to obfuscate or vulgarize something that should be perfectly clear. For example, in 1981 there was an exhibition at Wuppertal in the Federal Republic of Germany, *Fluxus: Aspekt eines Phänomens* (“Fluxus: Aspects of a Phenomenon”). It was, in the main, a rather good show, but it showed clearly the question of inclusion. Works were included by Al Hansen. Indeed some of Hansen's per-

3. Swedish Fluxus artist Bengt af Klintberg is a professional folklorist. Many of his works have a direct relationship to folklore (– ed.)

formance pieces were, in fact, included in some of the early Fluxus performance festivals. But Hansen did not get along with Maciunas personally, and so he never belonged to the group as such. Nevertheless, his pieces in the show matched most of the criteria, and so in this exhibition they looked fully in place. Surely they were, in fact, Fluxworks. On the other hand, there were also some pieces by Mauricio Kagel, Mary Bauermeister and Dieter Roth, all three of them excellent artists. But their pieces did not match the criteria and they looked rather incongruous in the Fluxus context.

There are some other non-criteria which are worth mentioning in this discussion. These are more in the way of Fluxtraditions, by no means criteria, but relevant to a Flux-discussion.

Usually Fluxus performances have been done in costume. Either one wears all white, or one wears a tail suit, tuxedo or formal evening dress. The former reflects the desire for visual homogeneity, which Maciunas, as a designer, tended to prize. The latter reflects his fondness for the deliberately archaic, formal and obsolescent being presented in a new way. One sees a similar current in his use, in his publications, of extremely ornamental type faces, such as Romantique, for the headings, box covers or titles. These contrast with the extremely austere type which he used in most of his setting of the body texts in Fluxpublications, IBM News Gothic, this last the version of the sans-serif News Gothic which was on the IBM typesetter which he used most of the time in the early days of Fluxus. There is no reason in particular why either of these traditions should be preserved; they are not integral to Fluxus. Perhaps it is one of the few areas in Fluxus in which there is room for sentimentality that both traditions have been carried on in Maciunas's absence.

Another typical involvement in Fluxus which is not, per se, a criterion, is the emphasis on events that center around food. Many art works and groups of artists have dealt with food, but in Fluxus it becomes one of the main areas of involvement, perhaps because of its closeness to the art/life dichotomy. There are not only pieces themselves, using apples, glasses of water on pianos, beans, salads, messes made of butter and eggs, eggs alone, loaves of bread and jars of jam or honey, to name just a few that come immediately to mind, but also there were innumerable Fluxfeasts of various sorts, concerts or events which used the feast as matrix. No doubt these will continue as long as many of the original Fluxpeople are alive. One might speculate that the reason for this is the typical concern with food on the part of poor or hungry artists. But that seems secondary to the art/life element, and for me fact that for works which are so much on the border of art and life, art and non-art as Fluxpieces, the convention of a concert is not always suitable. For casual occasions with small audiences, feasts using food art are the equivalent of chamber music concerts. Feasts have included such non-delicacies as totally flavorless gelatine "Jello," side by side with delicious loaves of bread in the form of genitals, chocolate bars cast in equally startling shapes, blue soups and so on. Whether or not such foods are totally satisfying from an æsthetic point of view is not the question. The point is, rather, that there are non-determinative but nevertheless typical involvement of Fluxus, side with the determinative criteria.

* * *

But what of quality? How do we judge these works?

Clearly, with Fluxus the normal theoretical positions will not apply. Fluxus works are simply not intended to do the same things as

a Sophoclean tragedy, a Chopin mazurka, or a Jackson Pollock painting, and it is absolutely pointless to make the effort to fit Fluxus into a system to do this. Fluxus may have its thrills, but it is qualitatively different from almost all other art, occidental or oriental; at least with respect to its teleology, its purposes, its ends.

First of all, what is it *not*?

It is not mimetic. It does not imitate nature in any narrative way, though it may be “natural” in the sense of imitating nature in its *manner* of operation – its craziness, the kinds of patterns that it evokes and that kind of thing. This is only to say that Fluxus could, in its own way, be realistic – very much so. There could be a genre of the Fluxus story, but it would have to be extremely generalized, stripped down to a bare minimum. A kiss – that might be a Fluxus story. But we don’t usually think of that as mimesis.

Neither does it fit into the normative Romantic/Classic or Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomies. Perhaps it has something in common with the romanticism of Novalis and the Schlegel brothers in German romanticism; but it does attempt what either romantic or classical art attempt – a world transformed by the imagination or by feeling; it is not visionary. Quite the opposite, in fact. In terms of its assumed effects, it does not attempt to move the listener or viewer or reader emotionally or in any other way. Neither does it attempt to express the artist emotionally or intellectually. Thus one would not call it expressive in the normal meaning of the term. The Fluxus artist does not even *begin* to reveal himself or herself through the work. Perhaps the viewer or listener is to reveal himself or herself by experiencing it, at least to himself or herself, but that is a different matter, and we shall return to it later. The important thing here is that the

artist is as far away from the assumed eye or ear of the viewer or listener as is possible in an artwork. Any expression is objectified and de-personalized to the point of becoming trans-personal. One does not, as one does in so many works of art, see through the work to the artist. There may be an individual style (most Fluxus artists have those), but that, too, is a different matter, more akin to having one’s own idiolect than to presenting a subjective vision of something.

Neither are Fluxus works, in the main, pragmatic. That is, they teach nothing except, perhaps, by example. They do not convey moral principles, nor do they present “correct” political or social views. They may be political, but this is apt to be in a symbolic way – e.g. all the elements of a performance behave democratically, none dominates the others. But this is more apt to the sort of thing that the artist thinks about than anything a viewer is concerned with.

Nor could they be called “objective” in the T. S. Eliot sense. They are not simply objects to contemplate; they are too minimal for that and, often, too active as well – they imply too much. Actually, some few Fluxus works do belong in this vein, but it is not typical.

Neither is the Freudian or symbolic analysis of a Fluxus piece apt to be very rewarding or extensive matter. One does not have enough materials to work on. Ninety eight percent of Fluxus pieces have no symbolic content. Their psychological processes are too far and few between. Since the artist is not making a statement of any personal, psychological nature, an analysis of this sort would make very little sense.

A political analysis, Marxian or otherwise, might be interesting, but it would more likely satisfy the critic than the reader of the criticism, since Fluxus is only metaphorically political.

Since meaning is not the point and the conveyors of the meaning are so incidental that rather few patterns can be detected, the semiotics of a Fluxpiece are minimal enough to be problematic or even irrelevant. Of course there *are* some such conveyors, but these require only the simplest of identifications. No patterns of communication would be likely.

The same holds true of structuralist analysis. The linguistics of Fluxus would be a mentalistic exercise, not that Fluxus lacks its overall grammar, but the typical is only sixty per cent of the corpus, with the rest being exceptions of some kind or another. The whole analysis, rather than developing a meaningful critique or picture, would devolve into hairsplitting distinctions of *langue* and *parole*. Few patterns would be revealed. One might analyze a concert as a whole, but the concert *as a work* is a fairly arbitrary unit, and each concert tends to be quite different from each other concert (within certain limits), so that a structuralist analysis of recurring patterns would be rather pointless.

And yet a person who attends a Fluxconcert, after the first shock, typically gets caught up in the spirit of it and begins to enjoy it, without consciously knowing why. Perhaps there isn't even any shock. What is happening? To get to the answer to this will take a moment.

There is one critical approach which works – hermeneutics, the methodology of interpretation, both with regard to the artist and to the recipient (the viewer, hearer or reader). This approach, pioneered in recent times (it has an earlier history too) by Heidegger, Betti, Gadamer and others in philosophy, can be used to discover the workings of Fluxpieces fairly well. Usually the relationship between the recipient and the work is described in terms of a hermeneutic circle – idea of work, leading to manifestation of

work, leading to recipient, leading to recipient's own thought processes, leading to new idea of work, leading to further thought processes, leading to modified perception of work being manifested, leading back to altered perception of the idea of work. In other words, what the recipient sees is colored by his or her perception of it – and this is an implied part of the piece, even though it may be quite different from what the artist thought of it or as the performer manifested it.

In practice, going through the whole hermeneutic circle is a terribly cumbersome process to consider. My own preference is to streamline it by borrowing the horizon metaphor from Gadamer. Taking performance as the standard, for the moment:

The performer performs the work. He or she establishes a horizon of experience – what is done, its implications and whatever style the performer uses are all aspects of this horizon.

The viewer has his or her own horizon of experience. He or she watches the performance, and the horizons are matched up together. To some extent there is a fusion of these horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*). When the horizons fuse, wholly or in part, they are bent, warped, displaced, altered. The performance ends, and the horizons are no longer actively fused. The viewer examines his or her horizon. It is changed, the worse or for better. The best piece is the one which permanently affects the recipient's horizon, and the worst is the piece which the recipient, acting in good faith, cannot accept at all.

The key processes here are: being conscious of the two horizons, completing the fusion process (by paying close attention to the performance), and then the discovery of the alterations in one's own horizon – as one

notices that, for example, the performance has affected how one has been thinking about beans, butter, smiles or eggs. Such criticism focusses a great deal, of course, on the viewer. It more or less, in performance work, ignores the original Fluxcomposer, who may or may not be the same as the performer. But this is only true as far as the viewer is concerned. Why?

Because there is a similar fusion of horizons taking place between the composer and the performer. The composer makes the piece. The performer looks at the performance area and available materials, and only then decides just how to do the piece under the specific conditions of the performance. The performer next matches the horizon which he or she has built up with the horizon of the original piece as he or she sees it. Even if the performer is performing his own work, there will still be something of such a fusion of horizons between X- as-composer and X- as-performer, because X adapts his or her own piece, takes the responsibility to make slight changes – and, if a piece is performed many years after it was written, X has changed and the interaction with the piece suggests different significances. The piece is viewed from many different angles, and different aspects are revealed by each.

Now we can see why the viewer can enjoy the concert without knowing why – instinctively he or she is matching horizons, comparing expectations, participating in the process; the more actively he or she does so, the more likely he or she will likely be able to enjoy the experience.

Nonetheless, for the viewer, the recipient, the composer is more or less an object of speculation. One wonders who might Mieko Shiomi be – does she have green horns? All one sees is the work that is being done. One does not really have any way of knowing if the performance is staying close to the

Fluxcomposer's work or if the performer is taking liberties with it. What the recipient sees is the performance, no more, no less. But in the case of works as minimalist as Fluxus ones are apt to be, the more actively the performance is watched, the more likely one is to enjoy it, as noted above.

A question may well start to go through the mind at this point, a natural question in viewing any unfamiliar art work: "Of what is this thing that I am seeing an example?" That is part of discovering one's meaning for a work. We love to classify. We involve ourselves in the naming of things, frame the work in its context, investigate its taxonomy. Of course, while I am talking about performance work, *any* Fluxwork, literary or fine art, would have analogical processes. But if one goes to a concert of familiar music, this question is minimalized, because one knows, before one sets a foot in the door, that in Chopin is on the program, the concert is likely to include at least some romantic music with a certain kind of sound to it. Thus the taxonomy is not so important there. On the other hand, if one turns on a radio and finds oneself enjoying some unknown piece, part of the key to enjoying the piece is to recognize the question – "of what is this an example?" – and to try to figure out what it is to match it with similar experiences in one's memory bank and, so, enjoy the work even more.

The matter of horizons takes place in any hermeneutic art process – it is inherent in the discovery of the horizons. But in watching a Fluxperformance example are all the more important since they involve discovering the pattern of the performance, the what-is-being-done. Quite often this discovery, detecting the example aspect of the horizon, come to the viewer with a striking impact; it is like "getting" the point of a joke. And, in fact, the similarity between even non-humorous Fluxpieces and jokes is striking.

Even when the piece is serious, one tends to react *as if* the piece were a joke, since a joke is the nearest thing on one's horizon to many Fluxpieces. For example, one is in an audience watching the stage. A balloon appears. A second balloon comes along. A third balloon comes along. One notices that the name of the piece is "Eight." Suddenly the pattern is clear. One laughs. Why? There is nothing inherently funny in the pattern, but it has enough in common with jokes so that each balloon, as it appears and confirms one's anticipation that there will in fact be eight balloons, feels like a stage along the way. Perhaps the metaphor of "joke" is implied by the piece. But what would happen if, in the piece, only seven balloons appeared? One would be annoyed, probably feel cheated. It would seem as if the Flux-composer were being overly clever. That would not be interesting. It would be like a tricky joke that dissolves into excesses of cleverness and amuses only the teller.

Some assemblages of Fluxpieces have been presented as other things besides concerts and feasts: rituals have a certain place in Fluxus too. A ritual is, basically, a ceremonial act or series of such acts, symbolically recognizing a transition from one life stage or situation to another. Three notable Fluxrituals have been a Fluxmass, a Fluxdivorce and the Fluxwedding of George Maciunas himself. In this last, Maciunas and his bride cross-dressed, as did the bridesmaids and best man (Alison Knowles). The wedding ceremony was based on a traditional Anglican one, but was altered with deliberate stumblings and falterings, the substitution of "Fluxus" for various of the critical words in prayers, etc. Instead of anthems and special music, there were various special Fluxuspieces which were, in one way or another, suitable for a wedding. And afterwards there was an erotic feast, including the special bread already mentioned above. According to classical theory

one might expect such a reversal of the normative, with the solemn made light and the religious made profane, to seem like a satire upon marriages in general. But no, the dominant feeling was one of joy. It was not a travesty but a incorporation of the horizon of Fluxus into horizon of marriage. The result was certainly serious: Maciunas and his bride Billie did, in fact, actually marry (including a civil service at another time). One felt that the participants were sharing the joy of the basic ceremony with their Fluxfriends – including one fifteen-year-old girl, a friend of one of my daughters, who came to the Fluxwedding without ever having seen a Fluxconcert or any other such event before. This young woman, whose horizons were thoroughly conventional, might have been expected to be shocked or offended – or at least startled by the erotic feast. But as a whole the situation was so far from the normative that normative standards did not apply, she did not reject the fusion of horizons but entered into the situation and enjoyed herself thoroughly as one might at any other kind of wedding.

Ultimately, of course, the purpose of achieving such a fusion of horizons is to allow the possibility of their alteration. I have not gone into Fluxobjects, Fluxboxes and Fluxbooks, but the situation is the same as with the performances – one sees the work, considers its implied horizons, matches them with one's own, and these last, if the work works well, are altered and enriched. One sees, for example, the word "green" in wooden letters on a wooden tablet. The tablet and word are painted green. One thinks about labels, green and life, craft and its absence, simplicity and complexity. That is one possibility. Or perhaps the tablet and word are painted red, though the word still says "green," In this last case there is a displacement. The word says something different from what one would expect. Or perhaps there is whole rainbow of "green" on tablets, from red

through violet and brown, perhaps even including black and white. Any of such piece would work reasonably well – the horizons would work, and the implications, while different, would follow somewhat along the same pattern: see, identify what it is, compare it with what it might be, consider, digest, anticipate the next possibility, observe the transformation of one's own horizons – and enjoy the process. Each of such pieces is *an example* of the possibilities. When one sees such a piece, one imagines its alternatives. The alternatives are implied in the piece. The work is, in this sense, exemplative: it does not exist, as most art does, in the most definitive and perfect form possible. It exists in a form which suggests alternatives. This is true of many recent works, not just Fluxworks but other works as well. They encourage the creativity of the viewer, listener or reader, that is, of the receiver.

Such implications are a key criterion for evaluating the quality of a Fluxwork. If it has them, if one is conscious of them on the intuitive and imaginative level (rather than forcing them through an act of will), the work is good. That is, it is achieving its potential. The extent to which it lacks implications, conversely, is the extent to which it is not good, to the extent that it fails. One can, for metaphysical reasons, reject such value judgements on the conscious level, of course; but one experiences them nonetheless, and performs an act of criticism and, hopefully, of self-enrichment when one allows one's horizons to be changed.

The best fluxworks imply a whole set of other possible Fluxworks; they are example. In terms of performance style (or style of execution as Fluxart, Fluxboxes and Fluxbooks) the best performances are therefore those which are most direct, so that one can perceive at least some of the alternative possibilities to the form in which a given

work appears. This avoids what would be a problem in these works of becoming involved with noticing craftsmanship and the definitiveness of the statement in a work.

The best performance style is, therefore, that which allows the piece to be experienced with a minimum of consciousness of the performer interceding between piece and receiver. This is also true of some kinds of non-Fluxus performances, of comedy, for instance. A comedian who intrudes on his joke by laughing, by expressing himself in a subjective way, by commenting "This is a great joke," by reducing the effect of joke by calling attention to himself, is likely to wind up as the only person laughing at his joke. In such cases the horizons of "joke" and "audience anticipation" fail to fuse. A Charlie Chaplin presents the humor in his films in an altogether deadpan way, while a twelfth-rate jokester in a hotel bar does much of the laughing and expressing himself – and bores the audience. So it is with Fluxus too. The proper style for Fluxus is the most low-key and efficient one. One does not mystify the audience – that is not the point – but one lets it have exactly enough information to discover the horizon, and then one lets the piece do the rest. It is *never* necessary to joke about the Fluxpiece or to comment about it in an evaluative way – "Next we will have a great piece from 1963 by Ben Vautier..." That would constitute an intrusion, and, far from making the piece more likable, would detract from it.

One digression is necessary here before we leave the matter of theory and horizons; this is the matter of large works. The impression exists that *all* Fluxworks are small or minimalist. This is obviously not the case with what I have called the collation sort of Fluxus assemblage. Some patterns simply cannot be absorbed in their minimalist statement, – they require time to reveal themselves effectively. The pieces are, necessarily,

harder to understand for an audience; the past experience of the members of the audience usually has led them to expect more entertainment values than they are likely to get. One hears it said, "I liked the little pieces, but the big ones went on too long." What one hopes is that the boredom, if any, will be temporary, while the receiver fights the horizon of the piece. Boredom is, of course, not the aim of the piece; but it may be a necessary way-station on the path to liking it. Therefore, with such pieces the characteristic length is apt to have to be sufficiently long to allow the receiver to get through the boring phase and into the spirit of the event afterwards. This is why Fluxus pieces are apt either to be very short – two minutes or less – or very long – twenty minutes or more. There are rather few in the middle length category.

There is a slight difference between European Fluxus and American Fluxus. The Europeans have tended to perform their Fluxus works in the context of festivals, while the Americans have tended to let the life situations predominate more often. Almost all the Fluxperformances in Europe have been in such concert situations, except for a few in the street; in America both of these have happened, but the feasts and the Fluxrituals have virtually *all* happened in the America. The reason for this is not a difference in attitude, but is, rather, that the European Fluxartists are more scattered and it takes a well-financed festival to bring them together. On the other hand, in spite of the worse financial situation in America, there are more Fluxartists or Fluxmen there, and they form one or several communities. For instance, in New York City alone there are perhaps forty Fluxpeople in residence, and, so to bring them together is not hard.

Also, the European Fluxworks, more typically than the American ones, come out of an expressive tradition. Since, to build up an

emotional impact, one usually needs to work on a scale that is beyond the minimal, the collation sort of work is more typically European, while the minimal one is more typically American or Japanese. Besides, even if an American wanted to work on the larger scale, funding and obtaining rehearsal time would be problematic, so that the economics militate against doing such pieces in America vis-à-vis Europe.

* * *

What about other aspects of reception – artists, public and institutions?

The reception of Fluxus, its popularity, influence and, in general, its acceptance varies considerably, according to who is seeing the work. The least problematic area is that of the general public. If even a relatively unsophisticated person attends a Flux-performance or an exhibition of Fluxus works, such a person is apt to have an interesting and pleasurable experience. Even at the very beginning of Fluxus this was true. At Wiesbaden in 1962 the *hausmeister* (janitor) of the museum was so delighted by the performances that he brought his family and friends to the concerts as well. Not a formally cultured man, he nevertheless was sufficiently enthusiastic about the concert to exert himself and bring those with whom he wanted to share it. Furthermore, some of the more successful Fluxusperformances have been done in the street or on boardwalks and in other public spaces. One performance by Benjamin Patterson comes to mind. It took place in New York's Times Square, on the edge of a red light district. He stood on street corners, waiting till the lights turned green, and then simply followed the light to the next corner. Several young women – they appeared to be prostitutes – watched him do this for a while, and then they joined in. This situation was not as exceptional as one might imagine. Thus it cannot be argued

that, simply because it is formally unconventional, that Fluxus is lacking in potential popularity. Because of the comparative simplicity of most Fluxus pieces, this is less true of Fluxus than of other avant-garde tendencies.

For most avant-garde art, one needs to know quite a considerable amount of art history and even of technical procedure in order to get one's bearings enough to be able to fuse one's horizons and experience pleasure. The difficulty of doing this is apt to become more pronounced, in fact, with the progressive intellectualism of the audience, since it has more expectations of what will or should happen. An audience with the baggage of ideas to which it feels some commitment has more to overcome than an audience without them. And it *must* overcome the false horizons in order to be able to fuse them and experience pleasure. An audience with a strong commitment to one or another alternative set of ideas – intellectual or derived from precedent and fashion – has to learn that these ideas are not under attack in Fluxus situations, that they are simply irrelevant to the work at hand, and this takes time.

As I have said, Fluxus performances and situations are popular with the public once the public is confronted by them. Many, many times “professionals” in charge of the programs of institutions have grossly underestimated the appeal of Fluxpieces; they devote an evening to Fluxperformances when they might have devoted several, and then they are surprised at the frustration among those who have to be turned away. They program an exhibition, print five hundred catalogs, and find that the exhibition breaks

attendance records and that they must print another thousand or so catalogs. The public is, therefore, not the problem.(4)

As for artists, few artists who do performance works can attend a Fluxus performance without, subsequently, including Fluxus-type elements in their own next performance. Naturally, these are usually not acknowledged, but a sensitive viewer can detect them. For example, in the 1960s, the famous Living Theater picked up fragments of Fluxworks, especially from Jackson Mac Low and myself (we had both worked with the Living Theater at various points) and included them in their program, “Shorter Pieces.”

Another example of the absorption of Fluxus happened during the 1970s, when “performance art” or “art performances” became common. Typically performance art was different from Fluxus, in that it included much more narrative and subjectively personal content, usually focussing on generating a public persona for the artist. Works by Laurie Anderson are a good example of this, stressing the bright young ingenue in the high tech world of New York City (not always justifiable, but usually fairly convincing in performance). The persona may be quite different from the private personality of the artist. However, the minimalist structure within which the performance takes place, the untraditional narrative matrix, the absence of most theatrical techniques, suggest a debt to Fluxus (and perhaps to Happenings). The performances of “performance artists” match many of the Fluxus criteria given above, and, but for their knowledge of Fluxus, it is unlikely that

4. In 1979, a Fluxconcert was presented by The Kitchen in New York. Originally scheduled for three evenings, the staff reduced it to one. Several hundred people were crowded in over house capacity and over a thousand people were turned away. In Paris in 1989, for a Fluxus evening at l'École des Beaux Arts, more than three thousand viewers were unable to fit into the hall. Special Fluxus issues of magazines have all done well, some going out of print with a few days of publication. (– ed.)

their work would assume the form it did without some awareness of it. Since the artists who did this work were, for the most part, younger than the Fluxus people, they naturally did not wish to present themselves as travelling in the wake of Fluxus or Happenings. They describe themselves as qualitatively new and different, although there are at least three overlaps, artists who have done major Fluxwork but who are accepted as performance artists as well – Alison Knowles (one of the original Flux-people), Geoffrey Hendricks, and Jean Dupuy. This legacy area can and should be explored more fully at some point.

But there are two bodies of people whose hostility towards Fluxus is profound. Maciunas thought this hostility was irreversible, and perhaps he was right. These are both groups of art professionals: those who work in art institutions (galleries and museums) and the artists who are “good” in whatever it is that they do, but who are not good enough to be really secure in it. Of this last group, it is a truism that “the good is ever the enemy to the best.” This means that, by their very nature, artists who are not really strong enough to create new territory must rely for their professional success on the continued attention (and therefore value) assigned to the safe ground that they are on. Such artists felt very threatened by Fluxus, which, as they see it, calls into question the validity of what they are doing by posing an alternative model. In fact, one might almost say that one way to tell the difference between a good pattern painter and a fine one, between a good photo-realist painter and a fine one, would be to ask them about Fluxus. The strong one will either be supportive or not interested; the weak one will attack it. Why? Because Fluxus is concerned with works and ideas, with a minimum of personality. It is done for the love of it – “for its own sake,” in Victor Cousin’s phrase (“l’art pour lui-même,” 1816). If value comes

to be attached to this – great! But it is uncommercial by its very nature. It does not take a great expert to make coffee as a performance. But commercial is exactly what most second-rate professional art is – it demands to be admired so that it can be sold. There is, thus, a real threat in this sense to this kind of professionalism on the part of Fluxworks, and the good artist who is not one of the best recognizes this on the gut level intuitively.

Museum and gallery people have a somewhat similar problem with Fluxus. Fluxus-works do not lend themselves easily to becoming commodities – precious objects sold through stores, as art galleries want it to be, or beautiful fetishes to immortalize the donor of works in the local museum – “gift of...,” well, whoever. But a Fluxobject is valuable not intrinsically but because of the ideas which it implies and embodies. It has more the quality of a souvenir or sacred relic than of an exquisitely wrought product of fine craftsmanship. There are only a few Fluxworks (again, Vostell is perhaps an exception) which could not be duplicated by the artist, more or less exactly, without any great effort. In fact, if a Fluxobject is damaged, – for example by a packer at a museum after an exhibition, who might well dismantle it without knowing what he is doing, – it is often easier to remake it than to repair it. This can be exasperating to the gallery or museum person. The collector bought the object and it was damaged; normally, if it were traditional art, he would arrange for the artist to restore it, or would hire a skilled restorer to do so. On the other hand, some Fluxartists feel that when the work has passed out of their possession, it is the responsibility of the new owner to restore it or possibly even to remake it. The idea of the work is part of the work here, and the idea has been transferred along with the ownership of the object that embodies it. This is discouraging to collectors, and is therefore

discouraging to those who service them as well. Normally when one goes to a great collection one is conscious of the display of wealth; one speculates on how much this or that work or the entire collection must have cost. Such collections belong not only to the world of art, of course, but to the world of taste and fashion. One can try to ignore this feeling or inquiry, but one will seldom succeed. But a collection of Fluxus works will inevitably include some pieces which are untransformed from life (Duchamp's urinal could have been a Fluxwork). Their significance is their ability to transform the viewer's horizons; this stress threatens the assumptions of those who are commodity or craft-oriented.

Gallery operators service such collections, of course. They therefore have a vested interest in discouraging their opposites. Museums service such collections too. Both, therefore, tend to disparage Fluxus – they say “it's over.” They have been saying this since Fluxus began. Since Fluxus is as much a form and an attitude as it is a historical tendency, even if the tendency were over the form might not be over. Is collage “over?”. Or they say “it's all paper,” meaning that there are no substantial works, which is untrue. It is the responsibility of Fluxartists, in order to bring their ideas to the people, to prove otherwise, and to endure until the

larger museums, however reluctantly, feel they must give more than token attention to Fluxus, even though most of the skill in Fluxworks goes into the conception rather than the execution.

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But to reiterate once again what I have said, before closing off. Fluxus differs from most art in being more purely conceptual. It is not just a group of people or a historic tendency so much as a class of form, with the nine characteristics which I already mentioned (*internationalism, experimentalism iconoclasm, intermedia, minimalism, the spirit of play, ephemerality and specificity*). The best ingress into the work, since it does not usually offer the same experience or have to match our normative expectation for art, is via hermeneutics – via the horizon concept. Historically Fluxus has had an influence on art performance – also on artists books (book-works), which I have not discussed. But its real impact will probably be when new artists can take up the Fluxus format without being self-conscious about it, to make what they themselves need from the area. To appreciate this a special kind of gallery director or museum person would be needed, since it would be, at best, problematic for a traditional one to deal with Fluxus.

Berlin , Germany
11, March, 1982
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The catalogs of major museum exhibitions of the better-known Fluxus artists are apt to include additional biographical and bibliographical information; this is the case with Joseph Beuys, Robert Filliou, Nam June Paik, Wolf Vostell, etc. But a really comprehensive Fluxus bibliography has yet to be prepared. The Ruhé book in section one is perhaps the best sources of information up to its date. Also, there is useful information in many of the art Who's Whos which has not been added into the specialized bibliographies. Generally speaking, there is more informations on the visual artists in Fluxus than on the Fluxcomposers, Fluxperformers, Fluxpoets, Fluxpoliticians, Fluxdesigners, etc.

DICK HIGGINS

Barrytown, NY
13. July 1987

(Bibliography updated 10. March 1991 by *Lund Art Press*)

RE: FLUXUS

by Johanna Grawunder

Johanna Grawunder is an architect and designer on the staff of Sotsass Associates. An American from San Diego, California, she now lives and works internationally from her office in Milan.

I WAS CURIOUS to be asked to comment on Fluxus. I knew very little about it; only vignettes here and there from art history classes at school and from my Dad, who is a big fan. To avoid having to stop there with the discussion I did a little research – I talked to people, and read the piece by Achille Bonito Oliva in the Biennale of Venice catalogue, and I read the *Fluxus Performance Workbook*.

It was interesting for me to note how the different people I asked reacted in very different ways to the subject. It revealed how provocative Fluxus is: everyone seems to have an opinion.

Professor Gianni Péttena told me all about the roots of the group, he said “pre-Pop,” and about the idea of provocation, about the invention of improvisation, the fascination of improvisation. We talked about John Cage and the spirit of the Andy Warhol films. We talked about starving, suffering artists and deprivation and then we talked about Fluxus some more.

Then I asked my friend Mike Ryan, who is my age (30), and has almost exactly my same cultural background (he is even from San Diego), but he’s a much darker character, and he knew a lot of the names dropped in the Péttena conversation that I didn’t know. I gave him the *Workbook* over night and he came in the next morning with scribbled notes torn out of a sketch book (architect). They were unsettling. He was really bothered by the whole operation. In general he

summed up his notes by saying that he would “like to like this stuff but...”

Christoph Radl is a graphic designer/advertising designer and a member of the original Memphis group. He’s also a conceptual art collector and the first thing he said was that Fluxus had rendered the selling of an art piece difficult...

I can’t imagine this information is going to be very helpful. I’m sorry for that. But I was happy to read the *Workbook*. My reaction was a little bit irritation, a little bit amusement; I understand the significance of the group and the timing now; but I also admit that I tend to feel more compatible towards Mondino videos. I tend to feel more provoked by easily accessible images. Fluxus required a lot of work from me.

We had a Japanese architect friend whom we considered the most powerful person we knew. He communicated without a lot of words, without a lot of movements. And I really don’t know what it was... but it was such a sort of soft media. I’m sure it was also a layering of antiquities and information and a special perception of the world and I’m convinced there was also magic. And softly, very softly he broke all preconception and rules and he brought us into a totally different world

So maybe I’m trying to follow that way right now, and the Fluxus event structure seemed so harsh to me on one hand, so much work on the other...



Photo: Robert C. Morgan

Eric Andersen at the Emily Harvey Gallery, New York 1990.

ABOUT FLUXUS, INTERMEDIA AND SO...

AN INTERVIEW WITH ERIC ANDERSEN

by Jean Sellem

Lund Art Press interviews Eric Andersen, a member of Fluxus and a pioneer in the performing arts in Scandinavia. To Andersen, a piece of art is not something to observe passively. Intermedia work gives the audience its own space. The audience must find its own way to conceive the work, in effect forming it. Here is Jean Sellem's interview with Eric Andersen:

JEAN SELLEM (JS) How and when was Fluxus introduced in Denmark? What was the first Fluxus event in Copenhagen?

ERIC ANDERSEN (EA) I have to describe things in general. Fluxus is normally misunderstood as a kind of art movement or as a group of artists that share the same program or the same aesthetics. That is not true. We can talk about two things in Fluxus: an aesthetic revolution which could be called *intermedia* and the relationship of *intermedia* to all kinds of aesthetic phenomena.

To me, Fluxus was just a meeting point. A number of events called Fluxus were organized in Europe during 1962 and 1963. These events engaged a number of people who had already been working with similar events for a number of years but never had called them Fluxus or given them any kind of label. If we are talking about events similar to Fluxus, then we have had things going on in Copenhagen for quite a while. We had the Gallery Kjøpcke introducing Robert Filliou, Dieter Rot and other people in Copenhagen from 1958 until '62. Nam June Paik had also been at the Louisiana show called "Movements in

Art," which came from the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and was moved to Louisiana and later on to Moderna Museet in Stockholm. Furthermore we had in 1960/61 my work with ordinary and accidental occurrences with full audience participation, as in *Opus 37*. This was an intermedia performance which could be seen and experienced. So all these events had already taken place in Denmark and elsewhere in Europe, USA and Japan before '62, but they were not called Fluxus at that time.

The word Fluxus was used in Denmark for the first time in October 1962 during seven performances which took place in St. Nikolaj Church. Before '62 nothing had been labelled as Fluxus in Denmark. George Maciunas, who had wanted to make a political art movement, came from Lithuania. He had presented oppositional Lithuanian art, though not very successfully, in New York.

He wanted to publish a magazine in New York about Lithuanian art. This was the first time Fluxus was used for a completely different purpose. He had to give up this whole concept and instead started showing artists

like La Monte Young, George Brecht and so on, in his AG gallery. Actually, in New York, he never used the term Fluxus for anything at that time, he had only plans. The first time the term Fluxus was ever used was at the festival of Wiesbaden. Wiesbaden was the first event, Copenhagen the second, and these were followed by Paris, Düsseldorf and later on Nice and Amsterdam.

JS Which influence was strongest in Fluxus, the American or the European?

EA Neither one nor the other. You can look upon it in two ways. There were some American and European artists joining these festivals. They were very different all of them. I don't think they were influenced by each other really. All of us had our own established positions. The extraordinary thing was that we met for the first time and that this meeting gave us an enormous burst of work and energy. We had all been living in very marginal situations and were very isolated from each other. We first met in Wiesbaden, and then in Copenhagen, Düsseldorf, Paris, etc. It is impossible to say that Dick Higgins influenced Robert Filliou or that Emmett Williams influenced La Monte Young. Neither can it be said that George Brecht influenced Robert Filliou by meeting him. This was never the case. At the beginning of the sixties our work had already delineated a very specific profile for each of us. We cannot say that it changed after '62. So, we had independent artists just working together on the same platform not really sharing a program. We can say that these were the only artists in the world at that time who worked with intermedia, even though some others who did not work with intermedia had an experimental attitude. This new art situation gave us a real alternative platform for what we were doing and free space to present our works which had never been presented before within the traditional art framework.

To me, it is interesting to note that the Fluxus label can have two meanings: the European one used during the festivals taking place in '62 and '63 in Copenhagen, Wiesbaden, Düsseldorf, Paris, Amsterdam and Nice, and the other one adopted by George Maciunas who was the practical organizer of those festivals. Maciunas tried to establish Fluxus as an art movement in the US after having returned from Europe. He wanted people to share the same goals, but he actually never succeeded in having any of us to agree with this conformism.

JS How and when did you become engaged in Fluxus?

EA Kjøpcke and I did not know each other until '62. Before that date there was little connection between visual and music groups in Denmark. Of course I was aware of the work of La Monte Young, Emmett Williams and others, and had been in correspondence with all of them, but we met only personally in '62 when they came to Copenhagen. They were invited by an organisation called The Young Composers Organization which organized the concerts in St. Nikolaj Church.

JS Were you interested in music before '62?

EA My original background is music. I was doing my first intermedia works in 1960 and 1961. At the same time I was finishing my studies as a classical composer.

JS You were very young then.

EA You have to imagine that I was only seventeen when I made my first intermedia performance. This is a typical age for musicians. They start much earlier than visual artists. If you look at most musicians, you see they are often very active before the age of twenty. It is not common to see visual artists working professionally at that age.

JS Has Cobra been important for the development of Fluxus in Denmark?

EA No, I don't think so. I think that Cobra has a completely different aesthetic and philosophical approach than most artists taking part in the Fluxus festivals. Asger Jorn was respected by Fluxus people, not for his painting but because of his writing about *Comparative Vandalism*, which of course is very interesting as a theoretical work. In fact, Cobra belongs to a simple line of painting and visual history of art. I cannot say that Cobra influenced Fluxus art in Denmark. As far as I can remember there was no contact existing between the Cobra group and the Fluxus people.

JS What about between Køpcke and the Cobra group?

EA Køpcke had nothing at all to do with Cobra. He was very much into the Tachism in his early years and also into Russian Futurism, and Nouveau Réalisme.

JS What sort of relationship existed during the sixties between Danish Fluxus people, the EKS School and the Bauhaus Situationists?

EA Of course we knew each other. But there were very strong differences between Fluxus, the EKS School, and the Bauhaus Situationism art conceptions and attitudes. My Fluxus friends and I saw the EKS School during the sixties as trying to imitate international trends to make a kind of new generation of artists. You could find these groups everywhere all over the world. For example when Pop Art became very fashionable, you had local Pop Art groups who tried to overthrow the decorative or expressionistic trends that were well established at that time. The EKS School was just the sort of group which took from Pop Art when it became fashionable and from happenings when these be-

came more popular and so on. I was really displeased with them. I saw them as traditional artists who were making their careers by following the leading trend. I remember that some Fluxus people called them "the epigone boys."

What concerned the Bauhaus Situationists, who are a dissident splinter of the International Situationists, is a little different because you cannot accuse them of plagiarism. The International Situationism is of course an art movement. The Situationists had specific philosophical axioms and points of view that they wanted to communicate, perform and impose on the world. We had much more respect for the Bauhaus Situationists than for the artists connected with the EKS school, but we considered them very naive in their conceptions. I mean the whole story about making people happy and liberated and putting fantasy to power. To speak about *homo ludens* and all these simplistic ideas. They were nice people to have around. They were amusing guys, we had great fun together. We really didn't work with them, there was no contact in that sense between the Bauhaus Situationists and us. We disagreed totally with them conceptually.

I want to point out in this context that most of the artists working with Fluxus have never had the intention to change or to educate the world. They never expected to liberate or to teach people. This is of course completely opposite from the attitude of the Bauhaus Situationists and the International Situationists. Most works made within the Fluxus framework were absolutely not didactic. Most of us have never tried to convince anybody about anything. I think it is very important to give the audience its own space and its own way to form the manner of the work itself.

JS How do you see the role of Per Kirkeby, Bjørn Nørgård, Poul Gernes and other artists

from the EKS School in relation with Fluxus in Denmark and internationally?

EA As I told you before, I considered Per Kirkeby, Bjørn Nørgård, Poul Gernes and other artists from the EKS School to be just a group of people who wanted to be in the new generation and they did not express any particular æsthetic or philosophy. They were a group of people who during the sixties were only copying and following international trends that had some impact, some power, some immediate media power. Fluxus investigations were to them much too confusing, too difficult to deal with. They could not use such art philosophy for their purposes because the Fluxus research had too many implications and was too vague to them. In their eyes Fluxus had too little focus and certainly was not a way to make an impact on the world and create change. The only way they could refer to what happened in Fluxus was to relate to Joseph Beuys in that very simple sense, that Beuys was a big romantic – dealing with mythology or similar things – which could in some ways be explained. An intermedia work is exactly what it is. It is nothing more or nothing less. There is no code to it and it means absolutely nothing. Joseph Beuys' work, however, is extremely metaphorical. It is referential and conveys utopian fantasies. It could also be explained in general terms to the public and art critics – they related of course to the phenomena which could be immediately perceived and included in a conventional understanding of art.

JS Beuys has been close to the people from the EKS School. How do you see his role as a Fluxus person?

EA Beuys is a kind of funny figure because he is probably the most well known of the Fluxus people, but he is probably the one who has the least to do with Fluxus. We met

him in Düsseldorf in '64, he was not even taking part in the Fluxus Festival, he was just a professor at the academy. He was the contact between the academy and the group, that was his first meeting with Fluxus. At that time he was doing completely different works but he fell in love with the the idea of the word Fluxus and started calling his own work Fluxus. In fact he participated in only one Fluxus Festival, that was in 1964 in Aachen, when he made his first performance piece with the cross and the piano, it was very Nam June Paik influenced, and he was attacked by the audience because he spilled some acid on their shoes. There is a very famous photo of him with blood running from his nose. It was really the only time he took part in a manifestation called Fluxus and for the rest he was just working on his own work. If you look at most of what was taking place in the Fluxus Festival, then his work was very symbolic, expressionistic and traditional. It was very much concerned with the concept of *Selbstdarstellung* as a personal interpretation of the world. It was absolutely not an anonymous work. It was a personal work socially oriented in a specific sense.

Wolf Vostell had to some degree the same elements in his work as Joseph Beuys, but Vostell's work didn't play a significant part in the Fluxus festivals. Most of the works he was doing had the character of expressionism and symbolism and he attempted to influence peoples' minds. So, Joseph Beuys is really a marginal phenomenon in what was happening during the first years of Fluxus. Later in the sixties Beuys became very famous but in '64 he was very marginal in Fluxus and very few of us had anything to do with him.

There was an important event at the Charlottenborg Festival in Copenhagen 1964. The people taking part were Emmett Williams,

Arthur K pcke, Wolf Vostell, Tomas Schmit, Joseph Beuys, myself and others. We started fighting about aesthetic and philosophical questions. Beuys and Vostell were kicked out of the festival because we totally disagreed with their artistic position. My friends and I were so angry that we just told them to get out of the country. They left. I mean the difference between us was so great that we could not be confined in the same festival as early as '64. After Beuys was kicked out, the cooperation started between him and the EKS School. We were really in opposition to the EKS School. George Maciunas was furious because Beuys called his work "Fluxus West," Maciunas hated this term. He wrote several times to Beuys and told him not to call him "Fluxus West" because Fluxus West referred to the west coast of the United States, not western Europe.

JS Why do you consider the Fluxus happening in St. Nikolaj Church in Copenhagen 1962 as an important manifestation?

EA First of all because we all met. We had not met personally before. Only a few of us had met. Secondly because it was the first larger presentation of intermedia works in Copenhagen. Of course we have had small events happening in '60 and '61. We had Nam June Paik in Louisiana, but that was only a small event. In St. Nikolaj Church it was a really extensive presentation of intermedia works. There were seven evenings in a row. There was extensive media coverage, television was there. Large articles were written on the front pages of the important Danish newspapers. The church was full of people every evening. So, this manifestation presented a completely new aesthetic which shocked all art life in Copenhagen and provoked an enormous scandal. Most of the people hated it. I was even beaten in a pub during the festival. People thought that it was the most disgustingly amateur dilet-

tante art they had ever seen. I don't remember one positive reaction from art critics or the art world. This manifestation created a completely alternative network however. It established another situation, and medium for presenting intermedia works. We had connected internationally, which meant that through this network we could travel and perform all over the world, in the United States, all over Europe and in Japan and present our work in alternative spaces, not dependent on museums, art institutions, galleries, etc.

JS Arthur K pcke, who worked closely with you from 1962 to 1966, expressed to me his great admiration for your artistic activities. What was your relation to him and to his work?

EA As I told you before, I have music and intermedia as my background. K pcke's background was Nouveau R alisme, Constructivism, he was also very influenced by Kasimir Malevich's Suprematism. There were a few turning points in K pcke's life. One was when he met Daniel Spoerri and started to make license-works. Of course, that was a new concept to do art work on licenses. He had also made environments in his gallery, but no performance pieces at all. We met for the first time in 1962, and we decided to work together following the festival at the Fluxus Festival in St. Nikolaj Church. So, the festival was the beginning of our co-operation. We made a lot of performances and publications and travelled together to Czechoslovakia, Holland, Germany and many other places. We had a close collaboration. But basically he was a painter and a visual artist, not really a performer. He made of course a few performance works but his profound interest in solving the imaginary "problems" of art and painting led to our separation in '66. We were still friends and had good contacts. I told him only that

there was no basis for doing performances together anymore, that our artistic orientations were too different. There was a period, however, when we had a very strong program. I must say that some of the performances we did in Charlottenborg, at the "May Exhibition," also in Prague and Berlin, were strong.

JS Kjøpcke was working with the Nouveau Réalisme before you met him. Has Nouveau Réalisme in some way influenced your conception of art?

EA Not mine, but of course Kjøpcke's. The Nouveau Réalisme was very important to him. My position, however, was not so much related to objects, but more to establish a kind of time/space process that included the audience participation to a very large degree in my work.

My artistic position actually is that the audience performs the art piece. The art piece is not something that you can observe, put in front of you, look at, and then make an interpretation of. I believe that it is interactive, something you take part in. This differs fundamentally from the Nouveau Réalisme aesthetic view. The Nouveau Réalisme attitude is confined to an object and to a work of art. The Nouveau Réalisme is also a comment on art and painting itself and it exists in the framework of visual art.

JS What interests you especially in Ben Vautier's artistic philosophy?

EA Ben is very interesting because he is much more than a Nouveau Réaliste artist. Of course he started his artistic activities with the Nouveau Réalisme. I know he has been influenced by Piero Manzoni and Yves Klein, but I don't think he had a lot to do with them. Normally, when you mentioned Ben Vautier one thinks of him as the ultimate ego

artist, a person who signed himself, signed the whole reality, signed everything. His attitude implies much more than that.

For many members of his audience and art critics Ben pretended to become an artwork himself, everything was focused on him. However, this must be regarded as just a provocation. Art to him is a much more complex and broader phenomenon than that. In his performances Ben seems to be all around, negating the attitude that he is requiring to be the focus of everything. Every time you try to make a serious statement about him or try to make a theory about his work, you find an element in his work that is completely contradictory to what you are trying to describe.

JS Has Kierkegaard been important for your artistic philosophy?

EA I read Søren Kierkegaard's writings very much from when I was fourteen until I was seventeen. Kierkegaard certainly influenced my concept of art in the sense that I share his idea that the world is completely absurd. Of course I don't share his beliefs about the absurd God and things like that, but I agree with him that the world cannot be finally understood, described or confined to a kind of blueprint and that it consists of contradictions. It is hard for me to tell you if Kierkegaard influences my thought and my work in any particular sense.

It is correct to say that there is an existential point of view in intermedia and that this point of view can be related to Søren Kierkegaard, but there are very few intermedia artists who have actually studied existentialist philosophy. The strong existential influence on intermedia is more related to Kierkegaard than to Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy. I mean, that Kierkegaard's idea of the absurd quality of life and the impossibility that any

statement can be made on a larger view of existence is closer to intermedia than for exemple Sartre's *L'Être et le Néant*.

JS In an interview in the Danish magazine *COPYRIGHT* (No 2, Copenhagen 1990) you say that you, Messrs. Lund and Cleff are now working on an idea for a Pan-European fireworks display to mark the end of the millenium. And that all you and your collaborators need is a billion Danish Kroner and a permit to invade space. Please explain a little more about this project because the *Lund Art Press* may have readers who perhaps would want to sponsor it.

EA The basic principle in the *Marianne* project is to place three triangular satellites in the Universe at a particular point in space calculated by the French astronomer Joseph Louis Lagrange at the beginning of the 19th century. If you put a weightless object at the Lagranges Point it will always indicate precisely where the sun will be in six months. The point which lies 1.5 million kilometers (875,000 miles) from earth will also be the location where the shadow of the earth disappears. The size of earth and the sun will appear exactly the same.

In other words, in co-operation with the astrophysicist Mr. Niels Lund and the architect Mr. Kurt Cleff, I am planning to put three satellites in space that will reflected sunlight in three different colors. These three satellites are expected to move in accordance with each other in such way that their forms constantly and very slowly will give a new configuration to the stars in the sky – and that everybody living on the night side of the earth will be able to see this star configuration, which is in fact itself a reflection of our sun.

What we actually are expecting to achieve with this project is not only to put three man-

made satellites in the sky, moving in relation to each other and to their background, but to change fundamentally the basic condition of mankind. If *Marianne* is realized, people around the world will be able to see the sun itself or its reflection. They will always be able to relate to the sun and see where it will be in six months time. This new awareness could modify many established philosophical conceptions and also provide a new scientific understanding.

The only technical hindrance for the realization of *Marianne* is how to construct a satellite without mass. As you know, this physical problem has already been resolved by Mr. Lund. The pressure of sunlight on the three satellites at the Lagrange point will create a weightless effect.

JS What is the difference between your and Dick Higgins's *intermedia* conception?

EA I think that all conceptions of art are changed by intermedia. With intermedia you cannot define or confine an artwork to itself any longer. Until intermedia appeared, everything you said about an artwork could be confined. You could define what was included in an artwork and what was outside the frame, which elements were inherent and contradictory to each other. This kind of interpretation is completely changed with Intermedia. You no longer have the possibility to define what is in the work. The intermedia work has no limits, is not confined to what you see or percieve in front of you, nor is it based on your personal interpretation, understanding or interpretation of reality.

You do not have one focus in an intermedia work, only a diffusion and an openness. What happens in an intermedia work doesn't depend on a *specific* focalization of reality. Everything that happens is in *general* and can be applied to all of the elements. Before

intermedia was established you had to talk about an artwork as a specific thing, not as something that occurs in general. To see art as something *general* and not *specific*, as something which cannot be confined to itself is really an æsthetic revolution .

Dick Higgins once wrote an essay about intermedia which he published in a news letter.* His thoughts about intermedia are more technical than mine. Higgins sees intermedia as something that can be described within the traditional genre and defined as being between painting, music, theatre, etc. To him it is impossible in an intermedia work to single out what belongs to one or another art.

JS In 1981 Dick Higgins wrote an essay on the "Nine Criteria of Fluxus." In 1989 Ken Friedman extended Higgins's list to 12 criteria of Fluxus. I understand that you disagree with these criteria. In what way are your views different?

EA One of the reasons Higgins gave up publishing his article on criteria for Fluxus works is that he agrees Fluxus work cannot be characterized as a style and framed in an art movement. The works presented at the Fluxus festivals or at other manifestations these past three decades have been so different from one another yet you cannot possibly say one of them is more Fluxus than the other. If you look for example at Wolf Vostell's, Dick Higgins's, Robert Filliou's, or my own work, you will see immediately that they are of different sorts, yet Dick Higgins is not more Fluxus than Robert Filliou, and Wolf Vostell is not more Fluxus than me.

Ken Friedman sees Fluxus as an art movement. But Fluxus is not an art movement. He thinks that art must be in some way defined.

The reason for Friedman's misinterpretation of Fluxus is that he was late in connecting with George Maciunas, who wanted Fluxus to be a specific art movement. Friedman never met us in Europe during the sixties or the seventies. I think the first time he came to Europe was around '80. He had never even seen our works. He saw only reproductions which were made especially in the way that George Maciunas presented them, that means as an edition in his design. He didn't meet us. Then he got this curious idea that Fluxus was an art movement. Alison Knowles, Emmett Williams, Ben Vautier, myself and other Fluxus people disagree totally with his standpoint.

The explanation of this is that George Maciunas tried to make Fluxus into an art movement, to make it into a program, etc. Friedman was a student of George Maciunas, so he simply believed that Fluxus should be an art movement, a special way to do and understand art.

It is to falsify history to describe Fluxus as an art movement. It was never the case. The most general thing we can say about Fluxus is that it did not even found intermedia. Intermedia was founded by many of us completely independent of each other before Fluxus was even established. If you look at the work of George Maciunas and if you look at that of Ben Vautier, you see that they are completely different in presentation and attitude. The same for Dick Higgins's and Emmett Williams's works. It is so, that most of us did intermedia performances before '62. This we have in common, not more. Criteria about Fluxus make no sense, especially in the way that Ken Friedman is so doing in his statement "Fluxus and Company" that you published in *Lund Art Press* (Volume I, No 4). Of course you can find

* *Something Else Newsletter*, Vol.I, No 1, (1966), New York: Something Else Press. -Ed.

some elements that he described in some of the Fluxus works. For example, that they are “ephemeral.” But on the other hand there are people working within the Fluxus framework who are not ephemeral at all, like Ay-o’s *Finger Suitcase*. It is certainly not “ephemeral” to put your finger into a box and feel what is inside.

In “Fluxus and Company” Friedman also spoke about “anonymity.” That is certainly true for many of the works made by Fluxus people, nevertheless if you look at Robert Filliou’s work, it is not anonymous. It is a work which follows the French poetry tradition and is very French in its spirit.

I agree with Friedman that Fluxus network and Fluxus people created a new form of internationalism. This point is important in his statement. Before Fluxus existed you had Schools. You had the Copenhagen, the Paris, the New York School and so on. You had Schools located in specific geographical centers. Even Cobra was still reflecting this regional art problem; with Fluxus you had for the first time an international situation. Dadaism had to some extent aspirations of internationalism, but not really, because you had the Berlin Dada, the Paris Dada, the Zurich Dada. The same with the futurists, you had the Russian futurism, the Italian futurism and so on. But with Fluxus it was individuals spread out all over the world. The artists never needed to move to the same city.

I think that this phenomenon has been caused in part by new processes of electronic communication which have appeared in our society since the ‘50s. For the first time in history we as artists were able to stay in contact, work, exchange and develop our ideas even if we were living far from each other. For the first time an international network was built up by artists themselves.

JS How do you explain the Fluxus renaissance and that Fluxus is still an avant-garde. Do you for example think that the political situation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has played a favorable role in this regard? Or do you see other circumstances?

EA To create an artwork or an artifact which intends to establish a special art language and vision of the world, means also to put forth the possibility to imagine a cosmology which can be used as a theory of science, or a religious or political doctrine, etc. Artistically and epistemologically such a postulation is inconsistent. The most important aspect of an artwork is what you create, not to educate people or dictate how they must perceive, understand and react when confronted with it. I consider that an artwork emanates from a special way of thinking in a precise time/space situation and that any serious examination of it can’t neglect this fact. Furthermore, I don’t intend to present people a doctrinaire statement with my art, or to propose to them how to understand the world through it.

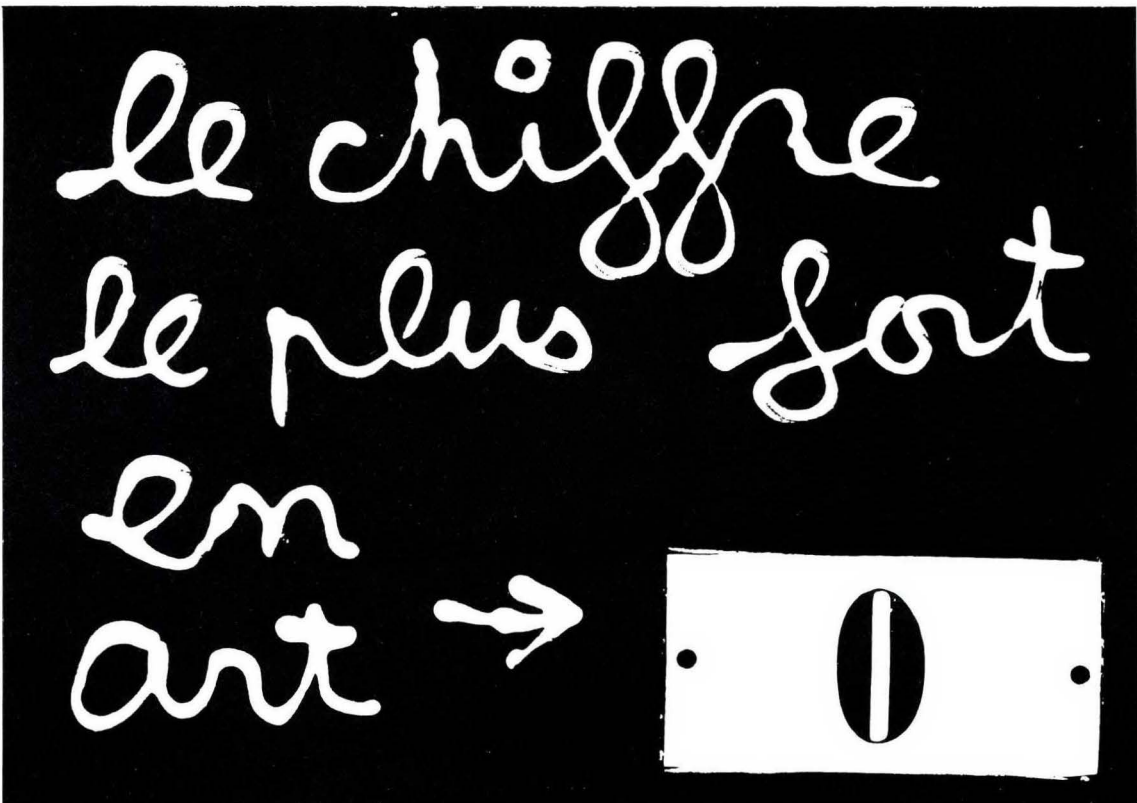
I believe that avant-garde cannot exist with strong social control or in a corporativistic political system where marginal positions are not permitted. Also, the conception of avant-garde has never appeared outside of growing open centres or cities. One basic reason for this is that open centres have very little social control compared to small communities. I mean that avant-garde is represented by seeing the world in a large perspective and not by a behaviour which is provincial.

Some epochs, for example the early sixties, have been more fertile for experimental art than others. One of the reasons for this is that during these periods less social control has existed and that the sense of freedom supported by most of the people in a natural way

permitted experimental attitudes and marginal situations in art to grow.

During a great part of the seventies the atmosphere of the avant-garde was different because of the political orientation after '68. You have Marxist-Leninist regulation of behaviour. But at the end the seventies and during the eighties the political situation became more democratic and more relaxed again. People can behave in a contradictory way, can disagree completely with society and social norms without being suspended from their jobs, or being completely neglected or punished. That is one of the reasons why Fluxus has a renaissance now.

Concerning your question if Fluxus renaissance has been influenced by the process of perestrojka, I will say that if you make a Russian, Lund or Copenhagen perestrojka, you create an openness, you permit different kinds of marginal activities and attitudes to be explored. The renaissance of Fluxus depends certainly on the democratic transparency of perestrojka, but it should not be forgotten that our civilization very often celebrates perestrojka at one end by creating a Gulf War at another end.



Ben Vautier. Le chiffre le plus fort en art → 0 1987.
Galerie 1900-2000, Paris.

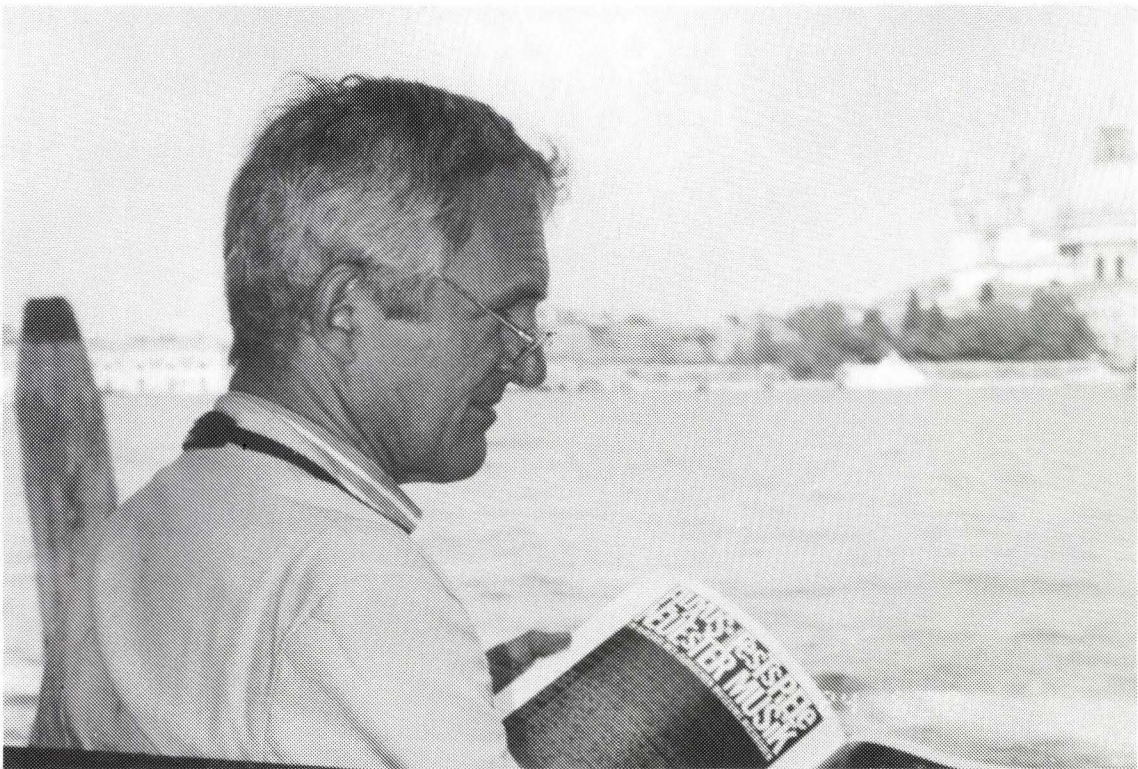


Photo: Francesco Conz

Bengt af Klintberg. Venice Biennale 1990.

THE FLUXUS OUTPOST IN SWEDEN: AN INTERVIEW WITH BENGT AF KLINTBERG

by Jean Sellem

Bengt af Klintberg is well known in Sweden for his books and radio programs about folklore. His collection of modern urban legends, *Rättan i pizzen* (*The Rat in the Pizza*) became a bestseller in Swedish, and was translated into Norwegian, Danish and German. He has also has a background in intermedia art, which makes him interesting to the readers of *Lund Art Press*. He is the only Swedish member of the Fluxus group. He participated in the historic Fluxus concert in Düsseldorf in 1963, and he was represented at the massive Fluxus exhibition at the Biennial of Venice in 1990. Jean Sellem exhibited Bengt af Klintberg's *The Forest Diver* at the art laboratory Galerie S:t Petri in Lund in 1974. Here, Sellem interviews af Klintberg about his involvement in Fluxus, past and present.

JEAN SELLEM (JS) Bengt, how would you describe your present situation?

BENGT AF KLINTBERG (BK) I now live as an independent writer after twenty years as a university teacher of folklore. I write books and articles and I give public lectures on topics related to folk traditions, poetry and storytelling. Every week, I have a radio program called *Folkminnen* (*Folk Memories*). On rare occasions I participate in group shows and other gatherings with Fluxus people.

JS How did you get in touch with Fluxus?

BK It was just a coincidence that I happened to be in Copenhagen in November 1962 when a series of Fluxus concerts took place in the Nikolai church. The main reason for my being there was that I wanted to meet Danish folklorist colleagues. One of them gave me a free ticket to a Fluxus concert but warned me at the same time: it is something very strange...some kind of dada music, many

people who have been there have become quite upset. This, however, was a recommendation in my ears. I had myself performed happenings earlier the same autumn in Stockholm, where my friend Staffan Olzon – now working as a theatre director – and I arranged weekly “literary and musical laboratories” at a small theatre, the Athena Theatre.

JS Were the compositions at the Fluxus concert similar to those happenings that you had performed in Stockholm?

BK No, not at all! Almost all happening artists whose work I had then heard about or experienced myself – Kaprow, Oldenburg, Dine in the U.S., Fahlström, Reuterswärd, Karlung in Stockholm – were painters, and this could clearly be seen in their happenings. They were based on visual effects and made use of materials that appealed to the senses of the audience: paint, smoke, water, paper, rubber. They were in fact rather reminiscent to their earlier canvases, only they

were three-dimensional and had a temporal duration. When I think of the happenings of the early 60s, I remember them as loosely structured, expressionistic pieces with an underlying romantic worldview, an artistic “Sturm und Drang.” The first things that struck me in the Fluxus compositions were their minimalistic form and very clear structure. This was an intermedia art rooted in music. Many of the pieces on the stage turned one’s musical conventions upside down in a very stimulating way. I realised that George Brecht’s *Drip Music* (where a performer pours water from a jug to a vessel on the floor) was analogous to Duchamp’s readymades: by naming the piece *Drip Music* and performing it at a concert, George Brecht had created a musical readymade. Another piece that I appreciated for its almost mathematical beauty was Emmett Williams’ *Counting Song*. The performer counts each individual in the audience and puts a candy in his mouth for each number he utters. The audience can follow how his voice becomes more and more indistinct, and it can anticipate what will eventually happens: if the audience is small enough, he will be able to count everybody. If it is big, he will reach a point when his mouth is so filled with candies that he cannot go on counting.

One episode from the concert later struck me as being very significant. The performers on the stage were preparing a salad that they afterwards distributed to the audience to eat (this was *Proposition* or *Make a Salad* by Alison Knowles). A young Dane who had apparently come to the concert to have some fun went up on the stage, took a carrot and started to eat it. He was chased away by one of the performers – Dick Higgins – who hit him with a wooden spoon so vehemently that the spoon broke into two pieces. At that moment I understood that the artists on the stage were very serious: what they were doing had nothing to do with entertainment.

What it was all about was a new concept of art. Some years later Dick Higgins wrote his article “Boredom and Danger” where he stated that a Fluxus concert, the same way as real life, involves risks for those who are present.

JS So this casual contact in Copenhagen led to your participation in some of the following Fluxus concerts?

BK Yes, that’s right. After the concert in the Nikolai church I joined the artists when they went to a little restaurant. I had a long discussion with Dick Higgins about actions as an art form and exchanged addresses with him, George Maciunas, Emmett Williams and Arthur Køpcke. Maciunas told me that he planned a Fluxus magazine with material from Scandinavia. He knew about the *Tvångsblandaren* by Pontus Hultén, Hans Nordenström and others – an early and very fine example of a multiple, created as a special issue of the publication of the technology students in Stockholm. In many respects it was similar to those Fluxus boxes that Maciunas and artists around him created the following years. In December and January, I had a correspondence with Maciunas about my participation in the next Fluxus concerts which were to take place at the Art Academy in Düsseldorf, where Joseph Beuys worked as a professor.

JS When did the Düsseldorf concerts take place?

BK They took place in the end of January 1963 and aroused just as strong feeling as the Copenhagen concerts had done. I went down together with Staffan Olzon and the two artist sisters Mieke and Beatrice Heybroek. We missed the first evening, but we could see that it had been dramatic – the wall behind the stage was spotted with eggs that had been thrown from the audience. During the second evening we performed my *Alter-*

native to Another Rattlesnake (I was fond of baroque titles at that time). It is a piece where two performers, each sitting on the top of a ladder, exchange fragmentary messages by means of a string, not a typical Fluxus piece, more in the happening tradition.

JS A typical Fluxus piece – what that be?

BK *Zyklus* by Thomas Schmit is a very typical Fluxus piece, as I see it. A dozen of bottles, one filled with water and all the others empty, were placed in a circle on the stage. Tomas Schmit poured the water-clockwise from one bottle to the other until all water was gone. It is at the same time meditative with its beautiful, simple structure and provocative because of its monotony. The pieces by Paik, Brecht, Higgins and Maciunas were also typical of Fluxus because of their clear, simple structures and almost Dadaist playfulness. The mode of performance in them was relaxed and neutral: the performers just carried out the instructions in the scores. Paik's pieces were the most provocative ones, since he played with the taboos of a bourgeois audience. In his *Fluxus Champion Contest* the participants pissed in a bucket at the same time as they were singing the national anthems of their respective countries.

The contribution by Joseph Beuys, *Siberian Symphony, First Movement*, was very different from the other ones. The components of his piece, mathematic formulas on a blackboard, a piano prepared with piles of earth and a dead hare all seemed to be parts of an alchemic experiment, and Beuys himself radiated an intense personal involvement during his performance. He could not be related to a Dadaist tradition. He was an innovator of archaic rituals, explaining eternal questions about life and death.

JS What happened next? I have understood that you, Bengt, were the first one to introduce Fluxus in Sweden.

BK Well, at least I took part in the first Fluxus concerts in Sweden. But the international group Fluxus artists was only represented by Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles. They performed, together with Staffan Olzon, Mieke Heybroek, Svante Bodin and myself, pieces by themselves, La Monte Young, George Brecht, Al Hansen, Emmett Williams, Ben Patterson, Bob Watts and others. The concert took place three evenings in the beginning of March 1963 at the Alley Theatre in Stockholm. Another Swedish participant was Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd who used a pseudonym, Charles Lavendel (= Lavender). He had informed me that he intended to do his piece the first evening sitting among the audience. And there he was sitting, until half of the concert had passed. Then a nauseating smell of lavender perfume spread in the theatre at the same time as we noticed that Reuterswärd had disappeared.

JS The spring of 1963 seems to have been an intense time, filled with Fluxus activities. First Düsseldorf, then Stockholm...

BK – and then Oslo. Later in March I went to Oslo to attend the lectures of folklore at the university. A poet friend of mine, Sten Hanson, became my travel companion and we decided to arrange a Fluxus concert together with some local people. The audience in Oslo was much bigger than in Stockholm, since we used the student inn, "studenterkroa," for our concert. It was overfilled, and the reactions were strong, indeed. I think that this experience had a decisive influence on Sten Hanson's artistic career. Before this concert he was a rather traditional writer, after he became an experimental composer.

JS You told me about your correspondence with George Maciunas. Was he your closest contact in Fluxus?

BK No, we had no private correspondence after the first months of our contact. He put me on his mailling list, so I got a lot of information about Fluxus through him. But I'm afraid I did not send very much back. My closest contact over the years has been Dick Higgins. He started Something Else Press soon after we had met, and this publishing activities has been of a great importance not only for Fluxus but to the American and European avant-garde on the whole. He published my events in a series called Great Bear Pamphlets. Dick is a real renaissance personality with an almost encyclopedic knowledge. He has been important as a theoretician – he was the one who created the concept of *Intermedia* – but he is also a very fine poet and an expert on pattern poetry.

JS The first time I met Beuys, he referred to you as his special Swedish contact. Did you know him well?

BK We shared an interest in arctic cultures and rituals; he told me that he liked my book *Svenska trollformler (Swedish Magic Formulae)*. In 1966 we performed together in Copenhagen; we were both invited by the artists in the group *Traekvogn 13*, I will never forget his performance of *Eurasia* there. It lasted for one and half hours, and Beuys was soaking wet with sweat when it was over. He balanced with a dead hare in his hands along a line on the floor. The legs of the hare were extended by thin wooden strips, reaching to the floor. Every step he took was exhausting because he had tied heavy iron plates to his shoes. While he was slowly moving through the room he put a thermometer in the mouth of the hare. The whole piece was a symbolic ritual, aiming at a restoration of the lost unity in Eastern and Western philosophy.

We met again when he exhibited at the Modern Art Museum of Stockholm, and the talks with him then were really inspiring. Afterwards I wrote a poem, “Beuys i Stockholm,” that is included in my collection *Skogsdykaren (1979)*. But we did not have any regular contact. Henning Christiansen, the Danish composer and Fluxus-member, is the only Scandinavian artist who has been in the closest cooperation with Beuys.

JS What about the other Fluxus artists such as Nam June Paik?

BK Paik started as an “enfant terrible” in avant-garde music and later created a new art form, where he explores the visual possibilities of television screens. After we had met in Düsseldorf I received his *Monthly Review of Avantgarde Hinduism*. It consists of torn postcards, strange messages from different part of the world and some very exciting essays, such as *New Ontology of Music*. When he was touring with Charlotte Moorman in 1966 we performed together at the Pistol Theatre in Stockholm. They both took part in my *Orangerimusik 1963*, which is a piece of “junk music”. To me Paik is one of the most charming and personal artists in the Fluxus group.

Another Fluxus artist from the Far East, Takehisa Kosugi, came to Stockholm with his music group Taj Mahal Travellers in 1971. We arranged a Fluxus concert at The Modern Art Museum together. Dick Higgins also performed Fluxus compositions at the Modern Art Museum together with me and some other Swedish friends. That was in 1977.

JS I have a feeling that there have been gaps in your involvement in Fluxus. Is that so?

BK Yes, there have been long periods when I have not been active at all, when I have devoted all my time to folklore scholarship.

The most intense Fluxus period was in 1963-66. After that my activities in a Fluxus spirit gradually became restricted to a private sphere. My interest came back in 1973 when I met a young artist and art historian from Lund who called himself Mats B. He had a burning interest in Fluxus and planned to write his dissertation on it. Our contact inspired me to start a project that I called *The Forest Diver*. It lasted for three years, 1973-75. It is regrettable that Mats B has left the art scene; his name now is Birger Rindeskär and he is the editor of a very good magazine for railroad travellers in Sweden.

In recent years Ken Friedman's activities in different parts of the Nordic countries have been very stimulating. When Maciunas died in 1978 I had the feeling that his meant the death of Fluxus as an active group of artists. But Ken has convinced me that Fluxus is in fact not dead – as a way of looking at art and life it has still much to offer. It is because of Ken Friedman's encouragement that I have recently participated in Fluxus exhibitions at Høvikodden in Norway and in Venice.

JS Can you see any similarity between your work as a folklorist and your activity as a Fluxus artist.

BK Yes, indeed I can! What attracted me so much in the work of the Fluxus artists in the 60s was that they reacted against the pompous image of the artist as a genius with a unique, personal style. an image that fits perfectly to the art market and an exclusive art concept. The Fluxus artist questioned the

borderline between art and life and created simple pieces filled with energy and humour, pieces without any personal stylistic features, pieces that could be transmitted orally just like folklore and performed by everyone who wanted to. Their compositions were a low budget art related to games, jokes and rituals, which are all well-known genres of folklore. I included some traditional magic recipes and riddles among the events in my *Great Bear Pamphlet*, and they fit in very well.

My conclusion is that what unites folklore and Fluxus art is their great social relevance. And I am not the only Fluxus artist who has become hooked on folklore. Willem de Ridder in Amsterdam, is a master storyteller.

JS Finally, Bengt, what do you think of Fluxus in the future?

BK I have personally seen many signs of a new interest. Young artists are curious to hear about Fluxus concerts, university students write their academic papers on different aspects of Fluxus. Many seem to have the feeling that the freedom and openness of Fluxus and intermedia art got lost in the 80s. The Swedish art critic Cecilia Stam has expressed it this way: "It is no coincidence that the 30 years old Fluxus movement has come to the fore again, which cannot be explained only by a number of jubilee exhibitions. The crossing of borders, the anarchistic, international, experimental and culturally radical attitude of Fluxus has a strong appeal on the 90s."

**BENGT AF KLINTBERG:
BOOKS AND ARTICLES ON FLUXUS.**

A SELECTIVE LIST.

“Komposition för purjolök och karameller.” *Expressen* 6 December 1962. /Report from Fluxus concert in Copenhagen/

“Jag är tungviktmästare i musik.” *Expressen* 26 May 1963. /On Paik’s *New Ontology of Music*/

“En dikt åker jorden runt.” *Expressen* 24 August 1965. /On Chieko Shiomi’s *Spatial Poems/ Stockholmsspelet*. Dikter, dagbok, events 1961-66. Stockholm: Nordstedts 1966./ Poems, diary, events/

The Cursive Scandinavian Salve. New York: Something Else Press 1967. /Events published in the series Great Bear Pamphlets/

The Forest Diver. Lund: Edition Sellem 1974. Alcheringa. New Series Vol. 2:1, 1976. Reprinted in *WhiteWalls. A Magazine of Writings by Artists*. Spring 1987.

“Dick Higgins, intermediakonstnär.” *Kalejdoskop* 1977: 3-4.

Skogsdykaren. Stockholm: Nordstedts 1979. /A collection of poems, many of which are related to Fluxus/

“Magisk teater.” *Kalejdoskop* 1985:6. /On magic rituals and performances by Joseph Beuys and Fluxus artists/

“Fluxus in Sweden.” *Ubi Fluxus, ibi motus* 1990-1962. Milano 1990. /Article in the catalogue of the Fluxus exhibition in Venice 1990/

“Allt flyter.” *Expressen* 19 August 1990. /Report from the Fluxus exhibition in Venice/

“Bengt af Klintberg: Events.” *El Djarrida: Fluxus Performance Workbook* 1990/Compilation of events and event scores by many artists./

THE QUINTESSENCE OF FLUXUS

By Bengt af Klintberg

FLUXUS never became as important in Sweden as, for example, it became in Denmark. One reason for this may be that much of what Fluxus represented – the revolt against traditional art genres, the challenges of social and cultural taboos, the playfulness, the utopian perspective – had already been introduced in Sweden when the first Fluxus concerts took place in Germany and Denmark. Öyvind Fahlström was especially influential; his happenings at the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm attracted thousands of spectators. In art as well as in agitational articles, Fahlström took a marked political standpoint, and this had an effect on the Swedish art scene of the late sixties. Revolutionary political ideas became more interesting for young artists than Fluxus' revolutionary ideas about art.

My own first contact with Fluxus was at a concert in Copenhagen in November 1962. It resulted in a correspondence with George Maciunas and Dick Higgins and my participation in Fluxus concerts in Düsseldorf, Stockholm and Oslo in 1963. During the following years I became the Fluxus outpost in Stockholm, taking part in concerts when the Swedish capital was visited by Fluxus artists such as Nam June Paik, Charlotte Moorman, Takehisa Kosugi and Dick Higgins. I believe that the aesthetics and methods of Fluxus that I passed on to my friends had an impact on the work of some of them, such as poet Åke Hodell, choreographer Margaretha Åsberg and composer Sten Hanson. But on the whole J. O. Mallander was right, when he wrote, "Bengt af Klintberg is the pioneer of many movements that never came to Sweden." (*Paletten* 1972:4)

I will not try to excuse myself for this. I chose to devote most of my creative energy to the exploration of folklore. Up to now, this has resulted in some twenty books. I also found that the private nature of much of the Fluxus art suited me. My own pieces from those years were private gatherings in forests and streets, events and rituals that did not reach many others than those involved. My name was included in the Fluxus lists, and I received a lot of exciting mail art during the 60s and 70s, filled with fantastic statements and poetic proposals. Ken Friedman (whom I had then not yet met) sent me an envelope filled with half-dried leaves of grass. When I opened it and breathed the smell of hay I took it as a greeting from Walt Whitman's America. In a letter from Addi Koepcke in Copenhagen, I got a message from George Brecht: "Be sure to observe International Take-A-Deep-Breath Day." These contacts with Fluxus people all over the world oxygenated my everyday life.

In a more indirect way, Fluxus has influenced many Nordic artists who had never been officially connected with Fluxus. I would especially like to mention the two Finland Swedes, J.O. Mallander and Carl-Erik Ström. Ström's book *Silence* (1988) with its photodocumentation of the life of a snail named *Silence* is congenial with the best pieces by Fluxus artists. There we meet *Silence* when he/she (snails are hermaphrodites) makes his/her circular travels around the brim of the artist's hat, and we see *Silence* sailing on a fragile raft with a feather as a sail. Ström's pieces have that playful, philosophical attitude towards life and art that I have always seen as the quintessence of Fluxus.

Two orange events

Peel an orange carefully and arrange pigs in a row:
choose one of the pigs.

Peel an orange carefully and place pigs here and there
in the apartment. Eat them when you happen to pass.

BENGT AF KLINTBERG

Chair event

Sit down on a chair. Examine, by movements of your bottom, if it creaks or cracks. If that is the case, decide it doe most: creaks or cracks.

BENGT AF KLINTBERG

“UNCENSORED AND UNREFLECTED THOUGHTS ON F - - - US”

by Guttom Nordø

Guttom Nordø is a painter and mail artist who lives and works in Trondheim, Norway. He is well known as the publisher of *El Djarida* magazine which recently released the *Fluxus Performance Workbook*, the largest collection of Fluxus performance pieces and event scores ever presented in a single volume.

F - - - us both seems to be and to have been. If F - - - us isn't the Biggest Joke, it has to be ONE of the Biggest Ones.

I like to talk about F - - - us. The reason: It has been PART of the ongoing avantgardistic artistic development up through this century. F - - - us has been very energetic in the field of documentation. F - - - us has recycled, rewritten, used, abused, and also invented new strategies for art presentation. But, still I want to claim: In the tradition of Dada (no doubt in my opinion).

Being a Maximalist, I'm able to enjoy (from a view above quarrels, distinctions etc) and accept ALL trends, fashions, movements, directions, theories, art groups. To me, F - - - us was and is just like everything else which has been or still is. What specifies F - - - us is that tricky grip: management – methodological – public-relation – conspiracy – religious – joy – trip.

Concerning F - - - us - performances: I see them as Anti-Theatre. A main point is to express arrogance toward the audience; to create distance and non-involvement, kind of a provocation – action instead of acting (or none of both). Watching a F - - - us - performance isn't far from watching TV – the distance between actors and watchers looks equal to me. Anonymous, distant, emotionally absent; The Perfect F - - - us Actor. The distance has always been great

(how do I know?) between the F - - - us Idea of direct involvement with audience, and the real situation. It's perhaps by purpose. Humourless Humour. Academics and intellectuals pretending to be no-brains (not now-brains). Non-involvement. F - - - us-performance seems to be most successful kept as written scores: Anti-Theatre should rather be presented on Anti-Stages. I'll suggest for future F - - - us performances: Install huge mirrorwalls on stage, separating actors/audience – mirror on both sides. The actors could then do as they wish; either perform their piece and watch themselves, or go to a restaurant nearby, perhaps travel to a foreign country, while the audience could watch each other and their reactions to eventual expectations to whatever they thought would take place in the showroom. Maybe better this way?

F - - - us: Keep the secrets hidden? I would have preferred staying mystified. Now that I know too much about the right things to mean and to think about F - - - us, the fun has run (a way). (Explain it all to Ms. Understanding and Mr. Ease ... calmcool it's just my contribution to a – maybe – collaborative confusion ... I don't look for truths, only for possible explanations and why am I asked over and over again to explain my view on F - - - us...?) Please, save the mysteries for the esoteric massmovement! Hide all answers to questions never raised. The flux is in the war. Wars. Fluxury Luxus? Yep;

F---us is interesting as history, especially when explained by historians who really admire it, or own **F-collections**. Today, is it right that **F---us** has gone through chemi-wash-treatments; cleansed and put inside glassboxes in pure sterile museums and hip galleries all over the western world? Has **F---us** got a marble heart beating twice a-year? If so – so what?

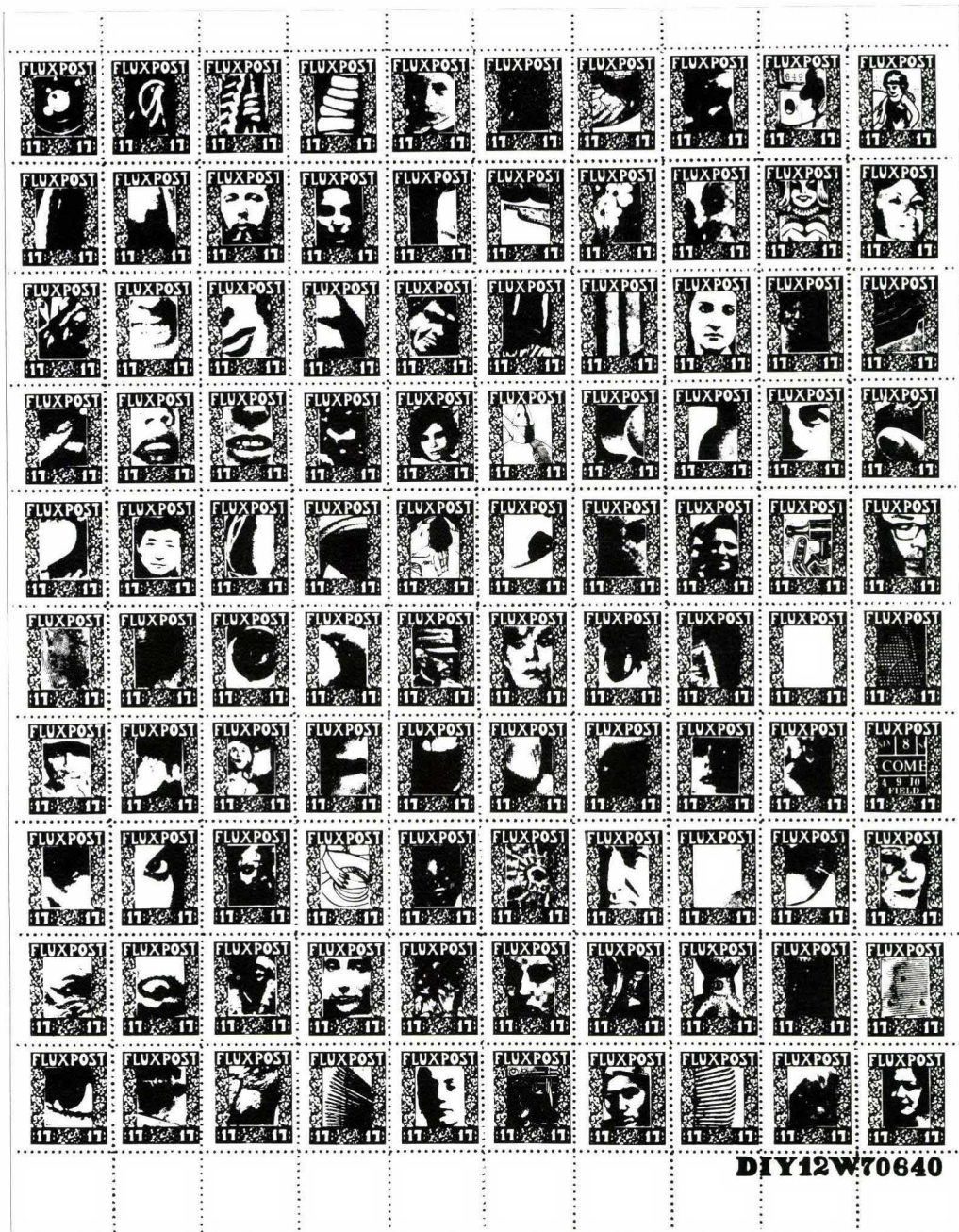
I didn't want **F---us** to dissolve. Neither did I want the dadaists to disappear. I want the return of the futurists, expressionists, surrealists, tramps, beboppers, rockers, beatniks, mods, situationists, hippies, yippies, metalglammers, pinks, rappers – I don't want just to read about them in boring magazines.

F---us: Is that a word for day and night (open 24 hours)? Art (or the presentation of art) is so dead and boring, like it always has been. Oh how I wish that anyone or everyone would do anything or absolutely all in the name of the great Nothingness! And how can I say nice things about **F---us**? From my point of view Maximalism overgoes and includes all thinkable theories/philosophies/formations/Movements/etc – I can only look to **F---us** in the same way which I look to a graveyard or to birth-rate-statistics of Indonesian ghosts... or in the same manner which I look to the Bible, Buddha, Wittgenstein or my own diaries. **F---us** is neither past nor presence, but rather the future of politics and poetry. True intentions? Plagiarism?

Another think is that I've heard ugly rumours, saying that **F---us** was invented by a little group of artists who always were met with refusals at juried exhibitions and ignored by hip galleries, because they were making traditional contemporary art that simply wasn't GOOD enough. By forming a group and presenting a mixmax their theory; by putting their loss of originality and miss-

ing talents together, some extraordinary concepts of meaninglessness evolved, which gave them the opportunity to break through the thick-brick-walls of media. If that's true, I'm surely IMPRESSED. Strategy, there has to be a clever strategy behind **F---us**. Maybe some sort of the same conspiracy which have found a place in art-/ cultural-life of countries like Norway, Denmark, Germany; totally dominated by marxists/leninists of the late 60s and 70s? Those old commies who decided to become system racers, in order to enter the chairs of committees juries finds museums publishing houses etcetera. Tactic: Friendship rules. contacts contacting contacts of contacts, to get contacts, prizes, grants, awards, roles, showrooms – perhaps that's what everything is about: to play the social games clever enough, join the free-masonry, find good pals and likeminded revolutionaries. Whatsoever: Talk besides the matter. Shit too becomes valuable, for the cultural life in the soil.

Runaway conclusions: But arrogance! Intellectualism! Distance! Hearly Humour! (?) **F---us** seems to be (or to have been) individual. No group. No Big Plan. Just coincidences, a bit of luck, a few analytic persons with talent for word- and media-treatment, good contacts (or working) on a social level; putting up shows where artists are/were collected under a invisible banner, and ablaka Dada: Fuckus! Excuse me (for Nothing).



Robert Watts. *Fluxpost*. 1965

FLUXPOSTINGS: FLUXUS AND THE MAIL ART PHENOMENON

by Michael Crane

Michael Crane is director of the University of Colorado Art Galleries in Boulder, Colorado. Between 1978 and 1980, he wrote and edited *Correspondence Art: Source Book for the Network of Postal Art Activity*. Published in 1984, Crane's book has become the definitive reference on mail art around the world.

"ANY FRIEND OF RAY JOHNSON IS A FRIEND OF MINE"

– Ken Friedman, rubber stamp message, 1971.

ONE OF the many contributions of both Fluxus the Group and Fluxism the Philosophy to contemporary art was in the often obscured arena of Mail Art. This is a genre that is sometimes fun and gregarious, sometimes serious, sometimes silly, that makes use of the international postal system for the exchange of aestheticized messages.

Mail Art, also known as "Correspondance Art," or "the Eternal Network," is an art-making activity that has been engaged in by thousands of individuals over the last 40 years. Messages have been exchanged on all continents, by senders and receivers whose demographics are so broad as to defy easy description. Participants have communicated and discussed nearly every topic known to human experience. Their effects have been far-flung, ranging from raising consciousness to not raising anything at all, not even a single thought. Mail artists do, however, have in common the intent to participate in the network and its activities. In addition to individual or mass mailings, Mail Art also manifests itself as shows and publications. Mail artists also share an intent to make their communications aesthetic, if not art. Art media indigenous to Mail art inclu-

de postage-like stamps, rubber stamps, and the use of the surface of letters, envelopes, post-cards, and anything else the imagination is able to fit in a mailbox or postman's bag.

As Mail Art now enters its fifth decade of existence, it is appropriate to reflect upon the contributions of Fluxus. It would also be appropriate to reflect on the contributions of Ray Johnson, the single most important individual of the development of the field. Ray Johnson, who operated through the mails as the New York Correspondence School and Buddha University, is the Father of Mail Art. He is often (and recently) associated with Fluxus – being included in shows and writings about the group.

It is perhaps an opportune historical moment to reflect on the attitudes of Fluxus that are still alive within the visual arts, or which should be resurrected. Foremost among these is the recognition of the social responsibility of art – that the artist has both an investment and commitment to serve or address a wide audience, and to make uncompromised art accessible to audience. The transformation of art and culture is a broad Fluxus value,

supporting an on-going process, needing diverse articulations to meet current global situations. Today is no different. Fluxus's recognition of perpetual change is a philosophical orientation reflected in its name (Fluxus, from the Latin "fluere" = to flow, to change). A Zen-like calmness, sense of humor, perceptive wit, and acceptance of the "is-ness" of things and the moment, are other operating strategies that are of useful importance to survival – for art, artists and art institutions.

The art-life interface, though not in vogue in current discourse, is another Fluxus value that seemed revolutionary in 1960's terms, and today seems like an accurate prediction of the changes in art contextualization that are related to changes in us as people. Aesthetic experience is no longer dependent on the institutions of high culture, i.e. galleries and museums. After two decades of slow encroachment and promotion by the artists of Happenings, installations, video and performance art – the kitchen sink, a bus stop, the street or even a mailbox is as suitable as any another place to find or enjoy an aesthetic experience.

The impact of Fluxus on Mail Art was not entirely coincidental. Fluxus members were spread around the earth. The mails became an important means to meet organizational needs. Most of the Fluxus artists initiated or carried on an activity paralleling Mail Art among themselves, friends and collaborators. The mails allowed these artists to exchange scores, notes, instructions, as well as graphic works and "unobjects" for exhibitions, reproductions (e.g. multiples) or publications. By 1966 Fluxus "centers" were established in Copenhagen, Nice, Prague and San Diego. The use of the Fluxus name, and activity in publishing and art reproductions gave Fluxus an organizational, if not institutional, image. During the late 60's and early 70's other "as-if" kinds of organiza-

tions exploded across the Mail Art scene, setting loose a host of fictitious organizations, made-up names, eccentric archives and non-existent galleries.

In Mail Art, the use of an alias is widespread. The anonymous character of a mailing encourages the artist's creativity in the use of names. Adult-like sensibleness yields to a playful approach. Satire and humor are alive and well here. Some of my favorites includes (and I'll let you stew over who or what they were or are): Al's Ham-n-Egger and Body Shop, Anna Banana, Bay Area Dadaists, Doo-Da Postage Works, Eternal Network, File, Vile, and Bile, Image Bank, Mail Queen, Sam's Cafe, Smegma (more than just cheese), Subwaxin Haddock, and Taki Bluesinger.

Fluxus the Group is made of individuals. The Fluxus artist who made the most significant and lasting contributions to Mail Art is Ken Friedman. Beginning Fluxus activity as a youngster, Friedman's operation became known as Fluxus West in San Diego, and was a clearing house for communications, performances, exhibitions, festivals and publishing. Friedman took Mail Art out of the private realm, which in the 60s included roughly 300 active participants in Fluxus and the NYCS. He made the activity public via the creation of models for exhibitions, mailings and publications. In 1972, he published the *International Contact List of the Arts*, containing some 1400 names. This list has become the basis for establishing other mailing lists, assembling shows, creating magazines, and has even been used as a source by major reference books. Friedman created the "Sock of the Month Club" in 1970, sending socks and many other objects to a select list. In 1971, he created the model for the mail art dadazine with his publication the *New York Correspondence School Weekly Breeder*. In 1973, his *Omaha Flow Systems* show at the Joslyn Art Museum set

the standard for the democratic, all-inclusive, viewer-interactive exhibit that was the forerunner of Mail Art Show as it is known today.

Dick Higgins, an original Fluxus and Happenings artist, is Mail Art's self-proclaimed "literary cognate." His theories and writings, on intermedia in particular, have had widespread impact. He sees Mail Art as a fusion of poetry and the mail. His aesthetic use of postal systems extends back to 1959, when he wrote "Thank You," the first and perhaps only play that incorporates the "real time" of a mailing into the action. In 1964, he founded Something Else Press, the granddaddy of all artist's book and publishing ventures.

Ben Vautier has been an active mailer since the early 1960's. His humor and conceptual acuity are well known, as are his use of rubber stamps and postcards along the network. His 1965 work, "Postman's Choice," a postcard with addresses on both sides, is classical, and frequently copied.

The late Fluxus poet Robert Filliou coined the term *Eternal Network* in 1963, to refer to the notion of the inseparableness of art and life. In time, the term also became a refer-

ence for Mail Art. Filliou is remembered for his "art as thought," and books like *Ample Food for Stupid Thought* reveal his Zen-like aesthetic – absurd, yet optimistic and delicate. Filliou explored the role of the artist in society, yielding imagination as his science.

Daniel Spoerri, the late Robert Watts, Nam June Paik, and Mieko Shiomi are other major forces of Fluxus who used the mails extensively. Their publications, rubber stamps, individual mailings, postage-like stamps, and more, are now treasured. Other major figures in Fluxus to participate in the activities of Mail Art included Joseph Beuys, George Brecht, Geoffrey Hendricks, Milan Knizak, Alison Knowles, George Maciunas, Yoko Ono and Wolf Vostell.

Fluxus the Group subsided by the end of the 1960s, though it continues to provide inspiration and role models for many younger artists, even today. To art in general, Fluxus played a transformative role. For Mail Art in particular, Fluxus provided the most significant and lasting influence from the recent past. Not only did the Fluxus artists participate directly, they created models that became evolutionary processes and systems that formed the field as we know it.





Photo: Francesco Conz

Ken Friedman at Maria's farm near Verona, 1989

TWELVE QUESTIONS FOR KEN FRIEDMAN

by Jean Sellem

George Maciunas brought Ken Friedman into Fluxus in 1966. At the age of 16, he was the youngest member of the classical Fluxus group. Since then, he has created an impressive and influential body of work, using art as a form of research. His projects have become models of innovation through intermedia, event structures and communication-based art forms.

Ken Friedman was well known in Europe for two decades before he finally arrived here in 1986. His first stop was Scandinavia, where Swedish film director and television producer Peter Meyer welcomed him as “a living legend.” By the mid-80s, Friedman had become a legend in Europe and around the world. During the 60s and 70s, his projects kept him travelling across the United States, but his work and his ideas were far better known in Europe.

Over the years, Friedman has worked with such visionary colleagues as Dick Higgins, Christo and Joseph Beuys to elaborate a vital strategy of art in social perspective, an art that is part of life rather than separate from it. He developed an approach to art information and publication to make ideas widely accessible and useful. He places art in a framework of social process as part of an entire public discourse, and his work explores broad ethical and social issues.

Today, Friedman works from his studio loft in New York and his office in Oslo, Norway. His company, Friedman Associates, engages in strategic planning and design development for government and industry. He divides his time between art and business projects. During the last year, he took part in the Biennial of Venice, served as a strategist for the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Project Norgesprofil, took part in Fluxus exhibitions in Vienna and New York, taught at the European Architecture Students Assembly, and worked with GRID Strategisk Design and Norsk Form on the *Made in Norway* exhibition.

Friedman has also written and lectured on the sociology and economics of art with clarity and precision. In 1976, he earned a Ph.D. in human behavior. As president of the Art Economist Corporation in the early 1980s, his analysis of the art market was so accurate that the late Dr Willi Bongart – Europe’s leading expert – termed Friedman “the Dow Jones of the art world.” *Forbes* magazine called his publications “authoritative.”

In 1990, Lund University’s Jean Sellem conducted an interview with Friedman in *Lund Art Press* (vol. 1, No 4, pp. 292-296) that drew the largest response to any piece we have published. As a result of that interview, *Lund Art Press* began work on its special Fluxus issue. Here, Prof. Sellem continues his conversation with Ken Friedman:

JEAN SELLEM (JS) Can existential philosophy be associated with the Fluxus's concept of art and life?

KEN FRIEDMAN (KF) It seems so to me. Perhaps I should clarify what I mean by the Fluxus concept of art and life. When Fluxus artists speak about Fluxus, its criteria, its meaning, its philosophy, perhaps we should speak specifically, referring to *my* criteria of Fluxus, *my* sense of its meaning, *my* interpretation of its philosophy.

Let's look at the different views of Fluxus. There has never been an issue on which all the Fluxus people have agreed. Some, like Dick Higgins, have a clear, articulate view of Fluxus and its meaning. Others, like Alison Knowles, hardly say anything at all. Eric Andersen believes that Fluxus artists have nothing in common with one another. He rejects the idea of any criteria. His feeling is that Fluxus was a forum, a meeting place for some friends, nothing more. I'm not sure that he completely believes that, but every time I ask, that's what he says.

Ben Vautier seems to see Fluxus as a great argument with the notion of art. He pursues the argument with the passion of a rejected lover. He wants to win the heart of the one he loves and hates at the same time. For me, Ben is also a moral philosopher. Through his argument with art, I see a larger discussion on art and life both.

Nam June Paik used Fluxus as a forum, an arena through which he moved on the way to something much larger. Paik's relationship to Fluxus is now a bit distant. Milan Knizak says Fluxus is dead. Beuy saw Fluxus as a proving ground for important ideas, ideas that he later developed more comprehensively in his own work. While he seemed to

draw a distinction between his Fluxus work and his other work, he used the Fluxus name and associated himself with Fluxus for over twenty years, from 1963 until his death in 1986.

Henry Flynt keeps a big distance to Fluxus. He joins the exhibitions, but he says he isn't a Fluxus artist. He considers Fluxus the "publisher of last resort" for his work, and considers his real work concept art. (He thinks that there are only four important concept artists, Christer Hennix, Robert Morris, La Monte Young and Henry himself.)

Filliou had an enduring friendship and association with Fluxus artists, but he had little attachment to the term or the idea of Fluxus as art. After a while, George Brecht became totally detached. He says Fluxus has Fluxed. That's it for him.

The only one who thought that there was something solid and central to Fluxus in an organized sense seems to have been George Maciunas. George still believed this even after the others had taken much more individualistic stands. We each have our own interpretation of Fluxus. All of the interpretations are valid. Fluxus is often compared to Zen Buddhism because, like Zen, there are many orthodoxies, many liberalisms, many interpretations. They are all valid.

I see the key issues in existentialism as related to the key issues in Fluxus. Authenticity, the call to being, the requirement to act from who one is are central. If you go back to Kierkegaard, even the requirement to make a leap of faith seemed to me to relate to what I saw in Fluxus in the 1960s. But remember, in the 1960s I was a young man who was planning to become a minister. I'm not sure

if I would portray issues in terms the leap of faith today, but I still regard the other issues as valid. The issues are important.

JS So you see this kind of work as an act of existential engagement..

KF Yes. Most forms of art make no demand on the person of the artist. That's why I say painting is a hobby. You can express central values and be a painter, but you can't simply be a painter and be interesting. That's why I can appreciate painters as dramatically different in their work as Julian Schnabel and Jack Ox. Even when they fail, they're doing something interesting. They're engaged in a sweeping discourse far beyond the retinal theatrics that Duchamp despised. Their work is far more interesting than the facile drama of today's new generation of ironic society painters or the self-important, tidy little steps that mark each art season's entries in the race for 15 minutes of fame. I like an argument with history, and the only way to make that kind of argument is from a position of existential good faith. Even if you're wrong, you have to be willing to address the issues, you have to dare to be wrong.

You have to be willing to use art as a tool to reach beyond art. Francesco Conz may believe in us too much when he sees Fluxus as a new religion, but I appreciate the faith he has in our search. He understands perfectly that we are looking for something more than effects. The only kind of art that has ever been interesting for more than a short time has that quality of the search. This is not something you can learn in art school. It is not often something you can learn in the art world. Like all truths, you can learn things everywhere and nowhere. You never know when you are going to hear what you need to hear in your search.

You could say that it's foolish of me to pursue social transformation through something like Fluxus. It is. I expect too much. I cherish dreams that have to do with the relationship between the broad frame of action called Fluxus and areas such as art, design, architecture, environmental planning, urban development: all the things that suffer in the hands of specialists.

One reason I like the others in Fluxus is that they are committed to their vision. They are willing to be misfits. They dare to be wrong. That's why I was drawn to them. When I met Dick and George and the others in 1966, I felt at home. They had a commitment I had only seen in a few places – in the civil rights movement, in the liberal church, among a few beatniks and philosophers. Somehow, the Fluxus people were pursuing a large agenda, a broad social and cultural agenda. It seemed to me that, at least in America, few were doing that. Philosophers studied existentialism, they didn't act. Fluxus acted.

There are many Fluxuses. Tim Porges says we each get the Fluxus we deserve. My Fluxus is an existential Fluxus.

JS What relationship exists between *Intermedia* and *Total Art* ?

KF *Intermedia* and *Total Art* are related, but they are different concepts. *Intermedia* is an art that lies on the edge of boundaries between forms and media. You can also find intermedia that exist between art forms and non-art forms. It's sometimes difficult to imagine an intermedium before it's created, but you can think of many in theory. Imagine an intermedia form combining aspects of typesetting, cooking, pyrotechnics and farming – or an intermedia form that embraces baking, sculpture, sewing and perfumery.

The great culinary pageants of the medieval times were intermedia. Later, they became an art form in their own right. So, too, the court pageant that became an important form of performance art – theatrical representations of huge sea battles celebrated in the flooded hall of a palace with music and dance in accompaniment or masked balls that were also allegorical pilgrim journeys.

Many forms of contemporary art began as intermedia. Artists' books, stamp art, performance art, mail art, certainly video all emerged into solidified media from the realm of intermedia. This is also true of social sculpture. Concept art, conceptual art – and there were important distinctions between them – concrete poetry and *poesie visive* all began as intermedia. Intermedia is often confused with multimedia. It shouldn't be. It's entirely different. The important distinction between *intermedia* and *multi-media* is the melding of aspects of different media into one form. When different forms merge, we see an intermedia form. The success of intermedia is seen in the coherence of mergers that give rise to new forms. The most successful intermedia forms will eventually cease to be intermedia. They will develop characteristics of their own. They will finally become established media with names, histories and contexts of their own.

JS What about multi-media?

KF It's important to mark the difference between intermedia and multi-media. The generation and birth of new art forms doesn't happen with multi-media. In multi-media, by definition, lots of things happen at once. They are, in Fluxus terms, neo-Baroque. They remain separated. Intermedia tend toward the unitary, toward the neo-haiku sensibility. Even when they emerge from several forms, they flow into one stream.

Multi-media pieces are typified by all sorts of action, all sorts of things taking place at the same time. They are scattered and confused, pulling you in different directions. Intermedia encourage focus and clarity of thought.

Happenings were by and large multi-media forms, but they were more sophisticated than most multi-media events. The 60s were filled with multi-media circuses. There were the kind of pieces where dancers ran around while films were projected and poets chanted to the music of saxophones and rumbling audiovisual equipment. *Happenings* weren't that silly, but they did involve lots of action on an explosive field. The happening didn't last as an art form. It was too low in coherence and intentional value. Fluxus and happenings are lumped together, in histories, in exhibitions, and even in some theories – but on a theoretical basis, they were allied only in that they were opposite tendencies, twinned polarities, two faces of the same coin. It's no coincidence that half the happening artists became painters and sculptors – like Oldenburg, Dine, and Grooms – while the other half were Fluxus people – like Higgins, Vostell, and Knizak. Allan Kaprow occupies a special position. He came out of art history and painting into happenings, but he didn't go back to painting. While he isn't part of Fluxus, his work over the years has become more and more intimate in its focus, taking on the psychological tone and event-oriented edge characteristic of much Fluxus work. Al Hansen is unique. He never abandoned the neo-Baroque tone of happenings. He's still quite loose. Of all the early happenings, he is the only one who maintained the happenings ethos. He has become more closely allied to Fluxus over the years.

It's important to raise the issue of multi-media to clarify it as distinct from inter-media and to show that multimedia is not total art. I wanted to bring up the issue of multi-media for the purpose of defining it and discarding it.

JS How do these relate to *total art* ?

KF Total Art is neither intermedia nor multi-media. Total Art, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, is a larger form in which many streams of action take place at one time in synergy and balanced relationship. Multi-media often has the smell of art teachers and their students diligently trying to be experimental. The multi-media streams do not meld and blend. That's why they are not intermedia. There's no merging of horizons, just a lot of stuff happening at the same time. People bounce around shouting "Look at me! I'm experimental!"

Total Art emerges from several streams, too. While the streams do not reduce and merge into single stream, they relate and interpenetrate. Opera is a form of total art. Film – moving pictures – began as an intermedia form. Then film grew new branches in relation to its first, and it grew from an intermedia form into total art.

To compare the ways in which intermedia and total art accomplish their relationships and unities, it may be useful to think of two kinds of river systems. In intermedia, several small rivers blend and merge together. At points, they may pick up force, as a river does when it goes over a waterfall, but the streams do not turn from five small rivers into a raging torrent. Intermedia forms grow in depth, but only a little in size. When an intermedia form becomes an established medium, it enlarges to take on force. Prior to that time, it may have depth and power, but

it will not be a huge river, a force. There's usually something contemplative, philosophical, perhaps even austere about inter-media. Its thoughtful birth, its experimental nature seem to require it. The tributary forms flow together in a complex algebra that reduces them to a single equation.

Total Art retains all the power and force of multiple forms flowing into a big system. Separate streams may flow side by side, but they relate. As they come together, they build. You are aware of separate streams merging and building. This is a contrast to intermedia, where you become aware of streams refining each other, paring each other down to the hybrid essentials. Opera is one of the first examples of total art, and still the best. Some of the medieval pageants that became sepecially complex may have been forms of total art. Social sculpture began as an intermedia form: as it grew, as it ramified, it added on dense associations such as the Free International University and the alliance to the Greens. It became a form of total art.

The edges of these things are not precisely clear. Maciunas's expanded arts diagrams showed the relationships – and you can see readily how one thing might become another with just a hint of different emphasis. An intermedia form with a touch of the circus and political psychology could blossom into a form of total art when those two streams become a larger part of the whole. Arnulf Rainer's actionist self-portraits were an intermedia form. Hermann Nitsch's actionism swelled into a symphony, a total art gesture.

JS Is not the Fluxus idea of applying scientific method to art a clinical form of thinking?

KF The notion of experimentation and the scientific method is often misunderstood. The scientific method is a way of seeking truth. It is not cold and rigid, and that's what I think your question suggests.

Truth is one of the most passionate possibilities open to us as human beings. The search for truth is exciting. The great legends, the great dramas, the great myths of human history all involve our search for truth.

There is no such thing as *the Truth*. But there is truth, and there is the search. Think of the great scientists of our time, people like Einstein, Bohm, Pauling, Gadjusek, Kekulé. Here are fascinating, charming people, engaged in a search. Their search was a dialogue with progress that grew from what came before and paved the way for what came after. The scientific method was a way to assure that their search built a road. Look at how carefully Einstein applied scientific method to his own theories. He was always willing to disprove a theory and start again. The search requires an astonishing open quality, not a cold quality.

Even scientists who don't show Einstein's generosity of spirit have a passion for the search. At its best, it is like the passion we see in artists. I read a lot in the history of science and scientific biography. The delicacy and strength of the way science grows is a constant source of delight, an inspiration.

Art that doesn't ask questions cannot contribute much to the human experience. What can be more cold than unquestioning, formula-based art? Who needs anything less than another object created for the market, more yard-goods on which a signature can be stamped and from which the chains of karma can be further elaborated. That's what we get in art that fails in its responsibility to the scientific method.

I don't mean every art work needs to prove a scientific point. I mean that the questions of intent, meaning, clarity, purpose, the issue of doubt and of possibility, all these must take place in the creation of a work of art.

An enormous amount of art is made for the purpose of possessing art. Artists imitate themselves, painting pictures of earlier paintings. Artists no longer ask the questions that once made them interesting. The work poses no questions, and there are no theories or queries against which to test the product. Boring stuff. A work of art that asks good questions and fails is far more interesting, far more useful than a pat illustration of a picture that has solidified into acceptable art.

JS Can art do this in a scientifically predictable way?

KF Art can't be precisely quantified as some science can, but it can benefit from the scientific method, from a process of questioning and testing. We're reaching areas of science where even science can't quite be quantified or given the mechanical expression that was possible in the Newtonian system. Look at chaos theory, quantum physics, fractal geometry. But as unmechanical as these are, they do enter into the discourse of scientific method and experiment. This is the realm of subtle description that brings passion and precision together. Look at early Hindu mathematics, at Buddhist psychology, at Pythagorean music to see examples of scientific method that we can think of as warm, filled with feeling and intellect at the same time. Look at Kierkegaard's psychological analysis.

It is the willingness to engage in an experimental approach that makes it possible for Fluxus to hope to be bigger than art. All of the aspirations that I hold for Fluxus arise from the idea of experiment and scientific method. The idea that the Fluxus approach

may attain unity of art and life, that Fluxus can contribute to positive globalism must be tested. These notions are visionary, larger than Fluxus has yet justified. The application of scientific method gives me hope: in seeing what doesn't work, I see ways to find what does. Edison attempted over 1,000 experiments before he created the incandescent light. He had over 1,000 failures before he succeeded. Scientific method offered the hope that he eventually would succeed. We want to create more than the retinal theater which most art has been and continues to be. If we want to be more than retinal theater-goers who have had a couple of theory-cocktails in the lobby between acts, we've got to bring the scientific method to bear on our work.

That's not a clinical approach. That's the foundation of excellence. It gives us the right to hope that we have something to look forward to.

JS *Chance, probability and opportunity* are three different concepts, each with its own implication. How can the key of Fluxus experimentation be chance?

KF In my essay, "Fluxus and Company," I use the word *chance* in specific ways. I use it because it has been associated with Fluxus since the beginning, made famous by John Cage and by George Brecht.

Let's clarify our terms. *Chance*, as I use it, has several implications. One of them is *aleatoric* or *random chance* – that is, *probability, probabilistic chance*. The other meaning is *evolutionary chance* – that is, *opportunistic chance, opportunity*. As most words do, *chance, probability* and *opportunity* have distinct ranges of meaning. Some of those meanings don't apply to the discussion at hand. For example, two meanings of the word *chance* are "a fielding opportunity in the American game of

baseball," or "a ticket in a raffle or lottery." The definitions that do concern us are linked as I described them. They include, according to *Webster's Dictionary*, "**1 a:** something that happens without discernable human intention or observable cause, **b:** the the assumed impersonal purposeless determiner of unaccountable happening; LUCK, **c:** the fortuitous or incalculable element in existence: CONTINGENCY, **2:** a situation favoring some purpose: OPPORTUNITY."

Before discussing these definitions and their meaning, I want to quote the passage in "The Twelve Criteria of Fluxus" to which you refer:

"One key aspect of Fluxus experimentation is chance. The methods – and results – of chance occur over and over again in the work of Fluxus artists.

"There are several ways of approaching chance. Chance, in the sense of aleatoric or random chance, is a tradition with a legacy going back to Duchamp, to Dada and to Cage. That's been very famous and much has been made of it, perhaps more than necessary, by those who have written about Fluxus. This is understandable, too, in the cultural context in which Fluxus appeared. The world seemed to have become too routinized, opportunities for individual engagement in the great game of life too limited. Random chance, a way to break the bonds, took on a powerful attraction.

"There is also evolutionary chance. In the long run, this plays a much more powerful role than random chance. Evolutionary chance engages a certain element of the random. Genetic changes occur, for example, in a process that is known as random selection. New mutations that offer good options for survival and growth are embodied in evolutionary development.

“This has parallels in art, in music, in cultures. Something enters the scene and changes the world-view we previously held. That influence may be initiated in a random way, that is, in an unplanned way, or as the result of signal interference to intended messages, or sudden insight. Any number of possibilities exist. When the chance input is embodied into new form, however, it ceases to be random and becomes evolutionary. That is why chance is closely allied to experimentation in Fluxus. It is related to the ways in which scientific knowledge grows, too.”

More stress has been placed on random chance or aleatoric chance than on evolutionary or opportunistic chance. In fact, they've both been equal in importance. The romance of Fluxus's past has emphasised random chance: Duchamp's *Nine Standard Stoppages*, Cage's use of the *I Ching* and of random number generators to create compositions, Brecht's experiments with chance operations, Knowles's use of chance in many of her projects are all quite real. In an age of academic art, the use of chance showed a marvelous flair. It was one token of a new approach, an approach different than the willful, determined approach characteristic of so much art. It was a statement about the way we approach the world.

JS What do you mean?

KF Let's take a moment to review the moment in history when Fluxus emerged. Imagine the 1950s. The Cold War was raging. In the United States, Europe and Asia, every aspect of culture was positioned as part of an immense battle for the human mind.

There are two ways to win the peace. One is expressed in the UNESCO charter: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must

be created.” The other is using art, science, the whole range of human endeavor and experience to prove the superiority of a way of life. Influential leaders in several nations thought that if they could position their artists and their national art as the most advanced, they could, in effect, position their nations as the most advanced. By a reverse logic, the nation with the best and most advanced art must also be the best and most advanced nation.

This assertion has no basis in reality, but it does exist in perception, and many nations practice it. We still see it – or we saw it – in the use of sports, especially the Olympics, as validations of national superiority. And we saw it in many other fields.

It is a corrupt logic, but by the 1950s, most people had forgotten the role of the Berlin Olympics in Hitler's propaganda machine. It didn't occur to many that some concentration camps had exquisite orchestras where the genocidal criminals who ran the camps might enjoy a divine rendition of Schuman or Mozart in the evening and murder the players the next day. There is no provable relation between esthetic sensitivity and moral or ethical superiority. Still, since the time of the Egyptians and the Greeks, it has been assumed that there is.

For most of America's history, she has been thought of as a nation devoted to commerce rather than to the intellect or the spirit. This is not so. It was thought to be so because Europe had the lead in art and music. Art and music were equated with intellect and spirit. America had an inferiority complex about culture. The inferiority complex produced far worse results than the supposed lack of culture ever did. Yet, a nation that is perceived as uncultured is disadvantaged in the eyes of the world. This perception condemned and still condemns America in the eyes of many Europeans.

Now, remember, we're looking back at the Cold War era. At that moment, America had produced a generation of interesting painters. It had also produced a number of articulate, eloquent critics who rationalized those painters as the best in the world. One critic, Clement Greenberg, created a theory which stated that this painting was, in fact, the logical end toward which art had marched since the dawn of time Greenberg's boast asserted: "It's happened here, in America; here, in the New World. The Old World looks to us for hope." That's a potent message for propaganda. Sure enough, a few members of the government caught the idea.

So it was that we saw what came to be called "the triumph of American painting." Museum tours, art exhibitions and books heralded the arrival of what was called the first great American art. This was nonsense: America had produced great art and architecture for over six centuries. It simply wasn't seen in the Eurocentric schoolbook history that descended from one center of power to another. Much great European art of our century had already been affected by the American vision. Europe's great architects had long been engaged in dialogue with the great Americans. The announcement of the ascension of American painting – New York School painting in specific – was bound up in political and economic considerations. There was some fine painting, but European painting of the greatest strength and stature continued. Earlier American painting had also been good, though it was not as widely noticed, nor as influential. In this heavyweight championship of painting and art, the emphasis was put on the majesty and will of the contestants. It was an imperial, even colonial view. But it was not, at first, a genuine reflection of American cultural imperialism and colonialism. It was

a reaction to the cultural imperialism and colonialism of Europe. Even more, it was an homage to – and a continuation of – European ideas. Only later did it become a tool of what some deem American cultural imperialism, when, with government funding, it was used as a political tool.

All of these considerations were extra-artistic, but the art and the cultural conditions that surrounded it took on a certain tone and flavor. New York School painting was used as the handmaiden of a political view. European art was also accompanied by vigorous political and philosophical writing. A major difference was that the Abstract Expressionists had critics for their cheering section, while artists in groups such as COBRA or Situationism tended to do their own thinking and writing.

John Cage and his students took a different viewpoint. They were engaged in the world, but far removed from the propagandistic bombast of the painterly triumph. Everything they did and valued took another tone. Two forces contributed to the chance methods in art. One was the Duchamp heritage, a detached, quizzical, even ironic mode of thought. The other was the Oriental strain of philosophy, typified by Zen and characterized by the attempt to work with the world rather than to impose one's will on it. In this context, chance operations became a political statement without a manifesto. The heavy guns of the New York scene were going to roar across the face of Europe as returned conquistadors. The intermedia-oriented Cage students travelled as pilgrims learning from global culture, in particular Asian culture. Chance operations were a statement of humility, detachment, even renunciation – an issue Francesco Conz catches quite clearly in his vision of Fluxus. Met-

aphorically, the use of chance operations was a path of submission, to the forces of time and space or perhaps to the Tao or the will of God.

Cloaked in the modernist, positivist language of Clement Greenberg, the triumph of American painting took on an imperious, arrogant tone. It all but shrieked "Gott mit Uns!" at the rest of the world. By contrast, the use of chance operations was a soft way to whisper, "Let Thy will be mine." Rather than asserting the artist as the flaming avatar of God's will, the artist would follow the signs, seeking knowledge with begging bowl and pilgrim staff.

This is a streamlined interpretation of the perceptual symbolism of two strains in art. The one, forceful, persuasive, imperial in tone, the other yielding, temperate, monastic. Many people who are fond of Fluxus and intermedia dislike the cultural context of New York School painting. Most have little use for Greenberg's articulate, self-centered certitude. The stress on the use of chance was a way of encoding that stand. But if Greenberg and the New York imperialists were wrong – and they were – so, too, were those who saw the use of chance operations as a pure way to move beyond choice, beyond self-assertion. There is no way for human beings to move beyond choice. If you are in a human body, you make choices. That's the way the universe works. Choosing not to choose is a choice, and you are bound by its consequences. Choosing to make works of art, whether declaring yourself an avatar or a pilgrim, is a choice. If the choices have different consequences, they are both choices made in the realm of karma. There is no escape on the level of doing.

My view is that we learn several things from the way the universe works, and the use of evolutionary chance is one of them.

JS How does chance flow from universal laws?

KF Chance operations depend on the law of entropy. The transformation of energy states or the translation of information from one state to another engages entropy. Order descends into disorder. The leakage of order into disorder permits chance to take hold.

Chance takes hold in many ways. One way is to generate disordered numbers from which we can build new orders. That's Cage's approach with the *I Ching*. Cage himself states that his use of the *I Ching* is a pure *operational* method, that the hexagrams that result are not oracular in nature. It's an interesting position. The sages who developed the *I Ching* saw it as a tool for coming to understand and move with the power of the universe rather than asserting one's will over against it. The hexagrams were ways to chart the flow of energy. By learning to follow the chart, one could follow the path of the sage. If one doesn't use this tool in this way, you may as well be throwing dice, using a random-number generator or flipping coins. Intermedia artists have tried all these and more.

But entropy operates in other ways. They do not all lead, finally, to the degrading of information. Energy is always flowing downhill. It's a property of the space-time universe. But it doesn't flow downhill equally and in equal measure in all places at once. It pools. It ripples. Again and again, the transformation of energy states sets up local conditions which can lead to the increase of order and the increase of energy states. This does not contradict the law of entropy. It is a condition of the way energy moves on its way through space-time.

When entropy operates on genetic material, we see mutation. Mutation may be introduced through radiation, through genetic

breakage, through a number of other operations. When this happens, new forms come into being. Some of those new forms have radically different properties than their predecessors.

All forms exist in space-time. Forms that mutate in ways less effective than earlier forms die soon. In this sense, nature is wasteful: it creates, through entropy and mutation, far more forms than survive. At the level of physics, matter and form are always coming into being and disappearing from it. In biology, the same is true. But of the myriad forms that spring into being, some turn out to be well suited for a localized niche. This is where random evolution comes in. An ecological niche is like the door to a combination safe. It opens only with a certain code. Nature is like a prodigal safecracker playing a game with herself. She tries combination after combination. Bad combinations don't get through the door. When a combination works, it moves through the door. These evolved forms then create the next set of niches. These niches make a place for the new codes that are cracked by the next set of evolutionary survivors.

We see evidence of this everywhere. Human depth perception is an example. Localized conditions built forests in certain parts of the planet Earth. Members of the primate family lived in the forests. Certain primates took to the branches. As these primates moved from tree to tree, some mutated to develop brachiation. That is the shoulder motion we use to swing from branch to branch, visible today when kids on a playground use the hand-ladder or a trapeze artist reaches from one bar to the next. Brachiation was a useful skill. Primates who swung survived better. They avoided dangers on the ground, while those who had to climb down to climb up again did less well. Depth sight was important for our swinging ancestors. When you swing from branch to branch, depth percep-

tion is a powerful competitive benefit. If you don't have it, you can't measure the accurate distance to your next safe grip. Primates with stereo vision survived much better than those without.

In the next several thousand cycles, different local conditions brought those primates down out of the trees onto the Savannah, taught them to hunt together and to eat meat. After a while, they built pyramids and the Parthenon. Their distant descendents gave birth to Pavlova, Pirandello and Picasso. All these were shaped in the crucible of evolutionary opportunity.

The difference between random selection and guided evolutionary opportunity is choice. We choose. A chemist dips a glass rod in a tainted solution. Later, he sees that it has unusual properties. Instead of throwing the rod away, he works his way back to the accident and Nylon is born. A researcher finds an unusual mold on a slice of bread. He investigates it and find that it has potential medicinal properties. He works with it and discovers penicillin. An accident in a laboratory spawns the telephone. A dream cracks the code of the benzene ring. Perception, choice, human selection operating out the flow of partially random forces is how things move forward.

That's the point. Your question is perceptive, but the terms are stated inaccurately. These are related aspects of the same concept. They all play a role in Fluxus.

The difference between Fluxus and much other art is in its use of chance. When you purposely experiment, you will find that evolution is far more kind to you than when you follow an academic course. There's a plus and a minus. On the minus side, tidy, well-trained artists are always bound to get more predictable, refined, acceptable work than we are. But if you come from the

position that you are interested in forwarding the human dialogue, that the dialogue is more important than art, then the choices arising from experiment become a rich source of opportunity. You get a lot of failures, you get a few successes. You use intelligence to follow the successful opportunities to the next level of dialogue.

In this regard, I think we ought to talk a little about what I mean by art, but maybe we can take that up a bit later.

JS Right now, I'd like to ask about *globalism*. Is *globalism* opposed to *hegemonism*?

KF Absolutely. Globalism requires a world of increasingly fewer boundaries. Hegemonism requires rigid boundaries. Globalism offers individual opportunity, cultural integrity, an open situation. Hegemonism requires the individual to select from a restricted menu, sets one culture over another, requires mechanisms of control.

Globalism as I mean it is similar to Nam June Paik's notion of open circuits. Massive technology is the basis of Paik's video paradise, but technology devolves into individual hands to offer direct access and multiple control. In Paik's vision, thousands of channels will operate. This is what Beuys expressed through the concept of *direct democracy*. This is a vital issue, social in nature, political and economic in expression.

If you put it in political and economic terms, globalism posits a world comprised of many independent, interdependent groups. Each offers ideas, products and services to all others. Each accepts or pays for what they want from the others.

In hegemonistic systems, people are required to do the will of others, they are forced into a pattern that others dominate.

The word *hegemony* comes from the Greek work *hegemon*, leader. It refers to the preponderant influence, authority or domination of one group over others. It has particularly come to refer to the relationships between nations. I'm sorry that in some dictionaries, the word *globalism* has similar meaning, related to the view that the entire world is the proper arena for the political ambitions of a great power. In that sense, both the term *globalism* and Dick Higgins's term, *internationalism* are tainted by the aroma of imperialism, colonial history and Cold War politics.

I intend the term *globalism* in its larger sense, as Dick intended *internationalism*. If it is understood that the entire world is an arena for politics, it is because the entire human race is our *polis*, our political body. Global ideas in politics can be as readily expressed in the concept of the United Nations as in the concept of great powers at odds with one another. In ecological terms, the Gaia hypothesis is an expression of globalism.

In hegemonies, one group dominates others. A few individuals act as though they are independent. Most are dependent and subservient. Globalism posits an open arena, democratic and free. It suggests individual rights, intellectual rights, spiritual rights and property rights. To have an appropriate sense of the term, one must look to green capitalism, Buddhist capital-ism to permit a global ethic. You can't force people or you have no proper world. And you can't permit people to be run over by those who abuse freedom at the expense of everyone else.

These are issues on which the debate between globalism and hegemonism take place. These are the issues, economic, behavioral, moral and ethical that every human being on the planet must consider. Questions concerning often Fluxus point to

art, but what makes Fluxus interesting is that Fluxus concerns have more been aimed at cultural and human affairs than at art alone. It sometimes seems that art is only an excuse for many of the Fluxus ideas or models.

The essence of globalism can be seen in Robert Filliou's idea of what he called "the Eternal Network." Filliou proposed that everyone involved in art is involved in a spiritual quest. He believed that the purpose of art is to make life more interesting than art. He believed that the conditions of human knowledge – including art – have changed from the past. By the early 1960s, it was not possible for one individual to have a complete knowledge of developments in any field. In that situation, he reasoned, no one can know who is the avant-garde and who is the rear, who is at the leading edge and who is following. The concept of the avant-garde was no longer valid. In its place, Filliou proposed a huge network of colleagues, a giant, on-going association he termed "la fête permanente" in French. He translated this into English as "the Eternal Network."

The Fluxus artists and many others were nodes on what he saw as a network. Filliou didn't see Fluxus as all that important in itself. As a node, as a link in a communication system, it had merit – as an art historical monument, it barely interested him. But art didn't interest him except as a vehicle for consciousness. The Eternal Network was much larger in his conception. Certain artists grew especially keen on the idea at the Eternal Network. One very visible example is mail art. Artists involved in mail art and correspondence art adopted the term "the Eternal Network" to refer to the the network of many thousands of artists around the word involved in mail art. Some work within the art system and some outside. Some work with patronage and some without. Some work within the law in the open communications available in the democratic world, others

operate at the edge of the law or well outside it in nations subject to restricted communication or censorship. The spiritual aspirations of Robert Filliou make sense to them. The term he used came to symbolize their effort to move beyond the limits of the nation-state and the art market. They haven't always been successful in doing that, but an impressive history of experiments shows interesting results. (Chuck Welch, an American artist, is now finishing a massive book on the thirty years of mail art entitled *The Eternal Network*, an overview of the globalistic perspective applied to one art system. It will be an excellent follow-up to Michael Crane and Mary Stofflet's definitive *Correspondence Art*, written in the early 1980s, and Jean-Marc Poinot's pioneering *Mail Art: Communication à Distance* published in 1972.

Filliou's ideas have grown far beyond the boundaries of either Fluxus or the mail art network. The way that Communication nodes in networks permit world-views to move from one sphere of influence into another. That's been happening.

Among my friends and colleagues, I see globalistic thinking increasing. This is an essentially social and political perspective. The late George Maciunas was a visionary spokesman for this position. Even though his viewpoint was restricted by his times, and his ability as an effective leader was low, the global, moral perspective was the basis of his politics. Joseph Beuys became an effective public spokesman for global thinking, an artist whose views on globalism became his art and found a wide hearing. Others, like Ben Vautier, are using their art, at least in part, to argue for the rights of linguistic and cultural minorities. Felipe Ehrenberg in Mexico has pursued local initiative and human autonomy through art. Globalism seems to me implicit in Fluxus, as it is in Buddhism.

Trends in world affairs point toward the greater possibility of globalism. Access to powerful technology at dramatically decreasing prices make job ownership an integral part of successful business. Distributed jobbing systems will make central management control increasingly obsolete. The erosion of information boundaries and barriers will begin to equalize opportunity on a global scale. These facts will change political life, too. The dissolving information boundary will erase the ability of dictators to maintain internal hegemony within their own nations. Nothing grows on the earth without hard work, but a globalistic world is coming.

JS What does this mean?

KF If we don't become global in our thinking, we'll lose the opportunities of the future as we endanger the planet. Norway's clean air is affected by Poland's pollution. The wealth of Europe is threatened by the poverty of Africa. The powerful US media industry will be influenced by illiteracy; since poverty breeds illiteracy, the only context in which the American media can finally remain wealthy is an increase in everyone's wealth. But the circle must close. Wealth must take on new values. An entire planet living in the style of North America, generating as much garbage, using as many cars, throwing away as much food as North Americans do would also destroy the United States. The developed West cannot survive in a world where rich and poor are divided as today, where the poor suffer as they do today. The world itself will not survive if the entire global population begins living as we do today.

Technology will offer some solutions, but there will be no quick fix. Increasing information-based industry will mean the possibility of more work at better pay. Energy-

saving devices and the eventual development of low-pollution energy will mean everyone can live better. But only saving and recycling will reduce the garbage mountain, end glass and metals wastage, or decrease atmospheric destruction. Only conservation will preserve our planetary water supply.

None of this can be achieved by state decree. It can come about through a global approach that offers opportunity, equality and growth for all. Two visionary studies on this topic have been published in recent years. One is an analysis of the present, the report of the Brundtland Commission, the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development. It is available in book form as *Our Common Future*. The other is a visionary history of the future by Norman Macrae an editor at *The Economist*. In a book entitled *The 2024 Report – A Concise History of the Future 1974-2024*, he looks back at today's world from the perspective of the year 2024. In this book, written in 1983, he shows how trends and challenges already in motion today are shaping the world of the future. No one can predict the future, but Macrae's imaginative, intelligent predictions on past occasions have proven close to the mark. We can already see that some of the predictions forecast in the early 1980s when he wrote this book have become history.

Everything that I see suggests that local initiative and individual opportunity in networked nodes offer excellent solutions to many of our problems, economic, political, cultural. Without coercion, without threat of force or violence – and economic threats are a form of violence as severe as threat of arms – problems can be transformed into opportunities. There will be problems, dislocations, even genuine violence along the way, but a global future requires global consciousness.

JS How do you feel this involves Fluxus?

KF What interested me about Fluxus was that it had a sharp, crisp approach to culture. It was an exciting forum for ideas. George Maciunas presented Fluxus to me as a moral and ethical forum. In some ways, George was wrong. In other ways, his hopes for Fluxus were far too high. Fluxus does specific projects. There's no way George Brecht's *Water Yam* is going to end hunger or injustice. But the creativity, the lightness, the rethinking of culture, of our approach to life are the context in which *Water Yam* takes place and from which it emerges. That may well have something to do with how we can finally end hunger or overcome injustice. And that interested me. I don't think I could have been excited enough by a group of painters to become an artist. Painting is great. I love painting. But painting a hobby. Thinking is useful work for an artist, and the whole idea of thinking on global issues, thinking in a globalistic way that attracted me to Fluxus.

Moral alertness mixed with humor gave Fluxus a sense of purpose, a feeling of substance. It's evident in Filliou's books. It's evident in Dick Higgins's essays. It's evident in the Maciunas Fluxus manifestoes. Even if they did not gain the approval of the others, those manifestoes set a tone for dialogue which flourished in the Fluxus circle.

Globalism is an ethical statement. There is no way that you can make the ethical statement which is globalism and accept hegemonism. The contrast is clear.

JS Why is playfulness in Fluxus reserved to insiders and intellectuals, rather than available to *homo ludens* in general?

KF Playfulness is available. It isn't reserved to insiders and intellectuals. It's free for the asking. Help yourself. Some Fluxus insiders – both artists and other insiders – behave as though they are part of the normal art world. Maybe they are. Don't mistake personal behavior for the essential qualities of spirit that Fluxus represent. You don't blame the Inquisition on Jesus. You don't blame Thomas Jefferson for the slaughter of the Native American people. Fluxus isn't to blame if some people miss the point. Every idea in human history seems to be expressed by a few people who miss its basic qualities. That's how it is with playfulness in Fluxus.

Some curators and collectors want to know that they are working with something guaranteed to be good. Maybe they don't trust humor. Maybe they don't trust themselves. They want to be sure that if someone makes a joke, it's an authentic joke, a real Fluxus joke. One way to be sure that a joke is a real Fluxus joke is to make sure it's a joke by a genuine Fluxus artist, an insider. The same joke by an ordinary person isn't valid from that position.

It's sad, but that's how it happens. Sometimes, that context pushes Fluxus people to take themselves a little too seriously. Sometimes, we take ourselves so seriously that we can't catch the joke, either. It happens to all human beings on occasion. But other issues come up, too. Everyone can have a bad day when you don't want to accept a joke or a playful gesture from anyone. Maybe you don't even want to talk or be touched. And sometimes what is supposedly playful is just stupidity. The Zen masters understood this. A joke may indicate enlightenment when one person speaks. The same comment from another person may simply indicate rudeness.

Playfulness is open to all. When the principle finds expression, that's Fluxus at its best. When the principle is ignored, that proves that Fluxus people are human and, like all human beings, they do not always live up to their dearest aspirations.

JS Is Fluxus an anti-illusionary form based on the principle of *Primary Structures*?

KF No, Fluxus has nothing to do with primary structures. Fluxus is anti-illusionary, but is not reductivist. *Primary Structures* was a theory of minimalism, and the name of a famous art show. It was reductivist work. A lot of that work seemed tedious. It was what it was. So what? Minimalism was an opportunity for artists who had been slaves to one form of art theory to break loose from that theory. To do it, they sold themselves to a new theory.

Minimalism broke free of pictorial illusion and representational illusion and sculptural illusion through reductivism. It was the step to take if you wanted to go beyond Clement Greenberg. But what if Clement Greenberg was headed in the wrong direction altogether? Why would you want to go beyond him?

In "The Twelve Criteria of Fluxus," I distinguish between simplicity and minimalism. The twelve criteria expanded on Dick Higgin's "Nine Criteria of Fluxus." In Dick's essay, he used the term *minimalism*. I believe that it's the wrong term to use. It doesn't catch the full range of Fluxus meanings because it is so closely identified with a particular form of art and music from the 1960s. The terms I prefer are *simplicity*, *parsimony* and *elegance*.

I often leave the term elegance out of the heading. Elegance must be understood in the

light of simplicity and parsimony. Elegance means what it does in mathematics or scientific theory. If you apply it to objects, the word elegant would relate to the spirit of Shaker furniture or Zen temples, not to the cluttered excess of Trump Tower. A designer once became upset with me for using the word elegance. He seemed to think the term has to do with upper-class objects, ritzy trade goods and costly furnishings. That's not how I mean the term, so I don't use it without defining it. Simplicity and parsimony are easy to understand. They mean very much the same thing to everyone.

Minimalism means something else. It refers to a pared-down sensibility. There is an aspect of that meaning in Dick's terminology. But it means more: it refers to a certain kind of pared down object that was lodged in the art market. These were precious objects parading as simple objects. Minimalism in the art world was a mandarin exercise in taste. Minimalist art sometimes makes me think of Marie-Antoinette living the simple life at Versailles by playing milk-maid. That's not what Dick meant by minimalism.

Primary structures in art are related to mandarin, precious minimalism. Primary structures doesn't refer to Pythagorean geometry or the harmony of the spheres. The central idea of primary structures in art is that the objects *are* art. They almost grab you by the collar and slap your face with the fact of how important they are as art objects. That's not Fluxus. Fluxus is not, to quote your question, "an anti-illusionary form of art." It is, to rephrase the question, "an anti-illusionary form that can sometimes be art." Primary structures is a subset of minimalism in art. There is a relationship between Fluxus and the form of art known as minimalism. That relationship is not what people sometimes think it is.

JS What is the relationship between Fluxus and Minimalism?

KF This goes back to things that happened before I came along. In the mid-50s, Cage and his students were exploring certain ideas that later fed into minimalism. This was the minimalism to which Dick Higgins referred. In other places, the same impulse was emerging. Artists, poets, composers and dancers began working in a minimalist vein. By the mid-50s, artist like Walter De Maria, poets like Jackson Mac Low, composers like La Monte Young, dancers like Simone Forti were exploring the possibilities of minimalism. It was refined and rigorous. It was open-ended and flexible at the same time. This was the era that some historians are now defining as pre-Fluxus.

These artists and their work began to rub against the normative art world at different points. There were crucial interactions in key forums. One forum with powerful impact was Yoko Ono's loft on Chambers Street in New York. Yoko Ono was herself an important figure exploring what could be called minimalist ideas. She created an on-going series of evenings, concerts, opportunities to present work and to learn from the work of others. Many leading artists such as Robert Morris and Carolee Schneemann took part in projects at Yoko's loft.

Another vital forum was the landmark book, *An Anthology*, edited by La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low. It was designed by George Maciunas. Gathered and prepared in 1961, lack of funds kept it from being published until 1963. The ideas, copies of the essays and contents were already in circulation – and when it was released in 1963, it had an enormous effect on the way people thought about art. The activities around

Fluxus in its early days were another forum. At Wiesbaden and Copenhagen, through publications and multiples, at festivals in the United States and Europe, the ideas that Higgins termed minimalist found expression.

All of this took place between the mid-1950s and the early 1960s. In the early 1960s, around 1962 or 1963, minimalism began to emerge as a key issue for the art world itself. By 1964 and 1965, it was a raging force. Some of the artists who became leaders in this art world minimalism were influenced by the earlier, pre-Fluxus minimalism. Some, like Robert Morris, were briefly part of Fluxus. Others, like Walter De Maria, were active in the circle around Fluxus. Some, like La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low, were considered part of Fluxus. The majority of Fluxus minimalists did not make the transition into art world minimalism. The art world minimalists had solid standarts and world credentials and good dealers. They had a way to address themselves to art discourse. Their focus was on art, arguments within art, arguments about art. Artists with a broader range, a more fluid perspective just didn't fit in. Look at Yoko Ono. Her importance in contemporary art is undeniable now. Her central position in concept art and performance art, her influence on minimalism and conceptual art become increasingly clear. In those days she didn't fit in. Her work didn't make sense in the context of the art world. That's because she, like so many Fluxus artists, wasn't organized exclusively around art and music, but around fluid forms that sometimes were also art and music.

There's an excellent biography on Yoko written by Jerry Hopkins, entitled *Yoko Ono*. In his book, Hopkins gives a marvelous picture of the era. When you read the book –

and Hopkins interviewed almost all of us for his background and research—that era comes to life. You can see how and why many things happened as they did.

From the time that minimalism became *an art form* rather than *a way to think that could also be applied to art*, the rigidity of the term made it inapplicable to Fluxus. That's why I use other terms. Minimalism is too confusing.

History offers other perspectives on issues in recent art. A sidelight to this discussion involves several other forms, such as *concept art*. Henry Flynt worked on his ideas and essays about concept art from the late 50s through 1961, when he finished his first, seminal essay. That essay was published in *An Anthology*. This fact has bearing on something that happens later in the 1960s, *conceptual art*, and the relation of conceptual art to the art form known as minimalism.

The way they tell the story of conceptual art in basic art history across North America, something quite different happens. Rather than a series of fluid interactions, we see a series of moves, actions and reactions. Some one does something. Someone else counters with a move that carries the pattern to its next level or breaks the pattern. The whole game is a matter of scoring points, claiming more history than the artist who came before. In some ways, it's fun. Look at how well Picasso and Duchamp played the game. Look at Ben Vautier. He made the game of triumphing over art history a central point in his art, and he played it so well that he has become art history. (Of course, his triumph means that he will need a new game soon. But that's another story.) For the majority of artists without the astonishing talents of a Picasso, the intellectual majesty of a Duchamp or the sheer bravura of a Ben

Vautier, the game is fruitless. Art doesn't really work that way. Like most human endeavors, art is a long discourse, and many people engage in a conversation to contribute to art.

In the action-and-reaction model, the story of minimalism takes a streamlined form. Pop art emerges as a reaction to abstract expressionism. Minimalism emerges, partly still reacting against expressionism, partly taking the anti-illusionist idea of Pop Art to its genuine conclusion. That points toward an idea-based art, and thus arises conceptualism.

It's partly true and mostly false. For those forms of art lodged in the art world, this model is reasonable enough. What's false is the way it neglects the interaction of art with a larger discourse of world events and inter-media forms such as Fluxus or concept art. Minimalism in art did come before conceptualism in art. But Henry Flynt's concept art came *before* minimalism. It was part of the minimalism to which Higgins refers, and it traces its roots to John Cage and the New School, to the Zen-inflected ideas that Cage brought with him from California, to the ideas of La Monte Young. It even had the elements of a vocabulary. Terms like Young's *short form* or Ono's and Brecht's *event* or Flynt's *concept art* and *brend* were in use well before the vocabulary of minimalism swamped the discourse.

After art world minimalism, there emerged a different form of conceptualism. This conceptualism was an important step in art. It was different from the earlier concept art in a significant dimension. Concept art, in Flynt's definition, was an art form of which the primary element is ideas, as, for example, the primary element of music is sound. Conceptual art is a form of art about art, in which ideas about art, a form of philoso-

phizing, become the art itself. Neither of these definitions are precise, but the differences in their direction are clear.

Flynt is angry about conceptual art, and rightly so. Concept art was conflated into and obscured by conceptual art. But when an exhibition of conceptual art includes Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner, but does not include Henry Flynt, it is as much an expression of Flynt's own reality and the direction of his vision of concept art as it is an act of discrimination. Concept art was a form that came well before conceptual art. There is evidence to show that certain conceptual artists were aware of Flynt's work. At the same time, the central conceptual artists are *visual* artists in a way that Henry Flynt is not.

JS What do you mean?

KF Henry Flynt created something quite new. Concept art went beyond the realm of art thinking. Henry Flynt's concepts of art are rooted in philosophy and mathematics. Even in those fields some of his ideas represent ruptures in the on-going dialogue. In every field where Henry contributes, it's as though he goes back – a decade, a century, a few millenia – to the last significant idea he considers useful. Then, starting at that point, he begins again. It's as though there is no history of intervening development between the earlier idea and Henry's work. In biology, it would be like finding DNA from a woolly mammoth and breeding it from the point ages before mammoths made their contribution and disappeared. It would be like hybridizing a horse from the days when horses were dog-sized and had toes. It's a bold, protean way to work. That explain why no one could get a grip on Henry's innovations. Henry Flynt was too radical. It's taken thirty years of art world debate, thirty years of evolution and dialogue to contextualize and embrace Henry Flynt's contributions.

Conceptual art, on the other hand was an important contribution to the on-going dialogue of visual art. It was more a bracing tonic to the art world than a rupture. Artists like Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Don Burgy or Douglas Heubler made wonderful contributions. Once I got beyond worrying about the fact that conceptual art had obscured Henry Flynt's work – a fact that bothered me no end in the 1960s – I was able to see just how important many of the conceptual artists were. It seems to me that only the contribution of conceptual art made it possible to understand concept art as Flynt intended it. These are different forms in the art of this century. They both find a common ancestry in the work of Marcel Duchamp and John Cage.

The biggest differences between concept art and conceptual art lie in the question of visual art. Flynt relies on an entire history of ideas outside visual art, a history of ideas so pure and refined it is quite inaccessible. Many people who think they admire Flynt's work don't understand it. Kosuth, on the other hand, is a visual artist, a wonderful visual artist. His piece with the three chairs, his works on Mozart, his neon texts are exciting visual work. The austere Henry Flynt could never create the aura of delight and emotional resonance that Kosuth creates. And most conceptual artists don't enjoy the rarified intellectual tournaments that Flynt finds entertaining.

The difference between concept art and conceptual art may be simple. Henry Flynt's concept art is an intellectual scalpel, drawing on ideas well outside the range of art. Concept art can be applied to art with interesting results. Conceptual art is a form of visual art. It is far more human and warm, and, for all its intellectuality, it embodies an amount of emotional resonance that concept art lacks. It is less precise and far more

accessible. Its very accessibility shows why the conceptual artists quickly became famous. Henry Flynt has only now begun to receive the credit he has earned.

These are the sorts of mistakes that emerge from the streamlined vision of art and art history which embraces the theory of primary structures as an art form. Primary structures bored me.

Anti-illusionism was another matter. Anti-illusionism in Fluxus was close to the ideas of *nouveau réalisme*. We see anti-illusionism in the way Dieter Roth handles printed objects, in Joseph Beuys's objects, in Emmett Williams's performance works. Anti-illusionism can be dry and pure, as Williams's *Counting Piece*, or wet and dirty, like Beuys's *Honey Pump*. You can even see a kind of dirty purity, as visible in Dieter Roth's book *101 Little Clouds*. None of it has anything to do with the academic tedium of primary structures.

JS How does Fluxus relate to time?

KF Fluxus uses time. It's a basic human resource. Time is an important part of art, though many approaches to art deny this. Fluxus acknowledges the fact that art functions in time. There is no eternal art. In fact, there may be no eternity. Either time operates in huge cycles or time will wind down in the cooling off of the universe. Scientists are still trying to determine which will be the case.

Some forms of art including music, theater and events accept and embody the flow of time as part of the experience of art. So, too, do many Fluxus works. I've always been fascinated by time. I don't think I'm unique

in this, but I have engaged my fascination as a functional element in much of my work.

JS When did you first use time in your work?

KF My event structures were time-sequence events, the 1956 *Scrub Piece*, the 1957 *Card Trace* works. They had duration, presence in time. My first continuous piece using time is *Green Street*. It involves a folding Japanese scroll that I acquired in 1959. It's a process piece that still goes on today. Other pieces also require the passage of time. In the *Sneeze Pieces*, you wait some minutes, some hours, or a full year before saying, "Gesundheit!" *In One Year and Out the Other* involves the shift of time zones and year's end to take place. I've been doing it since the 1975/1976 New Year's eve.

Time Piece mirrors the universality of time through the use of 1440 clocks, each set to represent a different minute of the day, so that each minute of the day, all of the minutes of the day everywhere on earth are emblemized. This is also a meditation on the changing view of time. The modern day is based on Greenwich time – the rational time created for railway and sea travel it has the same 60 minutes, always, the same minute in each of 24 time zones. This was not always so. There are still places where time zones play no central role in local life. I chose to imagine a world of 1440 minutes rather than of 24 hours.

JS Do you have any favorite example of time works?

KF Most of the Fluxus artists embody time in some aspect of their work. Eric Andersen did a fabulous piece at the National Museum

of Art in Copenhagen last year. He was invited to do a retrospective, but he hated the idea. Instead, he proposed a project, a group of projects about time and space. One was a series of boxes floated above the floor in the museum atrium. There were 50 boxes. The boxes were placed so that you had to ride up on a crane lift to see what was in each box and to interact with it. The boxes were painted with seven different colors. Each color was coded to a specific day. Over the course of the show, you could only be transported to a box with the color of the day chosen. If you wanted to see more than one box, you had to wait in line to get another turn riding the crane. If you wanted to see boxes of another color group, you had to come another day. To engage the full exhibition demanded dedication and time. The boxes belong afterward to the museum. Now they appear around the museum at different times and places. The piece is built into the life and future history of the museum.

The next project was *The Hidden Painting*. Eric commissioned a painter to paint a mural. After the show – and a symposium on conservation – the painting was painted over in such a way that it could be restored. The museum also promised that it would never be restored. Now the piece is in the body of the museum.

Finally, 50 chairs were placed around the atrium, each with a text silk-screened on it, “Become a member of Eric Andersen’s Random Audience.” These, too, will float around the museum for the remainder of the museum’s existence. There are many pieces in Eric’s work involving time. His solar garden project, the earth-fill mountain that will become Denmark’s highest point, the

space platforms of *Marianne* all involve time for their realization and time to activate them. These are meditations on time, its meaning and its uses.

Time has a stop, even when you plan duration. In 1963, I realized that if you waited long enough, compound interest would transform a dollar into as much money as there are atoms in the universe. Toward the last compoundings, the interest would even overcome the rate of inflation as the account represented an increasingly greater proportion of the capital base of the global economy. On September 19, 1963, my birthday, I opened an account for one dollar at Silver Gate Savings in San Diego, California. For some years, I received the regular statements of the increase. The last I recall, in the mid 70s it was up to \$1.78 or so. Then, Silver Gate Savings was absorbed by another bank. And then, it was merged into yet another bank. Finally, the notices stopped coming. I have no idea about the fate of my dollar. Eric did a similar piece in 1967 with a Danish bank and two other artists with plans for a project in the next century. Even if Eric got the idea 4 years later, he’s smarter than I am: he got lawyers and made a careful contract to prevent the problems my little dollar encountered. In another few decades, Eric’s project will be built. My poor descendants will be complaining, asking why great-great-great-(and so on)-grand-Dad wasn’t smart like Eric Andersen. I’ll be leaving them a little note in my will: “If you’re so smart, why didn’t you choose Eric Andersen as an ancestor?”

Another time piece that didn’t work involves the Newport Harbor Art Museum. It was my ambition to create a work of art for a permanent collection, so permanent that it

couldn't be deaccessioned. When Newport Harbor was building their new building, I found a way to do it. After discussing the proposal, I was invited to create my *Foundation Course in the Arts*. The project was welded into a metal slab, engraved and die-cut on the front. It was buried in the foundation of the new museum during the pouring of the cement just after the new year in 1976. Everything went well. A little plate was prepared for the wall, sometimes exhibited – though they didn't give this piece the respect I would have liked it to receive. I was the only artist in the world safe from the de-accessioning fever that has swept the world's museums. Or so I thought.

A few years ago, Newport Harbor Art Museum decided to build an entirely new museum. Now, they are de-accessioning the building. All the other art will be moved to the new building, and my project will remain behind.

But I have hopes for the future! A few months ago, Dr. Alan H Guth and a team of scientists at MIT announced that it should be possible, finally, to affect time. They've invented a sort of time machine, or, rather, a device to restart the flow of time by stating a new universe.

This is done by compressing 10 kilograms of matter into a space smaller than one quadrillionth of an ordinary sub-nuclear particle to form the quantum seed of a new Universe. It doesn't seem to make a difference what kind of matter you start with, so this can be a relatively inexpensive process. If you want to spend lots of money on a big science rig like a cyclotron or a magnetic gravity compressor, it would cost a fortune. But if you want to do the job in a more humble way, it can be quite cheap. I'm working on a new piece, *Time Machine*, that will do the job simply and effectively. The

machine will use 10 kilograms of lead. The lead will be compressed by a large vice. Anyone is invited to turn the vice until the lead is properly reduced in size to create the necessary conditions under which it will become the seed of a new universe.

This will take time. Many people will have to work for a long while to achieve the results. Even it takes centuries, it doesn't matter. When the job is finished and the new universe begins to expand, you'll have all the time you could ever want, all the time there is.

JS Is *specificity* in Fluxus similar to the structural principle of crystals or to the language of holography?

KF That's a wonderful analogy. I hadn't thought of it that way. I wish I had. Crystals or holograms may embody the concept of specificity. One fragment of a hologram enables you to reconstruct the entire image. In that way, the part contains the whole. This is also related to the concept of *implicativeness*. I've got to think on this issue, the parts containing the whole. Let's talk about another time.

JS In Matthew Rose's article for the Fluxus issue of *Lund Art Press*, Jon Hendricks referred to a discussion you and he have had for many years, disagreeing about some aspects of Fluxus. What's that about?

KF Jon and I have a different view of Fluxus. The way I see it, Jon's view is more narrow than mine. Jon has sought to define a Fluxus with very sharp outlines. It seems to me that the Fluxus artists – including every one of the founders still alive – say that what made Fluxus *Fluxus* was its fluidity, the impossibility of establishing a rigid definition.

My debate with Jon is not over that falls *within* his his definition of Fluxus. Jon's

research, his archival perfection, his scholarship on what is able to be considered Fluxus is universally acknowledged. The argument so many Fluxus artists have with Jon is about what he says is not Fluxus, those aspects of Fluxus that lie *outside* Jon's definition.

Jon bases his perspective of Fluxus on an idea that Fluxus is what George Maciunas touched, wrote about or defined as Fluxus. If he can find evidence that George said it is Fluxus, it falls within his definition. If he can't, and if George didn't produce it, it isn't. That simply doesn't fit the historical reality.

Fluxus took several shapes and forms at different times. Jon is absolutely correct that the Fluxus multiples published out of New York by George are Fluxus. He's wrong when he says other things aren't. Jon's catalogue raisonné on the Fluxus multiples edited by George is perfect. Yet it is not a catalogue raisonné of all Fluxus objects, it is a catalogue raisonné of the Fluxus edition objects produced by George Maciunas. You must understand how to read it. If you say that Newton's calculus is a central and key part of mathematics, you are right. If you say that only Newton's calculus is mathematics, and that all mathematics is defined by Newton's calculus, you misunderstand enormous areas of mathematics.

Jon has redefined one key part of Fluxus to be the whole, and in a way, he disputes our right to say what the whole is. He always asks me for criteria for demonstrating something to be Fluxus. My view is that the Fluxus artists are the criteria. We've said what we feel Fluxus to be for many years. In 1966, when I first joined Fluxus, no one asked me to demonstrate why I termed something Fluxus. No one disputed Dick Higgins's view or Eric Andersen's or Ben Vautier's. It's only now that anyone sug-

gests that somehow we are obliged to provide proof. We are Fluxus. We are the criteria.

It seems to me possible that Jon may be able to demonstrate a cogent argument or series of arguments that causes us to change some of our views. I feel that debating with Jon has sharpened my vision, and I respect the precision he has brought to his viewpoint. I disagree with him on the basis of historical fact, on what I personally experienced in the 25 years I have taken part in Fluxus. I disagree with him on the basis of what the founders like Dick and Alison and Emmett say. And I disagree with him on the basis of what the people who came into Fluxus between the foundation and my arrival – Eric, Ben, Milan and others – have said.

There were many Fluxuses, and they have been quite real. We've all changed our minds to some degree – and so did George. When George appointed Ben, Milan and me as directors of the Fluxus South, East and West respectively, he authorized us to speak on behalf of Fluxus. He told me to handle Fluxus business, to recruit new members, to spread Fluxus, and he authorized me to manage copyright permissions, concerts, publications, reproduction rights and sales in order to do so. There still exist copies of my further authorizations to people like David Mayor and Wolfgang Feelisch, extending these responsibilities and rights in clear, precise language, written in notarized documents. George had copies of these documents, and he supported me in extending Fluxus as I did. While there aren't any extant written authorizations between George and me, it's clear that if George supported my extension of the parameters of Fluxus, starting in the late 1960s, we shared a similar view. When George disagreed with me – and it did happen – he told me so. Our disagreements were few and modest. We worked together closely between 1966 when he appointed me director of Fluxus West and 1975, when I passed

that title on to Don Boyd. I think I can say with some authority that I understood what Fluxus was – and what George felt fit within Fluxus.

I feel that Jon neglects essential issues in historiography when he fails to take testimony from those who were present at so many of the key events he interprets. Jon says that people don't always remember accurately. That is true. Nevertheless, all historians know the value of living witnesses, and the fact that you cannot interpret an event solely on the basis of documents. The documentary record is liable to gaps and there are terrible gaps and losses to the Fluxus documents. The documentary record leaves many simple questions unanswered, especially on issues where people thought that agreement was so obvious that simple issues were never spelled out. Because of this, Jon makes simple mistakes that could be corrected by comparing the view of people who were there. Every scholar knows that witnesses are not equally reliable. You gather all the testimony. You compare it. You tally it against the documents. That's how you determine which views are reliable. You use all the views to understand what happened.

Jon's Fluxus centers on George. He sees George as the founder and chief architect of Fluxus. That's not how the others see it. He was a founder, but not *the* founder. He coined the term Fluxus, but the idea of Fluxus existed well before Fluxus was named. Many of the artists and composers in Fluxus already knew each other and worked together. When George was introduced to the circle by Richard Maxfield and Jackson Mac Low, he saw a commonality that he wanted to work with more closely. Through his efforts, Fluxus and its participants took on a more cohesive form. But if Fluxus was a "group" of people in the sense of people

working together, it was never a "group" that people formally joined (at least not most of them). For many it was a group in the sense that you can say "a group of us meet every Friday night to play chess." Some groups of individuals within Fluxus met, enjoyed festivals, did exhibitions and projects and sometimes published together. There were no common agreements or objectives characterizing the whole.

The artists at Wiesbaden founded Fluxus together – Brecht, Higgins, Knowles, Mac Low, Maciunas, Paik, Patterson, Vostell, Watts and Williams. Others, like Schmit, Young and Ono, like Vautier and Filliou were so close to them through correspondence and interaction, that they have to be seen as co-founders. At Wiesbaden, George proposed some declarations and manifestoes, but no one signed them. He published some of his manifestoes as documents or proposals. They were mistaken for group statements, but they weren't. Some of the manifestoes appeared on sheets with the names of many Fluxus artists, but George did that without asking anyone. He didn't seem to consider it as signatures, but more as a proposal that appeared on a sheet advertising Fluxus and listing Fluxpeople.

Everyone had their own idea of what Fluxus was. When the work being done on Fluxus by trained historians – art historians, cultural historians, anthropologists – is more complete, you'll see the diversity of views brought forward in much greater clarity than the unity implicit in Jon's books. The unity is tautological. Jon only accepts certain documents and artifacts as Fluxus, so the Fluxus those documents and artifacts indicate is identical to the documents and artifacts that Jon accepts.

Fluxus is, by definition, fluid. Its fluidity, its variety gave it the strength and resilience

it has had. This could not have happened with the strict, monolithic Fluxus that Jon proposes – and it couldn't have happened even with the early models of Fluxus George proposed. By the time I arrived on the scene, George had reached a very different view of Fluxus than than he had previously held. His willingness to see Fluxus take a new shape was part of the reason Fluxus did not disappear, but continued to grow and evolve.

So many myths have grown over the years in some cases the result is a completely imaginary Fluxus. Take the so-called "Fluxus Collective." There was never a real Fluxus Collective. The Fluxus Collective was an imaginary Fluxus that George proposed as the Fluxus publishing arm. He gave the so-called collective publications a uniform look – what we'd call corporate design was used to make his products seem like the outpourings of a vast organization. That built a powerful legend, proof of the value of design, but the legend was founded on the myth and the look, not on the fluid reality of the situation. By the time I met George, he was not using the term Fluxus Collective at all. It was just Fluxus. And none of the central figures in Fluxus ever seemed to acknowledge the collective as people think George defined it – they simply took part in Fluxus, and sometimes they worked with George. But as far as some of the people, especially the Europeans, were concerned, George was off on his own track. For most of them, Fluxus was what happened when Fluxus people met and worked together.

This was also true for many of the Americans. Dick and Alison admired George and they were very fond of him, but they were quite removed from George's view of Fluxus. Emmett liked George, but George was neither necessary nor sufficient to define the Fluxus Emmett Williams represents. George's view of things was

quite opposite from La Monte Young's, because George insisted on anyone being able to perform scores quite liberally, a view La Monte disagrees with. And so on.

I do not say George was wrong. I shared his views on many issues – on scores and concerts, for example, and on the ethical basis for art as a human activity. I learned more than I can possibly say about production, about developing projects, about the power of playful experimentation. But I also see that George's view of Fluxus was only one view. The more I understand that, the greater my understanding of Fluxus – and the greater my admiration for the real George Maciunas, not the mythical George Maciunas..

I feel that by excluding so much historical evidence, Jon has created a somewhat mythical George Maciunas. I am certain that when all the documents, the papers, and the letters are available, other scholars will offer convincing evidence for a very different view of George, maybe several views.

Whatever one thinks about George or says of George, George and Fluxus are not an identical set. That's where I find my disagreement with Jon. It seems to me that when Jon says that something happened on a certain date or in a certain place, or that something was Fluxus, he's reliable. He does great research, careful research to be able to pin facts to times, dates and places. It's when Jon says an object used by Alison Knowles at a key concert isn't Fluxus because there is no picture, or that Emmett wasn't at a certain concert because there's no ticket stub, or that an edition planned by George but published by Dick wasn't Fluxus – then Jon and I part views.

No one has published more source material on Fluxus than Jon Hendricks. His contribu-

tion is massive. Jon and Gil Silverman rank with Jean Brown and Hanns Sohm and a rare handful more as the key reason we know as much as we do about Fluxus today. They've been a powerful force in the huge interest Fluxus has today. I admire the energy and dedication Jon's work represents, and I'm grateful for all he's done for me. I simply disagree with a Fluxus that has its boundaries drawn as tight as Jon draws his.

JS What about your debate with Eric Andersen?

KF I'm not sure I have a debate with Eric. It seems that Eric thinks he has a debate with me. For a long time, he's been telling me he has a disagreement with my "Twelve Criteria of Fluxus" essay. I accepted that as a difference of opinion. Now that I see what he actually says, I feel Eric's misunderstood the whole thing.

JS In the conversation Eric had with me for *Lund Art Press*, Eric had a great many specific comments. Doesn't that seem like a debate to you?

KF Not when you analyse it carefully. When I read the manuscript of Eric's comments, I sent him a letter. He still feels as he felt. I believe that he's misinterpreted a lot of issues.

JS What do you think he has misinterpreted?

KF If you look closely, you'll find his comments filled with errors of fact. There are a great many mistakes.

The business with Beuys touches on me slightly. I was director of Fluxus West at the time of Wolf Vostell's big debate with

Joseph. Wolf was furious (and Eric didn't like Joseph much either) but George Maciunas never took any public stand on the matter. George always made his rages quite public. Since I was director of Fluxus West, George might have mentioned it to me, but he never discussed Beuys with me at all.

Eric thinks Beuys doesn't have much to do with Fluxus, but that's only his opinion. It's no law of Fluxus. Nam June Paik, Ben Vautier, Robert Filliou and quite a few others admired Joseph and worked closely with him at different times over the years.

Eric speaks as if there were a definitive Fluxus. It sounds, as if there is a "we" in Fluxus, and that this "we" holds a strong consensus on many issues. That's simply not so. Eric is wrong in stating his view as a majority opinion. There are different points of view on every issue he discusses.

He doesn't understand my "Twelve Criteria." They are not a prescription, or even a uniform description. They are a discussion of tendencies. I never say that a work must fit all the criteria – only that these are some commonalities among groups of work. You can compare it to waves of possibility in quantum physics. Even Dick Higgins, in his "Nine Criteria of Fluxus," goes further than I do when he states that the more criteria a piece fills, the more Fluxus it is.

JS Didn't Dick decide not to publish his "Nine Criteria" ?

KF Not at all. The "Nine Criteria" appear in an essay entitled *Fluxus: Theory and Reception* that has been circulated in manuscript form for many years. It was planned for publication in 1982, and the original publisher hasn't gotten to it – so Dick's been

circulating it himself. You ought to get a copy and publish it in *Lund Art Press*.

JS What about the debate with Eric?

KF I think Eric has simply misinterpreted things. For example, Eric brought some problematics of the *Fluxus: Theory and Reception* essay to Dick's attention. Eric seems to believe that Dick withdrew the essay for that reason. That's not the case... he's been circulating copies continuously, though he may have revised it partly as a result of Eric's comments.

Where Eric criticizes my *Fluxus and Company* essay, he hasn't read it carefully. He says I discuss anonymity as a criterion of Fluxus. If you read the essay, I don't even use the word. He seems to think I discuss all Fluxus work as ephemeral. I don't. First, I say that the criteria are tendencies, and not all works embody every tendency.

Second, the term I use in stating the criterion is *presence in time*, and that has two aspects, the *ephemeral* and *duration in time*. In the example Eric gives, Ay-O's *Finger Box*, the experience of putting your finger in the finger box, absolutely takes place in time. Eric insists that I say things I do not say. Then he creates a rationale to explain why he thinks I say them.

Eric believes I say Fluxus is an art movement. That is not true. I say, as Dick says and

others do, that Fluxus has qualities that resemble the qualities of many things: an art movement is one of them. Fluxus is unlike an art movement in that it is not restricted to art. Fluxus is much larger than what art has been considered to be.

When Eric characterizes me as Maciunas's student, he makes an exaggerated leap. I was young when I came into Fluxus, but I was already doing what I was doing things. Dick thought it was worth introducing me to George. George brought me into Fluxus on the basis of what I had already done. Like everyone else, I had a clear record of activities.

Unlike the other people in Fluxus, I lacked a cohesive vocabulary for what I was doing, and my colleagues in Fluxus helped me to find my vocabulary. George was one of three. Dick Higgins and Christo were the other two. Because I learned so much from George, because he trusted me to be responsible for some of the affairs of Fluxus, Eric assumes that I was George's creation. This isn't so. Dick can tell you. I was young, rough, unformed, and during the first years I was active in Fluxus, my presentation had the inconsistency and brashness of youth. Still, it was my own. I learned from dialogue with the others: but, then, the whole principle of Fluxus was a dialogue. Fluxus was a forum, to use Eric's own term, and all of the Fluxus people grew and learned from the dialogue.

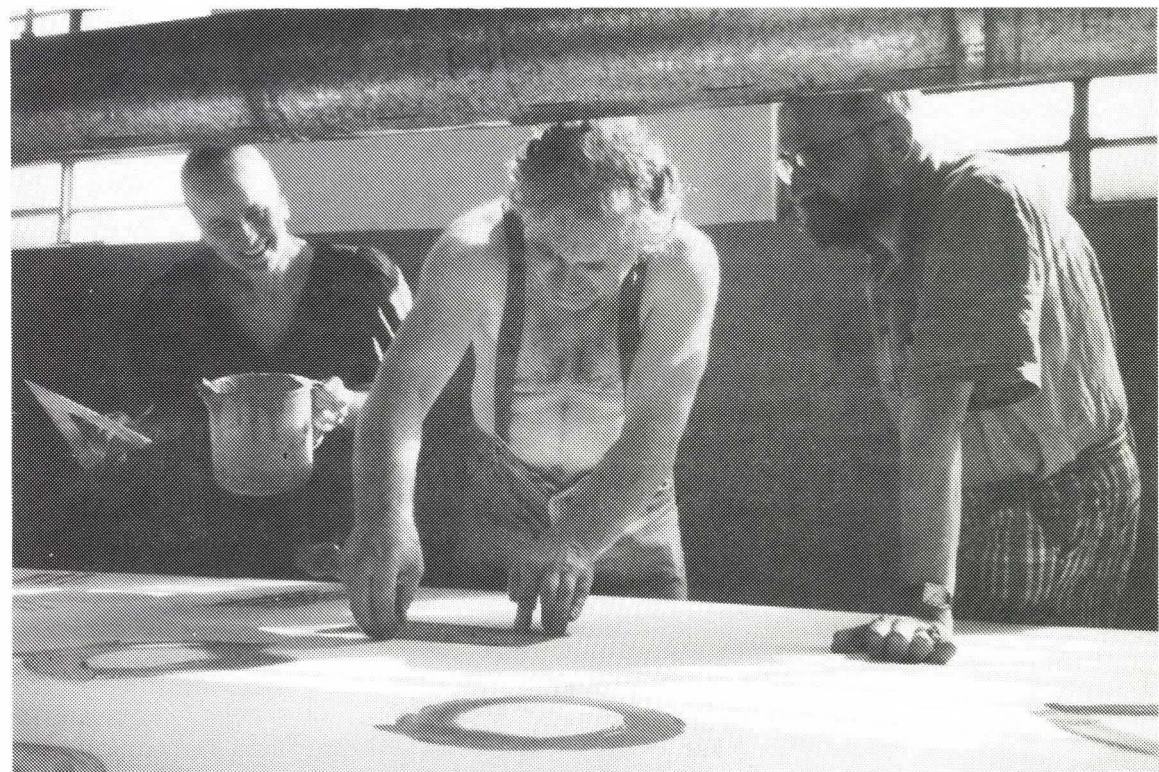


Photo: Editions Conz

Maria and Milan Knizak, and Francesco Conz, at the printing house near Como.
Como 1989.

A CONVERSATION WITH FRANCESCO CONZ

by Henry Martin

Henry Martin is an art critic and curator who has been writing about Fluxus for almost three decades. He was the author and editor of *George Brecht's The Book of the Tumbler on Fire*, and he has published essays on Fluxus artists from Brecht and Knowles to Friedman and Filliou. Martin lives in Bolzano, Italy, where he is currently organizing a major exhibition for the 30th anniversary of Fluxus. Henry Martin recently travelled to Verona to interview Francesco Conz for this issue of *Lund Art Press*.

Francesco Conz is one of the world's leading publishers of avant-garde and experimental art multiples. Beginning in the early 1970s in Asolo, Italy, Conz has worked with most of the members of the Fluxus group – including Watts, Higgins, Brecht, Dupuy, Spoerri, Williams and many more. He has also worked with artists from the Vienna Actionism Circle, artists active in Lettrisme and with the unique experimentalists such as Sari Dienes and Robert Lax. Today, Editions Conz is located in Verona, where Francesco Conz also maintains an important archive and collection of contemporary art.

HENRY MARTIN (HM) You've been working as a publisher for almost twenty years, and you've covered a great deal of ground. You're sometimes thought of as a Fluxus publisher, but the range of your interests is very much wider than that, from Fluxus, to the Vienna Actionists, to concrete sound and visual poetry, and then to various anomalous artists like Robert Lax or Sari Dienes or musicians like Robert Ashley, or the Spanish Group Zaj, with Hidalgo, Marchetti, and Esther Ferrer. The list could go on and on. You seem to work with several branches of what you possibly think of as a vast and extended family. How do you define that family.

FRANCESCO CONZ (FC) It was Hermann Nitsch who put me in touch with the Fluxus artists, first of all by way of Joe Jones. I began to invite the people who interested me to come and work for a while in Asolo, which is the town where I was

living at the time. There were Joe Jones, Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman, Philip Corner and Alison Knowles, Emmett Williams, Takako Saito, and Carolee Schneeman, Dick Higgins came as well, and Nitsch, any number of people, and these were the people, the people who came to Asolo, who were at the center of the first of my editions in 1972. Some of these first editions have never been seen, or have been shown only partially, like the edition, for example, that I did with Paik. That Paik publication is extremely complex, and showing it isn't easy. It's a virtual history of all the works that Paik and Charlotte Moorman had done together, or sometimes separately, and it's based on photos that were made by Peter Moore. Peter and Barbara Moore and their daughter came to Asolo from New York, and we selected all the photos together. Paik and Charlotte were also there and we put together a kind of retrospective, organized in a great enormous

box, where you see the whole history of all their previous collaborations, up until about 1975. The box has photos of all their performances, and reproductions of the records made in the courts when Charlotte was put on trial for acts of obscenity and musical pornography. There's also a printing of some of the original posters for Charlotte's Avant-garde Festivals, and a group of drawings as well, and silkscreen prints pulled in an edition of eighteen. All of this was still at a time when Paik was largely unknown. Paik and Charlotte also did a performance in a vineyard next to the house where I lived, and there are photos of that as well, a really complete documentation, all as a part of this edition. That's only the beginning of the things that took place in Asolo, which for years was the scene of a kind of constant happening. It was a place for happenings or events or modern rituals, which is really the best and clearest and most meaningful word. Geoff Hendricks, for example does rituals, since when you watch him you really can't help thinking of a shaman or a priest, and Geoff came to Asolo to complete a kind of transcontinental ceremony called *Between Two Points*, which was documented as a book. Philip Corner did his *MetaMeditations* in Asolo, Joe Jones did his *Music Bike*, Alison Knowles did the work called *Leone d'oro*, and there was also lots of work with Nitsch. Nitsch did a box of documentary photographs, and of course his *Asolo Room*. Günter Brus did the environmental work "LA CROCE DEL VENETO" (nine large paintings on wood), and Otto Mühl a set of his gestural paintings inspired at that time by his growing "Kommune".

HM Previously you'd opened a gallery in Venice, but almost instantly abandoned it. You always remark that Nitsch introduced you to a whole different world of artists, but still that doesn't explain why the very idea of a gallery should suddenly have seemed inappropriate.

FC There were all sorts of reasons for giving up that gallery including the reason that I'm not very good as dealer, since I'm far too attached to the art and to the artists I get involved with. It's a very deep and personal involvement, and a dealer has to deal with works of art in just the same way that a grocer buys and sells potatoes. Even at the time when I opened that gallery I called it "La galleria d'arte moltiplicata," which means "the gallery of multiplied art," since I always had the idea that what I basically wanted to do was to work as a publisher. That's much more creative, much more active.

HM Even as a collector, you're not simply interested in owning works of art, and you often prefer to commission a work, or to discuss and finance a new or previously unrealized project, rather than offer to purchase a piece that already exists.

FC You have to remember that I'm a fairly curious sort of collector. There's an awful lot of fetishism in the way I go about it. Collecting, for me, is all for the purpose of keeping things together, perserving them, keeping track of them, cataloguing them and setting them aside in a place where I can feel that they're safe. Collecting is an act of impulse, or even a compulsion, that some people simply have inside them, and I wouldn't quite be able to define it. Some people are thieves, because they're simply possessed by an instinct for theft. There are other people who have saintly instincts. Then there are people whose instincts make them collectors, which means searching out things that strike them as precious and setting them aside and locking them up and spending lots of time at looking at them. It's very much like hoarding. I hope one day to have a great enormous house or a villa or a castle where I'll be able to house all the various things I own, I'll set them all up with everything clearly ordered and all in its proper place,

with a room for this and a room for that, meaning a room for every artist. But then I'm almost certain that I'll rig up a curtain or a drape in front of every work so as to keep other people from looking at them.

HM Can you really collect things with the idea of hiding them?

FC You know, it's not at all like buying things at the supermarket. I get to be highly involved with an artist and the work that the artist makes. The works I collect are very intensely a part of my life. The artists I work with are the people I live with. The things I collect have always been purchased directly from the artists, or sometimes I've asked the artists to make them for me; there's no real reason for me to want to show them around or to turn them into some kind of public display. That has nothing to do with it. These are things for a few select people who really understand them, people who participate in what they're all about, somehow sharing in what they're all about, people who are passionately involved in what they're all about. That's a part of the whole experience of art. It's like the treasures of St. Mark, but certainly you can't expect to find them displayed in the Square. I mean it's not the same experience as the pigeons and the peanut vendors, maybe with the treasures in a few glass cases sort of off to one side. It's not that sort of thing at all. The treasures are in the treasury and the treasury's protected in the depths of the church.

There's a system of electronic surveillance. Before you get to see them you go and talk with a sacristan, and maybe he'll open the door to let you in. The general run of tourists will walk around the piazza and then visit the church. But the treasures are secret and out of sight. The only people who see them are the people who are really interested, who already know they're there.

HM You think of collecting as a very private activity, but your attitude must be different with respect to the editions you publish.

FC Sure. Part of the reason for creating editions is that there's a whole life activity that I have to finance, and dealing original works is something that doesn't interest me, if only because I'd find it far too painful. Each original work is like an only child, and how can you separate yourself from an only child? On the other hand when a work takes the form of an edition, it's something I can keep and let go of at one and the same time, even if my editions aren't really easy to sell. They're a part of a continuing avant-garde that doesn't have a lot of general appeal, and collectors, ordinarily, are careful to observe a kind of pecking order. First they want the older works of the artists who interest them, and then the newer works when the older works can no longer be found. It's only after the newer works become rare and expensive that collectors finally get around to thinking about the editions, even if thinking like that can be a terrible mistake. There are certain Dada and Futurist editions and publications that are no less valuable than the so-called original works. But none of that can happen until after the artists have been widely recognized. There's also the fact that the works I publish can be really quite huge since they're conceived of as documents or documentations. My edition of Gerhard Ruhm's *Automatische Zeichnungen* is a complete collection of a good fifty-five graphics. A collector always asks himself what the hell he could possibly do with fifty-five graphics. He's not very likely to be able to hang them all up on his living-room walls. And what could most collectors do with the things I published by Milan Knizak, or Ben Petterson, or Eric Andersen? Knizak did three copies each of nine life-size ceramic compositions. Ben Petterson did an edition of ten Fluxus double-beds. Eric Andersen made an edition on cloth that was five feet

high and a hundred and sixty feet long; that was a silk-screen print in ten copies, with one hundred and seven colors, a screen for each color, and the printers at one point calculated that for each individual piece they walked back and forth with the screens in their hands for over nine kilometers. Most collectors haven't yet managed to understand that the point in owning a work of art doesn't have to have very much to do with the idea of wanting to display it. Not everybody sees the point of having the treasures of St. Mark put away in a private sacristy. But I'm convinced that things are going to change, and that people will begin to be sensitive to a whole array of new and developing values. People are often confused by the fact that my editions are often so heavily based on photography, but that's because they haven't understood that photography itself is a dying art, or rather a dying technique. The value of certain kinds of photographs – their value as art, or perhaps as replacements for art, or as replacements for painting and other kinds of images – will remain unclear until the technique itself has grown totally obsolete. That's destined to happen. Already today there's a developing digital technology for making records of images that you'll be able to view on a TV screen, and the whole process of photography will soon be forgotten, just as now we've all but forgotten the skills involved in working the enormous lithographic stones that were used for making the posters of Toulouse Lautrec. Attitudes toward photography are going to change. As the other arts like painting and sculpture and ceramics die out and turn ever more into simple crafts, people will also begin to see the need for the iconographic arts that replace them. It's a vast process, because art, as I see it, will be the principal thing, in twenty or thirty years' time, that will take the place of religion, since religion, too, is well on its way to turning into just one more of the various political parties. The churches today are already empty, and their rituals and cere-

monies no longer compare to what they used to be; there's no more Haydn played in the churches, no more sumptuous processions passing through the streets. There's no longer that sense of power and mystery that was once so close to the essence of religious life. This is not a new idea, of course. Matthew Arnold, for instance, wrote about this more than one hundred years ago. Today the churches organize meetings and picnics and basketball teams that aren't much different from the meetings and picnics and basketball teams that are organized by everybody else. They run programs to help keep kids off the streets and to help the ones who've got problems with drugs. That's all well and good, but it's all just the same as the programs that are run by the parties and the social workers. Not exactly the same, but that's the point; it's almost the same, or surely a part of a single social context. If you want to point out the differences you find yourself looking at precisely the kinds of distinctions that separate the views of one political party from another. They just make proposals that compete with the slightly different proposals that are made by everybody else. Perhaps the religions are a little more attentive to the fear of death and retribution, but that's no more than the party line, or the line of special appeal to a certain public that thinks and responds in a certain way, or in terms of a certain ideology. Meanwhile, the convents and the monasteries get converted into luxury hotels. For this reason people with a need for a monastic kind of life have to look for it somewhere else, and that's the role that art can play, or the role in fact that it plays already. Instead of going into a convent and thinking about God, the modern way of looking for a spiritual life is much more a question of a private dedication to reading certain books and thinking certain thoughts and being involved in certain processes that are right at the center of avant-garde art. This avant-garde art, that replaces religion, already has its saints. People will

turn to photography as a way of staying in touch with those saints. That's the kind of photography that interests me. I'm thinking about the photos that were made by a person like Peter Moore, whose photos of the avant-garde art started in the 1960s. Again there's the photographic archive I have of all the work of the Guerrilla Art Action Group, I'm also thinking about the photographic documentation I gathered and published on the whole of the work and events in the life of Schwarzkogler. I'm talking about photos of really historical events, and people will one day need to have them, since in the future these things will be looked at as our relics and fetishes and *incunabula*. I also hope one day to be able to publish the photos that I myself have made, since that's another important part of all my various activities. I have a camera every-where I go, whenever I'm together with the artists, and I've made thousands and thousands of photographs. They're very curious photographs, entirely anomalous photographs where you get to see the artists in a very different way – where you get the feeling of the kinds of lives they lead. These photos one day will be very important, when people will have learned to look at the artists from another point of view that isn't yet common, seeing them for what they really are. They're the photos of the lives of the saints of the new religion. They're very unofficial photographs, since these saints are eating and drinking and maybe playing volley ball, or taking a shower or sleeping, or playing tag in a hay loft and doing a million different things that we ought to remember in addition to simply the work they do.

HM But when you talk about the saintliness of the artists who interest you, what, more precisely, are you referring to? Where do you manage to see all this saintliness?

FC That's simply what they are. They're the new saints. We're talking about people

who've had something important to say about our whole way of life, people who've raised some very radical objections and shown a dedication to a different kind of consciousness, a different kind of awareness. The saints that the church is still attempting to offer, including their newer and more human saints; simply don't make any sense, not today. There's no longer any place for religious saints. Of course I can think of Robert Lax as a saint. That's exactly the impression he gave me when he came not long ago to visit me in Verona. And who could be more of a saint than George Brecht? Saint Anthony went into a convent and didn't eat and didn't drink, but modern human beings no longer have a need for things like that. We don't need to whip ourselves or to wear hair shirts or to make ourselves sick by eating roots. George Brecht is a person who could easily be one of the world's most famous artists, with pieces that sell at the prices of Joseph Beuys or Jasper Johns, but that's not the way he lives. That's not the sort of thing that interests him. He lives a kind of renunciation, and his life is virtually monastic. He lives quietly in a small place, answers only a part of his mail, and only speaks on the phone by prior arrangement. His renunciations are just as radical as the ones that were made by St. Francis in the thirteenth century. He affirms a whole different set of values. It's a set of mental or spiritual or contemplative values that you simply don't find in the rest of the society around us. The spiritual figures that the church presents us with today, figures like Mother Theresa or the pope, are ultimately dependent on the same gigantic publicity machine that runs the rest of our society. Most of the pictures of the pope show him getting off an airplane. The pope's in the foreground on a great kitsch throne, and right behind him is his Boeing 747 – the great, mythic eagle that flies him magically back forth across the face of the earth. A kind of technological ubiquity. That's the sort of thing that impresses us, the sort of thing that

impresses all the ordinary people who make up our ordinary society. Those are the myths and rites of charisma and personal power that people now react to. But the real modern-day saints are the people who are able to reject that sort of myth. Thirty years ago. Robert Lax went off on his own to live in a corner of the island of Patmos, and he's still right there, continuing to make his book. I think of that as a great renunciation, a really saintly renunciation. Bob Watts was a very great artist and withdrew from New York City to a farm in Bangor, Pennsylvania. Robert Delford Brown is the founder of the First National Church of the Exquisite Panic, and he continues to live in New York, but remains virtually in hiding in a house to the north of Greenwich Village. Filliou at the end of his life retired to a Buddhist monastery. George Brecht lives the quietest possible life in a quaint and anonymous suburb of Cologne. Just like a saint in retreat. Or there's Charlotte Moorman who lives in an attic, which might just as well be a tree-house in a jungle. Jean Dupuy settled in a tiny village on the top of a mountain in the South of France, called Pierrefeu. Dick Higgins bought a Church at Barrytown and is there with Alison Knowles. The list could go on and on. And of course there's Maciunas, but to talk about Maciunas and what made him a saint I'd have to write a whole book. Ken Friedman is Maciunas's St. Paul, writing letters to all the apostles and spreading the Fluxus word, from California to Finland. The works these artists do are simply the relics they leave behind, and my editions are a way of documentating and collecting these relics and preserving them.

HM Do you think that explains why your editions are often so precious? Many of the artists who interest you work with very simple ideas, and yet you present them very lavishly. That could be viewed as a contradiction, but perhaps you'd say it's much the same

thing as presenting the bone of a martyred saint in a gold and crystal case.

FC I think that's true. But I'm also intrigued by the notion of using very classical materials in ways in which they were never intended to be used. For example, there's my edition of Alison Knowles' *Great Bear Fluxus Events*. It's a collection of sixteen texts that could hardly be more simple, or more minimal, almost painfully, or almost stupidly simple, but they're presented in a luxurious silk-lined box, and they're printed on some of the world's finest paper, with each sheet folded for protection in a vellum sheath. It's an acid-free Fabriano paper that's very much in contact with the work that it's used to present. It's a paper designed for totally different purpose; a quality of paper you'd expect to see used for lithographs, or maybe for watercolors. Now I'm planning to publish a series of editions on parchment, but the artists will be using this parchment in entirely unprecedented ways. I work with avant-garde artists, but I'm also fascinated by all these rare and precious materials that were used for the making a de luxe and classical art, because it's clear that all of these "supports" are now disappearing – meaning the silks and parchments and exquisite papers, the impeccable book-binding and handcrafted woods and precision casting – since the whole tradition of classical art they served is also disappearing. These crafts and techniques and materials are the only thing that that kind of art has left behind it, the only real legacy, and even *that* won't last for very much longer. So I like to recuperate these kinds of materials, pulling them outside their original context, and employing them for other uses.

HM But what's the purpose of a thing like that, creating a kind of confusion, a kind of conundrum? Working on the meaning of materials is hardly typical of the artists you

publish. This discourse on materials that belong to the art historical past is something you might be said to add to their work.

FG It's only a question of offering certain suggestions. It's not at all that the artists don't like to respond to them. For example, I'm now producing a work with Eric Andersen, a box containing his *Crying Plate*, which is a flat piece of marble with two small depressions in it – fine pink Verona marble – and I suggested to Eric that this plate should be presented in a beautifully crafted mahogany box: I mean the work is all very secretive, and the box is lined with satin. Mahogany is right since it's the warmest and most precious wood you can find, if in fact you can find it, and it's not very likely that Eric will want to say no, and insist on using plywood. Mahogany is now a very rare and expensive wood, not to mention the rarity of finding a carpenter who knows how to work with it. The artists are highly intrigued when I offer suggestion about the kinds of materials and craftsmanship that I can still make available. That's something I can do since I'm very much in touch with the various fields of fine craftsmanship; knowing about these things was an important part of the work I was doing when I used to own a furniture factory. So I can just ask the artists what they'd like. I can ask if they'd like to work with mahogany or marble or whatever else. Then it's up to them to decide. I simply point out that certain materials might be very interesting.

HM I imagine that this is how you got started with printing editions on cloth, except that then the idea got away from you and assumed a larger dimension, since you've published so many editions on cloth.

FC That's an idea that just seemed to take off because people seemed to accept it. At the beginning it looked like everything else and

was only another experiment, but then I discovered that there was even a market for my editions on cloth, not of course a tremendous market, but people didn't balk and were ready to accept them; people found it all quite natural and really quite obvious that there's no essential difference between silkscreens on cloth and silkscreens on paper. They could easily see that the shift in materials meant no loss at all in quality or credibility. And for me there was a whole host of primarily practical advantages. Working with images on cloth makes it possible to do shows the way I did a show in Australia. That whole enormous show got shipped as three postal packages. If the works had been printed on paper, I'd have met with a very different problem. A work on paper, if it's three meters tall and six meters wide, is a much more difficult thing to get the other side of the world. Everything is much more mobile with works on sheets of cloth, and I liked the idea of being able to have various collections in various places all at the same time. I do these works in editions of thirty, and I can make one package and mail it to New Zealand, and then make the same package again on the following day and ship it to Canada. The same show can travel on several different circuits all at once, since the effort involved in shipping is very slight and the costs are low. The works can be shown in all sorts of places that function on minimal budgets, universities, art clubs in Eastern Europe, and in other out of the way places in general. The whole idea was very very practical. Now I'm thinking about doing Dick Higgins' maps on cloth, but in a slightly different way, since I'll have them plastified and mounted on two wooden bars like the maps you used to find in all the schools, mounted on the wall over the blackboard.

HM You've worked with all of the Fluxus artists, but not only with Fluxus artists. You seem perhaps to think of them as a part of a

somewhat larger, or very much larger family. It's not that you've fallen in love with Fluxus as an isolated movement: you seem rather to feel that all of these artists have a quality that's strangely common not only among themselves, but also, say, with Sari Dienes, or Eric Dietman, or with Jackson MacLow, or Al Hansen, or Ay-O. How would you define that quality?

FC Each of them has a personal myth of his or her own, and each of these myths is independent and self-sufficient. The thing that always interests me is what we were talking about before, talking about the idea of saintliness. Each of these people has a personal history, and that purely personal history is the motor that drives their work, which is always totally independent of the work of everybody else. Emmett Williams, for example, is now doing work that belongs more to the field of poetry than to anything else; it's work that has very little to do with the Fluxus in his past, and the amount of Fluxus in his past isn't even all that great. Or look at Spoerri and how much his work has changed and all the different things he's done, or at Serge III and Jean Dupuy!

HM I myself think of Fluxus as something that seems once upon a time to have happened, and to have made its place in the histories of a great many different people; but it belongs to these people now as a part of a past that they've known how to leave behind them. They've all gone on to do hosts of different things, and it strikes me that you've always continued to support them, and that your own particular interest isn't at all limited to the Fluxus moment that they only momentarily shared. What they've continued on to do continues to arouse your interest.

FC I'd go even further than that, since I can happily admit that... well, it's quite clear that I didn't get started until the beginning of the

1970s, and you could say that by then the "historical" part of the Fluxus movement was already over and done with. So I never had the chance to give a lot of attention to the beginning of the Fluxus movement, since I hadn't been around to take part in it; it made much more sense to take an interest in what the artist were doing at the time when I met them, and I've continued to take an interest in what they've continued to do. I have a fairly romantic idea of the artist, which means that I really can't think that an artist was good some ten or twenty or thirty years ago, and that nothing since then makes a difference. People mature, and they ought to get better and better. I can see that these Fluxus people, and the other people who interest me, have grown and continue to grow. Much of the work they're doing now is better than the things they were doing before. Titian and Monet did their very best work at the end of their lives, and there's no good reason for that sort of thing not to happen again. The thing about the artists I work with most, and the thing that goes to show just how good they truly are, is that they've managed to be free of any simply repetitive trademark. They're always creative, and they can explore an idea with enormous tenacity, but often again it's not even easy to identify their work. If you want to know who did it you have to look for the signature. That's more the way it is with Duchamp, where the thing you most can love about his work is the fact that it's always incomprehensible, and is always incomprehensible in always different ways. Or think about the oracles. When people went to ask questions at the oracle at Delphi the answers were always mysterious, and they were also always different. No authentic oracle would ever say the same thing twice. That, again, is why religion today has no more saints to offer, or why we always find them disappointing, since the saints the church wants to give us have nothing new to say: all they manage to say is a further variation on a theme, maybe with a little evo-

lution, since certain sins today look a bit more admissible. There's not much point in insisting that they'll send you to hell, but it's pretty much the same old soup warmed up again and sent out from the same old kitchen, sort of like painting, which hasn't really changed very much in the last three thousand years. Eighty percent of the confessions that are made today in Italy in the confessionals of the Catholic church are about sex. Greed, and corruption and not paying your taxes are all by now so natural that confessions about things like that don't even cross people's minds. It's simple jungle survival. But sex as well will cease to be a sin, and the church will have to abandon all the idiot things it says about AIDS; and at that point even the pope will want to arrange for the canonization of Otto Mühl. The artists in the last ten years have done more on behalf of sexual health than the church has managed to do in three thousand years. Ever since 1966, Otto Mühl has been working with group of hundreds of adolescents and encouraging sexual enlightenment and a sensible attitude to the body. These are the saints who interest me. They're people who've invented a different iconography that has much more to do with life, or with giving you a dimension in which to think about your daily life and all the stupid importance you try to give it. Try to imagine a general, maybe, or a judge, or the head inspector of the federal tax office doing that. These people who leave everybody terrorized and quivering with respect. You can really ask, for just how long? Only until their sixty-fifth birthday. Then they go into retirement and nobody's scared at all. You meet them on the street and slap them on the shoulder and say "how's the wife, old boy," and they can't even frighten the sparrows in

the park any more, they're right back to zero, the very same zero as before the time when they first started out. They turn sixty-five and find themselves stripped of everything. The saints are the people who don't get subjected to the sort of thing, the people who never get stripped of everything, since there's nothing of which to strip them. Not even the emperors of China have left a lot of traces behind them. The thousands of emperors of China and Japan have simply disappeared and only a few scholars know as much as their names. The only people who remain are the people who leave tangible works of art behind them. And that's more or less where you find the proof of the saintliness of art. The artists build the churches and the monuments, and the works I publish are the churches and the monuments that artists can build today. The things I publish are very complete. It's never a question of a modest portfolio with six or seven prints, it's always more of a question of a cycle of works, or of something that has its own completeness. Like a cathedral. And I'm happy to be able to give them a hand.

HM You think of yourself as collaborating with the artists.

FC Exactly. Collaborating with the kinds of artists who can make that sort of claim to saintliness. Because if you talk about artists, there are lots and lots of artists, but saints are fairly rare. And maybe that saintliness rubs off. There are all sorts of distinctions in the religious orders of the church, the major friars and the minor friars and the deacons and all the rest. So maybe some collectors have a slight or collateral claim to saintliness, and maybe some publishers as well.

Some of my friends joined a tea party with a guy called George almost 30 years ago. They are still talking about it, and a lot about who was there and who they told about it later on.

I have seen a list. I think the list is called Fluxus. But I never heard what they were talking about. I never heard if they had anything to eat at all.

KIRSTEN JUSTESEN

FLUXUS AS IT WAS ... FLUX

Peter Downs brough is one of the major figures in the early development of Conceptual art. He now lives and works in Brussels.

by Peter Downs brough

FLUXUS as an art movement was something at the time (60s) that I personally had no direct relationship with – my thoughts were elsewhere. I didn't know the people involved and was only peripherally aware of their activities. All of which is to say that my observation and thoughts come as hindsight. They are somewhat formed by the fact that I recently have gotten to know a few of the people involved in/with Fluxus and also by the fact that as a job (87 - 88) I did some design and production work on the book *Fluxus Codex*.

As for the movement, Fluxus, in its time and place was very much an aspect of the/its time – the 60s when so much was happening /“changing” on a social hope-

fully political level. It was some people's answer, via the visual arts, to the activism and questioning of the time – locating the “me” within the society. This leads to a sort of irreverence, bordering on anarchism. An art is life – life is art attitude is adopted by the practitioners of the movement. This sort of manifestation is of interest historically, in order to better understand the full picture of a particular moment in history. It has however tended to stay rather localized because it functions so much around its time and context. However it is always necessary that a/the society get this kind of kick in the ass from time to time

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OF FLUXUS AND MASS MEDIA

A QUESTION TO THE FRIENDS OF FLUXUS WHICH MAY NOT NECESSARILY GET ANSWERED

by Jean Sellem

Jean Sellem is editor of Lund Art Press. In the 1970s, he was director of the experimental Galerie S:t Petri. Sellem's research has focused on many areas of experimental art in the larger social context, including Fluxus, conceptual art and Bauhaus Situationism. Today, he is examining changes in the world situation as they affect contemporary art and the mass media.

ART TODAY in the Soviet Union is not so extraordinary as many artists, art critics, curators and art dealers in the West believe. No significant art movements, defined by æsthetical theories or visions and influenced by the process of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, have so far been able to pass through the former wall of the Iron Curtain. No essential kind of post-minimal or post-conceptual art forms with the impact of Suprematism or Constructivism has been capable of modifying art evolution radically in the big Occidental art metropoli. No form of *Arte Povera* or similar æsthetical expression has been able to change the fundamentals of Western art conception. In other words, the great political changes among the superpowers have over the last years been of marginal importance for the development of contemporary art in the West.

It is surprising to see how the art seismographs from our part of the world have been so wrong in their evaluations concerning the

great significance that the processes of *perestroika* and *glasnost* were expected to have had for Western art. Modern art historians have every reason to be astonished at the way the wind from the East has so little influenced Western European and American artists, who live in the shadow of the art conceptions of Duchamp, Warhol and Beuys.

There is also every reason to reflect on the way, for example, that the "Moscow Young Artists Exhibition," in Dec. 1986, which was the first official presentation of Conceptual Art in the Soviet Union, has failed to stimulate contemporary Western art.

From my point of view it is unbelievable to think that millions of people who have grown up in a Communist dictatorship and now are suddenly living in a more or less "democratic society" have not even a handful of artists with innovative ideas of significant importance for the West. To pretend that the

repressive political system which existed in the Soviet Union for more than half a century should be the only cause of such a phenomenon is not quite justifiable.

Works and installations of, for example, Igor Kopystyanskaya, Sergei Volkov, Vadia Sakharov and Konstantin Zvezdochetov which have already been shown in the West indicate that in the Soviet Union of today – especially in Russia – there exists an advanced state of thought about contemporary art and that the separation of the art of the East from that of the West is also the result of other factors or circumstances than the political, for instance, the factor of media-communication.

To assume that contemporary artists in the Soviet Union are ignored in the West only because of bad social conditions of life in the East is not legitimate. We know that the Western mass-media pay great attention to what is going on in that part of the world. We also know that many art organizers, art dealers and businessmen from the West with good financial backing are continually going there to acquire their work.

The real difficulties for art communication with the East today depend on other factors than simply the heritage of Stalin and economic poverty. They seem principally to be obscured by the forms of development of modern language caused by the processes of advanced technology.

We must understand that in the Soviet Union and in other parts of the poor world important events have taken place which have been overlooked because of a euphorian, cynical and segregative mass-medial machinery. We must also be aware that art messages which do not suit the modern mass-

medial language are being ignored despite a content which can have greater ethical and æsthetic values than any kitsch medial message intended to exploit peoples' feelings and create mental disturbances and stupid behaviour.

We notice that the problems of alienation, corruption and violence in the highly industrialized world go parallel with the progress of media-technology and its use. Contemporary artists have, in my view, a common intellectual and moral responsibility for this negative development.

In a modern and democratic society the expression of art which does not fit in with the international mass-media machinery should be able to exist and even to grow.

Fluxus, which since the Second World War has been one of the most important art phenomena in the Occident and which in the 90s is experiencing a renaissance, is relevant in relation to a mass-medial non-Darwinistic way of thinking. The Fluxus Leitmotiv means, to me, the following:

Fluxus is a plural concept. (Emmett Williams)

Fluxus as a philosophical concept is not nihilistic.

Fluxus is not only what Fluxus is not: Fluxus is what Fluxus is.

Fluxus includes all kinds of contradictions (George Brecht).

Fluxus is not a moment in history, or an art movement. Fluxus is a way of doing things, a tradition, and a way of life and death. (Dick Higgins)

Fluxus is in a way a modern archeology of the soul.

Fluxus ideas, proposals, processes and objects are grounded in creative sharpness and a constructive conception of life.

Fluxus creators work with different forms of art.

The creative activities of Fluxus are provocative and pacific and show humour and self-irony.

Fluxus is not built on psychological and psychoanalytical speculations.

Fluxus has a positive attitude to science and to the humanisation of technology.

The creative process in Fluxus does not depend on a specific material, notion of time or context.

Fluxus is not reconcilable with a stereotypical *Gestaltungsprinzip*.

The Fluxus language of art is adequate for the transmission of concepts, proposals, and situations via the press, radio, TV, video, telefax, computers, satellites, etc.

The Fluxus network is an intramural and international information and communication system.

Fluxus does not stand for ethnic egoism, nationalistic hysteria or sociological postures.

Fluxus supports the concept of an open society.

Fluxus art creations and activities can be of industrial and commercial interest, but are not conditioned by a pragmatical way of thinking.

Fluxus art creations and activities are appropriate to a society maintaining democracy and a market economy.

Fluxus art activities in the society exist underground as well as in established forms.

In spite of the destructive consequences of mass-medial evolution, we can not deny the media's positive role in relation to certain processes of democratization in the world.

Without anticipating that Fluxus creators and theoreticians should work for "social service," the question is raised as to what perspectives for the future can obtain in the use of mass-media. How will they regard the problem of art communication between, for example, the Soviet Union, the poor countries, and the Western world, and what vision they have of tomorrow's media language and use? But this question, of course, doesn't imply that artists or creators must agree with ethical laws dictated by a multinational-government or organization, or that they must accept unreasonable statements which can led to political dictatorship. The question here strictly concerns how modern society can develop a non-imperialistic art language and art communication system which can positively be used by art friends around the world. How can Fluxus renaissance people who dispose an advanced art language and well established network, individually and without constraint, contribute to build up a more creative expression of human life? The question has no megalomaniac expectation of changing the world through art. Its purpose is only to ask Fluxus renaissance people how they are considering the negative effects of the mass-media in relation to their own art philosophy and works. Do they have a certain conception against mass-media brutality and censorship as it's expressed in the modern society of today?



Yoshi Wada. "What's the matter with your ear?"
Sound installation. Emily Harvey Gallery, New York 1991.

THE FLUXUS PHENOMENON

by Robert C. Morgan

Robert Morgan is an art critic and artist living in New York City and in Rochester, New York, where he teaches art history. After writing his doctoral dissertation on conceptual art at New York University, he began a long-term specialization in the relationship between experimental thinking in art and the experimental art forms that arise from new ways of thinking. Morgan has written for many leading American and European art magazines, and he is a frequent contributor to *Art in America* and *Flash Art*, as well as *Lund Art Press*.

IT IS REMARKABLE that a phenomenon such as Fluxus could still be around in an age of trends and fashions that spew forth as high-tech glut from the marketplace of images. Its inception back in the early sixties was a revelation of sorts. It was not a revolution, in that it did not profoundly alter the course of history, but it did alter the terms of art making, and create the awareness of a new possibility in art. The signs of its reception are clearly present. Perhaps, in retrospect, one could say that the precise problem with Fluxus today is less its absence than its presence. The imposition of presence is a difficult and overdetermined task. The urge toward repeated self-historification – that is, which artist did what work first or who obtained the true concept of a performative or compositional device – is less interesting than the absence of authorship involved in Fluxus; that is, the ensemble of Fluxus is generally more interesting than the polemics deliberated by individual artists. In the sense, through the vision or ideology of its founder, George Maciunas, Fluxus has become, at its best, a communist reality.

What is significant in a Fluxus exhibition is the diversity of strategies and the complementary nature of the varied artists' intentions.

If, in fact, Fluxus does touch upon a postmodern aesthetic, as once claimed by the critic Peter Frank, it is in the sense of disappearance.⁽¹⁾ By creating an absence of authorship, Fluxus has revived itself as a significant tendency in recent art. What seems to carry intellectual and aesthetic weight is the concept of a fluid ensemble – in fact, true to the meaning of the word “flux” and the capacity of that ensemble to offer a profoundly neglected vision of the detritus of culture as a statement in itself. For it seems to me that the ensemble of Fluxus acts as a kind of cleansing agent, a kind of scatological scent, in which the debris of the mass media are equivocally turned inside-out and given a face-lift.

What one perceives in this scent or flow is an enormous contagion for the emotional residue of such glut. Fluxus performs in much the same way that any catalyst performs. It enhances some form of motion, an intellectual or physical motion or a motion towards something previously considered inane. The worship of the inane is not a bad idea. It heralds a certain absurdity that needs to be evoked in our society if we are to remain sane. Put another way, the inane – when exquisitely performed – makes for sanity in

(1) Peter Frank quoted in exhibition brochure, *Fluxus Moment and Continuum*. Stux Gallery, New York City (May 10-June 3, 1989)

the world of high-tech effluvia. This is no mean feat. It is a difficult task. It is difficult in that it requires training of perception and insight. Training of perception should not be confused with academicism, although Fluxus, in some manifestations, does carry academic mannerisms. It is a thin line that the Fluxus artist rides between absurd insight and academic overdetermination.

On my way to Venice Biennale last summer, I stopped in Milan to visit with Gino DiMaggio, the organizer of *Ubi Fluxus, ibi motus:1990-1962*. In an unpublished interview (yet to be published), DiMaggio observed:

I don't find Fluxus in the individual works of the artists. It's very difficult today for me after 25 years to say: "This work is inside the meaning of Fluxus, this work is outside." For example, you feel in the experience of Dada and Surrealism, there is a general language, that the suggestion is inside the work and in the action at the same time. In Fluxus, it's quite different.(2)

What DiMaggio was expressing here seems relevant to the discussion. Whereas one can locate a sense of the spirit of Dada in specific works by Arp, Schwitters, Janco, Baader, Duchamp, Höch, etc., it is difficult to locate the spirit of Fluxus in a single artist's work – particularly today. The Fluxboxes, edited as multiples by Maciunas, for example, are good example of early Fluxus, but these are, for the most part, composite works. They are composite expressions of the Fluxus spirit. In other words, the sum (the spirit of Fluxus) is greater than its parts (individual works). It is interesting that the larger *group* exhibi-

tions of Fluxus tend to convey to the spirit of Fluxus much better than single person shows. Somehow the energy emanates from the ensemble. It is the ensemble that carries the weight or, better put, alleviates the weight of formal deflection so endemic to the project of fluxism.

When one views the ensemble of Fluxworks presented at the Venice Biennale or at DiMaggio's show at the Salvatore Ala Gallery in New York last fall, it becomes apparent that the spectacle has an appeal precisely because of the absence of a formal strategy or, for that matter, of a marketing strategy covertly supported by some transliteration of social scientific theory. Much the same could be said of the show called "Fluxus & Co." mounted several months earlier at the Emily Harvey Gallery. The point is that the various Fluxworks, displayed in static form in these exhibitions, have more than a mere complementary effect. They interact in such a way so as to energize one another; in this way, the spirit of Fluxus emerges as a collective statement, much in the way Maciunas envisioned it.

This is not to suggest that the artists connected to Fluxus should not do one-person shows; it is merely to suggest that some shows function more effectively when they are not intended to be seen within the context of Fluxus. If we are to believe, as Ken Friedman has tried to suggest, that Fluxus exists without methodology or ideology but rather as a way of life, would it not be appropriate to celebrate the idea of Fluxism (as René Block has separated Fluxism from Fluxus) in terms of the ensemble? (3) In an essay from

(1) Peter Frank quoted in exhibition brochure, *Fluxus Moment and Continuum*. Stux Gallery, New York City (May 10-June 3, 1989)

(2) Interview with Gino DiMaggio, Milano (Italy), June 24, 1990

(3) See Ken Friedman, *Rethinking Fluxus*, Henie Onstad Foundations (Norway), 1989; reprinted in *Fluxus* Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia (cat. for exhibition held June 14 - July 7, 1990)

1982, Dick Higgins has pointed out that “not every work by a Fluxartist is a Fluxwork.” (4) Higgins goes on to say that “Fluxartists do other works of other sorts as well, just as a collagist may also paint, or as a composer of piano music may also try his hand writing for orchestra.”

What Higgins implies here could be considered an extension of the anti-style tradition so evident among the New York Dadas (1918-19), namely Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia. Higgins has appropriated his own term for this maneuver which he calls intermedia. Intermedia is based on an idea as it moves between media rather than the “multi-media” display of several media happening simultaneously, usually within a theatrical or performance context. There are two recent examples of non-Fluxworks – at least what I would characterize as non-Fluxwork – both shown over the past year at the Emily Harvey Gallery. Both of these exhibitions were by Fluxartists: Alison Knowles and Eric Andersen.

“Seven Indian Moons” was an exhibition and a book. (5) The exhibition considered of paintings incorporating a hanging T-shirt image with a moon. These works were densely textured through the combined layering of silkscreen and painting. They function as a poetic narrative, the visual counterpart of the book which was, in fact, conceived according to chance operations. One can clearly make the connection between the use of chance in these works, particularly in the book, but the manifestation of visual ideas in the highly sophisticated use of materials in

the paintings is something else. In addition to the poetic narrative there is a certain phenomenological presence, a statement about the essence of things that seems to run contrary to the more casual display of cultural detritus often associated with Fluxus. In Knowles’ exhibition there was a complex lexicon of terms at work, suggesting a ritualistic nexus of culturally-bound forms, a pattern of nearly mystical proportions, where the commonplace and the transcendent merge into resolution.

With Andersen’s exhibition a few months later, the look of a visually sophisticated installation was also present. (6) Entitled “The Crying Place (Manhattan),” Andersen based his structural intentions on the mythological memories associated with finding a place in which to cry. He cites a place in his native Scandinavia, somewhere between the borders of Finland and Norway, where people actually go to participate in the physical exorcism of shedding tears. Andersen’s point is that this enactment will often hide the real intention behind the tears. Tears are, in fact, a physical manifestation of a physical phenomenon. He uses language, mounted in typographic phrases pinned to the gallery walls, to represent the inner state or intentionality behind the act of crying. In the middle of the space is a cut and polished rock on which tears have been shed. The conceptual appearance of the exhibition is linguistically severe, reduced to a kind of essence.

Higgins has stated in his famous “Nine Criteria of Fluxus” that the minimal action is, indeed, one of the *raison d’être*; therefore,

(4) See Dick Higgins, *Fluxus: Theory and Reception*, (typescript), Berlin, 1982

(5) Alison Knowles, *Seven Indian Moons*, Emily Harvey Gallery, New York (January 17 - February 10, 1990); also Alison Knowles & Bryan McHugh, *Seven Indian Moons* Emily Harvey Editions, New York City, 1990

(6) Eric Andersen, *The Crying Place (Manhattan)* Emily Harvey Gallery (October 26 - December 8, 1990)

one may assume that this aspect of the work is keeping with Fluxus.(7) One cannot ascertain that Andersen's installation is absolutely *not* Fluxus. This would be ludicrous. Yet there is reasoned aspect to the work that falls easily into a gallery situation; that is, a marketable context. The contradiction seems to emerge in the proto-Conceptual leaning of original Fluxus to evade the gallery context altogether; hence, Maciunas sought other forms of presentation, such as the multiples, boxes, editions, and correspondence. The ephemeral part of Fluxus is essential to the work's meaning. What is significant is the manner in which the action replaces or, in some cases, displaces the object. The performance aspect of Fluxus is all important, more significant than the adjustment of work to a gallery situation.

This is not to question either Knowles or Andersen in terms of terms of what they choose to present; it is merely to point out that the spirit of Fluxus resides elsewhere. These are both accomplished artists with acute sensibilities, and one can discuss these sensibilities in terms of Fluxism. Nevertheless, the function of these exhibitions as Fluxart does not seem accurate. They are rather works by highly mature artists. To categorize everything these artists do as Fluxus is less effective than to simply say that they are artists doing art. Henry Flynt is perhaps closest to acknowledging this distinction in that his recent works, described as "Concept Art," are exactly that – works that deal with concepts or that run parallel to concepts. Each concept has its own propensity to incite new ideas and new

visual manifestations; it is art, but not Fluxart. (8) It is a philosophical form of art, to be sure.

What I am arguing for in this brief paper should be clear. The spirit of Fluxus is something that these artists have adhered to in their works, in some cases, for nearly three decades. This is the spirit that emanates from *An Anthology*, from the music of La Monte Young, the poetry of Jackson Mac Low, the intermedia works of Higgins, the installations of Ay-O, the performances and collages of Ben Patterson, and the list goes on. It is presumed that the readers of this essay are not ignorant of the many tendencies that comprises the spirit of Fluxus. Maybe, in fact, Fluxus should be called *the spirit of Fluxus* – to borrow DiMaggio's phrase. Ultimately, it is about a spirit of life fusing into art and art fusing back into life. Fluxus is performance and life-giving.

In a panel I moderated a couple of years ago in New York, that included Higgins, Ay-O, Geoff Hendricks, Phil Corner, and Alison Knowles, I made up my own list of qualifiers that seemed close to the spirit of Fluxus: annoying, elusive, academic, controversial, rebellious, feisty, minimal, hermetic, expressive, and humorous.(9) I was not striving for accuracy in these qualifiers as much as a kind of spontaneous omniscient condition of the state of the art; in this case, the state of the art was the Fluxus ensemble – that is, the happening that inevitable occurs when works by these artists are seen together as a community. They can be exemplary. The Venice Biennale was its testament!

(7) Higgins, *Fluxus: Theory and Reception*

(8) See Henry Flynt, "Mutations of the Vanguard: Pre-Fluxus, During Fluxus, Late Fluxus" in *Ubi Fluxus, ibi motus:1990-1962* Curated by Achille Bonito Oliva (May 26 – September 30, 1990), *Venice Biennale* (catalog essay), Mudima Foundation, 1990

(9) "Talk with Robert C. Morgan on Fluxus," *Artists Talk on Art* (Ay-o, Philip Corner, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles), April 14, 1989 at SoHo 20 Gallery, 469 Broome Street, New York City

A COMMENT ON FLUXUS

by Ingolfur Arnarson

Ingolfur Arnarson lives and works in Reykjavik, where he directs the experimental media program of the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts. He was active in the Living Art Museum, and he was a friend and student of the late Robert Filliou.

DURING the last decades, many Fluxus artists have left their mark on artistic life in Iceland, have been here and shown their work. How strongly this has influenced it, I will not go into in detail, but I can say it's considerable and generally not acknowledged.

In the early sixties the group Musica Nova organized a concert with Nam June Paik. Gallery Súm organized exhibitions with many Fluxus artists involved. Dieter Roth with his contacts played here a large part.

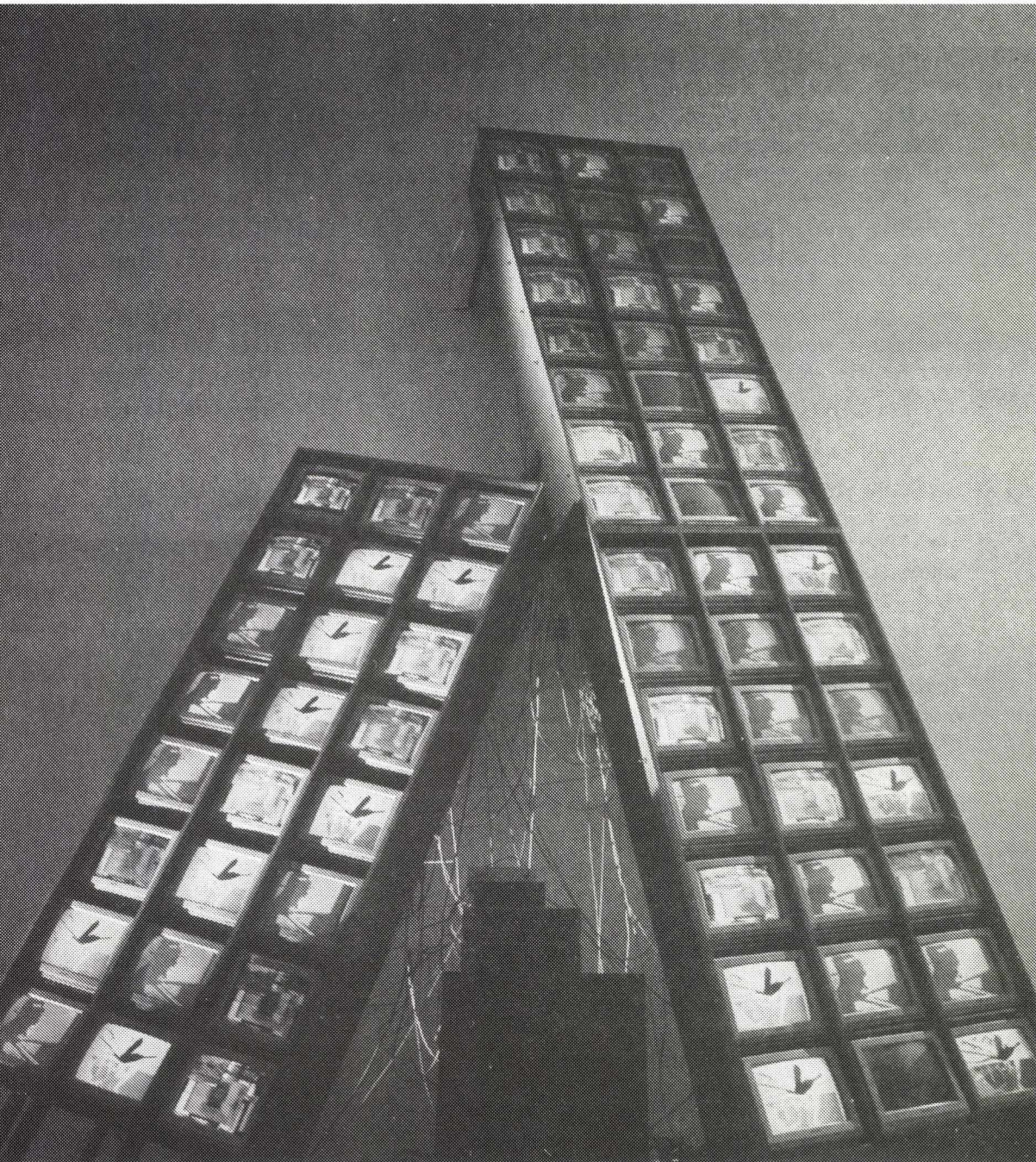
Like Fluxus, Súm was a group of artists sharing a certain spirit (though difficult to define) and not a real movement in the ordinary sense. Also because of social conditions and a relatively late development of urbanization, the fact of Iceland not being a large scale consumer society and with a strong literary tradition, the mentality of Fluxus, of intermedia and anti-establishment art fitted much more than, let's say, Pop art. This direct dialogue with both Fluxus artists and others has since continued mostly because of the efforts of some individuals and other artist-run galleries. The Living Art

Museum, Gallery Sudurgata 7, The Corridor and more.

Although many artists felt close to the Fluxus spirit at one time or another, I feel that in the long run, Magnús Pálsson is the artist here most involved with it, in his art and teaching.

Talking of myself, my inspirations come from many sources today, but as a young art student, Fluxus was the first art I got closely acquainted with (partly because of inspiring teaching of Robert Filliou). Some of these early impressions are still very strong and still with me. The event, the precise action is something I associate with Fluxus. The ones of George Brecht are of special interest to me.

Although I'm on the guard against religious kitsch, the influence of Eastern thought and the way many dealt with it, I often found interesting. Also the interest Fluxus took in daily life situations, the way the awareness of every day actions is sharpened, I found inspiring. Still, I don't think everything has to be called art, though I don't mind either.



Name June Paik. Man, 1990

Photo: Studio Azzuro

NAM JUNE PAIK: AN INTERVIEW

by Nicholas Zurbrugg

Sydney: 10th and 13th April, 1990

Nicholas Zurbrugg is a literary critic and cultural historian who lives in Brisbane, Australia, where he teaches at Griffith University. The following interviews with the New-York-based pioneer video artist, Nam June Paik, took place during his visit to the 8th Biennale of Sydney. The first of these two interviews was recorded by telephone, from Brisbane to Sydney; the second interview was recorded at Paik's hotel in Sydney.

NICHOLAS ZURBRUGG (NZ) Perhaps I could begin by asking you about your installation at *Documenta 8* entitled: *Beuys' Voice*. What sort of things were you trying to do with that footage of Beuys' performance? Were you interested in registering it as a performance?

NAM JUNE PAIK (NJP) That's a good question. But artists – generally speaking, you know – we don't really set out to do any concrete objective. So, in my case, when I make an artwork, we start from a few given conditions. One condition was that I was invited to do a big work by *Documenta*. And then, we had just finished a performance with Joseph Beuys in Tokyo, where I played a piano and he – he kind of screamed. It was quite an interesting performance – he liked it very much. Also, Beuys is popular in Germany – he's popular everywhere – but this piece was for Germany! So I thought, I'm going to do something with Beuys on that performance. So first I tried to use multiple projectors but it didn't work out so well. Then there was a new technology available – multivision, or the so-called "TV Wall." It's quite expensive – they were renting it for ten thousand marks for three days. So I gave up for a long time. But after all, *Documenta* is a big opportunity to excel and you don't get too many offers, and then, by that time, Beuys had died, so the information had become more dramatic. So, through our

friends, we inquired how much a couple of companies would charge for three months in the summer. And because in summer there are no trade fairs, they gave it to us for \$100,000. So it became more or less feasible. *Documenta* gave me \$40,000 or DM 40,000 – I forget – and I raised maybe \$60,000 – I forget! So we did it. And that was a kind of process. Artists, generally, have not profound theories, you know – we have instincts, and then practical methods afterwards. The main channel was normal Beuys, undecorated. And then there were two channels, left and right, where I and Paul Garrin, did some computer processing. So it was really successful like that. It went very well. So that was the inside story.

NZ I think I saw another version of that piece at your retrospective in London, at the Hayward Gallery. It seemed a more complicated piece, because there were not only monitors which showed your work with Beuys, but other screens which seemed to show a lot of unrelated images going by at tremendous speed. I found it more difficult to understand or to read what was going on. Was there any reason for this difference between the installations?

NJP Yes, that's an interesting question. In both shows we used identical tapes, because we didn't have any money to re-edit them – we just copied them. However, in the

Hayward show we didn't have any money to rent that TV Wall system. So we used this *Documenta* main channel which went into the TV Wall undecorated – you know, natural Beuys – as one channel. The other two channels were decorated, computerized video. So, without the TV Wall, the proportion of decorated, computer-ized tape became bigger. Whereas at *Documenta*, most likely, most people just watched Beuys' undecorated tape, at the centre. They didn't pay attention to the left or right, which is computerized tape. So everything most likely looked more complicated to you.

NZ Which version did you prefer yourself?

NJP I don't care! But the computerized version was more expensive – that's all I care!

NZ All the same, you seem very much committed to work with the new media, and to the significance of the new media arts. This serious motivation seems to be overlooked by some of your critics, such as the American theorist Fredric Jameson, whose catalogue essay for the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art's *Utopia* show, in 1988, suggested that there was no point in expecting your installations to offer coherent art. He argues elsewhere that video is a mobile medium, which may only generate superficial, ever-changing effects. Taking this argument one step further, Jameson likes to argue that Post-Modern culture as a whole consists almost exclusively of superficial effects without any special meaning. What is your response of that kind to argument?

NJP Where did he write that?

NZ In an essay entitled "Reading without Interpretation: postmodernism and the video-text" in an anthology entitled *The Linguistics of Writing*. Also in *Flash Art* (December '86/January '87), there's an interview with him, in which he's fairly dismissive about video.

NJP Yes – the so-called semiotic people, you know, they don't like video!

NZ Why do you think that is?

NJP I don't know really. I don't understand semiotics. Most likely semiotics is quite highly regarded in non-French speaking countries, like England, like America and also Japan, because it's difficult to understand. Academic people know they have to deal with complications. They think McLuhan is too much talked about, and is not academic enough. It's very hard to make a science out of communications because it is changing very fast, and in a way, it's too large. So French – and also kind of Labour-left British people – made these kind of post-Marxist theories. For some reason semiotic people like to be very manneristic – they hang on to very little things. They're basically sort the French-based people who kind of missed the bus of revolution, and who want to make a rear-guard critique about it. I respect theory when it is bold and something new. Cybernetics I respect, because you can learn something from it. I think I read one book by Foucault and then one book by Barthes, and one by one more guy. But when I study how much time I spent, I didn't get too much out of it. So I thought I would keep a kind of respectful distance from it, and then I will use my time more productively, that is, making videotapes and computer-tapes, and computer programming.

My work is rather popular in France, so I asked my French friends whether they think I should spend X number of hours to study semiotics or not, and everybody laughed, and told me, you are much more advanced than they are – why should you spend your time studying semiotics? So that is my relation to semiotics. If somebody has a Ph.D., and gets a teaching job in semiotics, that's fine. However, I have no time for that!

NZ Going back to the notion of content in video, would you say that you're interested

in communicating some general sort of message or content? Or are you most interested in exploring new sorts of process? Or would you say that it's a combination of the two, or perhaps something else?

NJP You know, we are, as I told you, an artist – and work with intuition – so we have, maybe, a higher rate of metabolism, so we get tired of it very quickly. So when in 1960 I did some sort of performance art, it was very nice at first. You know, I got kind of known in Fluxus circles in Germany. And then I met Beuys, who was not yet known. Then I was approaching thirty-one and I got tired of performance art. At the same time, also, I needed to make some money and then I started to make some *objects sonores* – you know, sound objects. Then, slowly, slowly, I got attracted to television. So I thought, well, you know it's kind of nice to do the first video art. I said “electronic television art” at that time, since I was doing electronic music art, which was not doing too well.

So then the first show was a hit, and then the second show was a hit and the third show was a hit, so I stayed with this medium. And when I came to this American country, it was rather easy to raise money in television, because official television was so bad. You said, “Oh I'm working with television,” and everyone was throwing money at you, you know! Also, we have to be written up in the newspapers and stuff in gallery shows and museums. So you speculate – oh well, I did this, next I did this, next I'll do this.

In the case of so-called important visual artists, painters, they in a way got their style fixed up by their mid-thirties – numbers, silkscreens on canvas, dots and enlarged comics and so on. I don't say that they make compromises. But other artists get fixed with styles which became successful. Some artists change and have two or three styles. At most you can have three styles in your lifetime.

Of course, everything in video is in one style, but in my case, I think I changed that a little more. Because number one, my work has not been profitable here, until three years ago. So I have no reason to hang up into one style. And secondly, all the electronic industry here has progressed very much. Think – at the time when I was doing video, you know, it was 1963, before Sony had even introduced their video recorder. The only home video available was Grundwig's camera. So for the last thirty years video technology has changed. So when new hardware combinations came up, either in home video, or more important, in computer programming in industry, I have more opportunities to try out new combinations of new hardware and new software. Hardware-software combinations are very, very rich, almost inexhaustible.

And then, obviously, I was not that bad in that application – there are other guys that are worse. So, for two reasons, because I did not make much money until three years ago, and because hardware keeps changing, I keep changing. So your question is almost irrelevant. Art-making is for anybody like breathing – luckily we don't have to go to the post-office and use stamps. We are a kind of privileged class – we don't have to work very hard. So we don't have to set up any objectives.

NZ I suppose your explorations of new media are like swimming in an endless ocean.

NJP A *tabula rasa*, you know a white paper. Video is a white paper, a *tabula rasa*.

NZ Are there some pieces that you think have worked particularly well, not only as a new process, but as a way of saying something about something beyond video?

NJP I get bad reviews still – *Art in America* recently wrote one. But I survive. If we think deductively, then certainly *Beuys' Voice* was successful. And another which was a very successful piece is *TV Garden*, where you see lots of TVs among the leaves. That was

very successful I think for two reasons, three reasons. One is that people look down at TV here, so it was kind of a new position. And in a way, you are fixed into one TV, generally, but you look around. And I deliberately made it to look around, but when you watched TV your eye got fixed. And most likely, the human instinct, the human nerve which is controlling the eyes' nervous system, is very happy that they are liberated from the one TV position, so that you can look around. And obviously, of course, the optic nerve likes that electronics impulses too, but also likes the natural habit of looking around. So these two combinations made the people happier watching *TV Garden*.

And then, of course, many people had thought that television is against ecology, but in this case, television is part of ecology. Then it had nice colour, and nice rock 'n' roll music, and it was dark, with light flowing from leaves in various greens and various rhythms. And then people were leaning onto railings in kind of comfortable positions, and could talk to their neighbours, whereas when you're watching TV or going to a movie, you don't talk to your neighbour. But in this case, all those disciplines are out, and you can go in and out at your leisure, like at a John Cage concert. I think that basically speaking, the use of natural leaves and television – that paradox – was important for people.

NZ Well, I think you've said that you're interested in humanizing television and video.

NJP That came from *Human Use of Human Beings* – a book by Norbert Wiener. Norbert Wiener is a fifties scientist – I think he's a genius. Although it was corny, I used the phrase "How to humanize technology" in the press release of the Howard Wise Gallery in '69. I thought it was very corny. But, for some reason, everybody quoted it and even now keep quoting it, you know, twenty years

after! It was exactly in 1969 that I wrote that press release, anonymously. So, obviously, that rings a bell for many people.

NZ It's probably the reverse of Andy Warhol's claim that he wanted to be a machine, whereas you want machines to be human.

NJP Yes. For some reason this kind of quotation becomes famous, so obviously people need that.

NZ And what do you think of contemporary culture as a whole? Would you say that we're living in a corny culture?

NJP Contemporary culture? As a whole?

NZ Well, that's a very big question, and probably a silly question.

NJP Yes. As you know, we are not Henry Kissinger – we are just a little player. I am generally optimistic about the human future, because of the Soviet crumble. For instance, Milan Knizak, the Czech artist, was arrested three hundred and sixty times. He was in New York when the tanks rolled in '68, but he chose to go back to Czechoslovakia. So he had a hard time. But he is now the President of the National Academy there. He was a real vagabond, a Fluxus artist. And then, the President of Lithuania, Vytautas Landsbergis, he was the best friend of George Maciunias – they were class-mates in grade school. His father and Landsbergis' father were best friends. And so, obviously, although our Liberal Left betted on Karl Marx too long, and found they bet on the wrong horse, the horse of liberalism also won, so that's very nice. Of course all intellectuals are against technology, and all for ecology, which is very important. But in a way, we are inventing more pollution-free technology. We intellectuals don't like cars and television, but we have to admit that

compared to Charles Dickens' time, we are living better, no? So we must give up certain parts of intellectual vanity, and look at the good parts of so-called high-tech research. For instance, hydrogen power, which nobody's talking about. It seems that people are getting smarter, and also that in the Western world people are getting less aggressive. When I look at the art world, they are playing games very harshly, but still they're not as bad as corporate games. Australian, Japanese or Korean artists – or whoever – who are not playing games in

New York shouldn't pay so much attention to the New York art world. If you make your own art work and can make a living, then that's good – if you're happy and don't have to dig ditches!

When we started out becoming an artist, we didn't aim or even think about becoming a famous artist. To take fame out of art, well that's the most important thing. Let's make that the closing statement for today. *To take fame out of the art-world.* That was the spirit of Fluxus.

NZ At the end of our interview the other day, you said that the Fluxus movement attempted to take the idea of fame away from the idea of the artist.

NJP Yes – we hope so! Yes, whether Fluxus has any common aesthetic or not, one thing which is remarkable about Fluxus is that for thirty years many different egos – twenty, thirty different artists – kept quite good friends and collaborated – which is remarkable. We must be very proud of it, because it is one of the very few anarchistic groups which has succeeded in surviving. Because with anarchists, by definition, the strongest guy becomes the dictator. In our case it didn't happen, basically speaking.

NZ Would you say that there are many special differences between Fluxus in America and Fluxus in Europe?

NJP Hardly any. For instance, George Maciunias, George Brecht, LaMonte Young, Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles were kind of cool people – they wouldn't go and shout "I am not typical of Fluxus." Fluxus is a kind of minimal aesthetic, and a minimal aesthetic, by definition, is not easy to succeed in. However, in Europe, we did have a fairly

good political base. When George Maciunias came, the European neo-Dadaist aesthetic already occupied a major forum. So we could incorporate very quickly. American and European Fluxus both needed each other. Of course, Europe had its own idea, and its more aggressive attitude. It was more arty – or more wet, and not quite dry – more dirty, and not quite clean. And if we include Joseph Beuys, whom we should include, because he worked with Fluxus many times, then we have excellent artistic talent. So we don't owe everything to America either!

Then, also, Georges Maciunias, being an internationalist Marxist, he always paid attention to Eastern Europe. He was also a Japan-worshipper. He discovered Takeshisa Kosugi, you know, and some unknown Japanese at that time, who became known, and also a very strong Dutch component. He had the idea of a united artists' front, like Karl Marx's idea that all the workers should unite. So he was very international from the beginning. There was really no elbowing for national hegemony or personal hegemony, you know. I think that's the record we're most proud of.

NZ Didn't Joseph Beuys argue at one point Fluxus wasn't giving sufficient attention to political and practical problems, and lacked a "clearly marked goal"?

NJP Yes, around '65 or '66 he went his own way. But from '62 to '66 he called himself many times "Fluxus." So – knowing what he achieved in the art world, we must be proud of him.

NZ Could you tell me a little more about the development of your work? You started out as a composer, didn't you?

NJP I think I made three performance pieces that can survive. And then I do notation work, and video. And then I wrote two piano pieces which will survive absolutely my death. I'm 58, so you have to think – even healthy Ben Vautier had a heart attack a few days ago. Fluxus is still a kind of stepchild in the art world, so if we don't care about our legacy, we will be very quickly wiped out by commercial interests. So we have to be vigilant about what we did!

NZ Are you carefully trying to document this work?

NJP Not document. My music was not recorded. I refused to record it because you need a certain kind of excited consciousness, and if you record them it looks very empty. I rather thought when I was young that it was better not to leave any records, rather than leaving false records. But now I know how to record those things!

NZ Was Cage one of the people you enjoyed working with?

NJP Of course, needless to say! His ascetic, ego-less way of life influenced lots of people. Also his kind of West Coast, semi-American Indian aesthetic – his undense – *not* dense – aesthetic – that influenced many

people. I admire these West Coast people very much – they are still very under-rated. People think they were influenced by Oriental Zen – that's true too – but also, I think they're influenced by electro-magnetism coming from earth. You know, geographical magnetism, which defines American Indians as a kind of ego-less, nature-bound lifestyle. I think that comes from an electromagnetic sphere that we haven't discovered yet.

NZ How to you find living in New York? Do you find that conducive to work and survival, or would you prefer to live in California?

NJP I'm in New York two-thirds and three-quarters of a year. The very practical reason is that computer-time is very, very cheap in New York – almost one quarter of California, or one-tenth of Germany. A certain kind of computer I use for video is not only cheaper – it's a fraction of the cost elsewhere. The Media-Alliance programme finds the empty hours of computers for artists, and uses them as a training ground for the new computer operators of that company. It's a very good mixed economy – capitalism and socialism. So I have to be in New York for that reason. There's no other place. Also there's a certain density of communication in New York, so that you meet people in the street and talk. Also, we're all regular human beings and so you work harder if there's an incentive. So you say, ah this guy's not really as talented as I am, but he's now getting bigger space in the *New York Times*, and you tend to work harder for that week! You have to admit that happens!

NZ What general directions would you like to see video-art move toward, yourself? Are there any-particular possibilities which interest you, or which you'd encourage?

NJP I'm lucky to have access to this high-grade computer very cheaply, which Ger-

mans, or you know, Japanese and French don't have. So I need to handicap myself and do low-tech video. Or I make best use of my resources. Because computers change very quickly, so things that we can do this year, we may not do next year, because that computer may be junked! So many of my early technological pieces are unplayable now. So I will continue with what I have access to. Because I've got assistants who are much better than me. For example, I work with Paul Garrin – he's about thirty-one – he's a genius! His computer programming operation is about twenty times better than me! He may quickly get rich and never have time for me, so I want to make good use of this opportunity! I also have another assistant my own age, in Japan.

NZ So this means that you enjoy collaborative work?

NJP Yes – with high-tech you have to collaborate! There's no other way! I work not only with these two guys, but when I go to the computer studio, it's the chance of that day that such a person is there. But that doesn't mean that only high-tech art survives. For example, last year I made a Living Theater video tape, *Living with the Living Theater*, which is not high-tech video, but a documentary. As you may know, the highest rating TV show in America is an anthology of home-video – a thing called *America's Funniest Home-Videos*, it's the ultimate documentary. The most popular show is *Sixty Minutes*, but one week they topped *Sixty Minutes*! It's the very show that I've been preaching about – everybody makes video!

NZ Turning from high-tech art to low-tech art, are you still doing performances yourself?

NJP I'm getting old, so I conserve energy, you know! I don't want to imitate young people when I'm old, because I didn't imitate old people when I was young.

NZ What do you think of the recent developments in multi-media theatre? Have you seen any of the productions of Philip Glass and Robert Wilson?

NJP Oh, yes – *Einstein on the Beach* was so good, I was really jealous! It's one of the most unforgettable experiences of my lifetime.

NZ I suppose that's not really the sort of work you're tempted to do?

NJP No. It needs a lot of labour, a lot of energy and organization. I did television shows, but I'm not really that sort of a perfectionist.

NZ What about installations? Are you interested in this direction?

NJP Yes, because, number one, they're easier to make. That means there's more net contribution to humanity there. Because most likely the combination of changing space and time on that rather big scale, computing that much information, is like a combination of grand operas and big exhibits. At the Whitney Museum I had a piece called *Image Wall*, 28 feet wide, and 20 feet high. And I think that I was able to create in that limited space the sound and the power of a space five times bigger than that, if you didn't use electronic media.

NZ So it's a sort of condensed art?

NJP Yes – inch by square inch, it has more power, I must say. *Art in America* said it was like the Palladium disco in New York – but

the designer of the Palladium said he was influenced by my other work. The Palladium has fifty monitors going up and down. I looks like a spaceship landing and going up – you know, it's great.

NZ What do you think of MTV?

NJP I think MTV is great. The first two or three years of MTV were very good – it was a big cultural phenomenon. And we video-artists must take credit for that, because two key persons of MTV went from our lab. You know, their vice-president in technology was practically my engineer. We had what was called the Television Laboratory. And two key persons – the first programme director, and the first vice-president in technology, came from our organization.

NZ I get feeling that some of your pieces – such as *TV Buddha* – seem quite contemplative. One's reaction is to look at them for quite while.

NJP Maybe.

NZ By contrast, MTV usually seems to offer a constant flood of images. Do you have any preference for rapid images or slow images?

NJP Generally, I might make it either very rapid or very slow. For example, *Living with the Living Theater* juxtaposes a very rapid style and normal tempo. It's my newest video piece. We're trying to get TV airtime for it in New York this summer, but it's not easy. So we're still fighting.

NZ I think you've also exhibited computer-generated images of various artists like Laurie Anderson. How do they relate to your work?

NJP When I did that big Image-Wall, which I'm very proud of, I made four big tele-

vision worldwide global shows, with various degrees of satisfaction. So I was able to attract big-name composers and performers in the show. One of them was Laurie Anderson, and as I'd raised the money, I made various computer-variation images from the show. Others included Joseph Beuys, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Philip Glass and Rebecca Allen – she's a U.C.L.A. computer professor. We used her computer-video from the German rock n' roll group called *Kraftwerk*. It made a real difference to my last piece – it made it really very strong. All the newspapers wrote that it's my work. It's my work, but her work is a very essential part of my work. In a way she works under my name, which is unfair to her. I was more well-known, so they associated it with my name, so she was not very happy. I constantly used her name on the screen because she spent eighteen months full-time work producing four minutes of tape. Can you imagine – that's a very important part of a young woman's life. So it's unfair to use somebody's life-time's work without credit. I didn't make much money either – money isn't really part of it. But the star-system is made so that there are only a few stars.

Fluxus was fighting against that system. We never limited the numbers of Fluxus. Anybody who said, I am Fluxus, was Fluxus. But luckily, not many young people said they were Fluxus! So we go back to the start: how to deal with the star-system in the art-world. The human being's artistic instinct is very contrary to our idea of the star-system. In a way, being a star physically shortened Joseph Beuys' life. He was a friend of the homeless, so he could not say, 'I won't see you.' He tried to be a friend of everybody.

When he succeeded, I bet it shortened his life. He had to create artwork, and he had this instinct to make more art, but he was

constantly talking. I think it's a problem of so-called post-industrial society. Vanity becomes important for everybody. Aristocrats had diamonds – not for real use, but to show they had power. That becomes, 'I know John Cage.' 'John Cage knows Henry Kissinger', 'Henry Kissinger knows Mrs Kennedy,' you know. It's this kind of thing – vanity's evil cycle – that's the problem.

I went to the California hippies – and they don't have a vanity. California hippies are fairly good. Communes are O.K. so long as they don't have children. Commune members are generally graduates from Harvard, or U.C.L.A. So when they were a child, they had the choice of becoming an accountant, a lawyer, a doctor or an artist, or a hippy. They chose to become a hippy – that's fine. But when they became over thirty and make babies in communes their children don't have enough choice. The commune standards go down and down, from the Abbie Hoffman

level to the Charles Manson level. The commune standards go down and down, from the Abbie Hoffman level to the Charles Manson level.

But in Austria, in Vienna, Otto Mühl's commune is doing fine, you know. Otto Mühl did all those performances with vomiting and mass orgies. They have a commune which is a model. They have their own commune school which has the highest academic standard in all Austria, which is not easy! And everyone goes to work – they're professionals. But they shielded themselves very much, because people misuse communes – homeless drug-addicts come, you know. So they made a high wall there, so that nobody can intrude or come in. In that way they are successful!

NZ Would you like to join a commune?

NJP No – I'm old!



Photo: Jean Sellem

Fluxus exhibition at The Henie Onstad Art Center Høvikodden, Norway, 1990.

WHEN FLUXUS CAME TO NORWAY

by Per Hovdenakk

Per Hovdenakk is Director of the Henie Onstad Art Center, Norway's international museum of art. The museum has mounted major exhibitions of Joseph Beuys, Christo, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Geoffrey Hendricks, Per Kirkeby and others, all well represented in the museum's collection. The new wing of the museum will incorporate a permanent Fluxus room, to be used for the museum's own collection – one of the largest in Scandinavia – and exhibition of individual Fluxus artists.

WHEN FLUXUS came to Norway, it walked directly into the museum. It arrived in the shape of Ken Friedman. On his way to Helsinki, he stopped in Oslo, and entered my office one grey winter day in 1986. After half an hour, he decided that the Henie-Onstad Art Center should become home of a Fluxus collection. Ken flew back to New York, to clear his house before leaving to live permanently in Scandinavia, and soon parcels started to arrive, and the collection was a fact. Since, it has continued to grow, by donation from Ken and many other Fluxus people. By now it has become an important part of the Art Center's collection, and like other good collections it continues all the time to attract new works. To me, it is a mystery that Fluxus

did not reach Norway until it was museum ripe. The only explanation I can think of, is that Fluxus is too close to the Nordic cultural identity to be taken seriously as something new or something alternative to what was already there.

Strange it may be, but to me, Haavamaal can be read as a score for a Fluxus event. And why did all these Fluxus people travel to Iceland? Did they go to look for Fluxus Odin? Was Tore Hund the first Jackson Mac Low and Saint Olav the Andy Warhol of the Viking age?

Some day we'll know. Ken has started to learn Old Norse.



Photo: Fluxus Code

Goeffrey Hendricks. "Meditation in Time Square." June 2, 1972.

MEETINGS. BEGINNINGS. ENDINGS.

By Geoffrey Hendricks

Fluxus artist Geoffrey Hendricks is known for his poetic and automythological objects and paintings, including the famous sky paintings that he has created on surfaces from canvas and ladders to lines of laundry and automobiles. Seeking new ways to address the poetics of experience, he became an early pioneer of performance art. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, he created performances that have considered classics of the medium. Two of his best-known performances are *Between Two Points* and *Ring Piece*, both documented in books based on Hendricks's own notes and writings. Hendricks played a key role in many of the legendary Fluxus rituals, including the controversial *Fluxmass* celebrated in the Chapel at Rutgers University, his own *Fluxus Divorce* from his former wife and collaborator, Bici Forbes, George and Billie Maciunas's *Flux-wedding*, the *Fluxfuneral* for Maciunas and the *Fluxlux* memorial service and ash-scattering of Robert Watts. Geoffrey Hendricks is a professor of art at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. A major retrospective exhibition of his work is now in the planning stages. It will tour Europe and the United States.

IN 1941, when I was ten years old, Crown Prince Olav of Norway was in Chicago gathering support the Norwegian-American community for the Resistance against the Nazi occupation. My father, proud of his Norwegian parentage went looking for me after school. He wanted to take me to meet the prince, but I had gone off to play with friends along the shore of Lake Michigan, and I missed the opportunity. This was later held up as what could happen by not doing what was expected of one. "Come right home. You do not want to miss the Crown Prince!" However in spite of going my own way then and later, I did meet the Prince Olav.

In 1984, at the Summer Solstice, King Olav V opened my exhibition at the Høvikodden Art Center, together with an exhibition on the Norwegian immigrant "Reise til Amerika". I told him the story, and he smiled, recalling that trip.

Ten years before, in 1974, my father had taken the whole family to Norway for our first visit to the land of our ancestors. For the Summer Solstice, circles in the snow covered mountaintop near Bergen, circles in the snow as the sun set and again as it rose. Meditative rituals there and a short time later in Italy, became *Between Two Points*, and the beginning of my collaboration with Francesco Conz.

In 1951 I went down to visit New York City from college in New England. At the suggestion of my sculpture teacher, Peter Grippe, I went to the Artists Club on 8th Street, to hear John Cage give his lecture on "Nothing." I missed being part of the famous class at the New School in 1957-58, although George Brecht said, "Why don't you come and join it?" I was already enrolled in art history classes at Columbia University, working on my master's degree on Roman Baroque Church ceilings.* The degree

* see Hendricks, Geoffrey. *Between Two Points / Fra Due. Poli*, Edizioni Parie Dispari, Reggio Emilia 1975, including the "Chronology of American Artists, Geoffrey Hendricks/Memories, like dreams, rising out of the past."

seemed important for keeping the job I had just gotten the year before, in 1956, at Rutgers University, where Bob Watts and Allan Kaprow were already teaching. A lot took place in the late 50s and early 60s at Rutgers in New Jersey. (See my article "Fluxritten" in *1962 Wiesbaden Fluxus 1982*, pp. 151-157, Harlekin Art / Berliner künstlerprogramm des DAAD. Wiesbaden/Berlin 1983, René Block, editor.)

Going to Columbia rather than to Cage's class led to another meeting. In the corridors of the Art History Department I encountered Bici Forbes who I knew from High School in Vermont. We were married in 1961.

Bici and I in 1963 or 1964 began a collaborative journal we called *The Friday Book of White Noise*, where we both wrote down scores, ideas, whatever came into our mind, sometimes taking dictation from the other who was perhaps driving the car, or washing dishes. These journals became source material for a lot of work. Bici's *Language Box*, her Black Thumb Summer Institute, my Tire Gardens and Sky paintings, and our Black Thumb Press mailings.

Some images of mine:

Read today's newspaper as if it were a book of mythology.

Dump a truckload of lemons into a New England winter woods.

Dumps flowers from a garbage pail into the center of a pond.

Washing as prelude for musical composition.

Make gardens of artificial flowers and tires.

Make ladder garden with flowers on steps of stepladder.

Free samples: earth, rocks, whatever, in small plastic bags, as give-aways.

Paint sky on everything.

Question: A circle? (with a solid yellow disk).

Some images of Bici's:

Defrost the American flag (small flags in ice cubes).

Fly kites in bed.

Balance an egg.

Egg/Time Event (eggs embedded in plaster).

Many, many workpairs that became two word poems.

Poems made with punctuation marks.

Terminal reading: reading and burning her novel manuscript as a quartet.

Shortly after Dick Higgins started the Something Else Press with the publication of his *Jefferson's Birthday and Postface*, we were riding together on the elevated train out to Queens, and I believe to his performance of "The Tart" at the Sunnyside Boxing Ring. I asked if he would be interested in publishing *The Friday Book of White Noise* as a Something Else publication. He said, "Why don't you start your own press?" Soon after, the Black Thumb Press was born.

March 1965 we did a collaborative reading of selections from *The Friday Book of White Noise* at the Café au GoGo, as part of the Watts and Brecht *Monday Night Letter*.

April 1966 I had a show of my Sky works at Bianchini Gallery in New York, and had a

chocolate ice cream soda with Ray Johnson across 57th Street from the gallery.

In 1970 at the *Happening & Fluxus* exhibition in Cologne, we had more meetings with a new group of friends in Europe.

In 1971, Bici and I celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary with a Fluxus Divorce, our last collaborative work, done together with George Maciunas. An ending, but also beginnings. New York: "Body/Hair", "Ring Piece", "Dream Event." And I was beginning to understand my love of men, my gayness, first in a stormy but creative relation with Stephen Varble. Then, in the autumn of 1975, I met Brian Buczak, and we were together until he died the 4th of July 1987 of AIDS, another ending.

Soon after Brian Buczak and I met I was at work preparing an exhibition for René Block's Gallery in New York at Spring Street and West Broadway. I thought I wanted a mass of paper bags, crumpled, gessoed and painted blue like the sky to fill the floor under a large painting of sky. Brian worked hard helping me get this done. Then in installing the show, they didn't seem to work, and stayed in a box in his studio or mine. That spring I was off to Europe and Brian staying in New York decided he would take them down to the corner of Spring and West Broadway to peddle them. After a while someone came by and asked "Are those by Geoff Hendricks?" Brian replied, "Yes they are, Mr. Silverman. How did you recognize them as Geoff's?" "I have a work of his that I bought in Japan, but how did you recognize me?" Brian replied that he had grown up in Detroit and gone to Art School there. Gil and Lila Silverman were well known in the Detroit art world. In the winter of 1977 George Maciunas ill with cancer asked us to try to think of people who could contribute \$1000 towards his medical expenses in exchange for a group of Fluxboxes. Brian said

"Why don't we write to Gilbert Silverman?" So we did and the next time he was in New York he came up to see us. "He said he didn't know about Fluxus, but was interested in helping people, and that he had work of a number of the Fluxus artists, and that he should know more about the group."

At that time my brother Jon and Barbara Moore had *Backworks* next door, and after we had talked with him for several hours, we took him next door to meet Jon, who went on to show him much more material on Fluxus. And so it was that through Brian painting paper bags blue that were not used in my show at René Block's Gallery that Jon and Gilbert Silverman met.

In 1977 Brian and I started the Money for Food Press, a format for a range of collaborative work. In the summer of 1977 we were in Italy working in Naples and Asolo and Cavriago, and performing in Bologna. That winter when George Maciunas became ill with cancer we were in New Marlborough, Massachusetts helping him finish work. And Joe Jones had come over from Europe. Spring 1978 George had a Flux wedding and asked me to be the Flux minister. Then, after George died, I was catalyst for the Flux funeral which George had suggested should also take place. Earlier, in 1976, after Maciunas was badly beaten, I pushed forward the idea of a Festschrift banquet for George Maciunas that George Brecht had discussed with me in a restaurant in Milan. It took place in Zaccars print shop where George did so much of his printing.

The year after Maciunas died, my father died. At the suggestion of my brother Jon, I made death mask of his face. They became incorporated into some of my work including the sky ladder, *Day to Night* in the Høvikodden collection and *Sound Within(W) Within Sound* which I did at P.S.1 was also a memorial piece to my father.

While Brian was battling his illness, my mother was also dying. She passed away just two months before Brian. Her memorial service took place on Memorial Day. Brian who came to New York the year of the Bicentennial and was intrigued with the flag as image, died on the 4th of July, America Independence Day. The title of his last show in Vancouver Search of *Accidental Significance*. This we also made the title of a memorial book compiled for Brian. There were memorial shows at Barbara Moore's place and at Emily Harvey's Gallery. Philip Glass dedicated a Quartet to Brian, the 4th, The Buczak Quartet.

Robert Filliou died a Tibetan Buddhist death close to the time Brian passed away. The next summer as part of the Festival Danae in Pouilly, France, I performed a work dedicated to Robert. Then that fall of 1988, Bob Watts, long time colleague, friend and, in spirit, a brother, died of cancer. Larry Miller

and Sara Seagull brought it together, with all of us joining in, a great memorial event, *Fluxlux*, at Bob's farm in Pennsylvania, something Bob had left notes and a score for before he died.

Now in 1991, just 50 years after I missed meeting the Crown Prince, King Olav V has died and Norway has a new king.

For the opening of my show at Armin Hundertmark's in Cologne, I did a small performance with a work I call *Cicular Music*, a piece about the phases of the moon and other cycles and sounds, and the small surprises that might happen to us along the way as we travel through time.

From the dung heap of the experiences of life new work grows.

New York and Cologne
Spring 1991

CONCERNING FLUXUS

I never had so much fun as I had with Fluxus. There are just a few things which are as exciting as Fluxus, as spontaneously surprising, without restrictions. I didn't know that such a thing is allowed. Never felt such a big freedom. Fluxus is not so much art, but part of life.

CHRISTINE DIETRICH

fluxus
subjektiv

FREIBORD
ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR LITERATUR UND KUNST
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fluxus

