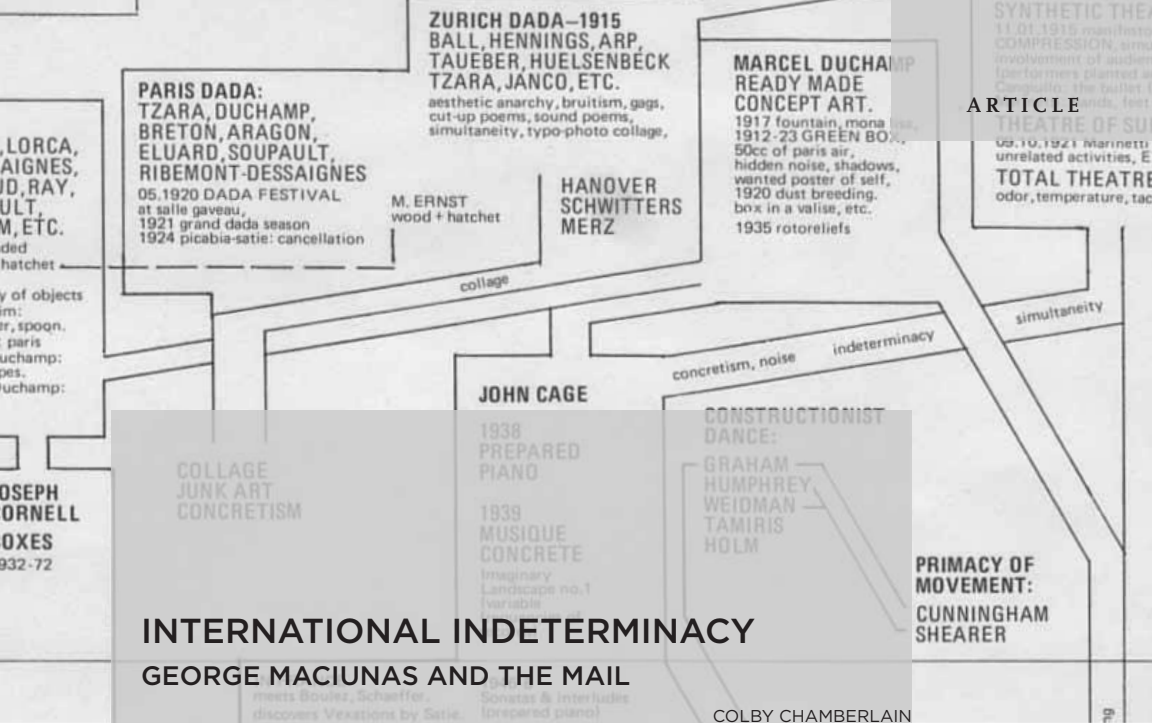


INTERNATIONAL INDETERMINACY

GEORGE MACIUNAS AND THE MAIL

COLBY CHAMBERLAIN

POST CHART

"The main thing I wanted to talk about is the chart," says Larry Miller.[1] So begins George Maciunas's last interview, in March 1978, two months before his death from pancreatic cancer. The video recording shows Maciunas supine on a couch, cocooned in a cardigan, noticeably weak. Miller speaks off camera, asking about "the chart," otherwise known as Maciunas's *Diagram of Historical Development of Fluxus and Other 4 Dimentional,* [sic] *Aural, Optic, Olfactory, Epithelial and Tactile Art Forms*, published in 1973.

"Maybe I ought to describe the general construction," Maciunas says.[2] The chart tracks time as it moves downward, he explains. From left to right it registers what Maciunas calls "style," with happenings at one extreme and Henry Flynt's concept art at the other. "I chose style rather than location because the style is so unlocalised [*sic*], and mainly because of the travels of John Cage. So you could call the whole chart like 'Travels of John Cage' like you could say 'Travels of St. Paul,' you know?"[3] According to Maciunas, Cage's peripatetic concerts and

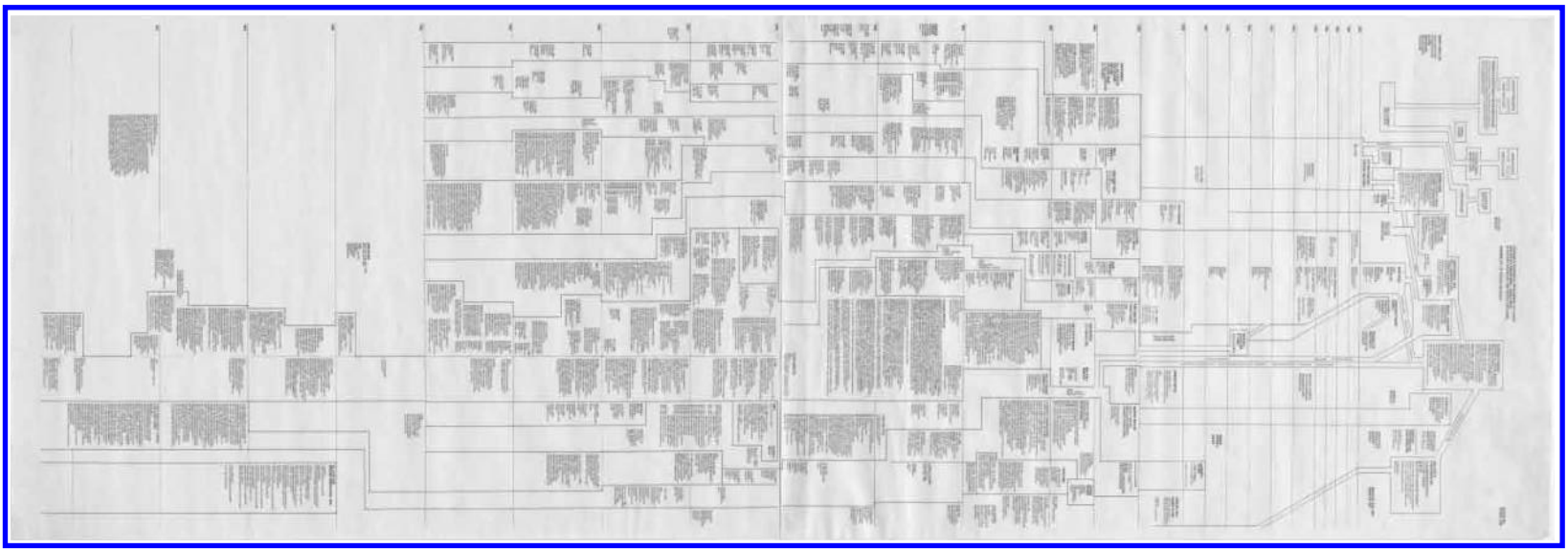
1 Larry Miller, "Transcript of the Videotaped Interview with George Maciunas, 24 March 1978," in *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman (Chichester, UK: Academy Editions, 1998), 183.

2 Miller, "Interview with George Maciunas," 183.

3 Miller, "Interview with George Maciunas," 183.

 doi:10.1162/ARTM_a_00218

George Maciunas. *Diagram of Historical Development of Fluxus and Other 4 Dimentional, Aural, Optic, Olfactory, Epithelial and Tactile Art Forms (Incomplete)*, 1973. Offset lithograph. Digital image © Museum of Modern Art, licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY. Image courtesy of Billie Maciunas.



lectures transmitted his methods and concepts—his "style"—across North America, Europe, and Asia. "Wherever John Cage went he left a little John Cage group; which some admit, some not admit his influence," Maciunas adds. "But the fact is there, that those groups formed after his visits. It shows up very clearly on the chart."[4]

Maciunas here suggests that the *Diagram of Historical Development* documents *legacy*. Yet only a few lines of lineage can assuredly be traced. For instance, two thick conduits feed straight from "Marcel Duchamp" and "Futurist Theater" into "John Cage," unambiguously establishing the link between Cage and the historic avant-garde. By contrast, Cage's influence on the neo-avant-garde appears far more diffuse. As the chart begins its year-by-year descent at 1948, the Cage column simply widens, like the mouth of a river, until it hits 1958, at which point it disperses. Cagean notions occasionally crop up, and little groups do form in the wake of his travels, but, despite Maciunas's claims to the contrary, the extent of his influence is difficult to gauge. The name "John Cage" is nowhere and everywhere. "You could call that chart the Cage Chart," Maciunas states, "Not [the] Fluxus Chart, but Cage."[5]

The graphic proximity of entries on the page often belies their geographic distance around the globe. Under "1960," for instance, La Monte Young's collaborations with Terry Riley and Walter de Maria in Berkeley appear beside Mieko Shiomi's improvisations with Group Ongaku in Tokyo; under "1961," a concert series Maciunas hosted in New York flanks Ben Patterson's solo performances in Cologne. These events took place without any direct connection, in separate cities and specific spaces, such as Maciunas's short-lived AG Gallery on Madison Avenue or Yoko Ono's Chambers Street loft. This situation began to change in October 1961, when Maciunas flew to Wiesbaden, Germany, for a job with the US Air Force Exchange. There, he continued his efforts to publish a magazine titled "Fluxus," only now he could no longer enlist editors or solicit contributions through in-person encounters. Instead, he took to the mail, which dramatically redirected the nature of the Fluxus project. Over the course of the next year, the word "Fluxus" went from referring to a discrete publication to denoting an international avant-garde extending across North America, Western and Eastern Europe, and Japan.

4 Miller, "Interview with George Maciunas," 183.

5 Miller, "Interview with George Maciunas," 184.

In debates over how to characterize Fluxus's internationalism and identify its membership, the term "network" has provided a convenient dodge. It connotes connection without proving cohesion, and conjures the gauzy image of Fluxus as a globe-spanning web. Talk of networks first arose among the artists themselves: George Brecht called Fluxus "a network of active points all equidistant from the center," and Robert Filliou coined "The Eternal Network" to evoke a chain of linked poetic gestures.[6] The term subsequently carried over into Fluxus scholarship, to significant effect. Since the 1990s, it has grounded the argument that Fluxus's international exchange anticipated forms of collaboration now associated with Internet-based art.[7] More recently, it has cast Fluxus as a precedent for applying a network model to other transcontinental avant-gardes, particularly in curatorial practice.[8] Yet in the rush to relate Fluxus to contemporary discourses on global connectivity, insufficient attention has been paid to the specific apparatuses that facilitated its cohesion. As a result, there is a persistent gap between how Fluxus's general aesthetic principles are understood and how its specific material production is analyzed.[9]

A tool for closing this gap can be located in the body of scholarship known in the United States as German media theory. A principal strategy in the work of Friedrich Kittler, Bernhard Siegert, Cornelia Vismann, and others has been to insist on the unacknowledged technical

6 George Brecht to George Maciunas, January 11, 1963, George Brecht Correspondence, Archiv Sohm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (hereafter, AS). See also Natilee Harren, "La Cédille Qui Ne Finit Pas: Robert Filliou, George Brecht, and Fluxus in Villefranche," *Getty Research Journal*, no. 4 (January 1, 2012): 138–40.

7 See Craig J. Saper, "Fluxus as Laboratory," in *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman (Chichester, UK: Academy Editions, 1998), 136–51; Craig J. Saper, *Networked Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Astrit Schmidt-Burkhardt, "Net-Working with Maciunas," *Leonardo* 44, no. 3 (2011): 256–57; Gillian Young, "THE SCORE: How Does Fluxus Perform?," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 34, no. 2 (May 2012): 38–45. Also see Owen F. Smith, "Fluxus Praxis: Exploration of Connections, Creativity, and Community," in *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*, ed. Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark, Leonardo Book series (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 116–38, as well as other essays in the same volume.

8 For instance, see the multicity approach to Dada in Leah Dickerman, ed., *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), or the extensive roster of artists included in the "ZERO network" in Valerie Hillings, ed., *ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2014).

9 Ina Blom's attempt to distinguish between Fluxus's principles and its "sophisticated versions of desktop clutter and executive toys" is exemplary of this gap. See Ina Blom, "Hiding in the Woods," in *The Fluxus Performance Workbook*, ed. Ken Friedman (Trondheim, Norway: Guttorm Nordö, 1990), 59–63.

conditions grounding much poststructural thought, beginning with Kittler's reconceptualization of Foucault's "epistemes" as "discourse networks" (*Aufschreibesysteme*) structured by historical shifts in technologies of data storage and transmission.[10] Here my argument is most indebted to Bernhard Siegert's *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, which foregrounds the "postal-historical a priori" latent in Foucault's lectures on governmentality and Jacques Derrida's play on postal metaphors in *The Post Card*.[11] For art history, German media theory's attention to the material substrates of knowedge production—like memos, binders, or typewriters—is of particular value for studies of Fluxus, Conceptual art, mail art, and other tendencies associated with communication or the "dematerialization" of the art object.[12] It provides models for approaching index cards, newsletters, and other documents not as *mediums*—that is, works on paper bearing an "aesthetic" of administration—but as *media*, a specific juncture of material and technique that I call "paperwork."

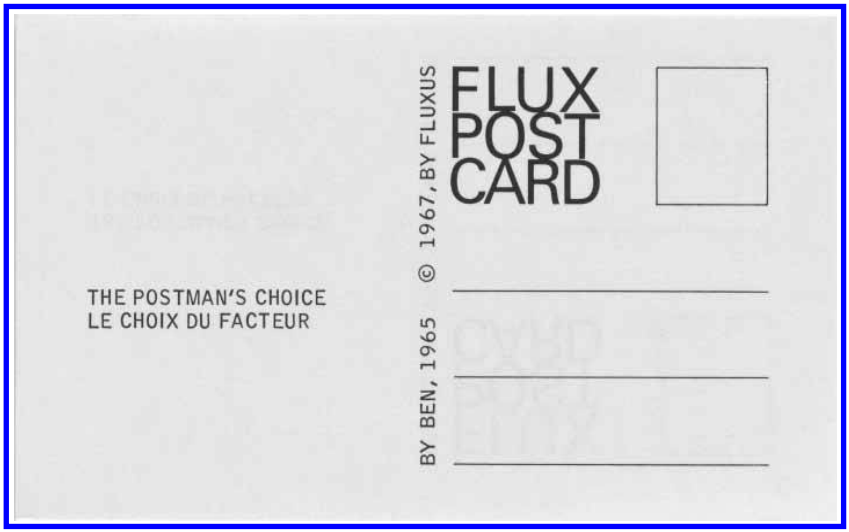
Paperwork, Maciunas is well aware, *functions*. "Now, Ben Vautier will do a very functional postcard where he has one called 'Postman's Choice,'" he says to Miller at the end of the interview. "On one side of the postcard, he'll write one address with a stamp and on another, another address with a stamp."[13] Maciunas is referring to *The Postman's Choice*, a standard-size postcard on whose right side are a rectangle designating a stamp's proper placement and three lines for writing an address. On the left, a title appears in two languages: THE POSTMAN'S CHOICE / LE CHOIX DU FACTEUR. The surprise

10 Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

11 Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, trans. Kevin Repp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 9; Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

12 For an excellent survey of such approaches, see Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Karl Ludwig Pfeiffer, eds., *Materialities of Communication* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988). More recently, many scholars associated with German media theory have shifted their attention to "cultural techniques" (*Kulturtechnik*), the precise material operations that generate cultural distinctions and constitute everyday practices. Notably, Siegert has applied this approach to a number of objects typically considered proper to art history. See Bernhard Siegert, "(Not) in Place: The Grid, or, Cultural Techniques of Ruling Spaces," in *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 97–120.

13 Miller, "Interview with George Maciunas," 198.



Ben Vautier. *The Postman's Choice*, 1965, published 1967. Offset lithograph. Digital image © Museum of Modern Art, licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY. © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

comes when the card is turned over, revealing . . . the same thing yet again. Whereas convention dictates that a postcard bear an image on the recto and all necessary transmission components on the verso, *The Postman's Choice* is doubly verso. This single piece of mail can be addressed simultaneously to two distinct destinations.

Maciunas brings up Vautier's postcard while explaining "functionalism." He attributes the concept to his training in architecture, yet, curiously, his examples all involve the mail. In addition to the postcard, Maciunas describes a stationery set he designed for Wooster Enterprises, a novelty-item business operated by Jaime Davidovich and Judith Henry between 1976 and 1978. The set's envelopes and letters were thematically coupled by the photographic images printed over their surface, of a glove and a hand, respectively. Says Maciunas, "The function is now an envelope and a glove—same function; the glove encloses the hand, right?"[14] The imagery depicts what the paper enacts. As a counterexample, Maciunas points to Robert Watts, whose artist stamps of W. C. Fields and pinup girls he finds decidedly *non*functional.

However, *The Postman's Choice* "functions" differently from the Wooster Enterprises stationery. It operates as a score, a performance that begins at the moment when a sender drops the card into a mailbox and ends when it arrives at a final destination, along a route that its

14 Miller, "Interview with George Maciunas," 193.

George Maciunas. *Hand in Glove*, c. 1975. Cardboard box with plastic lid, containing twelve offset envelopes and twelve offset sheets. Digital image © Museum of Modern Art, licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY. Image courtesy of Billie Maciunas.

sender can neither dictate nor predict. That is, the logic of *The Postman's Choice* is marked by both the principles of functionalism and the strategies of experimental composition. More specifically, the card is a legacy of John Cage. In 1958, Cage delivered at Darmstadt a lecture on "indeterminacy," which he defined as a composer's release of control to "some operation exterior to his mind . . . identifying there with no matter what eventuality."[15] To stress how an indeterminate score would privilege process over product, Cage added that "a recording of such a work has no more value than a postcard."[16] Could Cage have anticipated that someone would one day conceive of a postcard that could operate as both process and product, a score and its outcome compressed into a single flimsy unit of transmission?

Between the Cage Chart and *The Postman's Choice*—the recto and verso of Maciunas's last interview—there is a correspondence. *The*

15 John Cage, "Indeterminacy" (1958), in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 35.

16 Cage, "Indeterminacy," 39.

Postman's Choice is a legacy of Cage, and legacy itself is eminently postal. (Maciunas invokes the *travels* of St. Paul, but far better known are St. Paul's *epistles*.) When Maciunas moved to Wiesbaden and directed his organizational efforts through postal correspondence, the "little groups" that had formed around the world in the wake of Cage's travels were bound together, as much by stamp adhesive as by the word "Fluxus." Simultaneously, Cage's composition methods became embedded in the mail's material operations. This transfer, from concert halls and galleries to the routes and relays of postal networks, was never neutral or without risk, since the mail is an apparatus of the state.[17] German media theory has demonstrated that the regimes of discipline and security first described by Foucault are all grounded in media, so that even a postcard must be considered a mechanism of power relations.[18] As the title of Vautier's postcard implies, the postman exerts control over every sender's affairs.

POST CONCRETISM

The first concert Maciunas organized in Europe was held at Rolf Jährling's Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany. There, Arthus Caspari read aloud Maciunas's opening statement, "Neo-Dada in New York," in German translation. The very term "Neo-Dada"—implying Dada's revival or repetition—established the movement's historical dimension, as did the concert's title "Après John Cage." After Cage: as in following Cage, a legacy of Cage, but also subsequent to Cage, succeeding Cage. Post Cage.

The text of "Neo-Dada in New York" confirms that Maciunas was receiving Cage's ideas. Only a year earlier, Maciunas had understood the music of Cage's prepared piano as "polychromy," a term for

17 In this respect, my understanding of Fluxus's relationship to the postal service differs from that of Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, who has asserted that Fluxus treated "residual forms of public services and systems" as "found spaces and circuits for the noncommercial forms of social exchange, spaces and communicative circuits that can still operate outside of the sphere of a rigorously controlled commercial culture where no gratuitous exchange at all can take place any longer." My approach frames the postal service not as a refuge from the culture industry, but as itself a site of contestation. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Robert Watts: Animate Objects, Inanimate Subjects," in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 541–43.

18 For a nuanced discussion of Siegert's handling of Foucault's thought in *Relays*, see Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, "Going Postal to Deliver Subjects: Remarks on a German Postal a Priori," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 7, no. 3 (December 2002): 151–52.

compositions played on the chromatic scale.[19] Maciunas now deployed a new lexicon. "Concrete" denoted sounds consistent with their material origin, and "artificial" applied to those produced through tuned instruments. "[A] note sounded on a piano keyboard or a bel-canto voice is largely immaterial, abstract and artificial since the sound does not clearly indicate its true source or material reality," explained Maciunas.[20] A concretist, he wrote, would more likely kick a piano than press its keys. Later that evening, Benjamin Patterson advanced a less aggressive demonstration of concretism in *Variations for Double-Bass*, for which he played his instrument with clothespins, clamps, combs, and a feather duster. To close, he filled out a postcard, stamped it, and dropped it through the bass's f-hole, as if it were a mail slot.[21]

Maciunas also articulated his reception of a second Cagean concept: indeterminacy.

> [A]n indeterminate composition approaches greater concretism by allowing nature [to] complete its form in its own course. This requires the composition to provide a kind of framework, an "automatic machine" within which or by which, nature (either in the form of an independent performer or indeterminate-chance compositional methods) can complete the art-form, effectively and independently of the artist-composer.[22]

Maciunas astutely identified two forms of indeterminacy in Cage's thought: indeterminacy with respect to composition (whereby a score is written with the aid of chance techniques) and indeterminacy with respect to performance (wherein a score grants the conductor or individual musicians autonomy to interpret its notations). Maciunas also borrowed from Cage the notion of "nature" as a catch-all for any operation independent of the composer's subjective will.

Maciunas departed from Cage's terminology, however, when he

19 Referring to his early understanding of Cage, Maciunas stated in 1978, "For me the prepared piano was another device to extract musical color from a very, let's say, colorless or abstract instrument." George Maciunas, "This Is George Maciunas Speaking [and] Talking about Fluxus History," April 20, 1978, I.855, Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Archives, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York (hereafter, GLS).

20 George Maciunas, "Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art," 1962, IV.B.7, GLS.

21 Henar Rivière Rios, "Kleines Sommerfest: Après John Cage, Wuppertal, 9 June 1962," in *"The Lunatics Are on the Loose . . .": European Fluxus Festivals 1962–1977*, ed. Petra Stegmann (Potsdam: Down with Art!, 2012), 20–21.

22 Maciunas, "Neo-Dada."

Unknown photographer. Ben Patterson performing his *Variations for Double-Bass*, at "Kleines Sommerfest: Après John Cage," Wuppertal, June 9, 1962. Gelatin silver print. Digital image © Museum of Modern Art, licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

likened the task of composition to designing an "automatic machine." The implications of this metaphor are subtle but significant. Maciunas's early compositions adhere to rigid structures that infuse Cagean indeterminacy with Taylorist efficiency. At "Après John Cage," for example, Caspari, Paik, Jed Curtis, Tomas Schmit, and Schmit's friend Heine von Alemann together performed Maciunas's *In Memoriam to Adriano Olivetti*. Each held a discarded roll of Olivetti adding-machine paper and scanned its columns of numbers line by line, executing a scripted gesture each time they registered a particular digit: "see 3, smack lips; see 4, clear throat." The use of random adding-machine rolls ensured that the performance's outcome would be unpredictable and indeterminate, even as its appearance would be mechanical and rote.

Shortly after "Après John Cage," Patterson wrote to his parents: "This is the letterhead of [an] organization of young artist[s], composers, writers, etc. that I am now working with. More about this later, but if all goes well by 1964 we will have made a world concert tour, starting in Wiesbaden in September 1962, London, Paris, Milan, Vienna, Budapest, Warsaw, Moscow, along the Trans-Siberia railway to Japan, San Francisco, Montreal and New York."[23] No Fluxus yearbooks were yet published, no Fluxus Festivals had yet occurred. Patterson could call Fluxus an "organization" only insofar as "Fluxus" was a word on stationery. Yet already Maciunas was promising his collaborators that Fluxus would extend around the world.

Among the little groups that formed in the wake of Cage's travels, titles frequently contained dedications. This form of address situated scores within a play of correspondence, a structure of sending and receiving whereby each work was both an isolated performance and a discursive proposition that invited further interpretation and revision.[24] Maciunas adopted the convention for a spate of compositions he wrote in early 1962, among them *12 Piano Compositions for Nam June Paik*

23 Benjamin Patterson to Mr. and Mrs. B. A. Patterson, June 26, 1962, I.1005, AS.

24 Hannah Higgins has argued that these dedications internalized and thematized the correspondence among Fluxus's dispersed membership, thus flagging its "transnationalism." Branden Joseph has related them to the "social turn" of post-Cage art. See Hannah Higgins, "Border Crossings: Three Transnationalisms of Fluxus," in *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance*, ed. James Harding and John Rouse (University of Michigan Press, 2006), 265–85; Branden W. Joseph, "The Social Turn," in *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage (A Minor History)* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 59–108.

(January 2, 1962) and *Homage to Dick Higgins* (January 12, 1962). Maciunas's *Homage to La Monte Young* (January 12, 1962) was devised to follow performances of Young's *Composition 1960 #10* ("Draw a straight line and follow it"). It invited the interpreter to "erase, scrape or wash away as well as possible the previously drawn line or lines of La Monte Young or any other lines encountered, like street dividing lines, rulled [*sic*] paper or score lines, lines on sports fields, lines on gaming tables, lines drawn by children on sidewalks etc."

The "postal-historical a priori" for this structure of sending and receiving was Maciunas's gathering and compilation of scores via the mail. On Fluxus letterhead, Maciunas enlisted contributors. "We would like to request your esteemed participation in our effort to publish an international periodical devoted to [a] new tide in art, music, literature[,] etc.," wrote Maciunas to Emmett Williams. "Your very significant work in poetry we think makes their inclusion in the magazine almost mandatory to us."[25] The prospectus he sent to Williams listed several dictionary definitions for Fluxus, including, "2. A continuous moving on or passing, as of a flowing stream," and "3. a stream; copious flow."[26]

This "copious flow" materialized as letters. To streamline output, Maciunas made recourse to a specific paperwork format: the memorandum. In May 1962, he sent out "News-Policy-Letter No. 1," which opened with an explanation of its own exigency:

> Due to: (1) rapidly changing events, (2) increase in number of FLUXUS Yearbook and festival collaborators, (3) time consumed in typing all there [*sic*] developments to each separately, and (4) high cost of letter postage, it is found necessary from now on to issue "News-Policy-Letters" printed periodically of which this will be No. 1.[27]

The memorandum listed its recipients on the cover page. At left, a box set off the roster of Fluxus's coeditors, a combination of collaborators from New York—including Toshi Ichiyanagi, who had recently relocated to Japan—and new contacts in Europe, such as Paik, Wolf Vostell,

25 George Maciunas to Emmett Williams, December 16, 1961, I.562, Jean Brown Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (hereafter, JBP).

26 Maciunas to Williams, December 16, 1961.

27 George Maciunas, "News-Policy Letter No. 1," May 21, 1962, V.A.1.42, GLS.

and Josef Patkowski.[28] A much longer column at right included, among others, Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, Robert Morris, Gyorgi Ligeti, Mauricio Kagel, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Diter Rot, Piero Manzoni, Robert Fill[i]ou, Cornelius Cardew, Williams, Patterson, and, of course, Cage. Over the document's fourteen pages, Maciunas laid out his plans for upcoming publications and concerts. He signed off as "George Maciunas, for Fluxus administration."

The format of "News-Policy Letter No. 1" matched the template of the reports that Maciunas had prepared as a designer at the Olin Mathieson Chemical Corporation in the 1950s.[29] The one major departure from a typical memorandum was the document's title, which riffed off "information policy letter"—a term for official statements circulated through army bases. This minor appropriation of martial jargon hinted at the memorandum's surrounding circumstances: so long as Maciunas worked for the Air Force, Fluxus was a misuse of military resources.[30] Maciunas requisitioned mimeographs and diazotype machines to copy scores, took advantage of gasoline discounts to subsidize concert travel, and exploited his office's access to lower postal rates to facilitate communication. "I am using someone else's APO [Army/Air Post Office] address to save a lot on postage," wrote Maciunas to Jonas Mekas, explaining why his envelope's return address listed Paul Grieco, H.Q. 7480, APO 633. "This guy doesn't even know I am using his address so don't ever send anything via him."[31]

When a two-month assignment granted him direct APO access, Maciunas seized the opportunity to increase the volume of exchange between Wiesbaden and New York. To Young, he wrote, "[S]end with[in] these 2 months PLENTY OF BULK by parcel post."[32] To the Mekas brothers, he requested, "Just any bulk—send NY Times, old rags—anything by parcel post."[33] Maciunas justified his request by

28 Ichiyanagi traveled to Japan in November 1961. There, he and his then-wife Yoko Ono organized a concert tour for John Cage and David Tudor that took place in the fall of 1962. See Midori Yoshimoto, *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 29–32.

29 For instance, see George Maciunas, "Site Assembled Curtain Wall System (MRL-59-PR)," n.d., V.D.57, GLS.

30 See Friedrich Kittler, "Rock Music: A Misuse of Military Equipment," in *The Truth of the Technological World: Essays on the Genealogy of Presence*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 152–64.

31 George Maciunas to Jonas Mekas, January 22, 1962, V.A.1.22, GLS.

32 George Maciunas to La Monte Young, March 27, 1962, V.A.1.49, GLS.

33 George Maciunas to Jonas and Adolfas Mekas, March 27, 1962, V.A.1.20, GLS.

pointing to APO's low cost. "It's very cheap," he exclaimed.[34] However, Maciunas also pleaded thrift whenever he shrank his handwriting to fastidious, millimeters-high lettering. "Use a magnifying glass," he wrote Young, "I am saving on postage."[35] Penny-pinching zeal alone cannot account for Maciunas's performative penmanship, nor does it adequately explain his excitement over bulk mailings.

To articulate a rationale for Maciunas's desire to overload postal channels, we must establish the psychic and political dimensions of mail delivery in the early 1960s. For this, we can look to Thomas Pynchon, who—during the same period of time when Maciunas was coordinating the first Fluxus concerts via APO—imagined a wildly extensive diversion of military mail in the course of writing his novel *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965). During a visit to the fictional California town of San Narciso, the book's protagonist Oedipa Maas uncovers WASTE, a secret mail service routed through the interoffice delivery of the Yoyodyne Corporation, "one of the giants of the aerospace industry."[36] Her sleuthing traces WASTE back to the Trystero, couriers that challenged the Thurn and Taxis postal monopoly during the Holy Roman Empire, then transferred in the mid-1800s to the United States, where they came to handle correspondence for a cross-section of citizens who opted out of US mail as "a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery."[37]

The Trystero's "800-year tradition of postal fraud" was a fiction, but, according to Bernhard Siegert, Pynchon's exploration of empire and communication was otherwise historically accurate.[38] The mail originated in imperial courier services, *instrumenti regni* that transmitted instructions to "act in accordance."[39] In 1600, the viceroy of the Netherlands granted the Taxis Post permission to convey private correspondence. This shift in patronage, from the sovereign to the population, marked a new understanding of the post and, moreover, the state: both constituted, and were constituted by, subjects. These

34 Maciunas to Jonas and Adolfas Mekas, March 27, 1962.
35 George Maciunas to La Monte Young, July 3, 1962, V.A.1.49, GLS.
36 Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (New York: Harper PereniaI, 1999), 15.
37 Pynchon, *Crying of Lot 49*, 101.
38 Pynchon, *Crying of Lot 49*, 79.
39 Siegert, *Relays*, 7.

"subjects" (both individuals and their affairs) were now inscribed within state power. "Once compulsory use of the mail had defined the state's monopoly on power over discourse," writes Siegert, "every letter writer was a subject of posting."[40] The postal apparatus—what Pynchon might call the machinery of the Republic—had been activated.

"Write by WASTE," Oedipa hears a mother tell her son. "Remember. The government will open it if you use the other."[41] In the United States, Congress routinely treated postal regulations as grounds for political proxy fights, beginning with debates in the 1800s over the circulation of abolitionist pamphlets. In 1962, red-baiting legislators tacked on to a postal-rates bill the stipulation that communist propaganda be delivered only at the addressee's formal request. Lists of self-identified recipients were later surreptitiously forwarded to the House Un-American Activities Committee.[42] Perhaps Maciunas had this in mind when he mailed a printed Fluxus prospectus to Mekas and penned the word "Soviet" over the masthead.[43] The Post Office's role as an instrument of surveillance and interception was a matter of public record.

What Pynchon and Maciunas shared is an understanding of the postal service's place in the machinery of the Republic—its connection to the military industrial complex of Southern California and to the Air Force offices of Wiesbaden. The opening of courier routes to private correspondence in no way interrupted their function as *instrumenti regni*. Any act of communication could lead to conscription or capture. Two small drawings reveal how Pynchon and Maciunas differently imagined resistance to this postal predicament. In *Crying of Lot 49*, the WASTE logo resembles the horn in the Thurn-and-Taxis coat of arms, only with a few additional lines that Oedipa Maas describes as an "extra little doojigger sort of coming out of the bell." "It sounds ridiculous," another character says, "but my guess is it's a mute."[44] In a letter to Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles, Maciunas doodled his own version of a postal horn, directly beneath a request that they mail him

40 Siegert, *Relays*, 53.
41 Pynchon, *Crying of Lot 49*, 100.
42 Dorothy Ganfield Fowler, *Unmailable: Congress and the Post Office* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), 155–60.
43 Maciunas to Mekas, January 22, 1962.
44 Pynchon, *Crying of Lot 49*, 77.

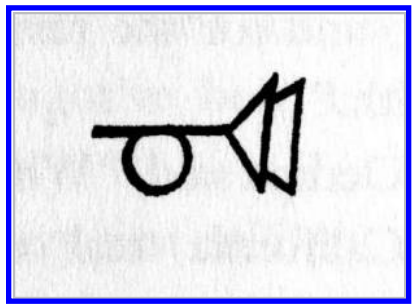
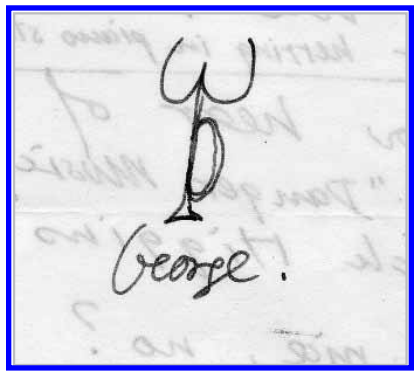


Illustration: the post horn "Trystero" symbol from *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon. Copyright © 1965, 1966 by Thomas Pynchon. Copyright renewed 1993, 1994 by Thomas Pynchon. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers and Melanie Jackson Agency.



George Maciunas. Drawing of reimagined postal horn, 1962. Detail from letter to Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles, March 1962. bpk Bildagentur/ Staatsgalerie Stuttgart/Art Resource, NY. Image courtesy of Billie Maciunas.

"PLENTY OF BULK SOLIDS. ANYTHING."[45] Like the WASTE emblem, Maciunas's horn bears extra lines: two matching curves on either side of the mouthpiece that read, unmistakably, as a pair of ass cheeks, between which the horn is firmly wedged.

Both drawings presuppose the metaphoric link between musical instruments and *instrumenti regni*, between postal horn and postal apparatus. For Pynchon, the mute over the WASTE horn signified a strategy of silent refusal. A disaffected plurality protested the state by removing their correspondence from its machinery. "Whatever else was being denied them out of hate, indifference to the power of their vote, loopholes, simple ignorance, this withdrawal was their own, unpublicized, private."[46] By contrast, Maciunas advocated direct

45 George Maciunas to Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles, March 1962, Dick Higgins Correspondence, AS.

46 Pynchon, *Crying of Lot 49*, 101.

tampering. His scatological doodle portrayed his request for bulky deliveries as the abuse of a music instrument—akin to Ben Patterson's attack on his double-bass with clothespins and clamps. At "Après John Cage," Maciunas had identified strategies of blockage and interference as concretism.[47] The following year, when he advocated deploying these strategies across an entire city, he would call them sabotage.

POST SABOTAGE

As Maciunas mailed out further memoranda, the word "Fluxus" shifted its application: from the name of a periodical in "News-Policy Letter No. 1," to the title of a concert series in "News-Policy-Letter No. 2 (Fluxus Festival Only)," to a general appellation in "Fluxus News Let[t]er No. 5."[48] Fluxus had become a means of address. "Fluxus News-Policy Letter No. 6," dated April 6, 1963, had fewer recipients than No. 1, but nearly all were performers or composers featured in concerts Maciunas had organized over the preceding year, in Wiesbaden, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Paris, and Düsseldorf.[49] Higgins, Knowles, and Patterson, alumni of the Europe concerts, had already come back to New York. Now Maciunas was planning his own return, laying the groundwork for a Fluxus Festival that fall.[50]

Under the heading "Proposed Propaganda Action for Nov[ember] Fluxus in NYC," the newsletter outlined a summertime campaign of "sabotage & disruption" that would build anticipation for future events by flooding the city's transportation and communication systems with word of Fluxus.[51] Trucks and automobiles bearing Fluxus posters would halt traffic at tunnels and bridges; signage and cumbersome instruments would "clog up" subway cars; "prepared" editions of local newspapers would count down the days until the festival's

47 Maciunas's interest in concretism as a means of blockage also connects to his well-known preoccupation with constipation and shitting (i.e., flux). Maciunas's most direct merger of concretism and corporeal function is likely the score *Solo for Sick Man* (January 4, 1962), which designated the coughs and sneezes of an ailing body as equivalents to the tacks and nails in a prepared piano. For further discussion of Maciunas's toilet humor, see Henry Flynt, "Mutations of the Vanguard: Pre-Fluxus, during Fluxus, Late Fluxus," in *Ubi Fluxus Ibi Motus, 1990–1962*, ed. Achille Bonito Oliva (Milan: Mazzotta, 1990), 112; Julia Robinson, "Maciunas as Producer: Performative Design in the Art of the 1960s," *Grey Room* 33 (Fall 2008): 72.

48 See George Maciunas, "News-Policy-Letter No. 2 (Fluxus Festival Only)," July 12, 1962, V.F.8, GLS; George Maciunas, "Fluxus News Let[t]er No. 5," January 1, 1963, V.F.9, GLS.

49 George Maciunas, "Fluxus News-Policy Letter No. 6," April 6, 1963, V.F.9, GLS.

50 Maciunas, "Fluxus News-Policy Letter No. 6."

51 Maciunas, "Fluxus News-Policy Letter No. 6."

kickoff. Cultural institutions were primary targets. Sneeze bombs would derail concerts, large deliveries of rentable bric-a-brac would block theater entrances, and group performances of La Monte Young's *Composition 1960 #10* would crowd sidewalks outside museums.[52]

In response, Paik and Schmit submitted additional proposals, with Schmit going so far as to suggest calling in bomb threats to shutter museums on Fluxus concert days.[53] However, it was precisely the newsletter's terrorist tinge that generated resistance among the majority of its recipients. Wrote Higgins, "Not one of the people here [in New York], except for Flynt, who's got dementia pr[a]ecox, approves [of] that letter, and none of us intends to participate if this stuff is carried out."[54] The most vociferous objection came from Mac Low. "I am, however, against all sabotage & needless disruption," he typed in underline-riddled all-caps. "I consider them unprincipled, unethical & immoral in the basic sense of being antisocial & hurtful to the very people whom my cultural activities are meant to help." To offer a positive alternative, he added, "Rather than clogging things I w[oul]d prefer (if funds were available) to help unclog them."[55]

Here, clearly, Maciunas's address had gone awry. This failure can be attributed to two errors in judgment. First, the newsletter borrowed heavily from the rhetoric of Henry Flynt, who two months prior had led a group to picket the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the New York Philharmonic with signs reading "Demolish Lincoln Center!" and "No More Art!" From Wiesbaden, Maciunas had assumed that Flynt's stance against "serious culture" enjoyed greater consensus than it did.[56] "I'm not opposed to serious

52 Maciunas, "Fluxus News-Policy Letter No. 6."

53 Tomas Schmit, "Some Activities for the Biggest Town in the World," n.d. (ca. spring 1963), Box 277, AS.

54 Dick Higgins to Emmett Williams, n.d. (ca. 1963), I.55.13, JBP.

55 Jackson Mac Low to George Maciunas and Tomas Schmit, April 25, 1963, I.31.14, JBP.

56 Maciunas overestimated Flynt's influence in part because he conflated Flynt's positions with those of George Brecht, whom Maciunas considered to be Fluxus's most significant artist. Maciunas was correct in recognizing that both Flynt and Brecht advanced models of aesthetic experience that operated outside the frame of art institutions. Only Flynt, however, viewed his position as a quasi-militant rejection of official culture. Brecht himself pointed out this discrepancy, writing to Flynt and Maciunas, "You both seem to feel it necessary to oppose very actively institutions you feel are obsolete or pernicious, or both (Art, Serious Culture, etc.) whereas I see anti-art as an aspect of art, for example, and an indifference to them both." George Brecht to George Maciunas and Henry Flynt, n.d., George Maciunas Correspondence, AS.

culture—quite the contrary," wrote Mac Low. "I'm all for it & I hope & consider my own work is a genuine contribution to it."[57]

Second, Maciunas's experience hosting concerts at AG Gallery would have bolstered his confidence that his New York contacts would endorse a campaign of clogging. On the final day of AG Gallery's lease, Ray Johnson staged its closing event, cryptically publicized as *Nothing*. Recalled Maciunas:

> Now the gallery had the narrow stair going up to the second floor and by the time the evening was scheduled it was already dark, so there were no lights in the stairs. What Ray Johnson did is bring a large barrel of little dowels . . . and turned them over so that the whole stair was covered with those dowels, like a small incline. . . . [T]he audience kept coming and not a single one could get up. They were all sliding down since we had this inexhaustible supply of dowels that we could turn over at the top of the stair.[58]

The event at AG Gallery was the first of several "Nothings" Johnson organized. He later described them as "an attitude as opposed to a happening," rhetorically setting them apart from the milieu of Allan Kaprow, and in line with the legacy of Cage.[59] Johnson's invocation of "attitude" framed *Nothing*'s absence of activity as an occasion for attentiveness, akin to the bracketed silence in Cage's *4'33"*. Maciunas derived a different lesson from *Nothing*. His recollection emphasized the pile of wooden dowels impeding entry into the gallery—a viable precedent for the sabotage proposal to block theater doorways with bulky deliveries.

Ray Johnson is best known as the nominal father of mail art. Beginning in the late 1950s, he took to mailing proto-Pop collages to a wide circle of recipients, among them Dick Higgins. Johnson was hardly the first artist to distribute work via the post, but he nevertheless occupies a privileged place in histories of mail art, in large part for the ethics his practice promulgated. The principles of ongoing exchange, frequent forwarding, unmotivated generosity, and democratic participation that informed Johnson's own New York Correspondence School

57 Mac Low to Maciunas and Schmit, April 25, 1963.

58 Maciunas, "Fluxus History."

59 Quoted in "Send Letters, Postcards, Drawings, and Objects . . . ," *Art Journal* 36, no. 3 (1977): 238.

are discernable in the unwritten rules of Ken Friedman's "Fluxus West" activities in California, the distribution lists maintained by Image Bank and *FILE* in Canada, Jarosław Kozłowski's and Andrzej Kostołowki's NET in Poland, and György Galántai's and Júlia Klaniczay's Artpool "active archive" in Hungary. Perhaps it is more than coincidental, then, that Maciunas's memory of *Nothing*'s flooded stairway so vividly resembles a dream of Franz Kafka's:

> A mailman brought two registered letters from you. . . . God, they were magic letters! I kept pulling out page after page, but the envelopes never emptied. I was standing halfway up a flight of stairs and . . . had to throw the page I had read all over the stairs in order to take more letters out of the envelopes. The whole staircase was littered from top to bottom with the loosely heaped pages I had read, the resilient paper creating a great rustling sound.[60]

This dream appears in the barrage of correspondence that Kafka directed toward his fiancée, Felice Bauer. Analyzing this passage, Siegert argues that Kafka's dream marks nothing less than the moment when the implementation of prepaid stamps and other standardizations had turned the postal service into a closed information system, one that could be calculated according to Claude Shannon's mathematical theory of communication. "What this means," writes Siegert, "is that signals transmitted by the communications system at a given time t_n are not viewed as the function of a data source or receiver—not, let's say, as the expressions or intentions of people looking for the understanding of other people—but instead as a function of factors in the system of communication itself."[61] Whereas once the mail could be conceived as discrete letters transmitted from one individual to another, now it was a circuit processing an undifferentiated volume of printed matter.

Siegert's assertions hum with the antihumanist hyperbole typical of German media theory, but they are nevertheless instructive in distinguishing between Johnson's mail art and Maciunas's postal tactics.[62]

60 Quoted in Siegert, *Relays*, 98.

61 Siegert, *Relays*, 99.

62 For a discussion of the rhetorical excesses attributed to Kittler and his followers, see Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, *Kittler and the Media* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 124–26.

Regardless of whether his individual collages acknowledged their conditions of circulation, Johnson's practice rested on the premise (and promise) of the understanding of other people. By contrast, Maciunas paid greater attention to how the postal service functioned as a technical system that could be overloaded or otherwise manipulated, as is evident from his sabotage proposals:

> 3. Stuffing postal boxes with thousands of packages (containing heavy bricks etc.) addressed to various newspapers, galleries, artists etc. bearing no stamps & bearing as as [*sic*] return address various galleries, concert hall, museums. Either "sender" or receiver would be bound to pay for these "packages."[63]

In Maciunas's scheme, "sender" and "receiver" no longer designated writing and reading individuals; they were simply factors in the communication system. His plan presumed the utter inflexibility of postal protocols. Once inserted into the system, each brick-laden package would inevitably arrive at a destination and exact a postage fee.

Even as he plotted to exploit the post's vulnerabilities, Maciunas still depended upon it for maintaining collectivity. To mend the rift created by his sabotage newsletter, Maciunas prepared yet another newsletter. The following month, he mailed out "Fluxus News Letter No. 7," where he summarized the sabotage proposals made by Schmit and Paik, as well as the counterproposals by Mac Low and Flynt.[64] He then acknowledged the "considerable misunderstanding" triggered by "News-Policy Letter No. 6" and insisted that it had been disseminated only to provoke further discussion, wryly adding, "(which it did—partly)."[65]

Of all Maciunas's propaganda-action proposals, only one was ever executed. In March 1964, Vautier and Knowles took to Canal Street to perform several scores on city sidewalks, including Young's *Composition 1960 #10*. Maciunas photographed the event and later published the image in an issue of the Fluxus newspaper *cc VTRE*. The caption reads, "La Monte Young: Composition 1960 No. 10 just performed by Ben Vautier during fluxus street theatre [*sic*] being

63 Maciunas, "Fluxus News-Policy Letter No. 6."
64 George Maciunas, "Fluxus News Letter No. 7," May 1, 1963, V.F.9, GLS.
65 Maciunas, "Fluxus News Letter No. 7."

terminated by [a] uniformed spectator."[66] Staging outdoor concerts indeed gained Fluxus a new audience, albeit an undesirable one: policemen.

POST INDETERMINACY

Fluxus's transcontinental dispersal was self-evident to its correspondents, but it possessed no visual correlate until Chieko (later Mieko) Shiomi devised her collaborative composition *Spatial Poem No. 1* in 1965. Maciunas had recruited Shiomi for Fluxus via the post. He first learned of her work via Ichiyanagi, after she played in his concert at Sogetsu Art Center as part of Group Ongaku, a Tokyo-based music ensemble.[67] Later, Paik encouraged Shiomi to send Maciunas her *Endless Box* (1963), a Russian doll-like assembly of paper containers. Maciunas so admired the work that he ordered ten additional copies, which subsidized Shiomi's flight to New York in 1964. There, she participated in the Perpetual Fluxfest at Washington Square Gallery and worked with Maciunas to prepare Fluxus editions, including her own *Events and Games* (1964).[68] Shortly before returning to Japan in July 1965, she mailed a request to a hundred-odd addresses Maciunas kept on file.

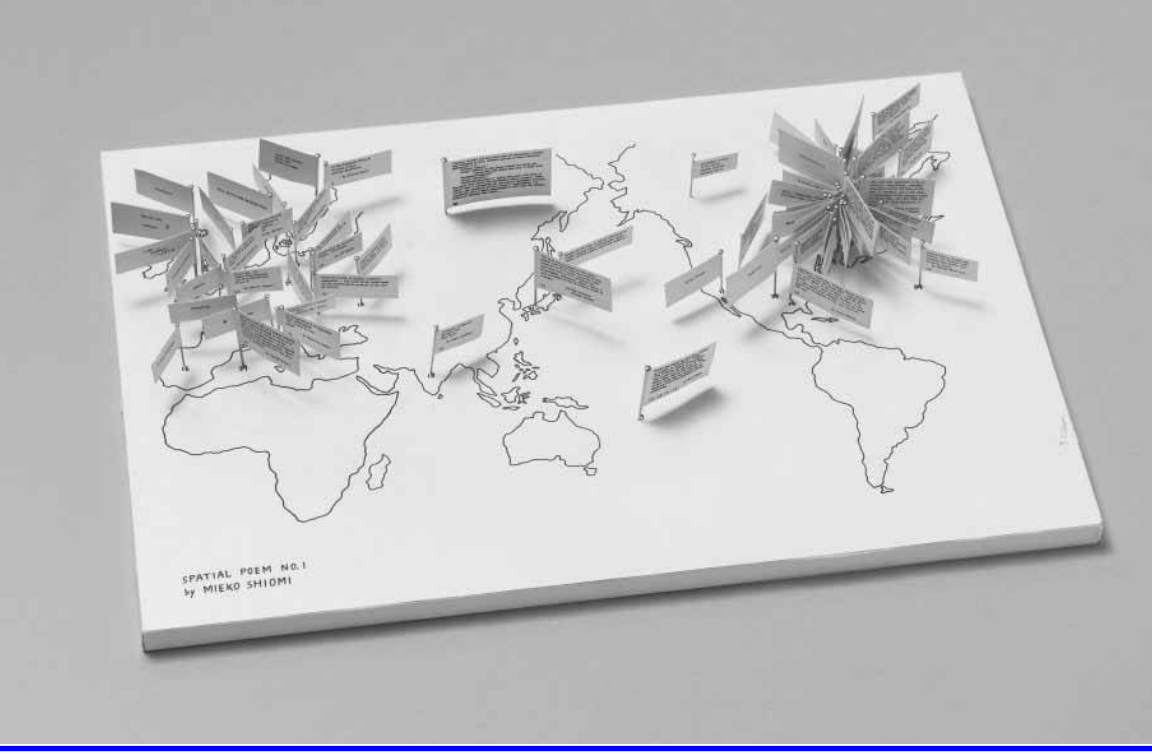
> A SERIES OF SPATIAL POEMS
> No. I
> Write a word (or words) on the enclosed card and place it somewhere.
> Let me know your word and place so that I can make a distribution chart of them on a world map, which will be sent to every participants [*sic*].
> Chieko Shiomi

Shiomi's score stretched a poem around the earth. Eric Andersen's "PRESENT" in Copenhagen could be read in tandem with Takako Saito's "MELT" in New Jersey, or with Barbara Moore's "ENVELOPE"

66 George Maciunas, *Vaudeville TouRnamEnt (cc VTRE No. 6)*, July 1965, Jean Brown Collection, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. Also reproduced are photographs of Vautier and Knowles performing Takehisa Kosugi's *Anima I* (1961) and Robert Watts's *2 Inches* (1962).

67 Maciunas recorded Ichiyanagi's recommendation of Shiomi in his card file. See George Maciunas, "Toshi Ichiyanagi, His Letter, Jan 21 1962," I.31.41, JBP.

68 See Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 139–67.



Mieko Shiomi. *Spatial Poem No. 1*, 1965. Ink on board with sixty-nine offset cards mounted on pins, and typewriting on paper with cardboard box. Digital image © Museum of Modern Art, licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY. © 2018 Mieko Shiomi.

at the Something Else Press office in New York. Shiomi charted these contributions in an "object poem," a foam-board map stuck with pins, each waving a small paper flag that indicated, on one side, a given word, and, on the other, its location. The pins clustered over North America, Europe, and Japan. A few flags stood in the ocean, representing guesses at the whereabouts of words in perpetual transit, including "LOVE JOE SHIOMI" (inside Filliou's wallet) and Maciunas's "CARD" (inserted in a bottle and tossed into the Hudson).

That same year, Cage—who deposited "EGG" at Stony Point, New York—published the first installment of "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)," a mosaic of anecdotes and observations written in the alternating typefaces of an IBM Selectric. The text chronicles Cage's attempts to ascertain the number of utilities now "global in extent."[69] Cage had inherited from Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller a technophilic confidence that the worldwide expansion of electricity, telephone, and other services would ameliorate social conditions and reduce competition for resources. The image

69 John Cage, "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) 1965," in *A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 4.

of a globe divided by national boundaries would give way to one enmeshed in cables, pipes, and wires.

Cage's faith in worldwide services had its limits, however. In the 1967 installment of "Diary," he noted: "Something needs to be done about the postal services. Either that or we should stop assuming just because we mailed something it will get where we sent it."[70] In other words, a letter will not always arrive at its destination. Cage's complaint is the underlying conceit for *The Postman's Choice*, one of five ideas for postcards that Vautier sent to Maciunas in 1965. "This doublefaced postcard is [a] WONDERFUL PIECE!!!"[71] Maciunas responded. Immediately he asked to print a thousand copies. Of the other four proposals, Maciunas said nothing. What accounted for the appeal of a postcard destined for two addresses?

Years later, in his final interview, Maciunas praised Vautier for his functionalist approach to the post. "Now the post card is used, he understands the medium and he uses the medium for his piece."[72] The "medium" of *The Postman's Choice* is not the postcard per se, but the entire postal system. A postcard, Siegert writes, possesses "a materiality consisting of self-reference to its own standards."[73] Essentially a stamp bearing an address, a postcard reduces communication to its minimum technical requirements. *The Postman's Choice* destabilizes those requirements by introducing indeterminacy. The card's construction converts the post's own procedures into an "automatic machine" that completes the composition independently of its author's (or sender's) intentions. Maciunas's contribution to Vautier's idea was to recommend printing a thousand. This calculation had less to do with fulfilling customer demand than with causing system overload. "I can see the Post Office being all gummed up in confusion!" Maciunas enthused.[74] No need for concretist clogging with rags or wrapped-up bricks. The postal apparatus could be undone by indeterminacy.

Shiomi's *Spatial Poem* seems at first to affirm Cage's vision of frictionless global communication. No national boundaries run across Shiomi's map, only scattered coordinates arranged into a network of

70 John Cage, "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1967," in *A Year from Monday*, 150.

71 George Maciunas to Ben Vautier, January 10, 1966, V.A.1.40, GLS.

72 Miller, "Interview with George Maciunas," 198.

73 Siegert, *Relays*, 154.

74 Maciunas to Vautier, January 10, 1966.

correspondence and exchange. Hannah Higgins argues that *Spatial Poem* emphasizes shared experience; it catalogs variations on a single gesture enacted within a fixed time frame.[75] Such a reading overlooks how every part of Shiomi's globe-spanning score was shuttled through the mail. Even the object-poem itself was produced via the post: Maciunas sent its pins, flags, and other components to Shiomi after she returned to Japan.

A few contributions to *Spatial Poem* did call attention to the piece's postal conditions. For a card bearing the phrase "HUNGARIAN MYSTERY PRINCESS," Robert Watts suggested "checking with knowledgeable postal authorities" to track its progress from New Jersey to London to Nukualofa, Tonga. Both William Meyer's "ONE MORE" and Tomas Schmit's "EXACTLY ELEVEN WORDS IS WHAT IM WRITING ON THIS CARD" were mailed to nonexistent addresses. Like *The Postman's Choice*, they could go astray, not arrive, or be intercepted. They could wind up in the dead letter office or, in sufficient quantities, cause clogging.

Spatial Poem No. 1 and *The Postman's Choice* together demonstrate the two sides, the recto and verso, of Fluxus's entry into the post. The post sustained Fluxus, yet, in contradistinction to Cage's technophilic outlook on telecommunication, the post was never a neutral conduit. Every letter bore traces of state power, and every act of transmission risked capture—unless, of course, measures were taken to ensure escape.

POST COMBAT

From Fluxus News-Policy Letter, to Fluxus Newsletter, to FluxNewsLetter—throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, Maciunas's missives continued to arrive. One newsletter, from May 1975, apprised its recipients of a piece currently underway:

> FLUX COMBAT WITH NEW YORK STATE ATTORNEY
> (& POLICE) BY GEORGE MACIUNAS (EVENT IN PROGRESS)
>
> a) Attorney General's arsenal of weapons: some 30 subpoenas to Maciunas and all his friends, interrogation of his friends, warrant for arrest of Maciunas, search warrants, 4 angry and frustrated marshals and policemen armed with clubs.

75 Higgins, "Border Crossings," 270–74.

> B) Maciunas' arsenal of weapons: humorous, insulting and sneering letters to Attorney General, various disguises (gorilla masks, bandaged head, gas mask, etc.) photos of these disguises sent to Att. General. Flux fortress (for keeping away the marshals & police: various unbreakable doors with giant cutting blades facing out, reinforced with steel pipe braces, camouflaged doors, dummy and trick doors and ceiling hatches, filled or backed with white powder, liquids, smell extracts etc. [F]unny messages behind each door, real escape hatches and tunnels leading to other floors, vaults etc. [V]arious warning alarm systems. [V]arious precautions in entering and departing flux-fortress. After termination of this combat (possibly flight from New York State) documentation of this event will be published by Maciunas (copies of letters, disguise photos, photos of various doors and hatches and photos of escape etc.)[76]

The thirty-odd subpoenas from New York Attorney General Lawrence Ravetz were requests for information pertaining to Good Deal Realty, the corporation Maciunas had formed for the Fluxhouse Cooperative at 141 Wooster Street.[77] Maciunas declared the confrontation an "event" and collected the resulting paper trail for inclusion in a FluxKit.

The strategy behind "flux combat" was to avoid being addressed. In a letter dated April 1, 1975, Maciunas admonished Ravetz for attempting to reach him by detaining his friends, and then tauntingly suggested additional candidates for interrogation: "Since you are obviously running out of persons to harass, I include some names and their phones. At least these names resemble mine," he wrote, typing out the phone numbers for Machuca, Macinnis, Ma Sin Kan, Macanas, McCannon, and other loose Maciunas homonyms. Upon learning that Ravetz's office was seeking his photograph, he mailed in a portrait of himself sporting a gorilla mask. He fortified his front door with guillotine blades and equipped his apartment with an escape-hatch. The May 1975 newsletter introduced an additional tactic for evasion: disappearing into the mail.

---

76 George Maciunas, "Flux Newsletter," May 3, 1975, V.F.15, GLS.

77 The minutes of a stockholder meeting for the 141 Wooster Street cooperative explains the circumstances behind the Attorney General's inquiries: Good Deal Realty lacked a formal prospectus, and Maciunas was at the time under an injunction not to deal or sell stock certificates. See George Maciunas, "Stockholders of Good Deal Realty Corp 141 Wooster St. Meeting of October 18, 1974," 1974, VI.A.41, GLS.

On the newsletter copy sent to Shiomi, Maciunas added a handwritten request:

> Dear Mieko,
> Could you mail me in an envelope a blank postcard[?] I need it for item 4 (on other side). I will write a message and then send it to you to mail to [the] Attorney General in N.Y. It will look like I am in Japan. I will do this from all over the world. Absolutely confuse him.[78]

Maciunas mailed related requests to several other newsletter recipients. With the aid of his international correspondents, Maciunas detached his messages from a fixed address, leveraging the truth-value of cancelled stamps to chart an imaginary itinerary.

In a 1965 interview, Cage stated, "Though I don't actively engage in politics, I do as an artist have some awareness of art's political content, and it doesn't include policemen."[79] The comment was in reference to Allan Kaprow's decision in *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts* (1959) to give the audience seating instructions. For Cage, the card's command recapitulated the "policed circumstance" of antiquated concert conventions: musicians following a conductor through a composer's fixed score, an audience packed together into rows.[80] Cage regarded his own composition methods as means to achieve an "un-policed" concert, which he termed an "anarchist moment."[81]

Cage was skeptical as to whether his own principles could be extended past the concert situation. In the same interview, he stated: "The lovely movement of philosophical anarchism in the United States that did quite a lot in the 19th century finally busted up because in the large population centers its ideas were not practical."[82] The exigencies of urban density demanded policing. In the "Diary" lectures, however, Cage seemed to locate in utilities the nascent potential for leveling power relations worldwide. "I'm an anarchist, same as you are when you're telephoning, turning on/off the lights, drinking water," he wrote

78 George Maciunas to Mieko Shiomi, May 3, 1975, V.A.1.35, GLS.
79 Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner, "An Interview with John Cage," *Tulane Drama Review* (1965): 69.
80 Kirby and Schechner, "Interview with John Cage," 69.
81 Kirby and Schechner, "Interview with John Cage," 69.
82 Kirby and Schechner, "Interview with John Cage," 69.

in the 1966 installment.[83] His ebullience overlooked how utility resources like water or fuel could themselves become the objects or instruments of conflict, or how expanded telecommunication might intensify police surveillance—a blind spot that Branden Joseph has characterized as Cage's "ultimate incapacity or utopian refusal to come to terms with modes of power that operate in anything other than sovereign form."[84]

For Maciunas, by contrast, an "un-policed" circumstance required fortified entries, escape hatches, false names, and forged addresses. *Flux Combat* testifies to his canny understanding of the postal medium. The definition of a legal subject has long been riveted to receiving mail at a fixed location. "To withdraw addressability or to make access to the slot in the door impossible therefore is a violation of the fundamental laws of human existence," writes Siegert. "Revealing our existence in the form of an address is consequently a matter for the police."[85] Louis Althusser once claimed that a policeman's call almost always arrives at its destination. "Experience shows that the practical telecommunication of hailings is such that they hardly ever miss their man."[86] Communication, however, could be tampered with, through gags of blockage or diversion that interrupted or repurposed the postal apparatus's designated functions.

Planning notes for *Flux Combat* reveal that Maciunas had wanted to send picture postcards from a slew of exotic locations: Antarctica, Siberia, the Seychelles.[87] In practice, however, he obtained postcards through his mailing list. *Flux Combat* was, like *Spatial Poem No. 1*, a collective composition. Many postcards addressed to Ravetz remain in Maciunas's archives, awaiting incorporation into an indefinitely postponed Flux-Kit.[88] Others were indeed mailed to the Attorney General's office.[89]

---

83 John Cage, "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1966," in *A Year from Monday*, 53.

84 Branden W. Joseph, "Flicker," in *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*, 337.

85 Siegert, *Relays*, 116.

86 Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation" (1970) in *"Lenin and Philosophy" and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 118.

87 George Maciunas, "AG Event," n.d. (ca. 1975), V.B.1.194, GLS.

88 For postcards addressed to Ravetz from Australia, France, Greece, the United Kingdom, and Hungary, see Box 288, AS.

89 For mentions of postcards being sent, see Branko Vucicevic to George Maciunas, n.d. (ca. 1975), I.31.39, JBP; Charles Dreyfus to George Maciunas, July 18, 1975, I.30.42, JBP; George Maciunas to Daniel Spoerri, n.d. (ca. 1975), I.31.32, JBP.

(At least one of Maciunas's associates, Robert Watts, suspected that the subterfuge had actually succeeded in curbing Ravetz's pursuit.)[90] Perhaps some assiduous agent of the law examined these postcards' canceled stamps and marked their points of origin with push pins on a map. How might that officer have interpreted the logic of their distribution?

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa Maas asks herself whether she has stumbled "onto a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating . . . maybe even onto a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know."[91] Pynchon called that alternative WASTE. Maciunas called it Fluxus.

90 "It seemed to have worked for the process servers were not heard from again." Robert Watts, "George Maciunas Memories," October 1980, Box 13 Folder 1, Robert Watts Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

91 Pynchon, *Crying of Lot 49*, 141.