





## Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life

Edited by Jacquelynn Baas

Fluxus—from the Latin, “to flow”—was a radical, international network of artists, composers, and designers noted for blurring the boundaries between what we term “art” and what makes up everyday life. Following on the work of American Fluxus founder George Maciunas, *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life* presents a variety of objects that express the Fluxus mission and empower readers to challenge the presumptions we bring to both art and everyday life.

Based on a large-scale exhibition organized at Dartmouth College’s Hood Museum of Art and traveling to NYU and Michigan, this book chronicles the movement in the form of an art self-help book, playfully providing answers to fourteen key questions such as “Art—what is it good for?” and “What am I?” via Fluxus works. Featuring over one hundred color and black-and-white illustrations, accompanied by essays from curator Jacquelynn Baas, Fluxus scholars Hannah Higgins and Jacob Proctor, and Fluxus artist Ken Friedman, this book will make an original contribution to our understanding of this provocative moment in modern art.







## Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life



WM JOHNSON

C. L. BILLINGS' PATENT, MAR. 15, 1922

BURGLARY FLUXKIT

HENRY DISSON & SONS  
U.S.A.  
PHILADELPHIA

BY GEORGE  
MACIUNAS

TRIMO-A 14"

# FLUXUS

and the Essential Questions of Life

Edited by  
Jacquelynn Baas

With Contributions by  
Jacquelynn Baas  
Ken Friedman  
Hannah Higgins  
Jacob Proctor

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College • Hanover, New Hampshire  
in Association with  
The University of Chicago Press • Chicago and London



Jacquelynn Baas is director emeritus of the University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Previously she served as director of the Hood Museum of Art. She is the author, coauthor, or editor of many publications, including *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today* (California, 2005), *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* (California, 2004), *Learning Mind: Experience into Art* (California, 2010), *Measure of Time* (California, 2007), *Darren Waterston: Representing the Invisible* (Charta, 2007), and *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (MIT, 1990).

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#### Exhibition schedule

Hood Museum of Art,  
Dartmouth College  
April 16–August 7, 2011

Grey Art Gallery,  
New York University  
September 9–December 3, 2011

University of Michigan  
Museum of Art  
February 25–May 20, 2012

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Cover and back cover: *Flux Year Box 2*, 1966, five-compartment wooden box containing work by various artists. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection; Purchased through the William S. Rubin Fund; GM.987.44.2 (cat. 6)

Frontispiece: George Maciunas, *Burglary Fluxkit*, 1971, seven-compartment plastic box containing seven keys. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection; Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.164 (cat. 22) © Courtesy of Billie Maciunas

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# Lenders to the Exhibition

Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College

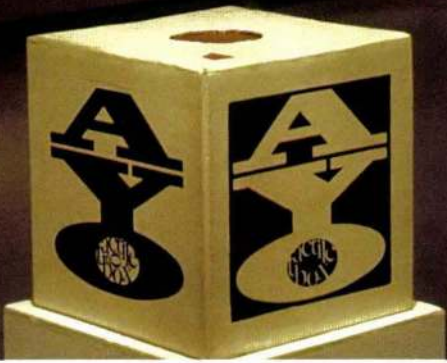
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FOR CALCULATIONS & REFERENCES WHITE DR. PA. BUDA TUD. 1982



## Preface

The history of the development of any museum's collections—especially ones as old, large, and varied as those at the Hood Museum of Art (over the past two hundred years, Dartmouth has collected some 65,000 objects from many and diverse art-producing regions)—is invariably filled with tangled stories that often take longer to play out than originally expected. Fluxus at Dartmouth is a case in point. The story of the Fluxus collection at Dartmouth College began in 1978 with a notion that is consistent with the purpose of the Hood Museum of Art today: to acquire objects for the educational benefit of Dartmouth students. The impetus for the current project was not only to exhibit and publish these works but to take the opportunity to explore new ways of looking at and thinking about Fluxus objects that would appeal, appropriately for a college campus, to young adults and to all museum-goers, whether or not they are familiar with this art movement that began in the early 1960s.

It is with this legacy in mind that the Hood presents its first major exhibition and publication of Fluxus objects. *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life* is drawn primarily from the museum's collection, with some wonderful loans from the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the

University Library of the University of California, Santa Cruz. The George Maciunas Memorial Collection of Fluxus objects was founded at Dartmouth College before the existence of the Hood Museum of Art, which opened in 1985. Jan van der Marck (1929–2010)—who as founding director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, gave the then relatively unknown artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude their first project in the United States in 1968—was director of the Dartmouth College Museum and Galleries from 1974 to 1980. Van der Marck's lifelong connections with the avant-garde inspired him to found the George Maciunas Memorial Collection, now numbering 564 objects, for Dartmouth in 1978, when the future of Fluxus and its impact were still unknown.

Jan van der Marck's determination led a small college in northern New England to be a center for Fluxus activity, attracting the attention of some of the world's most important art figures and compelling them to contribute to Dartmouth's establishment of "a collection of works by Fluxus artists and artists whose work bears aesthetic affinity to Fluxus."<sup>1</sup> Only months after the death of Fluxus leader George Maciunas at the age of forty-six on May 9, 1978, in Boston, Van der Marck formed a steering committee of friends and colleagues of the artist that included René Block, the Berlin-based art dealer; George's widow, Billie Maciunas; Jean Brown, archivist and collector; Jon Hendricks, curator of the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection (objects from which are on loan to this exhibition from the

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Opposite:

*A Tribute to George Maciunas*, November 22–January 14, 1979, Beaumont-May Gallery, Dartmouth College Museum and Galleries, Hopkins Center.



collectors' recent gift to the Museum of Modern Art); H. K. Pontus Hulten, former director of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris; musicians John Cage and La Monte Young; and the artists Dick Higgins, Claes Oldenburg, Yoko Ono, and Nam June Paik. Van der Marck affirmed that friends of Maciunas had agreed to found this collection at Dartmouth "with the express purpose of educating students and other museum patrons about the ephemeral aesthetic not documented or easily accessible anywhere else."<sup>2</sup>

Another purpose of the steering committee was to attract gifts of Fluxus objects from committee members and their acquaintances. The first gift to the George Maciunas Memorial Collection at Dartmouth College was from steering committee member Dick Higgins, who on August 30, 1978, donated Wolf Vostell's *Technological Oak Tree (T.O.T)*. "Nobody," Van der Marck wrote, "is 'off the hook' by giving once and everyone of our friends will be encouraged to continue 'providing' for this collection as an act of faith in the future of Fluxus."<sup>3</sup> Van der Marck set an example with a gift of Ben Vautier's *Propositions Pour l'Art* (1966, cat. 10). Arman, Jean Brown, John Cage, Peter Moore, Claes Oldenburg, Alison Knowles, and Nam June Paik soon followed suit. With these first thirteen donations, Van der Marck planned an exhibition and concert, not only to pay tribute to Maciunas but also to announce the coordinated collecting effort.<sup>4</sup>

The first Fluxus exhibition at Dartmouth, *Fluxus: A Tribute to George Maciunas*, was on view in the galleries of the Hopkins Center from November 22, 1978, through January 14, 1979, and was reported on in the March 1979 issue of *Art News* (see the image opposite this preface). A Fluxus concert at the conclusion of the exhibition on January 11 in Rollins Chapel on the Dartmouth College campus included performances by Alison Knowles, Philip Corner, and Malcolm Goldstein. At that time, Jan van der Marck reported that he hoped the exhibition would lead the college to "publish a catalogue and offer the George Maciunas Memorial Collection for loan

to other museums. Eventually I hope that it will travel extensively and do all the sort of things we have claimed for it."<sup>5</sup> Although objects from the collection have certainly been exhibited and loaned to museums since that time, Dartmouth's Fluxus collection has not traveled or been published until now.

In the mid-1980s, Ken Friedman, the youngest of the first generation of Fluxus artists, donated a large group of objects to the Hood Museum of Art and attempted to revitalize the steering committee, which, after the initial gifts, had not continued to be involved in the museum's Fluxus collection efforts after Van der Marck departed from the museum. He was cognizant of the fact by 1986 that Fluxus was already entering the art historical and curatorial canon, and he was determined to keep the voice of Fluxus artists heard within the discourse. Friedman also worried that the art historical interpretation of Fluxus was not "respectful of the philosophical basis of Fluxus itself," and that it was more concerned with "contemporary art and the avant-garde tradition."<sup>6</sup> His father, Dr. Abraham Friedman, had donated many objects in 1979 along with Ken that were accessioned as part of the George Maciunas Memorial Collection. While Ken Friedman was having these misgivings about the direction of Fluxus scholarship, he proposed an exhibition and catalogue to the fledgling Hood Museum of Art, along with a renewed effort to expand the Hood's Fluxus collection following his family's lead. Twenty-five years have passed since then; we are pleased that we were able to recruit the Hood director at that time, Jacquelynn Baas, to serve as the exhibition's guest curator. In developing *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life*, Baas began with the artists' philosophy as her inspiration, while honoring the founding principle of the Maciunas Memorial Collection—that it be an educational resource for Dartmouth students, and that it travel for the benefit of others. We are also fortunate to be working with colleagues at two other campus museums, the Grey Art Gallery at New York University and the University

of Michigan Museum of Art, in presenting this exhibition.

We are grateful to Dr. Baas, who has also served as editor and essayist for this book. She was the first director of the Hood Museum of Art and is director emeritus of the University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Since proposing this exhibition to the Hood in 2006, Baas has been the driving force behind its intellectual and practical organization, and has been the very best of colleagues. The Hood staff joins her in thanking all those involved with lending to and presenting the exhibition to college audiences and their regional communities.

**Juliette Bianco**

Acting Associate Director

## Notes

- 1 Letter from Jan van der Marck to Fluxus artists Ben Vautier, August 31, 1978. Hood Museum of Art archives.
- 2 *Acquisitions 1974–1978* (Hanover, N.H.: Trustees of Dartmouth College, 1979), 28.
- 3 Letter from Jan van der Marck to Jean Brown, August 31, 1978. Hood Museum of Art archives.
- 4 These gifts are published in *Acquisitions 1974–1978*, 85.
- 5 Memo from Jan van der Marck to Members of the Steering Committee for the George Maciunas Memorial Collection, March 5, 1979. Hood Museum of Art archives.
- 6 Notes regarding George Maciunas Memorial Collection, unsigned memo with handwritten notation “Ken Friedman 1/23/86.” Hood Museum of Art archives.



**flux** (flüks), *n.* [OF., fr. L. *fluxus*, fr. *fluere*, *fluxum*, to flow. See FLUENT; cf. FLUSH, *n.* (of cards).] 1. *Med.*

**a** A flowing or fluid discharge from the bowels or other part; esp., an excessive and morbid discharge; as, the bloody *flux*, or dysentery. **b** The matter thus discharged. 2. Act of flowing: a continuous moving on or passing by, as of a flowing stream; a continuing succession of changes.

3. A stream; copious flow; flood; outflow.

4. The setting in of the tide toward the shore. Cf. REFLUX.

5. State of being liquid through heat; fusion. *Rare.*

6. A fusible glass used as a base for enamels; also, an easily fusible enamel used as a ground for enamel painting.

7. *Chem. & Metal.* **a** Any substance or mixture used to promote fusion, esp. the fusion of metals or minerals. Common metallurgical fluxes are silica and silicates (acidic), lime and limestone (basic), and fluorite (neutral). **b** Any substance applied to surfaces to be joined by soldering or welding, just prior to or during the operation, to clean and free them from oxide, thus promoting their union, as rosin.

8. *Math.* The integral over a surface of the normal component of a vector field. Cf. STOKES' THEOREM.

9. *Photom.* = 1st LIGHT, 18 b.

10. *Physics.* **a** The rate of flow or transfer of fluid or of energy across a surface. **b** By analogy, the surface integral of a vector distributed over a surface. Cf. ELECTROSTATIC FLUX, MAGNETIC FLUX.

11. *Plant Pathol.* A slime flux.

**flux**, *v.*; FLUXED (flükst); FLUX'ING. *Transitive:* 1. To cause to become fluid; to fuse; to treat with a flux.

2. To affect, or bring to a certain state, by subjecting to, or treating with, a flux. "*Fluxed* into another world." *South.*

3. *Med.* To cause a discharge from, as in purging.

— *Intransitive:* 1. To flow freely. *Archaic.*

2. To become fluid; to melt.

3. To undergo a flux; specif., to bleed copiously. *Obs.*

**flux** (flüks), *adj.* [L. *fluxus*, fr. *fluere*. See FLUX, *n.*] In flux; variable. *Obs.*



## Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank former director Brian Kennedy and the staff at the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College: Juliette Bianco, Acting Associate Director, who adroitly managed all aspects of the exhibition; the exhibition's sensitive and skillful designer, Patrick Dunfey; Katherine Hart, Interim Director, who provided valuable counsel at key points, along with Essi Rönkkö, Nicole Gilbert, and Alexander Fidel '09 who assisted. Nils Nadeau, Communications and Publications Manager, edited this book and shepherded it through publication. I further thank independent designer Glenn Suokko for the book's look and feel and independent photographer Jeffrey Nintzel for his images of these objects. Kathleen O'Malley, Cynthia Gilliland, and Deborah Haynes in the museum's registrar's office patiently provided me with both information and access to works and coordinated the exhibition's travel. Nancy McLain, Christine MacDonald, and Roberta Shin made my visits to Dartmouth both effective and enjoyable. Brian Kennedy, Director of the Hood during the project's inception and development, departed in fall 2010 to become Director of the Toledo Museum of Art. Previous Hood directors (including myself) had never managed to organize a traveling exhibition of Dartmouth's extensive and

eclectic Fluxus collection. Determined finally to see this happen, Dr. Kennedy took on the challenge; I am enormously grateful to him.

Next, I want to extend my deep thanks to colleagues who kindly provided help and counsel in the course of my research and organizational activities, and those instrumental in loaning key objects to the exhibition from their respective institutions. Thanks are due to Glenn Lowry, Director, Kathy Halbreich, Associate Director, the curatorial staff of the Museum of Modern Art, with special thanks to Deborah Wye and Gretchen Wagner, and Lynda Zycherman, Conservator; Marcia Reed of the Getty Research Institute; Joan Rothfuss, formerly with the Walker Art Center, along with the Walker Art Center Director, Olga Viso, and Assistant Registrar, Pamela Caserta; at Harvard, Thomas Lentz, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director, Susan Dackerman, the Carl A. Weyerhaeuser Curator of Prints, and Assistant Registrar Kathryn S. C. Press; and Christine Bunting, Head of Special Collections and Archives, University Library, University of California, Santa Cruz. For both their counsel and their participation in the exhibition's tour, I thank Lynn Gumpert, Director of the Grey Art Gallery, New York University, Frank Poueymirou, the Grey's Deputy Director, and Lucy Oakley, Head of Education and Programs; and at the University of Michigan Museum of Art, Joseph Rosa, Director, Jacob Proctor, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, and Katharine Derosier, Curatorial and Exhibitions Coordinator.

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Opposite:

George Maciunas, *Prospectus for Fluxus Yearboxes—Flux Definition*, 1962, offset lithograph. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection; GM.979.180 (cat. 13). © Courtesy of Billie Maciunas.

Susan Bielstein and her good staff at the University Press of Chicago were critical partners in this enterprise. My thanks go to Susan for her support throughout the publication process, as well as to our anonymous reader, who provided a most helpful perspective on the essays. My three co-authors, Ken Friedman, Hannah Higgins, and Jacob Proctor, have been valuable sources of information and advice. Dartmouth Professor of Art History Mary Coffey and her students informed and inspired me with their fresh ideas. Dartmouth stalwarts Lu and Peter Martin kindly gave me shelter and occasional martinis both in New Hampshire and New York, while Frances Hill Barlow also provided a New York haven during the research phase of the exhibition.

The individuals who perhaps gave most generously of their time and resources are the amazing Gilbert and Lila Silverman, who in 2009 transferred their comprehensive collection of Fluxus to the Museum of Modern Art. Gil and Lila not only made their collection fully available, they also hosted me both in Detroit and in Vermont, quickly making it clear that any friend of Fluxus is a friend of theirs. Likewise their long-time curator, Jon Hendricks, shared with me his extensive knowledge and was unfailingly warm and supportive of my efforts. Through Gil

and Lila I reconnected with the late Jan van der Marck; it was a special pleasure to spend time with this founder of Dartmouth's George Maciunas Memorial Collection. I am grateful as well to have made the acquaintance of Nye Ffarabas, the artist and poet previously known as Bici Forbes Hendricks, who shared with me her experience with Fluxus and related art activities of the 1960s. I also want to express my gratitude to the energetic, multitalented Ken Friedman, who first introduced himself to me in 1985 as I was opening Dartmouth's new Hood Museum of Art, and who has contributed an essay to this publication. A Fluxus artist, entrepreneur, and scholar, Ken made Dartmouth one of the beneficiaries of his wide-ranging collection—an act of generosity that allows the phenomenon of Fluxus to be understood within a broad context. To all those mentioned above, my deepest thanks, and to anyone I've overlooked, abject apologies. My experience with this exhibition and book has been a reminder of the power of Fluxus to reveal new worlds of understanding and discovery—final thanks go to Fluxus artists past, present, and future.

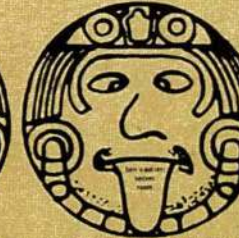
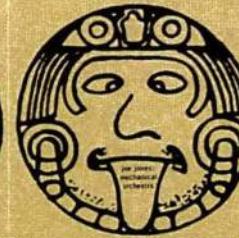
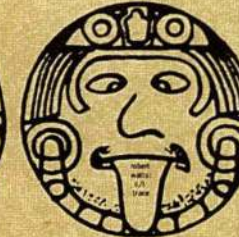
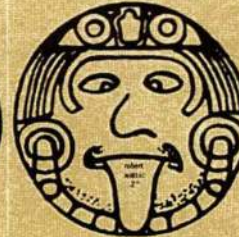
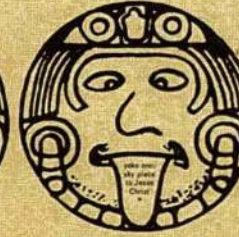
**Jacquelynn Baas**  
Exhibition Curator

# Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life



GREENFIBER - TRUMPET, JOE JONES - VIOLIN, H. KAPFLOW - VIOLIN, SHIGEKO KUBOTA - VIOLIN, DAN LAUFFER - VIOLIN, JOAN MATHEWS

ORCHESTRA MEMBERS: LA MONTE YOUNG - CONDUCTOR, AYO - TRUMPET, STEPHEN BARRY - MELODICA, LYNN BUNN - FRENCH HORN, JOHN CAVANAUGH - GUITAR, ANTHONY COX - VIOLIN, HENRY



HORN, JONAS MEKAS - ACCORDION, YOKO ONO - VIOLIN, JAMES RIDDLE - TRUMPET, LINDA SAMPSON - VIOLIN, STAN VANDERBEEK - VIOLIN, HELEN VASEY - MELODICA, STEVEN VASEY - HORN,

SPECIAL GUEST - SAMURAI SWORD

CHRISTOPHER WILMARTH - RECORDER, JOHN WORDEN - TRUMPET, ROBERT WATTS - TUBA,



# 1

## Introduction

Jacquelynn Baas

Spoerri, Filliou and I have often discussed the wisdom—and disillusionment—reflected in the letters of our respective mothers . . . One recent letter from my own mother counsels me that “Life is like an onion, son: you peel it off layer by layer, and sometimes you weep” . . . Considering my life a failure, she often ends her letters with the painful rhetorical question: “What did Dad and I do wrong?”

—Emmett Williams, in Daniel Spoerri’s  
*An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*<sup>1</sup>

This is not a book about the history of Fluxus. Still less is this book about the *art* history of Fluxus, despite critical claims that “without Fluxus there would probably be no Conceptual art, performance art or body art [and] Minimal and Pop would be substantially different.”<sup>2</sup> This is a book about how Fluxus *works*. Fluxus resists characterization as an art movement, collective, or group, and defies traditional geographical,

chronological, and medium-based analyses. This book and the exhibition it accompanies are intended to shift attention away from attempts to define and toward the asking of questions. The fundamental question—“What’s Fluxus good for?”—has important implications for how art is made and life is lived.

### Anti-Art or Anart?

Fluxus emerged as an art phenomenon in the early 1960s. Twenty years later, the German artist Tomas Schmit called Fluxus “a new thing in the art scene. Oh, it didn’t fill a gap in the art scene as it seems to do now, it created its own gap outside the scene. It gapped around it.”<sup>3</sup> Schmit’s statement suggests that Fluxus opened up new realms of possibility beyond the traditional art “scene”—galleries and museums and their art-going publics, made up primarily of artists and collectors. The concept of art as something broadly participatory was not, in fact, all that new. As early as 1849, composer Richard Wagner concluded his long essay “The Art-Work of the Future” with a question: “Who, then, will be the Artist of the Future?” His answer: “Without a doubt, the Poet. But who will be the Poet? Indisputably the Performer. Yet who, again, will be the Performer? Necessarily the Fellowship of all the Artists.”<sup>4</sup>

Wagner’s mid-nineteenth-century assertion

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Opposite:

George Maciunas, *Poster for Fluxorchestra at Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, September 25, 1965*, offset, designed by George Maciunas, 16<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (43 x 29.9 cm). The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY. © Courtesy of Billie Maciunas.

reads like a premonition not just of Fluxus but also of Dada and the Bauhaus, founded in Weimar, Germany, in 1919 by artists whose performative carryings-on had more in common with their Dada contemporaries than has generally been recognized by art historians.<sup>5</sup> In April 1920, Max Ernst and his fellow Dada artists opened *Dada Early Spring* at a brewery in Cologne, an exhibition that visitors entered by way of a public urinal. Ernst attached a hatchet to a chain, inviting visitors to destroy whatever works they didn't like (or maybe just a sculpture by Ernst; the accounts differ). Fifteen years later, Marcel Duchamp exhibited his "playtoy,"<sup>6</sup> the *Rotoreliefs*—colorful, spiral-printed discs that could be "played" on a record-player turntable—at the International Invention Show at the Parc des expositions, Paris. His intention was hardly mercenary; about marketing the *Rotoreliefs* in the United States, he wrote to Katherine Dreier: "I can't sell them anymore than \$1.25 . . . If people find it too cheap, too bad, but the cost of making it does not allow me to more profit."<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, Fluxus had its origins in a New York City gallery, though not a very traditional one. In October 1960, George Maciunas and Almus Salcius opened AG Gallery at 925 Madison Avenue. They planned to exhibit abstract art and sell ancient musical instruments, but this plan changed after Maciunas became involved with avant-garde music through classes at the New School for Social Research. He got to know musician La Monte Young and, through Young, met future Fluxus colleagues such as Jackson Mac Low, George Brecht, Yoko Ono, and Dick Higgins. Young invited Maciunas to design for publication a collection of radical scores, which Maciunas transformed into an exhibition-as-book, titled *AN ANTHOLOGY of chance operations concept art anti-art indeterminacy improvisation meaningless work natural disasters plans of action stories diagrams Music poetry essays dance constructions mathematics compositions* (1963, cat. 2). *An Anthology* became a template for future Fluxus productions.

Dada and Fluxus were often referred to as

"anti-art" movements (sometimes by their own members). More subversive than this characterization suggests, they might be better described as "anart" movements, along the lines of Marcel Duchamp's "anartist." "I'm against the word 'anti,'" Duchamp told Richard Hamilton in a 1959 radio interview, "because it's very like 'atheist' as compared to 'believe.' An atheist is just as . . . religious . . . as the believer is, and an 'anti-artist' is just as much of an artist as the other artist. 'Anartist' would be much better . . . meaning, 'no artist at all.' That would be my conception."<sup>8</sup>

The concept of Fluxus as an anart movement corresponds with Fluxus organizer George Maciunas's philosophical-political position that the end of art, in the sense of its goal, is the end of art, in the sense of its absorption into the practice of being human. His statement that "Fluxus objectives are social (not aesthetic)"<sup>9</sup> exemplifies Fluxus's intent to circumvent both museums and the commercial art world, and to empower people to engage with essential issues via the Fluxus approach to life as connection and flow. "Fluxus," Maciunas wrote, "is definitely against art-object as non-functional commodity . . . It could temporarily have the pedagogical function of teaching people the needlessness of art including the eventual needlessness of itself."<sup>10</sup>

His point is clear: art, to cite the title of pragmatist philosopher John Dewey's well-known book published in 1934, is experience. The pedagogical function of Fluxus artworks is to help us practice life; what we "learn" from Fluxus is how to function as an ever-changing self that is part of an ever-changing world. George Brecht's event scores, such as *Exit* (1961, event 5, p. 96), are good examples. "Rather than an image of a concrete moment in life," Brecht wrote, "it is a signal preparing one for the moment itself. Event scores prepare one for an event to happen in one's own now."<sup>11</sup> Whether characterized as signal, tool, game, or learning machine, Fluxus "art" becomes anything but by being everything and.



## Anartist: Maciunas as Case Study

Although this book is not about the history of Fluxus, George Maciunas is relevant to our topic of Fluxus and the essential questions of life, for without his grandiose imagination and organizational abilities, Fluxus would not have been what it was and is. Born in Lithuania in 1931, “Yurgis” was a sickly boy who suffered from tuberculosis (among other things) and spent a good chunk of his early life in sanitariums in Switzerland. Forty-seven years later, as he lay dying of pancreatic and liver cancer, the adult (but never quite grown-up) George regaled his friends with accounts of the emergency appendectomy without anesthetic he had undergone when he was nine.

Physical suffering was part of his life from beginning to end, but Maciunas was also possessed of prodigious intelligence and protean creative abilities. In 1949, the year after his family immigrated to the United States, he began studying art, graphic design, and architecture at Cooper Union, and then architecture and musicology at Carnegie Tech, receiving his BA in architecture in 1954. He was especially fascinated with geography and change through time; he attempted to organize space and pin down time by generating expansive geographical/historical charts and atlases,<sup>12</sup> an activity that would intensify as he began studying art history at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University (1955–60), where he focused on the art of migration.

All of this, including especially his talent for graphic design,<sup>13</sup> made George Maciunas a terrific impresario for Fluxus, the first interdisciplinary, global, artist-run arts collective. (As I have pointed out elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> Fluxus’s migratory patterns were enabled by the postwar development of commercial air travel.) Maciunas was a most unusual artist, to the extent that not everyone thought of him that way at the time: “Maciunas was the cautious office-type, who neither drank, smoked nor whored after women, or wanted to be famous,” Per Kirkeby recalled:

In fact he wasn’t really an artist, and this was supported by the way he had to sit there and be schoolmaster for the whole cause. If one did something wrong one got detention, if one did not get expelled . . . I had a bad conscience when I was to be enrolled in the firm. “I paint paintings,” I said desperately, “I am a born traitor.” I really thought that was forbidden. And then it came, here is the whole point of the story: “It doesn’t matter,” he said, “there’s nothing wrong with being a painter. It’s the *way* you are one.”<sup>15</sup>

It was a pragmatic position, and Maciunas was the ultimate impractical pragmatist, devoting almost all of his earnings to Fluxus productions and editions, spinning numbers out of the air, developing plans for prefab housing and for artist live-work spaces in SoHo—a project that led him to live in constant danger of retribution at the hands of both government inspectors and the mob. He was in fact badly beaten at one point and lost an eye. One might think that Maciunas courted punishment, and one would be right: Barbara Moore wrote of him,

He seemed to survive on pills, inhalators, and self-administered injections of cortisone (the empty vials and hypodermics of which became raw materials for Fluxus editions). At some point he acquired an attraction for pain so intense that he enjoyed flagellation. How long this had been present in his life no one knows, but soon after [his final illness was diagnosed] he openly told friends that “the pain kills the pain.”<sup>16</sup>

It may be telling in this regard that Maciunas chose as the Fluxus logo (see p. xvi) the central image of the ancient Mexica-Aztec *Piedra del Sol*, or “Sun Stone” (figure 1.1). Poet and Fluxus artist Emmett Williams had this to say about Maciunas’s choice of graphic to represent Fluxus: “The funny face with its tongue hanging out was no laughing matter to the Aztecs, the Mexican





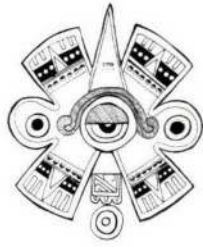
**Figure 1.1**

Mexican, *Piedra del Sol* (*Sun Stone*), about 1479, basalt, diam. 3.6 meters, Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City.

poet and diplomat Octavio Paz explained to me . . . This sun god, Tonatiuh, had an unquenchable thirst for human blood, the source of the vast amounts of energy required to control the universe, to rotate the stars and seasons, hence the fiery stretched-out tongue.<sup>17</sup> In this ancient

so-called “calendar” stone, the tongue is in fact in the form of a flint knife, like those used to cut open the chests of sacrificial victims in order to rip out their hearts—two hearts are grasped by claws in the circular forms to the right and left of the central image. The six-lobed shape of this





**Figure 1.2**  
Ollin glyph. Line drawing by Katherine Cholnoky.

framing image for Tonatiuh is the glyph, *ollin*, which signifies motion, movement, and change (figure 1.2).<sup>18</sup>

The Fluxus logo omits these framing details, but Maciunas was surely aware of the Aztec cultural paradigm linking circulation of blood in the human body with cosmic motion. Blood is where the animating spirit was believed to reside, and the heart circulates it. In order to ensure the reappearance of the sun and the continuation of light and life, human hearts were offered in ongoing ritual sacrifices. The Mexica-Aztecs conducted constant warfare with neighboring groups in order to capture live prisoners to be sacrificed. Captives were taken to the tops of pyramids, where their chests were cut open and their still-beating hearts torn out. Priests, along with audience members gathered in the plaza below, pierced and bled themselves in auto-sacrifice before and during the killings. Meanwhile, whistles, costumed dancers, and percussive music marked different phases of the rite.

This was, to say the least, a dramatic cultural response to the uncertainties of life, one whose grisly details would have intrigued Maciunas. Though the violence was less extreme, the performative aspects of these practices may have found an echo in Fluxus performances. Maciunas's *Flux-Mass* of 1970, for example, had the "priest" (Yoshimasa Wada) adding wine to water by "cutting skin of inflated superman filled with wine & letting wine drip into tub of water," and included a "breaking of the bread" by "two gorilla assistants with clubs, or axes,

sledge hammer, mace etc." (figure 1.3).<sup>19</sup> Of course, most Fluxus performances also included generous dollops of humor—no doubt in short supply at Aztec rites—and I am not suggesting Maciunas had ancient Mesoamerican practices in mind specifically as he developed his Fluxus programs. But without constant sacrifice, the Aztecs believed, all motion would stop, and Maciunas's frenetic, ongoing activity shared something of this urgency.

This suggests another possible aspect of Maciunas's interest in the *Piedra del Sol* image, for the early history of the Mexica-Aztecs was one of repeated migrations. Migration was likewise the story of Maciunas's life from his youth, when his family fled the invading Russians to Germany, and then moved from Germany to the United States. He studied the migrations of early peoples at NYU, and in later life he seems to have found satisfaction, or at least distraction, in planning elaborate group travels and relocations. In 1972, he wrote to Per Kirkeby:

The airport mixup—I ran out of money 4 days before my departure and had to plan on sleeping in airports. So I arrived in London a day sooner, since I knew the airport was very comfortable to sleep in . . . But the trip was not wasted, since I found a phantastic island in a large bay in Manorca . . . Island is only an acre but of a very irregular shape and the shores very accessible. I, Bob Watts and few others will most likely buy it. So now I am spending my efforts in making lots of money in as little time as possible. It will probably take all this year and probably 1973. 1974 some 8 of us are planning a 6 month trip in small airplane around the world . . . So we thought of leasing a STOL 8 passenger plane with 150 mile range . . . and go to strange and inaccessible places like Robinson Crusoe island, Easter, Pitcairn, Ua Huka, Bora Bora, Moorea, Rarotonga . . . etc. etc. etc. and then via Iceland, Greenland, Baffin island back to New York, all in 1000 mile steps. We would



**Figure 1.3**  
Peter Moore, *Flux-Mass: Breaking of the Bread*, photograph, 1970.  
© Estate of Peter Moore / VAGA New York

try to live off the sea. That's my plan for the next few years.<sup>20</sup>

Maciunas's obsession with migration and change is reflected in the name he chose in 1962 for his loosely organized group of performers. The first "Fluxus" Festival took place in Wiesbaden, Germany, where he was working as a designer for the U.S. Air Force. There were also performances in Copenhagen and Paris that year; the performers included, in addition to Maciunas, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Benjamin Patterson, Wolf Vostell, Nam June Paik, Emmett Williams, Tomas Schmit, Addi Kōpcke, and Eric Andersen. The following year, Ben Vautier, Daniel Spoerri, Robert Filliou, Joseph Beuys, and Willem de Ridder joined the group in the presentation of

Fluxus Festivals in Dusseldorf, Amsterdam, The Hague, and Nice.

But by the end of summer 1963, Maciunas's chronic health problems had put an end to his air force job. He returned to New York, where he began production of his planned Fluxus editions. What is known as the "Fluxus Manifesto" (though no other Fluxus artist recalls endorsing it) appeared around this time. One incarnation was reproduced on the cover of a prospectus for Fluxus Yearboxes published in Ehlhaltern, West Germany (cat. 13; see p. xii), where it took the form of a dictionary definition of "flux": "1. *Med.* a. A flowing or fluid discharge from the bowels or other part: esp., an excessive and morbid discharge: as, the bloody *flux*, or dysentery. b. The matter thus discharged. 2. Act of flowing: a



continuous moving on or passing by, as of a flowing stream; a continuing succession of changes. 3. A stream; copious flow; flood; outflow . . .”

If the first definition evokes, however remotely, the Aztecs’ visceral view of life, the second, “Act of flowing,” and third, “A stream,” suggest the diametric opposite of the Aztecs’ attempts to *control* change: namely, the ancient Chinese Daoist tactic of *accepting* change, or “going with the flow,” as the popular version has it. It is no coincidence that Maciunas’s mentor at NYU was Professor of Chinese Art Alfred Salmony, of whom Maciunas’s mother wrote: “An old and very good professor taught art history at the university. He treated Yurgis like a son . . . In [April 1958] his favorite professor died [and] something broke in his soul.”<sup>21</sup> Salmony was the author of the groundbreaking book *Antler and Tongue: An Essay on Ancient Chinese Symbolism and Its Implications*, which had appeared in the same year that Maciunas’s father died.<sup>22</sup> The exaggerated tongue in Maciunas’s iconic Fluxus image suggests a sub-rosa tribute to his mentor.<sup>23</sup>

Alfred Salmony had been personally involved with artists in the Dada movement that emerged in British-occupied Cologne when he was in his late twenties.<sup>24</sup> Maciunas stressed the Dada origins of Fluxus in his “Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art,” an essay read aloud in German at the first Fluxus concert, “Après John Cage,” in Wuppertal, West Germany, in June 1962. After a discussion of “concretism” in various art forms, Maciunas went on to address the nature of reality in Daoist terms:

Since artificiality implies human pre-determination, contrivance, a truer concretist rejects pre-determination of final form in order to perceive the reality of nature, the course of which, like that of man himself is largely indeterminate and unpredictable . . . Anti-art is life, is nature, is true reality—it is one and all. Rainfall is anti-art, a babble of a crowd is anti-art, a sneeze is anti-art, a flight of a butterfly, or movements of microbes are

anti-art. They are as beautiful and as worthy to be aware of as art itself. If man could experience the world, the concrete world surrounding him (from mathematical ideas to physical matter) in the same way he experiences art, there would be no need for art, artists, and similar “nonproductive” elements.<sup>25</sup>

The title of Maciunas’s essay—“Neo-Dada in . . . Art”—is significant, for as Salmony and thus Maciunas would have known, Dada claimed a Daoist lineage. Dada founder Tristan Tzara asserted, “Chouang-Dsi [Zhuangzi] was just as Dada as we are. You are mistaken if you take Dada for a modern school, or even for a reaction against the schools of today.”<sup>26</sup> Hans Arp similarly stressed the Daoist taproot: “Dada objects are made of found or manufactured elements, simple or incongruous. The Chinese several millenniums ago, Duchamp and Picabia in the United States, and Schwitters and myself during World War I, were the first to invent and spread these games of wisdom and acumen that were meant to cure human beings of the sheer madness of genius and to lead them back more modestly to their proper place in nature.”<sup>27</sup>

Daoism is hard to define, but it can be described: self-transformation through mind-body practices that enable the practitioner to take the world as it is. Daoism’s primary text is the *Dao de jing*, a collection of verses traditionally attributed to Laozi that offers a more than two-thousand-year-old vision of reality grounded in the extraordinary available within the ordinary. *Dao de jing* means “The Classic of This Focus and Its Field”;<sup>28</sup> its assumption is that “each particular element in our experience is holographic in the sense that it has implicated within it the entire field of experience.”<sup>29</sup> In short, what the *Dao de jing* teaches is how to see like an artist. In contrast with the poetic *Dao de jing*, the anecdotal accounts of Zhuangzi and his followers are laced with emphatic anti-authoritarianism and humor. The *Zhuangzi* came to stand for the opposite of Confucianism’s ethos of self-sacrifice:

specifically, the escape from societal strictures to an individual path of freedom. Equally important was Zhuangzi's humor, "that deadliest of weapons against all that is pompous, staid, and holy . . . He appears to have known that one good laugh would do more than ten pages of harangue to shake the reader's confidence in the validity of his pat assumptions."<sup>30</sup> Both aspects of Daoism—Laozi's vision of the extraordinary available within the ordinary and Zhuangzi's anarchism and humor—manifested in Fluxus. For many of the Fluxus artists, Daoism would have come packaged with Zen Buddhism (Buddhism + Daoism = Zen).<sup>31</sup> For Maciunas, who had been "like a son" to historian of ancient Chinese culture Alfred Salmony, Daoist philosophy was a fundamental part of his intellectual arsenal.

From an array of options I have chosen to foreground two quite different, one might even say opposite, resources—Aztec and Daoist—for the anartistic attitude of Fluxus impresario George Maciunas. But the incorporation of opposite philosophies would not have been a problem, or even an issue, for Fluxus was nothing if not catholic (big C as well as small c) in its inspiration. As George Brecht pointed out,

Artists, anti-artists, non-artists, anartists, the politically committed and the apolitical, poets of non-poetry, non-dancers dancing, doers, undoers, and non-doers, Fluxus encompasses opposites. Consider opposing it, supporting it, ignoring it, changing your mind.<sup>32</sup>

## The Art of Change

Fluxus developed during a canonical decade of change. The 1960s were a time of social upheaval around the world, due in part to the dissolution of European colonial empires and the demographic changes following World War II, and, in the United States, violent internal conflicts generated by racism and the Vietnam War. In the parlance of the period, Fluxus aimed to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. But which

solution? American philosopher Arnold Berleant frames the situation in this way:

While it is foolish to set certain, fixed goals, open-ended ones like the satisfaction of needs and interests, the development of productive and creative capacities, health, the expansion of awareness, and the enlargement of moral consciousness are among the central values for a fully realized human life . . . design decisions that are governed by such considerations are ultimately a philosophical activity, and this activity requires philosophical awareness.<sup>33</sup>

Philosophical awareness was one thing Fluxus artists shared, along with a determination to enlarge moral consciousness. A more elaborate version of the "Fluxus Manifesto" intersperses the dictionary definitions of "flux" with these words:

Purge the world of bourgeois sickness, "intellectual," professional & commercialized culture, PURGE the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art . . . PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD AND TIDE IN ART. Promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART REALITY to be fully grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals.<sup>34</sup>

In the end, Fluxus was perhaps less an art-making activity than a philosophical activity intended to open minds to the many-faceted reality of life (figure 1.4; cat. 115). Japanese artist Mieko Shiomi defined Fluxus as a way "to view and feel the world with innovated perception."<sup>35</sup> In this sense, we can all be Fluxus artists, as Maciunas urged. Fluxus's goal is to teach us to experience the world for ourselves, "in the same way" (Maciunas's words) that we experience art. It should not be surprising, then, that people sometimes have a hard time experiencing Fluxus objects *as* art. They are not "art"; they are more like tools or games, in pragmatist philosopher





**Figure 1.4**

George Maciunas, *Multifacted Mirror*, about 1966, wood box containing a square, concave metal plate set with forty-nine mirrors. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Gift; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. (cat. 115) © Courtesy of Billie Maciunas. Photograph by Jacquelynn Baas.

George Herbert Mead's sense of games as something that helps us attain selfhood by teaching us how to integrate the complex requirements of being human.<sup>36</sup>

So this book about how Fluxus works and what it might be good for is also intended as a kind of art-self-help book. To Emmett Williams's mother's question, "What did Dad and I do wrong?" George Maciunas might answer, as he answered Per Kirkeby: "It doesn't matter; there's nothing wrong." In the memorable words of Marcel Duchamp, "There is no solution because there is no problem."<sup>37</sup> A problem is something to solve. Things that cannot be solved are not problems; they are things to apprehend and integrate. From the perspective of Fluxus, no life is a failure and no answer (much less any question) is wrong. So, if you must choose, choose awareness. Put aside your predilections and fears and use your six senses to apprehend this ever-changing world. Fluxus can help by providing art-experience as life-experience that is guaranteed to change your mind.

## Notes

- 1 Daniel Spoerri, *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance (Re-Anecdoted Version)*, with the help of Robert Filliou and translated and further anecdoted by Emmett Williams (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), 11–12.
- 2 Roberta Smith, "Paying Homage to Irreverence," *New York Times*, July 16, 1993, C30.
- 3 Tomas Schmit, statement of February 3, 1981, in *Fluxus, Etc.: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection*, ed. Jon Hendricks (Bloomfield Hills: Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, 1981), 48.
- 4 Richard Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 92. (Also available online: <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagartfut.htm>.)
- 5 Joan Ockman, "Object Lessons from the Bauhaus," *Art in America* 98, no. 1 (January 1910), 86. See also Ute Ackermann, "Bauhaus Parties—Histrionics between Eccentric Dancing and Animal Drama," in *Bauhaus*, ed. Jeannine Fiedler (Cologne: Könemann, 2006), 126–39.
- 6 Term Duchamp used when writing of this project to Katherine Dreier. He seemed pretty hopeful: "In a week or 2, I will send you a sample of the toy. If you show it, don't let anyone take it away from you, as I want to first copyright it in America." *Affectionately Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk (Ghent: Ludion Press, 2000), 203.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 205.

- 8 From "Marcel Duchamp Speaks," an interview on January 19, 1959, by George Heard Hamilton in New York and Richard Hamilton in London, broadcast over the BBC Third Program in the series "Art, Anti-Art" on November 13, 1959; available at <http://www.ubu.com/sound/duchamp.html>.
- 9 January 1964 letter to Tomas Schmit, in *What's Fluxus? What's Not! Why.*, ed. Jon Hendricks (Rio de Janeiro and Detroit: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil and Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Foundation, 2002), 163.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 From the unpublished manuscript *George Brecht Notebook VII*, March–June 1961, The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Museum of Modern Art, New York; quoted in Julia Robinson, "In the Event of George Brecht," in *George Brecht Events: A Heterospective*, ed. Alfred M. Fischer (Cologne: Museum Ludwig, 2005), 16.
- 12 See Astrit Schmidt-Burkhardt, *Maciunas' Learning Machines: From Art History to a Chronology of Fluxus* (Detroit and Berlin: Silverman and Vice Versa Verlag, 2003).
- 13 Color blind, Maciunas parlayed this artistic disadvantage into brilliant black-and-white graphic designs for Fluxus events and editions.
- 14 Jacquelynn Baas, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 163.
- 15 Per Kirkeby, "George Maciunas," January 28, 1981, in *Fluxus, Etc.*, 28–29.
- 16 Barbara Moore, "George Maciunas: A Finger in Fluxus," *Artforum* 21, no. 2 (October 1982): 45; reprinted in *Mr. Fluxus: A Collective Portrait of George Maciunas, 1931–1978*, ed. Emmett Williams and Ann Noël (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 300.
- 17 Emmett Williams, *A Flexible History of Fluxus Facts and Fictions* (London: Hansjörg Mayer, 2006), 12.
- 18 For a summary of scholarship on this iconic object, see *The Aztec Calendar Stone*, ed. Khristaan D. Vilella and Mary Ellen Miller (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010).
- 19 From Maciunas's "Scenario of Flux–Mass" and "Outline of Flux–Mass," reproduced in *Critical Mass: Happenings, Fluxus, Performance, Intermedia, and Rutgers University, 1958–1972*, ed. Geoffrey Hendricks (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 132–33.
- 20 George Maciunas, from a letter quoted by Per Kirkeby in *Fluxus, Etc.*, 29. Maciunas's spelling was erratic; I have left it as is.
- 21 *Mr. Fluxus*, 30. See also Astrit Schmidt-Burkhardt, *Maciunas' Learning Machines*, 28, note 6. Salmony was born in Cologne and served as curator of the museum of East Asian Art there before emigrating in 1933 to Paris and then the United States.
- 22 Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae, supplementum vol. 13, 1954. Maciunas began studying with Salmony in 1955, and produced his *Atlas of Prehistoric Chinese Art* (whereabouts unknown) under Salmony's influence.
- 23 Salmony did not include the Aztec sun stone motif among his comparative examples of the extended tongue as a multivalent symbol of (among other things) emergence from darkness into light. However, there is a strong resemblance between that image (figure 1.2) and a fourth- to third-century BCE Chinese stone relief of a human face that Salmony included in *Antler and Tongue* as figure 32 (page 30).
- 24 Gustave Ecke, "In Memorium: Alfred Salmony," *Ars Orientalis* 4 (1961): 453. (Ecke characterized Salmony in words that could as easily be applied to Maciunas: "Under the cover of the acid jester there throbbed a devoted heart.") A veteran of World War I, Salmony was close to Max Ernst and wrote on both Ernst and Otto Dix.
- 25 Clive Phillpot and Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus: Selections from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), 27.
- 26 Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1951/1981), 250. Maciunas included this book in the bibliography for his 1959 essay "Developments of Western Abstract Chirography as a Product of Far Eastern Mentality" (<http://stendhalgallery.com/?p=4077>; accessed November 12, 2010). Written for a seminar taught at NYU by Robert Goldwater, the essay posits cyclical, yin-yang-like forces as a model for the forces of history.



- 27 Hans Arp, "Dadaland" (1948). In Jean (Hans) Arp, *Collected French Writings: Poems, Essays, Memories*, ed. Marcel Jean, tr. Joachim Neugroschel (London: Calder and Boyars, 1974), 235. Salmony may even have had some influence in this regard, as Arp was associated with Cologne Dada. For more on Daoism as a resource for Dada, see my essay, "Before Zen: The Nothing of American Dada," in *East-West Interchanges in American Art: "A Long and Tumultuous Relationship,"* forthcoming from Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press in spring 2011.
- 28 Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing "Making This Life Significant": A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine, 2003), 13, 60.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 30 *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 5.
- 31 On Buddhism and Fluxus see David T. Doris, "Zen Vaudeville: A Medi(t)ation in the Margins of Fluxus," in *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman (London: Academy Editions, 1998), 91–135; Baas, "The Sound of the Mind," in *Smile of the Buddha*, 159–97; and Baas, "No Boundary," in *Gwangju Biennale 2006: Fever Variations*, vol. 1 (Gwangju, Korea: Gwangju Biennale Foundation, 2006), 162–208.
- 32 George Brecht, "Something About Fluxus," *V TRE* 4 (June 1964), republished in *What's Fluxus?*, 112.
- 33 Arnold Berleant, "Art and Space-Age Communities," in *Art and Technology*, ed. René Berger and Lloyd Eby (New York: Paragon House, 1986), 386.
- 34 See page 22. Maciunas's formulations echo the opening lines of artist and architect Frederick Kiesler's 1947 "Manifesto of Correalism": "Drive out 'high' painting from art galleries . . . Drive out contemporary art from museums. Art belongs to the street, the home, the people . . . Drive out art traffickers from the salons of the *nouveau riche* . . . Demolish all these false temples" (*Frederick J. Kiesler: Endless Space*, ed. Dieter Bogner and Peter Noever [Vienna: MAK, 2001], 92).
- 35 Mieko Shiomi in *Fluxus, Etc.*, 51.
- 36 Among other things, Fluxus was influenced by American pragmatism (see both Ken Friedman's and Hannah Higgins's essays in this volume). For more on Mead, see *Mind, Self, and Society*, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).
- 37 According to Francis Naumann, this comment was published for the first time in Harriet and Sidney Janis, "Marcel Duchamp: Anti-Artist," *View*, series 5, no. 1 (March 1945): 24; it was quoted often, including by Duchamp's friend Henri-Pierre Roché in his "Souvenirs sur Marcel Duchamp," *La Nouvelle N. R. F.* 1, no. 6 (June 1953): 1136.





# 2

## Food: The Raw and the Fluxed

Hannah Higgins

A list of Fluxed food reads like a menu: a bed of fresh carrots, abundant salad, bean porridge, frozen strawberries and orange juice, tuna fish on whole wheat toast (butter, no mayo), fresh apples, savory cheese, chilled wine, and deep, dark chocolate. We seem to be seated at a banquet that takes us from hors d'oeuvres through dessert. There are other Fluxed food banquets in nearby rooms: a rainbow banquet, all white, all black, all boxed, all clear. Whatever form determines each meal's contents, it is all delicious. Well, not quite—these meals are tasty, but not entirely edible. Fluxed food serves up good taste, whether in culture or food, for chewing over.

From within the greater history of art, it can be argued that Fluxed food combines the still life and the readymade in equal measure. The readymade enables artists to use things selected from the world as the material of art. The still life expresses the passage of time, the world's impermanence, by way of overripe or rotting fruit, delicate flowers, and the occasional hungry ant or flitting fly. Fluxus was not the first to combine these traditions by using real food as art material. Thirty years earlier, beginning in 1931, the Futurists also used real food to launch their

attack on cultural decadence, habituated ritual, and institutionalized culture.

In Futurism, like Fluxus, food became a tool for reinventing life—most spectacularly through subverting norms of taste and domesticity. Filippo Marinetti's *Manifesto of Futurist Cooking* (1931), for example, inveighed against pasta as lethargy-producing, domesticated, and fattening. The manifesto was distributed at the Futurists' "Holy Palate" restaurant, where the familiar comforts of pasta and hearth were replaced, on one characteristic menu, with "blazing Jew's harp, draw-bridge, railway disaster, keel of infernal vessel, wines from Trentino, hot chocolate and coffee, and liquor."<sup>1</sup> Cecilia Novero describes the phenomenon handily in terms that apply equally to Fluxed Food:

These actions (eating, cooking, and their metaphoric counterparts) bear more or less directly, more or less politically, on the avant-garde's immersion in and decomposition of this world that they ingest, bite into, and thereby construct anew in their works.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning around 1960, a generation of neo-avant-garde artists loosely associated with Fluxus would use food in similarly inventive ways. Daniel Spoerri's experiments with real food date to a 1963 show at Galerie J in Paris and have continued through his Spoerri Restaurant and Eat

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Opposite:

Alison Knowles, *The Identical Lunch with George Maciunas*, 1973, screen print on canvas. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the artist; GM.978.208 (cat. 96).



Art Gallery in Düsseldorf in 1968 and 1970 to the present. Spoerri's historic food-works ranged from preserving meals as "snare" pictures, to naming a series of homonymous meals, to carefully rendering one food to look like another, to the delectable preparation of culturally taboo foods. Ants, horse meat, elephant meat, and snake all made appearances on the Restaurant Spoerri menu. Spoerri hung his famous trap-paintings on the walls: meals were displayed post-consumption, with all the leftover elements glued down—cigarette butt, wineglass, dirty plate, napkin, and scraps of food, preserved by air drying in the restaurant or studio. In Spoerri's careful constructions, the still life—in French, *nature morte*—was rendered real as a meal, consumed, and then "snared," to use Spoerri's term.<sup>3</sup>

Spoerri's friend Dieter Roth (or Diter Rot) displayed chocolate and bread sculptures, among other things, at Spoerri's Eat Art Gallery next door. Over the ensuing decades, Roth's chocolate busts acquired a patina of cocoa powder that slowly gave way to dust, and the bread sculptures hardened, chipped, and crumbled in response to the air, light, moisture, and movement of the surrounding environment. In other works, Roth sandwiched meat between glass plates; as the meat putrefied and decomposed, delicate rainbows of iridescent fat and mold gradually liquefied to a wafer thin, translucent fleshiness. A slice of life, Roth's food-works change in time.

While Futurism, as well as the food-works of Dieter Roth and Daniel Spoerri, demonstrates both historic and contemporary affinities with Fluxus banquets, Fluxed food differs in that it generally involves food's everyday aspect. If Marinetti's Jew's harps and railways are anti-food, and Spoerri's food a spectacle to be seen or enjoyed as outside the norm, Fluxed food tends toward the ubiquitous. To use a much-maligned term, it matters that Fluxed food is *real* food, in the everyday sense. It is real as it grows. Real as it is prepared. Real as it is eaten. And real as it rots.

Fluxus food events constitute a spectrum. At one end are works where the material qualities

of everyday food are paramount. At the other are works where actual consumption forms the basis of the "narrative." Most Fluxed food falls somewhere in the middle. The earliest event to emphasize the everydayness of food was probably George Brecht's *Incidental Music* (1961): "Three dried beans are attached to the keys [of a piano] with adhesive tape."<sup>4</sup> Brecht then elaborated, "So, any sound is incidental. The important thing is that you're attaching the beans to the keys with the tape."<sup>5</sup> The ubiquity of beans and tape, their nearly universal availability, locates this work within an everyday context. The roundness and hardness of the beans means they will likely roll, on or off the piano, requiring a gentle fingertip to stabilize them, or perhaps some advance preparation, sticking them first to the tape before introducing them to the surface of the piano keys. A key may be inadvertently sounded or a bean dropped. It's all music.

Moving slightly toward the consumable, the score for Dick Higgins's *Danger Music Number Fifteen* (1962) reads simply "Work with butter and eggs for a time."<sup>6</sup> As the butter and eggs are mashed, cracked, whipped, and otherwise "worked," the squeezing and slopping of the materials dominates the piece. Even if the yellow results momentarily resemble a cooking action, the hollow tap of the eggs, the smooch, squish, and clack between the spoon and the bowl, make up the work. *Danger Music Number Fifteen* is not particularly about being edible: butter and eggs are worked (not slurped!) as the score is performed.

At the other end of the spectrum is Alison Knowles's *Proposition* (October 1962): "Make a salad." *Proposition* describes a dish that is not only made but also served and consumed. Care is taken in the quality of the ingredients, their preparation—washing, dicing, shredding, and so on—and in the exacting bite of the vinaigrette with which they are dressed. As in Brecht's *Incidental Music*, the sound is not planned but incidental.

Wherever they fall on the spectrum, one question remains of these very simple gestures:



Why do they hold our attention? Many scholars have rightly noted in this regard Daisetsu Suzuki's transmission of Zen Buddhism's attention to the everyday to a receptive American audience. In the 1940s and 1950s, this audience included the American composer John Cage, and many of his students found their way in turn to Fluxus. However, this account habitually neglects the fact that Cage's receptivity to Zen was very much a byproduct of the experience-based, progressive education that had shaped him. The best-known proponent of progressive education, John Dewey, was much admired by Suzuki, widely read at the time, and active on the board of Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where Cage taught in the summers of 1948 and 1952. One explanation for how relatively insignificant events hold our attention, then, is offered by Dewey in *Art as Experience*:

A piece of work is finished in such a way that it is satisfactory; a problem receives a solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation.<sup>7</sup>

Beans are taped. Butter and eggs are worked. Salad is tossed. Dewey's "experience" is based on the homology of real things being worked or played or rounded out in real time and reaching some form of "satisfactory" finish, whatever that may be.

The instructional Fluxus event proposes just such an experience, something bracketed off and yet continuous with life lived. Insofar as Fluxus events move rhythmically back and forth between the unremarkable occurrence and the attentive "other" attitude or focus brought to it, event creators derive from music their interest in how time shapes experience. Even so, the specific duration of most events is not predetermined, since solution, satisfaction, and consummation

are hard to predict. Dewey again:

Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of the live creature and environment conditions is involved in the very process of living . . . In contrast with such experience, we have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, experience occurs in real time but is an experience by virtue of our attentive attitude toward it.

A onetime chemist, George Brecht invented the event type of performance that is associated with Fluxus in a 1958–59 class on experimental composition offered by John Cage at the New School for Social Research in New York. In a clear reference to music, the event instruction is called a score ("make a salad," "work with butter and eggs," "three dried beans are attached to the keys [of a piano] with adhesive tape"). Additionally, "event" is a scientific term that originated in physics. By ex-scientist Brecht's account, events are temporal objects, meaning that there is a material change involved in each of them.<sup>9</sup> If the essence of music is temporal, in other words, event scores express the musicality (or temporality) of their everyday materials.

In Fluxus works, as in the world generally, real time takes many forms. Already we have seen real time in the form of the production and consumption of food events. Other Fluxed food-works exploit the distinctions between biological and mechanical or industrial time more explicitly. Larry Miller's *Slab* (1970) consists of carrots roughly equal to the artist's weight and size, sewn together and placed on the earth—a "morgue cadaver on a slab," by Miller's account (figure 2.1).<sup>10</sup> Over the course of thirty-three days, the carrots withered, shrank, were nibbled away by forest fauna, or dissolved while the grass frame that contained them softened at the sides, rounded at the edges, and eventually grew through the framed material. Miller describes the evolution beautifully:





**Figure 2.1**  
 Larry Miller, *Slab*, April 1970. Dimensions approximate size and weight of artist's body, 155 lbs. and 5' 10" length. Installed as part of "Art in the Outside," Caldwell College, Caldwell, N.J. Images from 1st, 4th and 33rd days. Mac Adams, curator.

The depression which seems to appear was created by the organic processes of the piece itself over time, decaying slowly—the moisture within the fresh carrots creating a wetting and softening of the specific area below it, and the “fertilizer” it provided for the nurturing of emerging grass beneath, which sprouted much more brilliant green and grew longer than the regular new grass growing up around it . . . it sank lower back into the earth, being absorbed and recycled.<sup>11</sup>

*Slab* clearly demonstrates the process of ecological reclamation of natural material (the carrots? a body?), suggesting a symbiotic balance between artistic and ecological processes that, by definition, do *not* function like clockwork.

In contrast, George Maciunas's *One Year* (figure 2.2; cat. 94) consists of a grid made of the food containers Maciunas had used over the



**Figure 2.2**  
 George Maciunas, *One Year* (detail), 1973, empty food containers from one year. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. (cat. 94). © Courtesy of Billie Maciunas.



course of a year; he covered his wall with an irregular arrangement of areas dominated by the same frozen strawberry containers, frozen orange juice containers, sugar packets, and so on. This grid explicitly expresses the standardization of time and space into the quantified units of industrial life: a minute, an hour, a week, a month, and a year as rendered by the rhythmic repetition of carefully calculated ounces, pounds, and cubic inches in stackable form.<sup>12</sup> Digestive processes notwithstanding, the grid form of *One Year* illustrates the extent to which temporal and spatial regulation typify the widespread industrialization of society at large.

Likewise, Ben Vautier remarked poignantly on the abstract nature of food production and consumption with a street performance in Nice in 1963 and a subsequent edition of *Flux-Mystery Food* in 1966–67. These cans respond to Maciunas's practice of purchasing cans whose labels had fallen off from the grocery store for very little and consuming the contents, which would create essentially randomized meals of, say, peaches and beans or Spam and tomato sauce. Without the label, there is no visible relationship between the form of the container and its contents. Unlike the functionally specific household jars and bowls of pre-industrial food preservation, the manufactured can holds all variety of edible material in sealed, cylindrical, standardized volumes.

French philosopher Henri Bergson describes the distinction between biological and mechanical time in ethical terms that are useful in understanding these Fluxed food works. For Bergson, real life is expressed in ecological "evolution," where the historic record is embedded in the current state of a natural material as pure duration. In contrast, intellect (the rational mind) has created a world characterized by an exploitative standard expressed in measure and attention only to peak performance:

We do not think real time. But we live it, because life transcends intellect. The feeling we have of our evolution and of the evolution

of all things in pure duration is there, forming around the intellectual concept . . . Mechanism and finalism agree in taking account only of the bright nucleus shining in the center. They forget that this nucleus has been formed out of the rest by condensation and that the whole must be used, the fluid as well as and more than the condensed, in order to grasp the inner movement of life.<sup>13</sup>

Larry Miller's *Slab* (1970) and George Maciunas's *One Year* (1973) express exactly this opposition. *Slab* rots and regenerates. *One Year* expresses a mechanized world where food fails to decay and exists in carefully measured, prepared, preserved units. *Slab* expresses a confluence of creative and organic rhythms that seems a direct expression of Bergson's admonishment that "the whole [of temporality] must be used, the fluid as well as and more than the condensed, in order to grasp the inner movement of life."

These works demonstrate the extent to which the 1960s bore witness to a fundamental shift in how and what we eat. That decade saw the growth of the science of "flavormatics," when, according to food historians Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott, "flavorists set out to recreate virtually the whole spectrum of food flavors, from fruits and vegetables to meats . . . the majority of food on the supermarket shelves today has at least some artificial flavoring."<sup>14</sup> In other words, as these Fluxus food-works were being made, food was becoming ever more abstracted from nature in terms of its distribution—which is evident in the packaging—as well as the flavors and textures of food itself. "Some artificial flavors have no counterpart in nature," they continue.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, with artificial enhancements, food now consists of "a virtual reality of smell and taste."<sup>16</sup>

Traditional concerns with the freshness of meat and vegetables, as indicated by their skin, color, or smell, were exchanged for the clean sheen of plastic, an aluminum can, or a photographic label. Likewise, customs for preparing



food that might no longer be of optimal freshness, such as boiling and seasoning slightly rotten meat, virtually disappear with regard to the canned product. Another way to put this is that through the process of industrialization represented by preserved-food packaging, a shift occurred that resulted in the suppression of Bergsonian “duration.” Instead, scientists and businesspeople married predictable or mechanical duration to the organic material historically used as food, resulting in its being essentially unchanged by time. This shift was not without its consequences, as it signifies a form of alienation from this most basic human need. At some point, after all, food originates in the earth, not in a can.

It could be said, then, that whereas Vautier’s *Flux-Mystery Food* and Maciunas’s *One Year* replicate the abstract nature of food science in the industrial age and thereby offer it up for experiential (and/or critical) consideration, Larry Miller’s *Slab* articulates organic time as both productive of and effective on food products. It might even be said that *Slab* expresses precisely those values put forth by adherents of sustainable agriculture in the years since the 1960s. Albeit with certain faddish associations, the underlying logic necessitating sustainability confronts the abstraction of farming practices as based solely on production maximization. According to some critics,

[Our] food is becoming little more than a low quality medium to which food manufacturers add coloring and flavoring to give the stuff minimal consumer appeal, a dozen or so basic vitamins to give it “nutrition,” several chemicals to hold it together, preservatives to give it shelf-life probably greater than your own allotted years, sugar to cover up any mistakes and a package to make it “convenient.”<sup>17</sup>

Together, industrialized production techniques and modern consumer habits generate a lethal combination: food that is both bad for the environment and bad for the consumer.

Beginning with her *Propositions*, Alison

Knowles has made food-works for forty years.<sup>18</sup> One particularly well-known work, *Identical Lunch* (1969), resulted in a book, *The Journal of the Identical Lunch* (1971; see page 12; cat. 96).<sup>19</sup> Fluxus artist-composer Philip Corner shared a studio with Knowles in 1969 and noted her habit of eating exactly the same lunch each day at a diner in Chelsea called Riss Foods. The original work that arose from Corner’s observation simply describes a lunch: “A tuna fish sandwich on wheat toast with butter and lettuce, no mayo, and a cup of soup or glass of buttermilk.”<sup>20</sup> The book-length journal of the work, however, assembles accounts of this lunch from Knowles, Corner, and myriad other artists that indicate that the *Identical Lunch* was in fact never that: prices, bread type, consistency and flavor of the tuna, dishware, sounds, conversations all change.

Art historian Kristine Stiles has written eloquently and repeatedly about this work and describes the biological framework of the *Lunch*:

*Identical Lunch* is about the body that eats . . . Now the body that eats and drinks is alive. It is nourished, gains sustenance, and survives. The profundity of the *Identical Lunch* is sustained by the simplicity with which edible organic matter (“a tuna fish sandwich on wheat toast . . .”) signifies the primary, nurturing action of life.<sup>21</sup>

As Stiles notes, this “life” is distinctly social (or “communal”):

*Identical Lunch* negotiates sameness, unity, and homogeneity, all aspects of the individual identity unmitigated by the social, simultaneously with the foil of opposition, counterpoint and heterogeneity characteristic of the communal.<sup>22</sup>

This social dimension of Fluxus food-works predates Knowles’s *Lunch*. In Paris, Fluxus poets Emmett Williams and Robert Filliou introduced to the world their co-invention, *The Spaghetti*

*Sandwich*, on June 5, 1963, at the Galerie Raymond Cordier. While it “was hard enough to feed ourselves . . . these were happy days,” Williams recalls with characteristic good humor:

I cooked up an enormous batch of the spaghetti sauce for which I am famous, and put it in the refrigerator as a surprise . . . Robert and I decided to sample the sauce. It was very good, even cold. We spread it on bread, and ate it in this fashion several times, and even invited some of our friends to do the same . . . *The Spaghetti Sandwich* was born . . . it was indeed “born from necessity and consumed forthwith.”<sup>23</sup>

Born from economic necessity and framed by a close friendship between poets, this sandwich would even cause co-inventor Filliou to exult, “You can talk about art, music and poetry all you want, but remember, with The Spaghetti Sandwich you can feed an entire army. And the Astronauts. The Cosmonauts as well!”<sup>24</sup> There is some truth in his words, albeit expressed as a joke, in the exaggerated terms of space exploration. Unlike the expensive but lightweight powdered food associated with early space travel, the spaghetti sandwich was low cost, low tech, and reasonably nutritious.

Beginning four years later in 1967 (and continuing until 1978), Fluxus co-founder George Maciunas would host a series of now legendary New Year’s *Fluxmeals* at 80 Wooster Street in New York. These New Year’s parties offered denominations of food, such as clear foods, rainbow foods, or the single-colored, all black, all white, all red meal. Unlike the other meals thus far discussed, the later *Fluxmeals* included experimental and non-edible “food.” George Maciunas’s 1969 New Year’s banquet included delectable and nutritious “shit porridge” (a misnomer he attached to Knowles’s bean soup), as well as marginally consumable distillations of tomato juice, coffee, and prune juice—“all clear but retaining the taste”—and non-edible proposals for filling

eggs with paint and shaving cream.<sup>25</sup> The coordinated community experience at each of the later *Fluxmeals* included food, quasi-food, and non-food. Put differently, the experience ranged from meeting the most basic needs of the body to gustatory experimentation and conceptual play. It must have come as a relief when, at the New Year’s banquet in 1969, Knowles built a booth, offered identical lunches to her friends, and took the Polaroid photographs that would eventually constitute the illustrations in *The Identical Lunch*.

As demonstrated by the range of foodstuffs, edible and otherwise, at the *Fluxmeals*, the point of it all was not merely to enjoy the food and evening’s entertainment as delectation but to subject the consumption process to a form of critique by way of experimentalism. Fluxus artists were, by and large, financially poor, and inventive approaches to ubiquitous and inexpensive food items served both cultural and financial/nutritional interests. There are some noteworthy exceptions to this ascetic dimension of the Fluxus meal, however, especially with regard to the exotic, sexual, and even scatological dimensions of eating. I mentioned shit porridge, but other Fluxed food experiments could be quite lewd indeed, as when Fluxus friend Hala Pietkovich produced a detailed chopped-liver penis for the wedding reception of George Maciunas and Billie Hutchins on February 25, 1978. Similarly, in 1993, the Arts Club of Chicago hosted a Fluxus “Lewd Food” banquet of obscene-looking dishes. For this event, Larry Miller built a Plexiglas box that was lowered over the food and had holes for the arms and mouth of the diner. With this clever contraption, both the meal and the action of eating it were “framed” by a vitrine that embedded the food in an explicitly artistic process. The erotic nature of this meal, of course, removed it explicitly from the ubiquitous nature of food emphasized in much other Fluxus food-work.

We find food’s sensuous associations quite literally embodied in the last banquet that I will discuss. In 1980, Danish Fluxus artist Eric





**Figure 2.3**  
Eric Andersen, *Please Leave*, Roskilde Thing og Arresthus (City Court House of Roskilde), May 30, 1985. Photo courtesy of Sissi Jarner.

Andersen proposed a banquet to Interart in New York that was finally executed in 1985 in the Danish city of Roskilde and at several locations since, including the historic Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in the winter of 2008. At Roskilde, Andersen closed the doors of an unused courtroom and enticed the audience within to depart using a range of delicacies (figure 2.3). The piece is called *Please Leave*, and in it the audience is confronted with a choice. In Roskilde, they were offered good wine, fine sausages, cheeses, rare chocolates, and flowers, and could take any of it if they would agree to leave the room. This forced a dilemma between satisfying their intellectual curiosity about what would happen in the room and satisfying their bodily desire to indulge in the treats heaped high on a table, as if in a Northern Baroque still life. Good taste (in food) was put in direct competition with the propriety (the other kind of good taste) of the courtroom setting. Since nothing happened except for a slow whittling away at the table contents, the better choice was to take something good and maybe share it somewhere else with a friend.

Western societies have long associated food and temporal cycles quite closely—feasting of all sorts is linked to harvests as well as other seasonal

and calendar changes. The New Year's banquets marked time for the Fluxus artists. Fluxus today is characterized an irregular pulse of reunion performances and exhibitions. In much smaller increments, time also has something to do with the Fluxus event format itself. After all, it is time, however loosely marked as a beginning and end of an action, that demarcates the event as *an experience* and not merely an undifferentiated segment of life's flow.

Food likewise marks time uniquely. It was (and remains) a natural material for Fluxus artists, whose interests stemmed historically from the spatial/temporal dimensions of music that resonate with food. As Fluxus fluxes, the use and significance of food by Fluxus artists has become extraordinarily broad. I suggest that readers experience some of this work for themselves. Make incidental music. Make a salad. Make a soup. Work with butter and eggs for a time. Sew a carrot or carry or study one. Stack your containers. Make a Spaghetti Sandwich or an Identical Lunch. Make a *Fluxmeal* for your friends. Bon appetit!



## Notes

- 1 Cecilia Novero, *Antidiets of the Avant-Garde: From Futurism to Eat Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 6.
- 2 *Ibid.*, xxii.
- 3 Daniel Spoerri, *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance (Re-Anecdoted Version), with the Help of Robert Filliou and Translated and Further Anecdoted by Emmett Williams* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), 181–82.
- 4 George Brecht, *The Book of the Tumbler on Fire* (Milano: Multipla Edizioni, 1978), 105.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Dick Higgins, “Danger Music Number Fifteen (for the Dance),” May 1962. Many *Danger Music* scores are reprinted in Ken Friedman, ed., *The Fluxus Performance Workbook* (Trondheim: El Djarida, 1990), 23–24. All are reprinted in *A Dick Higgins Sampler: The Last Great Bear Pamphlet*, ed. Jeff Abel, Simon Anderson, and Hannah Higgins (Chicago: The Columbia College Center for the Book and Paper Arts, 2000), 9–11.
- 7 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934; New York: Penguin Putnam, 1980), 35.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 Email exchange with Larry Miller, October 13, 2009, in which Miller recounted a 1989 conversation with George Brecht.
- 10 Larry Miller, email to the author, October 13, 2009.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 For a brief survey of the history of time as linked to changes in capital development and industrialization, see Richard Biernacki, “Time-Cents: The Monetization of the Workday in Comparative Perspective,” in *NowHere: Space, Time and Modernity*, ed. Roger Friedland and Deirdre Boden (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 61–94. See also G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History: The Evolution of Our General Awareness of Time and Temporal Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
- 13 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (1906; Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Press, 1998), 318. This quotation demonstrates clearly the extent to which the common criticism of Bergson as a dualistic philosopher separating matter and life is based on an overdetermination of pieces of his argument. For an account of Bergson’s science as unified and implicative in this regard, see Pete A. Gunter, “The Heuristic Force of *Creative Evolution*,” *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (Fall 1970): 111–18.
- 14 Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London: Routledge, 1994), 197–98.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 199.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 198.
- 17 J. Hightower and S. DeMarco, “Corporate Chefs Cook Consumer’s Goose,” *National Catholic Reporter*, November 1978, quoted in Michael Schaaf, 283.
- 18 From the *Bean Rolls* (1963), which consisted of a can with beans and scrolls of bean lore, to the *Book of Bean* (1982), to large-scale paper instruments called *Bean Turners* (2001–present), Knowles has dedicated a lifetime to explorations of the physical and cross-cultural values of this homely food. Producing a compendium of these cultural values in 1982 as a book, *A Bean Concordance*, she organizes “bean culture” in the multiple forms of recipes, colloquialisms, associations, scientific records, and myths. In the ubiquity of the bean is its profundity, however sublime; she writes: “One of the delights of traveling is to find new names for beans we are long familiar with, to discover new types altogether, and to find slight variations on what we thought standard.”
- 19 Alison Knowles, *Journal of the Identical Lunch* (San Francisco: Nova Broadcast Press, 1971).
- 20 Conversation with Alison Knowles, February 21, 2003, New York.
- 21 Kristine Stiles, “Tuna and Other Fishy Thoughts on Fluxus Events,” in *FluxAttitudes* (New York: The New Museum, 1992), 25.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 23 Emmett Williams, *My Life in Flux—And Vice Versa* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 128.
- 24 Filliou quoted in Williams, *My Life in Flux*, 128.
- 25 *Fluxnewsletter*, Jan. 31, 1968; Silverman Collection, Detroit.

## Manifesto:

2. To affect, or bring to a certain state, by subjecting to, or treating with, a flux. "Flured into another world." South.
3. *Med.* To cause a discharge from, as in purging.

**flux** (flüks), *n.* [OF., fr. L. *fluxus*, fr. *fluere*, *fluxum*, to flow. See FLUENT; cf. FLUSH, *n.* (of cards).] 1. *Med.*  
a A flowing or fluid discharge from the bowels or other part: esp., an excessive and morbid discharge: as, the bloody *flux*, or dysentery. b The matter thus discharged.

Purge the world of bourgeois sickness, "intellectual", professional & commercialized culture, PURGE the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art, —  
PURGE THE WORLD OF "EUROPANISM" !

2. Act of flowing: a continuous moving on or passing by, as of a flowing stream; a continuing succession of changes.
3. A stream; copious flow; flood; outflow.
4. The setting in of the tide toward the shore. Cf. REFLUX.
5. State of being liquid through heat; fusion. Rare.

PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD AND TIDE IN ART,  
Promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART REALITY to be fully grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals.

7. *Chem. & Metal.* a Any substance or mixture used to promote fusion, esp. the fusion of metals or minerals. Common metallurgical fluxes are silica and silicates (acidic), lime and limestone (basic), and fluorite (neutral). b Any substance applied to surfaces to be joined by soldering or welding, just prior to or during the operation, to clean and free them from oxide, thus promoting their union, as ro-in.

FUSE the cadres of cultural, social & political revolutionaries into united front & action.



# 3

## George Maciunas's Politics of Aesthetics

Jacob Proctor

Political activity . . . makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise.

—Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*<sup>1</sup>

### The Originale Affair

On the evening of Tuesday, September 8, 1964, outside Judson Hall on 57th Street in New York City, a small group of picketers calling themselves “Action Against Cultural Imperialism” gathered to protest the United States premiere of Karlheinz Stockhausen’s happening-like theatrical composition *Originale*. Organized by Fluxus “chairman” George Maciunas and philosopher and composer Henry Flynt, the picketers consisted of Japanese Fluxus artists Ay-O and Takako Saito, violinist and filmmaker Tony Conrad, and poet and activist Marc Schleifer.<sup>2</sup> Although the picketers were protesting “white, European-U.S. Ruling-Class Art” in general, their particular target that evening was the German composer’s

alleged dismissal of non-Western and African American music as “primitive” and even “barbaric.”<sup>3</sup> Directed by Allan Kaprow, the Stockhausen performance was presented as part of Charlotte Moorman’s 2nd Annual New York Avant-Garde Festival. Flynt and Maciunas had organized a similar picket when Stockhausen appeared on a program of West German Music at Town Hall on April 29, but the *Originale* protest had more visibility and significantly deeper ramifications: this time several Fluxus artists and friends were participants in the performance.

In many ways, *Originale* was not an obvious target for Maciunas’s ire. Like many Fluxus performances, *Originale* was strongly influenced by the indeterminate compositions of John Cage, in particular Cage’s *Theater Piece* of 1960. And unlike the hyper-formalism that Stockhausen’s music was known for, *Originale* was almost vaudevillian in its mixture of order and chaos, the mundane and the absurd. Although the piece was tightly scripted from a temporal perspective, the stage actions consisted largely of normal, everyday activities performed by actors essentially playing themselves. “The poet” reads poetry, “the painter” paints, a “film man,” “lighting man,” and “sound engineer” go about their business, and so on. Despite the composition’s rigorous

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Opposite:  
George Maciunas, *Fluxus Manifesto*, 1963.



temporal structure, the overall effect was decidedly messy and chaotic.

Several contemporary reviewers mentioned the picketers. Some mistakenly interpreted them as part of the festivities, while others described them as avant-garde rivals. The day after the premiere, the *New York Times* reported, “Outside, just before the performance, seven or eight pickets were demonstrating. Some said they were part of the show. Others said no, including the picketers, but nobody believed them.”<sup>4</sup> To the uninitiated, there was little to distinguish one camp from the other. According to the *Times*, the picketers “claimed to be members of the Action Against Cultural Imperialism, but they looked like the participants in ‘Originale,’ they talked like the participants in ‘Originale,’ they acted like the participants in ‘Originale,’ and they were dressed like the participants in ‘Originale.’” Even to the initiated, the conflict was something of a mystery. Fluxus was among the individuals and organizations gratefully acknowledged in the 2nd Annual New York Avant-Garde Festival’s program of events, and no less an insider than *Village Voice* dance critic—and uncredited *Originale* cast member—Jill Johnston reported a few weeks later that even she didn’t know why the “Fluxus people” were picketing the concert.<sup>5</sup>

Despite *Originale*’s outward similarities to Fluxus events, however, Maciunas had long viewed Stockhausen as a prime example of the bourgeois artistic tradition that Fluxus was bent on eliminating. Writing to Robert Watts in early 1963, Maciunas referred to the German composer as a “nationalistic megalomaniac”<sup>6</sup> and in a contemporaneous letter to Ben Vautier described the recent *Festum Fluxorum Fluxus* at the Düsseldorf Art Academy as the successful completion of “our ‘winter offensive’ against all bourgeois reactionaries, dogmatists & Stockhausenism.”<sup>7</sup> Unlike the radical indeterminacy embraced by Fluxus, Stockhausen remained wedded to many of the essential conventions of Western music. As John Cage noted in his analysis of Stockhausen’s *Klavierstück XI*, the presence in the composition

of “the two most conventional aspects of European music—that is to say, the twelve tones of the octave . . . and the regularity of beat” means that the performer “will be led to give the form aspects essentially conventional to European music.” The indeterminate aspects of the composition, Cage concluded, “do not remove the work in its performance from the body of European musical conventions.”<sup>8</sup> At its core, however, the *Originale* affair was about much more than Stockhausen. It was the culmination of artistic and ideological tensions that had been growing within the Fluxus community for some time, a moment of crisis in a debate over the relationship between aesthetics and politics, two categories that for Maciunas had become increasingly indistinguishable.

### Rancière’s Politics of Aesthetics

In recent years the French philosopher Jacques Rancière has proposed a radical reassessment of the relationship between art and politics. Working independently of long-dominant models grounded in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, Rancière attempts to reclaim the politics-aesthetics relationship from its associations with totalitarianism and to recast it, under the rubric of the “politics of aesthetics,” as a mode of questioning—and challenging—the existing political order. For Rancière, both aesthetics and politics act through a process of disrupting and reconfiguring what he terms “the distribution of the sensible”: the implicit law governing “the sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and of its organization.”<sup>9</sup>

Starting from the Aristotelian axiom that a speaking being is a political being, Rancière argues that the distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do (their occupation) and on the time and space in which they do it. In this formulation, aesthetics is understood as “a delimitation of spaces and times, of

the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience.”<sup>10</sup> Politics, in turn, “revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.”<sup>11</sup> Politics is aesthetic because it reconfigures the common field of what is seeable and sayable. Within this economy, artistic practices have the potential to intervene in the distribution of the sensible and are thereby fundamentally involved in the political life of the community.

For Rancière, both art and politics are processes of egalitarian disruption in the distribution of the sensible that introduce new subjects and objects into the field of perception. Importantly, this disruption is not simply a redistribution of power between existing groups but a fissure in the aesthetic coordinates of perception, thought, and action, an introduction of something that would normally be inadmissible. Both art and politics work by making visible that which previously had no business being seen or making audible as discourse that which had previously been perceived as noise.

As a lens through which to view the diversity of Fluxus practice and its political implications, Rancière’s reframing of the relationship between politics and aesthetics can perhaps help us understand how Fluxus was able, at times, to reclaim and fuse the contradictory impulses of the historical avant-gardes, combining Dada negation, for example, with the utopian aspirations of the Productivist phase of the post-revolutionary Soviet avant-garde. Moreover, Rancière’s radically egalitarian concept of politics highlights the political implications of Maciunas’s commitment not only to prove that “anything can be art and anyone can do it” but also his parallel effort to “demonstrate the self-sufficiency of the audience,” thereby eliminating not only the artist’s claim to technical mastery (itself a relatively common tactic in the “deskilled” art of the 1960s) but also to a more sophisticated sensibility.

In this essay I want to suggest that Maciunas’s opposition to Stockhausen was not simply an anti-elitist, anti-art gesture, although it certainly was both of those things. Something more fundamentally political—in Rancièrian terms—was at stake: the disruption of an established order defining what kinds of phenomena count as music and which are only legible as noise, and therefore who or what subjects are granted a voice in the common culture. In this respect, Maciunas and Flynt’s protest was both a rejection of an idea of aesthetics as separate from politics and an affirmation of a new aesthetic model in which all subjects have the potential to be heard.

In seeking to eliminate *art* as an autonomous category of bourgeois society, I would argue, Maciunas did not aim to eliminate the *aesthetic*. Quite the opposite: through Fluxus, Maciunas sought to extend the aesthetic, and to reassert its coincidence with the social and the political. By considering Maciunas’s project in light of Rancière’s notion of the politics of aesthetics, I propose to step aside from the art/anti-art dichotomy that preoccupies Maciunas’s writing and so much writing on Maciunas and instead explore how Maciunas’s vision of a Fluxus-induced “non-art reality” exploded any perceived distinction between the political and the aesthetic.

### From Art to Non-Art Reality

There is good reason to believe that Maciunas had always understood Fluxus as primarily a form of social and political praxis. As early as 1961 he had identified the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s—in particular the Productivist *LEF* group—as a model for what would become Fluxus.<sup>12</sup> This influence is evident in the Fluxus Manifesto that Maciunas produced and distributed at the 1963 *Festum Fluxorum Fluxus* at the Düsseldorf Art Academy (see page 22). Between dictionary definitions of the word *flux*, Maciunas outlined Fluxus’s three main tenets:

- Purge the world of bourgeois sickness,



“intellectual,” professional & commercialized culture, PURGE the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art,—PURGE THE WORLD OF “EUROPANISM”[sic]!

- PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD AND TIDE IN ART. Promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART REALITY to be fully grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals.
- FUSE the cadres of cultural, social & political revolutionaries into united front & action.

Printed on a single sheet of paper, Maciunas’s “Purge” manifesto is a masterpiece of détournement, appropriating the institutional authority of the dictionary entry and repurposing it in the service of his resolutely anti-institutional project. As Julia Robinson has noted, the manifesto’s collage structure allowed Maciunas to weave together the dictionary excerpts and his own handwriting into a seemingly coherent whole, transforming the words from the dictionary text into imperatives in the handwritten segments.<sup>13</sup> Thus the bodily discharge in the first dictionary fragment is tied to the repeated calls to “purge the world” in the first handwritten section. In the second pair of texts, the dictionary’s “act of flowing” becomes Fluxus’s “revolutionary flood and tide.” In the third, the act of “fusion” is linked to the call to “FUSE the cadres of cultural, social & political revolutionaries into united front & action.”

This process of semantic repurposing mirrors the internal paradox of the manifesto’s call for the simultaneous promotion and destruction of art. The “purge” manifesto provides early evidence of Maciunas’s keen understanding of the aesthetic and political resonance of particular forms of address. The manifesto format, almost by definition, calls for the new order to be built upon the destruction of the old. Simultaneously calling for the promotion of revolutionary art, living art, anti-art, and non-art reality, Maciunas acknowledges that as interventions in the established distribution of the sensible, all were forms

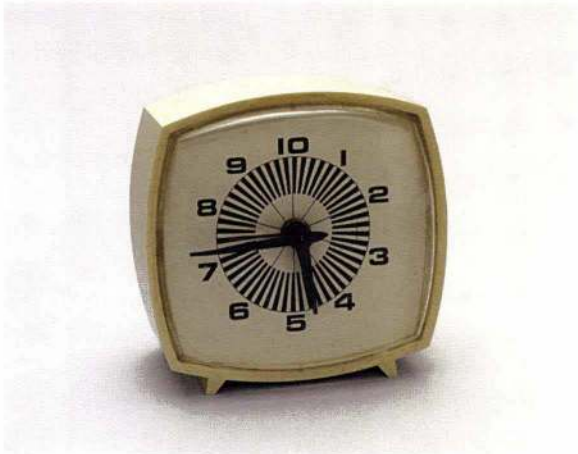
of politics and all were—temporarily, at least—to be encouraged.

Maciunas more fully outlined his position in a January 1964 letter to German artist Thomas Schmit: “Fluxus objectives are social (not aesthetic). They are connected to . . . the LEF group of 1929 in Soviet Union (ideologically) and concern[ed] with: Gradual elimination of fine arts (music, theatre, poetry, fiction, painting, sculpt—etc. etc.). This is motivated by desire to stop the waste of material and human resources . . . and divert it to socially constructive ends.”<sup>14</sup>

### From Dysfunctional to Functional Objects

When he wrote to Schmit, Maciunas was back in New York, pursuing such constructive ends in a loft space at 359 Canal Street, where he would, in the spring of 1964, open the Fluxshop/Fluxhall, a combination factory/retail/mail-order operation and official Fluxus headquarters. In place of the rarified atmosphere of the art gallery, the Fluxshop unabashedly announced its commercial status, a position highlighted by its location in a district dominated by light manufacturing and commercial distribution warehouses. Although Maciunas maintained that “Fluxus is definitely against [the] art object as non-functional commodity,” he conceded that such an art object “could temporarily have the pedagogical function of teaching people the needlessness of art including the eventual needlessness of itself.”<sup>15</sup>

Maciunas responded to this paradox by producing “art objects” disguised as cheap, absurdist send-ups of commercial products. These Fluxus editions present the artwork not only as a non-functional commodity but also often as an actively dysfunctional one. From games with absent or nonsensical rules to gadgets of dubious utility, such works often play on the incongruence between a work’s ostensible purpose (often cheekily advertised on its accompanying label) and its actual physical form, employing useful, everyday objects that have been altered or



**Figure 3.1**

Robert Watts, *10-Hour Flux Clock*, about 1969, alarm clock with added offset face, assembled by George Maciunas as a Fluxus Edition. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY (cat. 103)



**Figure 3.2**

Jock Reynolds, prototype for *Potentially Dangerous Electrical Household Appliance*, 1969, hinged clear plastic box with label containing two-headed plug, plastic sheet. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis: Gift of Jock Reynolds in memory of Beatrice B. Reynolds, 1993; 1993.16.1–2 (cat. 21).

repackaged to undermine their functionality. The face of Per Kirkeby's *Flux-Clock (Distance Traveled in mm)* (cat. 104), for instance, is altered so that it measures its own circumference, rather than the passage of time, while Maciunas and Robert Watts's *Ten-Hour Flux Clock* (figure 3.1; cat. 103) replaces the face on a standard alarm clock with a ten-hour clock face. Other Fluxus editions feature objects that are exactly what they purport to be but perform (or don't perform) functions ranging from the absurd, such as Watts's mute, inert *chromed goods* or *Flux-Rocks*, to the alarming, such as the two electrical plugs connected to either end of the same wire in Jock Reynolds's *Potentially Dangerous Electrical Household Appliance* (figure 3.2; cat. 21).

At the same time that he was publishing these ersatz consumer goods, Maciunas busied himself with “productive work” designing “functionalist” products—from tables and venetian blinds to underwear (figure 3.3; cat. 81; see also cat. 82) and stationery—that applied a Fluxus aesthetic to objects of everyday use. Closely related to his concept of musical “concretism,” Maciunas’s “functionalism” primarily involved the coincidence between an object’s function or use and its sensible appearance: aprons printed with an anatomical drawing of a stomach or a photograph of the Venus de Milo, dining tables topped with photos of legs or discarded meals, venetian blinds printed with nude and clothed versions of their owner, one per side, and so on. The high point of Maciunas’s functionalist design, however, was a prefabricated housing system conceived as a corrective response to Soviet prefabricated housing (cat. 95). An ingenious system consisting of only nine mass-produced components, constructed primarily from modern plastic materials, it was designed for a maximum combination of flexibility and efficiency.<sup>16</sup> Although never adopted by the Soviet Union, it was, Flynt reported, Maciunas’s greatest creative enthusiasm at the time.<sup>17</sup> Like the Constructivist ideal on which it was modeled, Maciunas’s functionalism was predicated on a belief in the power of aesthetics to





**Figure 3.3**  
 Robert Watts, *Female Underpants*, about 1966, screen print on fabric. Harvard Art Museum, Fogg Art Museum, Barbara and Peter Moore Fluxus Collection: Margaret Fisher Fund and gift of Barbara Moore/Bound & Unbound; M26488 (cat. 81). Photo by Imaging Department. © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

constitute a new collective world. That is, not only would Fluxus objects demonstrate the obsolescence of old models of doing and making; they would also reconfigure the conditions of reception, such that eventually “art” would no longer be necessary.

### From Works to Events

Just as Maciunas envisioned that, by demonstrating their uselessness, Fluxus anti-commodities would ensure their own obsolescence, so he hoped that “these Fluxus concerts, publications, etc.—are at best transitional (a few years) & temporary until such time when fine art can be totally eliminated (or at least its institutional forms).”<sup>18</sup> Although concerts and festivals might

be necessary in order to gain the audience’s attention in the near term, he suggested, eventually the spectator would come to realize his or her own self-sufficiency. The ideal Fluxus composition, in Maciunas’s view, would function as a kind of readymade, occurring automatically, without any “special” performance. All one need do is notice it.

Fluxus artists like Brecht and Dick Higgins, among others, had been introduced to strategies of indeterminate composition in John Cage’s experimental composition classes at New York’s New School for Social Research in the late 1950s. Coupled with a vastly expanded notion of what could constitute musical sound, these strategies were crucial to the development of the Fluxus event score.<sup>19</sup> Cage’s infamous “silent” composition *4’ 33”* (1952) is perhaps the most extreme example of indeterminate composition: the performer takes his or her place on the stage and remains silent for each of the piece’s three movements, for a total duration of exactly four minutes and thirty-three seconds. In fact, the piece is not silent at all but filled with the ambient sounds of the concert hall. This “noise,” unique to each performance, constitutes the form of the work, or its “music.” This abdication of authorial agency effectively dismantled the paradigm of artistic virtuosity and unilateral authorial control that had defined Western music for centuries.

In their event scores, Fluxus artists extended Cage’s compositional model to include not only readymade sounds but also readymade actions. Although such scores have the potential for great complexity, with multiple performers carrying out long series of simultaneous actions, in their most distilled form they schematically describe actions so simple and commonplace that one would scarcely be aware of them otherwise. Furthermore, such scores could be realized however the performer wished. The score for George Brecht’s *Word Event (Exit)* (1961) reads:

word event  
 • EXIT

Not only does this score require no special talent or skill on the part of the performer, it ultimately requires no human performer at all. The goal of such scores was not to produce “art” but to reframe experience and apply to “non-art reality” the level of attentiveness normally reserved for art. In Rancière’s terms, their effect was to make visible that which had previously been invisible, subtly but effectively altering the organizing terms of individual and collective experience in a radically egalitarian way.

### From Performance to Propaganda

On April 6, 1963, Maciunas mailed out “Fluxus News-Policy Letter No. 6” from Ehlhalten, West Germany. The first Fluxus newsletter to be handwritten rather than typed, “Newsletter 6” is nevertheless a highly structured document, laid out in five neat horizontal registers, each dedicated to a particular type of information or activity. Following the document’s title, date, and twenty-one-person distribution list, the bulk of the communiqué is devoted to two sections:

- I) PROPOSED PROPAGANDA ACTION FOR NOV. FLUXUS IN N.Y.C.
- II) PROPOSED PRELIMINARY CONTENTS OF NYC FLUXUS IN NOV.

The first section’s proposed “Propaganda Action”—intended to take place from May through November—was an unlikely mash-up of sabotage and PR blitz designed to simultaneously cripple the city’s existing cultural institutions and generate publicity for November’s upcoming series of Fluxus events. It outlined four primary forms of propaganda: (A) pickets and demonstrations; (B) sabotage and disruption of the city’s transportation, communication, and cultural systems; (C) public performance of Fluxus compositions; and (D) the sale of Fluxus publications.

As examples of sabotage and disruption, Maciunas proposed such tactics as blocking intersections and bridges with abandoned cars, clogging

the subway during rush hour with cumbersome objects such as large musical instruments or signs bearing Fluxus announcements, and distributing misinformation about cultural events. Concerts could be disrupted with “smell” and “sneeze bombs” and museum or gallery openings interrupted by arranging by phone for the delivery of “various cumbersome objects” such as rented furniture or construction materials.

In the third subsection, Maciunas listed a series of Fluxus performances that could be deployed as part of the campaign:

1. N. J. Paik’s string quartet (dragging through streets, stairs by a string cello, contrabass, etc. (on their backs)). (dragging like a toy wagon)
2. Performing R. Watts subway event during rush hours (group performance), casual event, washroom event, etc.
3. Carrying posters at museums, concert halls, theatres saying (in small letters) composition “x” & (in large letters) “Museum closed (or moves to Fluxus) due to . . . (burst sewage line, leaking urinal or other reason).
4. La Monte Young straight line composition on crowded sidewalks at museums etc.
5. Releasing balloons (helium filled) (arranged to explode high in the air) bearing R. Watts dollar bills, Fluxus announcements, “pictures” etc. etc.<sup>20</sup>

Section II—the preliminary contents of the November Fluxus Festival—proposed such activities as “concerts,” contests, and exhibitions in public spaces; lectures by Henry Flynt; and, grouped under subheading 5, “Sale of Fluxus, Yam publications & exhibits, sale of Ben Vautier ‘certificates,’ disposal of garbage etc. in galleries, by moving vehicle, fruit carts, etc.”

Maciunas was highly attuned to the aesthetic resonance of different formats of graphic presentation. Eschewing linear prose, he frequently adopted the diagrammatic chart or table’s



organizational system of columns and registers to visually establish hierarchies and relationships of significance within a given document. In the Fluxus newsletters, as in his earlier mobilization of the forms of the manifesto, the poster, and the diagrammatic chart, Maciunas exploited the aesthetic form of the outline. Like the chart, the outline is much more than an innocent list. Within the hierarchical schema of the outline, parallel levels of information may differ in content while being granted a parity of semantic importance. In this way, the outline is itself a potent mode of textual-visual argument—an artifact of the page and of thought that exploits the formal strategies of page layout and alphabetization (or numeration) to enforce a particular vision or understanding of the larger structure of thought that it claims to narrate.

In the case of “Newsletter 6,” the outline’s formal structure establishes a semantic equivalence between its different forms of propaganda. Although “Newsletter 6” does not strictly adhere to the classic outline’s system of alternating letters and numbers, its formal structure nevertheless endows each of the four lettered forms of propaganda with equal importance within the overall layout. That Maciunas, a professional graphic designer, established a formal equivalence on the page between propaganda through sabotage and propaganda through the performance of Fluxus compositions suggests that he saw a corresponding parity in terms of their political efficacy. Arranging these diverse activities under the overarching rubric of “propaganda,” Maciunas argumentatively asserts that they are simultaneously aesthetic forms and political interventions. In Maciunas’s extreme calculus, both sabotage and Fluxus had become useful tactics for intervening in and renegotiating the distribution of the sensible.

Within the Fluxus community, “Newsletter 6” sparked a fierce debate over the relationship between art, politics, and the ethical limits of provocation in the service of aesthetics. Schmit and Paik each responded with proposals for

propaganda actions that were even more extreme than Maciunas’s own suggestions. Both had spent considerable time with Maciunas in Europe during 1962 and 1963 and were familiar with his shift from promoter of new art to champion of anti-art and non-art reality. By contrast, the American Fluxus artists seemed unprepared for the aesthetic and political radicality of Maciunas’s position. Some of the New York-based Fluxus artists, having become interested in more elaborate Happenings, were unhappy with Maciunas’s programmatic bias for simplicity and brevity. Others, like Brecht—whose work otherwise exemplified the Fluxus ideal—were uncomfortable having their work associated with Maciunas’s increasingly strident political rhetoric. Although it might not have been apparent to outsiders, at the core of the disagreement was the fact that although most of the American artists associated with Fluxus remained strongly committed to pushing, and even exceeding, the boundaries of accepted artistic practice, only Flynt and Maciunas were interested in doing away with art altogether.

### From Spectators to Speakers

As the rhetoric and tactics outlined in “Newsletter 6” demonstrate, the gap separating the *Originale* performers from the picketers outside was far greater than most onlookers perceived. Although Kaprow had been on the “Fluxus News-Policy Letter” distribution list for a time in 1963, by the time of the protest Maciunas had come to view Kaprow’s brand of Happenings as neo-Wagnerian theatrical spectacles entirely at odds with the straightforward, unassuming quality of Fluxus performance, exemplified by the Brechtian event score. Indeed, Maciunas actively disdained the entire festival as unconscionably pompous. “To call oneself avant-garde is pretentious,” he wrote of Moorman at the time, “like calling oneself [a] great master etc. . . . If that is what avant-garde represents then Fluxus must be rear-garde since it moves in opposite direction.”<sup>21</sup> More

than anything, Maciunas objected to what he perceived as both Stockhausen and Kaprow's assertion of "professionalism" and disciplinary authority with respect to composition, performance, and discourse. This perception, however inaccurate or incomplete, was at the heart of Maciunas and Flynt's protest, which centered less on the formal qualities of Stockhausen's production than on the composer's role as co-editor of the influential journal *The Series*. By ignoring or denigrating musical traditions that existed outside the European canon, they argued, Stockhausen was guilty of propagating and enforcing an aesthetic doctrine that served to legitimate European and American cultural and economic imperialism.

Ultimately, however, it was not simply a question of what kinds of performances—be they traditional or avant-garde, Western or otherwise—should take place in the concert hall that was at stake for Maciunas. In Rancièrian terms, his response to the Stockhausen premiere can be understood as part of a larger project aimed at destabilizing the particular distribution of the sensible under which the concert hall itself functions as a designator of "art" experience as separate from other forms of experience and other forms of activity. As Maciunas wrote to Schmit in late 1963, "You also seem to imply that Fluxus people should turn into professional Fluxus performers. FLUXUS IS ANTI-PROFESSIONAL . . . Fluxus people must obtain their 'art' experience from everyday experiences, eating, working, etc.—not concerts etc. Concerts serve only as educational means to convert the audiences to such non-art experiences in their daily lives."<sup>22</sup>

The *Originale* picket, then, stands out as one exemplary instance in Maciunas's ongoing repudiation of an aesthetic and political order in which "professionals" are the speakers, and spectators, the spoken-to—in which some subjects have voices and others do not. The avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes of the twentieth century produced countless examples of dissident artistic thought and activity, myriad ways of questioning

and disrupting the established order of things. Fluxus took up and extended many of these strategies in various ways. But in at least one respect Maciunas was almost, if not entirely, unique: his insistence that artists should be actively trying to work themselves out of a job, demonstrating the self-sufficiency of the audience by speaking not from a position of authority but from a position of radical equality. As I have tried to suggest, the core Fluxus assertion that "anything can be art and anyone can do it" is simultaneously aesthetic *and* political. It is an assertion that everyone should have the ability to participate in the constant definition and redefinition of what is seeable and what is sayable, in what can be thought and what can be done. It is an assertion that every person has the potential to become a speaking subject—and therefore a political subject—in his or her community.



- 1 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 30.
- 2 Most accounts also place Ben Vautier among the picketers. See Henry Flynt, "Mutations of the Vanguard: Pre-Fluxus, During Fluxus, Late Fluxus," in *Ubi Fluxus Ibi Motus, 1990–1962*, ed. Achille Bonito Oliva (Milano: Mazzotta, 1990). Vautier had taken part in a similar picket at Town Hall on April 29, but Owen Smith maintains that Vautier was not in New York at the time of the September 8 event. Owen F. Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1998), 158, n. 81.
- 3 "Picket Stockhausen Concert!" leaflet for September 8, 1964, picket. The leaflet began with a paraphrased quote of Stockhausen in a 1958 lecture at Harvard University: "Jazz (Black music) is primitive . . . barbaric . . . beat and a few simple chords . . . garbage . . . (or words to that effect)." In the written version of the lecture, Stockhausen describes jazz as "melodic inventions within a given basic rhythmic and harmonic scheme" that he distinguishes from "serious" experiments in chance composition by Cage and others. See Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Electronic and Instrumental Music," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 387.
- 4 Harold C. Schonberg, "Music: Stockhausen's 'Originale' Given at Judson," *New York Times*, September 9, 1964. See also Art Seidenbaum, "Growth of Arts— Things So Far Out, They're In," *Los Angeles Times*, September 23, 1964.
- 5 Jill Johnston, "Inside *Originale*," *Village Voice*, October 1, 1964. Reprinted in Jill Johnston, *Marmalade Me* (New York: Dutton, 1971), 77–82.
- 6 Maciunas to Robert Watts, in *Fluxus Etc./Addenda II*, ed. Jon Hendricks (Pasadena: Baxter Art Gallery/California Institute of Technology, 1983), 150.
- 7 Maciunas to Ben Vautier, March 5, 1963, *ibid.*, 154.
- 8 John Cage, "Composition as Process," in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 36.
- 9 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2004), 18.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 13.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Flynt, "Mutations of the Vanguard," 112. It should be noted that whereas the influence of Dada could be felt in New York throughout the 1950s, Maciunas was virtually alone in his awareness of the Soviet avant-garde among New York-based artists at the time. Camilla Gray's *The Great Experiment: Russian Art, 1863–1922* did not appear until 1962; by contrast, Robert Motherwell's anthology *The Dada Painters and Poets* had been published in 1951. On Maciunas's knowledge and reception of *LEF*, see Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Architecture and Efficiency: George Maciunas and the Economy of Art," *Res* 45 (2004); Medina, "The 'Kulturbolschewiken' I: Fluxus, the Abolition of Art, the Soviet Union, and 'Pure Amusement,'" *Res* 48 (2005); and Medina, "The 'Kulturbolschewiken' II: Fluxus, Krushchev, and the 'Concretist Society,'" *Res* 49/50 (2006). On the reception of the Soviet avant-garde in the postwar period, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Cold War Constructivism," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal, 1945–1964*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986); Hal Foster, "Some Uses and Abuses of Russian Constructivism," in *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914–1932* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990); and Maria Gough, "'Frank Stella Is a Constructivist,'" *October* 119 (Winter 2007).
- 13 Julia Robinson, "Maciunas as Producer: Performative Design in the Art of the 1960s," *Grey Room* 33 (2008): 69.
- 14 George Maciunas to Thomas Schmit, January 1964, in Hendricks, ed., *Fluxus Etc./Addenda II*, 166–67.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Henry Flynt and George Maciunas, *Communists Must Give Revolutionary Leadership in Culture* (New York: Worldview

- Publishers, 1966), app. 1 and 2, reproduced in *Fluxus Etc./Addenda I*, ed. Jon Hendricks (New York: Ink &, 1983), 40–42.
- 17 Flynt, “Mutations of the Vanguard,” 118.
- 18 Maciunas to Thomas Schmit, January 1964, in Hendricks, ed., *Fluxus Etc./Addenda II*, 166–67.
- 19 Cage redefined silence not as the absence of sound but as the presence of *unintended* sounds. See John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961).
- 20 “Fluxus News–Policy Letter No. 6,” in Hendricks, ed., *Fluxus, Etc./Addenda I*, 156.
- 21 Maciunas, “Comments on Relationship of Fluxus to So-Called ‘Avant-Garde’ Festival,” 1964, in *Mr. Fluxus: A Collective Portrait of George Maciunas, 1931–1978*, ed. Emmett Williams and Ann Noël (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 120–21.
- 22 Maciunas to Tomas Schmit, late 1963, in Hendricks, ed., *Fluxus Etc./Addenda II*, 165.



A  
FLUX  
Corsage  
By  
K. E. N.  
Fried.  
F. man



# 4

## Fluxus: A Laboratory of Ideas

Ken Friedman

In 1979, Harry Ruhé labeled Fluxus “the most radical and experimental art movement of the sixties.”<sup>1</sup> In those days, few believed him. Three decades later, more people might feel this to be so, but few could say why. We might answer that question first by noting that experimentation is ultimately marked by qualities that emerge in a laboratory, scientific or otherwise. In this essay I will examine Fluxus as an international laboratory of *ideas*—a meeting ground and workplace for artists, composers, designers, and architects, as well as economists, mathematicians, ballet dancers, chefs, and even a would-be theologian. We came from three continents—Asia, Europe, and North America. At first, many critics and artists labeled us charlatans; the general public ignored us. Later they called us artists; finally they saw us as pioneers of one kind or another. The conceptual challenge of this essay by a Fluxus insider, then, lies in trying to identify just what kind of pioneers we were.<sup>2</sup>

Emerging from a community that began in the 1950s,<sup>3</sup> Fluxus had gained its name and its identity by 1962. In different places on different continents, meetings, friendships, and relationships brought various constellations of people

into contact with one another. The peripatetic George Maciunas managed to meet many of those who would cohere into Fluxus in the early 1960s. He had been trying to create an avant-garde art gallery named AG that was already nearly bankrupt on the day it opened. Next, he wanted to publish a magazine—really an encyclopedia of sorts—documenting the most advanced art, music, literature, film, and design work being done anywhere in the world. George had an ambitious plan for various interlocking editorial boards and publishing committees, but it never came to fruition. (He was better at planning than he was at fundraising or leadership.) By 1962, George was in Germany, developing a series of festivals for the public presentation of work that he planned to publish in the magazine he still had on the back burner. The magazine was to have been called *Fluxus*, so the festival was called *Fluxus*.

Nine artists and composers came together in Wiesbaden to perform: Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Addi Kōpcke, George Maciunas, Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson, Wolf Vostell, Karl Erik Welin, and Emmett Williams. The German press liked the name of the festival and began referring to the Wiesbaden nine as *die Fluxus leute*—“the Fluxus people”—and the name stuck.<sup>4</sup> Other artists became associated with Fluxus through contact with members of

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Opposite:

Ken Friedman, *A Flux Corsage*, 1966–76, clear plastic box with paper label on lid containing seeds. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection; Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.40 9 (cat. 17).



this burgeoning international avant-garde community, including such varied practitioners as Joseph Beuys, Henning Christiansen, Robert Filliou, Bengt af Klintberg, Willem de Ridder, and Ben Vautier. Others joined later, including Jeff Berner, Geoffrey Hendricks, Milan Knížák, and me.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to note that Fluxus was a *community* rather than a collective with a common artistic and political program.<sup>6</sup> (None of the artists signed the supposed Fluxus manifestoes that George Maciunas created—not even George himself.) Several streams of thought meet in the work and practices of the Fluxus community. One stream is the well-known Fluxus relationship to the teaching of John Cage, and to related lines of practice reaching back to Zen Buddhism.<sup>7</sup> Another stream is the more oblique but still strong relationship to earlier-twentieth-century avant-garde manifestations ranging from *LEF* and constructivism to Dada (though Fluxus people were *not* linked to the anarchistic and destructive ethos of Dada).

Perhaps the best short definition of Fluxus is an elegant little manifesto that Dick Higgins published in 1966 as a rubber stamp:

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.<sup>8</sup>

These words summarize the time-bound, transformational, and interactive development of Fluxus. In the late 1970s, I suggested using content analysis of Fluxus projects to give an overview of Fluxus, and in 1981, Peter Frank and I used this method to chart the participants for a history of Fluxus.<sup>9</sup> In 1991, James Lewes brought our chart forward in time by surveying twenty-one Fluxus exhibitions, catalogues, and

books. The resulting chart offers an overview of the “who was who (and where)” of Fluxus over a thirty-year period.<sup>10</sup>

The study suggested a consensus of opinion about the allegiance of those whose names appeared in more than half of the compilations as a key participant in Fluxus. There were thirty-three artists on this list: Eric Andersen, Ay-O, Joseph Beuys, George Brecht, Philip Corner, Jean Dupuy, Robert Filliou, Albert Fine, Ken Friedman, Al Hansen, Geoffrey Hendricks, Dick Higgins, Joe Jones, Milan Knížák, Alison Knowles, Addi Kōpcke, Takehisa Kosugi, Shigeo Kubota, George Maciunas, Larry Miller, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson, Takako Saito, Tomas Schmit, Mieko Shiomi, Daniel Spoerri, Ben Vautier, Wolf Vostell, Yoshimasa Wada, Robert Watts, Emmett Williams, and La Monte Young. These thirty-three individuals are included in the majority of projects and exhibitions, but a broad vision of the Fluxus community would include many more, among others Don Boyd, Giuseppe Chiari, Esther Ferrer, Juan Hidalgo, Davi det Hompson, Alice Hutchins, Bengt af Klintberg, Carla Liss, Jackson Mac Low, Walter Marchetti, Richard Maxfield, Jonas Mekas, Carolee Schneemann, Greg Sharits, and Paul Sharits.

In 1982, Dick Higgins wrote an essay in which he attempted to identify nine criteria that distinguished, or indicated the qualities of, Fluxus: internationalism, experimentalism and iconoclasm, intermedia, minimalism or concentration, an attempted resolution of the art/life dichotomy, implicativeness, play or gags, ephemerality, and specificity. Later on I worked with Dick’s list, expanding it to twelve criteria: globalism, the unity of art and life, intermedia, experimentalism, chance, playfulness, simplicity, implicativeness, exemplativism, specificity, presence in time, and musicality.<sup>11</sup> While Fluxus had neither an explicit research program nor a common conceptual program, a range of reasonable issues could be labeled ideas, points of commonality, or conceptual criteria.<sup>12</sup> If they do

not constitute the framework of an experimental research program, they do make a useful framework for a laboratory of ideas.

In some respects, the Fluxus community functioned as an invisible college, not unlike the community that would give rise to early modern science.<sup>13</sup> The first invisible colleges involved “groups of elite, mutually interacting, and productive scientists from geographically distant affiliates who exchange[d] information to monitor progress in their field[s].”<sup>14</sup> In a different way, Fluxus fulfilled many of the same functions, and several Fluxus people identified their work—and Fluxus—as a form of research.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the parallels, though, there are also major differences, particularly in the respective attitudes of the two groups toward experiment, and in the debate surrounding what each group learned from or developed through experimental work. The natural philosophers whose efforts gave rise to modern science developed an agreed-upon language and method of formal experiment, while the artists and composers in Fluxus experimented informally and hardly agreed on anything. Formal experiment often seeks to answer clearly identified questions; artistic experiment usually seeks informal, playful results that are cast as emergent discoveries only in retrospect. Finally, beginning with the earliest journals—the *Journal des Scavans* (1665–1792) and *Philosophical Transactions* (1665–present)—natural philosophers and scientists used articles, monographs, and other media, along with public debates and programs of experiments, as platforms for exchanging ideas and debating results, producing in the process a robust, progressive dialogue. Fluxus never developed such robust mechanisms.<sup>16</sup>

What does make the comparison with the invisible college appropriate is that hardly anyone in Fluxus was part of a formal institution. What we shared were common interests and reasonably regular meetings, both personal and virtual. Members of the Fluxus community created a rich informal information system of newsletters,

multiple publications, and personal correspondence that enabled continual communication among colleagues who might not meet in person for years at a time. There were only one or two large-scale events that gathered the entire community in one place.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, subsets and constellations among Fluxus participants have been meeting in a rich cycle of concerts and festivals that began in 1962 and have continued sporadically for much of the half century since then. All of this created a community that fits the description of an invisible college in many respects.

The idea of Fluxus as a laboratory, on the other hand, goes back to American pragmatism and its predecessors, Unitarianism and American transcendentalism, as well as to the Shakers.<sup>18</sup> The Unitarians descended from the Congregational churches of New England. These were Puritan Calvinist churches, but Puritanism took a radical turn in the theology of William Ellery Channing. In the early 1800s, Channing turned away from the doctrine of sin and punishment, as well as the doctrine of the Trinity, to establish what became Unitarian Christianity.<sup>19</sup> Channing influenced Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and the other transcendentalists, several of whom sought ways to build a world of action in daily life through communities that embraced new concepts of work.<sup>20</sup> Among European thinkers of interest to the transcendentalists were Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose term “intermedia” would reappear in Fluxus (though with a different meaning), and Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose work on Biblical criticism and hermeneutics (the art of interpretation) paved the way for a new concept of interpretation theory.

Emerson foreshadowed both Cage and Fluxus by introducing the concept of the ordinary into American philosophy and art. He was one of the first Americans to write about Asian religion and philosophy as well—another link to Cage and to Fluxus artists, many of whom shared an interest in Asian philosophy, especially Zen Buddhism. In contrast to the European concept



of the sublime, which was a distinctly different view of culture, Emerson emphasized the present moment and the commonplace. In his essay titled "Experience," Emerson writes, "I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic . . . I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into today, and you may have the antique and future worlds." His embrace of the quotidian even turns rhetorical: "What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and gait of the body."<sup>21</sup> Like Emerson and his close friend Henry David Thoreau, Fluxus artist Dick Higgins would also celebrate the near, the down-to-earth, the familiar, in his "Something Else Manifesto" and "A Child's History of Fluxus."<sup>22</sup>

Transcendentalism's emphasis on experience as the basis for philosophy evolved into pragmatism toward the end of the 1800s in New England. John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and Charles Sanders Peirce were born in New England, and William James spent much of his life there. Related to the Puritan Calvinist tradition through Congregationalism and transcendentalism,<sup>23</sup> these men ultimately developed a concrete philosophy for the New World. Mead's contribution to social thought through symbolic interactionism provides a rich framework for understanding Fluxus. The idea behind what George Maciunas labeled "functionalist" art was not functionalism as we understand it today but a complex paradigm of symbolic functions.<sup>24</sup>

The transcendentalist concern for the significance of everyday life manifested itself in the form of utopian communities such as Brook Farm, but this was not the first such effort, nor would it be the last. The so-called "Eightfold Path" of Buddhism—right view, right intention, right speech, right discipline, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration—embodies similar concepts of common work.<sup>25</sup> George Maciunas's great, unrealized vision of Fluxus was to establish such a community, an idea he

pursued in the Fluxhouses and several other ventures. Maciunas was never able to realize this fully, but his ideas did give rise to a number of workable projects.<sup>26</sup>

George's last attempt at building a utopian community took place in New Marlborough, Massachusetts, where he moved in order to be close to Jean Brown's Fluxus collection and archive in an old Shaker seed house in Tyringham, Massachusetts.<sup>27</sup> This part of the United States had a tradition of utopian communities, from the revolutionary period, to the American renaissance sparked by Emerson, Thoreau, and the transcendentalists, to Shaker settlements. Things had not changed all that much when Jean set up shop a little ways down the road from a half a dozen communes.<sup>28</sup>

The Shakers were among the first productive utopians of the modern era. They were a religious community, to be sure, but their religion was one of service. They established some of the first mass production industries in the world, selling objects and artifacts through catalogues. Their furniture, superb in design and perfect in balance, was the first example of industrial design and ergonomic sensibility in the furniture trade. And they supplied America's farms and gardens with top quality seed.

A seed house was a building where seeds were sorted and packaged. The packages could be ordered individually by catalogue or mail order, in much the same way Maciunas would market Flux-products. There were also seed kits with an assortment of packages in tidy boxes that were not too different in shape or size from the suitcase-sized Fluxkits of the 1960s. Like the Fluxkits, only a few remain. In an interesting coincidence, the most complete extant seed kit is to be found at Enfield Shaker Village,<sup>29</sup> close to Hanover, New Hampshire, where the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College houses a Fluxus collection established in honor of George Maciunas.

Like George, the Shakers were abstemious and celibate, and there were other delightful



similarities as well. The Shaker union of work and life included art and music as more than mere pastimes. A sense of industry and a light spirit were central characteristics of the Shaker community, qualities that also typified the Fluxus community at its best. The Shakers organized their communal life around two functions, work and worship, and the productive Shaker economy was a distinctive attribute of their villages.<sup>30</sup> Reading the rules of the order, it is nearly impossible to separate work from other aspects of Shaker life, with rising and returning to bed, meals, and even household management structured around the tempo and meaning of the working life.<sup>31</sup>

When I first met Dick Higgins in 1966, I caught from his ideas a vision of work as part of exactly that kind of community life. Dick's "Something Else Manifesto" called for artists to "chase down an art that clucks and fills our guts."<sup>32</sup> This was a call to collaboration and a call to productive work, to art as a kind of production that engages the concept of community. Dick would introduce me to George Maciunas, whose philosophy of Fluxus articulated many of the same principles. George's vision of Fluxus called for artists who were willing to create work together, sharing ideas and principles, supporting one another. While George's vision of Fluxus was intensely political at one point in his life, by the time I met him he had shifted from a strictly hierarchical concept of the collective to a vision that was much more open.

How did Fluxus so readily become this collaborative working community or laboratory of ideas and practices? For one thing, most of the Fluxus artists were already collaborating in one way or another; Fluxus simply became a new point of intersection for us.<sup>33</sup> Some of the artists already knew one another, and others had worked together for many years, such as those in the New York Audio-Visual Group and John Cage's former students. They did not come to Fluxus, Fluxus came to them when George Maciunas created the name for a magazine that would publish their work. This was a building

already under construction when Maciunas came along and named it Fluxus.

For another thing, despite the broad range of interests and wide geographical spread, Fluxus was not that large a community—in the 1960s, it involved fewer than a hundred people in a world population of about three billion, part of a slightly larger community of several hundred people who were active in a relatively small sector of the art world that we might label the avant-garde. Those who knew each other brought other interesting people into the group, where they became interested in the same kinds of issues and undertook the same kind of work.

History is always contingent, and there are countless scenarios in which certain people might never have met, or might have met without forming a community, or formed a very different kind of community. As it happened, however, the social and historical development of Fluxus generated intense correspondence among artists even at a distance, countless common projects, and many different kinds of collaboration. Fluxus artists met together sporadically but relatively often, and some have worked together closely for five decades now.

The concept of experiment makes claims on both thought and action. In a community such as Fluxus, these claims lead in different and occasionally contradictory directions. Such a diverse community of experimental artists, composers, and designers, who lacked a coherent research program while working with a multiplicity of approaches, runs the risk of being seen as an artist group or even a movement with some kind of continuing connection. This is especially the case because some of the participants managed to earn a living making art and most were happy, or at least willing, to exhibit their products in art museums and sell it in art galleries. While Fluxus was aggressively interdisciplinary, involving art, architecture, design, and music (among other things), it was never the kind of late modernist art movement to which it has often been reduced.

The Dartmouth College motto is apposite



here: *Vox Clamantis in Deserto*, taken from the first words of Isaiah 40:3: “A voice cries, ‘In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord. Make a straight highway for our God across the wastelands.’” In this passage, the mountains are to be made flat, the rough ground level, and the rugged places a fertile plain. For George Maciunas, the way forward involved leveling and bringing an end to the art world. He felt that art was a distraction that prevented people from building a better world, while reinforcing the concepts and privileges of the upper class. George’s vision of a productive world entailed erasing art, but it was a vision that tended to confuse art and the economic and social forces that surrounded it. Many Fluxus artists disagreed with his view, and even George was inconsistent—his taste in music, for example, embraced both Monteverdi and Spike Jones.

Of course, many love the mountains and the rough ground as much as the highways and the plains. The dialectical demands of Fluxus also included George Brecht’s proposal to think something else, Milan Knížák’s call to live differently, Robert Filliou’s vision of an art whose purpose is to make life more interesting than art, and Dick Higgins’s metaphor of an art that clucks and fills our guts. Such an approach to art and life—to art *within* life—entails an experimental approach that connects in significant if sometimes amorphous ways with being-in-the-world, and that generates multiple activities of different kinds.<sup>34</sup>

The differences within Fluxus have made it difficult to frame us all as “Fluxus people.” Art has been a default frame, one that is only occasionally appropriate. Compressing the larger laboratory into that frame means that a great deal about Fluxus has been missed. What Fluxus was and perhaps remains is the most productive laboratory of ideas in the history of art, an invisible college whose field of study encompasses the essential questions of life.

## Notes

- 1 Harry Ruhé, *Fluxus: The Most Radical and Experimental Art Movement of the Sixties* (Amsterdam: A., 1979).
- 2 In the space available here, it will be impossible to provide a full account of Fluxus as a laboratory of ideas and an experimental network. This is instead an “essay” in the classical senses of the word, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “Action or process of trying or testing,” and “A composition of moderate length on . . . [a subject] more or less elaborate in style, though limited in range.”
- 3 Several excellent accounts examine the years before Fluxus emerged, including Al Hansen, *Happenings: A Primer of Time-Space Art* (New York: Something Else Press, 1965); Dick Higgins, *Jefferson’s Birthday/Post Face* (New York: Something Else Press, 1964); Higgins, “In einem Minnensuchboot um die Welt,” in *1962 Wiesbaden FLUXUS 1982* (Wiesbaden and Berlin: Harlekin Art and Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD, 1982), 126–35 (in parallel German and English); Jerry Hopkins, *Yoko Ono* (New York: Macmillan), esp. 20–30; Jackson Mac Low, “Wie George Maciunas die New Yorker Avantgarde kennelernte,” in *1962 Wiesbaden FLUXUS 1982*, 11–125 (in parallel German and English); Owen Smith, “Proto-Fluxus in the United States: The Establishment of a Like-Minded Community of Artists,” in *Fluxus: A Conceptual Country*, ed. Estera Milman, a special issue of *Visible Language*, vol. 26, nos. 1–2 (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design, 1992), 45–57; and Owen Smith, *Fluxus: The*

- History of an Attitude* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1998), 13–68.
- 4 For a comprehensive history of Fluxus, see Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*. For discussions of early Fluxus, see also Owen Smith, “Developing a Fluxable Forum: Early Performance and Publishing,” in *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman (London: Academy Press, John Wiley and Sons, 1998), 3–21, and Hannah Higgins, “Fluxus Fortuna,” in *The Fluxus Reader*, 31–59. *The Fluxus Reader* also contains an extensive chronology.
  - 5 The loose but purposeful evolution of Robert Filliou into Fluxus is relatively typical; see Patrick Martin, “Unfinished Filliou: On the Fluxus Ethos and the Origins of Relational Aesthetics,” *Art Journal* 69, nos. 1–2 (Spring–Summer 2010): 44–62. Bengt af Klintberg is another good story; see Ken Friedman, “The Case for Bengt af Klintberg,” *Performance Research* 11, no. 2 (2006): 137–44, and Bengt af Klintberg, *Svensk Fluxus (Swedish Fluxus)* (Stockholm: Rönnells Antikvariat, 2006). Dick Higgins described the Fluxus expansion process as a series of waves; see Higgins, *Modernism since Postmodernism: Essays on Intermedia* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1997), 163.
  - 6 For an explicit discussion of this issue by Fluxus co-founder Dick Higgins, see Higgins, *Modernism since Postmodernism*, 161–63 and 173–82. Correspondence between the artists and George Maciunas, as well as correspondence among the artists themselves, contains explicit refusals to sign any proposed manifesto as well as opposition to the very notion of a common ideology. (There are many examples in the Archiv Sohm in Staatsgalerie Stuttgart and the Jean Brown Archive at the Getty Research Institute.) A recent conference titled *Alternative Practices in Design: The Collective: Past, Present, and Future* at RMIT University in Melbourne explored the multiple dimensions of the idea of the collective. In the 1960s, the word was closely linked to the Soviet notion of collective farms and forced industrial collectives, which probably influenced George Maciunas’s view at some point; certainly governance by an unelected commissar was one reason that most Fluxus artists shied away from the idea. After the Melbourne conference, however, my own view on all of this changed, and I have come to feel that more recent models of collective community and action might usefully describe the Fluxus phenomenon.
  - 7 See Ellsworth Snyder, “John Cage Discusses Fluxus,” in *Fluxus: A Conceptual Country*, 59–68. For an enlightening examination of Fluxus and Zen, see David T. Doris, “Zen Vaudeville: A Medi(t)ation in the Margins of Fluxus,” in *The Fluxus Reader*, 237–53.
  - 8 Higgins, *Modernism since Postmodernism*, 160.
  - 9 Ken Friedman and Peter Frank, “Fluxus,” in *Art Vivant: Special Report—Fluxus 11* (Tokyo: New Art Seibu Company, Ltd., 1983), and Ken Friedman with Peter Frank, “Fluxus: A Post-Definitive History: Art Where Response Is the Heart of the Matter,” *High Performance* 27 (1984): 56–61, 83.
  - 10 Ken Friedman with James Lewes, “Fluxus: Global Community, Human Dimensions,” in *Fluxus: A Conceptual Country*, 154–79. The completed chart offers a broad consensus of opinion by thirty experts who have given lengthy consideration to Fluxus, including scholars, critics, curators, gallerists, art dealers, Fluxus artists, and other artists interested in Fluxus. Altogether, the chart includes 351 artists presented in twenty-one different projects representing a wide variety of venues, presentations, and publications during the thirty years of Fluxus up to 1992.
  - 11 Dick Higgins, “Fluxus: Theory and Reception,” *Lund Art Press*, Fluxus Research issue, vol. 2, no. 2 (1991): 33. Dick’s first version of the nine criteria appeared in a privately published 1982 paper titled “Fluxus Theory and Reception,” which was reprinted in 1998 in *The Fluxus Reader*, 217–36. Dick expanded his list to eleven in Higgins, *Modernism since Postmodernism*, 174–75. For my amended list, see Ken Friedman, *Fluxus and Company* (New York: Emily Harvey Gallery, 1989), 4, reprinted in Achille Bonito Oliva, Gino Di Maggio, and Gianni Sassi, eds., *Ubi Fluxus, ibi motus 1990–1962* (Venice and Milan: La Biennale di Venezia and Mazzotta Editore, 1990), 328–32. A later version of *Fluxus and Company* appeared in *The Fluxus Reader* as well, 237–53.
  - 12 Dick and I discussed these ideas extensively over the years, and at different times Dick labeled them criteria or points. In *Modernism since Postmodernism*, he used the term “points” but added, “really, they are *almost* criteria” (175).



- 13 For more on the concept of the invisible college, see Diana Crane, *Invisible Colleges: Diffusion of Knowledge in Scientific Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Derek de Solla Price, *Little Science, Big Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963); de Solla Price, *Little Science, Big Science . . . and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); and Alesia Zuccala, "Modeling the Invisible College," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 57, no. 2 (2006): 152–68.
- 14 Zuccala, "Modeling the Invisible College," 152.
- 15 See Robert Filliou, *Research at the Stedelijk* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1971), and Ken Friedman, *The Aesthetics* (Regina: University of Saskatchewan, 1972; reprinted Devon, England: Beau Geste Press, 1973).
- 16 George Maciunas's publishing program developed a systematic series of test cases and projects in the form of Fluxboxes and Fluxkits, but there were long periods when almost no one in Fluxus worked or even talked with George. While Dick Higgins's Something Else Press offers a metaphorical parallel, many Fluxus people complained about Dick's essays and critical writings, disputing the value or even the possibility of a progressive research program (some still complain about my writing and editing, for similar reasons). Deep inquiry leads to a rich hermeneutics of understanding, and genuine experimentation requires deep, sustained inquiry. There is a literature of Fluxus that begins with writings by Fluxus people and continues with ongoing live conversations over the past five decades. I like to imagine this as a symposium where one is as likely to meet Diogenes or Nietzsche as Socrates and Aristotle, not to mention Kierkegaard, Mead, or Abelard. Like Diogenes and Abelard, as well, Fluxus participants are likely to be both grumpy and generous. For that matter, the history of the first invisible college demonstrates that the natural philosophers and the scientists that followed them were never entirely systematic or progressive themselves; as the coffin of a recently dead colleague was carried off to the cemetery, the great physicist Max Planck was overheard to say that science makes progress "funeral by funeral." Perhaps the same is true of Fluxus: Al Hansen's *Elegy for the Fluxus Dead* could be seen both as a celebration and as a requiem.
- 17 Perhaps the most notable example was the exhibition *Ubi Fluxus, ibi motus*, organized by Gino Di Maggio at the Venice Biennale in 1990.
- 18 It will be useful here to distinguish among three kinds of ideas, influences, and traditions. The first involves those that the artists themselves recognize. The second consists of ideas and traditions that may have influenced Fluxus people, whether or not they were aware of it. The third involves ideas or traditions that scholars may use in interpreting Fluxus and the work of Fluxus people. Fluxus people have explicitly acknowledged an interest in such things as Zen Buddhism and the ideas of Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Few, however, have drawn a line back through the transcendentalists to Unitarian and Congregational theology or Puritan Calvinism. Nevertheless, if Thoreau and Emerson play a role in Fluxus thinking and art, the lines to their predecessors can also be drawn. Similarly, few Fluxus people have explicitly cited pragmatism, but the pragmatist influence seems clear, and it is certainly a responsible interpretive mechanism. In *Fluxus Experience*, published by University of California Press in 2002, Hannah Higgins worked extensively with Dewey's pragmatism; in this volume, Jacquelynn Baas draws on the perspectives of Mead.
- 19 For more on Channing and his theology, see Jack Mendelsohn, *Channing: The Reluctant Radical* (Boston: Little Brown, 1971); David B. Parke, ed., *The Epic of Unitarianism: Original Writings from the History of Liberal Religion* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1957). Beyond its relationship with pragmatism, Unitarian Universalism had an even more direct relationship with Fluxus in the 1960s and 1970s. I originally intended to become a Unitarian minister, and Unitarian Universalist churches and conference centers sponsored Fluxconcerts as well as Fluxus-based sermons and publications, including the *Art Folio* that I edited in 1971 for the Religious Arts Guild (Boston: Religious Arts Guild, 1971 [Religious Arts Guild "Circular/Packet: 2"]). Milan Knížák's project and Wolfgang Feelisch's contribution created something of a stir, but the overall reception of the projects—including works by Higgins, Filliou, and Brecht, along with the original *One-Inch Art Show*—was good.

- 20 For more on transcendentalism, see Joel Myerson, *The Transcendentalists: A Review of Research and Criticism* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1984), and Myerson, ed., *Transcendentalism: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 21 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* (New York: The Library of America, 1983 [1837]), 68–69. Thanks to Ditte Friedman for directing me to these passages.
- 22 The “Something Else Manifesto” was published in 1964 in *Manifestoes* (New York: Something Else Press), 21 (digital reprint available from UbuWeb at <http://www.ubu.com/historical/gb/index.html>). “A Child’s History of Fluxus” was published in 1979 in Charlton Burch’s *Lightworks* magazine and reprinted in Dick Higgins, *Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984).
- 23 That is to say, not Calvinist dogma but rather Jonathan Edwards’s mystical “divine and supernatural light” imparted to the soul from God.
- 24 See George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, ed. and intro. Charles Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967 [1934]), and Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), esp. 1–60 on methodology and 61–77 on Mead’s thought. I discovered Mead’s work in 1965 and Blumer’s in the early 1970s and have relied heavily on both in the decades since. The first doctoral dissertation to examine Fluxus was by anthropologist Marilyn Ekdahl Ravicz, who developed her perspective based on Dewey’s pragmatism. Titled “Aesthetic Anthropology: Theory and Analysis of Pop and Conceptual Art in America,” she completed it in 1974 for the Department of Anthropology of the University of California at Los Angeles.
- 25 One of the genuine puzzles I contend with in considering Fluxus and other art (or “anart”) communities that acknowledge Buddhism as a source has been the general lack of interest in ethics. It is difficult to conceive of Buddhism, either Zen or the other schools, without the foundational ethics of the Eightfold Path.
- 26 For an excellent discussion of George Maciunas’s experiment in urban development and the Fluxhouses, see Charles R. Simpson, “The Achievement of Territorial Community,” in *SoHo: The Artist in the City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 153–88. In 2008, Stendhal Gallery in New York organized an exhibition titled *George Maciunas: Prefabricated Building System* that examined Maciunas’s architectural ideas. The Simpson chapter is available on the gallery’s website, along with excellent essays by Julia Robinson, Carolina Carrasco, Mari Dumett, and others. The gallery URL is <http://stendhalgallery.com>, and the essays are available at [http://stendhalgallery.com/?page\\_id=852](http://stendhalgallery.com/?page_id=852) (accessed August 19, 2010).
- 27 A sensitive portrait of George’s last community appears in a book by his widow: Billie Maciunas, *The Eve of Fluxus: A Fluxmemoir*, with a preface by Kristine Stiles, an introduction by Geoffrey Hendricks, and an afterword by Larry Miller (Orlando, Florida: Arbiter Press, 2010). The Jean Brown Archive is now part of the Getty Center for the Arts and Humanities in Los Angeles, California. Its URL is <http://www.getty.edu/research/>. The online catalogue and findings aids describe the collection.
- 28 I spent the summer of 1972 in Tyringham working with Jean Brown and helped arrange the first meeting between Jean and George Maciunas. I knew they would hit it off but never imagined how rich their relationship would become. It delighted me that Jean’s archive was located in an old Shaker seed house in the Berkshires of Massachusetts. Every evening when we ate dinner together, Jean would quote the old Shaker proverb, “Hands to work and hearts to God.” It is fitting that America’s first great Fluxus collection was established in a Shaker seed house, while George’s last Fluxus cooperative housing project was based nearby in the wooded heartland of transcendentalism.
- 29 Information on the Enfield Shaker Museum is available at <http://www.shakermuseum.org/index.html>.
- 30 See Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 94–135.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 253–89.
- 32 Dick Higgins, “A Something Else Manifesto,” in *Manifestoes*, 21. Digital reprint available from UbuWeb at <http://www.ubu.com/historical/gb/index.html>.
- 33 This includes even people like me, who were not artists before we became involved with the artists and composers in Fluxus. For the story of how a would-be minister became an artist—or, in Marcel Duchamp’s terms, an



“anartist”—see Ken Friedman, “Events and the Exquisite Corpse,” in *The Exquisite Corpse: Chance and Collaboration in Surrealism’s Parlor Game*, ed. Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren, Davis Schneiderman, and Tom Denlinger (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 73–74, fn. 6, as well as Peter Frank, “Ken Friedman: A Life in Fluxus,” in *Artistic Bedfellows: Histories, Theories and Conversations in Collaborative Art Practices*, ed. Holly Crawford (Lanham: University Press of America, 2008), 145–86.

34 Curatorial analysis in general has tended to dismiss Fluxus’s engagement with the larger world by portraying its experiments and failures as ineffective. For example, in Thomas Kellein’s 2007 book *George Maciunas and the Dream of Fluxus* (London: Thames and Hudson), George is depicted as a brilliant but failed dreamer. It is certainly true that we often influenced social change without influencing the formal qualities or conceptual focus of the trends and issues that we helped to create. Fluxus West, for example, was one of the six or seven founding publishers of the Underground Press Syndicate in 1967, but we never gained any traction on the way the papers were designed or what they dealt with. Even though we can be found in the first lists

of founding papers, along with the *East Village Other*, the *Berkeley Barb*, and the *Los Angeles Free Press*, we vanish from history soon after because our focus was so vastly different. Did we exert a role in developing the concept of an alternate press? Yes. Did we have any real part in the way the press developed? Perhaps we did, at least in a small way. Did we succeed in directing serious attention to cultural issues beyond the standard underground press focal points of rock music, drugs, sex, and new left politics? Not hardly.

# Catalogue of the Exhibition



# PROPOSITIONS POUR L'ART

ouvrez le dictionnaire à  
n'importe quelle page chois-  
siez n'importe quelle définition  
Bon vous l'authentifierez pour 10

C'est  
le  
sens  
de  
l'art

Tout

Tout n'est pas art. L'art est une gurnestère.



# 5

## Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life

Jacquelynn Baas

I don't mind to be "an artist" or "a composer"  
I mind to be *human* and all I do is just simple (and complicated) searching of life. Teaching myself and others how to live.  
To live otherwise. To live better.

—Milan Knížák, around 1972<sup>1</sup>

Fluxus introduced two new things into the world of art: event scores and art-as-games-in-a-box, many of which were gathered into "Fluxkits" along with other ephemera. The idea was to sell these kits at low prices—not through galleries but by mail and through artist-run stores. The events were even more accessible. Sometimes consisting of just one word, they could be performed by anyone, anyplace. Fluxus artist George Brecht wrote that his event scores were meant to "prepare one for an event to happen in one's own now."<sup>2</sup> Another thing that distinguishes Fluxus is the

self-evident nature of its productions: the point is to experience Fluxus artworks for yourself. These days, this will most likely be from behind Plexiglas or two-dimensionally, as in the pages of this book. Since all experience takes place in the mind anyway, that is probably all right. The section introductions below are offered as optional assists for the viewer/reader.

### Art (What's It Good For)?

A good question—in fact, *the* question, as far as Fluxus organizer George Maciunas was concerned. He devoted his life to the analysis of what art has been throughout the history of humankind and what it might be good for now. Maciunas regarded art at its best to be part of the social process, as it had been from prehistoric times to the Renaissance (figure 5.1; cat. 2). During our modern era, art became something with a unique aura, something to be evaluated by specialists and collected by galleries. After World War II, Maciunas and his fellow Fluxus artists took up the work of re-embedding art within life-as-it-is-lived begun by Dada and Russian Constructivist artists following World War I. Here are some thoughts on this project from Maciunas and a few other Fluxus artists:

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Opposite:

Ben Vautier, *Propositions for Art (Propositions Pour l'Art)*, metal desk painted black with white enamel lettering and dictionary. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of Jan and Ingeborg van der Marck; GM.980.290 (cat. 10). © 2011 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris





**Figure 5.1**

Various artists, *An Anthology of chance operations concept art anti-art indeterminacy improvisation meaningless work natural disasters plans of action stories diagrams Music poetry essays dance constructions mathematics compositions*, 1963, paperbound book. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis: Walker Special Purchase Fund, 1989; 1989.120.1–4 (cat. 2).

Promote NON ART REALITY to be fully grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals. (George Maciunas, 1963)<sup>3</sup>

Modes of apprehension: art, language, myth, science (each to be used sparingly, as needed, like food, water, sleep) . . . however, art remains within the universe of form, and what is beyond this universe, beyond dimensions, yet embodying them without conflict, is life. (George Brecht, 1961)<sup>4</sup>

The natural state of life and mind is complexity. At this point, what art can offer . . . is an absence of complexity, a vacuum through which you are led to a state of complete relaxation of mind. After that you may return to the complexity of life again, it may not be the same, or it may be, or you may never return, but that is your problem. (Yoko Ono, 1966)<sup>5</sup>

Art is what makes life more interesting than art. (Robert Filliou, n.d.)<sup>6</sup>

In September 1961, Daniel Spoerri opened his

*Grocery Store* exhibition at the K pcke Gallery in Copenhagen, where he sold grocery store items at their original prices, unaltered except for a stamp that read “caution art work Daniel Spoerri” and his signature. The following year, Spoerri wrote:

I brought back some of the canned goods from K pcke’s “grocery store,” with the intention of keeping them, but one day when I was broke I opened them all to make supper. I can attest that this meal of “works of art” was very bad, and I ask myself why.<sup>7</sup>

So this is another good question: why was his meal of artworks so bad? It was not because he was not a good cook; he was.<sup>8</sup> It may have had something to do with the fact that Spoerri was so broke he was forced to eat his own works of art—sort of like eating one’s own children. Such a meal would not taste good no matter how hungry one might be.

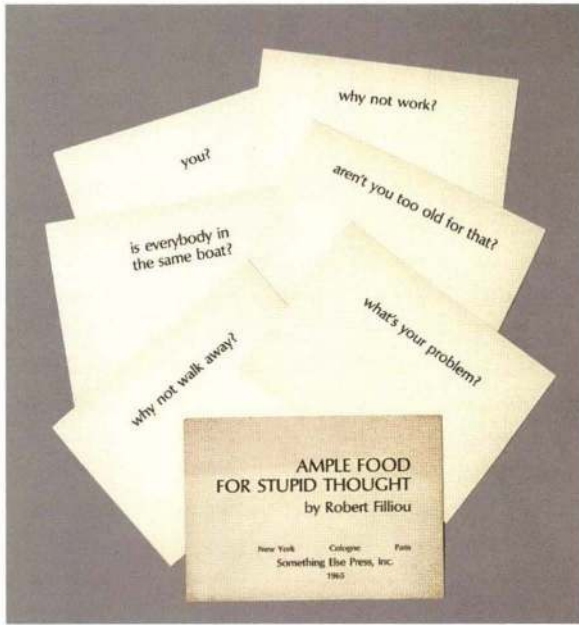
Another answer might be found by way of a related question. Around 1913, Fluxus “dada” Marcel Duchamp wrote a brief note to himself that he published in his “Green Box” in 1934:

Reciprocal Readymade = Use a Rembrandt as an ironing board.<sup>9</sup>

As opposed to using an ironing board as a “ready-made” work of art, which Duchamp actually might have done. Here is the question—or rather, two questions: would a Rembrandt painting make a good ironing board, and, if not, what else might it be good for?

One answer is that it might be used as a kind of escape hatch from habits of seeing and experiencing reality—as something that, according to Robert Filliou, “makes life more interesting than art” (figure 5.2; cat. 7). In the case of a Rembrandt self-portrait, for example, by depicting himself via paint on canvas, the artist, among other things,

1. Tried to see who he was



**Figure 5.2**  
Robert Filliou, *Ample Food for Stupid Thought* (New York: Something Else Press), 1965, ninety-three postcards (including title card) with questions. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.31 (cat. 7).

2. Offered us the opportunity not only to see him, but to see ourselves

Spoerri's "grocery store" is perhaps not all that different. "The problem of survival—its necessity and various aspects—became for me the object of long and deep cogitation," Spoerri once said.<sup>10</sup> Relevant fact: when Spoerri was eleven years old, his Jewish father was arrested and killed by the Nazis; his mother fled from Romania to Switzerland with her six children.

We expect art to be expensive and food to be affordable. Spoerri stamped those cans of food "attention art work" but sold them at their original grocery-store prices. When he designated food as "art," what do you think Spoerri was doing?

1. Creating art he could afford to make and his artist-friends could afford to buy

2. Saying everything is expensive to those who are "broke"
3. Suggesting that art, like food, is essential to survival, especially if it is something you can eat in a pinch
4. All of the above, and maybe a few other things as well

One of the things—maybe the most important thing—that art is good for is figuring out life. Art is something humans "do," on purpose, in order to generate a mind-changing experience in themselves and others. The sense of being present and engaged that art practice generates in both artist and viewer is what makes art so satisfying, no matter what it may look or sound or smell or feel or even taste like. Daniel Spoerri's "very bad" supper made from art may just have been the most nourishing meal he ever ate.

## Change?

In 1962, George Brecht and Robert Watts developed the concept of "an ever-expanding universe of events,"<sup>11</sup> which they dubbed "The Yam Festival" (Yam is May in reverse). It began with the mailing of event cards. Brecht



**Figure 5.3**  
George Brecht, *Water Yam*, 1963, wooden box containing paper cards printed with event scores. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.21 (cat. 3). © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



said that he sent these “scores” out “like little enlightenments I wanted to communicate to my friends who would know what to do with them.”<sup>12</sup> Brecht included the following 1961 score in his Maciunas–designed boxed publication *Water Yam* (figure 5.3; cat. 3):

Three Aqueous Events:

- ice
- water
- steam



**Figure 5.4**

Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi, *Water Music*, 1964, glass, plastic, rubber, paper. Harvard Art Museum, Fogg Art Museum, Barbara and Peter Moore Fluxus Collection; Margaret Fisher Fund and gift of Barbara Moore/Bound & Unbound; M26446.24 (cat. 16). Photo by Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Change: “There it is, this ‘completeness,’” Tomas Schmit said of this score.<sup>13</sup> Mieko Shiomi’s *Water Music* of 1964 (figure 5.4; cat. 16) is a little bottle partly filled with water whose label instructs:

1. GIVE THE WATER STILL FORM
2. LET THE WATER LOSE ITS STILL FORM

This could be thought of as do-it-yourself art of change. Daniel Spoerri belongs here as well. In 1965, fellow artist Allan Kaprow wrote of him:

Spoerri’s philosophical works were made in a hotel room, where he slept, made love, cooked marvelous meals, and defecated. His constructions crowded the space, mingling with the bed, the clothes, the odor of lasagna. One must pick one’s way through this intriguing mess. Where does the work of art end, and life begin? . . . I suggested that Spoerri invite the public to see his room, as it is being lived in, not as a memento or shrine . . . By agreeing, he has contributed to the eventual death of the art gallery and museums. This death will take time, but meanwhile, the world has become endlessly available.<sup>14</sup>

The goal of museums and archives is to preserve art for posterity by removing it from the hurly burly of “life”—this despite the fact that, from ancient Daoism to modern quantum physics, we have known that everything, including ourselves, is in a state of constant change. We may be able to affect the *rate* of change but not the fact.

It is far easier to recognize this reality than to realize and live it. Fluxus has come up with some effective tools for integrating the reality of ongoing change into our lives. Why would we want to do this? One very good reason is that going with change can be a lot more fun than trying to fight it, as Robert Filliou observed:

I took the Métro, one late morning . . . In the subway, that cold morning, I looked closely at all the people around me. They all seemed sad, preoccupied, gloomy, lost. (I probably looked

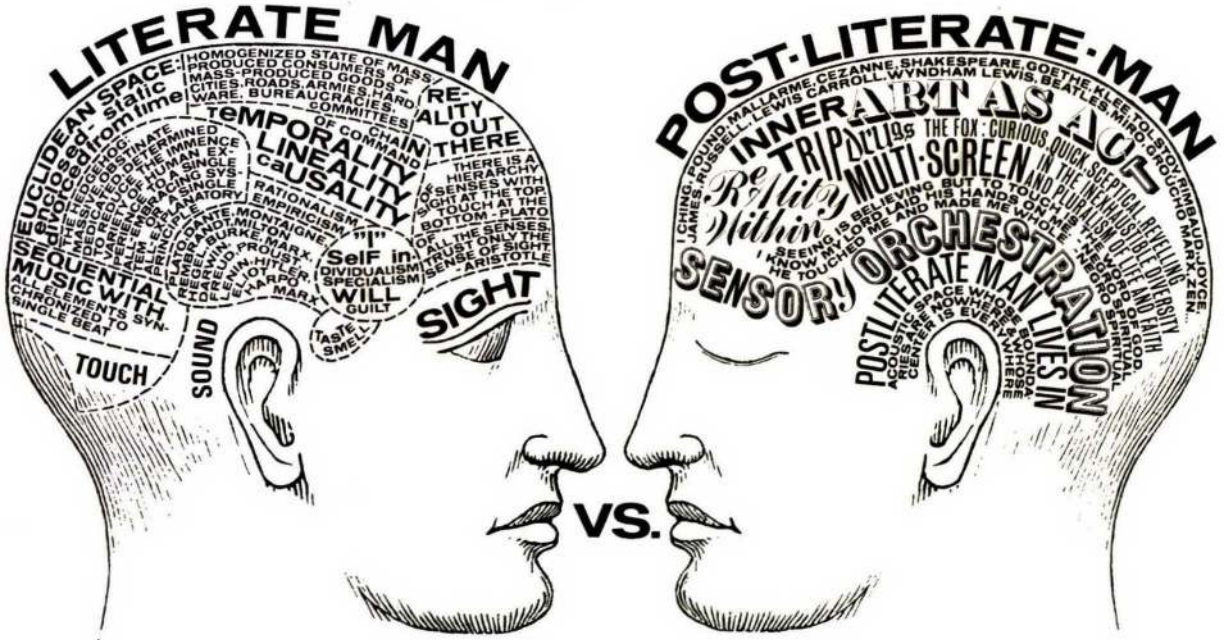


**Figure 5.5**  
 Ken Friedman, *A Flux Corsage*, 1966–76, clear plastic box with paper label on lid containing seeds. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.40 (cat. 17). (See page 34 for front of box.)

the same to them.) I thought to myself, like: What to do? I'd like to do something. What? What for? For whom? For all these people. But what? Why? I thought of my life. Is creating worth all these efforts, this discipline? . . . Creation is not enough. One must not stop creating. One can't afford to. That's it, I thought. What I must share with everyone is the knack of permanent creation. An Institute of Permanent Creation. Based on fun, and humor, and shifting perspective and good will and participation.<sup>15</sup>

As Ken Friedman suggests with his *Flux Corsage* (figure 5.5; cat. 17), you might get started by getting yourself some flower seeds, planting

**Figure 5.6**  
 George Maciunas, *Literate Man vs. Post-Literate Man*, about 1969, mechanical for Robert Watts, George Maciunas, et al., *Proposals for Art Education* (University of California, Santa Cruz, 1970). University of California Santa Cruz Library Special Collections; NX280.M63 1970 (cat. 14). © Courtesy of Billie Maciunas.





and nurturing them, and giving the blossoms to someone you love. The plant will die eventually and so might your love. But neither of them will disappear. Their energy will have morphed into something else, as will yours, and you will have become a member of the Institute of Permanent Creation.

George Maciunas attempted to chart the changes modern humans have undergone in his *Literate Man vs. Post-Literate Man* (figure 5.6; cat. 14), created in 1969 in conjunction with a group project on art education led by Robert Watts at the still fledgling University of California, Santa Cruz (founded in 1966). A Fluxus-type publication was originally planned, perhaps something along the lines of *Fluxus I* (figure 5.7; cat. 4). That proved impractical within an institutional context, and in the end their research was published as a book entitled *Proposals for Art Education*.<sup>16</sup> Maciunas's mind-diagrams depict the shift from Euclidean three-dimensional space, sequential time, and the Aristotelian hierarchy of the senses (sight at the top, touch at the bottom) to "acoustic space whose boundary is nowhere & whose center is everywhere," "sensory orchestration," and "art as act." His own contribution

to *Proposals for Art Education* was "A Preliminary Proposal for 3-Dimensional System of Information Storage and Presentation," by which he seems to have intended something like a print-out of constantly changing reality,<sup>17</sup> a concept that would only be realized some ten years after Maciunas's death in the form of today's Internet.

## Danger?

We fear what we have experienced, or have been taught to experience, as dangerous (cf. "Death?"). It is dangerous being born and it is dangerous being alive, but being afraid doesn't help matters; in fact, it can be downright distracting. A classic example: a man is frightened by a piece of rope he mistakes for a snake. Once he sees it for what it is, his fear dissipates. The answer to the question "What shall I do about the snake?" is "Nothing, except learn to see it for what it is." This perspective is quite different from the way many of us have been conditioned to perceive life and its dangers, which can be real (even a rope can be dangerous) but need not be scary.

With the right perspective, danger can even be funny. In his *Danger Music Number Seventeen*, an event score from 1962, Dick Higgins addressed the question of danger head-on. Higgins suggests:

Scream!! Scream!! Scream!!  
Scream!! Scream!! Scream!!

This might be a good way to express and thus dissipate your fear of danger, but it could alarm your friends. They could join in, of course—a group screaming session might be quite fun. George Maciunas turned danger into a game. In 1975, Maciunas published in his *Flux Newsletter* the rules of his personal danger-game, which he characterized as an "event in progress":

FLUX COMBAT WITH NEW YORK STATE ATTORNEY (& POLICE) BY GEORGE MACIUNAS (EVENT IN PROGRESS)



**Figure 5.7**

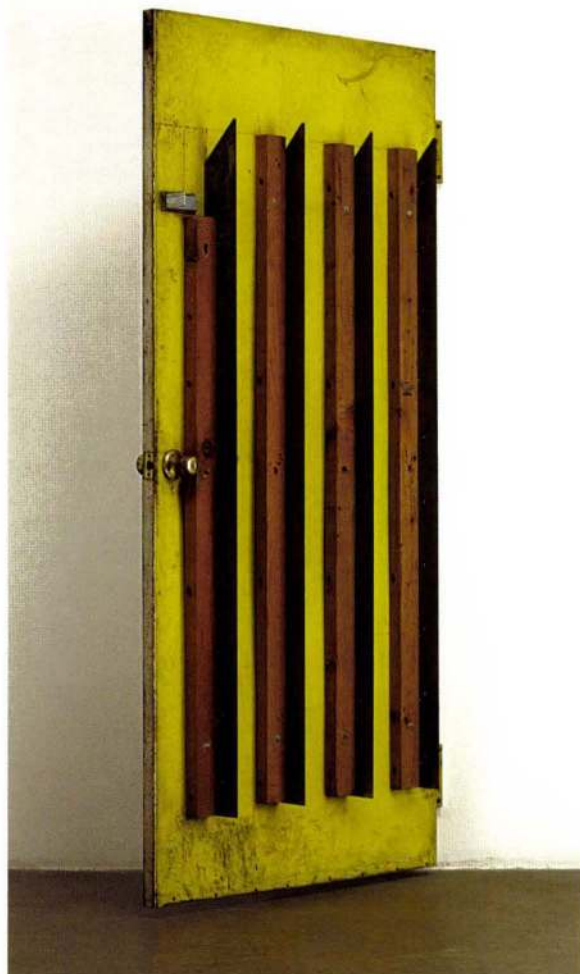
*Fluxus I*, about 1964, later assembling by Jean Brown, wooden box containing paperbound book of interleaved pages and inserts with works by various artists fastened with three metal nuts-and-bolts. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Purchased through the William S. Rubin Fund; GM.987.44.1 (cat. 4).

- 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.
- b) Maciunas' arsenal of weapons: humorous, insulting and sneering letters to Attorney General, various disguises (gorilla mask, 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, filed or backed with white powder, liquids, smelly extracts etc. funny messages behind each door, real escape hatches and tunnels leading to other floors, vaults etc. various warning alarm systems. Various 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.)<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 5.8**

Peter Moore, *George Maciunas behind door, face hidden by mask*, 1975, photograph mounted on board. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection; Gift of the artist; GM.978.209 (cat. 26) Photo by Peter Moore © Estate of Peter Moore / VAGA, NYC.



**Figure 5.9**

George Maciunas, *Giant Cutting Blades Door from Flux Combat with New York State Attorney (and Police)*, about 1970–75, door with metal blades. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY (cat. 25). © Courtesy of Billie Maciunas.

Maciunas did in fact flee New York in 1976, taking refuge in a Massachusetts farmhouse, which he hoped to turn into an arts learning center. Examples of his “documentation” of *Flux Combat* are included in this exhibition (figures 5.8 and 5.9; cats. 24–26), including an awesome example of what Maciunas described as “unbreakable doors with giant cutting blades facing out.”





Relevant fact: George Maciunas's mentor, Alfred Salmony, in an essay about a painting depicting the horrors of World War I (*The Trench* by Otto Dix), characterized "nerves of steel"—the armoring of the mind against sudden frights—as a phenomenon that non-veterans could not possibly understand.<sup>19</sup> Salmony was a veteran of World War I; his student Maciunas framed his own *Flux Combat* as a form of warfare and was in fact wounded in an altercation with two hired thugs (cf. "Health?").

Maciunas's door armed with huge steel paper-cutter blades is indeed quite scary—one way to arm yourself against danger is to pretend to be even more dangerous. Another is to channel your fear of danger into socially beneficial pursuits like science or medicine or art, thus creating subsets of reality where you can exert a sense of mastery, taking your mind off danger. And then there is always the option of laughing at danger and watching it dissipate: seeing the snake for what it is.

## Death?

I Ben I sign Death. (Ben Vautier, 1966)<sup>20</sup>

The root of all fear is of course fear of death. Death's paradox is that it emphasizes the potential of each moment by reminding us that at another moment we cannot foresee, all of our moments will be gone. It seems that for Fluxus artists, art was a good way not only to figure out life but to get some perspective on death. Ben Vautier "signed" death, just like he signed pretty much everything. Vautier thus declared himself the artist of death, including, presumably, his own. This

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Opposite:

### Figure 5.10

Ben Vautier, *A Flux Suicide Kit*, 1963, clear plastic seven-compartment box with label containing matches, razor, fish hook, rope, electrical plug, shard of broken glass, straight pin, small metal ball. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College. George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.235 (cat. 30). © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

would also seem to be the message of Vautier's *Flux Suicide Kit* (figure 5.10; cat. 30). Maciunas took a more sardonic tack, suggesting in a letter to Robert Watts:

We could publish 100 boxes—each containing objects which you would "mass produce" like in a factory . . . Catch 100 frogs put in press—& we put in book. Or maybe can get people from morgue—flatten (they will increase in size very much, so then they either must be cut to 100 pages or folded like newspaper).<sup>21</sup>

Like Vautier, George Maciunas approached the question of death humorously, bringing the metaphor of "turning" leaves (tree or book) to bear on a playful (we trust) suggestion that dead bodies might serve as handy raw material for a multiple. Pretty macabre, but black humor was how Maciunas seems to have dealt with the concept of death, until he came right up against it. A piece that could not be included in the exhibition because of its fragility is the poignant *Fluxmouse no. 1* from the Jean Brown Collection, now at the Getty Research Institute. Purportedly the prototype for a multiple, the work consists of a dead mouse floating in alcohol (relevant fact: Jean Brown was an alcoholic, Maciunas a teetotaler)<sup>22</sup> inside a glass jar with a label describing the death of the mouse:

11 PM, Jan. 18 1973 a mouse tripped a trap but got stunned instead of being caught. While it stood immobilized, I quickly covered it with an upturned pot. Next morning I passed a cardboard under the upturned pot and lifted the enclosure without permitting the mouse to escape. I noticed that the mouse attempted to tunnel out of its prison during the night by eating the rug near the rim of the pot. I carried the covered pot over a large pail of water and dropped the mouse into it hoping it would quickly drown, but instead it started to climb up the wall of the pail trying to reach



the rim. I had to cover the pail with a board, but suspecting how the mouse would try to lift it, I also placed a heavy weight on top of it.  
/ George Maciunas

At the time he immortalized this mouse, Maciunas was actively engaged in his own struggle to stay alive. The situation allowed him, however briefly, to play God, but Maciunas seems also to identify with the mouse. We imagine him listening anxiously by the covered pail, waiting for the silence that would signal the death of his “Fluxmouse.”

Perhaps the most poetic Fluxus “death” work is George Brecht’s event score from *Water Yam* (see figure 5.3; cat. 3), consisting of the one-word instruction: “EXIT.” Brecht generated a number of variations on this concept, including a “Word Event” for the 1966 Fluxfest in Prague: “A sign saying ‘Exit’ is put up on the stage. (Audience should understand that as a directive for them to leave.)”<sup>23</sup> Then there is *Fluxfilm 10, Entrance—Exit*, a seven-minute film in which an “Entrance” sign is followed by a bright white light that gradually darkens, followed by an “EXIT” sign, then white light again (fig. 5.11, cat. 29). Emmett Williams reported this brief conversation between George Maciunas and a nurse at University Hospital, Boston, in early May 1978:

“It’s no worse than being born.”

“What?”

“Dying.”<sup>24</sup>

Maciunas died on May 9. He had served as both producer and distributor of Fluxfilms, and one wonders whether Brecht’s *Entrance—Exit* may not have inspired or at least influenced his end-of-life observation. If so, this would be an example of art changing not only life but also death.

## Freedom?

George Maciunas promoted Fluxus as a collective, so he must have been delighted when Fluxus

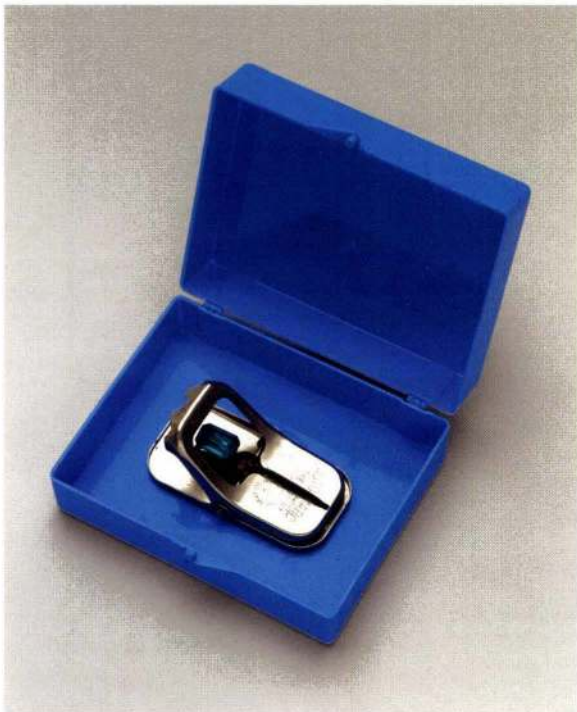
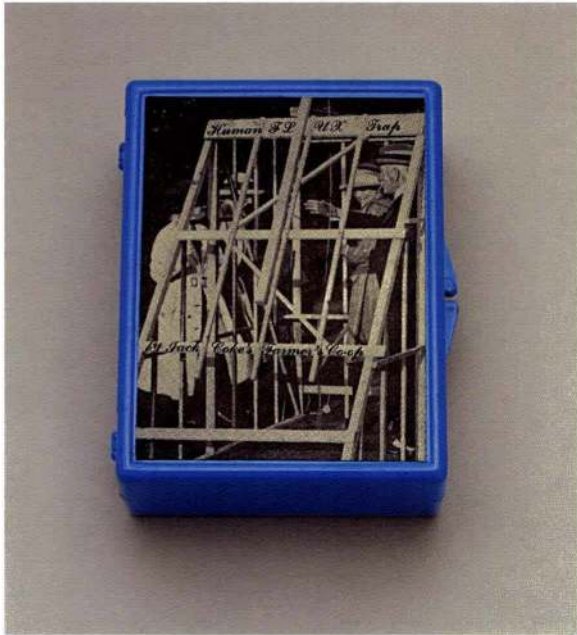


Figure 5.11

George Brecht, *Fluxfilm 10, Entrance—Exit*, 1966, silent black-and-white film. © 2011 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn (cat. 29).

artist Paul Sharits sent him “a bunch of box events” that, Sharits explained, had been made by Jack Coke’s sculpture students. “So credit for that should go to ‘St. Cloud State College Farmers’ Cooperative’ (most of the kids up here are from farms & thought it would be nice to label themselves as such . . . weird kids, eh?!).”<sup>25</sup> “Jack Coke’s Farmer’s Coop” is accordingly the artist of record for *Human Flux Trap*, a Maciunas-designed Fluxus edition from 1969 comprised of a blue plastic box containing a stainless steel trap set with a fake jewel (figure 5.12; cat. 39). The title implies the trap of desire, the cause of human suffering in which “we are at once the trapper and the trapped,” according to *The Way of Zen*, a popular book of the time by Alan Watts.<sup>26</sup>

To overcome desire—for things, for fame, even for safety—is to be truly free. What role can art play in this process? It can forgo its relationship with “thingness,” as Geoffrey Hendricks perhaps was suggesting with his own version of *Human Flux Trap*—a large mousetrap baited with a tube of red paint (figure 5.13; cat. 40). Hendricks’s *Sky Laundry (Sheet) #3* (figure 5.14; cat. 42)—a sheet painted to resemble a blue sky dotted with white clouds attached to a clothesline—was



**Figure 5.12**  
Jack Coke's Farmer's Co-op, *Human Flux Trap*, 1969, plastic box containing metal trap with plastic jewel. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY (cat. 39).



**Figure 5.13**  
Geoffrey Hendricks, *2 art traps "A"*, 1978, trap with paint tube. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY (cat. 40).

another way to pull both himself and his viewers away from the materiality of paint and into the realm of the sky, which represents openness and freedom.

Marcel Duchamp, more than two generations older than most of the Fluxus artists, was their model when it came to liberating art and thus themselves. "It will perhaps fall to an artist as free of aesthetic considerations and as concerned with energy as Marcel Duchamp to reconcile Art and the People," the poet-critic Guillaume Apollinaire wrote in 1912—the year Duchamp was beginning to assemble the conceptual components of *The Large Glass*. Apollinaire seemed almost to be anticipating Fluxus when he added: "Art such as this could produce works of unimagined power. It might even have a social function."<sup>27</sup> As examples of socially functional art, Apollinaire cited Cimabue's *Madonna*, which was "paraded through the streets" of Florence on





**Figure 5.14**

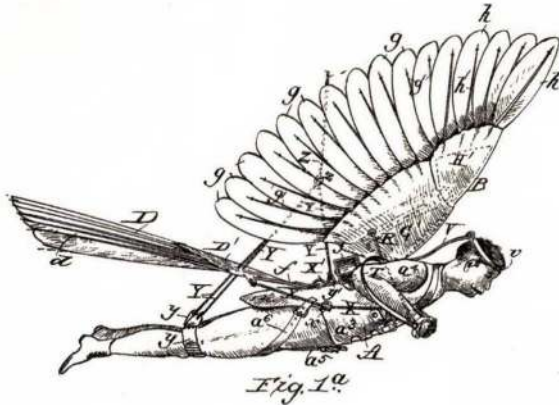
Geoffrey Hendricks, *Sky Laundry (Sheet) #3*, 1966–72, acrylic on cotton with rope and wooden clothespins. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of Jean Brown; GM.978.207 (cat. 42).

its way to be installed in the Rucellai Chapel, and the airplane in which Blériot flew over the English Channel in 1909, which was paraded through Paris before being installed in the Conservatoire national des arts et métiers.

According to Apollinaire, the airplane is art because it bears “the weight of humanity, of thousands of years of endeavor.”<sup>28</sup> The endeavor in question was Leonardo’s: to fly, to be free. Art, Apollinaire implied in 1912, can serve as a collective flying machine. “To fly is to fall. To fall is to fly. Joe Jones,” reads the typewritten instruction on a nineteenth-century illustration of a man in a flying machine that Maciunas probably

intended to turn into a multiple (figure 5.15; cat. 41). Failure, Jones implies, is a form of flying, and fear of failure is the number one impediment to creative freedom.

For Yoko Ono, the instruction “Fly” was fundamentally a message not to be afraid. This one-word event score from 1963 had its first appearance on Ono’s baby daughter’s birth announcement,<sup>29</sup> which also featured an ink impression of the baby’s hand in the “fear not” mudra—a hand gesture with the palm facing forward in the universal sign to “stop,” in this case, a reassuring order to stop being afraid. Ono subsequently realized her instruction to “Fly” in a number of formats—performance, film, music, and even billboard. “People were asked to come prepared to fly in their own way. I did not attend,” was Ono’s comment on her 1964 event,



To fly is to fall. To fall is to fly. Joe Jones

#### Figure 5.15

George Maciunas, *To fly is to fall. To fall is to fly. Joe Jones*, about 1972, offset. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY (cat. 41). © Courtesy of Billie Maciunas.

“Fly,” at Naiqua Gallery in Tokyo.<sup>30</sup> She issued the instruction to fly and then disappeared.

### God?

On the 25th of December Jesus was born.  
 or so the christians say.  
 the jews deny it.  
 the moslems are two minds about it.  
 the budhists don't care.  
 Nor do the communists and the atheists.  
 As for the artists—  
 Well what the artists believe is another story.  
 (Robert Filliou, 1963)<sup>31</sup>

Another story indeed. Filliou implies that he and his fellow Fluxus artists are on another track entirely, maybe something along the lines of

Marcel Duchamp's response to the question “What do you believe in?”

Nothing, of course! The word “belief” is another error. It's like the word “judgment,” they're both horrible ideas, on which the world is based. I hope it won't be like that on the moon!<sup>32</sup>

It seems the typically cool Duchamp could get pretty worked up on this topic. Like Filliou, he advocated for another realm of experience: aesthetic experience, where belief and non-belief, like judgment, have no role to play because art does its work by short-circuiting our habitual perceptions about what we “should” pay attention to.

“Shall we call [our concerts] ‘Fluxus,’ for the movement, not the sect?” Dick Higgins (excommunicated from Fluxus at the time) wrote a fellow Fluxus artist. “I'm afraid that, unlike Maciunas, I shall always be an atheist.”<sup>33</sup> In this 1966 letter Higgins implies that “Pope” Maciunas took the parallels between art and religion all too seriously. This was quite a criticism, for the Fluxus position on God seems to have been that His main purpose is to be made fun of.<sup>34</sup> God and religion were perennially popular subjects for Fluxus artworks such as Ben Vautier's *God* (figure 5.16; cat. 43), an empty wine bottle whose accompanying text reads: “If God is everywhere he is also in this bottle.” Vautier's choice of a wine bottle adds a humorous layer of meaning having to do with one purported way to see God. On the other hand, the same artist's *Fluxbox Containing God* (figure 5.17; cat. 44)—a plastic box glued shut—suggests both God's inaccessibility and Vautier's own omniscience (you can bet on the fact that Ben “signed” God).

Geoff Hendricks's *Flux Reliquary* (figure 5.18; cat. 46) and Carla Liss's *Sacrament Fluxkit* (figure 5.19 a, b; cat. 47) take different tacks. Hendricks's satirical “Flux Relics” include “Sweat of Lucifer from the heat of Hell,” “Fragment of rope by which Judas Iscariot hung himself,” “Holy Shit

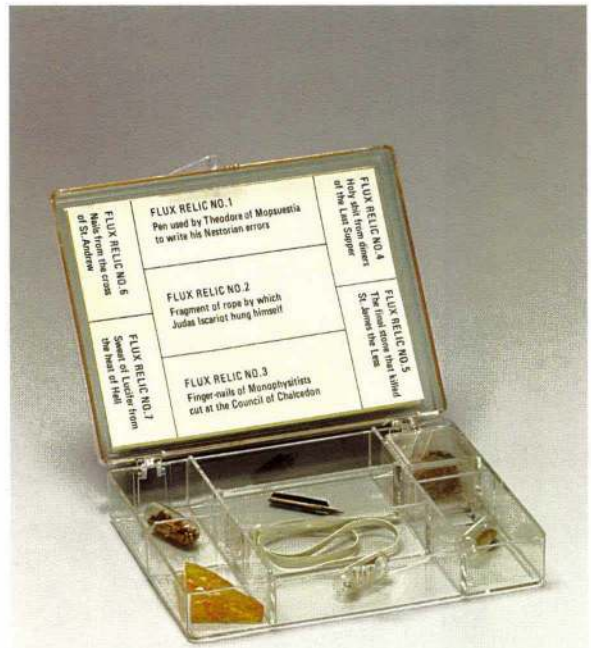




**Figure 5.16**  
Ben Vautier, *God*, 1961, glass bottle with label inscribed “God” in pencil. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. © 2011 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY (cat. 43)



**Figure 5.17**  
Ben Vautier, *Fluxbox Containing God*, about 1966, glued-shut plastic box with label. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 1995; 1995.97 (cat. 44). © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

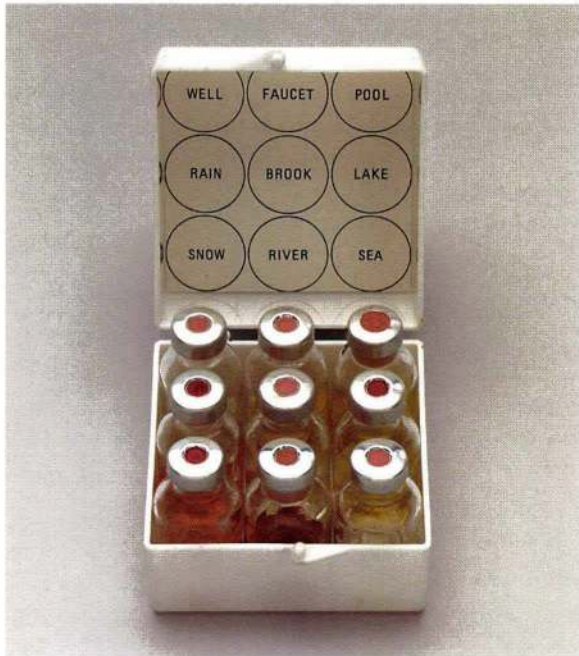
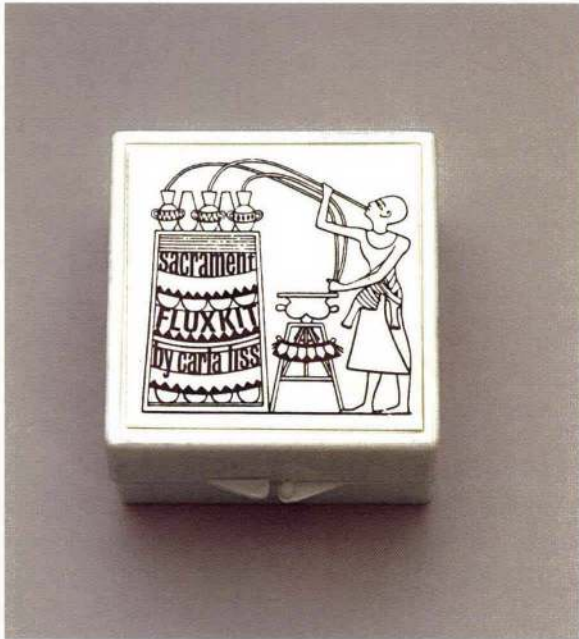


**Figure 5.18**  
Geoffrey Hendricks, *Flux Reliquary*, 1970, clear seven-compartment plastic box with label on lid and on underside of lid identifying items (relics) in each compartment: turd, pebble in clear capsule, pen nib, white rubber band, nail paring in clear capsule, little brass nails in capsule, fragment of melted yellow plastic. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.79 (cat. 46).

from diners at the Last Supper,” and other objects that upon reflection seem only slightly more arcane than the “real” things found in churches around the world. Liss’s poetic *Sacrament Fluxkit*, on the other hand, consists of a box of nine small specimen bottles labeled on the inside lid with everyday sources of the “holy” water within: “WELL, FAUCET, POOL, RAIN, BROOK, LAKE, SNOW, RIVER, SEA.” We can choose to have a sacramental experience each time we encounter water, Liss implies: it’s up to us.

### Happiness?

“May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness,” begins a Buddhist prayer. The



**Figure 5.19**

Carla Liss, *Sacrament Fluxkit*, date unknown, Fluxus Edition announced 1969, plastic box containing nine vials with liquid. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY (cat. 47).

question of happiness is really two questions: what is happiness, and what does it take to be happy? Fluxus artists had a few things to say about both. Regarding the first, consider Chieko Shiomi's *Disappearing Music for Face* from the 1966 *Proposed Program for a Fluxfest in Prague*:

Performers begin the piece with a smile and during the duration of the piece, change the smile very gradually to no-smile. Conductor indicates the beginning with a smile and determines the duration by his example, which should be followed by the orchestra.<sup>35</sup>

*Disappearing Music for Face* is included in this exhibition both as a movie (cat. 57) and as a flip-book, Fluxus's low-cost, DIY version of a movie (figure 5.20; cat. 56). Happiness, Shiomi seems to be suggesting, is both "catching" and fleeting, to be enjoyed while it lasts.

As for what causes happiness, consider George Maciunas's *Flux Smile Machine* (figure 5.21; cats. 51 and 52). Ostensibly a device for converting a non-smile into a smile, the "smile machine"



**Figure 5.20**

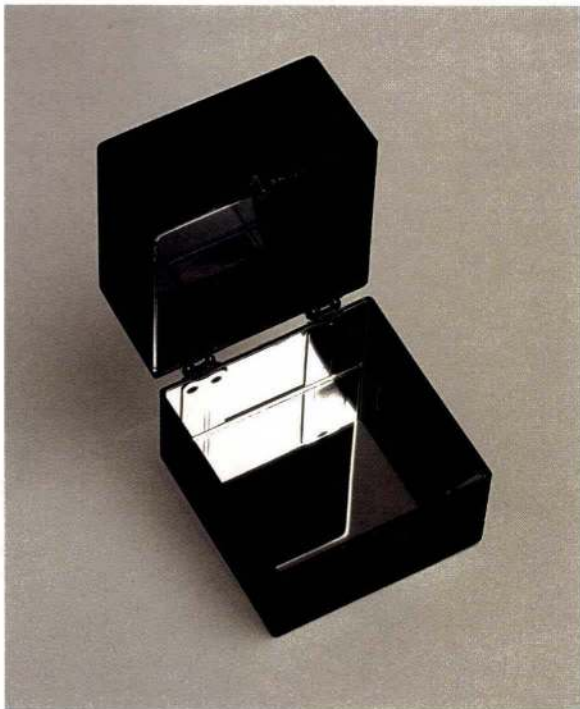
Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi, *Disappearing Music for Face*, 1965, thirty-nine-page stapled flipbook with sequential images of Yoko Ono's mouth losing a smile by Peter Moore from the fluxfilm of the same name. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection; Purchased through the William S. Rubin Fund; GM.987.44.2 (cat. 56).





**Figure 5.21**

George Maciunas, *Flux Smile Machine*, 1971, blue plastic box with label containing metal and plastic spring device. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection; Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.163 (cat. 52). © Courtesy of Billie Maciunas.



**Figure 5.22**

Yoko Ono, *A Box of Smile*, 1971/1984 ReFlux Edition, plastic box inscribed in gold: "a box of smile y.o. '71." Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College; Acquisitions Fund; GM.989.12.5 (cat. 55).

consists of a slightly malevolent-looking spring-loaded device in a box whose label features a face with teeth displayed in a forced grimace. The effect of the machine itself would presumably be more artificial, even horrific. A related piece, Maciunas's "Smile" *Grotesque Face Mask* (cat. 53), was a Fluxus edition produced about 1976.<sup>36</sup> Happiness is manufactured, Maciunas's message seems to be; it has to be *made* to happen, sometimes painfully. On the other hand, if one can get past the grotesqueness of these works, one might conclude that Maciunas is also implying the opposite by ironically suggesting that, to be "real," happiness—smiles—must come from within. This message is conveyed with gentler humor (and thus perhaps more convincingly) by Yoko Ono's *Box of Smile* (figure 5.22, cats. 54 and 55), the title of which brings the viewer/reader into the action by prompting a smile. I won't spoil the experience by revealing here what the box contains; its contents makes clear exactly where the secret of happiness lies.

"I would like to see the sky machine on every corner of the street instead of the coke machine," Ono once said. "We need more skies than coke."<sup>37</sup> Bici Forbes's *Stress Formula* (figure 5.23; cat. 50) proposes that we need more jokes than drugs. A vitamin bottle whose label is inscribed with the suggested dosage, "Take one capsule every four hours, for laughs," *Stress Formula* contains clear capsules with little rolled pieces of paper, presumably printed with humorous messages. It has been established scientifically that simply raising the corners of one's mouth tends to generate the sensations of happiness. Fluxus artists seem to agree that happiness is something we make for ourselves, not the result of something

Opposite:

**Figure 5.23**

Nye Ffarrabas (formerly Bici Forbes and Bici Forbes Hendricks), *Rx: Stress Formula*, about 1970–78, pill bottle with ink on pressure-sensitive labels, containing photocopy in twenty-six gelatin capsules. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY (cat. 50).



ONE CAPSULE SUPPLIES 15 times the minimum daily adult requirements of Vitamin B1, B2, B6, C, E, K, and Vitamin A.

BICI FORBEE

Rx A STRESS FORMULA PUBLICATION

2.g. - Take one capsule every four hours, For laughs

100 CAPSULES

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Cambridge, Mass 02138



that happens to us. Happiness can be yours; it is a question of noticing . . . the sky, your friend's smile, your smile.

## Health?

Happiness and health are certainly related, but even sickness can be worked with to generate happiness, or at least humor. Robert Watts recalled:

It must have been Alison Knowles who called me up to say [George Maciunas] was in bad shape with asthma in an Air Force hospital in Germany and needed help or at least some encouragement . . . I decided to send something for entertainment, so I stuck some pistol caps on the back of old photos from an Italian magazine of WWI vintage. I remember there was a photo of a priest blessing a propeller of an Italian Air Force fighter plane. The idea was to put the photo on an anvil and hit the front with a hammer until all the caps exploded. Later GM said he got a big kick out of this procedure, especially since after he exploded

all the caps, he set up the photos' remains for the locals to continue the destruction . . . he said the people beat the shit out of those photos until there was nothing left but fuzz.<sup>38</sup>

Maciunas, in a letter to Watts from the time, gave a somewhat different account: "I got your letter on the last day in the hospital (they did not succeed in curing me!) So I was not able to do the Hospital events . . . Your letter, you know, the one to the hospital did not have a name on the envelope HA! HA! So what do they do? They open to see to whom it could be & what do they find? The Hospital events. HA! HA!"<sup>39</sup> (Some of Watts's images were more sexy—today we would say more sexist—than he suggests above.)<sup>40</sup>

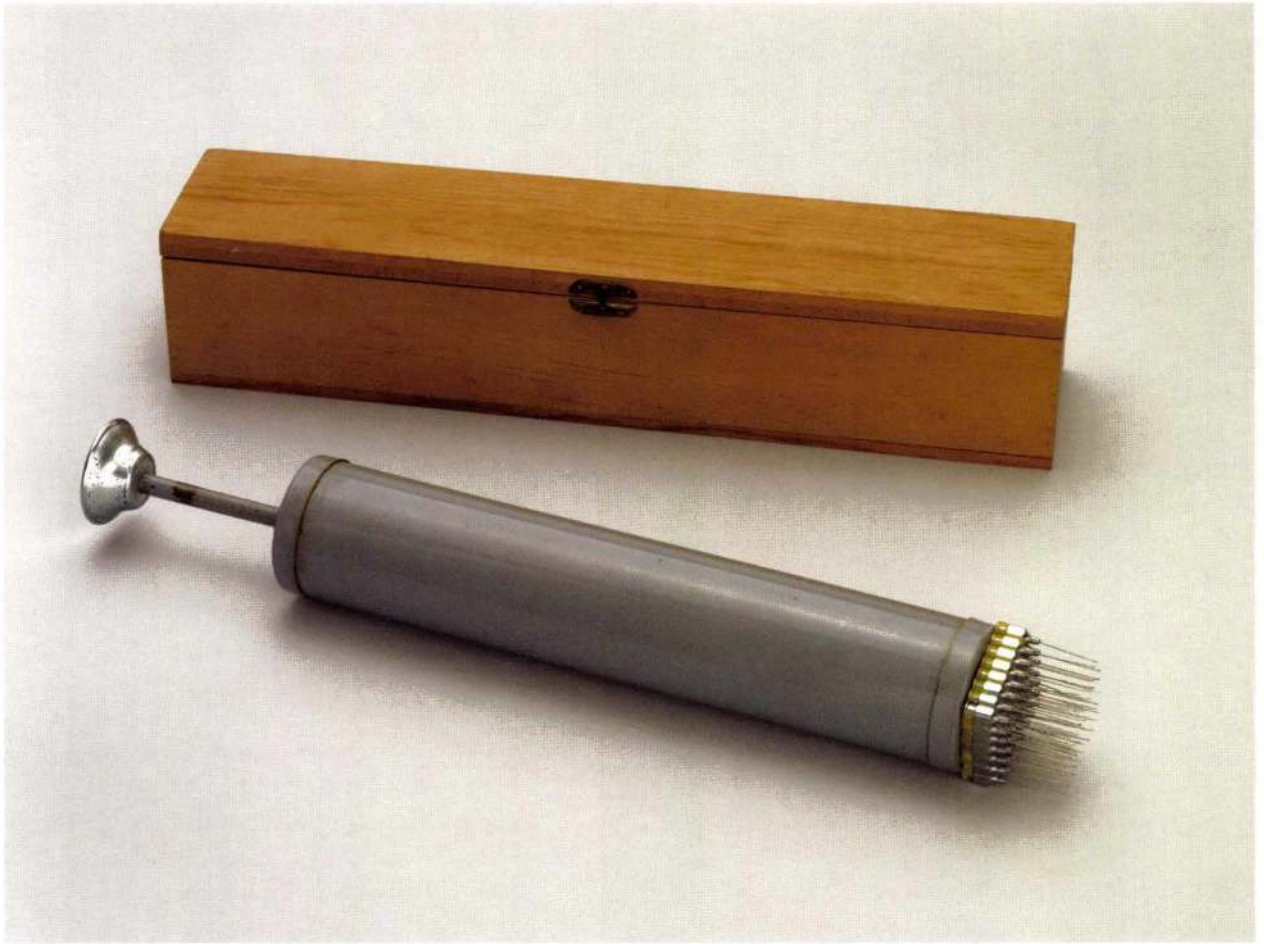
Maciunas's own *Solo for Sick Man* from 1962 (figure 5.24; cat. 58) is an opportunity to transform the state of your health into a musical score. Bodily/medical events (some associated with asthma) are listed vertically in apparent random order in the left-hand column—"cough . . . spit, gargle . . . blow wet nose, swallow pill . . . use nebulizer-vaporiser . . . drop pills over floor"—while the sequence and number of seconds each

SOLO FOR SICK MAN		by George Maciunas, Jan.4,1962											
seconds													
cough													
lunger													
spit													
gargle													
draw air (pitched)													
snore (non pitched)													
sniff wet nose													
sniff deeply & swallow													
blow wet nose													
swallow pill													
shake pills in bottle													
sipp cough syrup													
use nebulizer-vaporiser													
put drops into nose													
drop pills over floor													
put drops into glass of water													

Figure 5.24

George Maciunas, *Solo for Sick Man*, 1962, Fluxus Edition announced 1966, original artwork of typewriter and ink on transparent paper for printed edition. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New

York, NY, U.S.A. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY (cat. 58). © Courtesy of Billie Maciunas.



**Figure 5.25**

George Maciunas, *Fluxsyringe*, about 1972, Fluxus Edition announced 1973, wood box containing metal pump with fifty-six needles. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY (cat. 62). © Courtesy of Billie Maciunas.

act is performed are arrayed to the right as blank boxes to be filled in. An extraordinarily touching piece, in its dry way, this “solo” (one pictures Maciunas alone), which consists for the most part of involuntary acts, is here “scored” like an “event”—a work of art.

Very different is Maciunas’s *Fluxsyringe* (figure 5.25; cat. 62), a multiple from around 1972. A large, metal cylinder with a pump handle, its action-end is composed of a block of hypodermic

needles lined up in a square. In a letter to Hans Sohm, Maciunas described this planned multiple as “a giant syringe with 64 needles.”<sup>41</sup> The block of sixty-four is reminiscent of the sixty-four *kua* of the ancient Chinese *I Ching*, a connection that suggests that by taking appropriate action, however painful, we can transform, if not cure, troublesome medical conditions. Interestingly, this example has only fifty-six needles. On a more basic level, *Fluxsyringe* may simply embody the necessity to take our medicine for whatever ails us—and there are quite a lot of ailments, as the plethora of needles implies.

*Hospital Event Label* (not in the exhibition) was intended for an edition of relics from Maciunas’s traumatic 1975 encounter with two mobsters (cf. “Danger?”) that hospitalized him with broken



bones, a deflated lung, and a damaged eye. On November 30 of that year, Maciunas wrote collector Hans Sohm: “In January I will mail . . . My own new Hospital Event box which there will be only 6 since I don’t have enough bloody clothing. \$150.”<sup>42</sup> An announcement of this box mentions “x-rays etc.” as well as “objects,” but no boxes seem to have been produced.<sup>43</sup>

A team of three Japanese artists calling themselves Hi Red Center (Nakanishi Natsuyuki, Genpai Akasegawa, and Takamatsu Jiro, fragments of whose respective names read “hi,” “red,” and “center” in Japanese) produced with Maciunas’s help *Fluxclinic: Record of Features and Feats* for an event at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York on June 4, 1966 (cat. 59). In a letter to Ben Vautier, Maciunas wrote:

Hotel event was a clinic in a room, where we measured the visitors for their head volume (head to pail of water) volume of mouth, weight of 1 minute saliva—some 40 bizarre measurements . . . it went very well, for some 30–40 minutes.<sup>44</sup>

*Fluxclinic* was a version of *One Shelter Plan*, which Hi Red Center conducted at the Imperial Hotel in Hibiya, Japan, in January 1964. Participants were measured for a custom-made fallout shelter, a theme that carried considerable resonance in Japan. The American Fluxus version was more light-hearted, with overtones of playing doctor—which, as Jon Hendricks has pointed out, “acts as a kind of surrogate catharsis against real doctors, who hurt.”<sup>45</sup>

## Love?

“I Ben I sign Love”<sup>46</sup> was one of the French Fluxus artist Ben Vautier’s many appropriations. It was one way to satisfy—or distance himself from—what is arguably the most fundamental human need. Love did not play much of a role in the art of George Maciunas until he met and married Billie Hutching shortly before his death

in a ceremony they turned into a performance featuring cross-dressing. Geoffrey Hendricks and Bici Forbes, on the other hand, turned their divorce into a performance. *Flux Divorce Box* (figure 5.26; cat. 67) defies the injunction “What God has joined together let no man put asunder” in hilarious, if not hysterical, terms.

“I insist that all cultural activities be truly benevolent & positive & done in the spirit of love rather than one of scornful contempt or hatred or polemic,” wrote Jackson Mac Low in a letter to George Maciunas of April 25, 1963, in response to Maciunas’s anarchistic *Fluxus Newsletter No. 6* (April 6, 1963).<sup>47</sup> But the extent to which George Maciunas was loved by his Fluxus artists at the time of his death is clear from the *V TRE Extra*, “*Maciunas Dies*” issue, published in 1979 (cat. 36). Three years earlier, George Brecht had sent a group of thirty-three artists a proposal for a *Festschrift* in his honor:

Last year I proposed to Bob Watts and Geoff Hendricks that it might be nice if all the “Flux-people” (anyone ever connected, closely or remotely, with Maciunas) got together to make a *Festschrift* for him. In a December ’75 letter Bob Watts wrote: “This has been a rugged fall time. G. M. was mugged in a building in Mercer St. by Mafia types over a \$2000 misunderstanding with an Italian electrician. He had 4 broken ribs, puncture lung, 8 stitches in scalp, and damage to one eye. There is still some question about recover of the eye.” Geoff wrote that he thought this might be an especially good time to do the *Festschrift*.<sup>48</sup>

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Opposite:

### Figure 5.26

Geoffrey Hendricks, in collaboration with Nye Ffarrabas (formerly Bici Forbes and Bici Forbes Hendricks), George Maciunas, and Peter Moore, *Flux Divorce Box*, 1973, Fluxus Edition announced 1973, wood box containing objects of various media, assembled by Hendricks. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY (cat. 67).



Our Flux Divorce

Geoff and Bici  
24 June 1971

A FRAGMENT OF THE BLACK PLASTIC WHICH DIVIDED THE BALL MADE IN THE DIVISION OF PROPERTY.

A PIECE OF THE CARDBOARD BOX FROM THE LOWER LEFT HAND CORNER OF THE WALL WHICH DIVIDED THE PLAYROOM IN HALF.

A PIECE OF CORRESPONDENCE CUT IN HALF AT THE DIVISION OF PROPERTY.

FRAGMENTS OF THE BOX CUT IN HALF AT THE DIVISION OF PROPERTY.

A PIECE OF CORRESPONDENCE CUT IN HALF AT THE DIVISION OF PROPERTY.



Brecht himself created what may be one of the most beautiful works of art about love and loss ever made, his 1961 event score titled *Three Gap Events*:

- missing-letter sign
- between two sounds
- meeting again

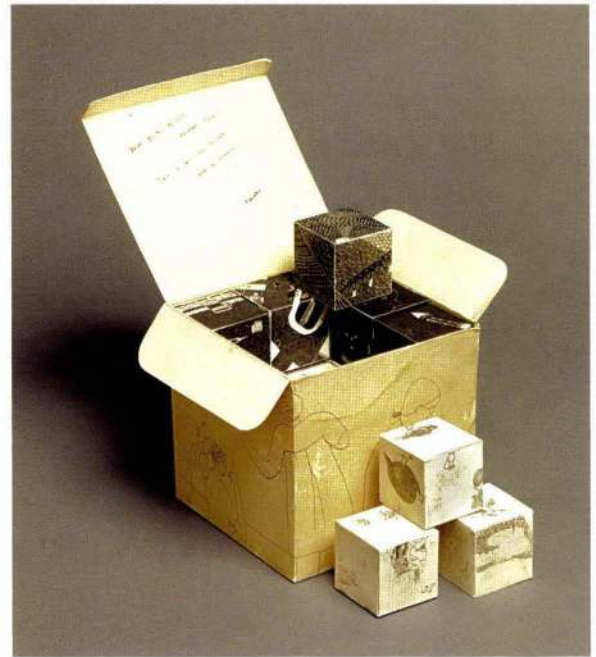
The concept of the missing-letter sign is Marcel Duchamp's: on the brass plaque for *With Hidden Noise*, Duchamp said he "wrote three short sentences in which letters were occasionally missing,

like in a neon sign when one letter is not lit and makes the word unintelligible."<sup>49</sup> In signage and in life, what is "missing" makes the rest unintelligible. Nothing—no sound—comes "between two sounds." And "meeting again" implies infinite longing.

Love is perhaps most strongly felt in absence. This may be the message of Milan Knížák and Ken Friedman's *Fluxus Heart Shirt* (figure 5.27; cat. 64), which has a heart shape cut out of its breast pocket. (Its title may also have been intended as a play on the "hair shirt," which was



**Figure 5.27**  
Milan Knížák and Ken Friedman, *Fluxus Heart Shirt*, n.d., man's white polyester and cotton long-sleeve shirt with the shape of a heart cut out of the breast pocket, tinted pink on the inside. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.3 (cat. 64).



**Figure 5.28**  
Takako Saito, *Heart Box*, 1965, paper box covered with drawings filled with smaller paper boxes with drawings. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of Alison Knowles; GM.978.212 (cat. 63). © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Opposite:

**Figure 5.29**  
Milan Knížák, *Enforced Symbioses*, 1977, typewriting, color instant print and ink with nails and twine on cardboard. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. © 2011 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY (cat. 66).

## ENFORCED SYMBIOSES

TO BE BOUND TO SOMEONE (something) FOR A LONG TIME.

2 TREES TIED TO EACH OTHER.

DO EVERYTHING, TWICE, THREETIMES, N-TIMES.

HAVE EVERYTHING TWICE, 3X TIMES, Nx TIMES.

BE TWICE, THREE TIMES, Nx TIMES.

TIE TWO HANDS TOGETHER, 2 BOTTLES, 2 CARS,  
2 STONES, 2 PEOPLE.

JOIN TWO IDEAS, 2 WHITE SURFACES, 2 FIRES,  
3 IDEAS, 3 WHITE SURFACES, 3 FIRES, ETC. ...

TIE TOGETHER 3 HEADS, 3 BOTTLES, 3 CARS,  
3 STONES, 3 PEOPLE, 3 WORDS, ETC.

CLOTHES FOR TWO, FOR THREE, FOR A CROWD.

GLUE TOGETHER BREADS, MACHINES, PAPERS,  
CLOUDS, TASTES.

ETC.....

By binding things, people, phenomena, etc. together, their common life /in the physiological sense/naturally doesn't begin /nor can it, because much of what we have taken into consideration does not even live this way/; but even so, in that instant they begin to exist for us as an individual, as a unit, as one. As long as what joins them continues to function, these twins, triplets or N-lets will be forced to appear together - that is, as a single existence.

At least in the sense that they will be mutually forced to accept the other as themselves.

Let us try to think of two as one, of three as one, of many as one.

/Carried out in the first half of 1977, as a synthesis of several previous efforts/. *Michael Kunisak*





worn to induce self-inflicted penitential pain.) In a different vein, Takako Saito's *Heart Box* (figure 5.28; cat. 63) suggests the omnipresence of love for a loving heart. A paper box whose sides are covered with images of the family of Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles is filled with smaller paper boxes also covered with drawings of objects and scenes from the world. Its lid features a large red heart and is inscribed on the inside: "Dear Dick, Alison, Hannah, Jessie, This is my love to you and all others. Takako." Along the same lines, Milan Knížák writes in his piece *Enforced Symbioses* (figure 5.29; cat. 66): "Let us try to think of two as one, of three as one, of many as one." According to these artists, love is the emotional experience of interconnectedness.

### Nothingness?

La Monte Young: I called Terry Riley on the phone. We talked for a while—at one point in the discussion Terry said, "You have to trust what you hear."—There was silence—I said Yeah—we had both said it many times before and I was tired . . . There was more silence—then Terry said, "You even have to trust what you don't hear."<sup>50</sup>

From Parmenides to Heidegger, the question of nothingness has long been a focus of Western philosophy. It is also at the very core of Asian philosophy, from Daoism to Zen. To the European-American mind, emptiness or nothingness tends to suggest vacuum or disappearance (cf. "Death?"); for the Daoist/Buddhist-influenced mind, it is a fecund source of everything that exists. "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form," insists the Heart Sutra, the most popular Buddhist scripture.

Nothingness was a big theme for Daoist- and Zen-influenced Fluxus artists and their friends, and it permeated much that they did. The message-in-a-bottle of Ben Vautier's *God* (see figure 5.16; cat. 43), for example, can be read as follows: Nothing is God, and vice-versa. George Brecht

addressed the question of nothingness in similar terms in his 1961 score titled *Two Elimination Events*:

- empty vessel
- empty vessel

The origin of Brecht's concept can be found in chapter 11 of the *Daodejing*:

We throw clay to shape a pot,  
But the utility of the clay pot is a function of  
the nothingness inside it.<sup>51</sup>

One implication of this metaphor is that the "utility" or creativity of the mind is a function of whether we can "empty" it of preconceptions and distractions. Brecht's doublet seems similarly intended to move us from objective to metaphorical meaning.

George Brecht was the initiator of *V TRE*, the Fluxus newspaper, whose missing-letter title was one of his "gap events" (cf. "Love?"). The second issue of *V TRE* (February 2, 1964) contained an "editorial" by Brecht that was grounded in Daoist philosophy and the Zen precepts, along with the Buddhist Heart Sutra's emphasis on "non-attainment":

TEN RULES: NO RULES (EDITORIAL)

forgoing intention: nothing unaccomplished  
forgoing needs: no requirement unfulfilled  
forgoing satisfaction: no favoring  
forgoing judgment: no inappropriate action  
forgoing comparison: exact oneness  
forgoing attachment: nothing to eliminate  
no true generality  
no progress, no regression: static change,  
complete punctuality  
no coming, no going  
no grasping

1962  
gb

Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film* (cats. 76 and 77) is perhaps the best-known Fluxus work to address the question of nothingness. It was issued as a Fluxus edition in 1965 in the form of a film canister containing approximately twenty minutes of clear sixteen-millimeter film leader, and it was also editioned by Maciunas as a short loop for inclusion in *Flux Year Box 2* (see the cover of this book; cat. 6). John Cage said of *Zen for Film*:

Paik invited Merce Cunningham and me to Canal Street to see his *Zen for Film*, an hour-long film without images. The mind is like a mirror; it collects "dust the problem is to remove the dust." "Where is the mirror? Where is the dust?" In this case the dust is on the lens of the projector and on the blank developed film itself. "There is never nothing to see."<sup>52</sup>

Cage's mirror/dust references two contrasting mind-metaphors purportedly offered by rivals for the role of China's Sixth Zen Patriarch.<sup>53</sup> His concluding statement, "There is never nothing to see," is reminiscent of his comment, "Art is everywhere; it's only seeing which stops now and then."<sup>54</sup>

In contrast to Cage's emphasis on perception, Paik probably intended *Zen for Film* to be an opportunity to empty the mind and allow an awareness of nothingness to arise. In 1963, he updated the notion of Buddha mind by equating the Buddhist concept of "no boundary" with the electronic technology of television. "I am proud to be able to say that all thirteen sets actually changed their inner circuits," Paik joked about the exhibition in which *Zen for TV* (figure 5.30; cat. 74) first appeared.<sup>55</sup> In fact the exhibition included twelve sets, two of which, including the prototype *Zen for TV*, had been damaged in transit.<sup>56</sup> Paik made the resulting horizontal line of light vertical by turning the set on its side and gave it the title *Zen for TV*, implying both that the set is in a meditative state and that it might serve as a meditation aid.



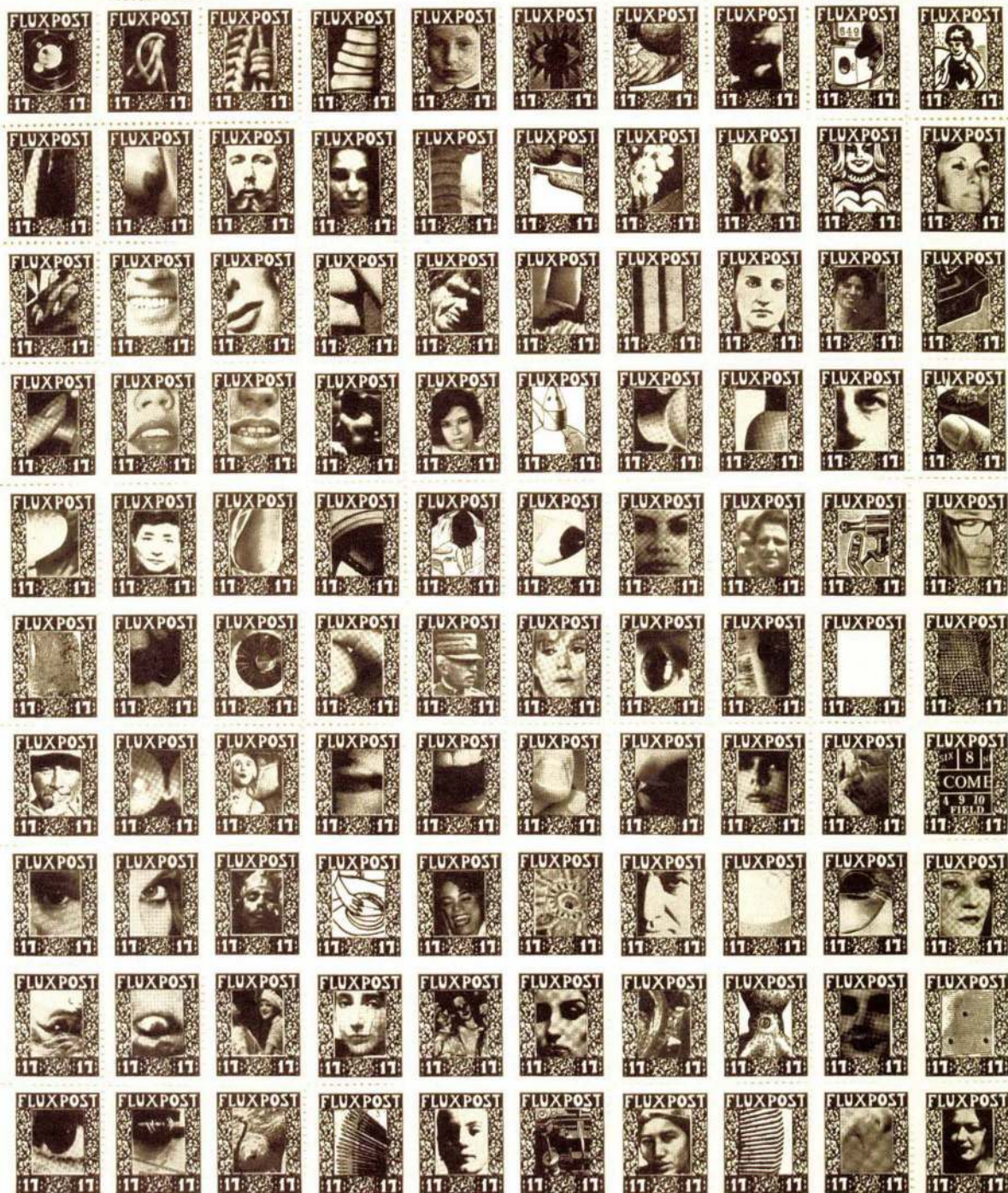
**Figure 5.30**  
Nam June Paik, *Zen for TV*, 1963/78, altered television set. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College: Gift of the artist in honor of George Maciunas; GM.978.211 (cat. 74).

But back to our subject, let's let Dick Higgins, who liked to refer to nothingness as "invitingness," have the last word: "Starting with nothing is a good way to get somewhere."<sup>57</sup>

## Sex?

Sex rivals nothingness as a favorite topic of Fluxus artists. The two are connected, both experientially and symbolically: *la petite mort*, "the little death," is a French metaphor for orgasm. From Daoism to Dada, the psychosomatic bliss of the orgasmic experience has been a metaphor for the experience of nothingness, and the fecund "emptiness" of the vagina has been a metaphor for how to get there.<sup>58</sup> Chapter 6 of the *Dao de jing* expands upon this metaphor:





**DIY12W70640**



The life-force of the valley never dies; this is called the mysterious female.

The gateway of the mysterious female is called the root of heaven and of earth.

It is endless and only seems to be there.

Using it, one never tires.<sup>59</sup>

“In this chapter and pervasively in the text,” Roger Ames and David Hall write in their philosophical analysis of the *Dao de jing*, “the image of the dark, moist, and accommodatingly vacant interior of the vagina is used as an analogy for [the fecundity of emptiness].”<sup>60</sup> This was one impulse behind the Fluxus obsession with holes—categorized here under “Nothingness?” but just as easily placed under “Sex?” (cats. 68–71).

*The Fluxus News-Policy Letter No. 6* (April 6, 1963) included among the “preliminary contents of NYC Fluxus in Nov.” an “‘Armory show of new American pornography’ (films, pictures, events, objects) . . . (& to include Paik sex-pianos).”<sup>61</sup> Nam June Paik directly addressed the challenge of integrating sex into music: “The parameter SEX is very undeveloped in music, as opposed to literature and optical art,” he wrote in his “Afterlude to the Exposition of Experimental Television,” published in *V TRE* in 1964.<sup>62</sup> Robert Watts was another Fluxus artist who made sex a particular focus. In August 1966, George Maciunas wrote Ben Vautier about some multiples he and Watts were working on:

Another new development: we are working on FLUXFURNITURE . . . Bob Watts: . . . [table] top with full size photo of girls crossed legs, so when you sit in correct side it looks as if these girls legs belong to you. Very funny effect.<sup>63</sup>

Watts himself wrote about his specially designed

---

Opposite:

**Figure 5.31**

Robert Watts, *Fluxpost 17-17*, 1965, stamps printed in black ink on gummed, perforated paper. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.285 (cat. 79).

stamps (figure 5.31; cat. 79):

I decided . . . to make my own postage stamps since most stamps are not very interesting any more . . . In making the stamps I found I was interested, evidently, in whiskey, W. C Fields, girls, sheet music, gas cans, sex, pliers, pencils, breasts, alphabet letters and a number of other things. Some of the stamps have been declared pornographic, a subject that is of some interest to me. I wonder if anything really is.<sup>64</sup>

Watts’s question about whether pornography “really is” was also addressed by Robert Filliou and Daniel Spoerri. Their “Flux Post Card,” from the series *MONSTERS ARE INOFFENSIVE* (figure 5.32; cat. 80), is captioned: “Men call pubic hair pornography but / MONSTERS ARE INOFFENSIVE.” As these furniture, stamp, and postcard examples illustrate, Fluxus artists aimed to challenge public mores and standards regarding sexual behavior. If from our twenty-first-century perspective some of their works in this vein seem a bit sophomoric, bear in mind that Hugh M. Hefner published the first installment of his *Playboy Philosophy* in the December 1962 issue of *Playboy* magazine, and the year 1965 marked both the advent of the mini-skirt and the wide availability of oral contraceptives in the United States.<sup>65</sup> It may be that the sixties’ aura of sexual “freedom” made some of the men of Fluxus a bit giddy.

Perhaps the most penetrating critique of pervasive attitudes toward sex at this time was Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece*, first performed in Kyoto in 1964. The instruction for the piece states simply: “Cut.” In her book *Grapefruit*, Ono added the following gloss:

It is usually performed by Yoko Ono coming on the stage and in a sitting position, placing a pair of scissors in front of her and asking the audience to come up on the stage, one by one, and cut a portion of her clothing (anywhere they like) and take it. The performer, however, does not have to be a woman.<sup>66</sup>





Figure 5.32

Robert Filliou and Daniel Spoerri, *MONSTERS ARE INOFFENSIVE*, 1967, Fluxus postcard captioned: "Men call pubic hair pornography but / MONSTERS ARE INOFFENSIVE." (from *Flux Year Box 2*, cat. 6). Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection; Purchased through the William S. Rubin Fund; GM.987.44.2 (cat. 80).

This superficially simple concept turned out, in performance, to be emotionally charged with violent and sexual content. Its most provocative element is contained in the last sentence of Ono's description: "The performer, however, does not have to be a woman." It is almost impossible to imagine a man performing this piece . . . which is, of course, the point.

### Staying Alive?

FLUXUS way of life is 9 am to 5 pm working socially constructive and useful work—

earning your own living, 5 pm to 10 pm—spending time on propagandizing your way of life among other idle artists & art collectors and fighting them, 12 pm to 8 am sleeping (8 hours is enough).<sup>67</sup>

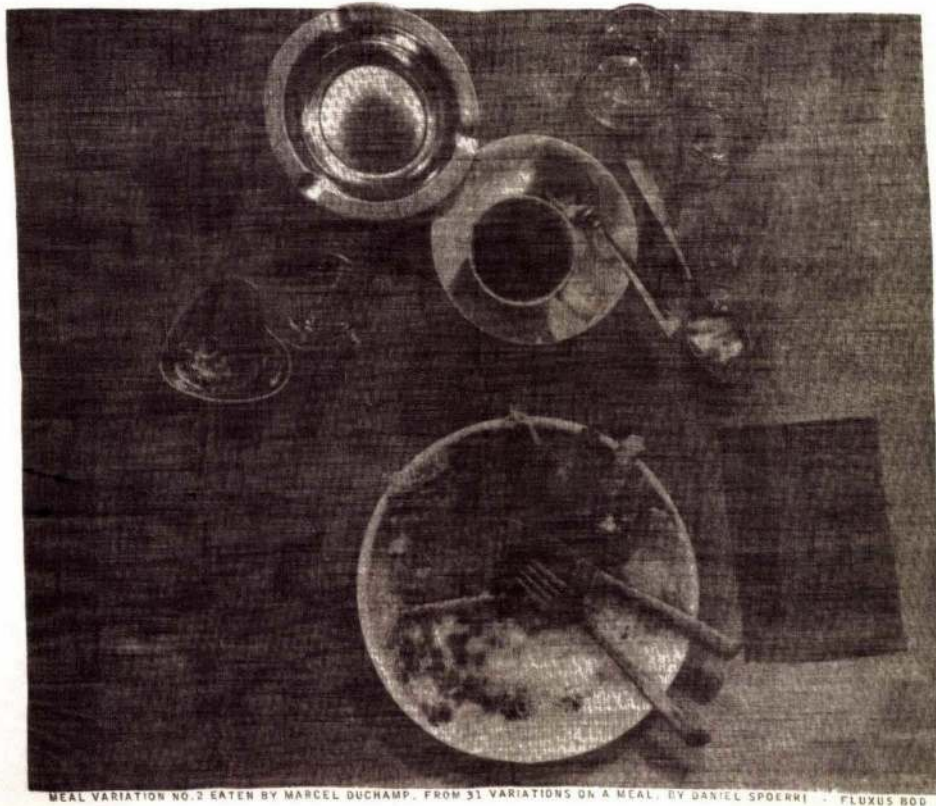
So George Maciunas instructed twenty-year-old Tomas Schmit, who somehow had gotten it into his head that he could be more useful to Fluxus by not working. "Usefull by doing what?" Maciunas asked, rhetorically. "What were you doing the past-week? Fluxus should become a way of life not a profession . . . I am very seriously suggesting that you complete your University studies. Study some totally non-art subject like science. OK?"<sup>68</sup> Fluxus had more than its share of non-professional artists: George Brecht was a chemist who worked as a consultant for companies including Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and Mobil Oil. Robert Filliou earned a master's degree in economics at UCLA and was sent to Korea as a United Nations advisor after the Korean War to help write the new constitution there. Maciunas himself earned his living as a graphic designer and eventually became a real estate developer.

Maciunas was nevertheless always on the alert for ways to make money while furthering the Fluxus cause. In 1967, he and Robert Watts created "Implosions, Inc.," which, according to the *Flux Newsletter* of March 8, 1967, was to be a "triple partnership" between Maciunas, Robert Watts, and businessman Herman Fine "to introduce into mass market some potentially money producing products (of practical nature) (mostly) . . . This business will be operated in commercial manner, with intent to make profits. Artists will be offered 5% royalty from total gross sales of products." Planned Implosions projects included disposable, stick-on jewelry; aprons to be offered to "various beer and food manufacturers as premiums etc."; sweatshirts printed front and back with statements like "front" and "back"; disposable paper tablecloths, napkins, towels, dishes, and cups; and playing cards and other games.<sup>69</sup> Remarkably, most of these ideas actually came to

fruition, and others besides. Their wit was a bit too wry and the distribution system too ad hoc to engender mass sales, but it is tempting to speculate what Maciunas might have accomplished had he had access to the Internet.

As Hannah Higgins discusses in her essay, food served as both frequent subject and medium for Fluxus artists, and meals were occasions for Fluxus performances, such as the New Year's Eve Flux-Feast on December 31, 1969:

Geoff Hendricks: clouds—mashed potatoes in 10 flavors (vanilla, almond, orange, mint etc.); Bici Hendricks: colored bread (purple etc.); Dick Higgins: gentle jello—tasteless jello (gelatin & water); Milan Knížák: sausage log cabin; Alison Knowles: shit [bean] porridge and Shit Manifesto; Elaine Allen: eel soup (with whole eel in fish bowl); George Maciunas (with Barbara Moore): eggs containing: vodka, fruit brandy, wine, noodles,



**Figure 5.33**  
Daniel Spoerri, *Meal Variation No. 2, Eaten by Marcel Duchamp*, from *31 Variations on a Meal*, about 1965, screenprint on fabric (64.6 x 80.5 cm). The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus

Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. © 2011 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York / ProLitteris, Zurich. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY (cat. 89).



cheese and coffee jello; . . . Joan Mathews: black foods; Hala & Veronica Pietkiewicz: shit cookies; Frank Rycyk, Jr.: unopenable nuts in openable paper enclosures; chocolate inside nut shells; Paul Sharits: jello in their own paper packs and wrappings; Yoshimasa Wada: vitamin platter and salad soup; Bob Watts: shooting with gun candies into guests' mouths.<sup>70</sup>

Clearly, one of the functions Fluxus served was as a means to defy mother's injunction not to play with your food. On the other hand, a kind of desperation regarding the experience of staying alive lay behind a significant number of Fluxus artists' food productions. Yoko Ono, for example, said her "instruction paintings" (cat. 18) were intended to be constructed in her viewers' heads: "This painting method derives from as far back as the time of the Second World War when we had no food to eat, and my brother and I exchanged menus in the air."<sup>71</sup> About his "snare pictures"—the remains of meals, etc., glued to or photographed on tabletops—Daniel Spoerri wrote:

I think that actually it's a question of territory. Because I had lost my territory since childhood, and even during childhood, I never had a territory . . . I was a Romanian Jew, evangelical in an orthodox country, whose father was dead, without being certain that he was really dead. I swear to you, the first things I glued down were all that, that feeling.<sup>72</sup>

One of the things Spoerri's snare pictures, like *Meal Variation No. 2, Eaten by Marcel Duchamp* from *31 Variations on a Meal* (figure 5.33; cat. 89), seem to have been about was nurturing his friends and memorializing the event, thus "snaring" that feeling—in this case, of being fatherless and homeless and without sustenance.

## Time?

"I must organize my time very efficiently—that's part of FLUXUS-way of life," George Maciunas wrote in 1963.<sup>73</sup> So much to do, so little time, seems to have been Maciunas's motto. Time was something of an obsession with him, as witnessed by his November 1975 proposal for a "Flux-New Year's Eve Event at Clock Tower (Leonard & Broadway)," suggesting that participants submit proposed objects and events to him by December 1:

### EVENTS:

1. alarm clocks and other noise makers descending by parachute from top of tower (Bob Watts) . . .
3. clock arms on 4 clock tower faces being turned manually; 1st very fast, 2nd backward, 3rd back and forward, 4th irregular.
4. monitoring time given by telephone for 2 hours (wrong time, from tape) . . .

### OBJECTS:

1. Various flux-clocks (time by degrees, compass directions, colors, decimal, etc.) . . .

### FOODS:

1. 1 minute egg, 2 min. e min, 4 min, 5 min. 6 min, 7 min, 8 min, 10 min. eggs, or potatoes,
2. food that continuously expands, or changes color, or shrinks, or melts . . .
4. food that takes very long time to chew . . .<sup>74</sup>

Opposite:

### Figure 5.34 a–d

Ben Vautier, *Time*, 1961, (a) cut-and-pasted printed paper, colored paper and ink on graph paper; (b) painted alarm clock; (c) gelatin silver print; (d) cut-and-pasted paper and typed carbon paper transfer on graph paper. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. © 2011 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY (cat. 97).

Le temps - (1961)



Figure 5.34 a



Figure 5.34 b



Figure 5.34 c

LE TEMPS ( 1961 )  
 ———  
 Du Juin 1961, consacré à un astronome d'occident, je conclus le beau et plastique et insubmersible du temps .  
 A) Soit à éternité. (1961)  
 Contient un temps immortel même après destruction du contenant.  
 B) Matras d'heure. (1961)  
 Je fixe le temps en œuvre d'art à la question "Quelle heure est l'it" par sa réponse écrite .  
 C) Certificats rouges. (1962)  
 Attestent de la réalité artistique d'un laps de temps précis contenu entre deux autres temps précis.

<p>PAR LA PRÉSENTE ATTESTATION          JE DÉCLARE PRENDRE CONSCIENCE ET CERTIFIER          RÉALITÉ ARTISTIQUE ET ŒUVRE D'ART :</p>			
<p>LE TEMPS ÉCOULÉ ENTRE :</p>			
DE L'ANNÉE GREENWICH	HEURES	DE L'ÈRE	MINUTES SECONDES A L'HEURE DE GREENWICH
<p>ET</p>			
DE L'ANNÉE GREENWICH.	HEURES	DE L'ÈRE	MINUTES SECONDES A L'HEURE DE GREENWICH.
<p>BEN LE _____</p>			
<p>BY THE PRESENT ATTESTATION          I BEN VAUTHER DECLARE ARTISTIC REALITY          AND MY PERSONAL WORK OF ART :</p>			
<p>THE LAPSE OF TIME BETWEEN          O'CLOCK</p>			
OF THE YEARS AND	OF THE CENTURY	MINUTES AND CENTURY	SECONDS BY GREENWICH TIME.
<p>AND</p>			
OF THE YEARS	O'CLOCK	OF THE CENTURY	MINUTES AND SECONDS BY GREENWICH TIME.
<p>BEN _____</p>			

Figure 5.34 d



Maciunas's examples emphasize both the effects of time and the arbitrariness of how we measure it—themes that were something of a Fluxus leit-motif, from Ben Vautier's "signing" time (figure 5.34; cat. 97) to the many Fluxus versions of altered clocks and watches (cats. 99, 103–5) to elaborate records of global events, such as the Fluxus edition of Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi's *Spatial Poem No. 3, a fluxcalendar*, 1968 (figure 5.35; cat. 106). One of nine separately scored "global events" instigated by Shiomi between 1965 and 1975, *fluxcalendar's* forty-three leaves were designed by Maciunas to be bolted to a strip of cowhide so that the sheets could "fall," like leaves from a tree. Instructions sent to participants framed time not as linear but as movement toward a center, as though events in time are simple responses to gravity: "The phenomenon of a fall is actually a segment of a movement towards the center of the earth. This very moment countless objects are falling. Let's take part in this centripetal event."

Robert Filliou contributed his version of the so-called "fall" of man: "My effort about this event consisted in trying to grasp what FALL means in relation to human beings. My Proposition: *When man first stood up, he fell.*" To illustrate Filliou's "proposition," Maciunas selected a diagram of the musculature of a standing and lying baby. Filliou's wife Marianne's contribution reads: "My most intentional effort to make something fall occurred between 7 and 10 AM, Jan. 14, 1961. What finally fell was my daughter Marcelle Filliou." To illustrate her statement, Maciunas chose an Indian sculpture of a standing woman giving birth. The emerging child has its hands clasped over its head, as though diving into what we humans experience as the stream of time.

Shiomi had been introduced to Maciunas by Nam June Paik, who proposed his own ideas about how to escape time in his "Afterlude to the Exposition of Experimental Television." "Many mystics are interested to spring out from ONE-R-O-W-T-I-M-E, ONE-WAY TIME, in order to GRASP the Eternity," Paik wrote.



**Figure 5.35**

Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi, *Spatial Poem No. 3, a fluxcalendar* (falling events, loose leaf calendar), 1968, page by Marianne Filliou, image selected by George Maciunas. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection; Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.191 (cat. 106).

To stop at the consummated or sterile [*sic*] Zero-point is a classical method to grasp the eternity. To perceive SIMULTANEOUSLY the parallel flows of many independent movements is another classical way for it . . . The simultaneous perception of the parallel flows of the 13 independent TV movements can perhaps realize this old dream of mystics, although the problem is left unresolved, whether this is possible with our normal physiognomy . . . without some mystical training. And IF WELL TRAINED, , , , , he need neither 13 TVs, nor TV, nor electronics, nor music, nor art, . . . . the happiest suicide of art . . . The most difficult anti-art, that ever existed.<sup>75</sup>

Time, Paik implies, is a function of the mind; conventional linear time does not exist apart from it. A mind trained to perceive this fact does not need the help of art.

### What Am I?

The study of this question—about the nature of being—is called “ontology.” How we fit into the universe may be the biggest question of all, and it turns out that Fluxus has quite a lot to say about it. Popular wisdom has it that we are defined by what we do; this is held to be especially true of artists. George Maciunas, on the other hand, was a firm believer in the uselessness—indeed, the harmfulness—of a strong sense of identity, in terms of one’s role in the world. About his planned Fluxus editions, he wrote:

Eventually we would destroy the authorship of pieces & make them totally anonymous—thus eliminating artists “ego”—Author would be “FLUXUS.” We can’t depend on each “artist” to destroy his ego. The copyright arrangement will eventually force him to it if he is reluctant.<sup>76</sup>

Maciunas’s attempts to repress artists’ egos were only moderately effective; nevertheless, it can be

difficult to pin down precise authorship for a fair number of Fluxus works. An example is Robert Watts’s Fluxfilm *Trace No. 22* (cat. 108)—X-ray footage of someone eating and speaking that was supposedly fished from Watts’s dentist’s garbage.<sup>77</sup> So is Watts the artist? His dentist? Or maybe Maciunas, who incorporated the rescued snippet into his Fluxfilms?

In general, Maciunas’s packaging and design provided a distinctive (to say the least) identity for Fluxus editions like Watts’s *Fingerprint* (figure 5.36; cat. 114), a white plastic box containing white plaster of Paris imprinted with somebody’s (whose?) black fingerprint; or Ben Vautier’s *Living Fluxusculpture*—the one with the mirror (figure 5.37; cat. 109), which can be edifyingly compared to the one with the dead fly (cat. 37); or the version of George Brecht’s *Games and Puzzles* entitled *Name Kit* (figure 5.38; cat. 112), which



**Figure 5.36**  
Robert Watts, *Fingerprint*, 1965/1969, plastic, paper, plaster with fingerprint. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Walker Special Purchase Fund, 1989; 1989.483 (cat. 114).





**Figure 5.37**  
Ben Vautier, *Living Fluxsulpture*, 1966/1969, plastic, mirror, paper. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Walker Special Purchase Fund, 1989; 1989.405.1-2 (cat. 109). © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

contains an assortment of small objects along with the injunction to “spell your name.”

Maciunas blithely adapted Brecht’s concept for his own name-kit boxes—for example, *Gift Box for John Cage: Spell Your Name with These Objects* (figure 5.39; cat. 113). John Cage could, in fact, have spelled his name with the first letters of the things in Maciunas’s box, which contains items such as a (pine) cone, acorn, glass (bottle stopper), and egg. Brecht was less literal minded, or perhaps more evolved: he left open the answer to the question of the relationship between your name (and by implication you) and the things in the box—an approach that opens up the whole question of naming and categorization.

Maciunas, in contrast, was a maniacal namer and categorizer, as exemplified by his *Excreta Fluxorum* (cats. 110–111; see page 130)—carefully organized and labeled boxes of animal excrement ranging from caterpillar and grasshopper to turtle and iguana to lion and buffalo. These sample turds certainly look authentic, and one pictures Maciunas scavenging manure at the Central Park Zoo, much as Watts scavenged trash

at his dentist’s office. *Excreta Fluxorum* is more interesting than one might expect. If we are what we eat, are we also what we excrete? And, as always with Maciunas, there is a zinger: if you go



**Figure 5.38**  
George Brecht, *Games and Puzzles*, Fluxus CL (Name Kit), 1965, plastic box containing objects and paper printed: “NAME KIT / Spell your name.” Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.24 (cat. 112). © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Opposite:

**Figure 5.39**  
George Maciunas, *Gift Box for John Cage: Spell Your Name with These Objects*, about 1972, leather-covered, red velvet-lined box containing 15 objects (acorn, egg, glass stopper, plastic boxes of seeds, etc.). Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of John Cage; GM.978.204.2 (cat. 113). © Courtesy of Billie Maciunas.





through every category, you'll eventually come upon a white marble labeled "unicorn (unicornis fantasticus)." Is this just one of Maciunas's jokes, or is there some message here?

It can be an ongoing struggle, this question of what we are. Yoko Ono's thoughts on the matter addressed the "answer" provided by Asian philosophy:

Failing in the attempt of making the fabricated order appear equally real as nature, the contemporary man has now gone into a totally opposite direction of placing men in equal position to objects and plants . . . It is the state of mind of wanting to become a weed and join the heartbeat of the universe by entering a state of innocence/nothingness and blowing in a gentle wind . . . I am still groping in the world of stickiness.<sup>78</sup>

The world of stickiness is the world of bodily existence, of questions without simple answers. This seems as well to be the message of Maciunas's *Multifaceted Mirror* (see figure 1.4; cat. 115), a wooden box containing a concave plate set with forty-nine mirrors. The answer to the question of how you fit into the universe, according to Maciunas, may be another question: which universe?

"Because," said Filliou, "whenever I ask questions—no matter how serious—I usually get stupid answers."<sup>79</sup>

All questions are fundamentally serious; most answers, stupid. Maybe the thing to do is to stick with questions. One thing Fluxus teaches for sure: a sense of humor helps.

## Notes

- 1 Ms. in the George Maciunas Memorial Collection, Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College (cat. 1).
- 2 From the unpublished manuscript *George Brecht Notebook VII*, March–June 1961, The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Museum of Modern Art, New York; quoted in Julia Robinson, "In the Event of George Brecht," in *George Brecht Events: A Heterospective*, ed. Alfred M. Fischer (Cologne: Museum Ludwig, 2005), 16.
- 3 George Maciunas, "Fluxus Manifesto," 1963, in *What's Fluxus? What's Not! Why.*, ed. Jon Hendricks (Rio de Janeiro and Detroit: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil and Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Foundation, 2002), 95. Reproduced on page 22.
- 4 George Brecht, "Events. (assembled notes.), 1961," in Hendricks, ed., *What's Fluxus?*, 85.
- 5 Yoko Ono, "To the Wesleyan People (who attended the meeting.)—a footnote to my lecture of January 13th, 1966," reproduced in Jon Hendricks, "Anthology: Writings by Yoko Ono," in *Yes Yoko Ono*, ed. Alexandra Munroe (New York: Japan Society and Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 291.
- 6 Gerhard Neumann, "'Les enfants adorent les nouilles bleues,' Daniel Spoerri ethnologue de la culture culinaire," in *Restaurant Spoerri* (Paris: Jeu de Paume, 2002), 24 (Neumann cites *Schweitzer Monatshefte*, 81st année, cahier 5 [May 2001], 34b).
- 7 Daniel Spoerri, *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance (Re-Anecdoted Version)*, with the help of Robert Filliou and translated and further anecdoted by Emmett Williams (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), 16.

- 8 Spoerri's translator-friend Emmett Williams insisted, "Indeed, he is a first-class cook" (ibid.).
- 9 *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), 32.
- 10 Daniel Spoerri, "Petit discours à l'occasion du Banquet Henkel, 29 octobre 1970," in *Restaurant Spoerri*, 88. The entire quote is even better: "Our two most important impulses are survival and reproduction or, put plainly, eating and fucking. I leave to others the sex question, which has been extensively treated. The problem of survival, therefore—its necessity and various aspects—became for me the object of long and deep cogitation."
- 11 Robinson, *George Brecht Events*, 68.
- 12 Ibid., 70.
- 13 Ibid., 275.
- 14 From the introduction to "Daniel Spoerri's Room No. 631 at the Chelsea Hotel," sponsored by the Green Gallery, March 1965; published in Spoerri, *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, 76.
- 15 From *Teaching and Learning as Performance Arts* (Cologne: Kasper König, 1970), 191.
- 16 Edmund Carpenter, Christopher Cornford, Sidney Simon, Robert Watts, with graphics by George Maciunas, *Proposals for Art Education, from a year long study supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1968–1969* (Santa Cruz: University of California, Santa Cruz, probably 1970). Maciunas's *Literate Man vs. Post-Literate Man*, and its mate, *Contemporary Man*, serve as illustrations for Carpenter's very interesting essay
- "Art and Declassification and Reclassification of Knowledge," 27–48 (Maciunas's graphics are folded double and inserted between pages 42 and 43).
- 17 Thanks to Ken Friedman, who suggested to me that this was how Maciunas conceived of his "Learning Machines."
- 18 From *Flux Newsletter*, May 3, 1975, in *FLUXUS etc. / Addenda I: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection*, ed. Jon Hendricks (New York: Ink &, 1983), 244.
- 19 Alfred Salmony, "Die Neue Galerie des 17. bis 20. Jahrhunderts im Museum Wallraf-Richartz in Köln," *Der Cicerone* 16 (Jan. 1924): 8 (from Paul Fox, "Confronting Postwar Shame in Weimar Germany: Trauma, Heroism and the War Art of Otto Dix," *Oxford Art Journal* 29, no. 2 [2006]: note 46.)
- 20 "Ben Vautier to Fluxus, 1966," in *What's Fluxus?*, 185.
- 21 George Maciunas, letter to Robert Watts from March 1963, in *What's Fluxus?*, 139.
- 22 Thanks to Marcia Reed of the Getty Research Institute for reminding me of this context for *Fluxmouse*.
- 23 *Addenda I*, 163.
- 24 Recounted by Emmett Williams in 1993 ms., published in *Mr. Fluxus: A Collective Portrait of George Maciunas, 1931–1978*, ed. Emmett Williams and Ann Noël (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 302.
- 25 Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex* (New York: Abrams, 1988), 225.
- 26 *The Way of Zen* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 66.
- 27 Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters*, transl. with commentary by Peter Read (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1913] 2004), 75.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 The announcement is reproduced in *Yes Yoko Ono*, 310.
- 30 Yoko Ono, "To the Wesleyan People," *Yes Yoko Ono*, 291.
- 31 Final lines of "Robert Filliou's Whispered Art History," in *Teaching and Learning as Performance Arts*, ed. Robert Filliou (Cologne: König, 1970), 64.
- 32 Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, transl. Rod Padgett ([London: Thames and Hudson, 1971] New York: Da Capo Press, 1987), 89.
- 33 Dick Higgins, letter to Jeff Berner, August 22, 1966, in *What's Fluxus?*, 179.
- 34 See Maciunas's "Scenario of Flux-Mass" and "Outline of Flux-Mass," reproduced in *Critical Mass: Happenings, Fluxus, Performance, Intermedia and Rutgers University, 1958–1972*, ed. Geoffrey Hendricks (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 132–33.
- 35 *Addenda I*, 162.
- 36 The source for this alarming image is the publication *Dentistry of Nutritional Deformities and Physical Degeneration*, according to Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, 355.
- 37 Yoko Ono, "To the Wesleyan People," in *Yes Yoko Ono*, 289.
- 38 Robert Watts, in *Mr. Fluxus*, ed. Emmett Williams and Ann Noël (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 62.
- 39 George Maciunas, letter to Robert Watts, March 1963, in *What's Fluxus?*, 139–141.
- 40 See Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, 551.
- 41 Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, 349.
- 42 Ibid., 358.
- 43 Ibid., 359.
- 44 George Maciunas, letter to Ben Vautier, ca. summer 1966, in *What's Fluxus?*, 169.
- 45 *Fluxus Codex*, 268.



- 46 “Ben Vautier to Fluxus, 1966,” in *What’s Fluxus?*, 185.
- 47 Both reprinted in *What’s Fluxus?*, 143–49 (this quote from 147).
- 48 George Brecht, letter of January 14, 1976, in *Addenda I*, 286.
- 49 From Duchamp’s notes for his slide lecture “Apropos of Myself,” in *Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Anne d’Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 280.
- 50 La Monte Young, “Lecture, Summer–Fall, 1960,” in *What’s Fluxus?*, 82.
- 51 Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing: “Making This Life Significant,” A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine, 2003), 91.
- 52 Toni Stooss and Thomas Kellien, eds., *Nam June Paik: Video Time—Video Space* (New York: Abrams, 1993), 22.
- 53 Yoko Ono used this famous contest to conclude her 1966 lecture/manifesto “To the Wesleyan People”:
- The body is the Bodhi Tree  
The mind like a bright mirror  
standing  
Take care to wipe it all the time  
And allow no dust to cling.  
—Shen-hsiu
- There never was a Bodhi Tree  
Nor bright mirror standing  
Fundamentally, not one thing  
exists  
So where is the dust to cling?  
—Hui-neng
- 54 Constance Lewallen, “Cage and the Structure of Chance,” in *Writings through John Cage’s Music, Poetry, and Art*, ed. David W. Bernstein and Christopher Hatch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 234. John Cage’s “Experimental Composition” classes at the New School for Social Research in the late 1950s were formative for future Fluxus artists George Brecht, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, and Jackson Mac Low.
- 55 Nam June Paik, “Afterlude to the Exposition of Experimental Television, 1963 March, Galerie Parnass,” in *What’s Fluxus?*, 98 (orig. publ. *V TREE 4* [June 1964]: 1).
- 56 Edith Decker-Phillips, *Paik Video* (Barrytown: Barrytown Ltd., 1998), 36.
- 57 Dick Higgins, *Foew&ombwlmw; a grammar of the mind and a phenomenology of love and a science of the arts as seen by a stalker of the wild mushroom* (New York: Something Else Press, 1969), 31, 33.
- 58 See my essay “Before Zen: The Nothing of American Dada,” in *East-West Interchanges in American Art: “A Long and Tumultuous Relationship,”* forthcoming from Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press (Spring 2011).
- 59 Stanislas Julien, *Le Livre de la voie et de la vertu par le philosophie Lao-Tseu* (Paris: L’Imprimerie Royale, 1842), 21 (my translation).
- 60 Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 86.
- 61 Reproduced in *Addenda I*, 156.
- 62 Paik, “Afterlude,” in *What’s Fluxus?*, 98.
- 63 George Maciunas, letter to Ben Vautier, August 7, 1966, in *What’s Fluxus?*, 171.
- 64 Robert Watts, “In the Event, 1964,” in *What’s Fluxus?*, 113 (orig. publ. in *The Times Literary Supplement*, August 8, 1964).
- 65 Although the FDA approved the first oral contraceptive in 1960, contraceptives were not available to married women in all states until *Griswold v. Connecticut* in 1965 and were not available to unmarried women in all states until *Eisenstadt v. Baird* in 1972 (Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Combined\\_oral\\_contraceptive\\_pill#cite\\_note-marks-16](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Combined_oral_contraceptive_pill#cite_note-contraceptive_pill#cite_note-marks-16); accessed August 15, 2010).
- 66 “Record of 13 Concert Piece Performances,” piece 3, from Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings by Yoko Ono*, intro. John Lennon (New York: Simon & Schuster [1964, 1970] 2000), unpaginated.
- 67 George Maciunas, letter to Tomas Schmit, January 1964, reprinted in *What’s Fluxus?*, 164.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 160.
- 69 *Addenda I*, 174.
- 70 From *Flux Newsletter*, January 8, 1970, reproduced in *Addenda I*, 229. This event took place at Filmmakers’ Cinémathèque, 80 Wooster Street, Soho.
- 71 Yoko Ono, “To the Wesleyan People,” in *Yes Yoko Ono*, 288.
- 72 Giancarlo Politi, “Daniel Spoerri,” *Flash Art* 154 (Oct. 1990): 119.
- 73 George Maciunas, letter to Tomas Schmit, January 1964, reprinted in *What’s Fluxus?*, 165.
- 74 November 1975, reproduced in *Addenda I*, 283.
- 75 Nam June Paik, “Afterlude to the Exposition of Experimental Television,” in *What’s Fluxus?*, 100.
- 76 George Maciunas, letter to Tomas Schmit, January 1964, reprinted in *What’s Fluxus?*, 164.
- 77 According to Jon Hendricks in *Fluxus Codex*, 576.
- 78 Yoko Ono, “A Word of a Fabricator, 1962” in *What’s Fluxus?*, 82.
- 79 Robert Filliou, *Ample Food for Stupid Thought* (New York: Something Else Press, 1965), unpaginated.

# Illustrated List of Works

Unless otherwise noted, editions are Fluxus publications.



## I ART (WHAT'S IT GOOD FOR)?

### EVENT 1

La Monte Young, 1960

*Composition 1960 #10*

Draw a straight line and follow it.

1

"M. K." [Milan Knížák], Czech,  
born 1940

Manuscript statement

About 1972

Ink on paper

33 x 22.3 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection; Gift of Dr. Abraham M.  
Friedman; GM.986.80.150

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New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

I don't mind ~~to~~ to be "an  
artist" or "a composer"  
I mind to be my business.  
and all I do is just  
simple (and complicated)  
practicing of life.  
Teaching myself and others  
how to live. To live  
otherwise. To live better.

mk  
(Dedicated)

2

Various artists

*An Anthology*

1963

Paperbound book

19.84 x 22.70 x .95 cm

Collection Walker Art Center,  
Minneapolis, Walker Special  
Purchase Fund, 1989; 1989.120.1-4

Full Title: *An Anthology of chance  
operations concept art anti-art  
indeterminacy improvisation meaningless  
work natural disasters plans of action  
stories diagrams Music poetry essays dance  
constructions mathematics compositions*

by George Brecht, Claus Bremer,  
Earle Brown, Joseph Byrd, John  
Cage, David Degener, Walter De  
Maria, Henry Flynt, Yoko Ono, Dick  
Higgins, Toshi Ichiyonagi, Terry  
Jennings, Dennis, Ding Dong, Ray  
Johnson, Jackson Mac Low, Richard  
Maxfield, Robert Morris, Simone  
Morris, Nam June Paik, Terry Riley,  
Diter Rot, James Waring, Emmett  
Williams, Christian Wolff, La Monte  
Young. La Monte Young and Jackson  
Mac Low, Editors; George Maciunas,  
Designer (New York: La Monte  
Young and Jackson Mac Low, 1963).  
Download available: [http://www.  
ubu.com/historical/young/index.  
html](http://www.ubu.com/historical/young/index.html)



3

George Brecht, American,  
1926–2008  
*Water Yam*  
1963

Wooden box containing paper cards  
printed with event scores  
4.5 x 24.3 x 22.5 cm  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of the Friedman  
Family; GM.986.80.21  
© 2011 Artist Rights Society (ARS),  
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4

Various artists  
*Fluxus I*  
About 1964, later assembling by  
Jean Brown  
Wooden box containing paperbound  
book of interleaved pages and inserts  
with works by various artists fastened  
with three metal nuts-and-bolts  
22 x 24 x 6 cm  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Purchased through  
the William S. Rubin Fund;  
GM.987.44.1  
Contains works by Ay-O, George  
Brecht, Stanley Brouwn, Robert  
Filliou, Brion Gysin, Sohei  
Hashimoto, Dick Higgins, Joseph  
John Jones, Alison Knowles, Takehisa  
Kosugi, Shigeo Kubota, Gyorgy  
Ligeti, Jackson Mac Low, Nam  
June Paik, Benjamin Patterson,  
Takako Saito, Tomas Schmit, Mieko  
(Chieko) Shiomi, Ben Vautier,  
Robert Watts, Emmett Williams,  
LaMonte Young



5

Various artists  
*Flux-Kit*, "B" copy  
1965  
Black vinyl attaché case containing  
works by various artists; "FLUX-  
KIT" screenprinted in white on lid  
12.5 x 44.4 x 30.3 cm  
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A. Contains: George Brecht,  
*Water Yam*, Robert Watts, *Events*,  
Mieko Shiomi, *Events*, Ben Patterson,  
*Instruction No. 2*, Robert Watts, *Rocks*,  
*Marked by Wgr.*, George Maciunas,  
*Fresh Goods from the East*, Nam June  
Paik, *Zen for Film*, George Brecht,  
*Games & Puzzles / Bread Puzzle*,  
Brecht, *Games & Puzzles / Inclined  
Plane Puzzle / Ball Puzzle / Swim  
Puzzle*, Dick Higgins, *Invocations of  
Canyons and Boulders for Stan Brackage*,  
Ben Vautier, *Fluxholes*, Joe Jones,  
*A Favorite Song*, Ay-O, *Finger Box*,  
Giuseppe Chiari, *La Strada*, Mieko  
Shiomi, *Endless Box*, Alison Knowles,  
*Bean Rolls*, Ben Vautier, *Dirty Water*,  
Mieko Shiomi, *Water Music*, Emmett  
Williams, *Alphabet Poem*, Fluxus  
Newspaper #3, March 1964, *cc Valise  
e TRangle*



## I ART (WHAT'S IT GOOD FOR)? (continued)

6

Various artists

*Flux Year Box 2*

1966

Five-compartment wooden box containing works by various artists; "FLUX YEAR BOX 2" screen-printed in black on lid

8.57 x 20.32 x 20.32 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection; Purchased through the William S. Rubin Fund;

GM.987.44.2

Contains works by Eric Andersen, George Brecht, John Cavanaugh, Willem de Ridder, Robert Filliou, Albert M. Fine, Ken Friedman, Hi Red Center, John Lennon, Frederic Lieberman, Claes Thure Oldenburg, Yoko Ono, James Riddle, Paul Jeffrey Sharits, Bob Sheff, Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi, Vera Spoorri, Roland Topor, Stanley Vanderbeek, Ben Vautier, Wolf Vostell, Yoshimasa Wada, Robert Watts

See also cover and back cover



7

Robert Filliou, French, 1926–1987

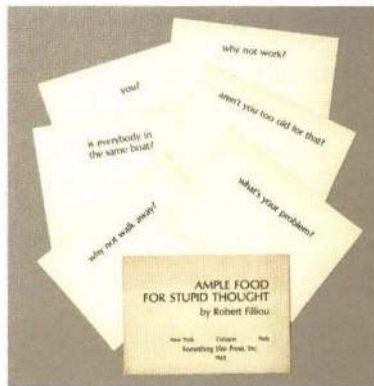
*Ample Food for Stupid Thought* (New York: Something Else Press)

1965

Ninety-three postcards (including title card) with questions printed on them, such as, "Why did you do that?" "Was it a dream you had, or a vision?" "What do you laugh at?"

Each card 12.6 x 17.7 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection; Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.31



8

Ben Vautier, French, born 1935

*Theater of Total Art (Theatre d'Art Total)*

1967/1969

White plastic box with printed label containing thirty-one cards with comments on art in French and (mostly) English

1.4 x 12.7 x 10.16 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection; Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.407

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9

Takehisa Kosugi, Japanese, born 1938  
*Events*  
 1964/1987 Reflux Edition  
 Black plastic box with clear lid and paper label containing event scores 1.3 x 9.6 x 12 cm  
 Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Purchased through the Hood Museum of Art Acquisitions Fund; GM.989.12.2



10

Ben Vautier, French, born 1935  
*Propositions for Art (Propositions Pour l'Art)*  
 1966, modified 1970  
 Metal desk painted black with white enamel lettering and dictionary: *Larousse Elementaire* (1955)  
 147.3 x 90.3 x 57.1 cm  
 Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of Jan and Ingeborg van der Marck; GM.980.290  
 © 2011 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris



11

George Maciunas, American, 1931–1978  
*Encyclopedia of World Art*  
 1964  
 Black-bound telephone book stamped "Encyclopedia of World Art"  
 28.7 x 24 x 10 cm  
 The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.  
 © Courtesy of Billie Maciunas  
 Note: This is a unique piece given by Maciunas in 1964 to Ben Vautier, who entitled it *Telephone Book*.





14

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978

*Literate Man vs. Post-Literate Man with  
Contemporary Man*

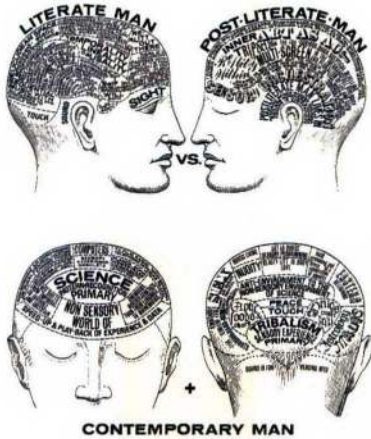
About 1969

Mechanical for Robert Watts, George  
Maciunas, et al., *Proposals for Art  
Education* (University of California,  
Santa Cruz, 1970)

53.7 x 44.3 cm

University of California Santa Cruz  
Library Special Collections; NX280.  
M63 1970

© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas



15

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978

*Ageing Men Fluxpost*

n.d.

28 x 21.7 cm

Sheets of black-and-white headshots  
numbered 1–42 on gummed,  
perforated paper

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection; Gift of the Friedman  
Family; GM.986.80.162

© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas



16

Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi, Japanese,  
born 1938

*Water Music*

1964

Glass, plastic, rubber, paper  
8.5 x 3.6 x 2.5 cm

Harvard Art Museum, Fogg Art  
Museum, Barbara and Peter Moore  
Fluxus Collection; Margaret Fisher  
Fund and gift of Barbara Moore/  
Bound & Unbound; M26446.24  
Photo by Imaging Department ©  
President and Fellows of Harvard  
College

Note: Label text reads, “Water Music  
by Chieko Shiomi 1. Give the water  
still form 2. Let the water lose its still  
form. Fluxwater.”

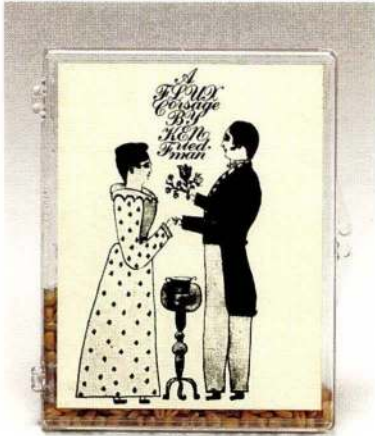




## II CHANGE? (continued)

17

Ken Friedman, American, born 1949  
*A Flux Corsage*  
1966–76  
Clear plastic box with paper label on lid containing seeds  
1 x 9.2 x 12.1 cm  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.40

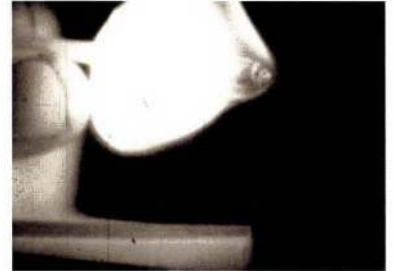


18

Yoko Ono, American, born 1933  
*Painting to be Stepped On*  
Winter 1960, displayed 2011 by permission of the artist  
“Leave a piece of canvas or finished painting on the floor or in the street.”

19

Yoko Ono, American, born 1933  
*Fluxfilm No. 14, One [Match]*  
1966  
Silent black-and-white film (camera: Peter Moore)  
Slow-motion striking and burning of a match



### III DANGER?

#### EVENT 4

Dick Higgins, 1962

*Danger Music Number Seventeen*

Scream!! Scream!! Scream!!  
Scream!! Scream!! Scream!!

#### 20

Robert Filliou, French, 1926–1987

*Optimistic Box No. 1*

1968 (published Remscheid,

Germany: VICE-Versand)

11.75 x 11.11 x 10.80 cm

Wood box with brass hinges and clasps, stone, offset lithography on paper labels

Collection Walker Art Center,

Minneapolis: T. B. Walker

Acquisition Fund, 1992; 1992.134

Exterior label text: "OPTIMISTIC BOX no. 1 / thank god for modern weapons"

Interior label text: "we don't throw weapons at each other any more / Robert Filliou"



#### 21

Jock Reynolds, American, born 1947

Prototype for *Potentially Dangerous*

*Electrical Household Appliance*

1969

Hinged clear plastic box with label containing two-headed plug, plastic sheet

1.59 x 12.07 x 10.16 cm

Collection Walker Art Center,

Minneapolis: Gift of Jock Reynolds

in memory of Beatrice B. Reynolds, 1993; 1993.16.1–2





## II DANGER? (continued)

22

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978

*Burglary Fluxkit*

1971

Seven-compartment clear plastic box with black and white printed label featuring a drawing of several hardware tools and the words: "BURGLARY FLUXKIT BY GEORGE MACIUNAS"; contains seven keys, including a roller-skate key

2.5 x 12.1 x 9.2 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.164

© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas



23

George Brecht, American,  
1926–2008

*Barrel Bolt*

About 1962–63

Two blocks of wood painted white, attached to each other on the back with metal braces; on the front, a silver-colored metal barrel bolt "locking" the two pieces together

14.1 x 23.2 x 3.8 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

24

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978

*Safe Door from Flux Combat with New York State Attorney (and Police)*

About 1970–75

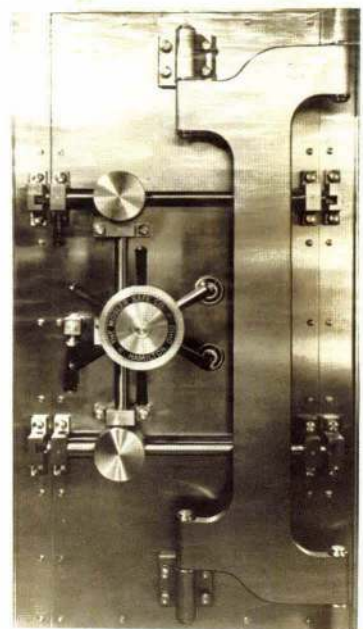
Gelatin silver print

160.5 x 98 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas



25

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978

*Giant Cutting Blades Door from Flux  
Combat with New York State Attorney  
(and Police)*

About 1970–75

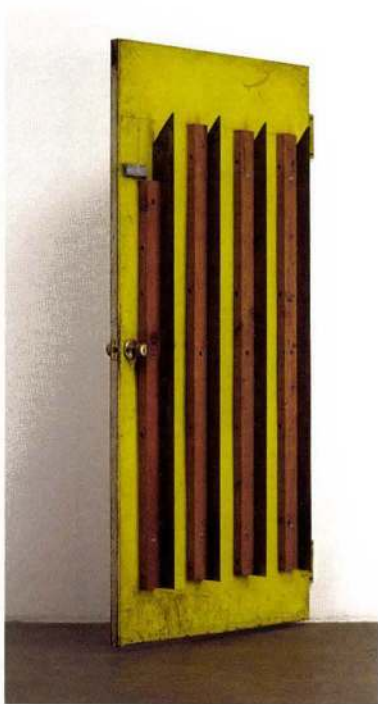
Door with metal blades

197.5 x 94 x 21.6 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.

Digital Image © The Museum of  
Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA /  
Art Resource, NY

© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas



26

Peter Moore, American, 1932–1993

Untitled (George Maciunas behind  
door, face hidden by mask)

1975

Photograph mounted on board

49.5 x 75.5 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial

Collection: Gift of the artist;

GM.978.209

Photo by Peter Moore © Estate of  
Peter Moore/VAGA, NYC



27

John Cale, Welsh, born 1942

*Fluxfilm, No. 31, Police Car*

1966

Silent color film

Nighttime scene of blinking light on  
a police car



## IV DEATH?

### EVENT 5

George Brecht, 1961  
*Word Event*

- EXIT

### 28

George Brecht, American,  
1926–2008

*Exit*

1961, realized as sign about 1962–63  
Metal sign mounted on painted wood  
with metal screws  
9 x 28.2 x 2.2 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.

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Digital Image © The Museum of  
Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA /  
Art Resource, NY



### 29

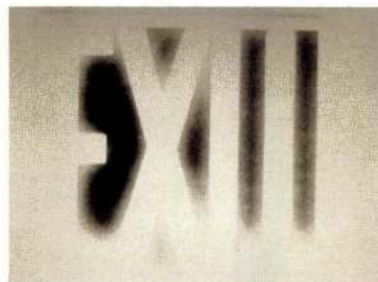
George Brecht, American,  
1926–2008

*Fluxfilm No. 10, Entrance—Exit*  
1966

Silent black-and-white film

An "ENTRANCE" sign, white  
letters on black background, fades  
in, then slowly transitions to white;  
fade into black, then "EXIT," which  
transitions to white

© 2011 Artist Rights Society (ARS),  
New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



30

Ben Vautier, French, born 1935

*A Flux Suicide Kit*

1963

Clear plastic seven-compartment box with label containing matches, razor, fishhook, rope, electrical plug, shard of broken glass, straight pin, small metal ball

2.5 x 12.1 x 9.2 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.235

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31

Milan Knížák, Czech, born 1940

*Killed Book*

1972

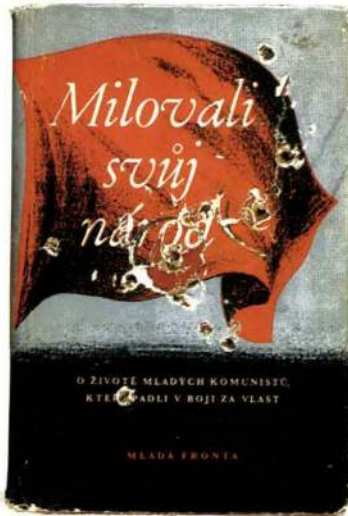
Paperback book pierced with what look like bullet holes

20.3 x 14 x 2 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.149

Note: Book published in Prague by Mlada Fronta in 1954; title translates as "They loved their nation," subtitled, "Of the lives of young communists who fell in battle for homeland."

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32

Jiří Valoch, Czech, born 1946

*Little Red Book*

n.d.

Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book* bound in red plastic with hole drilled through it

9.5 x 6.7 x 1.3 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College: Gift of the Friedman Family; KF.986.80.399





## IV DEATH? (continued)

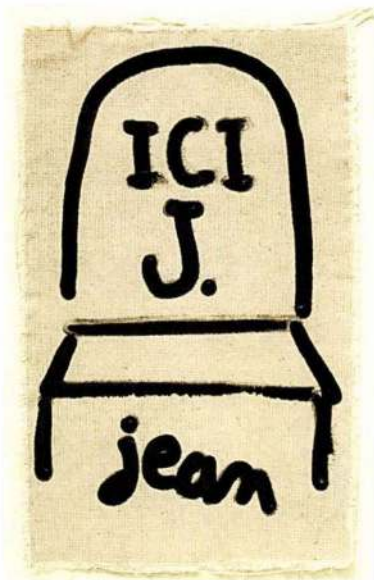
33

Robert Filliou, French, 1926–1987  
*Optimistic Box No. 4 and 5*  
1968 (published Remscheid,  
Germany: VICE-Versand)  
Ceramic piggy bank, paper labels,  
offset lithograph  
11.11 x 15.56 x 9.53 cm  
Collection Walker Art Center,  
Minneapolis; T. B. Walker  
Acquisition Fund, 1992; 1992.137  
Text, right side: "OPTIMISTIC  
BOX No. 4 and 5 / one thing I  
learned / since I was born"  
Text, left side: "that I must die / since  
I was born / Robert Filliou"



34

Jean Dupuy, French, born 1925  
*ICI J. / JEAN*  
About 1988  
Stamped and inscribed on verso:  
YPUDU 88.  
Acrylic on canvas  
33.02 x 20.32 cm  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of Emily Harvey;  
GM.988.31.6  
© 2011 Artist Rights Society (ARS),  
New York / ADAGP, Paris



35

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978  
*U.S.A. Surpasses All Genocide Records*  
About 1966  
Offset lithograph  
54.20 x 87.80 cm  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of the Friedman  
Family; GM.986.80.167  
© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas



**U.S.A. SURPASSES ALL THE GENOCIDE RECORDS!**  
**KUBLAI KHAN MASSACRES 10% IN NEAR EAST**  
**SPAIN MASSACRES 10% OF AMERICAN INDIANS**  
**JOSEPH STALIN MASSACRES 5% OF RUSSIANS**  
**NAZIS MASSACRE 5% OF OCCUPIED EUROPEANS AND 75% OF EUROPEAN JEWS**  
**U.S.A. MASSACRES 8.5% OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE & 75% OF AMERICAN INDIANS**  
**FOR CALCULATIONS & REFERENCES WRITE TO: P.O. BOX 180, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10013**

## V FREEDOM?

36

Fluxus Editorial Council [Geoffrey Hendricks]

*V TRE Extra*, "Maciunas Dies" issue  
1979

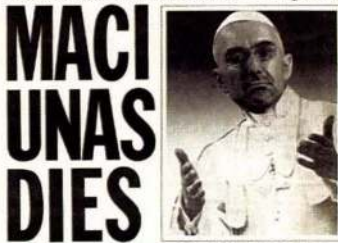
Offset lithographs, four double-sided  
pages

38.1 x 29.2 cm (each sheet)

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of the Friedman  
Family; GM.986.80.34A-D

### a V TRE EXTRA

Hart attack kills him at summer palace



#### EVENT 6

Yoko Ono, 1964

*Breath Piece*

Breathe.

#### EVENT 7

Yoko Ono, 1963

*Fly Piece*

Fly.

37

Ben Vautier, French, born 1935

*Living Flux Sculpture*

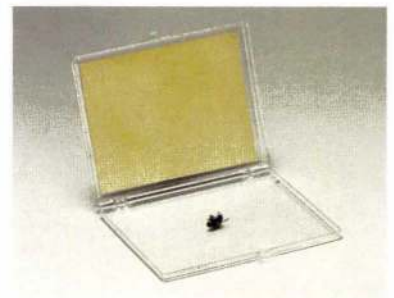
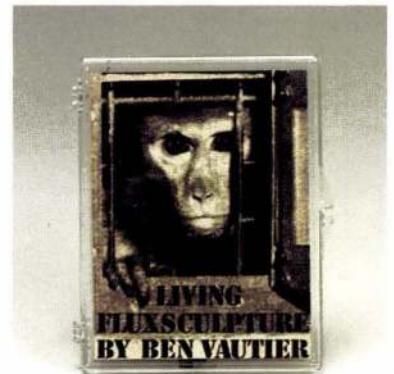
1966

Clear plastic box with label on lid  
containing a dead fly

1.0 x 9.2 x 12.1 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of the Friedman  
Family; GM.986.80.234

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38

Ken Friedman, American, born 1949  
*Mandatory Happening*  
1972

Black plastic box with label on lid containing a slip of paper that reads, "Mandatory Happening / You will, having looked at this page, / either decide to read it or you will not.

/ Having made your decision, the happening is now over. / KF 1966"

1.5 x 10 x 12 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

39

Jack Coke's Farmer's Co-op  
*Human Flux Trap*  
1969

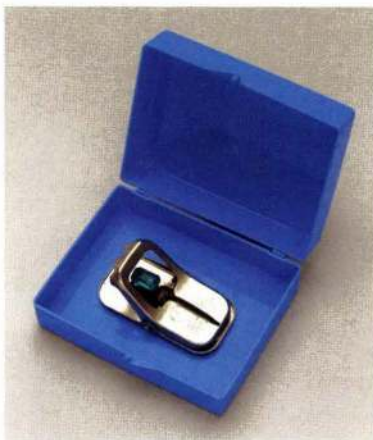
Fluxus Edition announced 1967

Plastic box containing metal trap with plastic jewel

4.9 x 10 x 11.9 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY



40

Geoffrey Hendricks, American, born 1935

*2 aRt traps "A"*

1978

Trap with paint tube

3.5 x 11.2 x 18 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

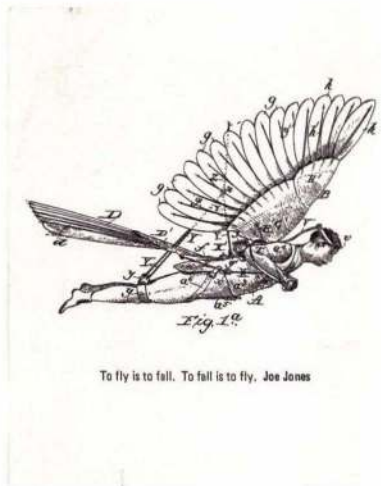
Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY



## VI GOD?

41

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978  
*To fly is to fall. To fall is to fly. Joe Jones*  
About 1972  
Offset lithograph  
13.9 x 10.8 cm  
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.  
Digital Image © The Museum of  
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Art Resource, NY  
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42

Geoffrey Hendricks, American,  
born 1931  
*Sky Laundry (Sheet) #3*  
1966–72  
Acrylic on cotton with rope and  
wooden clothespins  
114.2 x 195.6 cm  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of Jean Brown;  
GM.978.207



43

Ben Vautier, French, born 1945  
*God*  
1961  
Glass bottle with label inscribed  
“God” in pencil  
30 x 8.5 cm  
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.  
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## VI GOD? (continued)

44

Ben Vautier, French, born 1935  
*Fluxbox Containing God*  
About 1966  
Glued-shut plastic box with label  
1.59 x 11.91 x 9.21 cm  
Collection Walker Art Center,  
Minneapolis: T. B. Walker  
Acquisition Fund, 1995; 1995.97  
© 2011 Artist Rights Society (ARS),  
New York / ADAGP, Paris

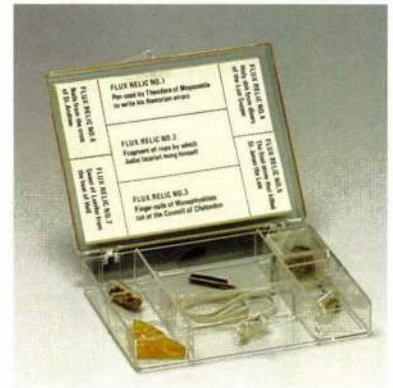
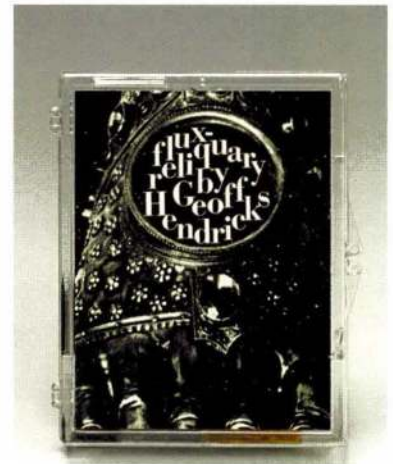


45

Robert Watts, American, 1923–1988  
Untitled (Dispenser of the 23rd  
Psalm)  
1960–61  
Cast-iron string dispenser emitting  
metal tape measure with type writing  
on paper  
12.3 x 16.1 cm  
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.; 2786.2008  
Text on tape: "LORD IS MY  
SHEPARD [sic] STOP. I SHALL  
NOT WANT STOP HE MAKETH  
ME TO"

46

Geoffrey Hendricks, American,  
born 1935  
*Flux Reliquary*  
1970  
Clear seven-compartment plastic box  
with label on lid and on underside of  
lid identifying items (relics) in each  
compartment: turd, pebble in clear  
capsule, pen nib, white rubber band,  
nail paring in clear capsule, little brass  
nails in capsule, fragment of melted  
yellow plastic  
9.2 x 12.1 x 2.5 cm  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of the Friedman  
Family; GM.986.80.79



47

Carla Liss, American, born 1944  
*Sacrament Fluxkit*  
 Date unknown, Fluxus Edition  
 announced 1969  
 Plastic box containing nine vials with  
 liquid  
 5.2 x 6.6 x 7.5 cm  
 The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
 Fluxus Collection Gift, The Museum  
 of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
 U.S.A.  
 Digital Image © The Museum of  
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 Art Resource, NY



48

George Landow, American,  
 born 1944  
*Fluxfilm No. 25, The Evil Faerie*  
 1966  
 Silent black-and-white film  
 Man on a roof making flying gestures  
 with his arms and hands (with Steven  
 M. Zinc)

## VII HAPPINESS?

49

Ben Vautier, French, born 1935  
*Crisis and Nervous Depression*  
 About 1962-63  
 Letterpress on paper  
 11.75 x 10 cm  
 Collection Walker Art Center,  
 Minneapolis; Walker Special  
 Purchase Fund, 1989; 1989.396  
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 New York / ADAGP, Paris

**BEN, IS SO MUCH OF A TRUE  
 FAILURE AND A SHABBY  
 FOOL, CRYING TO BE GREAT,  
 THAT HE HAS HAD ENOUGH  
 OF IT ALL.**

**CRISIS AND NERVOUS  
 DEPRESSION**

**THE \_\_\_\_\_ OF  
 AT \_\_\_\_\_ OCLOCK**

**TOTAL ART GALERY  
 32, RUE TONDUTTI DE  
 L'ESCARENE - NICE  
 FRANCE**



## VII HAPPINESS? (continued)

50

Nye Ffarrabas (formerly Bici Forbes and Bici Forbes Hendricks), American, born 1932

*Rx: Stress Formula*

About 1970–78

Pill bottle with ink on pressure-sensitive labels, containing photocopy in twenty-six gelatin capsules  
12.9 x 4.4 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

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51

George Maciunas, American, 1931–1978

*Flux Smile Machine*

About 1970

Blue plastic box with offset label containing metal and plastic spring device

3.3 x 12 x 10 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas

52

George Maciunas, American, 1931–1978

*Flux Smile Machine*

1970

Blue plastic box with offset label containing metal and plastic spring device

3.3 x 12 x 10 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.163

© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas



53

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978  
*Grotesque Face Mask*  
About 1976  
Offset lithograph on paper  
20.32 x 16.35 cm  
Collection Walker Art Center,  
Minneapolis: Walker Special  
Purchase Fund, 1989; 1989.278  
© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas



54

Yoko Ono, American, born 1933  
*A Box of Smile*  
1971  
Plastic box containing mirror with  
transparent lid inscribed in gold: "A  
BOX OF SMILE Y.O. '71"  
5.4 x 5.4 x 6 cm  
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.

55

Yoko Ono, American, born 1933  
*A Box of Smile*  
1971/1984 ReFlux Edition  
Black plastic box inscribed in gold:  
"A BOX OF SMILE Y.O. '71";  
mirror on bottom of interior  
5.4 x 5.4 x 5.5 cm  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College: Acquisitions Fund;  
GM.989.12.5





## VII HAPPINESS? (continued)

56

Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi, Japanese,  
born 1938

*Disappearing Music for Face*  
1965

Thirty-nine-page stapled flipbook  
with sequential images of Yoko Ono's  
mouth losing a smile by Peter Moore  
from the Fluxfilm of the same name  
(cat. 57) (from *Flux Year Box 2*,  
cat. 6)

5.7 x 9 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Purchased through  
the William S. Rubin Fund;  
GM.987.44.2



57

Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi, Japanese,  
born 1938

*Fluxfilm No. 4, Disappearing Music  
for Face*

1966

Silent black-and-white film (camera:  
Peter Moore)

Yoko Ono's mouth slowly  
transitioning from smile to no smile



## VIII HEALTH?

### EVENT 8

Alison Knowles, 1965  
*Wounded Furniture*

This piece uses an old piece of  
furniture in bad shape. Destroy it  
further, if you like. Bandage it up  
with gauze and adhesive. Spray  
red paint on the wounded joints.  
Effective lighting helps . . .





## VIII HEALTH? (continued)

61

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978  
*Shigeo Kubota's 'Flux Medicine'*  
1966

Mechanical for label of Fluxus  
Edition  
19 x 24 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.

© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas

62

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978  
*Fluxsyringe*

About 1972, Fluxus Edition  
announced 1973

Wood box containing metal pump  
with fifty-six needles

8.1 x 41.8 x 9.6 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.

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Art Resource, NY

© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas



## IX LOVE?

EVENT 9

George Brecht, 1961  
*Three Gap Events*

- missing-letter sign
- between two sounds
- meeting again

63

Takako Saito, Japanese, born 1929  
*Heart Box*  
1965

Paper box covered with drawings  
filled with smaller paper boxes with  
drawings

14 x 14 x 14 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of Alison Knowles;  
GM.978.212

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64

Milan Knížák, Czech, born 1940,  
and Ken Friedman, American,  
born 1949

*Fluxus Heart Shirt*

n.d.

Man's white polyester and cotton  
long-sleeve shirt with the shape of  
a heart cut out of the breast pocket,  
tinted pink on the inside

82.55 x 93.18 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of the Friedman  
Family; GM.986.80.3

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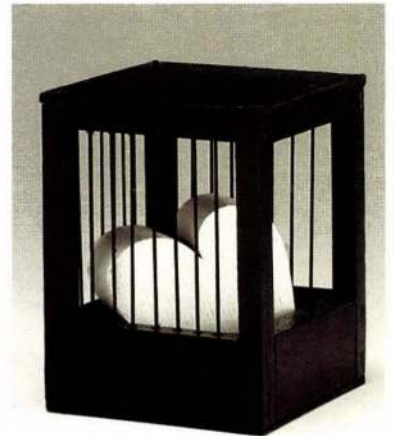
65

Ken Friedman, American, born 1949  
*Herz (the heart that goes into the box)*  
1968, reconstructed 1986

Painted wood

15.24 x 11.43 x 11.43 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of Emily Harvey;  
GM.988.31.18A and 18B





66

Milan Knížák, Czech, born 1940  
*Enforced Symbioses*  
 1977

Typewriting, color instant print and ink with nails and twine on cardboard

40.1 x 24 cm x 1/5 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

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Text: "ENFORCED SYMBIOSES / to be bound to someone (something) for a long time [examples] . . . As long as what joins them continues to function, these twins, triplets or N-lets will be forced to appear together—that is, as a single existence. At least in the sense that they will be mutually forced to accept the other as themselves. Let us try to think of two as one, of three as one, of many as one."



EVENT 10

George Brecht, 1961  
*Two Elimination Events*

- empty vessel
- empty vessel

67

Geoffrey Hendricks, American, born 1931, in collaboration with Nye Ffarrabas (formerly Bici Forbes and Bici Forbes Hendricks), George Maciunas, and Peter Moore

*Flux Divorce Box*

1973, Fluxus Edition announced 1973  
 Wood box containing objects of various media, assembled by Hendricks

10.5 x 50.6 x 39.7 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

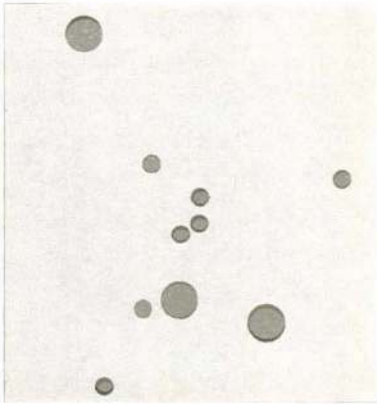
Note: The album is cut in two horizontally; objects include fragment of coats, barbed wire, black plastic, three pieces of correspondence cut in half, and half of a wedding announcement.



68

Diter Rot (Dieter Roth),  
Swiss-German, 1930–1998  
*White Page with Holes*  
1963/1970

Sheet of paper with scattered punched  
holes, "Poetry" from *An Anthology  
of Chance Operations*, ed. La Monte  
Young and Jackson Mac Low [1963],  
2nd ed. 1970  
19 x 20.3 cm  
Private collection



69

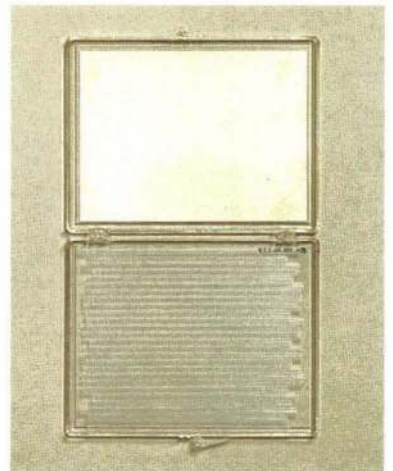
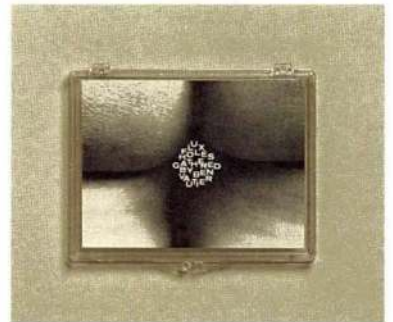
Robert Watts, American, 1923–1988  
*Yam Ride*  
About 1962

Small Goodyear rubber tire with  
"YAM RIDE" stenciled in silver on  
the side  
8 x 26.6 cm  
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.

70

Ben Vautier, French, born 1935  
*Fluxholes*  
1964

Clear plastic box with label printed  
with a photographic image of  
human buttocks and white text:  
"FLUX HOLES GATHERED  
BY BEN VAUTIER." Inside, clear  
plastic tubes (drinking straws), of  
approximately the same length, laid  
out flat, filling the bottom surface of  
the box  
1.3 x 12.1 x 9.2 cm  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of the Friedman  
Family; GM.986.80.237  
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71

Ben Vautier, French, born 1935

*Holes*

1964/1969

White plastic box with label printed with finger-in-anus motif containing four offset black and white-printed cards with images of holes, two of which have been punched; a stainless steel sink strainer (attached to the bottom of the box); two rubber washers; rubber band

1.3 x 12 x 10 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

72

Endre Tót, Hungarian, born 1937

*Dear Stanley, . . . I am glad if I can type zeros*

1973

Cardstock postcard with cancelled postage stamps and typed text

10.5 x 15.0 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.197



73

Endre Tót, Hungarian, born 1937

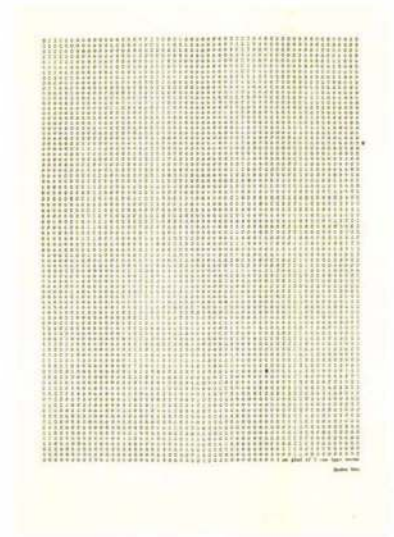
*Evergreen Idea*

n.d.

Typewritten (printed?) ink on paper: a block of zeros ending with text, "I am glad if I can type zeros"; stamped on back, in green ink: "Evergreen Idea."

42 x 29.5 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.264



74

Nam June Paik, American,  
1932–2006

*Zen for TV*

1963/78

Altered television set

53.3 x 39.3 x 31.1 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College: Gift of the artist in honor of  
George Maciunas; GM.978.211



75

Per Kirkeby, Danish, born 1938  
*Flux Box*

1969

Red plastic block filling inside of red  
plastic box, paper label on lid  
1.4 x 10 x 12 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift, The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.

76

Nam June Paik, American,  
1932–2006

*Zen for Film*

1964

White plastic box with paper label on  
lid containing a section of blank 16  
mm film leader

2.7 x 12 x 10 cm

Collection Walker Art Center,  
Minneapolis: Walker Special  
Purchase Fund, 1989; 1989.303.1–2





## XI SEX?

77

Nam June Paik, American,  
1932–2006

*Zen for Film*

1964 (reconstructed)

Projector showing a continuous loop  
of clear film leader in a darkened  
space

78

Al Hansen, American, 1927–1995  
*Homage to the Girl of Our Dreams*

1966

Hershey Bar wrappers collaged onto  
wood

19 x 16.5 x 1.9 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of Corice and  
Armand P. Arman; GM.978.203.2



79

Robert Watts, American, 1923–1988  
*Fluxpost 17-17*

1965

Stamps printed in black ink on  
gummed, perforated paper

27.9 x 21.6 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of the Friedman  
Family; GM.986.80.285



80

Robert Filliou, French, 1926–1987; and Daniel Spoerri, Swiss, born 1930  
*MONSTERS ARE INOFFENSIVE*  
1967

Flux Post Card captioned: "Men call pubic hair pornography but / MONSTERS ARE INOFFENSIVE." Sideways: "By Filliou-Spoerri-Topo. Photos: Vera Spoerri. © 1967, by Fluxus, Division of Implosions, Inc." (from *Flux Year Box 2*, cat. 6)

16 x 11 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Purchased through the William S. Rubin Fund; GM.987.44.2



Men call pubic hair pornography but  
MONSTERS ARE INOFFENSIVE.

BY FILLIOU-SPOERRI-TOPPO. PHOTOS: VERA SPOERRI.  
© 1967, BY FLUXUS, DIVISION OF IMPLOSIONS, INC.

FLUX  
POST  
CARD




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81

Robert Watts, American, 1923–1988  
*Female Underpants*

About 1966

Screen print on fabric

33 x 28 cm

Harvard Art Museum, Fogg Art Museum, Barbara and Peter Moore

Fluxus Collection: Margaret Fisher Fund and gift of Barbara Moore/Bound & Unbound; M26488

Photo by Imaging department © President and Fellows of Harvard College



82

Robert Watts, American, 1923–1988  
*Male Underpants*

About 1966

Screen print on fabric

33 x 22 cm

Harvard Art Museum, Fogg Art Museum, Barbara and Peter Moore

Fluxus Collection: Margaret Fisher Fund and gift of Barbara Moore/Bound & Unbound; M26489

Photo by Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College





## XI SEX? (continued)

83

Robert Filliou, French, 1926–1987  
*Boîte optimiste no. 2 (Optimistic Box no. 2)*  
1968 (published Remscheid, Germany: VICE-Versand)  
Wood box with brass hinges and clasps, photograph on paper, paper labels, offset lithograph  
4.76 x 12.88 x 10.48 cm  
Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 1992; 1992.135  
Note: Exterior label reads, “Boîte Optimiste Nr 2/Vive la marriage”; Interior label reads: “A trois./ Robert Filliou”; box contains a photo of three people engaged in sexual activity.



84

Jock Reynolds, American, born 1947  
*Revealing Fact*  
1970  
White plastic box with label containing thermometer attached to a card with ballpoint pen  
1.5 x 12 x 10 cm  
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.  
Note: Label on lid features a photograph of a nipple over which are printed the words: “Revealing fact . . . hold finger on nipple one minute \*\* then open box & read.” Inside, the tip of the thermometer coincides with the underside of the nipple on the lid; the card to which it is attached is divided by a black line with the words “good person” printed under the lower end of the temperature scale and “bad person” under the upper end.

85

Jere Lykins, American, born 1946  
*Underland Explorations, Remains of Common and Ithyphallic Beings*  
1977  
Three terracotta objects with pinned paper label typed “remains of common and ithyphallic beings” in a stamped wooden box with plastic cover, inscribed on bottom: “1977, Jere Lykins, 19/50” (not a Fluxus edition)  
11.4 x 13.4 x 1.9 cm  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College; Gift of the Friedman Family; KF.986.80.350



## XII STAYING ALIVE?

86

Robert Watts, American, 1923–1988

*Fluxfilm No. 13, Trace #24*

1965

Silent black-and-white film

Photo of Marilyn Monroe, shifting to the lower half of a female body wriggling under cellophane.

---

### EVENT 11

Alison Knowles, 1962 event score

*Proposition*

Make a salad.

---

87

Jock Reynolds, American, born 1947

Untitled

1981

Medicine bottle containing cotton and gelatin capsules stuffed with shredded money

15 x 5 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.



## XII STAYING ALIVE? (continued)

88

Jane Knížák

Untitled

n.d.

Two rolls of joke \$-printed toilet paper wrapped in plastic

11.4 x 12.6 x 6.6 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

89

Daniel Spoerri, Swiss, born 1930

*Meal Variation No. 2, Eaten by Marcel Duchamp*, from *31 Variations on a Meal*

About 1965, Fluxus Edition

announced 1965

Screenprint on fabric, produced by George Maciunas

64.6 x 80.5 cm

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90

John Chick, American, twentieth century

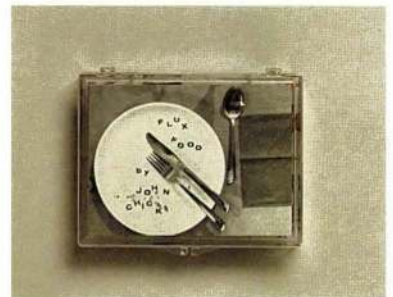
*Flux Food*

1969

Seven-compartment clear plastic box with label on lid containing woodland flora (pinecone, wood, birch bark, seed pods, lichen, fungus)

2.5 x 12 x 9.3 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.28



91

John Chick, American, twentieth century

*Flux Food*

1969

Seven-compartment clear plastic box with label on lid containing twelve and a half inch Styrofoam cubes, three green Styrofoam noodles, five blue plastic tubes, eleven cardboard cylinders, piece of bark, and several pine needles

2.5 x 12 x 10 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

92

Per Kirkeby, Danish, born 1938

*Four Flux Drinks*

1969

White plastic box with label on lid containing four tea bags containing white powders such as sugar, salt, aspirin

.9 x 11.9 x 10 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

93

Claes Thure Oldenburg, American, born 1929

*False Food Prototype for Rubber Food*

*Fluxkit*

1966

Mixed media

5.1 x 18.1 x 13 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of Billie Maciunas; GM.979.181.4

Photo by Mark Corliss





## XII STAYING ALIVE? (continued)

94

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978

*One Year*

1973

Empty food containers from one year

Dimensions vary

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman

Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.

© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas

95

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978

“Prefabricated Housing System”

1965

Offset black ink on tan paper

43 x 43 cm (folded)

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman

Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.

© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas

96

Alison Knowles, American,  
born 1933

*The Identical Lunch with George*

*Maciunas*

1973

Screen print on canvas

35.1 x 44.4 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of the artist;

GM.978.208



## XIII TIME?

### EVENT 12

Jackson Mac Low, 1961  
*Tree Movie*

Select a tree.\* Set up and focus a movie camera so that the tree\* fills most of the picture. Turn on the camera and leave it on without moving it for any number of hours. If the camera is about to run out of film, substitute a camera with fresh film . . . Beginning at any point in the film, any length of it may be projected at a showing.

\*For the word "tree," one may substitute "mountain," "sea," "flower," "lake," etc.

97

Ben Vautier, French, born 1935  
*Time*

1961–66

(a) Cut-and-pasted printed paper, colored paper and ink on graph paper; (b) painted alarm clock; (c) gelatin silver print; (d) cut-and-pasted paper and typed carbon paper transfer on graph paper

(a) 32 x 24.1 cm, (b) 11 x 9.7 x 6.5 cm, (c) 30.3 x 23.9 cm, (d) 32 x 24.1 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

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b



c

*Le temps - (1961)*



a

LE TEMPS (1961)  
 Je suis né le 10 novembre 1935 à Paris.  
 Je suis mort le 10 novembre 1966 à Paris.  
 Le temps, c'est ce qui nous sépare de la mort.  
 Je suis né à 10 heures, 10 minutes, 10 secondes.  
 Je suis mort à 10 heures, 10 minutes, 10 secondes.  
 Le temps, c'est ce qui nous sépare de la mort.  
 Je suis né le 10 novembre 1935 à Paris.  
 Je suis mort le 10 novembre 1966 à Paris.  
 Le temps, c'est ce qui nous sépare de la mort.

FOR THE FRENCH ATTENTION JE SUIS NÉ LE 10 NOVEMBRE 1935 À PARIS. JE SUIS MORT LE 10 NOVEMBRE 1966 À PARIS. LE TEMPS, C'EST CE QUI NOUS SÉPARE DE LA MORT.			
IN L'ANNÉE QU'EST-CE QUE C'EST QUE	MOIS LE 10 MINUTES À 10 HEURES	ANNÉE 1935 ANNÉE 1966 ANNÉE 1966	SECONDES À 10 HEURES SECONDES À 10 HEURES SECONDES À 10 HEURES
FOR THE ENGLISH ATTENTION I WAS BORN ON NOVEMBER 10, 1935 IN PARIS. I WAS DEAD ON NOVEMBER 10, 1966 IN PARIS. TIME IS WHAT SEPARATES US FROM DEATH.			
OF THE YEAR WHAT IS OF THE YEAR	MONTH THE 10 MINUTES AT 10 O'CLOCK	YEAR 1935 YEAR 1966 YEAR 1966	SECONDS AT 10 O'CLOCK SECONDS AT 10 O'CLOCK SECONDS AT 10 O'CLOCK

d



**98**

Benjamin Patterson, American,  
born 1934

*Dance (Instruction No. 1?)*

1964

Yellow, purple, and brown magic  
marker drawing of two shoe soles  
with rubber-stamped text "LATER"  
and (upside-down) "NOW"

36.8 x 28.5 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.

**99**

George Brecht, American,  
1926–2008

*Eastern Daylight Fluxtime*

1977

Engraved metal watch casing with  
plastic "crystal," inner works and  
stem removed, containing small  
screws, brown pebbles, seashell, fake  
diamond, balls, etc.

6 x 5 x 1.4 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.

**100**

Robert Watts, American, 1923–1988

*Flux Timekit*

Late 1960s

Clear plastic box with offset-printed  
label containing a small roll of  
audiotape, a metal bullet, cinnamon  
powder in glass bottle, glass ampule  
filled with water, a wood ball, dried  
beans of various kinds, wheat and oat  
grains, and a steel ball bearing

2.5 x 12 x 9.5 cm

Harvard Art Museum, Fogg Art  
Museum, Barbara and Peter Moore  
Fluxus Collection: Margaret Fisher  
Fund and gift of Barbara Moore/  
Bound & Unbound, M26492

Photo by Imaging Department

© President and Fellows of Harvard  
College



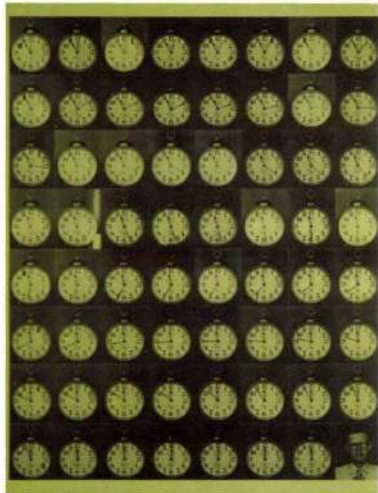
**101**

James Riddle, American, born 1933  
*One Hour*, page in *V TRE*, 3  
*newspaper eVenTs for the pRicE of \$1*,  
 no. 7

February 1, 1966

Offset lithography on green paper  
 57.4 x 40.5 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
 College, George Maciunas Memorial  
 Collection; 2010.68

**102**

James Riddle, American, born 1933  
*Fluxfilm No. 6: 9 Minutes*  
 1966

Silent black-and-white film

Nine minutes counted off in seconds

**103**

Robert Watts, American, 1923–1988  
*10-Hour Flux Clock*

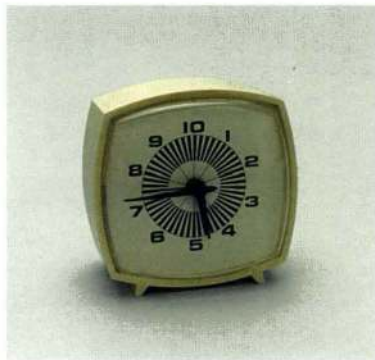
About 1969

Alarm clock with added offset face,  
 assembled by George Maciunas as a  
 Fluxus Edition

8.2 x 8.2 x 5.4 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
 Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
 of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
 U.S.A.

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### XIII TIME? (continued)

104

Per Kirkeby, Danish, born 1938  
*Flux Clock (Distance Traveled in mm)*  
About 1969

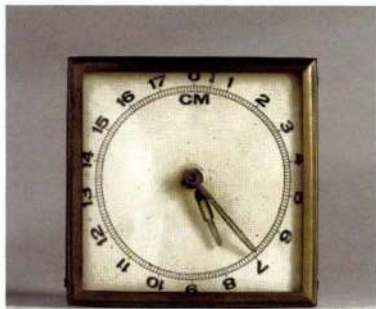
Altered readymade alarm clock with  
printed paper face

6.9 x 6.9 x 3 cm

Harvard Art Museum, Fogg Art  
Museum, Barbara and Peter Moore  
Fluxus Collection; Margaret Fisher

Fund and gift of Barbara Moore/  
Bound & Unbound; M26421

Photo by Junius Beebe © President  
and Fellows of Harvard College



105

Per Kirkeby, Danish, born 1938  
*Degree Face Flux Clock*

1969

Small green wind-up alarm clock  
marked "Western Germany," original  
face replaced with printed 360° face  
7 x 7 x 4.4 cm

The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift. The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.

106

Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi, Japanese,  
born 1938

*Spatial Poem No. 3, a fluxcalendar*  
(falling events, loose leaf calendar)

1968

Day-to-day calendar with leather  
cover, four bolts, forty-three leaves,  
a thicker cover leaf with photo of a  
hand, and blank last page; each day  
has several events

30.3 x 12.9 x 3 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection; Gift of the Friedman  
Family; GM.986.80.191

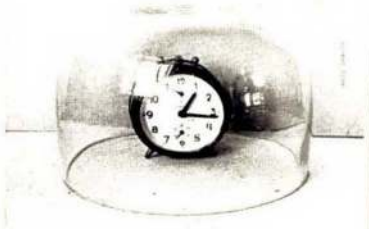
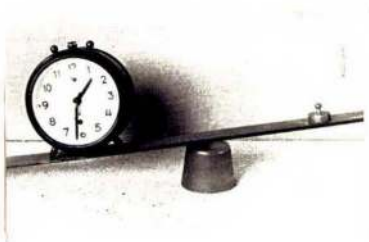
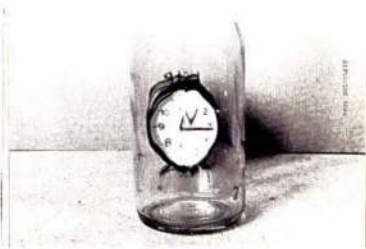


107

Dora Maurer, Hungarian, born 1937  
*Time*

Ten silver prints mounted on fabric,  
accordion fashion, individually titled  
*The Mirror of Time, Distorted Time,*  
*Reflected in Mirror of Time, Easy Time,*  
*Lead Time, Busy Time, Mixed Time,*  
*Closed Time, Merry Time, Dead Time*  
1972

Gelatin silver prints mounted on  
cotton cloth  
14.7 x 23.8 cm each  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College: Gift of the Friedman  
Family; KF.986.80.363





## XIV WHAT AM I?

### EVENT 13

Emmett Williams, 1962  
*For La Monte Young*

Performer asks if La Monte Young is  
in the audience.

### 108

Robert Watts, American, 1923–1988  
*Fluxfilm No. 11, Trace No. 22*  
1965

Silent black and white film  
X-ray film of mouth and throat  
eating and speaking

### 109

Ben Vautier, French, born 1935  
*Living Fluxsculpture*  
1966/1969  
Plastic, mirror, paper  
2.6 x 9.3 x 12 cm  
Collection Walker Art Center,  
Minneapolis: Walker Special  
Purchase Fund, 1989; 1989.405.1–2  
© 2011 Artist Rights Society (ARS),  
New York / ADAGP, Paris



110

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978

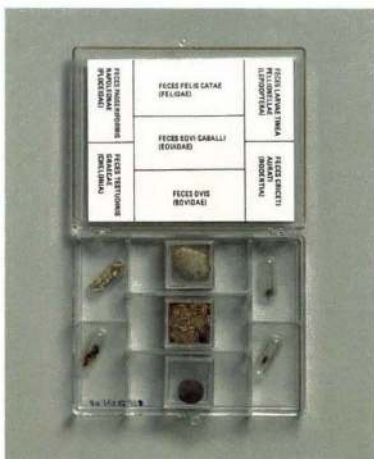
*Excreta Fluxorum*  
1973

Seven-compartment clear plastic box  
with labels containing feces from  
different animals

2.5 x 9.2 x 12.1 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of the Friedman  
Family; GM.986.80.158

© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas



111

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978

*Excreta Fluxorum*  
1973

Eighteen-compartment clear plastic  
box with labels containing feces from  
different animals and a white marble

1.4 x 4.2 x 8.4 cm  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of John Cage;  
GM.978.204.1

© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas



112

George Brecht, American,  
1926–2008

*Games and Puzzles, Fluxus CL*  
(Name Kit)

1965

Plastic box containing die, scrabble  
letter, clear blue plastic cube, etc., and  
blue paper printed: "name kit / Spell  
your name"

2.3 x 12.1 x 9.2 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of the Friedman  
Family; GM.986.80.24

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## XIV WHAT AM I? (continued)

113

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978  
*Gift Box for John Cage: Spell Your  
Name with These Objects*  
About 1972

Leather-covered, red velvet-lined box  
containing fifteen objects (acorn, egg,  
glass stopper, plastic boxes of seeds,  
etc.)

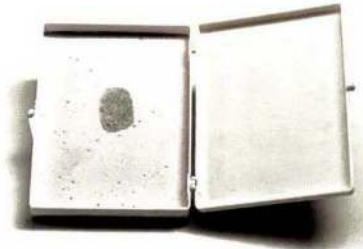
5.4 x 23.8 x 10.5 cm  
Hood Museum, Dartmouth College,  
George Maciunas Memorial  
Collection: Gift of John Cage;  
GM.978.204.2

© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas



114

Robert Watts, American, 1923–1988  
*Fingerprint*  
1965/1969  
Plastic, paper, plaster with fingerprint  
2.54 x 10.16 x 12.07 in  
Collection Walker Art Center,  
Minneapolis: Walker Special  
Purchase Fund, 1989; 1989.483



115

George Maciunas, American,  
1931–1978  
*Multifaceted Mirror*  
1970  
Wood box containing a square,  
concave metal plate set with forty-  
nine mirrors  
32.7 x 37.3 x 37.3 cm  
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman  
Fluxus Collection Gift; The Museum  
of Modern Art, New York, NY,  
U.S.A.  
© Courtesy of Billie Maciunas

116

Fluxus Editorial Council (Geoffrey Hendricks)

*Correction: George Maciunas: Life Span Data*, insert, *V TRE Extra*, "Maciunas Dies" issue, 1979

Black ink printed on brown paper  
37.5 x 7 cm

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of the Friedman Family; GM.986.80.34A

## GEORGE MACIUNAS: LIFE SPAN DATA

### CONSUMPTION

Lemons: 4524  
Eggs: 12,480  
Bread: 2691 lbs.  
Cereal: 2301 lbs.  
Apples: 12,857  
Beets: 3214  
Meat: 1607 lbs.  
Milk: 6420 qts.  
Water: 17.72 Tons  
Total Food Intake at Smorgasbord  
Restaurants: 2.85 Tons.  
Total Food: 21.62 tons.

### ELIMINATION

Feces: 8.12 tons  
Urine: 10.68 tons  
Perspiration: 910 lbs.

### PRODUCTION

Hair: 118.7 miles  
Nails: 11.75 sq. ft.  
Words Spoken:  $3.07 \times 10^8$   
Lines Drawn & Words Written:  
62.14 miles  
Characters Typed:  $2.53 \times 10^7$   
(stretched-out length: 47.8 miles)  
Distance Traveled: 14,829 miles  
(foot)  
Distance Traveled: 256,000 miles  
(mechanical)

### OBSERVATION

Total Observed Distance:  $8.88 \times 10^{10}$   
ft. (16,830,000 miles)  
Total Objects Seen:  $9.6 \times 10^{11}$  (add  
 $10^{11}/10^{12}$ , all stars in galaxy)  
Total Sounds Heard:  $3.14 \times 10^7$ .

Robert Watts  
May 12, 1978





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### Opposite:

George Maciunas, *Excreta Fluxorum*, 1973, eighteen-compartment clear plastic box with labels containing feces from different animals and a white marble. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection: Gift of John Cage; GM.978.204.1 (cat. 111). © Courtesy of Billie Maciunas

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