

The

FLUXUS

Reader

EDITED BY KEN FRIEDMAN

AE ACADEMY EDITIONS

THE FLUXUS READER

Edited by KEN FRIEDMAN

First published in Great Britain in 1998 by

ACADEMY EDITIONS

a division of

John Wiley & Sons,

Baffins Lane, Chichester,

West Sussex PO19 1UD

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Other Wiley Editorial Offices

New York • Weinheim • Brisbane • Singapore • Toronto

ISBN 0-471-97858-2

Typeset by BookEns Ltd, Royston, Herts.

Printed and bound in the UK by Bookcraft (Bath) Ltd, Midsomer Norton

Cover design by Hybert Design

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A book is always the product of a team. A book on Fluxus must certainly be so. Several individuals made this book possible. Thanks are due first to George Maciunas. Back in 1966, he proposed that I prepare a history of Fluxus. Thanks are due also to Nicola Kearton. She welcomed the book to Academy Press and shepherded it through development and preparation. Without her, this book would never have been possible. Thanks, finally, to Mariangela Palazzi-Williams, senior production editor at John Wiley & Sons. She made this book the physical reality you hold some thirty-odd years after George suggested it.

Much Fluxus research has been made possible by four individuals who have been responsible for publishing the three largest series of publications of Fluxus material: objects, scores, and multiples, books and catalogues. George Maciunas' Fluxus editions launched Fluxus publishing as an organized phenomenon. Dick Higgins' Something Else Press books brought Fluxus to the larger world. Gilbert Silverman and Jon Hendricks are responsible for the catalogues that have become the largest series of Fluxus research documents.

Several collections are central to the research on Fluxus. Three major collections are now readily accessible. Hanns Sohm's Archiv Sohm is now located at Stadtsgalerie Stuttgart and Jean Brown's collection has become The Jean Brown Archive at the Getty Center for the History of the Arts and Humanities. The collections and archives of Fluxus West and my own papers have been distributed among several museums and universities. The largest body of material is located at Alternative Traditions in Contemporary Art at University of Iowa, the Tate Gallery Archives in London and the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College. Substantial holdings that once belonged to Fluxus West are now part of the Museum of Modern Art's Franklin Furnace Archive Collection, the Museum of Modern Art's Performance Art Archives, the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, the Ken Friedman Collection at the University of California at San Diego and the Henie Onstad Art Center in Oslo. All of these holdings are available for research, publication and exhibition under the normal conditions of research archives and museum collections. A number of important private collections are available under restricted access or by special appointment. Most notable among these are the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Foundation in New York and Detroit, Archivio Conz in Verona, and MuDiMa in Milan.

The documentation section was edited by Owen Smith. I developed the first versions of the documentation at Fluxus West in 1966 and supported improved versions over the years since. Project scholars and editors included Nancy McElroy, Kimberley Ruhe, Matthew Hogan, Judith Hoffberg, Giorgio Zanchetti, and James Lewes. Hoseon Cheon, Dick

Higgins, and Jean Sellem contributed to key bibliographies. The Fluxus Reader documentation team at the University of Maine consisted of Mat Charland, Patricia Clark, Christina Coskran, Christeen Edgecomb-Mudgett, Beth Emery, Jennifer Hunter, Stosh Levitsky, Carol Livingstone, Patricia Mansir, Tim Morin, Trevor Roenick, David Shoemaker, March Truedsson, Margaret Weigang, Emily Worden.

The Norwegian School of Management has been generous with resources, time and freedom for research and publishing. The poetic and playful dimensions of Fluxus often involve intensely practical phenomena. We wanted to work with industry. Our experiments in media and industrial production, successes and failures both, led me to doctoral work in leadership and human behavior. Our ideas on design, manufacturing and marketing took me to Finland and then to Norway. This is the place to thank Lisa Gabriellson and Esa Kolehmainen who brought Fluxus into a working industrial organization at Arabia in Helsinki, and this is the place to thank John Bjørnbye, Ole Henrik Moe and Per Hovdenakk, who brought me to Norway, together with the American Scandinavian Foundation, which funded a year of research.

Professor Johan Olaisen, my department head, has encouraged me to deepen my thinking on the arts as a supplement to scholarship in management and informatics. Professor Fred Selnes, my recent dean, encouraged me with solid collegial support that made it a joy to work with him. Professor Pierre Guillet de Monthoux of the University of Stockholm School of Management invited me to join the European Center for Art and Management at a time when I was ready to stop my research in the arts. Instead of leaving the field, he urged me to consider how Fluxus ideas might apply to management theory. My work on this book is a step in that direction. The freedom to explore problematic concepts is at the heart of the academic enterprise. It is interesting to note that the world of management and industry is often more open to revolutionary thinking than the world of art and culture. This idea, in fact, was at the heart of George Maciunas' view of Fluxus. The bridge between art and the world of social and political production is a central issue in the work of two people who have been vital to my thinking on art, Christo and Jeanne-Claude. My esteem and affection for them cannot be measured.

Here, I thank also Ditte Mauritzon Friedman. Canon and deacon of Lund Cathedral, psychotherapist-in-training, and wife, Ditte has enriched my perspective on Fluxus and on life. And I thank Oliver Mauritzon, walking companion, philosopher and the first taster of whatever I happen to be cooking for Ditte.

Another wise man made this book possible in many ways. He was the secret patron of Fluxus West. The Fluxus West projects in San Diego, San Francisco and around the world did more than anyone thought possible on limited resources and money. As creative and resourceful as it was possible to be, however, money often ran out. That was when our patron stepped in. He made it possible for me to follow my passion for knowledge. He helped me to organize and preserve the collections that are now housed in museums and archives around the world. He was profoundly generous, the more profound considering that he was a patron of the arts on a college professor's salary. I dedicate this book to an outstanding human being: advisor and patron, friend and father, Abraham M Friedman.

THE CONTRIBUTORS

The scholarly content of *The Fluxus Reader* has been the product of a laboratory of ideas, a virtual colloquium. It has been my pleasure here to work with a number of the leading scholars now writing on Fluxus. The authors of the history chapters wrote doctoral dissertations on various aspects of Fluxus. **Owen Smith** is associate professor of art history at the University of Maine. He wrote on George Maciunas at University of Washington. Simon Anderson is head of art history, theory and criticism at the School of the Art Institute Chicago. He wrote on Fluxshoe and British Fluxus at the Royal College of Art. **Hannah Higgins** is assistant professor of art history at University of Illinois at Chicago. She wrote on the interpretation and reception of early Fluxus at University of Chicago.

The authors of the theory chapters have specialized in different aspects of intermedia. **Ina Blom** is doctoral research fellow in art history at the University of Oslo. She has written extensively on Fluxus and intermedia. Craig Saper is assistant professor of criticism at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. He has written on intermedia, multimedia, artist publishing and visual poetry. **David Doris** is a doctoral fellow in art history at Yale University. The chapter on Fluxus and Zen was adapted from his award-winning master's thesis at City University of New York.

The chapters on critical and historical perspectives have been written by three internationally renowned scholars in art history, art theory and literary theory. **Stephen Foster** is professor of art history at University of Iowa and director of the Fine Arts Dada Archive. **Estera Milman** is associate professor of art history at the University of Iowa and founding director of Alternative Traditions in Contemporary Art. **Nicholas Zurbrugg** is professor of English and head of the department of English, Media and Culture Studies at De Montfort University.

The section titled 'Three Fluxus Voices' is the result of two unique collaborations. The first is an extensive interview between Fluxus artist **Larry Miller** and Fluxus co-founder George Maciunas. Made just before Maciunas's death in 1978, it sheds important light on Maciunas' view of Fluxus. The second is the only known interview with Maciunas' wife, Billie. This interview was recorded by **Susan Jarosi**, doctoral candidate in art history at Duke University. The section ends with Larry Miller's own thoughts on what it is to think about Fluxus. Here, I beg the reader's indulgence. There could have been, perhaps there should have been any number of other views, other chapters. Time and space limit every book. I selected these three voices because they are unique and because they form a conceptually elegant triad. If there is a clear message in the sections on history, theory, critical and historical perspectives, it is that there no way to encapsulate Fluxus in any neat paradigm. On another occasion, and for other reasons, I will present other voices: here, time, a page limit and circumstance dictate a useful choice that makes available an interview with ideas that have never before been published.

The section titled 'Two Fluxus Theories' makes available the thoughts of two Fluxus artists who have attempted to theorize Fluxus and place it in a larger intellectual and cultural framework. The first is by **Dick Higgins**, Fluxus co-founder and legendary publisher of Something Else Press. The second is my own: as editor of this book, I feel obliged to put my thoughts on the table here, too.

FLUXUS READER WEB SITE

The World Wide Web is making a vital difference to many fields of human endeavor. The arts and scholarship have been particularly well served by this medium.

One of the most important developments for research and writing on Fluxus is a consortium of five major universities and museums with a key focus on Fluxus and intermedia. These five are developing a Web-based series of virtual resources for scholarship and reflection on contemporary art. University of Iowa's Alternative Traditions in Contemporary Art, the University of California Museum of Art at Berkeley, Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth, Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and Franklin Furnace in New York maintain the site. ATCA at University of Iowa will be hosting a wide variety of scholarly and pictorial materials that dovetail with the material in this book, and a portion of the site will be dedicated to expanding and reflecting on the specific chapters presented here.

The URL is: <<http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/spec-coll/resources/atca.html>>. Please visit the site.

INFORMATION AND IDEAS

I welcome queries and idea on any of the subjects covered in this book. If you have questions or thoughts you would like to pursue, please contact me at:

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KEN FRIEDMAN: INTRODUCTION: A TRANSFORMATIVE VISION OF FLUXUS

A little more than thirty years ago, George Maciunas asked me to write a history of Fluxus. It was the autumn of 1966. I was sixteen then and living in New York after dropping out of college for a term. George had enrolled me in Fluxus that August. Perhaps he saw me as a scholar, perhaps simply as someone with enough energy to undertake and complete such a project.

Not long after, I grew tired of New York and I was ready to move back to California. That was when George appointed me director of Fluxus West. Originally intended to represent Fluxus activities in the western United States, Fluxus West became many things. It became a centre for spreading Fluxus ideas, a forum for Fluxus projects across North America – outside New York – as well as parts of Europe and the Pacific, a travelling exhibition centre, a studio in a Volkswagen bus, a publishing house and a research programme. These last two aspects of our work led George to ask me once again to take on a comprehensive, official history of Fluxus. I agreed to do it. I didn't know what I was getting into.

This history project was never completed. In part, I lacked the documentation, and despite gathering documents and material for years, I never did accumulate the material I should have done to carry out the job. Moreover, I found that it was the ideas in Fluxus that interested me most, far more than the specific deeds and doings of a specific group of artists. While I am a scholar in addition to being an artist, my interest in Fluxus does not focus on documentation or archival work.

The documents and works I did collect have not gone to waste. They found homes in museums, universities and archives, where they are available to scholars who do want to write the history of Fluxus, as well as to scholars, critics, curators and artists who want to examine Fluxus from other perspectives. The history that I never finished gave rise to several projects and publications that shed light on Fluxus in many ways. This book is one of them.

The key issue here is explaining a 'how' and 'why' of Fluxus. Emmett Williams once wrote a short poem on that how and why, writing 'Fluxus is what Fluxus does – but no one knows whodunit.' What is it that Fluxus does? Dick Higgins offered one answer when he wrote, '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.' For Dick, as for George, Fluxus is more important as an idea and a potential for social change than as a specific group of people or collection of objects.

As I see it, Fluxus has been a laboratory, a grand project summed up by George

Maciunas' notion of the 'learning machines'. The Fluxus research programme has been characterised by twelve ideas: globalism, the unity of art and life, intermedia, experimentalism, chance, playfulness, simplicity, implicativeness, exemplativism, specificity, presence in time and musicality. (These twelve ideas are elaborated in the chapter titled 'Fluxus and Company'.) These ideas are not a prescription for how to be a Fluxus artist. Rather they form a description of the qualities and issues that characterise the work of Fluxus. Each idea describes a 'way of doing things'. Taken together, these twelve ideas form a picture of what Fluxus is and does.

The implications of some ideas have been more interesting – and occasionally more startling – than they may at first have seemed. Fluxus has been a complex system of practices and relationships. The fact that the art world can sometimes be a forum for philosophical practice has made it possible for Fluxus to develop and demonstrate ideas that would later be seen in such frameworks as multimedia, telecommunications, hypertext, industrial design, urban planning, architecture, publishing, philosophy, and even management theory. That is what makes Fluxus so lively, so engaging and so difficult to describe.

We can grasp the phenomenon through the lens of several disciplines. One such discipline is history, and there is a history of Fluxus to be told. While the core issues in Fluxus are ideas, Fluxus ideas were first summarised and exemplified in the work of a specific group of people. This group pioneered these ideas at a time when their thoughts and practices were distinct and different from many of the thoughts and practices in the world around them, distinct from the art world and different from the world of other disciplines in which Fluxus would come to play a role. To understand the how and why of Fluxus, what it is and does, it is important to understand 'whodunit', to know what Fluxus was and did. History therefore offers a useful perspective.

Fluxus, however, is more than a matter of *art* history. Literature, music, dance, typography, social structure, architecture, mathematics, politics ... they all play a role. Fluxus is, indeed, the name of a way of doing things. It is an active philosophy of experience that only sometimes takes the form of art. It stretches across the arts and even across the areas between them. Fluxus is a way of viewing society and life, a way of creating social action and life activity. In this book, historians and critics offer critical and historical perspectives. Other writers frame the central issues in other ways.

The ideal book would be three times as long as this one is and impossible to publish. I therefore chose to focus on issues to open a dialogue with the Fluxus idea. Rather than teaching the reader everything there is to know about Fluxus, this book lays out a map, a cognitive structure filled with tools, markers and links to ideas and history both.

Fluxus has now become a symbol for much more than itself. That companies in the knowledge industry and creative enterprise use the name Fluxus suggests that something is happening, both in terms of real influence and in terms of fame, the occasional shadow of true influence. Advertising agencies, record stores, performance groups, publishers and even young artists now apply the word Fluxus to what they do. It is difficult to know whether we should be pleased, annoyed, or merely puzzled.

Tim Porges once wrote that the value of writing and publishing on Fluxus rests not on what Fluxus has been but on 'what it may still do'. If one thread binds the chapters in this book, it is the idea of a transformative description that opens a new discourse. A new and

appropriately subtle understanding of Fluxus leaves open the question of what it may still do. That's good enough for me.

Owen Smith and I were discussing this book one afternoon. We reached the conclusion that it is as much a beginning as a summation. If, as George Brecht said in the 1980s, 'Fluxus has Fluxed', one can equally well say what someone – Dick? Emmett? – said a few years later: 'Fluxus has not yet begun.' There is an on-line discussion group called Fluxlist where the question of what lies between those two points has been the subject of much recent dialogue. One of the interesting aspects of the conversation has been the philosophical subtlety underlying the several positions. Those who believe there is a Fluxus of ideas and attitudes more than of objects feel that there is, indeed, a future Fluxus. This Fluxus intersects with and moves beyond the Fluxus of artefacts and objects. This vision of Fluxus distinguishes between a specific Fluxus of specific artists acting in time and space and what René Block termed 'Fluxism', an idea exemplified in the work and action of the historic Fluxus artists.

Beginning or summation, this book offers a broad view of Fluxus. It is a corrective to the hard-edged and ill-informed debates on Fluxus that diminish what we set out to do by locating us in a mythic moment of time that never really existed. Fluxus was created to transcend the boundaries of the art world, to shape a discourse of our own. A debate that ends Fluxus with the death of George Maciunas is a debate that diminishes George's idea of Fluxus as an ongoing social practice. It also diminishes the rest of us, leaving many of the original Fluxus artists disenfranchised and alienated from the body of work to which they gave birth. In the moments that people attempt to victimise us with false boundaries, I am drawn to two moments in history.

The first moment occurred in sixth-century Chinese Zen. It reflects the debates around Fluxus in an oddly apt way, and not merely because Fluxus is often compared with Zen. It involved the alleged split between the Northern and Southern schools of Zen. The real facts of the split seem not to have involved the two masters who succeeded the Sixth Patriarch, one in the North and one in the South, Shen-hsiu and Hui-neng. The long and tangled stories of schism seem rooted, rather, in the actions of Hui-neng's disciple Shen-hui and those who followed him. It has little to do with the main protagonists who respected and admired each other to the point that the supposedly jealous patriarch Shen-hsiu in fact recommended Hui-neng to the imperial court where he, himself, was already held in high renown. This is like much of the argument around Fluxus. It seems that the protagonists of one view or another, the adherents of one kind of work or another, those who need to establish a monetary value for one body of objects or another, seem to feel the need to do so by discounting, discrediting or disenfranchising everyone else. That makes no sense in a laboratory, let alone a laboratory of ideas and social practice.

The other moment I consider took place a few years ago, when Marcel Duchamp declared that the true artist of the future would go underground. To the degree that Fluxus is a body of ideas and practices, we are visible and we remain so. To the degree that Fluxus is or may be an art form, it may well have gone underground already. If this is true, who can possibly say that Fluxus is or isn't dead? We don't know 'whodunit', we don't know who does it and we certainly don't know who may do it in the future.

PART I
THREE HISTORIES

SIMON ANDERSON: FLUXUS, FLUXION, FLUXSHOE: THE 1970s

The 1970s saw Fluxus in flux, and this state, fluxion, is evident across the surprising range of Fluxus activity from 1970 to 1982. It is impossible to follow every thread of Fluxus through this period; the scattering of documented exhibitions, performances and discourses fail to give any indication of the actual spread of Fluxus ideas. However, a debate within and around Fluxus as to its actual constituency continued throughout the decade, in the form of drunken debates and letters to periodicals; in the blossoming field of Correspondence Art; and in the organisation of catalogues, collections and exhibition tours.

Several changing versions of Fluxus survived. One of these was an increasingly conventional art movement, circumscribed by major retrospective shows and documented in official publications. Another was an international network of comrades – including some from the ‘original’ Fluxus tour – connected by ideology, friendship, and shared working practices. These laid-back activists often prepared to travel anywhere to perform, read, play, or simply connect with like minds. They generated a set of hilarious and libertarian ideas which were passed from hand to mouth – or from mailbox to mailbox – across the provinces of the coca-colonised world, mostly on a level that generated no more objective evidence than a fading mimeographed flyer, saved for posterity by accident rather than design.

The decade opened with the first great monument of Fluxus history, the exhibition and catalogue ‘Happening & Fluxus’.¹ At this time happenings were an international and formally recognisable phenomena. The exhibition was accompanied by a graphically utilitarian series of catalogues whose rudimentary use of chronology and alphabet posited a Fluxus firmly in the realm of advanced art activity, linking it explicitly with a documentable happenings movement. Unfortunately, the association created by the title also implied stylistic parity. The fact that some artists were upset by this identification illustrates some of the issues that have continued to dog Fluxus: who has the right to define it, and on what bases should those definitions be made?²

The collector Dr Hans Sohm and his co-organiser, Harald Szeemann, mounted an important and impressive exhibition. Beset by difficulties and personal antagonisms – although to what extent these were apparent to visitors is no longer clear – the show generated a document that has become a landmark in the history of Fluxus. In addition to an annotated chronology of actions and events from 1959 to 1970 (taking up more than half the book), the catalogue of the exhibition included a general bibliography covering the same span and an inclusive alphabetical list of artists or artist groups from Andersen to Zaj, with details of published work, photographs and bibliographies for each.

At the close of the decade came a similar, if rather more deliberately selective, series of emanations. The year 1981 saw the impressive public launch of the Silverman Collection.³ In celebration of Fluxus' official twentieth birthday, there were also three exhibitions, a festival and a symposium held in Wiesbaden.⁴ The catalogues generated by this flurry of historic activity both attempted chronologies and alphabetical lists, but again, reflected different views of Fluxus. The Wiesbaden birthday, riven with contradictions, argument and celebration, stood in sharp contrast to the Silverman's Fluxus, which passed exclusively through the 'pure process' of the great organiser, George Maciunas.⁵

The Silverman Collection was opened to the public in an exhibition held at the Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, from 20 September to 1 November 1981. The show highlighted published objects from Gilbert and Lila Silverman's considerable accumulation of Fluxus ephemera. Organised around the central principle that the presence of George Maciunas is the most appropriate measure of Fluxus-ness, it presented a picture of Fluxus that some artists have repudiated. Tomas Schmit did so in his contribution to the catalogue that accompanied the Cranbrook show.⁶ Offering reproductions of enormous numbers of objects and graphic material, many the product of Maciunas' fascinating and fertile brain, it carries, without editorial comment, an enumerated catalogue of objects, boxes and documentary fragments generated by historic events, posters, postage stamps and games. The first of several such catalogues documenting their holdings, it continued the Silverman's enduring contribution to Fluxus scholarship.

The criterion that filters the Silverman collection, understandable though it is, created a Fluxus without the messy, uncategoryable, vague and shifting connections that often seem to characterise European Fluxus. Sharp differences, however, are not always easy to find, for much as the scene in Europe included a host of American visitors who put their individual stamp on interpretations of Fluxus, so Maciunas made Fluxus a vehicle for a variety of aesthetic, social, political and art-historical experiments as the decade progressed. The strict reading of Fluxus implicit in the Silverman Collection, whilst being evolutionary in some ways, and of necessity being museologically correct, cannot do justice to the kinds of American Fluxus activities that developed on the West Coast, outside New York, or even through Charlotte Moorman's New York Festivals of the Avant-Garde, which Maciunas deprecated almost obsessively, it seems. However, he continued to expand the Fluxus canon almost up to his death, including such media pranks as *Twelve Big Names*, of April 1975; the development of the Fluxlabyrinth, and the continuing tradition of New Year reunions – a tradition disparaged by Tomas Schmit as 'jokey parties with coloured drinks and manipulated food'.⁷

Perhaps Maciunas would also have cavilled at the twentieth anniversary in Wiesbaden, which offered an ironic celebration of Fluxus' advance toward Art History. Spread throughout the town, occupying not only the museum where Fluxus had begun, but a local *Kunstverein* and another commercial gallery, Harlekin Art, whose owner, Michael Berger, was one of the sponsors of the occasion. The exhibitions travelled to Kassel and closed in Berlin's *daadgalerie*, after a series of new and historic performances and practices. This was a prescient mixture of Fluxuses; not quite the Fluxus later to be known through catalogue essays, centred on objects, multiples and endless texts; nor yet the heroic Fluxus that had generated so much frenzy two decades before; but a shifting coalition of artists united by

their past and surrounded by a network of supporters: new friends, collectors, the occasional dealer, and, increasingly, embryonic Fluxus historians. Fluxion was evident in the rancour that existed at times between artists, as well as in aspects of the exhibitions and celebrations.

During the weekend of opening events, Fluxus was represented by such stylistic variations as Geoffrey Hendricks' meditative ritual installation, an aggressive electronic opera by Wolf Vostell, and Giuseppe Chiari's gestural music. In addition, there were concerts of early Fluxus works, sometimes performed by the composers; a reinterpretation, by the artist, of Ben Patterson's *Lick*; and opportunities to play fluxping-pong and other games in the museum. Alongside the *Fluxlabyrinth* was its apparent antithesis: the tie that Paik used to begin the first ever *Zen for Head*, preserved as a reliquary; and in a piano-concert scene that surely opposed Maciunas' idea of Fluxus, Fred Rzewski's hands were filmed in close-up, for German TV.

The monochrome catalogue that accompanied the exhibitions echoes the graphic severity and apparent neutrality first adopted by 'Happening & Fluxus'. Once again, documentary evidence of past Fluxus events was shown alongside a wide variety of contemporary work, ranging from astrological charts by Ludwig Gosewitz to Yoshimasa Wada's instrumental installations. Although leavened by Filliou and William's anarchic cataloguing system, the texts included were serious and written with an eye to history. The *infra mince* element within Fluxus is evident in the illustrated chronologies and itemised personal narratives that supplement the essays: these included a wide variety of voices, from Henning Christiansen to Henry Flynt, and notable were Jackson Mac Low's account of the genesis of *An Anthology* and Emmett Williams' reportage. The catalogue makes no claims, however, to complete historical coverage and is organised around individual artists rather than publisher or medium.

A similar alphabetical and individual-oriented approach had been used some years earlier by Harry Ruhe, in his thorough and wide-ranging index, *Fluxus: The Most Radical and Experimental Art Movement of the Sixties*.⁸ This ring-bound document resulted from his earlier exhibition of Fluxus at Gallery A in Amsterdam, in 1976. The ruggedly stylish book provides an expanded and expandable reading of Fluxus; the editor quoted Maciunas' blacklist in his introduction, but offered fair justification of his inclusions. Ruhe's Fluxus was fluid enough to contain tenuous historic connections such as Marcel Alocco and Tamás Szentjohy along with more traditionally contentious inclusions such as Joseph Beuys. Obscure entries, such as Bob Grimes and Bob Lens or George Landow and Dan Lauffer, form an informative exploration of Fluxus ideas, appropriately opening with Maurizio Nannucci's 150 questions on the subject.

Also ring-bound, and intended to expand, though smaller in size and scope, *Fluxus International & Cie* likewise added to the Fluxus stable, but took pains to distinguish new associates such as John Armleder, Patrick Lucchini and other members of the Ecart Performance Group.⁹ Featuring texts and event scores by Fluxus artists and an essay by Charles Dreyfus, the catalogue is an early effort to analyse Fluxus historically, stylistically and philosophically. It is organised using a complex classification system, illustrating different versions of Fluxus. Composed of history, music, words and posters, and including charts, manifestos, artists' statements, a chronology of events from 1951 to 1964, and a section devoted to Correspondence Art, it was a fertile breeding ground for Fluxus ideas.

Beside the institutional sanctions offered by these efforts – a first retrospective, a double-digit anniversary, and the public launch of a private collection – Fluxus effectively disappeared during the 1970s. Those events that were reviewed in international journals tended to be regarded as ‘Flux-funny reincarnated revival reminders of Fluxus’ contribution to the “sixties”.¹⁰ After Maciunas’ death in 1978, such efforts as Jan Van der Marck’s ‘George Maciunas Memorial Collection’ at Dartmouth College Museum & Galleries served to reinforce either the perception that Fluxus finished at some point during the 1960s, or that with the passing of Maciunas, the Fluxure ceased.

The increasingly official and academic historicification of Fluxus visible in these shows, however, also ignores any number of sympathetic attempts to proselytise the idea, or extend the network. Occurring mostly at a less ‘heroic’ level than early developments, and subsequently lost in the authentic-object-oriented machinations of museum history, these examples of ‘applied flux’ offer salutary lessons in the power of that combination of humour, intermedia and imagination which fuelled Fluxus.

‘Fluxshoe’ was the second Fluxus exhibition to occur in England, a little-known, but fascinating example of how Fluxus was understood in that country at that time. It offers an exemplary opportunity to witness Fluxus as it survived the 1970s. It can be regarded almost as a laboratory study – a sample of Fluxus culture growing, mutating, and being exposed to the various viruses of a particular time, place and set of personalities, each of whose understanding of the original combined to create a travelling circus of experiment and adventure.

The provincial, personal, almost extra-curricula nature of ‘Fluxshoe’ acts as another parallel with the general fate of Fluxus before its resurrection as art history. Just as ‘Fluxshoe’ avoided London and its sophisticated art establishment, so a greater part of the documented Fluxus activity that occurred in the 1970s took place in secondary sites of culture, powered by one or two hardcore missionaries. Places like Liège, Milan or Seattle hosted Fluxus events or exhibitions in the second half of the decade, none of which accurately reflected the heroic Fluxus of the 1960s, although each was blessed with the presence of a founding Fluxist. Apart from New York’s annual reunions, or the occasional get-together, and aside from René Block’s outpost in Berlin – and again, temporarily, in New York – Fluxus ‘flourished in semi-obscurity’,¹¹ beyond the limits of the art world.

‘Fluxshoe’ began in the small university city of Exeter, conceived by Fluxus artist Ken Friedman and Mike Weaver, a young academic who had met Maciunas in the early 1960s through his interest in concrete poetry. ‘Fluxshoe’ was originally to be a modest exercise, consisting mainly of photocopies and publications, but as it happened, with the additions and changes that organiser David Mayor allowed, it became a lesson in the living development of art, of the idea of Fluxus. ‘Fluxshoe’ does not equal Fluxus; but if Fluxus had originally developed through a socially shared idea, then ‘Fluxshoe’ promoted the idea enthusiastically, very effectively, and with an antipathy to organising principles that amounted to anarchy. Chance, opportunity, proximity, personality and willingness-to-help were the final arbiters of entry, acceptance and continuing involvement – though not necessarily in that order. By mixing contemporary ideas with historic work, and by allowing artists from many different backgrounds to perform whatever they felt most appropriate, ‘Fluxshoe’, like the Correspondence Art network that helped fuel it, was itself continuing the Fluxus tradition.

‘Fluxshoe’ – the name stems from an inspired typing error – was one of numerous seeds

sown and nurtured by Ken Friedman,¹² but grew into an international festival of live, graphic and published art works, with dozens of participants, hundreds of correspondents, and thousands of spectators. Moving to the operational base of Beau Geste Press – a low-tech co-operative art-publishing venture run by a commune headed by Martha and Felipe Ehrenberg, David Mayor, and others – the tour was basically sponsored by government and regional grants, and, although very different, each show was centred upon the same portable and flexible core of Fluxus material: mailed stuff from Friedman and his infinite correspondents, a number of Fluxboxes sent by Maciunas, and a large amount of printed matter given or loaned by artists, Dr Hans Sohm and other interested individuals.¹³

'Fluxshoe' exemplifies the general style of Fluxus in the 1970s in many ways. It was determinedly international and was constituted around a few 'stars' from the early days of Fluxus. The still relatively young survivors from the first few years travelled widely, singly or in pairs, and spread their individual – and often different – interpretations of Fluxus at each venue. The first bona fide Fluxus artist to appear during 'Fluxshoe' was Eric Andersen, who had been associated with Fluxus since 1963, when, with other members of the 'gruppe fra eksperimentalmalerskolen', he had given a Fluxus concert in Copenhagen. In 1972 Andersen's notable contribution to the leisure activities of the seaside town of Falmouth was *Random Audience* – a participation piece in which he offered members of the public 'FREE DRINK, FREE MUSIC, FREE SEX', handing out a printed notice to this effect, with the date and time of the offering handwritten on it. If anyone was brave enough to show up at the allotted time and place, they found a notice announcing a change of time and venue. If they were then persistent enough to catch up with him, they would find him armed with a bottle of whisky, a portable cassette player, a vibrator and a rubber vagina.

Fellows Danes Knud Pedersen and Per Kirkeby – both Fluxus artists by virtue of early association or published work – also appeared during the tour. Kirkeby performed an understated Event: a jigsaw puzzle that he failed to complete, despite the help of visitors. Pedersen organised, among other participatory actions, a two-balled soccer match – an entertaining and educative intervention into normal expectations that asked a whole series of questions about what constitutes art, a game, competition, a goal, and so on. This tightly organised and fascinating public spectacle was re-created by Pedersen some twenty years later as part of an exhibition, at the Tate Gallery, London.

Fluxus' early and vital links with Japan were well represented both in 'Fluxshoe' and Mayor's other concern, Beau Geste Press. Takako Saito infused both with her delicate aesthetic, and Mayor's base outside Exeter was visited by the Taj Mahal Travellers – or at least a contingent from that group – consisting of Takehisa Kosugi, Yukio Tsuchiya, Ryo and Hiroko Koike. Kosugi himself had been a cofounder, with Mieko Shiomi, of the experimental music group Group Ongaku, in 1961, and had worked in the early to mid-1960s with a whole range of internationally renowned artists and musicians from Toru Takemitsu to Robert Rauschenberg, including Ichihyanagi, Cage, Paik and Vostell. His involvement with Fluxus began early, and he had a collection of events published, which were included in the first Fluxus Yearbox.

Ay-O was originally to have re-created the New York Fluxshop for 'Fluxshoe', but instead built a site-specific environment, threading string through the banisters of the stairs at Oxford's Museum of Modern Art. He also performed events so subtle that most people

ignored them. It would seem that Ay-O's understanding of Fluxus meant that he felt justified in simply talking to people, perhaps performing very simple and delicate Events, such as simply sitting and burning small pyres built of matches, watched by only one or two people. This rejection of formality – which pervaded 'Fluxshoe' to its core – was also typical of a variety of other Fluxus artists throughout the decade, from Robert Filliou's poetical *Research at the Stedelijk* (1972), which he used as a framework for extended, international and poetic conversations about the state of the world, to Maciunas' reliance on games and sports as a model for cheap, public performance art.

The international roster of artists who attended 'Fluxshoe' included Canadians Paul Woodrow and Clive Robertson, plus assorted European performers of varying stature, including Hungarian stamp artist Endre Tot. It also provided performance opportunities for local talent, from novices such as Paul Brown to seasoned artists such as Stuart Brisley.

An American then residing in England, Carolee Schneemann was perhaps the most experienced performance artist to appear in 'Fluxshoe'. She had become famous for her sensuous and visceral happening *Meat Joy*, but she had been a radical filmmaker and performance-painter since the end of the 1950s.¹⁴ Despite the fact that Schneemann had taken part in the Berlin 'Festum Fluxorum' of 1970, and despite her consistent and persisting sympathies with Fluxus ideas, Maciunas advised Mayor that Schneemann was '... doing very neo-baroque style happenings which are exact opposite of flux-haiku style events ...', thereby revisiting disagreements about the constitution of Fluxus.¹⁵

Giancarlo Politi's *Flash Art*, sometime supporter of Fluxus artists collectively and individually, stirred this debate by accusing 'Fluxshoe' of expansion to the point of confusion. A notice in this publication characterised 'Fluxshoe' as a mere approximation of Maciunas' philosophy, and that the show included artists who 'never had any rapport with fluxus, neither ideological nor esthetic'.¹⁶ This generated a spirited but friendly response from Ken Friedman, who, in his capacity as 'director of fluxus west' (the lower case was *de rigueur* at the time) repudiated the notice and quoted his own *Omaha Flow Systems* as proof that Fluxus was capable of divergence, difference, inclusion and expansion. He argued that Fluxus sought to break boundaries, and that these included the rules of traditional art history as well as bourgeois social practice.

Other artists felt differently. Davi Det Hompson believed that Fluxus as such was over, and that shows such as 'Happening & Fluxus', 'Fluxshoe' and his own 'International Cyclopedia of Plans and Occurrences' (1973) were proof of that. Admitting to being very much a second-generation Fluxus artist, he was interested in taking the ideas that Fluxus had developed and continuing them. One of the important ideas of Fluxus, for Hompson, was that personalities were less important than things and ideas, although he distinguished between Fluxus and conceptual art on the grounds that Fluxus was not simply ideas alone. Hompson performed a number of times in Blackburn: in the Museum, where he made *Whispered Writings*, a series of circular, self-descriptive texts; and on the street, where he lectured, using gestures, a blackboard and a gag over his mouth, so that he was incomprehensible – variations on Fluxus which were very much in keeping with other events seen on the tour.

On the other hand, Alice Hutchins, whose 'Jewelry Fluxkits', were produced well into the 1970s, thought Fluxus was still extant, but as a sideline, something given for enjoyment – for

no money was ever made. Much more than for Hompson, Fluxus was centred on objects: she had never performed, or written an event until offered the opportunity in Oxford, where she wrote and performed a site-specific event, *102 Stroke Piece*, about an ancient college bell. She outrang 'Great Tom' and handed round Bell's whisky. It was simple, friendly and unpretentious; it suited the intimate atmosphere of the evening, and won David Mayor's approval.

'Fluxshoe' was a site of negotiation between classic Fluxus and the new directions taken by individual artists. Thus, underfunded reconstructions by the schoolboy duo Blitzinformation, of early Fluxus events by Brecht, Schmit, Maciunas, and so on, were complemented with their own Flux-inspired research into average measurements around Hastings and a stylistic concept called 'fot'. The Taj Mahal Travellers performed interpretations of early Events, as well as creating their own piece, a 24-hour-long jam session at Beau Geste's farmhouse headquarters.

For some purposes, the events most characteristic of Fluxus' early days – those labelled by Maciunas as 'mono-structural neo-haiku' – are at an advantage over other, more complex performances, in that they have a particular portability. The nature of the classic Fluxus event – simple, funny, even elegant – is such that it creates its own atmosphere as part of the performance. The structure of events, based on the characteristic of being repeatable, yet unique, each time they are performed, also distinguishes them from other live actions – a knowingly in-built asset. It is one of the reasons that early Fluxus is so suited to historic exhibitions, because its intimate atmosphere can be conjured up by anyone willing to spend time, and a little effort, on their own version of Events: much of the potential therein comes from the score, the particular notation used to describe many Fluxus pieces.

Nevertheless, not all Fluxus pieces work in this fashion. Many straddle the borderline between subtle, intimate event and complex action, and it is presumably this mixture that David Mayor wished to promote in 'Fluxshoe'. The valuable openness and multivalence of the Fluxus Event, with instructions as flexible as they are specific, meant that, in 'Fluxshoe', Fluxus was allowed to live on and change form, evolving to suit the various personalities and circumstances of each situation. Occasionally the deviation was so radical that Fluxus may have been misrepresented: anyone who saw Ian Breakwell in Nottingham or Su Braden at Oxford has a different idea of Fluxus to that of Dick Higgins or others among the early Fluxus core. This is not necessarily a bad thing, particularly as few of that generation, or the subsequent generations of Young Fluxus propagated by Maciunas, Friedman, Block, *et al*, have ceased to elaborate personal styles of their own – each in varying proximity to their idea of flux. Giuseppe Chiari, when asked if he was still a Fluxus artist responded: 'How could I say no, from the moment that Fluxus is only a name. Fluxus is the most indefinite thing I know ...'¹⁷

The changing and varied interpretations were disseminated by two interconnected spheres of activity closely affiliated with Fluxus – Correspondence Art and small-press publishing both of which were inextricably associated with 'Fluxshoe'. The rise in popularity of Artists' books, an increasing use of the international postal system as medium, and the widespread diffusion of Fluxus ideas outside the gallery system occurred simultaneously but not coincidentally. Fluxus was formed around publishing, and sympathetic ideas were promoted from the beginning by efforts such as Vostell's *dé-collage* and Something Else Press. In the

1970s fluxion was encouraged by dozens of small presses across the world, which published a wide range of Fluxus-inspired work, or work by artists who still felt an affinity with Fluxus. From Albrecht d's heavily political *FlugFLUXblattzeitung* to Pawel Petasz's nomadic mail-art magazine *Commonpress*, variations of Fluxus ideas permeated the art world at a deliberately extra-institutional level. Only rarely did more commercial periodicals spread Fluxus ideas or widen the debate. *Flash Art* publisher Giancarlo Politi was a regular promoter of Fluxus ideas cooperating with Maciunas on publishing projects; commissioning Ben Vautier and other sympathetic individuals to contribute artists' pages; compiling a special edition on Fluxus, *Happenings and Performance* in 1978. This issue contained thoughtful commentaries by Higgins, Friedman and Charles Dreyfus, as well as pieces by Takako Saito, Alison Knowles and George Brecht, and texts by Flynt, Vostell and others. Earlier in the decade, Britain's *Art & Artists* had given an issue over to Fluxus, thereby priming a small audience for 'Fluxshoe'.¹⁸ But it was usually the more specialised, even esoteric, magazines which showed support and extended the interpretation of Fluxus. From *Art Press* and *Source*, to the obscure *Spanner*, *Canal* or *AQ*, the audience was gradually extended and new connections formed.

Fluxus artists, with their accessibility, ad hoc attitudes, and ever-present humour were a very visible part of the small-press scene, and also quickly became legendary in Correspondence Art circles, which were rapidly developing across the world. Fluxus is consistently quoted as the chief influence on the manners, mores and morals of Correspondence Art, which admitted neither jury nor fee. Fluxus was initially constituted through letters, between people like Paik, Brecht or Watts; and several Fluxus artists, such as Higgins, de Ridder and even Maciunas, continued to operate in correspondence networks well into the 1970s. Associated artists as diverse as Anna Banana and Robin Crozier were connected to each other and to Fluxus by post. 'Fluxshoe' was quickly swamped with mail after the indefatigable Correspondence artist Klaus Groh successfully challenged David Mayor's definition of Fluxus. Groh's International Artists' Co-operation organisation was in many ways similar to the Beau Geste Press, but its international commitment meant a higher profile on the Correspondence Art scene, with the intermittent publication of information sheets, which acted as databases for mail-art activity. Such centres created a network of artists who shared the 'attitude towards art' identified as Fluxus.¹⁹ They formed a community based on an international web, generating its own energy, which was a source of many alternatives from the conventional gallery system. Helped by Ken Friedman's compilation of a huge address list – one of a number which were circulated virtually freely, through which sympathetic individuals, institutions, publishers and collectives were all potentially connected. 'Fluxshoe' became one way of extending this network to the British provinces: admittance to the exhibition could, if so desired, mean more than simple visual access to published texts, or even sight of performances – themselves rare opportunities in 1972. With the almost guaranteed assistance of David Mayor, it would have been eminently possible for any casually inquisitive visitor to gain postal access to everyone concerned, to discuss live work with the artists present, to interact with the exhibition on a positive level – to enter the network, in short.

In the network, fluxion accelerated to the point where '[W]hatever one can say about Fluxus will have usually been true at one point or another ...'²⁰ It was a matter of 'innovated

perception', according to Mieko Shiomi,²¹ or, as George Brecht aphorised the problem, 'if the flux fits, wear it'.²²

What Fluxus was, who could or could not be considered Fluxus, where Fluxus had gone, all depended on whom one asked, and where they stood in relation to the polarising events of the 1960s. With the advent of another decade, however, a new generation of acolytes, artists, historians and fellow-travellers began to emerge, and in the 1980s, the territory was extended into a broader, more academic debate, shifting from personality and politics to identity and ideology.

NOTES

- 1 Hanns Sohm and Harald Szeeman, eds, *Happenings and Fluxus*, Cologne, Kunstverein 1970.
- 2 Tomas Schmit, for example, wrote: 'every time I hear the words happening and fluxus together in the same breath, I shudder as if I saw a carp fuck a duck ...' in 'Free Fluxus Now', Special Issue of *Art and Artists*, vol 7, no. 7, issue 79 (October 1973).
- 3 The exhibition was accompanied by an elegant and exhaustive catalogue: Jon Hendricks, ed, *Fluxus Etc.: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection*, Bloomfield Hills MI, Cranbrook Academy of Art, 1981.
- 4 René Block and Anne Marie Freybourg, eds, *Wiesbaden Fluxus 1962–1982: Eine kleine Geschichte von Fluxus in drei Teilen*, Wiesbaden and Berlin, 1983.
- 5 Per Kirkeby, in Hendricks, ed, *Fluxus Etc.*, p 29.
- 6 Tomas Schmit, in Hendricks, ed, *Fluxus Etc.*
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Harry Ruhe, *Fluxus: The Most Radical and Experimental Art Movement of the Sixties*, Amsterdam, 'A', 1979.
- 9 *Fluxus International & Cie.*, Nice, 1979.
- 10 Review of performances at the Kitchen, New York, *Flash Art*, nos. 90–91 (July 1979), p 49.
- 11 Peter Frank, 'Fluxus Fallout', *Visible Language*, 26 (1992).
- 12 Friedman was responsible for Fluxus activity, exhibitions and archives or resource centres across America and Europe, including 'Fluxshoe', which is now held in the archives of the Tate Gallery, London, and Iowa University, among many others.
- 13 The infrastructure of the exhibition was designed by Martha Ehrenberg, and consisted of a series of cardboard screens which, in addition to reflecting the ad hoc nature of some Fluxus emanations, could be modulated to fit the many different kinds of space occupied by 'Fluxshoe'.
- 14 First performed at the 'Festival de la Libre Expression', Paris, 1964.
- 15 David Mayor, ed, *Fluxshoe*, Cullompton, 1972.
- 16 *Flash Art*, no. 38. Friedman's response was published in *Flash Art*, no. 40; David Mayor's response was not, I believe, published at all.
- 17 Giuseppe Chiari, interview with Helena Kontova, *Flash Art*, nos. 84–5 (October–November 1978).
- 18 *Free Fluxus Now*.
- 19 Ben Vautier's definition of Fluxus in *Flash Art*, nos. 84–5.
- 20 Friedman, *Flash Art*, nos. 84–5.
- 21 Mieko [Chieko] Shiomi, in Hendricks, ed, *Fluxus Etc.*
- 22 Brecht, *Flash Art*, nos. 84–5.