

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 II
THEORIES OF FLUXUS

CRAIG SAPER: FLUXUS AS A LABORATORY

Much has been said about the fact that Fluxus was not intended as an art movement. Participants and historians alike have argued that Fluxus sought an alternative to the commercial gallery system, along with its faith in masterpieces. In a letter to Tomas Schmit, George Maciunas argued that the goal of Fluxus was social, not aesthetic, and that it 'could have temporarily the pedagogical function of teaching people the needlessness of art.'¹ Historians point out that these efforts to transgress the boundaries of art eventually fail. The art world eventually recuperates from once-radical transgressions, and dealers and collectors soon learn to buy and sell even the most transitory objects and performances. The talk of resistance and recuperation, however, obscures the idea of many associated with Fluxus that their work was never intended to function merely as part of the art world. There was something more, and that something more is what we miss when one considers Fluxus merely from the perspective of art history.

Much attention is now directed to the monetary and historical value of Fluxus works as works of art. This involves the customary and sometimes useful interpretation of Fluxus as an art movement. Another interpretation of Fluxus interests those concerned with the impact of electronic webs and Internet on future forms of thought, pedagogy and communication. Fluxus offered a research methodology for and what I call 'networked ideas' and demonstrated the value of those ideas in various experiments. That history has received less attention.

Fluxus often parodied the kind of art that posits a masterpiece appreciated by a spectator. By contrast, Fluxus works highlighted socio-poetic interaction and encouraged epistemological experimentation among participant-users. Confronted with a Fluxus work, a participant-user would first notice how these works played against the notion that art should follow certain (modernist) rules of form.²

For example, one work by Ken Friedman suggests socio-poetic and anti-formalist qualities. The work consists entirely of the following text: 'The distance from this sentence to your eye is my sculpture.' This work pokes fun at the normal criteria for sculpture. It also suggests a particularly important interaction with the spectator. It goes beyond a mere critical appreciation of art in its striving toward the status of masterpiece to suggest a social network built on playing through or *interacting* among people, activities and objects. In this sense, Fluxus functions as more than a way to organise information: it is also a way to organise social networks, networks of people learning. These networks are based on an interactive model of art rather than on the traditional model of art as a one-way communication from sender to receiver, the notion of the artist offering inspired genius

intended to dazzle spectators. This can be done in many ways. In an issue of *Editions Et*, for example, Eric Andersen's contribution consisted of three cards with instructions on one side on how to mail the card and these instructions on the other side: 'don't do anything to this very nice card.'³ Typical of Fluxus work, these instructions put the participant in a humorous double-bind and point to the social interaction involved in the work.

The social project of the Fluxus laboratory involves disseminating knowledge. This is the social situation of learning. Simone Forti suggests that in the context of this social – that is, anti-aesthetic project – Fluxus work has no intrinsic value. The value of the work resides in the ideas it implies to the reader, the spectator and to other participants. Forti goes on to explain that, 'when the work has passed out of their [the producer's] possession, it is the responsibility of the new owner to restore it or possibly even to remake it. The idea of the work is part of the work here, and the idea has been transferred along with the ownership of the object that embodies it.'⁴ Forti explains that the audience performs the piece in the process of transferring the ideas. The work is 'interactive'.⁵ The term interactive suggests the shift away from the notion of passing some unadulterated information from the mind of an author, an artist, or a teacher directly to the eyes and ears of a spectator. Instead, participants interact with ideas, playing through possibilities rather than deciding on the meaning of a work once and for all. Dick Higgins categorises Fluxus under the phrase Exemplative Art, which he defines as 'art as illustration or example or embodiment of idea, especially abstract conception or principle'.⁶

Higgins' description of Fluxus 'art-games' can function as a coda for this particular type of work. He writes that in art-games, one 'gives the rules without the exact details', and instead offers a 'range of possibilities'.⁷ Higgins goes on to list a series of crucial elements in art-games including social implications and a community of participants more conscious of other participants than in most forms of drama or of performance art, what we might call team spirit. And there is an element of fascination about when the rules will take effect. Again, the authors leave the details of the actual event open. In an essay titled, 'Getting into Events', Ken Friedman discusses ways to perform Fluxus event scores:

You can perform a Fluxus event in virtuoso or bravura style, and you can perform it jamming each piece into the minimal time possible as Ben Vautier does; or, go for a slow, meditative rhythm as Alison Knowles does; or, strike a balance as you'll see in the concerts organised by Dick Higgins or Larry Miller. Pieces can have a powerful torque, energised and dramatic, as in the work of Milan Knizak, the earthly folkloric touch seen in Bengt af Klintberg's pieces; or, the atmospheric radiance, spiritual and dazzling, that is seen in Beuys' work.⁸

Significantly, these poetic scores do not depend on the voice of a reader. Instead a participant-user 'reads' the poetic event by creating a situation. Fluxus event scores and performance instructions have a didactic structural grammar; they seem to be parodies of scientific experiments simply because they reduce theatricality to a set of instructions. Using the trappings of a science experiment suggests a way to further displace the interpretation of Fluxus as an art movement. Building and interacting with their work, rather than passively appreciating it as a finished product, changes interpretation into a generative project. The start of that sort of interpretation begins with a new concept for the endeavour previously known as Fluxus: the Fluxus laboratory.

I first became interested in the concept of a Fluxus laboratory after discovering a number of references to the pedagogical and experimental imperatives central to much Fluxus work. It is well known that two of the key roots of Fluxus included the experimental pedagogy at Black Mountain College (during the summer sessions of 1948 and, especially, 1952)⁹ and the New School for Social Research (from John Cage's seminar). Black Mountain College focused on a redefinition of the arts by stressing a holistic and experimental approach to art rather than a technical or formal approach. In earlier years, students had approached wider questions not typical of art schools; for example, they helped Theodore Reich build his first 'orgone boxes'. The 1952 summer session added to, and changed, this experimental approach to art. Cage, fast becoming a major influence on the experimental arts, brought to the summer session his concerns with the *I Ching*, 'chance', etc. His *Theatre Piece I*, which assigned a specific time bracket within which each performer had to perform a specific action, became the prototype of Happenings.

Buckminster Fuller summarised the experimental nature of these influential summer sessions: 'failure is a part of experimentation, you succeed when you stop failing'.¹⁰ Although Black Mountain College eventually closed its doors, the teachers present during those two summer sessions (including Cage, Fuller, MC Richards and Merce Cunningham) conspired to create a travelling school: 'the finishing school was going to be a caravan, and we would travel from city to city, and it would be posted outside of the city that the finishing school was coming ... we would finish anything ... we would really break down the conventional way of approaching school.'¹¹

Many other experimental schools have been associated with Fluxus over the years. For example, Dick Higgins and Al Hansen organised the New York Audio-Visual Group as an outgrowth of the Cage classes at the New School; Jeff Berner and Ken Friedman were involved in the San Francisco State College Experimental College and Friedman was later involved in the College of Mendocino. Of the nearly two-hundred experimental colleges and Free Universities started in the mid-1960s, however, few survive. These attempts at allowing for a laboratory-like atmosphere in the study of the arts and humanities were superseded by more mundane institutional concerns, and those experimental colleges that developed in the context of larger universities transmitted their lessons and were essentially absorbed into the bodies of the larger institutions that supported them.

Even so, a number of educational institutions took a deliberately Fluxist tone. California Institute of the Arts – Cal Arts – began as a particularly prominent forum for Fluxus experiments. Fluxus artists played a major role in the founding faculty, and Fluxus people flourished there for a short time. An issue of *Aspen*, the 'Cal Arts Box', documents some of this activity. The faculty included Allan Kaprow, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Peter Van Ripper, Emmett Williams and Nam June Paik. Although the laboratory atmosphere at Cal Arts quickly faded, participants like Paik went on to have an influence on many other curriculums and temporary educational situations.

George Maciunas also planned the organisation of a school as well. In a prospectus for the New Marlborough Centre for the Arts, he described a think-tank that would devote itself to:

- 1) study, research, experimentation, and development of various advanced ideas and forms in art, history of art, design and documentation; 2) teaching small groups of apprentices in subjects not found in colleges; 3) production and marketing of various

products, objects and events developed at the centre; and, 4) organisation of events and performances by residents and visitors of the centre.¹²

It was an effort to purge the art world of authors and creative geniuses. Like many of the contributions to assembling magazines, the works became models for alternative forms of social organisation. Indeed, as Estera Milman explains, 'Fluxus work (objects, paperworks, publications, festivals, and performances) and the movement's social structures became congruent and interchangeable.'¹³ George Maciunas' manifesto for Fluxus explains this socio-poetic practice:

Fluxus FLUX ART: non art – amusement forgoes distinction between art and non-art forgoes artist's indispensability, exclusiveness, individuality, ambition, forgoes all pretension towards a significance, variety, inspiration, skill, complexity, profundity, greatness, institutional and commodity value. It strives for nonstructural, non-theatrical, nonbaroque, impersonal qualities of a simple, natural event, an object, a game, a puzzle, or a gag. It is a fusion of Spike Jones, gags, games, Vaudeville, Cage and Duchamp.¹⁴

The Fluxus project combined a sometimes parodic emulation of the Bauhaus model, with the production of 'impersonal' conceptual games and puzzles, concrete poetry, along with an interest in situations, experimental culture, and an attack on 'commodity value' in art. These concerns and the mixing of these tendencies appeared in a number of Fluxus assemblings and periodicals. While Vaudeville, Cage and Duchamp have secured prominent places in scholarship on art and mass culture, Spike Jones still remains a somewhat marginal figure. Yet, his *Musical Depreciation Revue* offers a whole array of useful jokes, gags, puns, spoonerisms and so on.

My corporate name for these works, the Fluxus laboratory, alludes to the function of laboratories in large manufacturing concerns: they attempt to develop new products through endless rounds of experiments, failures and sharing of successes among the participants. It also subverts the notion of limited liability among corporate shareholders, to suggest that possibilities were unlimited and the participants, unlike shareholders, had to take unlimited chances. It even hints at the way some of the participants used a corporate umbrella, a single name for many diverse artists and divergent art works, to help them initiate a unique and specific type of working with ideas. Although Maciunas' rhetoric suggests the anonymous IBM structure in which all participants became anonymous contributors to the single corporate identity, Fluxus was in reality closer to the Bell Labs model in which participants were credited with particular innovations and works within the larger Fluxus project. Even Maciunas, who tried to produce his contributions to many works anonymously, now regularly receives careful credit for each and every aspect of his contribution. Many of the works were produced by a number of participants, and this aspect is still relatively rare in the art world. The individual contributions were combined into something much more interesting than any of the parts alone.

This way of working placed creativity and innovation in the hands of a linked or networked community rather than locating it in the mind of a sole genius in the form of a single artist's inspiration. Of course, this has political ramifications, and it may or may not have succeeded in negating or avoiding the art world's recuperative powers. The context of a concept such as the Fluxus laboratory introduced a method of research that makes increasing sense to those involved in transforming pedagogy and the creative process from

individual inspiration to a virtual community networked through with hyper-media links and relays.

Considering these works as part of a Fluxus laboratory has both an air of humour and a suggestion of translating these works toward a structure of influence. Fluxus sought to purge the art world of its problems; that purge was perhaps an unwitting discovery of a way of working that depended on something like a viral influence among participants. Things in the air were passed around and developed. The Fluxus laboratory is impossible to trace to a single origin. The group previously known as Fluxus can now function as a generalised systems theory that experiments with the structure of influence and socio-poetic links.

In an issue of *Aspen*, George Maciunas highlights this interest in new forms of systems theory.¹⁵ The subtitle of the issue is 'Art Information and Science Information Share the Same World and Language'. A number of artists who were partially influenced by Fluxus participated in this project. Robert Morris' *Los Angeles Project* suggests the shared fascination with art, technology, and information systems especially in these networks of cultural work looking for new maps for contemporary experience. He proposes an ecological experiment in which he will bury air-conditioners and heaters and measure effects. Presumably you could visit the site as a national park. Morris explains that what 'miniature golf did for the game, this park will do for the national park system'. Edward Ruscha's *Parking Lot* includes an aerial photo of thirty-four parking slots in a lot, and similarly in Richard Serra's *Lead Shot Runs* the artist dropped lead shot from an aeroplane and measured the size of the holes. Robert Smithson also has a work about landscape structures entitled *Strata*. These absurdist projects function as conceptual scores. They also highlight the interest in experimental procedures to change the way people understand the urban and post-urban contemporary landscape.

The Fluxus magazine, *Dé-coll/age*, compiled by Wolf Vostell, began publishing in the early 1960s, subtitled 'Bulletin der Fluxus und happening Avantgarde'. The July 1967 issue of *Dé-coll/age*, bound in a cover of the *Figaro* newspaper printed on card-stock, includes contributions from the concrete poet Dom Sylvester Houédard, the composer and editor of the assembling *Revue Ou*, Henry Chopin, Ben Vautier, Daniel Spoerri and Diter Rot, the well-known printer, designer and artist who collaborated with Gomringer. There is a police-department letter to Vostell explaining their actions in arresting Charlotte Moorman for undressing during a performance. The issue includes a number of documentations of happenings by Allen Kaprow and Al Hansen. Articles include Dick Higgins' 1966 essay 'Intermedia', a reprinted essay on the all-at-once world by Marshall McLuhan and a series of works by Gustav Metzger on the 'Destruction in Art Symposium'. In the reprinted text of a leaflet, Metzger, who later initiated the 1974 'Art Strike', announces the symposium and explains 'auto-destructive art'. A series of letters signed by Metzger follow this leaflet about the planning for events in Germany and London. A series of photos documents a symposium in which people sit inside or under the eviscerated bloody bodies of large animals. There is also a negative review from the London *Guardian* of 9 September 1966, which reads in part:

The destroyers-in-art include writers who obliterate words, burn books, and cut odd words out of dictionaries and paste them up haywire. They tear books apart and shuffle the pages so the narrative now reads surprisingly (which is art). Words are displaced and lines transposed in a new and meaningful way. Some newspapers, it seems,

especially in their hurried first editions, have long possessed a natural aptitude for the new and the meaningful. That's art. Or is it? More often it is error. Just as destruction-in-art is mainly perverse, ugly, and anti-social.

The designer has photocopied a series of programmes by Ad Reinhardt written vertically over this newspaper article. They give instructions about programme painting. In addition to these works, there are documentations of papers presented by George Maciunas on Fluxus, Jean Tinguely's statement, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Milan Knizak, Yoko Ono and Vostell. The point of including the entire conference and the negative review suggests that the artists were less concerned about their work receiving adulation than in constantly highlighting the social interactions and even negative responses to the situations they presented.

Erving Goffman explains that the primary experience of a participant confronted with, for example, a Fluxus event is to become '*interactionally disorganised*' (emphasis added).¹⁶ Although Goffman is specifically describing the experience of attending an Happening, his description also captures some of the elements of Fluxus Events. These events were not Happenings, but the audience reactions were quite similar. Reading interaction in terms of how these events (dis)organise and disseminate knowledge can help explain precisely the effects produced by the Fluxus laboratory. Goffman explains that when the audience encounters an event like the one reviewed above, watching becomes doing; it would be a mistake to argue that a listening, watching and still audience is, therefore, passive. In fact, the opposite may be the case. The breaking of the normal frame of reference – seeing an art opening or a theatrical performance – can actually induce involvement. Goffman explains, however, that the initial reaction to the event will probably be negative:

If the whole frame can be shaken, rendered problematic, then this, too can ensure that prior involvements – and prior distances – can be broken up and that, whatever else happens, a dramatic change can occur in what it is that is being experienced . . . negative experiences . . .¹⁷

Among the various ways to shake the frame or reflexively examine the frame and its dissolution, Goffman mentions brackets, direct address to the audience, the 'fool' character in a play, and, in terms of Fluxus, the spectacle-game. The spectacle-game addresses the whole matter of the show under presentation, and, in doing so, sets in motion a merger of performers and spectators – in some sense, the spectators (and their expectations) are put on stage.¹⁸

One way these events play the spectacle-game is to announce a performance in a conventional way. When the audience arrives, some of the expected activities occur, but the traditional performance does not take place. In this situation, Goffman explains that an audience is made 'conscious of its own restrictive conventions' in thinking of a performance only in a traditional sense. These events create a situation where the audience has to interact with the frame of reference. As Goffman explains, in a discussion of Happenings, 'actual performances of this kind often do succeed, of course, in driving the audience up and down various keys in their effort to arrive at a viable interpretation of what is being done to them.'¹⁹

George Maciunas had experimented with machines that use arbitrary constraints to change the frame of reference. For example, his *Smile Box*, makes you smile. In a work he

planned before he died, he charted the outline for a Fluxus laboratory experiment. His *Learning Machine* (1969) functions as the transitional work between Fluxus and the Fluxus laboratory. It would have contained charts, diagrams and atlases; it would have re-categorised fields of knowledge. Maciunas only completed a two-dimensional diagram and tabulation; he intended this diagram as the first surface for a three-dimensional storage and retrieval system. He later built a few models of these machines, and one can consider all of the Flux Kits as cognates for the *Learning Machine*. Even these incomplete diagrams and models suggest a plan for using electronic media for a memory theatre dedicated to invention rather than mere descriptions. Indeed, one could argue that the machine hints at a Fluxus memory or intelligence (post-cognitive, involutory and interactive).

Maciunas' machine lists all knowledge in a classification system. For the most part, the grid is not exceptional. It closely resembles traditional taxonomies of knowledge, and it suggests the classifications found in memory theatres. These were systems of classification and organisation used in remembering large amounts of information. Some even attempted to categorise all known information. One of the devices used to create a memory theatre was the conceit of an imagined building. Giulio Camillo's memory theatres, for example, stuffed all his knowledge into an imaginary Roman amphitheatre. This encyclopaedia, thesaurus and poetry machine became 'a work of manic idiosyncrasy, resembling a private museum like those of [Duc Jean Floressas] des Esseintes, [Joris-Karl] Huysman's paragon of decadence.'²⁰

The tradition of these memory devices goes back to Classical times when Simonides used the memory of a tragic event as the basis for his device. When he was asked to identify the bodies in a collapsed building that he had left shortly before the collapse, he remembered where each person stood. Later, he realised that he would never forget the way the room appeared before the tragedy. As a result, he learned to store particular types of information with each figure. Later, he would imagine walking around the space while each of his former friends held these bits of information. In this way, he could store much more information than he could remember without the aid of this system. The *Learning Machine* resembles this effort to describe all knowledge.²¹ The use of a memory theatre shifts the process of knowing and remembering from an organic cognition to a discursive practice – a learning machine. This particular machine was not Maciunas' only foray into memory systems. He had also, for example, diagrammed the history of world architecture.

Maciunas' system contains a few anomalies. For example, he includes a heading called Uology. This apparent neologism suggests a science of 'u'. Of course, there is no traditional science of Uology, but the possibility of such a science suggests the play between the particular and the general discussed above. Another suggestive neologism is flexography, which may hint at a flexible writing practice – a way to write in the Fluxacademy. In terms of how the *Machine* organises information, it lists the term 'food' under 'light'; it lists 'light' under 'chemical'; and 'chemical' under 'engineering'. This suggestive organisation makes one rethink the way we normally classify the notion of food. In another organisational aberration, it lists 'textual criticism' under 'philology'; 'philology' under 'cybernetics'; and 'cybernetics' under 'biological sciences' (which appears as two separate headings). It also lists 'cybernetics' both under 'applied math' and under 'physiology'. In terms of organisational suggestiveness, the art and design section is the most interesting because it appears to function as a *mise-en-abyme* for the rest of the memory grid. Everything in the rest of the classification grid is at least suggested in

the art and design section. In contrast to most classifications of art and design, however, sculpture has no listing, and painting and drawing have only minor listings. In most traditional taxonomies those three listings would be the dominant areas.

Maciunas' classification is different in many ways. It does not quite match a mere description of art and design. One possibility suggested by the classification is how a category can shift from one heading to another; for example, it lists 'cinema' under 'photography', but contains a special listing for 'expanded cinema'. What Maciunas does in this work, and in his chart on the history of art movements, is to provoke new possibilities through the unusual classification of information. The startlingly wide scope of the art and design classification includes wars, orgies, prisons, clouds, fountains, shells, insects, food, cybernetics ... Including all or any of these headings in discussions of art and design makes the system a provocation as much as a description. How, for example, can one make insects into art or how are they already aesthetic or part of design?

Other than these few anomalies, the *Learning Machine* does not, at first, appear to diverge from traditional taxonomies of knowledge. On closer examination, however, there is one key difference. The information is not structured in epochal categories – that is, the *Learning Machine* does not structure the categories under headings according to historical chronologies, movements, or periods, nor does it organise information according to authors, artists, inventors, leaders or other individual systems. Much of the knowledge taught in universities, and especially what is taught in secondary schools, depends on these kinds of marker for legitimacy. We rarely find departments or pedagogical methods based on the premises of a taxonomy that organises information in an alternative to history and 'great men'. In contrast, Maciunas' *Learning Machine* reworks the frames of reference for organising knowledge; it suggests alternatives to disseminating that knowledge; and it can function as a generative device to produce knowledge structures through interaction within and among our frames of reference. These interactions (for example, asking why orgies and wars are included as art and design) suggest more than a semiotic reading of culture as designed. It suggests that culture and taxonomies are open to art and design. It suggests that in an open exchange of knowledge, even nonsense may play a crucial role in learning. And it suggests that those who risk nothing, those who give no part of the self to the learning experience will never understand either Uology or fluxography. Fluxus wanted to make conceptual cognitive maps more mobile. One way to do that was by inventing kits and boxes that directly addressed these conceptual issues, and by inventing tools like the *Learning Machine*.

Another important transition to Fluxus laboratory experiments are the Fluxus film works. Fluxfilms set out to reinvent the wheel. That is, Fluxus invented a protocinema within a mass-produced industrial mechanism in order to ask what would have happened if the history of film had taken a different route. Like Maciunas' graphic design, the first Fluxus films focused on the moment when modern industrial production had not yet institutionalised popular culture. Dick Higgins describes Maciunas' choice of type style – 'extremely ornamental type faces, such as Romantique' – as 'deliberately archaic'.²² Fluxus went back to the protocinematic experiments of Edward Muybridge and the cinema's first decade for models of film-making. In doing so, Fluxus film-makers desedimented the perceptual and cultural experiences now buried by Hollywood's mode of film-making.

Tom Gunning explains that in the way these early films restructure both traditional representations of space and 'the relation of spectacle to the audience we may find a link to avant-garde practice'.²³ The same preoccupations of the early cinema and protocinema appear in the Fluxus films. Many Fluxfilms are experiments in time and movement without any narrative progression. These Muybridge-type experiments in time-motion studies – stoppages in Duchamp's well-known terminology²⁴ – suggest the same preoccupation with travel, movement and movement-and-travel as change that we have seen in other Fluxus works. We can see the Muybridge-like isolations of particular movements (and the effort to capture the progression of time) in the Fluxfilm of *Eye Blink*, in Higgins' close-up film of a mouth chewing, Ono's film of moving buttocks, or Paik's clear film accumulating dust.

In terms of the early cinema's use of short reels, Fluxus films often were film loops about two feet long. Maciunas explored the possibility of a different history of cinema with his rope in sprocketless projector. Craig Adcock explains that Duchamp understood 'that time could affect artistic outcomes'. For example, the description of the ready-mades as '*instantané*' or 'snapshots' suggests the effort to capture a moment of public taste from the flow of time. The object implies the passage of time. In terms of the Fluxus films, Duchamp's *3 stoppages étalon* suggests more than the freezing of a moment in which string twists freely in the air to be glued down as it lands. It is also a homophonic reference to Muybridge's serial photographs of a horse galloping: one can translate *étalon* as both standard and stallion. Yoko Ono's film of buttocks moving does more than follow Duchamp's efforts to 'reduce, reduce, reduce' the image to a single gag and Muybridge's effort to isolate serially a particular movement. Her film also suggests another reference to the horse/stallion homophonic chain: her film is of an 'ass'.

The Fluxus laboratory teaches through the projection of a 'what if' situation. In repeating protocinematic experiments *in the contemporary world*, Fluxus artists do not make a nostalgic return to a phenomenological project of isolating animal and human movements. Instead, they used the frame of reference of those earlier cinematic experiments to disrupt both the perverse phenomenology of the Muybridge studies and the contemporary narrative cinema. After all, there is a difference between Ono's film of moving buttocks and Muybridge's protocinematic investigations of a horse galloping. Both focus on the isolation of a single movement, but the content of the films makes the Fluxus work a corrosive joke and the Muybridge experiment merely a document about an attempt to capture the truth of movement. Fluxus projected the possibility of a cinema that would use 'the relation of spectacle to the audience' as a vehicle for invention rather than mere description. With this possible use of media in mind, a concept such as the Fluxus laboratory does not merely use machines as processors of information. It uses them as provocations to learning – a learning machine.

For the Fluxamusement centre, John Lennon and Yoko Ono designed or planned a series of 'Dispensing Machines'. These included machines to dispense water (without a cup), sand and glue, an endless stream of water, slugs (for money), and a crying machine that was to dispense tears. Those machines led the way to the most important contribution to a Fluxacademy, a learning machine. Yoko Ono's *Chewing Gum Machine Piece* (1961), which has word cards in a gum machine, hints at how a learning machine might work. We get a more developed version of this possibility in George Brecht's *Universal Machine* (1976), a box with many diagrams and pictures printed on the bottom inner surface of the box. The diagrams resemble nineteenth-century drawings from engineering and design manuals,

physiology and medical manuals, and drawings of animal life. A number of objects (a golf tee, marbles, plastic numbers, coiled string, and so on) are loose inside the box. The directions explain how to use the machine:

for a novel: shake the box, open, chapter one. close. shake the box. open. chapter two. close. shake the box ... for poems: substitute line one for chapter one, etc. For plays: Actor one. For dance: movement one. For music: sound one. For event score: event one ... For biography: divide life into units, shake for each unit makes biography substitute countries and make histories; substitute religions and make spiritual narratives; substitute families and make genealogies.... 5. write question, put it in box, open, conjunction of paper edges, words on paper, holes in paper with the objects and the images of floor of box answers question.... 9. Are you sad? Shake box. obtain joke. 10. resolution of marital problems. 11. consider adding or subtracting objects; extending or contraction images on floor of box. 12. For generating new languages, logics, mathematics.... 15. Inventing. Consider any two elements in an existent relationship. Replace either or both elements and/or the relationship using the Universal machine. Consider repeating.... 18. Travel Itineraries.

The *Universal Machine* sets up a situation where the participant uses a series of variable combinations to write novels, plays and biographies, solve problems, tell jokes, make further plans, or even change the parameters of the machine. The fifteenth possibility, 'Inventing', explains a process that resembles the basic methods described above in terms of the Fluxacademy. When two elements have an 'existent relationship', then they both appear in the same frame of reference. If one replaces one or both elements using an arbitrary constraint, then the disrupted frame produces both the nonsense associated with learning through decontextualising information and the interactions/intersections associated with a relay in-transformation (or involution). *The Universal Machine* (a name reminiscent of the early name for the computer) suggests a way to combine information not as part of a descriptive system (as a cognitive work), but as part of generative interactions (as a postcognitive work).

Among the other Fluxus publications, *The New York Correspondence School Weekly Breeder* (1970) had strong connections to Correspondence Art. The Breeder's mailing lists started years before the *Breeder* itself, elaborated from older Fluxus lists, later to serve as the beginnings of the mail-art networks. Ken Friedman explains:

the Fluxus publishing ethos came directly into the realm of contemporary mail art was in *Amazing Facts Magazine* ... a crudely assembled publication created at Fluxus West [Friedman's base of operations] in 1968. We gathered our mail, put it into a folio with a cover, and sent it out. The idea lasted one issue, but established a notion of gathering as the editorial principle of a magazine.²⁵

In 1970 Michael Morris and Gary Lee Nova began Image Bank as a 'commercial images' request list for mail artists and montage artists. It began using its extensive address list, and by 1971 merged many lists, including the huge list of 1400 names, addresses and phone numbers that Ken Friedman began compiling in 1966. The list became the artist's directory for the magazine *FILE* when Friedman visited Canada in 1972. Still later, *Flash Art* based its *Art Diary* on Friedman's original list and *Who's Who in American Art* and *Who's Who in America* were both expanded through selections from Friedman's lists. *FILE's* parody cover of *LIFE* was produced by the General Idea Group. The lists distributed free helped assembling editors to distribute international mail art through networks.

Friedman notes that the *Breeder* was 'both a joke and way to establish regular, weekly contact with other artists'. The work of Fluxus laboratory begins with a corrosive joke in order to experiment with social networks. The most influential experiment in social networks was the Correspondance School that the *Breeder* mentions in its full title. Ray Johnson, considered by many to be the central figure of early mail art, founded the New York Correspondance School in the early 1960s. This became the source of overlapping variant networks, such as Glen Lewis' Corres Sponge Dance School of Vancouver, started around 1970. Ed Plunkett, who actually coined the name, explains that 'it was a reference to the "New York School," the leading group of mostly abstract painters that flourished then.'²⁶

The type of work prevalent in the mail-art network always had a parodic connection to the vanguard of abstract painting. May Wilson, who also participated in Johnson's School, explains that, 'Correspondence is spelled *correspondance* . . . the truth for Ray Johnson is not correspondence to actuality (verisimilitude), but is correspondence of part to part (pregnant similarities that dance).'²⁷ Johnson's Correspondence Art has an implicit epistemology: a fan's paranoid logic. He used the corrosive joke about the art world and about the culture of fans for artists and stars as a mechanism to explore as well as initiate, and participate in, artists' networks. One chapter in my larger book-length work on assemblings and networks examines in detail the logic and systems involved in Ray Johnson's work.²⁸ His Correspondence Art and 'on-sendings' were aligned with Fluxus, and his influence on mail art throughout the world spread many of the Fluxus concerns to a huge pool of participants.

One aspect of these socio-poetic works is that they take a bad situation and turn it into an opportunity for experimentation. In the mid-1960s George Maciunas found himself trying to continue to publish kits and boxes as well as contribute to Fluxus events in an extremely difficult living situation. Maciunas' work in setting up artists' cooperatives in SoHo functions as one of his most important works and an example of socio-poetic work. The first Fluxhouse Cooperative was in the building at 80 Wooster Street that later became the home of Jonas Mekas' *Film-Maker's Cinematheque*. Maciunas purchased the empty loft building in 1967. Hollis Melton explains that the city fought the formation of the Cinematheque as well as the cooperative. In reaction, Mekas 'called a meeting of artists from the neighborhood' that led to the formation of the SoHo Artists Association. They sponsored street festivals attracting thousands of tourists. The city, realising the potential gain, eased its position, and in 1970 allowed artists to live in loft buildings. The term 'artists' loft' soon became a natural phrase to describe a place where artists lived. Maciunas organised fifteen co-ops between 1966 and 1975. He used the logic of art to solve the problem of a living situation.

The Fluxus work *Visa TouRiste (Passport to the State of Flux)* (1966/77) was originally proposed by Ken Friedman in the mid-1960s as a conceptual work that allowed entrance to a state of mind. Later Maciunas adapted this work to enable the bearer to 'pass freely and without hindrance' into a Fluxfest. The state of mind for which Friedman was supplying the passport was as delimited as the Fluxfest – you visited these states and left. One could argue that this in some sense proved that the group still elevated art activity above everyday life. Another reading merely suggests that the activities functioned as *tests* or *experiments* rather than as an entrance into a 'new life style' or a social(ist) utopia; that is, experiments are always contingent, changing and in flux rather than continuous, stable, settled or decided. The passport suggests an art in the sense of *ars erotica*, *ars theoretica*, *ars politica*: strategies

that resemble the Situationists' call for experimental culture. Fluxus does not privilege art; it sets aside a space for Fluxamusement such as a Fluxacademy – a transient space literally and figuratively. It suggests an altered social relation, a different way to proceed. The passport gives the bearer the right of entry to 'a country whose geography was a figment of the communal imagination, whose citizenry was transient'.²⁹

Robert Filliou's *Permanent Creation (Instead of Art)* (undated) explains to the participant how to create his or her own territory. And, his *Territory 2 of the General Republic*, located in a farmhouse outside Nice, dedicated itself to pedagogical research into genius and 'stupidology'. In this way, Fluxus connects the transient approach to invention that resembles the phenomenon of mail-art tourism. In fact, Filliou's use of the phrase 'eternal network' to describe the inability of any one individual to know everything in a single field was the term later adopted by the mail-art community to describe their socio-poetic project. They did not see the connection between the end of the coverage model of scholarship and learning, but they saw in Filliou's phrase the possibility of forming their own virtual territory. It is the geopolitical, and doubly geo-graphic, metaphor that attracted the mail artists. To form this territory, their work now represented a form of transient life that was, if not tourism, then at least a sending-out of probes. Again, Fluxus provided keys to how to make art from this particular transience:

Encyclopedia of transient aspects of life ... jammed chock-a-block with mute containers of all shapes and sizes, little wooden and plastic boxes ... corrugated cardboard, mailing tubes, scraps of paper, plastic indecencies from the local joke or tourist shop, miniaturised Pop gew gaws of prepossessing verisimilitude – cucumbers, fried eggs – ball bearing purlieus that tax manual skill, articulated plastic and wooden take-apart puzzles and games, meaningless gadgets displaced from household and hobbyist needs, the tiny paraphernalia of the home workshop and playroom – all these and more were subject to the ordering premise of the Fluxus board game cum encyclopedia, from lotto to the rebus to the child's mineral set.³⁰

Larry Miller's interview with Maciunas appeared in a special issue of *aV TRE* dedicated, posthumously, to Maciunas.³¹ According to George Maciunas' system the 'a' before the title '*V TRE*' indicates that the project was initiated by Nam June Paik. This was a special issue of *V TRE*, the Fluxus tabloid publication, produced after Maciunas had died. The first four issues of *V TRE* include the prefix of 'cc' indicating that George Brecht was the primary artist behind this endeavour. Later 'official' issues dropped this prefix, and Brecht appeared as co-editor; George Maciunas was the driving force of these issues of *V TRE*.

Maciunas explains that Fluxus is 'more like a way of doing things'. He goes on to elaborate what this entails by repeating that 'Fluxus is gaglike ... a good inventive gag. That's what we're doing.' In order for the gag-like element to work, objects and events must have a very simple 'monomorphic' structure. In fact, when one examines the issue of *aV TRE* and the earlier issues of *ccV TRE*, they have a simple and immediate visual joke on newspapers. Not only the headlines and the news stories, but the organisation of the editorial board, and the (dis)connection between the captions and the photographic illustrations.

Fluxus offers a way to reduce concepts and ideas to simple gaglike events or objects. When taken up by the audience (when they 'get it'), these deceptively small 'gifts' can lead to many transformations. The reduction to a monomorphic structure obviously resembles

Concrete Poetry's reduction of language to a structural conceptual game. The Potlatch-like festivity with gag-gift giving that Fluxus produces resembles the spirit of the Letterists and Situationists.³² In a number of the event announcements and manifestos, Fluxus claims to include 'concretism' and 'letterism'. Even though the two variants of visual poetry disagreed, the merger passed with little critical comment. Assemblings mixed and merged without regard to the previous contexts; in doing so, the participants invented a hybrid tendency, a mutation, the Fluxus laboratory.

John Lennon demonstrates this tendency in the supposed facsimile of his diary for 1968. Because of his status as a star, one rushes to read it carefully for any new information, especially since Yoko Ono has now refused to release his diaries to the public. This parodic use of 'everyday life' appears in *The Lennon Diary* in which all the entries read: 'Got up, went to work, came home, watched telly, went to bed.' The entries get increasingly scrawled, and the diary ends with one last 'memorandum' that says, 'Remember to buy Diary 1969'. In some ways, then, the repetition of the same everyday events plays a joke on the fan's narcissistic identification with a star. One cannot avoid the urge, and the joke depends on that uncomfortable recognition and deflation of the pay-off. The other reading of the diary is that it parodies the boredom of everyday life in a Situationist send-up of the promise of change in the 'society of the spectacle'. Like much of the work in assemblings, this is at first just a joke of recognition: you simply get the joke and move on. Its other meanings seep in more slowly. Fluxus laboratory work teaches how humour – in this case the joke of repetition and recognition – can serve as a memory device. You remember the joke as it corrosively changes the situations that we encounter every day; it writes graffiti on habituated conceptions. It functions as a joke time-bomb.

Dick Higgins explains that Fluxus work fits into a postcognitive model. Higgins, in his book on intermedia, describes the post-cognitive alternative to the cognitive model of education. He defines cognition as a the 'process of becoming known by perception, reasoning or intuition', and it also concerns 'the expressionistic, self-revealing, and uncovering of reality (transcend personal view) in order to interpret world in new way.'³³

Henry Flynt, who coined the phrase 'concept art', in 1961 (although not with the same meaning as the later usage 'conceptual art') began using the term 'postcognitive' to describe the impact of conceptual work. The cognitive model attempts to interpret and describe reality, and, at least in its current incarnation, attempts to postulate the abstract rules of supposedly pure unadulterated thought. Social interaction is conceived in terms of an algorithmic thought-code machine. Cognitive explanations describe supposed origins of moves in a thought-game rather than generating novel moves. The postcognitive works set out to play the game rather than determine who made the rules or where they come from. In short, the postcognitive creates novel realities.

In fact, if we attempt to find a logic in Fluxus activities, they resemble *Zen koans* more than a reflection or description of social or artistic realities. These activities-koans have a peculiar structure that allows for both a simplicity and an alchemical disruption or 'breaking' of the frame of reference. Greg Ulmer describes this structure and gives an example from a quote from Joseph Beuys:

Another decisive Fluxus element was the 'lightness and mobility of the material.' The Fluxus artists were fascinated by the opening up of the simplest materials to the total

contents of the world. ... [Beuys]: 'Everything from the simplest tearing of a piece of a paper to the total changeover of human society could be illustrated.'³⁴

Robert Pincus-Witten explains how this simplicity works on the audience. He writes that 'Fluxus makes ideas reachable through gags. You can get it quickly'. He also suggests one obvious outcome for the effort to make the ideas quickly accessible and available: 'By designation, a Fluxus work must be cheap and mass-producible.'³⁵ What is amazing about these works, and their importance for the Fluxus laboratory, is how they function to make the most particular (even autobiographical elements) into widely disseminated ideas. Beuys' transformation of his autobiographical art into first a Fluxus programme and, from then, into a grassroots participational political movement, and then into the Green Party, offers the most obvious example of this transformation.³⁶ Maciunas explains that Fluxus is 'more like a way of doing things'. He goes on to elaborate what this way entails by repeating that, 'Fluxus is gaglike ... a good inventive gag. That's what we're doing.'³⁷ In order for the gaglike element to work, objects and events must have a very simple 'monomorphic' structure. Fluxus offers a way to reduce concepts and ideas to simple gaglike events or objects. When taken-up by the audience (when they 'get it'), these *sapates*, or deceptively small gifts can lead to many transformations like bits and pieces of Beuys' autobiography later provoking the foundation of the Green Party. Ken Friedman explains how this quality appears in Fluxus events:

There is an important distinction that George Maciunas drew between the sensibility of the happening and the sensibility of the event. He referred to happenings as 'neo-Baroque' theatre, a phrase that summoned up the elaborate flourishes of European Baroque architecture and music, as opposed to the concentrated, austere focus on Japanese poetry and its architecture which was reflected in the event form that Maciunas termed 'neo-Haiku theatre.' Yoko Ono characterised this work as having an 'event bent,' while I created a term that caught both the meditation and the humour in Fluxus pieces with the term 'Zen vaudeville.'³⁸

As an example of this Zen vaudeville approach, a special Fluxus issue of *Art and Artists* closes with one final Fluxus event score: 'When you are through doing every other event in this magazine, take the paper to the roof, crumple it, throw it into the air, and see if it becomes a cloud.'³⁹ A social sculpture does not merely comment on the production of art, but also on the production of specific types of social networks. As a forum for this extension, one can consider Fluxus laboratory boxes, kits, and assemblings as the transition into, and kitlike instructions for, the quintessential works of the twenty-first century: networked-ideas. With Fluxus laboratory, the production and distribution systems become poems themselves. One cannot 'read' these socio-poetic works the way one reads a phonetic poem, but one can read these works as poetry on our current cultural situations.

NOTES

- 1 Robert Pincus-Witten, 'Introduction', in Jon Hendricks, ed, *Fluxus Codex*, Detroit, MI, Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection in association with Harry N Abrams, New York, 1988, p 37.
- 2 Dick Higgins, 'Intermedia', in Higgins, *A Dialectics of Centuries: Towards a Theory of*

- the New Arts*, New York, Printed Editions, 1978, pp 12–17. Compare Stephen Foster and Hans Breder, *Intermedia*, Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1979.
- 3 Eric Andersen, [untitled], *Editions Et*, 1.
 - 4 Simone Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, Halifax, NS, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974, p 45.
 - 5 *Ibid.*, p 58.
 - 6 Dick Higgins, 'Five Traditions of Art History: An Essay' [poster]. See also Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of Art*, New York, Praeger Publications, 1973. Lippard offers descriptions of various conceptual and Fluxus works during the years 1966–71. For a broader context than *Six Years*, see also Adrian Henri, *Total Art: Environments, Happenings, and Performance*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1974.
 - 7 Higgins, *A Dialectics of Centuries*, pp 20–21. Compare Richard Schechner, 'Happenings', *Tulane Drama Review*, vol 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965), where he argues persuasively that happenings resemble scientific laboratory experiments.
 - 8 Ken Friedman, 'Getting into Events', *Fluxus Performance Workbook*, special issue, *El Diarida*, 1990, p 5.
 - 9 Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, Cambridge, MA, MIT, 1987. Ray Johnson, founder of the NY Correspondence School, attended Black Mountain College as a student that summer and is often associated with Fluxus.
 - 10 Buckminster Fuller, as quoted in Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, p 156.
 - 11 Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, p 159.
 - 12 George Maciunas, 'Prospectus for New Marlborough Centre for the Arts', [xerox; unpublished].
 - 13 Estera Milman, *Fluxus and Friends: Selections from the Alternative Traditions in the Contemporary Arts Collection*, Iowa City, University of Iowa, Museum of Art, 1988, p 7. Compare Victor Musgrave, 'The Unknown Art Movement', *Free Fluxus Now* Special Issue of *Art and Artists*, vol 7, no. 79 (Oct 1972).
 - 14 Milman, *Fluxus and Friends*, p 5, citing George Maciunas' Fluxus Manifesto.
 - 15 *Aspen*, vol 1, no. 8 (Fall/Winter 1968), designed by George Maciunas and edited by Dan Graham (New York: Roaring Fork Press, 1968) [loose pamphlets and pages, boxed].
 - 16 Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Expertise*, Boston, MA, Northeastern University Press, 1986), p 375.
 - 17 *Ibid.*, p 382.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, p 399.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, p 408.
 - 20 Michael North, *The Final Sculpture: Public Monuments and Modern Poets*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985, p 136.
 - 21 Compare George Maciunas, *Expanded Arts Diagram* [a poster/diagram charting out the genealogy of Fluxus in terms of many other art movements].
 - 22 Dick Higgins, 'Fluxus: Theory and Reception' in *Fluxus Research*, Special Issue of *Lund Art Press*, vol 2, no. 2 (1991), p 37.
 - 23 Tom Gunning, 'An Unseen Energy Swallows the Space: The Space in Early Film and Its Relation to American Avant-Garde Film', in *Film before Griffith*, in John L Fell, ed, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983, p 356.
 - 24 Craig Adcock, 'Marcel Duchamp's "Instantanés": Photography and the Event Structure of the Ready-mades', in Stephen Foster, ed, 'Event' *Arts and Art Events*, Ann Arbor, MI, UMI Research Press, 1988, pp 239–66.
 - 25 Ken Friedman, as quoted in Stephen Perkins, ed, *Assembling Magazines*, Iowa City, Subspace Gallery, 1996, p 15. According to Peter Frank, the periodical *Avalanche* shared the high production values favoured by Maciunas. See also Ken Friedman, 'The Early Days of Mail Art', in Chuck Welch, ed, *Eternal Network*, Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 1995, pp 2–16.

- 26 Ed Plunkett, as quoted in Robert Filliou, 'Research on the Eternal Network', *FILE* (1973), p 7. The same quote appears in John Held, 'Networking: The Origins of Terminology', in *Eternal Networks*, p 17.
- 27 William Wilson, 'NY Correspondence School', *Art and Artists* (April 1966), p 54. The same quote appears in Held, 'Networking', pp 17–24.
- 28 *Intimate Bureaucracies: The Socio-Poetics of Assemblings and Artists' Networks* (pending).
- 29 Milman, 5.
- 30 Pincus-Witten, 'Introduction,' in *Fluxus Codex*, ed. Jon Hendricks (New York, 1988), p 16.
- 31 *aV TRE*, no. 11 (March 24, 1979). For a complete discussion of this newspaper, see Simon Anderson, 'Fluxus Publicus,' in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, published on the occasion of the exhibition 'In the Spirit of Fluxus', organised by Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 1993), pp 38–61.
- 32 See for comparison Simon Anderson, 'Fluxus Publicus,' in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, published on the occasion of the exhibition 'In the Spirit of Fluxus,' organised by Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 1993), pp 38–61, 52. Anderson also appreciates Situationist work as a forerunner to Fluxus.
- 33 Dick Higgins, 'Intermedia,' in *Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1984, pp 20-21; and Dick Higgins, *A Dialectics of Centuries: Towards a Theory of the New Arts*, New York: Something Else Press, 1978, p 7.
- 34 Greg Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Joseph Beuys to Jacques Derrida*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984, p 240; in part quoting from Gotz Adriani, Winifred Konnetz, and Karin Thomas, *Joseph Beuys: Life and Works*, trans. Patricia Lech, Woodbury, New York: Barrons, 1979, p 79.
- 35 Pincus-Witten, 25.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 37 Larry Miller, interview with Maciunas in a special posthumous issue of *aV TRE* no. 11, March 24, 1979, dedicated to Maciunas.
- 38 Ken Friedman, 'Getting into Events,' unnumbered electronic pages.
- 39 Geoff Hendricks, 'Message for readers of this issue received from Geoff Hendricks', *Art and Artists*, special issue on 'Free Fluxus Now' 7, no. 79 (Oct., 1972): 9.