Fluxus: The Collective that Might Have Been

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Abstract

While Fluxus can best be described as a laboratory, it is often labeled as a collective or an art movement. Neither designation is accurate. Both the movement and the collective presume some form of explicit or implicit programmatic goals, and the collective presumes an explicit governance structure. Fluxus had neither.

In the early 1960s, Fluxus took shape as a floating international community of artists, architects, composers, and designers who pursued what was then one of the world’s most radical and experimental programs of research and development in art and design. Including such figures as Nam June Paik, George Maciunas, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Yoko Ono, and George Brecht, Fluxus pioneered art forms, social practices, and new media.

The exact nature of Fluxus is as varied as its participants, and the descriptions applied to it reflect their divergent ideals and aspirations. For a time in the early 1960s, George Maciunas described Fluxus as a collective. As the organizer of the first key festivals and the primary designer and publisher of Fluxus multiple editions, Maciunas became the de facto chairman of Fluxus. He is also the central focus in the legendary Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, now housed at the Museum of Modern Art. The special attention now given to Maciunas has tended to privilege Maciunas’s view of Fluxus over equally valid competing views, and attention to his publications during the period in which he saw Fluxus as a collective privileges that view over Maciunas’s own later ideas.

In this chapter, a Fluxus artist from the 1960s will examine Fluxus – the historical Fluxus, the notion of the collective, and a vision of what Fluxus might have been.

The Birth of a Community

Fluxus is now the focus of more attention than it received when it was born in 1962, nearly half a century ago. When Dick Higgins and George Maciunas brought me into Fluxus in 1966, many of the people I met in the art world were mystified. “Fluxus is dead,” they’d say with the certainty of people who thought they knew everything about art. I was just a kid at
the time, so I didn’t know what they were talking about. That’s just as well.

While Fluxus was born in Wiesbaden four years before I arrived on the scene, the Fluxus community began in the 1950s. Starting in different places on different continents, meetings, friendships and relationships began to bring a community of people into contact with each other. These people came from America, Europe and Japan to form what would eventually become Fluxus.

George Maciunas met most of these people in the early 1960s after many already knew each other. Some had worked together closely. Maciunas, an energetic creator of projects and propositions, had tried to create an avant-garde art gallery named AG. The gallery was nearly bankrupt on the day it opened its doors. Next, he planned to publish a magazine. He conceived it as an encyclopedic venture to present the most advanced art, music, literature, film and design work being done anywhere in the world. He had an ambitious plan for national and regional editors, artist participants and colleagues with an elaborate structure.

Since George was better at plans than fundraising or leadership, few of his early plans worked. In 1962, he found himself in Germany where he conceived a series of festivals presenting the work of the same international avant-garde that he had planned to present in the magazine. The magazine was to have been called Fluxus, so the festival was called Fluxus.

Nine artists and composers came together in Wiesbaden to perform – Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Arthur Koepcke, George Maciunas, Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson, Wolf Vostell, Karl Erik Welin, and Emmett Williams. The German press liked the name of the festival and began referring to the Wiesbaden nine as “die Fluxus leute.” The name stuck. The group traveled to other cities in Europe to stage more festivals and concerts of their work. Other artists, composers and performers joined in at other stops and other festivals. Things began to roll.

Legends on top of legends surround Fluxus; some true and some half-true, some that could never have been true and some are so good that they ought to be. I realized early on that everyone in Fluxus had a different vision of what Fluxus was or ought to be, different stories explaining its origin, and differing accounts of what it meant.

Many misinterpretations of Fluxus contain an element of truth. George Maciunas coined the name Fluxus. He was not the founder of Fluxus, the community that came to use the name.
He tried to publish a magazine named Fluxus that never appeared, but he convened a festival where the name came into use. When Maciunas tried to establish a Fluxus Collective, he failed to do so, becoming instead a central and influential figure in the group that several artists and composers brought to life as the common founders of Fluxus. The origins of Fluxus extend back to the 1950s, before Maciunas came on the scene, and Fluxus survived his death.

Several founders played a key role in shaping Fluxus activities. This included several who weren’t at Wiesbaden, but whose work helped to precipitate the 1962 festival tours. These include George Brecht, Philip Corner, Jackson Mac Low, Yoko Ono, Robert Watts, La Monte Young, and several others who did not come to Wiesbaden played key roles.

Other artists working in experimental ways began to enter Fluxus through contact with members of a burgeoning community, including such people as Joseph Beuys, Henning Christiansen, Bengt af Klintberg, Willem de Ridder, and Ben Vautier. Others joined later, including people like Jeff Berner, Geoffrey Hendricks, Milan Knizak, and me.4

Fluxus was defined by meetings and engagements. Geoffrey Hendricks had been on the scene since the mid50s. Instead of joining Cage’s renowned class at the New School, he was busy with an MA in art history at Columbia, entering Fluxus in a later wave. Other New York figures from that era in New York became members of the classic Fluxus group, Philip Corner and Bici Forbes Hendricks among them. Some moved on, as Forbes did, while Phil and Geoff became key Fluxus participants for five decades. Others came along such as Davi det Hompson, Greg Sharits, and Paul Sharits from Indiana. Larry Miller worked with Robert Watts at Rutgers, and Jock Reynolds studied with him at University of California. Fluxus grew and changed.

In 1966, I had no idea of the severe differences of opinion among my Fluxus colleagues. Since Dick Higgins sent me to meet George Maciunas with words of praise for George, I didn’t know there had been a schism between Fluxus and Something Else Press. It seemed to me that they were two faces of the same phenomenon. Fluxus produced boxes and multiple artifacts, and it encouraged festivals. The Press produced books. Most people seemed to see them as two sides of the same coin. George might have found this idea problematic a year or so previous,5 but when I met him, George was not opposed to the Press6 and he never grumbled when I included Press materials in exhibitions and festivals. Today, most Something Else Press publications seem to be Fluxus projects in a more public format and under another name.
In this, as in other ways, the evolution of Fluxus shaped the meaning that it holds.

**Considering a Community**

One way to explore Fluxus is to consider its development as a community. Fluxus was a community before it had a name or found a shape. It began as communities do, when people migrate and meet.

Studying Fluxus through its demographics, population, and community offers a refreshing perspective on a phenomenon that has been notoriously difficult to describe.\(^7\)

Critics and historians often attempt to describe what Fluxus was not, and analysis that leads nowhere. What Fluxus is not resembles the emptiness at the center of a cup. It is important to the cup’s nature, but it does not describe what the cup does. The Fluxus community made Fluxus extraordinary. While Fluxus was a floating “festival of misfits,” that simple fact doesn’t explain the durability that Fluxus attained and it fails to explain what Fluxus achieved.

It is more useful to examine Fluxus by asking who became Fluxus and why they did so. The patterns are complex and subtle.

To explore Fluxus, it is valuable to examine a number of the ways in which Fluxus has been defined. Each of these definitions is partially accurate and somewhat inadequate.

Fluxus has been described using many terms. Aspects of each term denote aspects of the reality of Fluxus. Selecting from more comprehensive definitions in order to focus on the meanings that apply to Fluxus, a brief overview of terms is useful.\(^8\) These terms include group,\(^9\) forum,\(^10\) movement,\(^11\) school,\(^12\) collective,\(^13\) philosophy,\(^14\) cooperative,\(^15\) and more. In part – and only in part – it has been all these things, resonating to the frequencies implied in each of these terms while fulfilling none of them completely.

Selected aspects of these definitions afford the senses of these terms that shed light on Fluxus, and senses in which these terms can be considered appropriate. Even so, none of them describes properly what Fluxus is. This is so because Fluxus has – and always had – different meanings to the different individuals who created and populate the Fluxus community.

Fluxus grew as any community grows, through the actions and interaction of the people who developed it. Unlike many communities that formalize into towns or nation-states, churches
or universities, there was never a point at which the Fluxus community codified itself through a formal statement.

Churches and denominations – the “church” write large – begin as groups of people gathering for worship. Most churches become organized on the basis of charters or covenants signed by members of the congregation as the basis of on-going church life and governance. No similar process marks Fluxus.

The first universities began as loose communities of scholars. Some were rooted in towns, some attached to cathedral schools. Eventually, charters and by-laws codified the life of the university. Today, most colleges and universities are regulated by a governing document. Nothing like this happened in Fluxus.

Most political movements or art movements begin when like-minded individuals find one another and state their common ideology in a manifesto or constitution. This was not the case with Fluxus.

Understanding the fluid, loose nature of the Fluxus community and its identity requires recognizing that nearly everyone in and around Fluxus agrees on one thing: Fluxus will never have a single definition. This may be considered the first clause, and possibly the only clause, in the unwritten Fluxus charter.

The Myth of the Fluxus Collective
Despite discussions of a “collective” era or what French critic Charles Dreyfus once labeled the “euphoric” era in the evolution of Fluxus, there was never a time of ideological unity. The notion that a Fluxus manifesto was signed by several Fluxus artists is incorrect. It is based on ambiguous artifacts misinterpreted as documents. The supposed manifestoes were graphic artifacts created by George Maciunas with statements that might – under appropriate circumstances – be read as manifestoes. Some were even proposed as manifestoes, but no one signed them, not even George himself.

While several items presented lists of names on the same page as the statements, their meaning is open to question. None of the artists whose names appear in the lists signed the manifestoes. Every artist who ever discussed this issue with me was clear about this. Since George Maciunas seems never to have represented these artifacts as signed statements, their nature remains ambiguous. What is clear is that no original manifestoes exist bearing the names in signature form. None existed. The notion that any Fluxus artist
once agreed to these statements, later to change his or her mind, is based on the misguided assumption that the statement was signed in the first place. No evidence supports this assertion.

To the contrary, the extant correspondence between other artists and George Maciunas as well as correspondence among the artists themselves often stated explicit refusals to sign any proposed manifesto while opposing the notion of a common ideology.\(^{18}\) Many such letters can be read at Archiv Sohm in Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, at the Jean Brown Archive in the Getty Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, and in major collections of Fluxus correspondence.

The concept the movement and the concept of the collective presume explicit or implicit programmatic goals, and the collective presumes an explicit governance structure. Fluxus had neither.\(^{19}\)

**Definitions of Community**

The best short definition of Fluxus is an elegant little manifesto published by Dick Higgins in the form of a 1966 rubber stamp:

“Fluxus is not:
--- a moment in history, or
--- an art movement.

Fluxus is:
--- a way of doing things,
--- a tradition, and
--- a way of life and death.”

In these words, Higgins summarizes the time-bound, transformational, and essentially interactive development of Fluxus. Defined by patterns of action and interaction, Fluxus grew organically through a number of periods in time.

Fluxus lacked the ideological and artistic cohesion to be characterized as an art movement. Even so, the ways that people worked with each other, and the traditions they developed created enough cohesion to make the terms movement appropriate in other ways. Those ways became the reality of Fluxus. That reality gave Fluxus its living, durable qualities, qualities reflected in and developed through the lives of its members.
Those qualities are well summarized by the term community. As defined in Webster’s, the term illuminates several aspects of Fluxus:

community: 1 : a unified body of individuals: as a: STATE, COMMONWEALTH b: the people with common interests living in a particular area; broadly: the area itself <the problems of a large ~> c: an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (as species) in a common location d: a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society <a ~ of retired persons> e: a group linked by common policy f: a body of persons or nations having a common history, or common social, economic and political interests <the international ~> g: a body of persons of common and esp. professional interests scattered through a larger society <the academic ~> 2: society at large 3 a: joint ownership of participation <~ of goods> b: common character: LIKENESS <~ of interests> c: social activity: FELLOWSHIP d: a social state of condition.20

Fluxus is a community, much like any other. One can imagine Fluxus as a kind of town spread a little farther through space and time than most, a global village.

Imagine a town, a community of people who see each other on a regular basis, some of whom also work together. In their lives together, they cooperate, they compete, they form friendships, antagonisms, loyalties and jealousies. People who work together on one project may work against each other on the next. Two loyal friends that support each other on a personal level may fight vigorously on opposite sides of a political issue and yet remain fast friends. Political or business associates work together on specific projects yet dislike each other as individuals. Today's argument is tomorrow's joke. The myriad shifts of thought, affection, and commerce that define human interaction take place in time and space through a series of balances and shifts. That describes Fluxus fairly well, or used to do when enough members of the original community were alive to preserve a community of feeling.

While this is true of other communities, it demonstrates the use of applying the paradigm of community here. One sees it in the priestly hierarchy of the Catholic church. One sees it in the lay body of the Lutherans. One sees it in cities and in towns. One sees it in universities.

There are similarities and distinctions in Fluxus as a specific community. All communities are specific at the direct level, defined by common factors that render them specific, and its members the members of a class or species. As professional communities are – for example, “the community of scholars,” “the intelligence community” – our community was
international, rather than based in a single area. We convened ourselves, rather than being summoned into existence. In this sense, we were much like a self-declared nation-state such as Ireland, Norway, or East Timor or an organization such as The Rugby Union, The Red Cross, or the International Chess federation. Like many communities, we did not remain together for ideological or economic reasons, but for issues more complex that may perhaps touch on both. Like all communities that endure, Fluxus was cemented by “a way of doing things, a tradition, and a way of life and death.”

Who Fluxus Is (or Was)
Many people have been involved with Fluxus, directly, peripherally, and in an extended community of discourse. If one considers a circular field of members, with concentric rings moving outward from core involvement to participation on a less central basis, few dispute the fact that many people have been involved in Fluxus. The issue of key participation by central artists is a subject of dispute, and has been for years.

Disputes arise on many grounds.

A curator who defines Fluxus by its most active members will see a Fluxus in which Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles, for example, were central figures from the beginning through Dick’s death in 1998, more central to the artists themselves than George Maciunas was. Alison is among the few whose activities extend from the pre-Fluxus period through the present day. Their engagement began in the 1950s during the Cage course at The New School. They were leading figures in pre-Fluxus activities, long before George himself became involved. Their participation continued on to An Anthology, through the so-called collective period, through the era of feuds and disputes, and on into the time after Maciunas’s death.

A curator who defines Fluxus predominantly in the light of Maciunas’s projects, and who measures importance by the number of Maciunas-produced multiples objects and editions, will weigh Robert Watts and George Brecht as the central figures.

A curator or historian who views a Fluxus in the light of a specific philosophy or style, may view Robert Filliou, Ben Vautier, or Joseph Beuys as the key members. It would depend on the issues and defining principles through which Fluxus is viewed.

Whoever one may see as central, many artists, composers, and designers are involved in Fluxus. Even so, the question of centrality, organizing principles and participation is part of
understanding the demographics of Fluxus. This has been the subject of arguments and assertions since the beginning.

**A Broad View of Fluxus**

One way to determine a consensus on Fluxus is to present the aggregate opinion of a number of expert scholars, critics and curators. These opinions have been demonstrated in the exhibitions, catalogues and books they have presented over the years.

In the later 1970s, I proposed using the sociological technique content analysis to give a broader view of Fluxus. In 1981, Peter Frank and I did a simple checklist analysis of the names the artists presented in the exhibitions, catalogues and books on Fluxus up to that time. Peter organized it into a chart that we used in writing an overview of Fluxus history to the early 1980s. In 1991, James Lewes used my model to bring the Peter Frank chart forward in time. The chart used a comprehensive survey of major Fluxus exhibitions, catalogues and books up to 1992, including every survey of Fluxus and every major exhibition to include a survey of Fluxus in a special section such as the 1990 Biennal of Venice or the Pop Art exhibition at the Royal Academy in London in 1991. The chart offered an overview of all the inclusions and entries in a series of 21 major projects, representing evolving and differing views of Fluxus over a 30-year period.

The Lewes study suggested a consensus of opinion for anyone whose name appeared in more than half of the compilations as a key participant in Fluxus, with thirty-three artists in the list: Eric Andersen, Ay-O, Joseph Beuys, George Brecht, Philip Corner, Jean Dupuy, Robert Filliou, Albert Fine, Ken Friedman, Al Hansen, Geoffrey Hendricks, Dick Higgins, Joe Jones, Milan Knizak, Alison Knowles, Addi Køpcke, Takehisa Kosugi, Shigeko Kubota, George Maciunas, Larry Miller, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson, Takako Saito, Tomas Schmit, Mieko Shiomi, Daniel Spoerri, Ben Vautier, Wolf Vostell, Yoshimasa Wada, Robert Watts, Emmett Williams, La Monte Young. While the list may have changed slightly since 1992, these thirty-three names represent a broad vision of the Fluxus community as determined by objective content analysis.

While content analysis is inclusive, it is not exclusive. Some names do not appear on the list who would be considered central by many.

The Swedish Fluxus artist Bengt af Klintberg is a good example. In the mid60s, af Klintberg withdrew from the art world to pursue his work as a folklorist. Af Klintberg is a poet and writer who created many delightful event structures and scores in the early 1960s. Despite the
importance his performable ideas, he produced little exhibitable or salable art. By the late 1960s, he was no longer active on the scene. As a result, he vanished from Fluxus history until recent research began to highlight the significance of his early role.

Jackson Mac Low is another central figure in Fluxus who suffers from the same problem as af Klintberg, though not as visibly. As a poet, he produced far less visual work than others. As a result, he appears in just under half the exhibitions and projects used in compiling the list, just below the cut-off point. An arbitrary cut-off point set at half or more of the possible inclusions means that a consensus suggests that an artist is in the core of Fluxus. It does not mean that an artist is not a core figure. Mac Low is an example of this.

Different ways of organizing historical facts reveal different issues. Some will demonstrate a sense of centrality to the community venture. Some will show the divisions and discontinuities in Fluxus, different lines along which the community is shaped. Any community is as much defined by its divisions as its cohesions, and Fluxus is no different.25

**Modes of Participation**

Scholars view membership or participation in Fluxus in many ways. The ways in which the artists themselves view these issues are equally varied.

Artists who became active in the pre-Fluxus era continued to be defined as Fluxus even when they themselves were somewhat diffident. This was the case with Jackson Mac Low and La Monte Young, who formally withdrew from Fluxus. It was the case with Henry Flynt, who maintains a distance from Fluxus. It was also the case with George Brecht, who asserted that “Fluxus has Fluxed,” declining to attend any Fluxus project, festival or activity for many years before his recent death. He nevertheless remained the central figure in any Fluxus retrospective, in part due to the unique stature of his *Water Yam* box and his event scores.

Artists who took part in one or more of several key events form a core group within Fluxus, regardless of other distinctions. They also seem to regard each other as a special group within Fluxus, regardless of artistic differences or personal differences among themselves. The most important of these events was the first festival at Wiesbaden. To some, the participants in the first Wiesbaden festival are enshrined as central figures in the mythology of Fluxus.

Mythology is a powerful force in defining any community. The Wiesbaden festival was
important historically, but it has been even more important as a legend. Dick Higgins and others assert that “Fluxus is not a moment in history, or an art movement,” but despite Higgins’s definition, the focus on Wiesbaden suggests that for some, Fluxus was a moment in history.

There exists an attitude that participation in that moment defined an elect within Fluxus. While other artists are clearly central to Fluxus in significant ways, there have been appeals to the fact of participation at Wiesbaden or the other early festivals as central criteria, or even definitive criteria, in selecting artists for shows or projects. This suggests that membership in that small group is more important than the work an artist does in determining the issue of what one might term “Fluxus-ness.” It also suggests that participation in a brief moment in history is seen by some as more central to an artist’s engagement in Fluxus than an enduring participation in Fluxus activities.

This can be seen readily in contrasting the inclusion of artists in exhibitions or concerts representing Fluxus. Some of the Wiesbaden participants have had relatively little to do with Fluxus since the early 60s, except when they have been invited to take part in exhibitions and festivals. Even so, they have been given far greater attention than an artist such as Larry Miller, who worked closely with George Maciunas and Robert Watts from the late 1960s. Miller has been an active custodian of the Fluxus heritage, yet while many discussions of Fluxus stress the communal spirit, little emphasis has been placed on Miller’s contribution to that spirit ... despite the fact that Miller has now been active in Fluxus for more years than Maciunas was at the time of his death.

Maciunas’s influence on the Fluxus community was profound and central, but he served his own, unique vision of Fluxus, a Fluxus that was, at times, political, even eschatological. In contrast, Miller’s presence has been much more low-key, yet far more communitarian in spirit.

The Wiesbaden participants earned an uncommon place in cultural history because of the revolutionary nature of their contributions in the early 1960s. I simply wonder why greater acknowledgement has not attended Larry Miller’s important contribution to Fluxus, especially by those who insist that Fluxus represented not only an aggregate or collective spirit, which it sometimes was, but a group or community of individuals, which it was to a far greater degree.

Even though Fluxus is not a group in any formal sense, a claim to group status and rank has
been heavily invested in a specific group within Fluxus. While general Fluxus attitudes suggest that the Fluxus ideal values the spirit of experimentation and the method of philosophical inquiry over the domination of history, participation at Wiesbaden nevertheless defines a hierarchy of status. Anyone who took part in Wiesbaden has an automatic platform within the group. Everyone else must argue forcefully for their ideas or for their vision.

Transforming Fluxus from an idea and a community to a moment in history is necessarily reductive. It reduces the quality of Fluxus from a rich and often ambiguous laboratory to the image of an art movement. Worse yet, it denatures the pluralism of Fluxus, while shifting the reception of Fluxus toward a univocal monotone.

At the same time, pressures from within Fluxus have also worked to make Fluxus an artistic phenomenon rather than a deeper and more resistant phenomenon.

**A Contrary Community**

As the generative moments of Fluxus receded into history while key originators died, a powerful spirit of factionalism took hold as some Fluxus artists began to attack members of the community whom they did not see as friends or partisans. While this tendency was present from the beginning, it grew worse in the years following the death of Dick Higgins, a key voice and articulate thinker, managed to keep a spirit of public inquiry alive while resisting a growing tendency to identify Fluxus solely with George Maciunas and the single legacy of George’s work. Dick also managed to keep people in a common dialogue despite arguments and disputes. Emily Harvey, the last key gallerist to work with nearly all the Fluxus artists in a non-partisan fashion, died soon after, leaving behind a marvelous collection and the galleries and residences of the Emily Harvey Foundation. Without the personal weight of Dick and Emily to keep people in some kind of open – if occasionally grumpy – dialogue, Fluxus became far more factional. With this factionalism, Fluxus lost the tone that permitted a sense of community and evolution.

Creating clubs and factions in any community seems to be a human characteristic. From religious sects to political parties, humans, like baboons, form packs, tribes, and factions. Since the problem of factional rivalry even plagued Zen Buddhism, it isn’t surprising that Fluxus has had its share of factions. Nevertheless, the vehement factionalism of this small community remains surprising.

Fluxus has been endowed with mythic qualities developed a patina over the years. Many suggest a stronger spirit of cohesion among and between the Fluxus participants than is the
Some accounts of early Fluxus suggest a small band of intrepid pioneers marching shoulder to shoulder as they travelled about on the first tours. Friends and sometimes rivals traveled together, but there was no unified program. The spirit that Charles Dreyfus labeled euphoria emerged later when the pioneers looked back in some astonishment to find that they had been pioneers. The way I see it, these artists always had a strong sense of their own importance, but it was only in recent years that the world celebrated their importance with equal vigor. That fact and nostalgia for a delightful moment in their own history is the cause of euphoria. Documents and correspondence from the early 60s suggest vitality, energy and lots of fun, but things were more chaotic, more antagonistic, and far less euphoric at the time than they seem today.

The fact that people were willing to work collectively, at least at times, to support one another in the achievement of mutual goals has given rise to the powerful myth of a “Fluxus Collective.” There was never an operating Fluxus Collective. George Maciunas invented the so-called Fluxus Collective and it did not interest the others, at least not following a brief conversation or two. Nevertheless, Maciunas was a talented designer and publisher, and he was able to create the illusion of a collective by applying what would today be termed a corporate design program to the publications and artifacts he produced for other Fluxus artists. Clearly, there was a group of people in some of the senses defined earlier, but there was never a “collective.”

These issues aside, some forty to eighty people have been active in Fluxus over extended periods. They have to some degree been friends, sharing ideas, sharing discussion, and sharing a forum. Even without sharing a common program, they have a history of achievements in common. It has been perplexing, therefore, to see how antagonistic some are toward one another.

At one point a few years back, I had a week in which I received telephone calls and emails on this problem from a Swedish professor, an American museum director, gallerists in four nations, a rare book dealer, two art historians and several Fluxus artists. All were doing research on Fluxus or preparing shows, and they all expressed surprise and some amazement at the degree of what one termed “conflict and backbiting in Fluxus.” I’ve been amazed, too.

Communities are odd things. A community is defined by differences and conflict as much as
by cooperation, and that’s to be expected in Fluxus. However, there is such a thing as cooperative conflict and I have been intrigued by its absence. I expected that everyone in a community as experimental and radical as Fluxus has been would recognize that cooperative behavior is far more productive than uncooperative behavior or antagonistic behavior. Perhaps I am naive. Nevertheless, research in behavioral science, economics and political science demonstrates that even rivals succeed better in their mutual and individual goals through cooperation rather than destructive conflict. I remain puzzled that this seems to have been difficult for Fluxus and its friends.

The degree to which a community can sustain itself despite occasionally destructive conflict and succeed despite itself shows two things. First, it shows that the community is genuine and deep-rooted. Second, it shows that a better process of communication and conflict resolution would offer astonishing opportunities to optimize wasted resources. But that sort of idea is precisely why people think I’m naive.

The chart that James Lewes developed using my analysis was a concise, graphic, tool demonstrating that Fluxus was larger, wider and deeper than the factionalists believe, bigger and broader than some of the narrow experts hold. It didn’t reveal the intricacies of community life. Other forms of charting may.

If one uses a chart set in concentric circles, with artists appearing more close to the center depending on the number of inclusions, one sees an interesting picture. A chart showing the correlation between the era in which one became active in Fluxus and the degree to which the consensus of opinion sees one as part of the Fluxus community is another.

Still another very interesting series of issues would be made visible in a diagram showing participation in Fluxus in terms of the chronological periods of activity. This would be especially interesting in terms of artists who were active in Fluxus for periods of a few years, such as John Armleder, Per Kirkeby or John Lennon. It would also be interesting in terms of artists who have been (or were) intermittently active in Fluxus projects over a long period, since that includes such major figures as Jackson Mac Low or Robert Filliou.

Only a handful of artists maintained a continuous identification with Fluxus from their first involvement in the first Fluxus days to the present day, most notably figures such as Alison Knowles, Ben Patterson, and Ben Vautier, as well as Dick Higgins and Emmett Williams while they were alive. Nevertheless, other figures have been forthright and consistent about their engagement with Fluxus. Whatever his participation meant, Joseph Beuys used some
forms of Fluxus terminology and his “Fluxus Zone West” trademark from the 60s through the end of his life. However remote he has been from the center of Fluxus action, Don Boyd has been presenting himself and his work in the context of Fluxus since he first became active in 1975. This is true of several others.

It is not my purpose to analyze these issues or to suggest what these facts mean. I simply point to the fact that some people have identified Fluxus as something – whatever that thing is – which which they have in some way identified themselves and their work. Some have done this fleetingly, some continuously, some intermittently on a long-term basis.30

A Community of Customs
Every community develops a range of customs and practices that govern its social life. In large-scale communities, these customs cover everything from kinship and marriage to religious rituals and taboos, from table manners to business transactions.

Many communities that operate within larger communities accept common, unwritten customs for the major body of community practices while creating written bodies of law for local practices. This is visible in the communities that are governed by a covenant, such as universities, professional societies or churches.

The members of the Fluxus community all belong to one or more larger societies. For example, one participant might be a citizen of Denmark, governed by national and local law, a member of the international community of publishers bound by copyright law and fair use provisions, and a composer, participating in several of the communities of modern music. Some of these communities are governed by written covenants, as a nation is or the publishing community is. At the same time many unwritten practices also serve to organize the practices of community life. At Danish breakfast meetings, a dram of Gammel Dansk bitters is served with coffee. Publishers frequently trade information and assistance with each other even as they compete against each other for authors and sales.

Even though the members of the Fluxus community were never bound by any formal manifesto of political belief or artistic practice, they did share a number of social practices governing the ways in which they related to one another on several issues.

Some of these customs were partially formalized. Others were totally informal, and yet quite strong and customary. In some circumstances, the customs accepted by one group of artists conflicted with the customs of another group. This defined some of the boundaries, collisions
and rivalries of small communities within the Fluxus community.

Some of the different factions within Fluxus revolved around practices established by George Maciunas. The three rules governing the use of Fluxus work and the Fluxus name at concerts, exhibitions and publications is an example. According to Maciunas, one was permitted to use Fluxus material in concert provided that any work performed be identified as Fluxus work with credit to the artist and copyright acknowledgement to Fluxus. If 50% or more of the content of a performance, festival, or concert was Fluxus work, the concert or festival must be identified as Fluxus. If less than 50% was Fluxus work, the concert must not be called Fluxus. Maciunas encouraged the extension of these rules to exhibitions and to publications.

These rules, whether or not they were formally accepted, became customary for most Fluxus artists. At the same time, Maciunas's demand that all work by every artist associated with Fluxus be published, copyright, and administered by Fluxus was acceptable to no one. The concept foundered first on the fact that Maciunas was simply unable to handle the publishing load for as much work as the Fluxus artists and composers could produce. But finally, his demand for control and conformity on artistic and political issues was even more of a stumbling block.

Copyright and the anti-copyright Fluxmark were further issues. As I've mentioned earlier, the custom of Fluxus people realizing each work for each other was a common habit. At the same time, most people maintained their own copyright. Certain works were copyright by Fluxus when they were published by Fluxus. In 1966, Maciunas authorized Ben Vautier, Milan Knizak, Per Kirkeby and me to grant permissions and rights and to supervise royalties on behalf of Fluxus. What this has meant in practice is the right to encourage and grant permission, which I've been doing for over 40 years.

The possibility of forbidding performances or publications had already become impossible when George tried to forbid concerts or projects in the early 1960s. There is no longer any reason to do so. Even so, as long as all four of us remain alive, any one of us has unilateral right to grant permission even though the others may refuse. I have always been willing to grant permission for reproductions and usage while encouraging people to follow the three rules. At one point, I tried to develop a system for royalties and fees on the performance or publication of artist works copyright by Fluxus, but I was unable to reach a workable solution. In practice, permission is usually to small groups of artists or musicians, or to non-profit organizations, and the question of royalties would be incredible.
The anti-copyright Fluxmark registration is even more interesting. In 1972, David Mayor, associate director of Fluxus West in England, director of the Fluxshoe, and co-publisher of Beau Geste Press, invented the anti-copyright mark. The mark was an X in a circle, a hybrid form based on the marriage of the copyright circle and the Fluxus West X. The mark meant that anyone was free to use or to reproduce the marked material in much the same way that permission is required in order to use or reproduce copyright material. It was a fascinating idea. While it did not catch on at the time, it was an important precursor to the idea of copyleft.\(^3\) In reality, of course, the liberties taken with copyrighted Fluxus material suggest Mayor’s anti-copyright philosophy was always more powerful than Maciunas’s rules. It is of course possible that no one knew how to enforce our copyright.

Festivals, concerts, performance, publications, and exhibitions were the most common forms of Fluxus community interaction. A body of practices emerged, ranging from several forms of performance style to the way programs are selected. These practices differed among groups within Fluxus. This is a rich field in its own right, and several books and catalogs discuss these issues in depth.\(^3\)

Other customs characterize the Fluxus community. Some are public, or become public as performance practices do. Others are private, shared experiences among friends, like the dinners and food events that have been a tradition in Fluxus since the beginning.

These become a medium of exchange and development. Some become the basis of the paradigms, models and algorithms that also inform Fluxus work. Above all, Fluxus is a community of work, art work, music work, transformative work and intermedia work, including the important form of work known as play.

**A Concept of Community**

In 1992, Estera Milman suggested that I explore the demographics of Fluxus. I wasn’t sure that demography – “the statistical study of human populations especially with reference to size and density, distribution and vital statistics” – would offer the sort of insights I was looking for. As I dug into the topic, I found a useful approach. While demographics is primarily based in statistical analysis, the word demography comes into English from an 1880 French word, demographie, with a Greek root demos and a French, Greek-based suffix, graphie.

Fluxus had been looked at in many ways, but some of the most interesting and obvious had
been overlooked. It had never been examined as a population or a community. That essay was the view of one member of the Fluxus community.

One aspect of Fluxus that always intrigued me is its resistance to simple definition. That is what makes it so resistant to a standard, streamlined art historical approach. While it is possible to pry valuable information out of Fluxus through historiographic methods, it can’t be reduced to art history in any simple way. What makes Fluxus interesting as art is precisely the fact that it is not “an art movement or a moment in art history.”

**Tradition and Community**

In one way, the work speaks for itself. At least, this is true of any one piece, any individual score, any single work. But the aggregate, the totality is something else, and it forms a tradition, a range of views, the traces of human community. The relations of the many complex parts to one another form a whole greater than their individual sum in much the same way that productivity and synergy equations are multiplicative rather than additive.

The work of Fluxus, a community of work, has been more than a discourse of art works. It has never been entirely satisfying to analyze Fluxus in the light of art. And it explains why Fluxus – a phenomenon that many consider coeval with and parallel to Pop Art – has never been understood as art in the same way that Pop Art has. This difficulty of describing Fluxus as an art movement involved in producing discrete, salable artifacts is visible in the failure of the art market to embrace most Fluxus artists. And while Fluxus work is becoming more valuable, that fact is explained by more than the nature of art.

Working together with other human beings is an aspect of life that makes us human. Many creatures cooperate for safety, food, and shelter. Birds in flocks, wolves in hunting packs, tribes of primates all cooperate. Human beings do more. We work together and we plan our work, building projects and building organizations to realize our projects. We generate communities, societies, and cultures as we do.

The idea of communal work has been central to my interests for nearly five decades. In the early 1960s, I became interested in Unitarian Universalist theology, history, and social practice. The Unitarians descended from the Congregational churches of New England. These were Puritan Calvinist churches, but Puritanism took a radical turn in the theology of William Ellery Channing. In the early 1800s, Channing turned away from the doctrine of sin and punishment, turning from Trinitarian doctrine at the same time to establish what became Unitarian Christianity. Channing influenced Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David
Thoreau, among the other transcendentalists, all seeking better ways to build a world. This community development embraced the concept of work.

While transcendentalist utopian communities as Brook Farm embodied this vision, this was not the first such effort. The Buddhist Eightfold Path – right view, right intention, right speech, right discipline, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration – embodies concepts of common work.

The Shakers organized most of their communal life around two functions, work and worship, and the productive Shaker economy was a distinctive attribute of the Shaker villages and communities. Much of the regulation of Shaker life concerned work and community elations concerning work, and reading the rules of the order, it is nearly impossible to separate work from the other aspects of Shaker life, with rising and returning, meals, and even household management structured around the tempo and meaning of working life.

When I first met Dick Higgins, I caught a vision of community life and work in his ideas. Dick’s “Something Else Manifesto” called for artists to “chase down an art the clucks and fills our guts.” This was a call to collaboration and a call to productive work, to art as a kind of productive work engaging the concept of community.

Dick introduced me to George Maciunas, whose philosophy of Fluxus articulated many of the same principles. George’s vision of Fluxus called for artists to work together, creating work together, sharing ideas and principles, supporting one another.

While George’s vision of Fluxus was intensely political at one point in his life, he had shifted from a strict hierarchical concept of the collective by the time that I met him to a far more open vision.

The verb “to collaborate” come from the Late Latin collaboratus, past participle of collaborare – to labor together, from the Latin words “com” and “laborare” to labor. The relevant definition here means “to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor.” The Oxford English Dictionary makes the definition particularly relevant to my purpose in this note: “To work in conjunction with another or others, to co-operate; esp. in a literary or artistic production, or the like.”

Three factors explain Fluxus as a collaborative working community.
Most of the Fluxus artists were already working in the tradition that Fluxus came to represent. Fluxus was our meeting point. As we found out about one another, we began to meet and work through Fluxus. This includes people who were not artists before the meeting, even though we did things that paralleled the activities of the artists and composers in Fluxus. That was the case for me.

Many of the artists already knew each other, and some had worked together for many years. This includes the people in the New York Audio-Visual Group, John Cage’s former students, and more. They did not come to Fluxus: Fluxus came to them when George Maciunas created the name for a magazine that would publish the work of these artists. This work established the foundation of a building under construction. The work was already under way when Maciunas named the building “Fluxus.”

Despite the broad range of interests and the wide geographical spread, this was not a large community. In the 1960s, the community involved fewer than a hundred people in a world population of about 3,000,000,000 human beings. These 100 or so were part of a slightly larger community of several hundred people active in the relatively small sector of the art world that we might label the avant-garde.

In this context, those who knew each other brought other interesting people into a relatively small community of people interested in the same kinds of issues, people doing the same kind of work.

History is always contingent. A dozen different scenarios are possible in which people never met or met without forming a community or formed a very different kind of community. In this world, the social and historical development of Fluxus and intermedia meant intense correspondence for artists at a distance, common projects, and many kinds of collaboration. I remain interested in collaboration.

George Maciunas’s last attempt at building a utopian community took place in New Marlborough, Massachusetts. George moved there, close to Jean Brown’s Fluxus collection and archive in an old Shaker seed house.

This part of the United States had a tradition of utopian communities from the birth of the Commonwealth to the grand experiment of the Republic. It was true for the American Renaissance spurred by Emerson, Thoreau, and the Transcendentalists to the settlements of the Shakers. It was true when Jean Brown set up shop a little ways down the road from a
half a dozen communes.

I spent the summer of 1972 in Tyringham working with Jean Brown. Every evening when we ate dinner together, she would quote the old Shaker proverb, “Hands to work and hearts to God.” I helped to arrange the first meeting between Jean and George Maciunas. I knew they would hit it off, but I never imagined how rich their relationship would be. George soon found his way to Jean’s corner of the world, heartland of the Shaker expansion.

It always delighted me that Jean’s archive was established and located in an old Shaker seed house in the Berkshires of Massachusetts. George’s last attempt at building a utopian community in New Marlborough took place not far from there. Utopian communities had always been a tradition in that part of North America. This was so from the birth of the Commonwealth to the grand experiment of the Republic. It was true for the American Renaissance spurred by Emerson, Thoreau and the Transcendentalists to the settlements of the Shakers. This was true when Jean set up shop a little ways down the road from a half a dozen communes.

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

A seed house was a building where seeds were sorted and packaged. The packages could be ordered individually by catalogue or mail order. There were also seed kits with an assortment of packages in a tidy box not too different in shape or size from the Fluxkits of the 1960s. Like the Fluxkits, only a few of these remain. In an interesting coincidence, the most complete extant seed kit is to be found in the museum of the old Shaker Village a few minutes’ drive from Hanover, New Hampshire, where the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College houses a Fluxus collection established in honor of George Maciunas.

Fluxus people other than Maciunas have not been celibate and abstemious, which the Shakers – like Maciunas – famously were. In other regards, there were delightful similarities. The union of work and life, an art and a music which were not separate from life of mere pastime, a sense of industry combined with a light spirit were the characteristics that seem to me central in the Shaker community. These qualities typify what it best in the Fluxus.
community as well.

It seems entirely fitting that America’s first great Fluxus collection was established in a Shaker Seed House while the last Fluxus cooperative housing project was based in the heartland of transcendentalism.

Acknowledgements


Endnotes


George did continue to circulate criticisms of Something Else Press and its participants in 1966. This was not new material, however, by material he printed earlier. One reason he continued to circulate it was that he hated to waste anything or throw material away. The second reason was that some of the information on the documents was still current. The first time Dick learned of one such pamphlet was when I brought it to the Press in 1966. George had apparently printed it in 1965 without sending it to Dick.


There are several plausible conjectures on the graphic presentations and the lists of names associated with them. One possibility is that Maciunas printed statements that he felt characteristic of Fluxus, including a number of proposed manifestoes. To these he appended lists of the names of artists, composers, and others whom he felt represented what he saw as the Fluxus position. If this is so, the conjunction of statements and names is innocent and circumstantial. Another hypothesis suggests that Maciunas put the statements forward as proposed manifestoes together with the names of artists he hoped would come to sign them. This suggests wishful thinking or a political campaign. A third possibility is that Maciunas, familiar with Marxist-Leninist revolutionary ideology, intended it to appear that these manifestoes had in fact been signed, even though they had not. This view positions the documents as a form of propaganda or agit-prop with the goal of convincing each artist that the others had already signed, and that they, too, should go with the tide of historical dialectic by acquiescing, retroactively, to have signed. Some evidence exists for each view. I feel that the matter is best left open. Each of these three interpretations of the artifacts and the associated lists has possible merit. All three views lead to a common conclusion. The notion that George Maciunas summoned Fluxus into being by as an ideological, revolutionary cadre is nonsense. Because it has been repeated often, it bears refutation in any serious discussion of the Fluxus community. Fluxus was far richer and more interesting.


Young, La Monte, editor. 1963. An Anthology of chance operations, concept art, anti art, indeterminacy, plans of action, diagrams, music, dance constructions, improvisation, meaningless work, natural disasters, compositions, mathematics, essays, poetry. New York: Jackson Mac Low and La Monte Young.


The completed chart offers a broad consensus of opinion by 30 experts who have given lengthy consideration to Fluxus. These include scholars, critics, curators, art dealers, Fluxus artists and non-Fluxus artists interested in Fluxus. Altogether, some the chart included 351 artists presented in 21 different projects representing a wide variety of venues, presentations and publications during the 30 years of Fluxus up to 1992. The scholars, critics, curators, and artists responsible for the projects were: George Maciunas; Harald Szeemann and Hanns Sohm; David Mayor; Gino DiMaggio and Ben Vautier; Harry Ruhe; Ursula Peters; Jon Hendricks; René Block; Dick Higgins; Estera Milman; Clive Phillipot; Marcel Fleiss and Charles Dreyfus; Emily Harvey; Alessandro Masi; Ina Blom; Ursula Kriozinger; Peter Weibel, Francesco Conz, Birgitta Kowanz; Milan Knizak and Ben Vautier; Vik Muniz; Achille Bonito Oliva, Gino DiMaggio and Gianni Sassi; Salvatore Ala and Caroline Martin; Marco Livingstone and Thomas Kellein; Susan Hapgood and Cornelia Lauf.

After 1992, I stopped going to Fluxus exhibitions or anniversary festivals other than the Seoul NYMax project that Nam June Paik organized in 1994. I did take part in two small conferences, one at the Corbusier monastery La Tourette in France in 2003, the other at The Danish Design School in Copenhagen on the topic of events, but I have been giving more time to life than art. Since Fluxus has increasingly become part of the art world, a contest for position and standing has eroded the community of practice that made Fluxus both a conceptual country and a laboratory of experimentation across the boundaries of media, disciplines, and ways of life. At this point, it would be difficult for me to say what kind of consensus exists on these issues.

Carolee Schneemann, who should be seen as a central member of Fluxus, but is not, contributed a wonderful critique of Fluxus to the 1993 exhibition at The Walker Art Center. Titled In the Spirit of Fluxus, the exhibition privileged boxes produced by George Maciunas, reducing entire bodies of work to one or two boxed multiples while excluding the work of some artists altogether. The work of Dick Higgins was notably absent. Carolee created a vitrine criticizing the way that Fluxus was rendered a univocal, male-centered art movement rather than a plural and ambiguous laboratory as her contribution to the exhibition.

At the same time, some artists have returned to Fluxus quite easily. Consider the vigorous career of Ben Patterson following his return to art in the 1980s. Much like Bengt af Klintberg, Ben Patterson withdrew from active participation on the art scene to pursue other career options. In the 1980s, he once again became active as an artist. He had been one of the Wiesbaden participants. His absence left a niche in a small, select group, since only a few were at Wiesbaden. It was impossible to fill the place that Patterson held. As a result, on his return to activity as an artist, he filled a role in the Fluxus community as though he had never left. But there are other reasons for this. Patterson is a quintessential Fluxus artist in many important ways. His work captures the astonishing, enchanted humor of Fluxus perfectly with performance at the border of objects and objects that establish a theatrical presence. The sense of collegiality and shared experience is a human feeling, and this, too, makes sense. When Patterson became active once again, many saw it as welcoming an old friend who had been away on a short trip. This attitude is encouraged by the fact that participation in Fluxus is not necessarily an intense, continuous, mutually involved process. Some of the artists are close friends who communicate with each other often, even daily. But many of the artists see each other only at festivals. They aren’t much involved in each other’s life or work. Some like each other. Some avoid each other. And some like each other, but haven’t had occasion to know each other well or to work together closely.

In every human community, physical meetings and friendships are more important than intellectual or artistic issues. For many, an absence of 20 years was little different than working with an artist like Mieko Shiomi, who had been physically distant in Japan. Patterson, who had once been an immediate
and close part of the community in a way that Shiomi never had. For many, Patterson's return was much homier and less exotic in feeling than Shiomi's infrequent visits -- despite the fact that Shiomi had been more continuously active in Fluxus while Patterson's career had taken a dramatic detour.


28 The inaccurate notion of an intention by Fluxus artists, composers, designers and architects to be anonymous may also be linked with the issue of the collective. The idea of replacing individual names to efface identity with anonymity is incorrect. This idea may have had a role in some of George's discussions on the notion of the collective, but every multiple that George produced for each artist bore a signature, except for those of his own works that he attributed only to Fluxus. George was always careful about credit.

Several factors may account for the myth of anonymity. Perhaps the illusion of collectivism inspired a further leap into the doctrine of anonymity on the part of some interpreters. Perhaps the corporate look of the Fluxus graphic design created by George Maciunas led some to see us as a form of avant-garde corporation in which, despite our signatures, individuals were anonymous in the same way that corporate executives sign letters but products and services come from the corporation itself, each an artifact of anonymous authorship.

Perhaps we inadvertently gave rise to the idea though the common practice in which Fluxus artists realized each other’s work. This took place in several ways. Artists often performed the scored work of other artists at festivals and concerts. Occasionally, we realized work for each other on what could be called a sub-contract basis, as Addi Kapcke did for Daniel Spoerri. Occasionally, we even created work for another artist, as I planned to do when Nam June Paik commissioned me to write his Third Symphony. This is not anonymity, but musicality, a very different issue. It arises from the rich background in music that so many Fluxus people have. But whoever realizes a musical work, it is still the work of the composer, and it is not anonymous.

The notion of anonymity may have had something to do with George Maciunas’s own tendency to leave his name off things he designed or published, but that’s not unusual. He was the designer, not the artist. Dick Higgins never signed the books he published at Something Else Press, only the ones he wrote.

The issue of anonymity has come up often over the years. In the early 80s, a number of young artists in Milwaukee identified themselves as Fluxus MidWest. They published a series of magazines and catalogues, operating collectively and anonymously. Their work raises an interesting series of issues and questions, but it has nothing to do with the issues raised by central figures in the Fluxus community. Later, these artists, notably Allan Bukoff, demanded personal recognition as Fluxus artists. The most interesting question, of course, is to what degree they can be considered Fluxus. I think the question is fascinating. If Fluxus is not a group, not an art movement, and not a moment in history, then one must acknowledge them as Fluxus artists. But that is another story.


30 Given the growing volume of art historical research and the available information on Fluxus, it might be productive to examine available data through different forms of content analysis, flow chart methodology, social patterns, communication flows and other vehicles. It's too late to do this sort of thing for other cultural communities. There is enough data available on Fluxus as a time-located, physical community to permit this.


33 There is some discussion of how Fluxus artists have presented events in: Friedman, Ken. 2009. “Events and the Exquisite Corpse.” The Exquisite Corpse. Chance and Collaboration in Surrealism's Parlor Game. Edited by Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren, Davis Schneiderman, and Tom Denlinger. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 48-81. See also: Emmett Williams's My Life in Flux and Vice Versa, Dick Higgins's Postface and Jefferson's Birthday, Al Hansen’s Happenings: A Primer of Time-Space Art, and Allan Kaprow’s Happenings, Environments and Assemblages. Simon Anderson's PhD thesis at the Royal College of Art in London was a venue-by-venue examination of the Fluxshoe in its progress about the British Isles in 1972 and 1973. Owen Smith's dissertation at the University of Washington included detailed discussions of several festivals during the early European tours of 1962 and 1963. Karen Moss's article in the Fluxus Virus exhibition discussed how Fluxus events were presented in California. Discussions on these issues also appear in the Fluxus issue of the Norwegian music magazine Ballade, and in the catalogs of the Wiesbaden exhibition in 1982 and the Venice Biennal in 1990 as well as the special Fluxus issue of the journal Performance Research.


36 The conference on Alternative Practices in Design: The Collective: Past, Present, and Future revealed many dimensions of the idea of the collective. In the 1960s, the word was closely linked to the Soviet notion of collective farms and forced industrial collectives. This may have been the case in George Maciunas’s view at one point as well, and the problem of governance by unelected commissars is one reason that some Fluxus artists shied away from the idea of the collective. In the early 2000s, it can be seen that collectives take many shapes and forms. One result of the conference is that I came to feel that Fluxus may well fit these newer and more ambiguous models of collective community and collective action.


45 The Jean Brown Archive is now part of the Getty Center for the Arts and Humanities in Los Angeles, California. URL: [http://archives.getty.edu:8082/cgi/f/findaid/findaid-idx?sid=f28fb38780063af9a655841817b562db;c=utf8a;idno=US::CMalG::890164](http://archives.getty.edu:8082/cgi/f/findaid/findaid-idx?sid=f28fb38780063af9a655841817b562db;c=utf8a;idno=US::CMalG::890164) Date Accessed 2007 July 25.

46 It was Ralph Waldo Emerson who introduced the concept of the ordinary into American philosophy and art. This formed an interesting stream of thought that would lead to John Cage in one stream of thought and to John Dewey and the pragmatists in another. Both streams meet in Fluxus. Emerson’s position was a contrast to the European sublime, a distinctly different view of culture. In his essay on “Experience,” Emerson writes, “I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic... I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into today, and you may have the antique and future worlds.” Emerson, Ralph Waldo. 1983 [1837]. *Essays and Lectures*. New York: The Library of America, p. 68-69. Emerson’s perspective emphasizes daily life in much the same way that Dick Higgins would later do in his *Something Else Manifesto* – or his *Child’s History of Fluxus*, writing: “What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and gait of the body.” Both Emerson – and his close friend Henry David Thoreau – emphasize the everyday elements, near to us, down to earth, familiar. It is this, and the experiential, that would later emerge in Dewey’s thinking. It always interested me that pragmatism emerged in the same part of the world as Unitarianism, both descended from the Puritan stream of Calvinism, influenced and opened to new influences by the spirit of the New World.