

## Abstract

The literature of Fluxus documents a conversation on the concepts, media forms and practices developed in an international laboratory of artists, architects, composers, designers and poets. It also documents a dramatic shift in impact and reception. Half a century ago, Fluxus participants did most of their own writing. Today, a far broader conversation includes a wide variety of writers from many fields and disciplines. This article traces a half-century of change and growth from a critical perspective. It addresses problems in the work of early writers, enthusiastic but personal, often flawed by inaccuracies reflecting personal positions while lacking historiographic awareness. It also raises questions and issues that scholars and critics must consider in today's intermedia era. Serious contributions to the literature of Fluxus now join personal reflection, philosophical depth and careful scholarship. The growth of excellent writing and the accessibility of source documents make this a time of renewal and opportunity for the literature of Fluxus. The claims of history require establishing a literary space in which the original Fluxus voices speak while allowing writers the freedom of multiple interpretations.

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# ature OF Fluxus

KEN FRIEDMAN

*"Fluxus is what Fluxus  
does but no one knows  
whodunit."*

— EMMETT WILLIAMS

## The Fluxus Problematic

WHILE FLUXUS IS WHAT FLUXUS  
does, the question of "who done it"  
leads to a major set of problems. The

lack of consensus regarding who the Fluxus people are or were  
leads to three problems in historiography and criticism. The  
first problem involves understanding the community of people  
known as Fluxus. The second problem involves understanding  
their actions. A third problem arises as we attempt to learn "who  
done it" in the first place. Defining Fluxus as a laboratory or social

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ecology leads to one kind of historiography. Defining Fluxus as a group of individuals located during a specific moment in time leads to another. Defining Fluxus in terms of a single man and a short list of artists who worked with him only during the times they worked with him leads to yet a third.

Beyond the “who done it,” there are major disagreements on what Fluxus is or was. Every artist, curator, critic and historian with an interest in Fluxus has his or her own view. Some adopt positions with serious internal contradictions, giving them several views at once. Despite these challenges, perhaps because of them, the last four and a half decades have seen the creation of a large body of literature on Fluxus.

The term Fluxus was created in the early 1960s for a magazine that never appeared. The name of the magazine—Fluxus—was used for a festival in Wiesbaden in 1962 that was originally planned to help develop and support the magazine. As a result, the group of artists whose work was presented at the Wiesbaden Fluxus festival was called “Fluxus people” by the German press. The name stuck, in great part because the Fluxus people chose to accept the designation as a usable identification.

Despite multiple debates over the “who” of Fluxus, there are ways to catalogue the individuals who populate the Fluxus community. In 1978, I adapted content analysis, a well-known social science research method, to chart the actors in the Fluxus drama. Content analysis begins with documents forming a data set to reveal the significant patterns of a subject field. In this case, the subject field is Fluxus. The documents are a collection of major catalogues, books and membership lists. The data set reveals patterns to answer the question, “Who are or were the actors in Fluxus?”

The analysis begins by listing all artists represented in the exhibitions, books and projects charted in the collection of documents about Fluxus. The names are placed on a simple matrix chart. The books, catalogues and projects are listed chronologically across one axis of the matrix. The artists listed alphabetically along the other. The matrix forms a grid of boxes. Marking each box where an artist is represented in an exhibition, book or project, reveals the names of those who took part in or were represented in Fluxus activities with greater or lesser frequency.

The project examined all major exhibitions and books along with key publications and special documents such as George Maciunas's lists and Jon Hendricks's catalogues. This selection gives a fair consensus of the overall views of the leading participants, scholars and curators. The matrix chart revealed a population of artists who are generally considered part of Fluxus by a broad group of active participants and objective scholars.

Peter Frank and I compiled the first chart in 1982 in writing an historical survey on Fluxus.<sup>1</sup> The chart revealed four populations. The first was a small inner core of central participants noted in almost all documents. The

1 Friedman, Ken, and Peter Frank. 1983. “Fluxus.” *Art Vivant: Special Report—Fluxus*. Tokyo: New Art Seibu Company, Ltd.; 1983 [special magazine issue devoted to Fluxus]; Frank, Peter and Ken Friedman. 1984. “Fluxus: A Post-Definitive History: Art Where Response Is the Heart of the Matter.” *High Performance*, 27, 56–61, 83.

second was a slightly larger outer core of participants whose names occur almost as frequently. The third was a large circle of occasional participants whose names occur with far less frequency than the first two groups. The fourth was an extremely large scattering of people whose names occur once or twice only.

The first two groups are those whom most consider central Fluxus figures. The central core of participants corresponded to what George Maciunas termed "the Fluxcore." Maciunas's Fluxcore was down to a dozen or so people by the end of his life, but the Fluxcore as most see it is comprised of two or three-dozen people. The artists in the second, slightly larger circle are significant Fluxus artists such as Jackson Mac Low and Bengt af Klintberg whose work has been neglected in exhibitions. There are many reasons for this neglect. Distance from major art centers is one. Weak connections to the normative art world are another. The third is the fact that many members of the second circle produce less exhibited work than others in the central core. With every new exhibition or project, however, the artists in the second circle are being given increasing attention. The two groups are therefore beginning to converge. This convergence can be explained by several factors.

A richer historical perspective now helps to explain greater attention to artists by serious scholars with a foundation in historical research methods rather than an eye to art markets. The other reason is the deeper consideration of key Fluxus issues that grows as better scholarship and criticism takes place. This means that key Fluxus participants who were occasionally overlooked in earlier projects are increasingly included in later compilations or exhibitions.

The third group includes the artists, composers, architects or designers in the group that Maciunas termed "Fluxfriends." This group has been relatively stable. It consists of artists who appreciate Fluxus or have friends among the Fluxus artists. Many of them take an active part in Fluxus projects and exhibitions for a year or two and then cease to do so. Some artists who have been considered part of Fluxus at one time or another are later seen as Fluxfriends. These artists include people like John M. Armleder and Dieter Roth.

The fourth, and final, group consists of artists who might generally be considered Fluxfriends whose active participation in Fluxus activities was limited.

In 1992, James Lewes worked with me to compile an updated version of the chart for the article on "The Demographics of Fluxus" published in Estera Milman's special issue of *Visible Language*, Fluxus: a Conceptual Country.<sup>2</sup> The 1992 chart used the combined lists of Fluxus exhibitions, concerts and performances between 1962 and 1991. Lewes identified over three hundred and fifty artists, composers, designers and architects who have been presented as "Fluxus people" over the three decades the chart covered. The vast majority of these three hundred and fifty names occur only once or twice. Three dozen or so comprise the Fluxcore. They are the ones "who done it."

2 Friedman, Ken with James Lewes. 1992. "Fluxus: Global Community, Human Dimensions." *Fluxus: A Conceptual Country*, Estera Milman, guest editor. *Visible Language*, 26.3/2, 154-179. [Special issue devoted to Fluxus, also exhibition catalogue.]



While a rough survey recently revealed continuity in a stable Fluxcore, I suspect that a careful review would expand the outer circles.

These three dozen artists, composers, architects and designers in the Fluxcore are—or were—intelligent, opinionated and articulate. As a result, there are quite a few versions of the Fluxus story. While Fluxus is what Fluxus does, everyone who was there has a personal view of what they and their friends did. Thus begins the fascinating problematic involved in understanding the literature of Fluxus.

### The First Wave: Fluxus for Itself

NO MATTER WHO TELLS THE STORY, THERE ARE POINTS OF GENERAL AGREEMENT. Whatever Fluxus is or was and whoever it was that done it, Fluxus participants made interesting, entertaining, and sometimes revolutionary contributions to art, music and design for nearly forty-five years. They have also contributed to architecture, urban planning and film.

The Fluxus circle of artists, composers, designers, filmmakers and architects invented and named concept art, intermedia and video. They were pioneers in developing innovative media such as artist's books, correspondence art, minimal music, structural cinema, conceptual music and several other fields. In its interaction with the larger environment, Fluxus ideas and projects helped to define and shape later art forms, including those that pointedly differ from Fluxus practice. These included conceptual art, the more refined and studious forms of minimalism and dozens of schools of intermedia, multimedia, mail art, bookmaking and others.

Fluxus people were active in expressing their ideas. Some are skilled writers and polemicists, including Joseph Beuys, George Brecht, Robert Filliou, Henry Flynt, Ken Friedman, Bengt af Klintberg, Geoffrey Hendricks, Dick Higgins, Milan Knizak, Jackson Mac Low, Jan Olaf Mallander, Larry Miller, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Tomas Schmit, Daniel Spoerri, Ben Vautier and Emmett Williams. Higgins, Friedman, Mallander and Vautier wrote extensively on art and intermedia, Berner on photography, Af Klintberg on folklore. Jeff Berner, Wolf Vostell and La Monte Young as well as Friedman, Higgins, Mac Low, Maciunas and Williams have edited anthologies, catalogues and collections. Several, including Friedman, Higgins, Mac Low and Williams, worked professionally as editors and publishers.

The first Fluxus book to develop and present an articulate artistic and intellectual position for the artists and composers of the Fluxus group was La Monte Young's *An Anthology*.<sup>3</sup> The book started in plans for the never-published special issue of the magazine *Beatitude East*, finishing as a book edited by La Monte Young, designed by George Maciunas and published by Jackson Mac Low and Young in 1963.

Dick Higgins's 1964 essay, *Postface*, was the first monograph-length book

<sup>3</sup> Young, La Monte, editor. 1963. *An Anthology*. New York: Jackson Mac Low and La Monte Young; Young, La Monte, editor. 1970. *An Anthology*. Second Edition. New York: Heiner Friedrich.

about Fluxus.<sup>4</sup> It was also the first of many first-person accounts of life in the Fluxus community. Nearly thirty years later, Emmett Williams published an autobiography, *My Life in Flux -and Vice Versa*.<sup>5</sup> Williams's 1991 book is a richly detailed and highly personal account of the early days of Fluxus as the artist himself saw and experienced things. Written with a master's eye for detail and a bon vivant's ear for a good story, this is an enchanting first-person account of art history in the second half of the twentieth century. In between, Al Hansen, Milan Knizak, Knud Pedersen and others wrote memoirs on their lives and work, including their involvement in Fluxus. Nearly all the key artists have given interviews, while Filliou, Flynt, Geoffrey Hendricks, Klintberg, Mac Low, Schmit and others have written first-person historical essays in various catalogues.

Over the years, we defined Fluxus, presenting our ideas and our history in our own words. Through these writings and discussions, Fluxus artists shaped the first wave of Fluxus literature. Intellectual focus and literary skill were two reasons. The third reason, plain and simple, is that we felt we had to do it.

Forty-five years ago, people did not know how to respond to the ideas or the work. The easiest thing for critics and historians to do was not to respond at all. If Fluxus people wanted to put ideas into play, we had to do it ourselves. We presented the work by organizing our own exhibitions and performances. We presented art and music in published works. We contributed our views of the history and theory of art, music, literature and design by writing essays and books. We published these—as well as our works and those of our colleagues—through our own presses.

Fluxus artist-publishers spanned a broad range of styles. Some were tiny, studio operations like Bici Forbes and Geoffrey Hendricks's Black Thumb Press, or the later Money for Food editions that Hendricks published with Brian Buczak. In Nice, Ben Vautier produced books, pamphlets, broadsides and posters using xerox, mimeograph and multilith offset. Milan Knizak and the Aktual group in Prague produced lavish, hand-made samizdat books with typewriter and carbon paper for text, hand-tipped photographs, hand-made paintings and object-oriented cutouts in paper cloth.

In Germany and New York, the peripatetic Nam June Paik published *Post Music, the Monthly Review of the University of Avant-Garde Hinduism*, combining collages, xerox, objects and some of the most fascinating essays on media of the last three decades. At Fluxus West, my colleagues and I used everything from spirit duplicator and Gestetner mimeo to multilith and huge Xerox collating machines to produce broadsheets, posters, newsletters and even books. These included legitimate books and pirate editions of hard-to-find European intermedia publications. We did not sell the pirate editions of work from other publishers. We distributed those free of charge just to circulate books we felt important to an American market in which no one wanted to buy or sell them.

4 Higgins, Dick. 1964. *Jefferson's Birthday/Postface*. New York: Something Else Press; Higgins, Dick. 1982. Postface. Reprinted in *The Word and Beyond: Four Literary Cosmologists*. New York, The Smith, 7-96.

5 Williams, Emmett. 1991. *My Life in Flux and Vice Versa*. Stuttgart, London and New York: Edition Hansjörg Mayer and Thames & Hudson.

6 Mayor, David, editor. 1972. *Fluxshoe*. Cullompton, England: Beau Geste Press; see also: "Free Fluxus Now." 1972. *Art and Artists*, special magazine issue devoted to Fluxus; Anderson, Simon. 1988. *Reflux Action*. Doctoral dissertation. London: Royal College of Art, doctoral dissertation.

7 Smith, Owen. 1991. *George Maciunas and a History of Fluxus (or) the Art Movement that Never Was*. Seattle: University of Washington, doctoral dissertation. See also: Smith, Owen F. 1998. *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*. San Diego, California: San Diego State University Press.

8 Hendricks, Jon. 1989. *Fluxus Codex*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

9 Key discussions of the invisible college can be found in Price, Derek J. de Solla. 1963. *Little science, big science*. New York: Columbia University Press; Crane, Diane. 1969. "Social structure in a group of scientists: a test of the 'invisible college' hypothesis." *American Sociological Review*, 34, 335-352; Crane, Diane. 1972. *Invisible colleges: diffusion of knowledge in scientific communities*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Price, Derek J. de Solla. 1986. *Little science, big science... and beyond*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Later, there were publishing cooperatives such as Printed Editions, presenting work by John Cage, Philip Corner, Geoffrey Hendricks, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Jackson Mac Low, Pauline Oliveiros and Jerome Rothenberg. In addition, several artist-based Fluxus publishing groups emerged at different times. The most notable of these was Beau Geste Press, a publisher that grew out of the traveling Fluxshoe projects and exhibitions in the UK.<sup>6</sup>

Along with the host of small presses, coming and going in an eternal state of flux, there were two central Fluxus publishers. The first Fluxus publisher was Fluxus itself, or what was called "Fluxus." Editor-chairman George Maciunas in New York organized this publishing house, a publishing firm that fairly well consisted of Maciunas himself. He handled all editorial functions, all design functions and he managed almost all production and distribution functions personally. Maciunas worked closely with dozens of artists to realize those of their works and ideas that fit his idea of Fluxus.<sup>7</sup> Due to Maciunas's skill as a designer and editor, Fluxus was the one Fluxus publisher that had a conceptually and visually consistent program. As a result, Maciunas's Fluxus publications are sometimes taken to define Fluxus. Fluxus produced a few books, many broadsheets, papers and hundreds of multiples and boxed object editions. Maciunas also funded and subsidized the entire Fluxus publishing program. While it involved the works of dozens of artists, the output was the work of one man, a magnificent campaigner for ideas, who devoted much of his life and work to an idea of what art, music, architecture and design could—and should—be. The aggregate compilation of Maciunas's Fluxus editions and projects is visible in Jon Hendricks's *Fluxus Codex*<sup>8</sup> and this body of work forms the core of the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection.

As magnificent an achievement as George Maciunas's publishing program was, however, it represented only one vision of Fluxus among several. Several other Fluxus perspectives were prominent in Europe and in the United States. These views served as meeting points for many talented, articulate and skillful individuals. The perspectives that became visible in their several forums were less consistent than a forum shaped, edited and funded by one individual. The publications emerging from these forums were broad, fuzzy, ambiguous, intellectually complex and wide in theoretical focus. This pluralist publishing program lacked a sharp, consistent focus and purposely so. It was rooted in the activities of what sociologists describe as an "invisible college."<sup>9</sup> The lack of a sharp program makes it difficult to define this vision of Fluxus. Some see this as a weakness. Others see strength in this approach.

From another perspective, the natural ecology of intermedia and experimental art demanded a complexity and ambiguity visible in the works of this international community of artists. Rather than a museum without walls, Fluxus was a laboratory without boundaries. Many of us described our activities as a form of "research art." (I note this as an historical fact without attempting

to define the term "research art" in terms of the present-day discussion on artistic research.) A broad, somewhat chaotic ecology of publishing programs formed an aggregate series of publications making the results of our laboratory available. This was a sharp contrast with the single-minded, pointed vision of Maciunas's publishing program.

In one way, Maciunas's publishing program can be described as the research journal of a specific research program in one department of a larger laboratory. Other departments of the laboratory had their own publishing series and some published across department boundaries. The focused, consistent multiples and newsletters in the Maciunas program supported and reinforced Maciunas's own philosophy. While his philosophy changed and deepened over the years, he never published work that contradicted his vision of Fluxus. In contrast, many other programs published work with which the editor might personally disagree.

As a result, the focused Maciunas program became a central platform for the eventual visibility and influence of Fluxus as an idea. Maciunas's conceptual genius and his uncommon skill as a graphic designer reinforced this development. In this sense, Maciunas's publishing program became what marketing scholars would label a "brand," and they would describe Maciunas's activities as brand building. Design scholars see Maciunas's contribution to developing a profile or corporate identity program for Fluxus. Maciunas studied design and architecture and he worked for many years as a designer in the New York advertising industry. Nevertheless, there was another platform for the eventual visibility and influence of Fluxus. This was not the Fluxus brand or even Fluxus as a specific ideology. Rather, this platform involved a vision of Fluxus as a robust range of ideas developed in a dynamic interactive system. While the broader Fluxus configuration was more influential in reality, it was more complex and harder to understand.

Understanding the broad, influential but ambiguous Fluxus is difficult for scholars that might have been expected to study Fluxus in art history and musicology. The difficulty is understandable. Complex systems are especially incomprehensible to those trained to study the visual or sonic morphology of artifacts, collecting and cataloguing artifacts in categories and types. To understand complex dynamic systems, one must examine social, intellectual and artistic structures to understand the dynamic, interactive systems they produce. (This problem is visible in how long it took art historians and musicologists to begin working with scholarship on Fluxus. An anthropologist who wrote the first doctoral dissertation on Fluxus, Marilyn Ekdahl Ravicz did her dissertation in 1974 at the University of California at Los Angeles in the department of anthropology.<sup>10</sup> It would be fourteen years before the first doctoral dissertation on Fluxus by an art historian would appear when Simon Anderson did his work at the Royal College of Art, and four years more before Owen

10 Ravicz, Marilyn Ekdahl. 1974. *Aesthetic Anthropology: Theory and Analysis of Pop and Conceptual Art in America*. Los Angeles: Department of Anthropology, University of California, doctoral dissertation.

11 Anderson, Simon. 1988. *Reflux Action*. London: Royal College of Art, doctoral dissertation; Smith, Owen. 1991. *George Maciunas and a History of Fluxus (or) the Art Movement that Never Was*. Seattle: University of Washington, doctoral dissertation.

Smith would write the first American doctoral study on Fluxus at the University of Washington.<sup>11</sup>)

Fluxus was a dynamic, interactive series of systems. The Fluxus publishing program was a way of sharing our ideas and spreading them to the large environment. As important as Maciunas's publishing program was, it was only one of several. Most of the other publishing programs were short-lived. They were often limited in outreach to the micro-ecologies of specific communities. Some were local or regional. Others were international but limited in membership.

Something Else Press was the one important exception. The Press was the one Fluxus publisher to be rooted in the Fluxus ecology while also lodged in a variety of other discourse economies. Something Else Press books were widely distributed and widely available. They were archived and collected around the world. This gave the Press an immediate impact and influence on those who were about to become opinion leaders in the arts in many areas. The archival presence of the Press in museums and libraries also gave it a durability that helped carry the influence of Fluxus forward to artists who would later become interested in the Fluxus vision.

Something Else Press was of decisive importance for Fluxus and intermedia publishing. It was a publishing firm in the old-fashioned sense. Something Else Press produced beautifully designed and well made trade editions of books for sale in bookstores. The books were widely advertised and sold to libraries and individuals. As a result, Something Else Press became the most visible Fluxus publisher in the world. Fluxus produced objects in editions of a few dozen and broadsheets in editions of several hundred. Something Else Press produced challenging and innovative books and publications in large editions ranging from 1,000 to 18,000 copies. Most books ran between 3,000 and 5,000 copies. The books of Something Else Press can be found in thousands of libraries around the world as well as in the archives and museum collections where most Fluxus publications are now housed. This had an important effect on the cultural life of the United States and in Europe, where the Press introduced a new mentality in the arts.

Something Else Press existed for only ten years. This decade was long enough to make a difference. Even though the Press stopped publishing three decades ago, the difference it made is still important.<sup>12</sup>

To our own presses, one must also add the occasional presses made available to us when Fluxus artists were given magazines for special issues or presses for special projects. Fluxus artists were the first regular writers on Fluxus, but they were not the last. The literature of Fluxus developed in six relatively distinct waves. In the second wave, a group of friends who became an important part of the Fluxus community joined us. These were the people that George Maciunas referred to as "Fluxfriends" along with practicing artists who fit that category.

12 Frank, Peter. 1983. *Something Else Press, an annotated bibliography*. Barrytown, New York: McPherson and Company; Higgins, Dick. 1992. "Two sides of a coin: Fluxus and the Something Else Press." *Visible Language*, 26, 1/2, 143-53.

## The Second Wave: Fluxfriends

THE SECOND WAVE DEVELOPED BY THE LATE 1960S AND EARLY 1970S.

Writers who were Fluxus friends and enthusiasts typified it; they included critics who saw something interesting and useful in the Fluxus approach to art and music. This group also included a few who arranged projects, catalogues and publications as organizers. They encouraged others to write while writing little themselves.

In this wave, we meet figures such as Thomas Albright, Jill Johnston or Henry Martin. It also included archivists, collectors, curators and gallerists who sometimes wrote or organized catalogues and publications. The most notable among these were René Block, Hermann Braun, Francesco Conz, Tjeerd Deelstra, Jon Hendricks, Judith Hoffberg, Barbara Moore, Knud Peder-sen, Clive Phillpot, Harry Ruhé, Jean Sellem and Hanns Sohm.

Fluxus artists also continued to write. This remained a necessity in an environment where there were more artists in Fluxus with something to say than there were critics or scholars who wanted to write about us.

## The Third Wave: Early Scholars

THE THIRD WAVE OF WRITING ON FLUXUS BEGAN IN THE 1970S AS TRAINED scholars began to examine Fluxus. Scholars in the arts began to explore Fluxus timidly in papers and articles. The first doctoral research on Fluxus was in the field of anthropology in 1974 (mentioned earlier). During the 1970s, art historians migrated to Fluxus and Fluxus artists from traditional topics in classical and modern art. The first American among them was Peter Frank. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, several more American art historians were at work. These included scholars such as Stephen C. Foster and Estera Milman at the University of Iowa and museum director Jan van der Marck. In addition to art historians, there were scholars from other fields. Scholars in comparative literature such as Georg M. Gugelberger or theater such as Philip Auslander also wrote on Fluxus artists and their work.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the available literature on Fluxus began to expand for many reasons. Growing interest across several disciplines was one reason. Another was the work of one man: Jon Hendricks.

## Jon Hendricks: One Man in Three Waves

JON HENDRICKS FORMS A BRIDGE BETWEEN THREE ERAS OF FLUXUS scholarship. He began his work as a Fluxfriend. As a founder and member of the Guerilla Art Action group (GAAG), he was a radical political artist in the 1960s. He was not part of Fluxus, but a friend of many Fluxus artists and the brother of Fluxus artist Geoffrey Hendricks.

Hendricks's writing and research on Fluxus began in the 1970s when he worked as a dealer in rare books and artifacts. His major publications began to

appear in the 1980s after the classically trained art historians had begun their work. Today, he is a curator and archivist and his publications form a central body of material for Fluxus specialists. Hendricks's books, catalogues, monographs and checklists are the largest single source of Fluxus documentation in print. His books represent thousands of pages of historically important source materials in reprint and photographic form, the most important body of reproductions of original Fluxus material available.

Hendricks's collections include *Fluxus Codex*, a fully illustrated catalogue raisonné of George Maciunas's Fluxus multiples and editions. He has also published a nearly complete selection of George Maciunas's original Fluxus newsletters; many of the catalogued holdings in the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection; several important selections of Yoko Ono's event scores and writings; and—scattered through several volumes—the largest available body of Fluxus event scores to date. Hendricks has also edited or co-edited several important museum catalogues, including the elegant 1988 catalogue published by the Museum of Modern Art.<sup>13</sup>

The availability of so much source material made an important difference to the development of interest in Fluxus. Through them, scholars and writers who became interested in Fluxus had the chance to examine images of work that had, for many people, been more a rumor than a fact. Seeing these works or finding copies of the documents that Hendricks made available would previously have required extensive research in an archive or collection.

While Jon Hendricks has had an important career as a curator and an archivist, he comes to history without the foundation in historiography or scholarly research methods that one would expect of an historian. Hendricks approaches his historical writing from an archival rather than a historiographic position. In books such as *What's Fluxus? What's Not? Why?*, for example, he offers assertions and criticism without offering the evidence on which he bases his assertions. He never explains "Why?" In this book, as elsewhere, Hendricks repeats critical claims against those he disagrees with while declining to answer the challenges they offer to his earlier claims. As a result, many historians challenge Hendricks's approach. Others avoid challenging him, despite a quiet disagreement with his views. Given his dominant position in the field and his control of a central archive, younger scholars fear that an open challenge to Hendricks would make their work impossible.

Like Dick Higgins, Emmett Williams, Estera Milman and others, I have had my disagreements with Hendricks. I find it frustrating to write careful replies to mistaken claims when Hendricks argues that he does not have time to look in his own archive to substantiate or refute my reply. This would not be a problem if he did not repeat the mistake in his next book or article. As a scholar, I also find some of Hendricks's critiques far too harsh. Because

13 Hendricks, Jon, editor. 1982. *Fluxus, etc.: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection*. Bloomfield Hills, MI: Cranbrook Museum of Art; Hendricks, Jon, editor. 1983. *Fluxus, etc.: Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection. Addenda I*. New York: Ink &, 1983; Hendricks, Jon, editor. 1983. *Fluxus, etc.: Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection. Addenda TWO*. Pasadena: California Institute of Technology, Baxter Art Gallery, 1983; Phillpot, Clive and Jon Hendricks, editors. 1988. *Fluxus: Selections from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection*. Clive New York: Museum of Modern Art; Hendricks, Jon. 1989. *Fluxus Codex*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.; Hendricks, Jon. 2002. *What's Fluxus? What's Not? Why*. Detroit, MI: The Gilbert and Lisa Silverman Fluxus Foundation.

Hendricks is not a scholar, he fails to recognize the literal meaning of his words, and he does not understand how scholars would react to similar claims should another scholar offer them.

In one sense, these are serious issues, and it is unfortunate that none of us has been able to engage Jon seriously on these questions. The history of art has often been distorted, at least temporarily, by the fact that a major figure refuses to engage in the debate that forms the life of inquiry. When a scholar controls a major holding with unique access to unique sources and the right to deny this access to others, he is secured against the kinds of scrutiny and argumentation the rest of us face. In a way, this position mistakes control of the physical legacy with the role of the legate. That Jon Hendricks seems to occupy this position is a source of frustration to many. My view is slightly different.

In my view, Jon Hendricks occupies a unique position in Fluxus scholarship, spanning, as I note, three different eras. In one context, he is a central Fluxfriend. He helped to preserve, develop, present and focus on this material when no one else would. In a second context, he is the most important living Fluxus archivist and documentary publisher. Only George Maciunas or Dick Higgins surpass Hendricks's importance as a publisher of central Fluxus source material. The third context is where my occasional disagreements with Hendricks occur. This is where Hendricks, the archivist, shifts from the custodian and presenter of documents to the analyst and interpreter of what those documents mean.

The general rule of scholarship is that all scholars must have equal access to the same body of evidence. If one scholar draws a debatable conclusion, fair argumentation in scholarly debate demands that other scholars must have access to the full original source. This includes access to evidence that the scholar decides not to present or cite. This principle lies at the heart of fair process. In law, a review court declares a mistrial if the prosecution withholds evidence from the defense. A mistrial may also occur if either side fails to give proper advance notice of evidence to be entered to permit the opposing side to prepare a proper argument. In theology, the core principle of the Reformation was that each person must be able to read scripture to reach a valid and reasoned conclusion on doctrine, even on doctrinal issues of faith when they are anchored in scripture. This is a principle in physical and social science, and it is a core principle of history.

Jon Hendricks offers a weak argument against this claiming that it is impossible to grant others full and equal access to the documents he claims support his views. It is one thing for an archivist to claim lack of time and resources make it impossible to grant access to a collection. It is an archivist's job to preserve and guard the physical safety of documents. It is another matter entirely for an historian to claim privileged knowledge based on



14 Valla, Lorenzo. 1922. *Discourse on the Forgery of the Alleged Donation of Constantine*. Translated with an introduction by Christopher B. Coleman. New Haven: Yale University Press.

unique access to documents that no one else is permitted to investigate, particularly not when asserting claims also involves denying access to contextual documents that may place cited sources in a different light. Scholars see this as special pleading, and it explains why scholars with enough knowledge of Fluxus to understand the deeper historical problems are skeptical to Hendricks's approach, in contrast with those who accept expertise based on unique access without question.

This distinction goes to the heart of the furor that broke out in 1440 when Lorenzo Valla challenged the Donation of Constantine, a document carefully guarded by the Vatican archive as the cornerstone of papal authority over European political life. Authority over text was a key issue in the arguments against Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into German. The argument was that the right to examine and interpret documents could only be entrusted to the ordained clergy. In contrast, most of us believe that we should all have the right to examine the evidence on which experts base their claims. It may be, of course, that our expertise is not great enough to decide among viewpoints in many fields. I have no ability, for example, to decide between rival claims in physics or evolutionary biology. In social science or history, I do. Most scholars in the humanities and the social sciences are as capable of interpreting Fluxus documents as Hendricks is or I am. As a result, lack of access to sources of Fluxus documentation raise more questions than expert authority resolves. This is especially the case for those of us trained in advanced research methods and comparative research methodology.

This contest involves a clash of two cultures. The culture of democratic debate and scholarly inquiry demands open access to materials. This requires equal argument on equal terms. The culture of control demands restricted access to materials and it privileges ownership over inquiry. This culture accepts secret documents and private decisions as the foundation of privileged argument favoring those who own the archives. Universities and public museums clearly distinguish between these positions by entrusting ownership and preservation functions to the positions of archivist, registrar and librarian, while entrusting research and debate to scholars, scientists, curators and students. This, in fact, is the foundation of democracy and a cornerstone of the Fluxus argument against the restrictive culture of the art market. It is impossible to own the Fluxus idea and denying access to the idea is a contradiction in terms.

Everyone understands the need to guard objects and artifacts. Restricting access to correspondence, papers and documents is another matter entirely.

### The Fourth Wave: Fluxus as an Emerging Scholarly Discipline

THE LATE 1980S AND EARLY 1990S SAW THE FOURTH WAVE OF WRITING AND scholarship on Fluxus. Many more art historians and critics began to discover

Fluxus and intermedia. Some chose Fluxus as a major focus for their work.

These included Europeans such as Simon Anderson, associate professor of art history and chairman of the department at the School of the Art Institute, Chicago; Marianne Bech, director the Roskilde Museum of Contemporary Art in Denmark; Ina Blom, associate professor of art history at University of Oslo; Ina Conzen-Meairs, director of Archiv Sohm at Stadtsgalerie Stuttgart; Adrian Glew, archivist-curator at the Tate Gallery in London; Ludo van Halem, an editor at the Dutch magazine *Jonge Holland*; Elizabeth Delin-Hansen, former curator at the National Art Gallery of Denmark, now director of Copenhagen Contemporary Art Center; Thomas Kellein, former director of Archiv Sohm and current director of Kunsthalle Bielefeld; and Adalsteinn Ingolfsson, chief curator of the National Gallery of Iceland.

These also included Americans such as Kathy O'Dell, associate professor of art history and associate dean at the University of Maryland; David Doris, assistant professor of art history at the University of Michigan; Hannah Higgins, associate professor of art history at University of Illinois; Owen Smith, professor of art history at University of Maine; Kristine Stiles, associate professor of art and art history at the University of North Carolina. There were also Asians such as Hong Hee Kim Cheon, the distinguished Korean art critic and curator, and Japan's Keiko Ashino, an editor at the Art Vivant publishing company.

These years were marked by the first significant body of writing by trained scholars specializing in Fluxus. Simon Anderson completed his doctoral dissertation on Fluxus at the Royal College of Art in London. Owen Smith wrote his dissertation at the University of Washington. Ina Blom published her doctoral dissertation at the University of Oslo. David Doris completed his master's work on Fluxus at Hunter College before moving on to doctoral work in African art at Yale University. Hannah Higgins completed her doctoral dissertation at University of Chicago during this period as well as organizing several distinguished exhibitions.

Over the past forty-five years, international interest in Fluxus and intermedia has grown. A large and significant body of literature on Fluxus has grown with it. The thirtieth anniversary of Fluxus in 1992 marked the beginning of what seems to be a fifth wave of research and writing on Fluxus.

### **The Fifth Wave: Fluxus seen from the outside**

THE GROWTH OF FLUXUS WRITING FROM THE WRITING OF THE ARTISTS themselves to the work of independent scholars was characterized by a significant number of overlaps. The distinctions were not always clear between Fluxus artists and their friends; between artists and scholars; between artist-scholars, outside scholars and scholars who make art.

Almost everyone who wrote on Fluxus in the early days was intimately connected to the development of Fluxus, artist or not. Until recently, even those

who came to Fluxus completely from the outside could engage in a dialogue with the artists about whom they wrote, or at least speak with the close friends and colleagues of dead artists.

That era is coming to a close. The youngest members of the classical Fluxus group are in their fifties and the oldest artists are in their late seventies and eighties. Scholars and critics new to Fluxus come as outsiders. Curators and editors now work in great part based on secondary material or a second-hand look at source material. They are not always able to discuss issues and ideas with the artists, composers, designers and architects whose work they present. While careful researchers can find out how the work was presented by talking with people who were there, the amount of research required is inevitably greater. Some people now writing on George Maciunas were not yet in school when he died. People now writing on Joseph Beuys never had the experience of meeting or corresponding with a man who was one of the most communicative and accessible artists in the world. Nevertheless, it is possible to meet, work with and learn from the still-living actors.

Much curatorial research is inevitably seen from the outside simply because curators interpret or reinterpret without necessarily working through the entire historical discourse. Cornelia Lauf and Susan Hapgood's 1991 *Flux-Attitudes* exhibition at The New Museum in New York is a case in point. The curators formed a view of the work based on a radical reinterpretation of the material. While this re-interpretation brought interesting questions to light, it went astray in making historical claims. The work may, indeed, speak for itself, but history must attend to the voices of those "who done it."

### Beyond Fluxus: the Intermedia Era

THE ERA WHEN MORE CENTRAL FLUXUS ARTISTS WERE ALIVE, DECISIVELY ended when Dick Higgins died. A new era is opening. This is a time when Fluxus and much like it is being contextualized in the larger frame that Dick Higgins labeled intermedia.

The old era of Fluxus scholarship ended and a new era began with the first major history of Fluxus, Owen Smith's *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*.<sup>15</sup>

This book locates Fluxus in the context of twentieth century experimental art forms, including intermedia, digital art, mail art, artist books and performance. While scholars took this position in earlier projects—Smith himself among them—this was the first monographic history to focus on the work of artists associated with Fluxus and on Fluxus itself. The book demonstrates a reflective and explicitly philosophical position, bringing an articulate historiographic sensibility and a rich theoretical focus to bear on specific issues and artists, bringing historical inquiry to life by articulating specific topics that shed light on the flow of history. While arguing his own case, Smith invites readers to join a critical debate on what the history means.

15 Smith, Owen F. 1998.  
*Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*.  
San Diego, California: San Diego  
State University Press.

As an historian, Owen Smith has had a unique role in the development of scholarship on Fluxus. He began his work on Fluxus in the third wave of scholars, as one of the first trained scholars to work with these issues. At that time, writing and scholarship on Fluxus took three main forms. The first was the writing of the Fluxus artists. While this writing was important and significant, rich thinking by artists who write on their own work leaves corresponding gaps. The second was well-intentioned and enthusiastic writing by collectors and critics. While much of this writing was interesting and some of it was intelligent, it lacked the rich philosophical and historiographic understanding that illuminates art in the work of the best scholars. Worse, yet, much of the writing involved problematic accounts and inaccurate stories repeated indiscriminately by authors who drew on the work of earlier enthusiasts. The third stream was a form of collage, comprised of documentary compilations reproduced in catalogues and collections.

Owen Smith and the other authors in the fourth wave changed this. Smith went to Germany on a DAAD Fellowship to study the original documents and works of the Fluxus artists at Archiv Sohm, the first great Fluxus collection and a center for primary research. He contacted the artists to learn about their own views of their work, and since many still were alive in the 1980s, he developed a unique first-hand perspective to balance his painstaking archival studies. He spoke with enough artists to gain multiple perspectives and to eliminate the necessarily individual perspective and occasional biases of any one artist in favor of a balanced view embracing the entire community. He brought these together into an unparalleled body of careful notes, then he examined them through the lens of historical inquiry. The result was a doctoral dissertation that was the first of its kind in the field of Fluxus and intermedia studies. This dissertation reoriented the field, becoming the pivotal exemplar for the work of nearly all historians and scholars since.

One may reasonably argue that Owen Smith holds this unique role because he had the good fortune to be the first serious scholar to work this field. In a sense, that is true. More important is the fact that Smith undertook pioneering work where other scholars did not. Equally important, his work measures up to the highest international standards of scholarship: even if Dr. Smith had not been the first, his work would be exemplary in quality, consistency and impact.

Equally important, Owen Smith has been generous with the many scholars who look to him for advice and guidance. He always offers information and resources to those who ask. He works in the best scholarly tradition, sharing information and ideas with skeptics and critics as well as with those who accept his views. He continues his own work, deepening his inquiries and plowing new ground. This shift in position and context marked a new era in Fluxus scholarship.

In the years since Smith published his history, significant new scholars have emerged to make important contributions to the new field. These include: Bertrand Clavez, assistant professor of art history at University of Lyon 2; Anna Dezeuze, post-doctoral research fellow at University of Manchester; Craig Dworkin, associate professor of English at the University of Utah; Stephen Perkins, Curator of Art, Lawton Gallery, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay; Julia Robinson, doctoral research fellow in art history at Princeton University; and Craig Saper, professor of English at University of Central Florida. These are a few exemplary names. There are too many to do justice to in a short essay.

The new era of Fluxus scholarship has a second landmark. After working with Fluxus for her 1994 doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago,<sup>16</sup> Hannah Higgins's *Fluxus Experience*<sup>17</sup> moved the field forward into the deep monograph-length consideration of central Fluxus themes and topics. The conceptual strategy of the book points the way to new approaches to Fluxus scholarship by using well-known and less-known facts to develop surprising conclusions. This hermeneutical reading reveals hidden depths in apparently simple Fluxus ideas that reverberate across an unexpected range of topics.

In an important philosophical sense, Higgins recovers the multiplicity of original Fluxus voices that argue Fluxus as experience before it is art. The philosophical and experiential nature of Fluxus enables it to remain a lively presence while art movements come and go. Higgins captures this point in two ways. The first is a philosophical link to John Dewey's pragmatist approach to philosophy and education. The second is the fact that Fluxus has been an educational and philosophical venture from the beginning. Past writers have often neglected the important focus on learning and teaching among Fluxus artists. This book performs a great service by foregrounding a topic that deeply engaged many Fluxus artists, and by using the thematic frame to generate a renewed understanding of the Fluxus conversation through close reading as a central strategy. The close reading of works brings Fluxus history into the kind of mature light that enriches other forms of history and such fields as musicology. She starts with films and optical experiments, ending with globalization and the event as democratic practice.

The core principles of the book is central to the final chapter, "Teaching and Learning as Art Forms: Toward a Fluxus-Inspired Pedagogy." While Ravicz addressed these issues thirty years ago in the first doctoral dissertation on Fluxus, Ravicz was ahead of her time and outside the art world. These themes require a broad interdisciplinary perspective that is only now emerging thanks to the contributions of such scholars as Higgins.

These two books have helped to reorient the field. Deep inquiry refreshes the dialectics of legacy in important ways. What comes next in the field must

<sup>16</sup> Higgins, Hannah. 1994. *Enversioning Fluxus*. Chicago: Department of Art History, University of Chicago, doctoral dissertation.

<sup>17</sup> Higgins, Hannah. 2002. *Fluxus Experience*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

respond to Fluxus in the new context established by a new critical historiography and a revitalized hermeneutic narrative.

## Renewal and Opportunity

SCHOLARS CAN STILL ASK QUESTIONS OF THE REMAINING FLUXUS ARTISTS in the few years left. There are questions that ought to be asked and this happens less often than it should. As a result, writers—including art historians—repeat the misunderstandings of ill-informed journalists by copying mistakes that first appeared in decades-old articles. Rather than inquiring how the artists themselves see an installation or a performance, curators represent the artists and the work in line with curatorial theories based on repeated misinterpretations. It would be one thing if the ideas that seem to dominate the debate had ever represented Fluxus, confusing and multidimensional as it was. Instead, many of the current misinterpretations are based on simple mistakes.

Much of what people think they know about Fluxus began in misunderstood ideas and misinformation. For many years, Fluxus activity was a relatively obscure phenomenon. Even Fluxus activity that took place in major art centers and influenced other artists through direct contact or through one or another of the many Fluxus publications remained generally invisible.

In the 1960s and 1970s, there were few collections of source material and all were located at a great distance from anyone who was interested.

To see comprehensive collections of original documents and works, it was necessary to travel to Archive Sohm in Mark Groningen, Germany, to Jean Brown's Shaker Seed House in Tyngham, Massachusetts, to Fluxus West in San Diego, California or to wherever Dick Higgins was living with his library and filing cabinets. These collections were open to scholars. The sad fact is that few scholars consulted these collections, sometimes for lack of funding, more often for lack of interest.

Lacking knowledge of the original sources, many writers passed ideas from article to article without careful investigation and many of those ideas were misinterpreted as facts. As a result, many of the so-called facts about Fluxus are an historian's copy of a critic's discussion of a journalist's account of a misunderstanding uttered by a confused spectator at a festival several years earlier. When mistakes enter the literature of any discipline, they tend to be repeated. Enthusiastic scholars pushing an immature hypothesis often neglect their research. Younger scholars at the undergraduate and beginning graduate level do not yet have the depth of information or the level of skill needed to compare sources and evaluate reliability. This is why it is useful to use these last remaining years to query the artists.

That is also why the work of seasoned scholars who have worked in the archives and studied original sources is essential to future scholarship and to

any future interpretations. There are now hundreds of writers on Fluxus. Of these, only a handful of trained scholars have done serious archival research at the Getty Institute, University of Iowa, Stadtsgalerie Stuttgart, the Tate Gallery or the Silverman Collection.

It is now impossible to do serious scholarly work on Fluxus without reading the work of those scholars who did the early and substantial first-hand research in the archives and consulted the artists. These include Anderson, Blom, Clavez, Conzen-Meairs, Doris, Frank, Hendricks, Hannah Higgins, Kellein, Moss and Smith.

Access to major Fluxus collections is now much easier. The documents once represented in great private collections are now available to scholars. The holdings of Archiv Sohm are now at Stadtsgalerie Stuttgart. The Jean Brown Archive, many of the Dick Higgins papers, and Carolee Schneemann's papers are now at Getty Center for the History of the Arts and Humanities in Los Angeles, California. The Fluxus West papers and collections have been distributed across Europe and the United States. They can be found at Alternative Traditions in Contemporary Art at the University of Iowa, Tate Gallery Archives in London, Henie Onstad Art Center in Norway, Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, in the Museum of Modern Art's Franklin Furnace Archive Collection, the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art and the Mandeville Department of Special Collections at the University of California at San Diego,

Several documentary collections are partially accessible on the web. These include Alternative Traditions in Contemporary Art at the University of Iowa, the Tate Gallery Archives, the Franklin Furnace Archive at the Museum of Modern Art and the MOMA Library, the Getty Center for the History of the Arts and Humanities, the Mandeville Department of Special Collections at the University of California at San Diego and Artpool in Budapest, Hungary.<sup>18</sup>

One can understand that few people can afford to travel to three or four archives on two continents and stay on site for anywhere from two weeks to several months. What is hard to understand is why so few scholars read the widely available writings of the artists themselves. It is equally odd that so few pick up a telephone or write a letter to query living artists on specific points. It is interesting that the scholars who have done the most serious archival research are also the scholars who query the artists most diligently in correspondence and lengthy interviews. This is a sharp contrast with the majority, many of whom base their understanding of Fluxus on a few myths, entertaining stories and a selection of work by their favorite artists.

This is particularly true of the many views of Fluxus now being put forward in the form of exhibitions. Most curators are too burdened by the press of administrative activities to base their interpretations on first-hand histori-

18 Fluxus documentary collections partially accessible on the World Wide Web:

Alternative Traditions in Contemporary Art at the University of Iowa  
<http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/spec-coll/atca/intro.htm>

Tate Gallery Archives  
<http://www.tate.org.uk/research/researchservices/archive/>  
[http://www.tate.org.uk/research/researchservices/archive/archive\\_mayor.htm](http://www.tate.org.uk/research/researchservices/archive/archive_mayor.htm)

Franklin Furnace Archive at the Museum of Modern Art  
<http://library.moma.org/>

MOMA Library  
<http://library.moma.org/>

Getty Center for the History of the Arts and Humanities  
<http://www.getty.edu/research/>

Mandeville Department of Special Collections at the University of California at San Diego  
<http://orpheus.ucsd.edu/speccoll/testing/html/mss0128a.html>

Artpool in Budapest, Hungary  
<http://www.artpool.hu/>

cal research. As a result, many artistically engaging shows give historically skewed views of Fluxus. It is one thing to present a critical or interpretive view of the art. It is another to offer an interpretation of art as a representation of history. Interpretation is an inevitable aspect of scholarship. Radical interpretations and re-interpretations often pose particularly valuable challenges to received knowledge. Nevertheless, interpretation is not history. As hard as it sometimes is to locate and validate facts, there is a difference between scholarly interpretation and historical fact. An interpretation states, "This is how I view Fluxus, and what I think it means." This is not the same as saying, "This is what the Fluxus people did. This is what they believed and how they saw themselves." The distinction between what an artist intended and the interpretation of the artist's work is often neglected in art historical scholarship and curatorial demonstration.

### Multiple Interpretations: Ideas in Flux

FLUXUS PERMITS AND ENCOURAGES MULTIPLE VIEWS AND INTERPRETATIONS. Multiple interpretations are one thing. Statements of fact are another. The purpose of this bibliography is access to facts and to the wide range of viewpoints and interpretations.

Consider, for example, the interpretation linking Fluxus with Zen. Many have compared Fluxus with Zen Buddhism. Until this decade, however, few established a proper scholarly interpretation of the comparison. It was not until 1993 that art historian David Doris made this mundane comparison elegant in his master's thesis and a later contribution to *The Fluxus Reader*.<sup>19</sup> The general comparison between Fluxus and Zen extends to a comparison between the literature of Fluxus and the literature of Zen.

The comparison between Zen and Fluxus practice and is quite understandable. The spare, austere Zen koan is reminiscent of Fluxus event structures. The humanistic, open-ended philosophy of Zen permits multiple understandings and interpretations. At the same time, koan practice is accompanied and surrounded by a massive literature, including the special sleeve-books of koan and replies that students use in their own koan study. We study Zen and Buddhism in general through a massive body of articulate and subtle writings.

In much the same way, scholars must distinguish between the frequently ambiguous and evanescent doings of Fluxus artists, and the literature that describes and reflects on what the doings mean. It is one thing to shape the direct experiential practice. It is another to write the history and philosophy of the practice. Zen Buddhists—monks, scholars and scholarly monks—have always understood the subtle differences between those two positions. That has not yet become clear to many of the scholars and commentators who write on Fluxus.

<sup>19</sup> Doris, David T. 1993. *Zen Vaudeville: A Meditation in the Margins of Fluxus*. New York, New York: Department of Art History, Hunter College, master's thesis; Doris, David T. "Zen Vaudeville: A Meditation in the Margins of Fluxus." *The Fluxus Reader*. Ken Friedman, editor. London: Academy Press, John Wiley and Sons, 237-253.



Different forms of immediate perception and the interactive engagement form the core of the Fluxus experience. Those who engage in interpretation and historical analysis, however, take on the responsibility of reliable and appropriately subtle accounts of the immediate and interactive. It may not be necessary to engage in history to understand Fluxus. When one does engage in history, historiographic integrity demands the responsible management and representation of facts. The question of historiography has had too little place in discussing Fluxus.

20 Friedman, Ken, and Owen Smith, editors. 2005. *Fluxus and Legacy*. *Visible Language*, 39, 3. Special issue.

21 Friedman, Ken, and Owen Smith. 2005. "History, Historiography, Historicism, Legacy." *Visible Language*, 39, 3, 308-317.

In a special issue of *Visible Language* on Fluxus and Legacy,<sup>20</sup> Owen Smith and I addressed this specific problem.<sup>21</sup> Historiographic awareness and methodological sensitivity involve useful and necessary questions that help us to understand and practice historical inquiry in a skilful way. No work or source speaks for itself. One must subject each source to inquiry. Is the source authentic? What is its authority? What biases and interests does the source entail? Is it intelligible? No author speaks fully for a context or a time. Similar questions help us to understand the authors. Who wrote the text? What was this person like? What theoretical orientation does the text reflect? What or who was the intended audience? Responsible authors must ask and answer these questions rather than assuming that everything is plain on the surface of a document. If that were so, then Benedict XVI would rule Europe. If that were so, of course, we might not be discussing Fluxus at all, unless it might have been the name of a cranky group of dissident theologian-poets, a Kapellmeister here and there with an interest in playing aleatoric hymns, mystery play performers, and shrine carvers.<sup>22</sup>

22 This might be an idea worth pursuing. In the 1960s and 1970s, I created a series of projects involving shrines. A year or two back, I organized a Fluxusconcert with Ben Patterson and Bertrand Clavez at the La Tourette Monastery built by Le Corbusier. For the symposium attending the event, I delivered a paper in which I proposed developing a Fluxus theology.

## The Claims of History

IS IT POSSIBLE TO VIEW FLUXUS THROUGH THE LENS OF HISTORY? IT MAY be or it may not. That very question is a central theme in Simon Anderson's research. If it is possible, it is only made possible by distinguishing between what people have said for themselves and what others have said about them; between what each person said for himself and the other evidence that sheds light on situation, context, process and occurrences; between what happened and what people thought about what happened. Even if it is not possible to fully understand Fluxus through the lens of history, however, facts remain facts. Whether or not one can unfold the philosophical position or the practice of Fluxus through analysis, historical reflection adds light and dimension to the discourse surrounding Fluxus. Fluxus has been an experimental forum, a laboratory. This situation implies rigorous thinking combined with empirical research and experience.

The idea of Fluxus as a laboratory, a framework for serious discourse means that a rich body of discourse and dialogue remains to be brought forward. There are four ways to consider these issues. The first allows us to

consider experimental art and intermedia. The second focuses on the projects and history specific to Fluxus. The third requires considering the work and practices of the individual artists. The fourth requires us to consider our response to these first three, reflecting on our own response and reaction to them, and the uses we make of what we learn, know and experience.

The largest and most abstract level involves a body of information and a record of process issues worth harvesting and preserving. Fluxus has been a laboratory for specific projects in art, music, literature, architecture and design, a laboratory for ways of thinking and being. The results deserve examination and reconsideration. That is a task for historical scholarship and historiographic care on one hand, for philosophical inquiry on the other.

On the next level, the dialogue among and between the artists and other colleagues has a continuing value. Approaching Fluxus and Fluxus work as pure personal response or critical reflection often strips significant issues from the living and once-living conversations of history. Doing justice to these conversations and to the lives and practices they represent requires methodological awareness and appropriate care. Whether or not any of us agrees with a specific viewpoint, the viewpoints are there and they have been for nearly five decades. Dealing with this material in a thin way misrepresents Fluxus, the artists who shaped it and it diminishes the practice and outcome of scholarship, reducing it to opinion.

On the most specific level, we each have our own work and viewpoints. We are a group of artists who did what we did in order to be able to say things as we felt it necessary to say them. During the long period in which Fluxus was neglected and overlooked by the art world, by art historians, by curators and by gallerists, we preserved our own voice and vision. It is unfortunate that the growing interest in Fluxus that has brought us to wider recognition now threatens to overwhelm our ideas with shallow distortions and streamlined misrepresentation.

Careless, inappropriate or untruthful representation of serious and subtle ideas distorts what happened, what we said and thought, what we did. From the beginning, we shaped our own vision of Fluxus as artists and we paid a price to maintain an independent vision. Exhibitions, projects and publications should respect that fact. Every curator or scholar has the right to his or her own interpretation. That right must be established by acknowledging our individual interpretations, even if only to disagree with us.

It is amazing that so much writing about Fluxus has been published with so little recourse to what we ourselves have had to say. There is a large body of writing by Fluxus people and much of it is widely available. Filliou, Flynt, Friedman, Higgins, Knizak, Paik, Vautier and Williams have all written extensively. Brecht, Beuys, Christiansen, Klintberg and others have written from

time to time and what they have written has been interesting and valuable. It is difficult to imagine acceptable scholarship in any comparable field being conducted with less recourse to the source material. The source materials must be acknowledged, if only to reject them.

Fluxus history is a laboratory for ideas. That is one of the most interesting issues that Simon Anderson, David Doris, Hannah Higgins, Craig Saper, Owen Smith and others raise in their work. The dialogue of history is a form of experiment, experimentation with ideas, with culture, with values. In other ways, Fluxus scholars from Henry Martin to Kathy O'Dell and Kristine Stiles have said the same thing. Robust experiment demands the ideas and issues be examined and questioned.

If the art history of Fluxus is to measure up to mature historiography in other fields, those who write on Fluxus must address the full scope of Fluxus and the subtle realities that made it what it is. The same is true in film, design, urban planning, musicology and other fields where historians are examining Fluxus and—in Owen Smith's words—playing with difference. Play and interpretation are part of the forum of history. They are one aspect of a conversation on the dialectics of legacy. The requirements of historiography are another.

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Design at the Norwegian School of Management and at Denmark's Design School. Friedman's research concentrates on organization, culture and design in the knowledge economy. He has worked with intermedia and concept art since 1966 when Dick Higgins and George Maciunas enrolled him in Fluxus. He also worked as director of Fluxus West and manager of Something Else Press. In 1998, he edited *The Fluxus Reader* for Academy Press.