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I, Chris M Reeves, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History.

It is entitled:
United Front and Action vs. Beautiful Coffee Cups: Fluxus Through the Publications of George Maciunas and Dick Higgins

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United Front and Action vs. Beautiful Coffee Cups:  
Fluxus through the publications of George Maciunas and Dick Higgins

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Abstract

By examining publications of two key Fluxus producers, George Maciunas (1931-1978) and Dick Higgins (1938-1998), this thesis explores their different ideas of Fluxus. Through this analysis, I argue that Higgins’ publications allowed more freedom and artistic autonomy and broadened Fluxus’ definition of what it could do and be. Maciunas’ more hegemonic positioning of Fluxus has lead to a misunderstanding of Fluxus’ historical legacy, in particular, with the prevailing narrative that Fluxus artists were anti-art. Chapter One focuses on how Maciunas used graphic design and typography to brand the group. In Chapter Two, I examine Higgins’ publishing press, comparing his presentation of Fluxus to that of Maciunas. Finally, in Chapter Three I analyze the overall effects in art history of the different visions of Fluxus Maciunas and Higgins had.
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Introduction

I always felt that George was the fifth Marx Brother and I loved his humor, but it distorted the intention of my works.

-- La Monte Young¹

It was this remark by La Monte Young (b. 1935) that made me being to think seriously about the hermeneutics and politics surrounding Fluxus publications. More questions relating to these themes occurred to me on reading George Maciunas’ (1931-1978) thoughts on authorship regarding Fluxus publications in the 2003 anthology *What’s Fluxus? What’s Not! Why*:

Eventually we would destroy the authorship of pieces & make them totally anonymous –thus eliminating artist’s “ego” – Author would be ‘FLUXUS.’ We can’t depend on each “artist” to destroy his ego. The copyright arrangement will eventually force him to it if he is reluctant.”²

What struck me about this passage, particularly in relation to Young’s comment, is the contradictory way in which these two artists operated. Maciunas was too strong a presence in presenting a Fluxus artist’s work, yet he wanted to destroy the author function in the Fluxus work he presented. As Fluxus’ founder and self-appointed chairman, Maciunas held most of the authority over its dissemination. His talk of

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¹ Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Scores and Instructions: The Transformative Years: “Make a Salad”: Selections from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection* (Detroit, MI: Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection, 2003), 53.

“force” in the aforementioned remark is an example. Yet, his politics and authority tended to distort Fluxus’ aims. After all, how could ego be removed from Fluxus, when Maciunas’ designs and agenda for the group became its most recognizable facet? His life-long dedication to promoting Fluxus as something that could operate outside the boundaries of art, through collective action that lampooned its capital structures, ironically became the ribbon that tied Fluxus together and into the hands of the institution that he so strongly denigrated. This study will look at Fluxus publications, defined here both traditionally as books and pamphlets and as “Fluxus Multiples” – non-precious objects based on ideas by Fluxus artists that were produced almost exclusively by Maciunas – investigating how a myriad of disparate artist’s ideas were unified and sometimes usurped by Maciunas’ Fluxus branding. It will also examine a different approach to that of Maciunas, in the Fluxus publications of Dick Higgins (1938-1998), and in particular the case of his Something Else Press.

Chapter One examines a cross-section of Maciunas’ design work for various publications, proto-Fluxus and Fluxus proper. The Fluxus artists whose names adorn these works are a diverse group of international writers, poets, musicians, and performers, but their Fluxus publications almost all display the idiosyncrasies of Maciunas himself. These visual embodiments of Maciunas’ idealism and ideologies reveal themselves as running counter to the egalitarianism that Fluxus posited as essential. Critical discussions of Maciunas’ notion of functionalism in his design are investigated. Maciunas wanted design to be functional, and believed this to be a key tenant of Fluxus presentation. Further, his design work was viewed by
Maciunas as a kind of concretism; the package design for a Fluxus object was meant to be a mirror reflection, conceptually, of the object itself. Maciunas does not always live up to this self-standard in his designs. This is exemplified by comparing Maciunas’ supposedly functionally designed *Venus* aprons to the largely considered non-functional *Venus* collages by Fluxus artist Al Hansen (1927-1995). The chapter closes on Maciunas’ Fluxus history charts, largely controversial in that they outline Fluxus under the rubric of what he believed to exemplify – and historically align – Fluxus. I argue that this model has helped to inform the dominance of Maciunas in art historical narratives about Fluxus.

In Chapter Two I focus on Dick Higgins, and his differences from Maciunas. I argue that many of Higgins’ Something Else Press bring out the shortcomings of Fluxus publications organized by Maciunas: uniformity, production agenda, and usurped autonomy. Several examples are given of publications by Fluxus artists produced by Higgins, in tandem with the goals of Fluxus yet not overwrought with the imprint of their producer. Fluxus’ position in the greater annals of art history are further examined with Higgins’ publishing of Richard Hueselenbeck’s *Dada Almanach* and works by Gertrude Stein.

Finally, in Chapter Three and in the conclusion, I use key Fluxus publications and exhibitions from the past few decades as an indicators of the critical landscape concerning the history of Fluxus. Two markedly different approaches to the presentation Fluxus are prevalent, each mirroring the separate definitions of Fluxus that Maciunas and Higgins espoused.
George Maciunas’ Fluxshop and Mail Order Warehouse existed for a little under a year in his loft at 359 Canal Street in New York City in 1964. Unintentionally, but nonetheless notably acting as a contrast to Andy Warhol’s assembly line “Factory” just a little over four miles away, the Fluxshop contained a variety of Maciunas-designed Fluxus objects by Fluxus artists and advertised the sale of “Games, Gags, Jokes, Kits, Machines, Boxes, Amusements, Bottles, and Cases.”3 While the “machines” advertised had been created by Joe Jones (1934-1993) and Robert Watts (1923-1988), the majority of other sale items would bear Maciunas’ recognizable graphic design and editorial stamp of approval, a license that most Fluxus artists were willing to forgive. La Monte Young considers the rationale behind this forgiveness, saying “For many artists whose work had no strong identity of its own, Fluxus provided the sense of unity in which there was strength and the sense of commonality and belonging, as to a church.”4

In this case the commonality that Young mentioned refers to branding, i.e. Maciunas’ offer to produce their work, with the minor stipulation, although never stated explicitly or contractually, that he would market it under his own design. Further, Maciunas’ “offering of his skills as an entrepreneur and P.R. man were a

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4 Hendricks, 53.
boon that most could not resist.”

The critic Julia Robinson described Maciunas’ role as “producer,” citing Walter Benjamin’s idea of “author as producer” and pointing to Maciunas’ “circulating regular newsletters to inform the Fluxus group of events of collective concern; advertising their activities in posters, announcements, and flyers; publishing their work in cc V TRE, the Fluxus newspaper; as well as the more practical tasks of organizing accommodations...all the while trying to recruit colleagues to start a commune, or collective farm” as evidence of this.

In his exhaustive efforts to shore and foster an identity for Fluxus-related artists, Maciunas, as is the tendency with most self-imposed “art-leaders,” for example, Surrealism head Andre Breton, had a tendency to equate a collective vision with his own idea of what that vision should be. Simon Anderson in his essay, “Fluxus Publicus” (1993), says, “in physical terms, Fluxus publications can be cruelly divided into three or four types: advertising material, printed event scores or instructions, graphic ideas, and objects.” In this chapter I will examine several Maciunas–produced–and–designed examples of these “four types” of Fluxus publications, and argue that through his packaging and branding in order to market the group as a collective, posited these objects as more of an extension of his personal ideology of Fluxus that usurped the intent of the artist who consigned it. This is problematic when considering the historical legacy of Fluxus, in which a largely Maciunas-centric understanding of the group is the prevalent narrative in historiography.

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5 Hendricks, 53.
7 Elizabeth Armstrong, ed. In the Spirit of Fluxus (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 1993), 41.
An Ideal(ist) Design

The re-emergence and revisiting of the ideas of Duchamp and Dada in the 1960s by artists, and further espoused by influential thinkers of the time, such as composer John Cage (1912-1992), turned Maciunas’ toward the ideas of concretism, that is, works that are exactly what they seem, i.e. Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917). The notion of concretism would become a staple of Maciunas’ design ethic. Owen Smith, in his book *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* writes that Maciunas’ assertion was that “design, especially two-dimensional design, must have a direct association with its use and should not merely decorate an object or visually enhance the text.”

In 1961, Maciunas asked Young to curate a series of concerts and events at his gallery, the AG Gallery, in New York City. The series, *Musica Antiqua et Nova*, ran weekly from May 7 to July 30 in 1961, and featured events and performances from composers and artists such as Cage, Robert Morris (b. 1933), and future Fluxus associates such as Dick Higgins (1938-1998) and Jackson MacLow (1922-2004). *Musica Antiqua et Nova* would mark the origins of Fluxus, at least in affiliation, with Maciunas being introduced to many artists of the New York avant-garde. Further, the graphic announcements for the series, designed by Maciunas, would contain “the seeds of a design style that Maciunas was to refine and perfect the following decade.”

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9 Armstrong, 42.
The announcements (fig.1) were emblazoned with a thin Gothic sans serif typeface\(^{10}\) from Maciunas’ IBM Composer Typewriter, an “Executive 065,”\(^ {11}\) and were designed to fold up into the shape of a cube. Maciunas’ emphasis on functionalism and economy, often at the expense of legibility, are seen in their infant stages in this work. The blending of letters to form subsequent or other letters, which would be perfected in his later Fluxus Monogram cards (1962), first appear here, as does the first example of what would become a Maciunas’ design staple, both due to thriftiness and design principles, of multiple paragraphs of text in a barely readable font size. The physical layout of the announcement reflects the economic design found on it, it being a transformable object that folds from a compact cube to a large poster. This is important in Maciunas’ design genesis, in that it marks the beginnings of his many forays into containing a lot of information into a compact presentation, later exemplified by Fluxus Year Boxes and Flux Kits.

Perhaps because of an appreciation of Maciunas’ design sensibilities for his Musica announcement sheet, or as a gesture in return for his curatorial services for the concert series, Young and his co-editor MacLow, invited Maciunas to design An Anthology of Chance Operations (1963). The book is a collection of scores, compositions, poetry, and essays that features nearly ever participant from Musica, alongside a wealth of other international composers, writers, and authors. Maciunas’ design approach to An Anthology further elaborates what he had accomplished with his Musica announcement, and indicates a starting point for

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three aspects of understanding Maciunas’ approach towards Fluxus: anthological presentation, recognizable stylistic typeface that unites disparate ideas and artists, and the artist’s consigned work being, presentation-wise, at the mercy of the producers, in this case Young and Maciunas.

*An Anthology* bears Maciunas’ standard sans serif typeface, with formal variations on letters and words that were both visually interesting and economically presented. The book itself is also indicative of Maciunas’ tendency towards material efficiency, with his realized demand of “contributions...be copied on colored, almost square copy paper, pasted together, and sold as a low cost book.” While MacLow and Young typed up the bulk of the essays and poems, Maciunas was responsible for all title pages and section breaks, as well as the more ambitious additions to the publication, such as pages that were perforated with holes and an affixed envelope containing a card of an event score. The book is composed of nine sections: poetry, essays, dance constructions, compositions, mathematics, plans of actions, music, diagrams, and stories. One of these categories were given to each composer, writer, or artist based on the nature of their contribution, and their entry followed the section break indicating the category.

Despite Maciunas’ best efforts to typographically unite and categorize, there are several fairly ambiguous examples throughout that could benefit from clarity. One such example is from the contributor Ding Dong, on whom I can find no information, who is classified under “music” with an entry that simply contains the words/his name, “ding dong,” written horizontally and cutting off into both sides of

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the page margin. While it is not uncommon in this publication, or in later Fluxus-based objects by or inspired by the Fluxus artist George Brecht (1926-2008) to find text-based composition scores, the nature of what Ding Dong’s compositional aim was in this publication remains unclear.

The decisions of how and why to present this material in this way remains unknown, and is further muddled by its typographical mirroring of the design approach of An Anthology's cover. Therefore, several questions remain regarding the line between clarity, Maciunas’ typographical efforts, editorial decisions, and authorial intent. This complication of Maciunas’ dedication to unity through presentation, categorization, and the consigned artist’s intent did not change with the advent of Fluxus.

**An Ideological Design**

During the Musica concert series at the AG Gallery, Yoko Ono (b. 1933) recalled Maciunas first bringing up the word “Fluxus” to her:

George said we had to have a name for this movement that was happening. “You think of the name,” he told me...To me “movement” had a dirty sound-like we were going to be some kind of establishment...So I didn’t think of any name. The next day, George said, “Yoko, look.” He showed me the word “Fluxus” in a huge dictionary. It had many meanings, but he pointed to the word “flushing.” Like toilet flushing!” he said laughing, thinking it was a good name for the movement. “This is the name,” he said.13

Maciunas initially planned to name a follow up to An Anthology, “Fluxus,” claiming he chose the word based on the fact that “the various meanings that you’d find in the dictionary for it...(are) very broad, many meanings, sort of funny

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meanings. This rationale would seem to be in accord with the disparate and sometimes irreverent approaches that were apparent in the first publication, and would continue in its sequel. In an interview with Fluxus artist Larry Miller (b. 1944) in 1978, Maciunas discussed how the planned follow-up to *An Anthology* launched the first Fluxus festivals.

The second one (anthology) was going to be the first Fluxus publication but it took a few years to get off the ground. Meanwhile, we thought well, we’ll do concerts, that’s easier than publishing and will give us propaganda like for the publication. Maybe then we’ll find people who will want to buy publications because at first we couldn’t sell *Anthology* either, you know, so it was just accumulating in a warehouse. So then the idea was to do concerts, as a promotional trick for selling whatever we were going to publish or produce. That’s how the Wiesbaden series came by and that’s the first time that it was called Fluxus Festivals...

In 1962, Maciunas gathered a group of international avant-garde artists, composers, writers, etc. to perform a concert, organizing it through the aid of German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), at the Museum Wiesbaden in Wiesbaden, Germany. Following the concert’s notoriety, Maciunas put together his *Manifesto*, also sometimes referred to as the Purge Manifesto in 1963 (fig.2). The manifesto contained ten variants on the word “flux” photocopied from at least two different dictionaries, broken into three groups with handwritten annotations under each group by Maciunas. It is in this manifesto that Maciunas politicized Fluxus, with statements such as: “purge the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art, purge the world of “Europanism”...promote living art, anti-art, promote non art reality to be fully grasped by all peoples, not only

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15 Ibid., 15.
critics, dilettantes and professionals...fuse the cadres of cultural, social and political revolutionaries into united front and action...\(^{16}\)

In his “Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art” (1962), Maciunas wrote that “Almost each category (of the subjects found in the title) and each artist (involved in said subjects)...is bound with the concept of Concretism ranging in intensity from pseudo concretism \((sic)\)...to the extreme of concretism, which is beyond the limits of art, and therefore sometimes referred to as anti-art, or art-nihilism.”\(^{17}\) Hannah Higgins wrote of this politicization of Fluxus, particularly through the language of Maciunas’ manifesto, that,

in 1962 Maciunas’ use of the term \textit{neo-dada}, while it may have had some political implications, was primarily not political but philosophical, aligning Fluxus with artistic concretism and anti-expressionism and with the historic shift from expressionism to dada. By the time he wrote the Purge Manifesto in 1962, his evolution towards the “extreme of concretism” was complete.\(^ {18}\)

Therefore, when considering the notion that “Maciunas consistently utilized images in his designs that related directly to the material or idea being presented”\(^ {19}\) based on his thinking of Concretism, which at the point of writing his manifesto had evolved into a more “anti-art” stance, one must consider the ramifications of how Maciunas’ sentiments factored into the design of a large number of consigned work from artists affiliated with Fluxus. Thomas Kellein wrote, ”Maciunas’ intention with his “anti-art” was to improve social institutions,”\(^ {20}\) yet, the fact that this manifesto

\(^{16}\) Williams, 96.


\(^{18}\) Higgins, 168.

\(^{19}\) Smith, 144.

\(^{20}\) Kellein, \textit{The Dream of Fluxus}, 73.
was “never signed or agreed to by Fluxus artists”\textsuperscript{21} is indicative of the general consensus of the involved artists’ sentiments on Maciunas’ view of their motives, as well as an ironic problem when considering his descriptor of a “united front.” However, this ideological disagreement did not prevent most Fluxus artists from allowing their works to be produced as Fluxus multiples by Maciunas.

A particularly successful example of a marriage of Maciunas’ Fluxus vision literalized through Fluxus multiples and consigned artist is the many Maciunas produced objects by Brecht. In her book \textit{Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art}, the author Liz Kotz writes, “The Fluxus (Maciunas) politicization of the readymade, as a strategy leading to an eventual elimination of the author function, was at least partially shared by Brecht, who later insisted that, “all I do is bring things into evidence. But they’re already there.”\textsuperscript{22} Brecht, however, did not agree with the notion of Fluxus as a movement. He thought of Fluxus as a group with the common sentiment that “the bounds of art are much wider than they have conventionally seemed, or that art and certain long-established bounds are no longer very useful.”\textsuperscript{23}

Brecht’s aim, like many Fluxus affiliates and artists, was not to destroy the institution of art, as Maciunas’ manifesto implies, but to instead broaden the horizons of art in order to hinder institutional imposition. Brecht’s event score-cards, born out of Cage’s composition class at the New School for Social Research,\textsuperscript{24} were simple but ambiguous instructions, often bullet-pointed, that could be

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Higgins, 75.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Liz Kotz, \textit{Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art} (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 91.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Julia Robinson, \textit{George Brecht: Events, A Heterospective} (Cologne: Museum Ludwig, 2005), 118.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 34.
\end{itemize}
performed by anyone. For example, *Solo for Violin Viola Cello or Contrabass* (1962) simply contained the word, “polishing,” allowing any performer, or anyone for that matter, to perform and interpret the action.

Such deconstructions of the hierarchy and “genius” of the artist had an obvious (and paradoxical) appeal to Maciunas, who published Brecht’s complete scores in various boxed Fluxus editions. In a way, Brecht’s work was the closest to the idealist notion that Maciunas espoused, creating work that was nearly impossible to institutionalize, endlessly reproducible, and required only literacy to engage with. Yet, while Brecht’s work was concerned with the “elimination of the author function,” I would argue that, despite the nature of the work being in ideological tandem with Maciunas’ vision, Maciunas was still very much a prominent “author” in the production of these works. The text on the box employed Maciunas’ standard playing with text format for increased economy, while the event cards themselves share the same typeface used by Maciunas in *Musica Antiqua et Nova* and *An Anthology*. By the point of the production of Brecht’s *Water Yam* (1964), these two design components were officially part of the Fluxus brand, a unifying signifier for works that, despite their disparities, would be forever also associated with the design and layout Maciunas chose for them.

This would be further exemplified by Maciunas’ belief in humor and the joke, particularly vaudeville, as the best means of selling difficult concepts meant for social change. Again, Brecht’s objects were easily given over to Maciunas’ vision in this respect, with works such as *Games & Puzzles* (1965) that contained an assortment of dice and game pieces. However, other works, such as Ken Friedman’s
(b. 1949) *Flux Clippings* (1966/69) (fig. 3), were not as easily adaptable and suffer somewhat when comparing the objects at conception vs. the final product. For *Flux Clippings*, Friedman intended to present a collection of clipped pieces of paper, but *Flux Clippings* was instead reformatted and designed by Maciunas. It was presented as a small plastic box containing flakes of skin, as opposed to clipped paper pieces. On its box cover label was a found image from a 19th-century illustration of medieval punishment. One man is about to be decapitated and another is in a guillotine; both men are waiting for their respective axes to come down. What was originally conceived as something of a presentation of fragmented information, more in line with the *Destroyed Music* (1963) series of broken and altered records by Milan Knizak (b. 1940), became more of a macabre one-liner under the publication of Maciunas.

This is evinced further by Maciunas’ design for Ben Vautier’s (b. 1935) *Holes* (1964) (fig. 4) and *FluxHoles* (1964/19) (fig. 5). *Holes* contained a variety of reproductions of photographs of holes, such as a keyhole, holes in a drain, the hole of a faucet washer, etc. *FluxHoles* was a variation on this, containing an assortment of drinking straws. Maciunas added to Vautier’s collection of found holes by adorning a label with a finger in an asshole, taken from a 19th-century illustration for *Holes*, and a label featuring a found image of bare buttocks for *FluxHoles*. Vautier would hold the same sentiments on art and institutions as Maciunas. An example of this is his *Total Art Matchbox* (1966) that instructed the owner of the matchbox to burn down a museum with the matches found inside. Yet, the deconstructive nature of Vautier’s photographs and readymade “holes,” that garner their influence from
the art and life bridging principles of Cage and Duchamp, find their meaning somewhat confounded by another of Maciunas’ one-liner presentations.

Maciunas repeatedly recycled product label images, likely for ease and cost efficiency. The finger in asshole design from Holes adorns several of these Fluxus editions. For example, Miller’s Orifice Flux Plugs (1974) and the Maciunas-designed poster for Ono’s Do It Yourself Fluxfest (1966) (fig.6) which features a “greatest hits” of Maciunas’ perverse found design imagery. Maciunas uses these motifs as labels and as selling points for these artists’ works. This decision reveals that by using a distinct style he creates a semblance of uniformity between the disparate ideas and natures of the artists’ objects he designed; although using such images to represent the object can depart from the artist’s intent.

Regarding the design of Ono’s Do It Yourself Fluxfest poster design, Simon Anderson says Maciunas’ imagery is so strong that it alters the tenor of Ono’s text.”25 For example, Ono’s text for day nine (Shake: Shake hands with as many persons as possible. Write down their names. Try in the elevator, subway, toilet, daydream, street, on top of a mountain, on the clouds, in the dark) (fig. 7) is accompanied by an assortment of colliding penises, giving the otherwise whimsical instructions of meeting strangers on the street and the subway an unintended perverse and ominous atmosphere.

25 Armstrong, ed., 51.
The Fluxus Venus Problem

Higgins remarked in his essay, “Fluxus Theory and Reception” on the 1981 *Fluxus: Aspects of a Phenomenon* exhibition in Wuppertal, Germany, that it "showed clearly the question of inclusion. Works were included by Al Hansen. Indeed, some of Hansen’s performance pieces were, in fact, included in some of the early Fluxus performance festivals, but Hansen did not get along with Maciunas personally, and so he never belonged to the group as such.”

Although Higgins goes on to remark that Hansen’s works “looked fully in place” and “were in fact, Fluxworks” the crux of the problem with Fluxus is evident: Fluxus’ connection to its founder, Maciunas.

This sentiment of “whoever Maciunas liked best or whoever Maciunas chose to be Fluxus” as the criterion for who, and who should not be part of the legacy of Fluxus is a common sentiment in art historical readings of Fluxus. Consider that Jon Hendricks, Curator of the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection, the largest collection of Fluxus objects in the world, organized a catalogue raisonné on Fluxus under the criteria that the only objects presented are to have passed through Maciunas’ hands. The strategic nature of this dynamic is illustrated in what I refer to as the Fluxus Venus problem. Based on a critical comparison of Maciunas’ *Venus Barbeque Apron* (1967) (fig. 8) and Hansen’s “Venus collages” such as *Venus of Shop-Ritedorf* (1965) (fig. 9) and *Calliope Venus* (1968) (fig. 10), I discovered a similar conceptual framework. This comparison reveals what is and isn’t Fluxus in accord with the popular historical narrative that relies on Maciunas’ design intent and his anti-art bent.

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27 Ibid.
In 1967 Maciunas produced and manufactured two aprons as Fluxus editions, one featuring a photographic reproduction of Alexandros of Antioch’s (life dates unknown) *Venus de Milo* (130 – 180 BC) on it, called *Venus Barbeque Apron*, and the other featuring a reproduction of human stomach anatomy. Maciunas, in conversation with Miller in 1978 discusses how these aprons fit into his thoughts on art as function, saying

>a non-functional apron would be to print some flowers on it...now that has nothing to do with the fact that it's an apron or the fact that you wear it on top of your body...I was interested in functionalism so therefore when I came and designed aprons I designed aprons that had something to do with the shape that was going to cover you, so for instance, one version was Venus de Milo, both sides blown up so that when you covered yourself, from neck to knee, you were covered with this Venus de Milo – photographic image.\(^29\)

Returning to Smith’s notion of the emphasis placed on Maciunas’ functionalist design mentioned previously, and the complexities of works such as *Flux Clippings* and the poster for *Do It Yourself Flux-Fest* it is evident that not all of Maciunas’ design work falls in line with his conception of functionalism, and indeed veers into ornamentation. Maciunas’ *Venus de Milo Barbeque Apron* is a curious example, in that it raises the question as to why the *Venus de Milo* is made, under his intent, functional (as a wearable apron) and if it is actually serving a true function. For Maciunas to choose the *Venus de Milo* over, for example, a regular nude body, seems to more serve a concept, particularly one that can link art to commodity, but also art to function - two concerns for Maciunas. The *Venus de Milo* represents a symbol of “fine art.” To relegate it to a common apron, not only denigrates its status, but also, in its attempt to be made functional, is representative of Maciunas’ goals to

\(^{29}\) Hendricks, *Fluxus Etc. Addenda* 1, 24.
make art functional with Fluxus. I argue, however, that by choosing a symbol of fine art (likely for “statement” purposes) over a regular nude body, Maciunas’ “functional” design for the apron becomes more decorative and therefore akin to the printed flowers example he mentions to Miller. Considering this, we find parallels between Maciunas’ Venus and Hansen’s works featuring the Venus figure.

In the early 1960s Hansen began working on collages made of Hershey Bar wrapper. Hansen recalls his process saying,

I began a series of collages with torn Hershey’s chocolate bar wrappers. The first five or six had Charlie in the title. The first was "Charlie Chan" … Others were "Charlie Chaplin," "Bicycle Charlie," "Charlie Moon," etc. They were all rough figures, like early Dubuffet shapes and the respelled Hershey words were equivocal in that small ones could be seen as the same size as the larger ones if they were further away . . . Usually I tipped the horizon of the letter words. It was at this time in the early Sixties that I first became involved with the…Venus…figure.”

The “Venus” figure populates Hansen’s two-dimensional work from the early Sixties until the end of his life, becoming one of his most recognizable motifs.

Hansen’s Venus collages, and his life long dedication to happenings, brought to the forefront his leading artistic concern: that of the body as art, and its relation to the surrounding environment. Living in subway stations and staging happenings that Dick Higgins would call, “super-duper Hellzapoppin blow ups of life in a busy city inhabited by cruel and lovable perverts,” Hansen’s medium of detritus, indicated by the Hershey candybar wrappers, reflects the city around him and his desire to, as

32 Ibid. 64
he proclaimed in his 1966 “Lettuce Manifesto,” “combine life and art, overlap and penetrate them.”

This sentiment by Hansen echoes the definition of Fluxus given by Higgins, who claimed Fluxus was “art of life,” and is also manifest when viewing Fluxus objects. Shigeko Kubota’s (b. 1937) *Flux Medicine* (1966) (fig. 11), was a small box containing transparent medical capsules, adorned with a Maciunas designed label featuring a small pill with the title of the piece engraved on it. This work contains non-precious objects, converging the idea that everything can be art and everyone can do art. Objects such as these are examples of where art “overlaps” life. They contain objects that can be found anywhere, marketed as art. From a Maciunas-centric view, and perhaps a Fluxus one as well, they erase the commodity status of art – i.e. if art is made from valueless materials and everyone can do it, its commercial status declines.

Hansen’s early Venus collage, *Venus of Shop-Ritedorf*, contains a kind of combination of these elements and, based on the criteria for a Fluxus object, attempts to usurp the commodity status of art. It is a Fluxus work. Elizabeth Schambelan, writing in *Art Forum* on Hansen’s retrospective at the Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York City, says of the *Venus of Shop-Ritedorf* “the archetypical pictorial subject, the female nude, was a site on which mass media’s alternately exhilarating and alienating dislocations of subjectivity could be writ large—in Hansen’s case, literally so.” Therefore Hansen makes explicit mass media’s

commercialization and sexualization by of the female, using reconfigured text from mass-produced objects including words such as “sin,” “fornic,” and “hole.”

He further develops this idea with his Hershey Bar Venus collages, such as *Calliope Venus*, that stresses the female body semiotic by composing the body with gender specific pronouns such as “her” and “she” (also a pun on the materials). He employs more explicit text with phrases such as “oooh like me, like me” and “oh lick me lick me.” The concrete poet and Fluxus artist Emmett Williams (1925-2007) says that Hansen’s Venus collages were a

poetry beyond paraphrase, a poetry that often asked to be completed or activated by the reader, a poetry of direct presentation – the word, not words, words, words, or expressionistic squiggles – using the semantic, visual, and phonetic elements of language as raw materials in a way seldom used by poets of the past...it was born of the times, as a way of knowing and saying something about the world of now, with the techniques and insights of now.36

Here Williams suggests a cross-pollination of linguistic and visual direct presentation indicative of a specific temporal moment. This further illustrates the qualities that these collages have with the happening, which in itself was a time and space based art composed of raw materials that sought a new visual language, hybridizing a wealth of sounds, materials, and actions. Hansen’s collages, while being two-dimensional objects, are residual of the environment surrounding him, and further, have a distinct, but inverse relationship with his happenings work, where the (physical) body becomes the medium and the environment a metaphorical “canvas.” They fall in line with Maciunas’ sometimes-successful design

ideas for Fluxus, in that text, rather than simply accompanying an object or image, directly relates to the image.

The Fluxus Venus problem refers to two representations of Venus, one that is always classified in art historical scholarship as Fluxus, and another rarely viewed, even by those involved with the group, as canonical. Yet, the differences between the two works, I argue, are minute. Maciunas created a functional art object that when worn, turned the physical body into a representation of a work of art. This Venus mirrored the methodologies and ideas of happenings artists. Hansen, with his collages, refers to the happening with a two-dimensional collage featuring a representation of a human body composed of found materials and text, hinting at an environmental relationship with both material and sound. Both created a Venus that questions the commercial worth of art, Maciunas with his concept and Hansen with his materials. The two also shared an affinity for using text as not mere adornment, but a necessary component for communicating an idea. While the difference between the two is their functionality, with Maciunas’ meant to be worn, and Hansen’s for the walls of a gallery or museum, the question remains of really, just how functional ornament can be on a functional object?

What is the difference between an apron adorned with an image of flowers and an apron depicting a famous statue mirroring the contours of the body wearing it? Again, it is plausible that Maciunas’ penchant for one-liners and anti-art usurps the functionalism that appears to be a hallmark of Fluxus design and objects. With similarities such as these in play, the final question remains of Hansen’s canonical
status within the realm of Fluxus. One likely answer for this, among the prevailing Maciunas-narrative, is one of Maciunas’ most controversial publications.

**Maciunas’ Historical Paradigm**

In 1966 Maciunas published two diagrams that schematized the historical relevance and antecedents of Fluxus, positing it into a larger historical and selective scale. *Fluxus (It’s Historical Development and Relation to Avant Garde Movements)* (1966) and *Expanded Arts Diagram* (1966) (fig. 12) are perhaps, aside from his *Manifesto*, the most explicit indicators of Maciunas’ thinking on Fluxus, both in historical precedent and in who are its representatives. For the *Fluxus (Its Historical Relationship to Avant Garde Movements)* diagram, Maciunas prefaces the visual component, writing that “Since Fluxus activities occur at the border or even beyond the border of art, it is of utmost importance to the comprehension of Fluxus and its development, that this borderline be rationally defined.”

Maciunas does so by creating a small chart that illustrates the Fluxus artist’s advocacy for “natural events, production of food, housing, security, games, jokes, gags, sports.” Using this chart and text as a platform for the larger illustrated diagram found below it, Maciunas went on to use the aforementioned Fluxus definition, alongside other statements such as “competitive attitudes, forming rival operations” to justify

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39 Ibid.
individual Fluxus participant’s sudden expulsions from the group, and in the general planometric diagram of history that Maciunas outlines.

On this diagram Fluxus is documented the way Maciunas viewed it, sharing a historic kinship with jokes and vaudeville alongside past avant-gardes such as Bauhaus and Marcel Duchamp. Further with the inclusion of movements such as the socialist LEF group and Chinese Red Guards, he positioned Fluxus as being rooted in and following in the ideology of leftist/socialist politics. While the diagrams are fascinating as a way of understanding Maciunas’ thoughts on Fluxus, it is certainly not indicative of the Fluxus sentiment as a whole. This becomes apparent when noting the exodus of artists involved with Fluxus around the years 1963 and 1964.

On the Fluxus diagram Maciunas includes a category that prefaces the visual component:

“Individuals active within Fluxus since the formation of Fluxus but having since then detached themselves on following motivations:

a.) anticlective attitude, excessive individualism, desire for personal glory, prima dona complex (MacLow, Schmit, Williams, Nam June Paik, Dick Higgins, Kosugi)

b.) opportunism, joining rival groups offering greater publicity (Paik, Kosugi)

c.) competitive attitude, forming rival operations (Higgins, Knowles, Paik).”

While some Fluxus artists are named for their transgressions, six remain, two of them repositioned to the “Independents” brackets (Thomas Schmit, Emmett Williams) while the rest of them follow a line that leads nowhere (in his revised diagram that appeared the same year, Expanded Arts Diagram, this is cemented further). However, upon closer scrutiny of several controversial events that

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occurred between Fluxus artists and Maciunas, their expulsions seem less of a breach of an imposed philosophy and more along the lines of petty ideological differences, and most importantly not a realigning of their artistic concerns as the diagram suggests.

Following the controversy over Maciunas’ manifesto, another thing to look at is Fluxus Newsletter 6 (1963). This particular edition, Fluxus News Policy Letter, featured Maciunas’ proposed new strategies for Fluxus, called “Proposed Propaganda Action for November Fluxus in NYC.” Among these strategies, “sabotaging museums by flooding them with C.O.D. packages filled with bricks” and “creating mayhem during rush hour by abandoning cars at major intersections.”

Maciunas’ strong language (using the word “policy”), as well as his suggestion of quasi-terroristic acts, did little to assemble the “united front.” With alarm bells raised, many Fluxus artists and affiliates wrote to Maciunas over his proposed new direction and the language used in the newsletter.

The final straw for Maciunas was an incident in 1964 regarding the performer Karlheinz Stockhausen’s (1927–2006) concert of his piece “Originale” in New York City. Maciunas, taking issue with the “high culture” that Stockhausen symbolized, decided to picket the concert, calling on Fluxus to join him in a “united front” that according to Emmett Williams, “backfired, seriously weakening the “soliditary” of the Fluxus collective.” The problem, aside from political differences by the artists themselves, was that many Fluxus members wished to attend or were

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41 Higgins, Fluxus Experience, 75.
42 Ibid., 77.
43 Williams, 340.
called upon to perform in the concert. Allan Kaprow (1927-2006) who had a loose affiliation with Fluxus through his “happenings” work, recalls that “Maciunas telephoned me and said that he would forbid Fluxus members to participate because Stockhausen’s music was “ruling class” and “fascist” and that he would banish any Fluxist who disobeyed him...the result was some withdrew, while others who had no strict ties to Fluxus (Jackson MacLow, Nam June Paik, and Ayo) did take part...I briefly joined the small group of protestors during an intermission of the piece. As Maciunas hissed at me to go away, I replied that it was a free country.”

Considering these events give some insight into all three of Maciunas’ categories that entailed Fluxus artist expulsion seen in his diagrams. The “anti-collective attitude” reads “challenging Maciunas’ authority.” Although Maciunas’ diagram charts the end of an abundance of artists’ affiliation with Fluxus, their work continued in the same vein as it did prior to expulsion. The Fluxus scholar Hannah Higgins finds the “before and after” situation troublesome in that alongside the issue of historically framing their departure from Fluxus while they continued to make Fluxus-oriented work, Maciunas situated these artists, and many others, following the lineage of history as Maciunas viewed it. Higgins argues,

Accordingly, Maciunas’ activist vision, his dynamic conception of the relationship between the historic and the contemporary avant-garde, and his ability to define this relationship for a given member, determined Fluxus membership. The diagonal lines of influence that move along the timeline into and out of Fluxus imply the historicist aspect of this determinacy. This chart is, therefore, the graphic equivalent of Maciunas’ representation of Fluxus to the world as a historically validated form of avant-garde activism. If these judgments are taken for truth, the chart is also a justification for the

historicist aspect of the Maciunas-based paradigm, which ends with his death – the last judgment.45

Conclusion

Maciunas’ publications are inventive, interactive, and generous, showing the myriad of ways in which a group of artists can be represented. Yet as I have outlined, that representation came at the cost of often time surrendering the autonomy of the artist. An affiliation with Fluxus meant either having a malleable enough idea that fit in with Maciunas’ ideology or conceding your idea over to it. Anderson says,

Maciunas’ supervisory capacity makes it attractive to imagine some kind of subtext for Fluxus, based on the inclusions and exclusions in the various anthologies. Given the inconsistencies of any artist’s representations in each FluxKit, and Maciunas’ notoriously volatile temper with regard to his colleagues’ Flux- standing, one might suppose that every kit could be read as symbolic of the editor’s perception of the Fluxus. Indeed, this may be the case with regard to a few artists. Ultimately, however, such a reading would be indefensible, if only because hard facts about the timing of each production are lacking. Maciunas was known to have large stacks of material around, and it is just as likely that the assembly of each it depends less on ideology than on factors as banal as closeness to hand.46

This statement takes the benefit of the doubt, and, given the examples of duplicate designs on Fluxus objects, it is quite possible that it did sometimes boil down to whatever materials Maciunas had on hand as far as decision making would go. Yet given his somewhat radical political stance on top of his expulsions and rigid parameters of what Fluxus should be, it seems that a case can be made for Maciunas’ deciding on who and what best represented Fluxus. Yet this runs counter to the overall aim of what Maciunas himself envisioned Fluxus as being able to do, that is,

45 Friedman, The Fluxus Reader, 47.
46 Armstrong, 55.
open the doors for everyone to make art, and everything to be art. By subjecting Fluxus to his own vision, as a movement, a gag, a “united front,” Maciunas, in a sense, became the kind of oppressor he rallied against. In Chapter two I will look at Dick Higgins’ Fluxus publications under the Something Else Press as an alternative to Maciunas’ version of Fluxus. It is my contention that the Something Else Press offered an organic and autonomous approach to Fluxus and artists involved that perpetuated the notion of Fluxus freedom instead of branding it.
Chapter Two:

Something Else: Dick Higgins’ Fluxus Publications

In 1963, growing weary of George Maciunas’ publishing delays of his complete works as a Fluxus edition, Dick Higgins “returned home and announced to (his then wife) Alison Knowles that he was starting his own press.” The legend goes that Knowles, upon hearing Higgins’ answer of “Shirtsleeves Press,” responded with “call it something else,” a suggestion Higgins took literally. This story is perhaps the most cited version of the story regarding the origins of Something Else Press. Yet, in his book Fluxus, The History of an Attitude, Owen Smith explains Higgins’ story differently. Citing a letter written by Higgins, the origin story is nearly identical yet with one crucial difference: “Then I went home to Alison Knowles…I told her we had founded a press. She asked what its name was. I said it was ‘original Fluxus.’ She said that was too aggressive, and why didn’t I call it something else. So I did.”

The notion of “original Fluxus” is further perpetuated by Higgins’ statement regarding, aside from Maciunas’ constant publishing delays, the intention behind the press.

The reason that my press has been founded is that I originally wanted to do what Fluxus has been founded to do, namely to propagandize and provide a

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48 Reasons for this could be due to Frank’s catalogue raisonné being, outside of Higgins himself, the central authority on information regarding the press. Further, this story is recounted by Higgins’ daughter, the critic and art historian Hannah Higgins in her essay on her father and mother “Love’s Labor’s Lost and Found: A Meditation on Fluxus, Family, and Something Else,” Art Journal, March 22, 2010.
49 Smith, 150.
rostrum for a certain body of material that was 1. experimenting with form...and 2., exploring the boundaries between arts and other fields, such as politics, psychology, philosophy, etc.\textsuperscript{50}

However, Higgins never explicitly called his publications “Fluxus” despite the evidence that they were meant to “carry out the original goals of Fluxus.”\textsuperscript{51} He instead coined the term intermedia. Higgins writes of the term’s origins:

The vehicle I chose, the word “intermedia,” appears in the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1812 in exactly its contemporary sense—to define works which fall conceptually between media that are already known, and I had been using the term for several years in lectures and discussions before my little essay was written. Furthermore, as part of my campaign to popularize what was known as “avant-garde: for specialists only,” to demystify it if you will, I had become a publisher of a small press, Something Else Press which brought out editions of many primary sources and materials in the new arts (as well as reissuing works of the past which seemed to merit new attention—works by Gertrude Stein, the dadaists, the composer Henry Cowell, etc.). It seemed foolish simply to publish my little essay in some existing magazine, where it could be shelved or forgotten. So it was printed as the first Something Else Newsletter and sent to our customers, to all the people on our mailing list, to people to whom I felt the idea would be useful (for example, to artists doing what seemed to me to be intermedial work and to critics who might be in a position to discuss such work).\textsuperscript{52}

Higgins used the term to describe the cross pollination of various media in the arts that emerged in 1960s, citing for example “parallels to the happening in music, for example in the work of such composers as Philip Corner and John Cage, who explore the intermedia between music and philosophy, or Joe Jones, whose self-playing musical instruments fall into the intermedium between music and

\textsuperscript{50} Smith, 151.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Dick Higgins, \textit{Horizons}, (Ubu Editions, 2007), 27.
sculpture.”

In his *Fluxus Chart* (1981) (fig. 13) Higgins positions Fluxus as the intersection between life and art, with the note “anything fashionable's outside,” alluding to other media that intersect from what Fluxus does according to Higgins (bridges life and art). This is exemplified further in his *Intermedia Chart* (1995) (fig. 14) in which he posits Fluxus as the largest of intersecting media. In this sense, Fluxus, in that it blurs a boundary between the everyday and art, becomes something of the epicenter of intermedial relationships, creating a shared symbiosis. This is a markedly different approach to Fluxus’ role that is seen in Maciunas’ graphs and diagrams. Fluxus is treated more as an entity than a “movement” in Higgins’ model and further informs and is informed by surrounding media, as opposed to being a product of our an offshoot of a particular movement, ideology, or politic. Viewing Fluxus in this way, makes the notion of its role in the Something Else Press clearer, in that, while being viewed as a central point – in that it is the most broadly defined – its position does not have one fixed point, i.e. it intersects with concrete poetry, the happening, etc. and vice versa.

Of the forty-eight books published by the press under Higgins, twenty-two are written by Fluxus artists, or at least those with an involvement with Fluxus. These publications can exemplify Higgins’ effort to rectify the shortcomings of Fluxus under Maciunas’ authority and further evolving political and gag-oriented positioning. Therefore, they can be considered as Fluxus publications in their own right, albeit casting a wider net with their means of conventional accessibility– in

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that they are largely standard mass produced books. I will discuss this further and present several exceptions in this chapter.

**Working Out of Uniform**

Establishing his own publishing press allowed Higgins, and therefore the authors of the press’ publications, to expand and further elucidate the idea of Fluxus, with author of Something Else Press catalogue raisonné Peter Frank describing the press as “publishing large and beautiful editions concerning Happenings, poetry, Dada, events, architecture, art theory, music, and literature.”54 In many of these publications, by “varying materials and printing methods...(to) fit the look of the book to the intention, or at least the spirit, of the author,”55 Higgins emphasized “propagandizing” the artist’s idea, without an overt hierarchical dynamic, as perhaps is suggested by Fluxus publications and design under Maciunas. The artists’ insistence on promoting and contextualizing the new sensibility prevalent in the avant garde – Fluxus being a conglomeration of this – can be a possible indication for understanding Higgins’ approach in this way. His prevalence in this vanguard, from Cage’s class at the New School with Hansen and Jackson MacLow, to the infamous happenings performances at the Judson Gallery in 1960 with Oldenburg and Kaprow, puts him, perhaps in a more emphatic position than Maciunas. Maciunas, while engaging and positing himself, appropriately so, among them, was not necessarily a progenitor of the New York avant garde in the early 1960s, but more of its publicist, or producer.

54 Armstrong, 52.
55 Frank, 7.
Higgins’ first publication for the press, *Jefferson’s Birthday/Postface* (1964) (fig. 15) was his own. Published in book format, the *Jefferson’s Birthday* segment “consists of all the things Dick Higgins wrote, composed, or invented between April 13th 1962 and April 13th 1963, inclusive, on the assumption that the bad work that one does is just as valid as the interesting work.” The *Postface* portion, appended to the back of the book, upended relatively to *Jefferson’s Birthday*, is Higgins’ commentary on the state of the arts, a combination of flaneur anecdote, historical reminiscence, and polemical tirade. This book recalls Maciunas’ design in a variety of ways with its adornment of found 19th century woodcuts and images from various sources that cryptically decorate and sometimes function as additions to the text/idea being an example of this. The most notable relation to Maciunas’ design however is the usage of his signature typeface throughout the book. Peter Frank writes that “Higgins had the texts composed in the IBM News Gothic type that was characteristic of Fluxus publications. Subsequently, however, the set copy (the typed version of Higgins’ original draft) languished for almost a year as Maciunas became involved in other activity. Finally...Higgins lost patience and retrieved the copy.” If Frank’s account is indeed the truth of the matter, then this could be attributed to a logistical decision to not retype a years worth of material all over again. However, this does not necessarily account for Higgins’ inclusion of the Maciunas-esque found decoration that accompanies most of the book (fig. 16). Either consciously or unconsciously, Higgins approached the look of this book in the style consistent of

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57 Frank, 3.
Fluxus publications up to this point, carrying on with Maciunas’ uniform presentation and accompanying image adornment.

Examining the book in this way can offer up two different scenarios. In the case that this is indeed a Maciunas designed object, then it adheres to the uniform and decorative/functional framework associated with his design paradigm. It is listed as an upcoming “Fluxus Edition” in issues two and three of the Fluxus newspaper *ccV* Tre (1964), and therefore, through its passing through Maciunas, is considered an “official” Fluxus object by Jon Hendricks’ rationale laid out in the *Fluxus Codex*. Yet, if this is indeed a Maciunas designed publication intended for, but not realized as, a Fluxus edition proper, there is no actual crediting of him for its design from Higgins or Hendricks. If we were to remove Higgins’ anecdotal evidence of retrieving the manuscript, and look at this as a Maciunas-free object, it can be construed strictly as Higgins’. Therefore, the decision to keep Maciunas’ decorative elements and font could be considered as Higgins presenting his book as a Fluxus publication, and therefore aligning well with the aim of the press in filling an apparent void. There is, however, the irony of Higgins branching out Fluxus publications but keeping his in line with Maciunas’ collective vision through uniform typeface and design in this suggestion. Yet, other attributes of Maciunas’ design, such as economy of space, and complicated font arrangements, are noticeably

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58 Criteria for Hendricks catalogue raisonné, *The Fluxus Codex* is further laid out in Chapter Three, but to summarize briefly, the only works listed in the catalogue consist of those officially licensed as Fluxus by Maciunas or mentioned in correspondence by him. *Fluxus Codex*, 25.
59 Hendricks writes that “Maciunas’ production program, coupled with concerts, ill health and monetary problems delayed and defeated many projects. Finally, perhaps as a result of these delays, perhaps because of ideological or personality conflicts, Higgins took the project back. He designed and published it himself in the first title of his newly established Something Else Press, in 1964.” *Fluxus Codex*, 270.
missing in this publication. Thus, *Jefferson’s Birthday/Postface* is a fairly conservative Fluxus design example, if indeed it is designed by Maciunas.

Following *Jefferson’s Birthday/Postface*, subsequent publications, for the most part moved away from a typographical connection to Maciunas. There are formal similarities with some publications, such as Robert Filliou’s (1926-1987) *Ample Food for Stupid Thought* (1965) (fig. 17). The first edition of this publication featured loose postcards with text that offered cryptic rhetorical questions such as “aren’t you forgetting the essential” housed in a wooden box, and recalls Maciunas’ various publications of George Brecht’s *Water Yam* (Fig. 18). While some degree of Maciunas influence may seem apparent in a publication design such as this, form seems consistently wedded to content. Filliou’s postcards were intended to be mailed and therefore their initial production of being housed in a loose box seems appropriate (as opposed to the book bound second edition that disrupts the non-linear effect that the project implies). *Water Yam*, while being perhaps one of Maciunas’ less impossibly designed Fluxus productions, was a malleable enough concept to be produced without much degree of imposition by its publisher particularly when realizing Brecht’s indifference towards the author function in his work. As mentioned previously however, this effect somewhat tarnishes Brecht’s notion in that the design of *Water Yam* becomes ultimately tied with other Fluxus pieces under Maciunas, giving the work a shared-collective identity. *Ample Food for Stupid Thought*, while bearing similarities to Maciunas produced Fluxus objects, stands out in the sense that there are no special accouterments that detract from the

61 Frank, 12.
intent of Filliou, further exemplifying Higgins’ attempts at making a Fluxus object more adherent to the artist’s autonomy.

This can be evidenced further when comparing the design elements apparent in two publications by Daniel Spoerri (b. 1930); *L’Optique Moderne* (1964) (Fig. 19) and *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance (Re-Anecdoted Version)* (1966) (Fig. 20). Maciunas published the first as a Fluxus edition; Higgins published the second with Emmett Williams translations and annotations. Speaking of Spoerri’s 1960s work, Allan Kaprow wrote:

Spoerri’s philosophical works were made in a hotel room, where he slept, made love, cooked marvelous meals, and defecated. His constructions crowded the space, mingling with the bed, the clothes, the odor of lasagna. One must pick one’s way through this intriguing mess. Where does the work of art end and life begin?...I suggested that Spoerri invite the public to see his room as it is being lived in, not as a memento or shrine...By agreeing he has contributed to the eventual death of the art gallery and museums. This death will take time, but meanwhile, the world has become endlessly available.62

With sentiments such as those suggested by Kaprow, Maciunas’ interest in Spoerri’s work does not seem surprising, given the ideological “anti-art” bent.

*L’Optique Moderne* is essentially a photo book featuring images of Spoerri wearing a variety of different eyeglasses, some of them virtually unwearable without inflicting pain. Hannah Higgins writes of one photo in the book (Fig. 21) that shows “pins attached to the lenses of a pair of glasses and pointing at the eyes. One imagines the composed man (Spoerri) contorting in pain and darkness when the pins pierce his

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Among the various interpretations that this kind of work can incite/provoke, one that seems relatively in line with the Maciunas brand of Fluxus is the notion of a volatile relationship between art and the visual, implying an emphasis on the transmission of ideas – a cornerstone of anti-aesthetic thought that permeated both Fluxus and 1960s art – over standard visual objects meant to stimulate the senses.

Maciunas’ design for the book’s cover presents its title and authors (Francois Dufrène adds commentary throughout) according to his standard fashion of typographical approach, landing somewhere between functional and decorative, and recalling the textual and visual acrobatics he used in An Anthology. Hannah Higgins writes that aside from a never realized project with Maciunas, Filliou, Peter Moore (1932-1993), and Robert Watts (1923-1988) entitled Monsters are Inoffensive from 1967, “Spoerri collaborated very little with Fluxus after this point.” Yet, there is a shared relationship between L’Optique Moderne and An Anecdoted Topography, particularly with the dangerous eyeglasses mentioned previously. An Anecdoted Topography can be seen as the author’s jaunt through recollection, inventorying the objects found on his kitchen table in his apartment and recalling personal anecdotes about each one. As Frank writes, here Spoerri “celebrates and magnifies the mundane and the usually minute changes that circumstances effect on the mundane…This book supplants the actual objects with

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64 Ibid. 135
historical itemization, replete with intimate illustrations by the French artist-illustrator (Roland) Topor.”

In his introduction to the book Spoerri writes: “In case it might be helpful in understanding this experiment, I should state that it was after constructing a pair of eyeglasses equipped with needles to poke the eyes out that I felt the urge to recreate objects through the memory instead of actually displaying them.” If *L’Optique Moderne* is considered a “Fluxus publication”, one could surmise that this is because its content was particularly attractive to Fluxus; at least it fitted well with Maciunas’ outlook, and likewise, Maciunas’ approach suited Spoerri, who allowed him to design and publish it as such. By this rationale *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance* can find its ancestry in a Fluxus work. With its collaborative processes, Topor illustrating Spoerri’s objects, Williams annotating Spoerri, and an open call in the book’s conclusion asking for further annotations, there is a spirit of open-endedness, recalling again, Fluxus event scores that could be revised and reconsidered forever. Consider that this book has been republished in several languages. These include a German translation and annotation by artist Dieter Roth. It has been revisited and expanded upon again by Spoerri, Williams, Roth, Filliou, and Topor in a 1996 edition. Like a Brecht event card, it seems to recycle itself endlessly with revision and revisiting. This effect of endlessness is certainly in keeping with the general logic of Fluxus.

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65 Frank, 13
67 The book’s publisher, Alastair Brotchie, contends *An Anecdoted Topography* “personifies the whole Fluxus spirit.” (See *Atlas Arkhive 4 – Fluxus/Nouveau Realiste* atlaspress.co.uk). Williams disagrees,
When viewing these two publications as Fluxus in their own respects, you can consider them both as collaborations of sort, *L’Optique Moderne* with Dufrêne and published by Maciunas, and *An Anecdoted Topography* with the involvement of Williams and Topor, and published by Higgins. Maciunas’ design, perhaps with the exception of the cover, does not particularly hinder or alter the tenor and motives of *L’Optique Moderne*. However, the design clearly aligns/brands it alongside Fluxus objects and publications in its presentation – font, typeface, vertical/horizontal typography, etc. *An Anecdoted Topography* leaves the connection to Fluxus implicit – to be understood through its subject and its content, etc. There was little input from Higgins other than his open call for more annotations and his decision (with Williams) to publish a new version of the book. This publication (and others that moved/strayed outside of the standard motif of Fluxus publications) served to extend the way Fluxus and Fluxus publications could be perceived, ironically enough, by releasing them from the uniform trappings of being considered as Fluxus.

**Contextual Excursions**

As mentioned previously, the gap in Fluxus book publications under Maciunas (see footnote 59) led Higgins to focus his attention on publications that could be considered either Fluxus objects in their own right, as I have argued, or

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68 Spoerri was interested in the developments and variants of a specific object. *L’Optique Moderne* exemplified this concern, by showcasing various developments on eyeglasses. Elaborated further on http://www.danielspoerri.org/web_daniel/englisch_ds/werk_einzel/06_collections.htm

provide much needed context in the zeitgeist surrounding Fluxus, and Fluxus thought. These contextual excursions focus their attention on things such as notable precursors. These included the happening in Al Hansen’s *A Primer of Happenings and Time/Space Art* (1965) and Allan Kaprow’s LP *How to Make a Happening*; commercial frameworks and institutional critiques such as Robert Filliou and George Brecht’s *Games at the Cedillia, or the Cedillia Takes Off* (1967), Claes Oldenburg’s *Store Days* (1968); historical and contemporary convention rupturing, like reprints of Richard Huelsenbeck’s *Dada Almanach* (1966) and several Gertrude Stein novels, alongside contemporary revisions of literature, dance, and poetry by the likes of John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and collections of concrete poetry. Just as Maciunas relied on discursive collective objects to emphasis his dismantling of bourgeois foundations, Higgins’ historical referents and examinations of burgeoning forms through the press offered up a collective vision of his own concerns, and the exploration of intermedia.

Although the subjects presented in these publications were organized in accordance with Higgins’ own belief in their importance and in their cultural and historical relevance to the 1960s avant-garde, there is little intervention aside from his selection. According to Hal Foster, “Fluxus had to dismantle all of the traditional conventions that had offered a cultural guarantee for the continuity of bourgeois subjectivity. This premise had remained more or less valid until the arrival of Dadaism and Gertrude Stein, both ‘rediscovered’ by… the editorial interests of… Dick Higgins.”69 In his “rediscoveries” of things like Stein and the *Dada Almanach*, as well

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as informal contemporary expositions such as Hansen and Cage, Higgins used the press as a site for both contemporary pedagogy and historical context.

Yet, Foster’s notion of Fluxus, being both rooted in a Maciunas-centric vision that disrupted hierarchies, and also in alignment with the rediscovery of avant-garde ideas (convention bucking of Dada and Stein) via Higgins, continues to examine these two ideas mutually. In 1962 Maciunas wrote “Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art,” saying that,

> neo-dada, its equivalent or what appears to be neo-dada, manifests itself in very wide fields of creativity...(and is) bound with the concept Concretism, which is beyond the limits of art, and therefore sometimes referred to as anti-art or anti-nihilism.”

Considering Higgins’ statement that “it was only because the proto-Fluxus community had no name, that they used Neo-Dada faute de mieux, though [they] knew it was inaccurate,” a historical legacy seems to be implied out of necessity at the time and not so much an actual identification as such. Yet, Maciunas’ *Expanded Arts Diagram* traces a shared lineage between Dada and Fluxus. Maciunas pointed to a mutual reliance on the gag as an identity informant; the anti-art rhetoric was also made apparent in his *Manifesto* and various other aspects outlined in Chapter One. For him, encoding the group with a lineage is another way to create a shared relationship between their disparate aims and ideas, and while there are certainly

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71 Estera Milman “Fluxus History and Trans – History: Competing Strategies for Empowerment,” [http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/atca/subjugated/cover.htm](http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/atca/subjugated/cover.htm)
elements of Dada-esque approaches in the ideas of Fluxus, Maciunas presents these as a definite thing. By contrast, Higgins’ publication of the *Dada Almanach*, perhaps presents more of a query into the sensibility of the times in a similar view to Hansen’s musings found in *A Primer of Happenings and Time/Space Art*, rather than as an expressed relationship. If for nothing else, they provided a much needed re-examination of ideas that began to be revisited at the time by artists and concrete poets.

**Interventions**

While Higgins’ authority over the content and design of Fluxus publications under the Something Else Press is largely unimposing, as I have argued above, there are several potentially problematic examples that are worth pointing out. Ray Johnson’s (1927-1995) *The Paper Snake* (1965) (fig. 22) is a collection of his own drawings, collages, writings, and ephemera. Johnson was the founder of the “New York Correspondence School,” which was the official title for his mail art project. Over the course of his life, Johnson would send objects through the mail to a variety of different recipients, Higgins being one of them. For *The Paper Snake*, as Frank recalls, these objects that Higgins accumulated are “arranged spaciously all about every page, in several colors, and often elegant typefaces. The composition, setting and layout is Higgins.”72 In this sense, there is a shared presentation sensibility with a Maciunas approach, altering Johnson’s work into a reconfigured catalogue of sorts. There are however, some key differences when comparing them. First, consider that

72 Frank, 8.
this is a collection of works Higgins accumulated and published on his own accord, not an idea given to Higgins from Johnson to be published. This is made further explicit in the foreward to the book, which states, in a way that is telling of the Press’ approach to its publications in general, that “Since a change in style is a change in meaning, this book is a translation of Ray Johnson into Dick Higgins; reading these is like reading over Higgins’ shoulder, or hearing him read them aloud.”73 The presentation of the material is explicitly acknowledged as central, something, for the most part, wholly avoided (but indirectly implied) with Maciunas’ publications.

Another Something Else Press publication to consider is the publication

*Fantastic Architecture* (1970), edited by Higgins and German artist Wolf Vostell. The book featured Fluxus artists and others. The authors called for “the real need for creating space (through ‘fantastic’ architecture), which may or may not be functional, but which is at least relevant to the sensory environment in which we live.”74 Carolee Schneemann’s (b. 1939) contribution to the book is “Parts of a Body House,” a proposal for a theoretical architecture composed of the human boy.

Schneemann, most known for her infamous *Meat Joy* (1964) (fig. 23) performance, an orgiastic display that, in the words of the artist herself, had, “the character of an erotic rite: excessive, indulgent, a celebration of flesh as material; raw fish, chickens, sausages, wet paint, transparent plastic, rope brushes, paper scrap. Its propulsion is toward the ecstatic – shifting and turning between tenderness, wilderness,

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precision, abandon; qualities which could at any moment be comic, joyous, repellent.”

One “room” featured in “Parts of a Body House,” “The Nerve Ends Room” bears similarities to Meat Joy in its conceptual composition, with Schneemann writing that, “The Nerve Ends Room is evolved as a free flowing, self perpetuating, self-destroying energy environment,” with elements such as, “orgasmic screaming...extrasensory perception...(that) can be used in any imaginable way, alone or in cooperation with people.” Through Meat Joy and “Parts of a Body House”, she presents the body (hers included) as an artist’s medium, a Fluxus (and 1960s art) staple. Schneemann’s is arguably the most explicit feminist voice when considering the artists associated with Fluxus. In her article “Bodies of Action, Bodies of Thought: Performance and Its Critics,” Bonnie Marranca calls Schneemann “an interesting case since, unlike much feminist performance, her work does not invoke victimhood and it revels in heterosexual expression.”

Hal Foster claims that “Fluxus...engaged from the beginning with a radical critique of conventional concepts of identity...this took an antimasculinist, if not yet an explicitly feminist stance.” Yet, in her essay “Fluxus Feminus” Kathy O’Dell questions the motives behind certain gender politics in Fluxus, focusing on a pattern of exclusion when female artists involved with Fluxus would present works that

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76 Higgins and Vostell, np.
77 Ibid, np.
79 Foster, 458.
created collisions between text and the body. She specifically brings up an omission involving Schneemann’s entry in *Fantastic Architecture*.

As part of her essay...Schneemann displayed a nude self-portrait. The image of her body appears across the middle of the book, with semitransparent pages of text separating the two parts of the picture. The superimposition of Schneemann’s body and text constitutes a send up of the *Playboy* centerfold tradition (fig. 24). Unlike *Playboy* centerfolds, however, which typically feature women in poses configured by men. Schneemann’s self portrait is in a position of her own construction, poised as if ready to pounce, eyes assertively, if not warily, trained on the viewer...Schneemann had (also) expected that the editors would include the detailed drawings of the various “body rooms”...While the ostensible reason for the work not to be included was financial...is it too speculative to imagine that on an unconscious level the level the editors may have felt that to include yet another form of “Fluxus Feminus” representation would only have increased the excessiveness of the body-text relationship already inherent in the centerfold”?

The exclusion of Schneemann’s illustrations (fig. 25) in this publication were said by Higgins to be financially related. However, recalling Simon Anderson’s comments concerning Maciunas’ omissions being related to whatever materials he had on hand, this reasoning seems insufficient. In fact *Fantastic Architecture* was an extremely lavish production for a small book format, with transparent pages, complicated design layouts, images spread over multiple pages, and so on. If cost were truly the issue, could this not have been rectified by omitting some of the other very costly additions? Further, of the forty nine publications on the Press, there are only three women authors: Gertrude Stein, Knowles, and the poet Ruth Krauss, which lends some credence to O’Dell’s speculation of a prevalent attitude among Fluxus men. In her essay O’Dell blurs Maciunas’ and Higgins’ actions together as Fluxus, much like Foster, and therefore attributes Maciunas’ excommunicative

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81 Ibid., 58.
behavior as symptomatic in Higgins as well, Perhaps, O'Dell overstates her case – how would we know one way or the other? I do find the situation curious, given the otherwise largely transparent and organic way that Higgins would handle artists’ work for the press.

The Great Bear Pamphlets were an offshoot of the Press, but included many familiar names, including Cage, Kaprow, Hansen, and Higgins himself. Frank recalls the origins of this endeavor:

During the life of the Press, Higgins established sub-categories and imprints in order to publish material that, in format or in content, was not appropriate to the Press’ own formats. Most important of these spin-offs were the Great Bear Pamphlets. Named in Higgins’ epiphany-of-the-mundane manner after the distilled water company that supplied the Press office with its water cooler, the Great Bear series resembles earlier art and political booklets and handouts of the Dadaists, Surrealists, and Futurists... Higgins regarded the pamphlets as the ‘new sensibility’ equivalent of the literary press chapbook. Material was chosen, or edited, for this uniform format: sixteen pages stapled, without covers, eight by five inches. Great liberties were taken to model format to content in the Something Else Press books, but in the Pamphlets the reverse was the rule... The Pamphlets were set in traditional, highly readable typefaces, and were handsomely printed.82

To develop a series of supplemental (yet thematically in tandem) publications to the Press, that forewent wedding format to content, a staple of what separated Higgins’ publications to Maciunas’ seems puzzling. Barbara Moore, an editorial director at Something Else Press) until 1966, writes “Their uniform understated character, typographic sameness and identical 16-page format (except for the 32-page Manifestos), although in contrast to Dick’s more flamboyant designs for the press’s heftier books, were part and parcel of the same marketing strategy.

Something Else Press targeted librarians by disguising radical concepts in

82 Frank, 65.
conformist packaging.”\textsuperscript{83} In taking up this view, we can understand Higgins’ motives as less an issue of artist autonomy surrender, but an issue of easier dissemination. Higgins recalled that, “The pamphlets, all twenty of them, were able to get places that the larger books couldn’t...For example, in the late 1960’s they were sold from a rack beside the produce stand at the Berkeley Coop...we were always delighted by the notion of a shopping basket containing ice cream, the making of a good salad -- and our pamphlets!”\textsuperscript{84}

Moore further explains the Pamphlets as “Dick’s intentional rejoinder to the more unconventional shapes and boxes issued by Maciunas as Fluxus editions,”\textsuperscript{85} a statement that echoes Frank’s statement that “the pamphlet format allowed Higgins to supplement the intimate and informal publications and editions issued by George Maciunas under the Fluxus rubric.”\textsuperscript{86} Under these readings, Higgins, albeit less elegantly than the Pamphlet’s parent publisher, again attempts to fill in for what he perceives as Maciunas’ shortcomings with Fluxus – accessibility being a chief concern in this case.

The pamphlets themselves are almost entirely devoid of any kind of special design accouterments, printed black and white on colored stock, and have identical covers (fig. 26). Exceptions include John Cage’s \textit{Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse: Continued Part Three)} (1967) (fig. 27) and \textit{Manifestos} (1966) (fig. 28). Cage’s contains variants of typeface font and color that

\textsuperscript{84} Dick Higgins, ”The Something Else Press -- notes for a history to be written some day" \textit{New Lazarus Review}. Vol. 2, No. 1. Utica, NY, 1979, 30.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Frank, 65.
are dependent on his chance oriented writing process; *Manifestos* font formatting seems a necessity given the nature of a publication strictly dedicated to an artist’s declaration of aims. The crucial difference between the homogeneity of these publication’s appearances and those of Maciunas’ are that there is not necessarily an imposition in The Great Bear Pamphlets. In the Pamphlets minimal design presentation there is a sense of almost blankness, one that does not convey the material contained in the publication by the artist, nor an overt agenda on Higgins’ part. Cheap to produce and made at a publisher’s loss in their pricing, marketing strategies and dissemination prevailed, perhaps likening these objects closer to Maciunas’ mode of production than those of Something Else Press.

**Conclusion**

The Something Else Press was not necessarily, although setting out to be such initially, an antagonistic response to Fluxus under Maciunas. Although “(Maciunas) never forgave Higgins for starting the Something Else Press,” Higgins ultimately provided a more open avenue for Fluxus artists to present their ideas, one largely without the “united front” hindrance as I have outlined. The press provided an alternative way to present artists’ ideas, one that both filled in for the shortcomings of Maciunas’ publications, and at times, rose above them, but ultimately worked alongside of them. This working in tandem is difficult to perceive

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87 Starting at forty cents a piece, Higgins called them a “poor man’s key to art.” Ad for the first 10 pamphlets in *Something Else Newsletter*. Vol. 1, No. 4, Aug. 1966. 5.

based on appearances, and Higgins’ approach to Fluxus publications – mostly a standard book format - is a markedly more conservative one than the lavish punch-line productions of Maciunas. Yet, both, despite their differences in ideological approach, were mass produced items that displayed an artist’s idea. I argue that Higgins’ Fluxus publications are not largely recognized as such because they don’t necessarily look like Maciunas’ Fluxus publications, and are thus often treated as supplementary material. This is a problem that largely still persists and is evidenced Foster’s remarks in this chapter. With this inability to separate two different modes of production that are, ironically, working to promote Fluxus, albeit in ideologically disparate ways, in mind I will examine how a Maciunas dominated view of Fluxus permeates its understanding, particularly in exhibitions and in catalogues, in Chapter Three.
Chapter Three: The Historical Legacy of Fluxus

George Maciunas, after a long and painful period of illness, died May 9, 1978. Robert Pincus-Witten in his introduction to The Fluxus Codex, writes, “Fluxus begins with the foundation of Fluxus press in 1961-62, abruptly terminating in May of 1978 when Maciunas dies.” In September of 2011, MOMA opened Thing/Thought: Fluxus Editions, 1962-1978, organized by Gretchen L. Wagner and Jon Hendricks. The dates featured in the title of this exhibition are not arbitrary, as a cursory glance at Maciunas’ death year will suggest. The exhibition focuses on “Fluxus editions”-ranging from FluxFilms to FluxKits. Of the ninety objects presented in the exhibition, Maciunas has an involvement, either through production or creation, with forty-four of them, nearly half. In Hannah Higgins’ chapter Great Expectations: A Reception Typology from her book, The Fluxus Experience, she goes into great detail on the issue of Maciunas’ historical legacy. She believes the dominant historicization of, as she calls it, the “Maciunas = Fluxus perspective on the group” as erroneous in understanding Fluxus, and cites several propagators of this paradigm, particularly with “the largest collection of Fluxus materials in the world,” the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection.

With a Maciunas-centered paradigm dominant, things that are inherent in his view of Fluxus-the group as a movement, anti-art rhetoric, collective action, cheap materials, and mass production-become the prevailing narrative when viewing the

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89 Hendricks, Fluxus Codex,
90 Higgins, Fluxus Experience, 157.
91 Ibid.
group. Consider this definition of Fluxus from the *Fluxus* (October 2, 2009 – August 23, 2010) exhibition held at MOMA:

An international art movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Fluxus—whose name was based on the Latin word flux, meaning constant flow or change—brought together artists working in music, poetry, film, theater, and the visual arts. The movement challenged the commodification of art and favored nontraditional modes of expression, such as collective performances, inexpensive publications, and unlimited editions of small objects. This special installation of posters, newspapers, Fluxus editions, films, and photographs celebrates the recent gift by Gilbert and Lila Silverman of their renowned Fluxus collection.92

“The recent gift by Gilbert and Lila Silverman” means the involvement of that collection’s curator, Jon Hendricks, who currently holds the title of “Fluxus Curating Consultant” at MOMA. As mentioned throughout this study, *The Fluxus Codex* an exhaustive look at the Silverman collection, is framed in a Maciunas-dominant way, as are several other books put out under Hendricks (*Fluxus Etc.*, *Fluxus Etc. Addendum I*, and *Fluxus Etc. Addendum II*). In his essay “Fluxus: To George with Love” he writes:

With the death of George Maciunas in 1978, Fluxus ceased—or didn’t stop, or stopped sometime before, depending on one’s attitude or perception, of the movement. (personally, I think of art movements as having something like a nuclear half-life of residual essentialness.) in the case of Fluxus there is no disputing the continuous, central role of one man. And even though in the end Fluxus failed in its objective of replacing art with “functionalism” and only partially succeeded in engaging artists in a collective struggle against bourgeois aesthetics, nonetheless, its contributions are enormous93

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92 [http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1033](http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1033)
While conceding somewhat to the multiple perspectives on Fluxus’ ending with the death of Maciunas, he continues to identify the group under the aims of Maciunas, and finds its epicenter in Maciunas’ contributions. In 1966, Dick Higgins wrote, “the best short definition of Fluxus”94 according to critic and Fluxus member Ken Friedman: “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.”95 In this respect, Higgins (and to this extent Friedman) view Fluxus as an idea. Friedman continues to suggest that, “Fluxus is more valuable as an idea and a potential for social change than as a specific group of people or a collection of objects.”96

In his essay “What is Fluxus” Fluxus artist Ben Vautier writes,

Why are people interested in Fluxus?
Answers:
Because of our great intelligence? no
because we are creators? no
because we are creative musicians? no
because we are radical? no
because we represent newness? no
because they can make money with us? yes97

While this is certainly a cynical repose to the question asked, there is some truth in Vautier’s sentiments. In investigating why Maciunas has come to be considered the center of art historical attention, one can conclude that this is largely by his own design—as the self appointed leader and positing his personal stamp on a large number of the objects he produced for other artists. Tales of Maciunas barricading

his door with guillotine blades to keep out New York City tax collectors and losing an eyeball to a gang of mafia thugs make him a compelling character to profile. Further, however, to posit Maciunas as the epicenter of Fluxus makes him more financially desirable, ironically, to institutions and collectors. This model also adds a coherent narrative to Fluxus, a group that largely resisted cohesiveness-sans Maciunas.

In this chapter I will examine the ramifications of Maciunas’ branding and redacting of himself and of Fluxus as an artistic entity, looking at the curatorial and publishing endeavors of Jon Hendricks that position Maciunas as center. I will also consider the writings of scholars who have attempted to dispel Hendricks’ narrative, such as Owen Smith, Ken Friedman, and Hannah Higgins. Finally, I will draw on the issues raised by these texts to make a case that Dick Higgins’ understanding and presentation of Fluxus is of a great importance in rethinking its historical legacy. In Chapter Two, and evinced by his *Fluxus Chart* Higgins thought of Fluxus as a bridge between art and life that was less about institutional takedowns and united fronts and more about making art an egalitarian practice. This is exemplified in his publications and therefore opens up a more profound, complex, and historically accurate picture of the group’s work.

**The Fluxus Codex**

*The Fluxus Codex* is over 600 pages long and is the closest thing there is constituting a Fluxus catalogue raisonné in print. In the foreward to the book
Hendricks writes of the criteria he used in selecting the objects for inclusion in the Codex.

The criteria we have chosen have nothing do with quality; quite simply, they have to do with two conditions: either a work must have been listed or described in a Fluxus publication or it must have been mentioned in correspondence by George Maciunas as being planned as Fluxus work. In determining these criteria, it is hoped that much clearer picture of the movement will emerge. Fluxus will be seen to have a particular time frame and a specially stated intent which can be considered when studying Fluxus works. Characteristics can become apparent. 98

These criteria ultimately prove to be problematic in engaging with Fluxus as a whole since it emerges that objects must have gone through Maciunas in order for them to be considered noteworthy Fluxus objects (or Fluxus at all). In examining the book, certain exclusions on account of this become clearer. Consider that Dick Higgins gets two pages dedicated to him in the Codex, while John Lennon (1940-1980), a somewhat tangential member, receives five (although no mention is made of Maciunas’ design work on Lennon’s seminal Imagine album). Further, Higgins’ Jefferson’s Birthday, mentioned in chapter two, is catalogued but only due to the fact that it appears in correspondence from Maciunas. In this reading of Fluxus, Maciunas is effectively the gatekeeper.

Not surprisingly, Maciunas himself is the focal point of The Fluxus Codex, which dedicates eighty-one pages to his work. While Maciunas certainly has an industrious and exhaustive output, his proposals and unrealized ideas are catalogued as objects. For example Index (1964) is given the note, “Index would have been a readymade, for example an index to a number of volumes altered by

98 Fluxus Codex, 25.
Maciunas by printing ‘Fluxus’ on the spine, or in some other way. I have never seen index."\textsuperscript{99} Another entry, \textit{Foam Steps} (1976) a component to the “collective environment, Fluxlabyrinth...realized in the fall of 1976”\textsuperscript{100} is said to be a Maciunas idea that is ultimately created by Larry Miller.\textsuperscript{101} Yet, this collaboration is not mentioned under Miller’s entry in the book, whereas all Maciunas’ contributions to the work of other artists, such as labels etc., are noted.

To catalog and present Fluxus in this way becomes problematic in that it establishes a hierarchy by streamlining Fluxus as Maciunas. Further it legitimizes Maciunas as authority figure, lending credence to controversial facets of Fluxus, such as political stances (soviet LEF) and that “Fluxus makes ideas reachable through gags.”\textsuperscript{102} This previous statement by Hendricks runs counter to a host of objects he has selected as Fluxus, an example being Henry Flynt's Maciunas designed manifesto, \textit{Communists Must Give Revolutionary Leadership in Culture} (1965) (fig. 25). The question remains as to why Hendricks chose to present these objects in this way other than it streamlines the difficult process of having to decide what Fluxus is. Hannah Higgins in a 2003 interview comments:

\begin{quote}
Fluxus is something besides a group of artists circled around George Maciunas. That has been the predominant message in the past, and it’s really historically inaccurate. There’s almost no basis for that in the way the artists saw it, with the exception of Henry Flynt and Emmett Williams--both of whose work I love--and Maciunas himself. Now, the collectors love that model--they love (emphasis Higgins) an art movement to have a center, because then value accrues as you get to closer to the center. It’s like any other capitalist model: you want to get to the source of production and own
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{99} Hendricks, \textit{Fluxus Codex}, 361.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 352
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 25.
it. And if you own Maciunas, you own the source of production, and everything he produces has value.\textsuperscript{103}

It is interesting to consider the possible role of market imperatives in Hendricks’ arrangement in this book. It shines some light on this scenario, particularly considering Hendricks’ arduous task of applying value to a large collection of objects that, by their very design (and often their content) were meant to be valueless. Fluxus did not, and arguably still does not have a superstar in the vein of a Salvador Dali with respect to Surrealism, a Duchamp with respect to Dadaism. Maciunas’ marketability may lie in what the critic Liz Kotz refers to as his using the Duchampian model of the readymade into a strategy. Aligning Fluxus with a Dada mode of production lends credence to the connotation of Fluxus as a neo-Dada exercise, historically locating Fluxus as a movement, guided largely by Maciunas’ efforts. Ultimately at stake in Hendricks’ model of Fluxus is an overall misrepresentation of Fluxus as a whole. There are alternatives to this model, however, particularly in exhibition. I will examine two recent Fluxus exhibitions, one curated outside this model, and one within, making a case that viewing Fluxus outside of Hendricks’ broadens the notion of Fluxus as something bigger than Maciunas.

\textbf{Two Exhibitions: Thing/Thought and The Essential Questions of Life}

Two Fluxus exhibitions took place in 2011. A traveling exhibition, Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life, which was curated by Jacquelyn Baas, director

emeritus at University of California Berkeley Art Museum, and *Thing/Thought: Fluxus Editions*, held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, and curated by Hendricks and MOMA Assistant Curator Gretchen Wagner. *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life*, born out of a Fluxus collection from the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth frames Fluxus around questions such as “Art (What’s It Good For?),” “Nothingness,” “Death?,” and “Love?” Seemingly taking the definition of Fluxus as an idea espoused by Higgins and others, Baas organized this exhibition in a way that looks more at what Fluxus does and how it works, rather than forgoing an overarching narrative of what it is and why. In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Baas writes,

> Fluxus resists characterization as an art movement, collective or group, and defies traditional geographical, chronological, and medium-based analyses. This book and the exhibition it accompanies are intended to shift away from attempts to define and toward the asking of questions. The fundamental question – “What’s Fluxus good for?” – has important implications for how art is made and life is lived.104

Familiar objects such as the aforementioned guillotine blades attached to Maciunas’ door, *Giant Cutting Blades Door from Flux Combat with New York State Attorney (and Police)* (1970-75) (fig. 26) are situated with less noted objects such as John Cale’s (b. 1942) *Fluxfilm, No. 31, Police Car* (1966) (fig. 27) under the category “Danger?.” Al Hansen, who received not even a paragraph in *The Fluxus Codex* has a Hershey bar wrapper collage, *Homage to the Girl of Our Dreams* (1966) (fig. 28) under “Sex?,” alongside *Fluxpost 17-17*(1965) by Robert Watts (1923-1988) (fig. 29), an artist strongly endorsed by Hendricks and Maciunas. Further, Robert Filiou’s *Ample Food for Stupid Thought*, the publication I have reconsidered as a

104 Baas, 1.
Fluxus object in Chapter Two, makes it into this exhibition under the category “Art (What’s It Good For)?” (It was not included in The Fluxus Codex). To exhibit Fluxus in this way, under broad categories that speak for how Fluxus objects can be perceived, however, is not without its share of problems. In a way, the open ended nature of the objects themselves, particularly those by George Brecht, can be misunderstood by being framed in such a subjective way. Yet, I would argue that presenting Fluxus objects in this way, collectively, but not without a unifying thread, is perhaps the most fitting way to display them. The objects themselves are freed somewhat from the political demands that are often imposed upon them. If Fluxus, at least according to Higgins, is about bridging life and art, then presenting the group’s work as a component in asking life’s big questions seems an apt mode of viewer/object dialogue.

On the other hand, Thing/Thought, is simply a large exhibition that surveys Fluxus “artist editions.” It focuses on FluxKits and, as mentioned previously, a large number of objects produced by Maciunas. The exhibition’s press, written by co-curator Gretchen L. Wagner, outlines the aims of the exhibition, along with some historical background information:

As the transmission of ideas in artworks became a primary interest for many artists (eclipsing aesthetics), innovative publishers in Europe and the United States pioneered nontraditional forms and methods. For Fluxus Editions, Maciunas solicited concepts from his colleagues and then often designed and assembled the projects himself, unifying their appearance. In addition, he envisioned showrooms—called Fluxshops—where the general public could purchase objects directly from the group. Along with collective authorship
and self-representation, the tension between material and concept—the thing and the thought—was of main concern.105

This tension that Wagner claims as the exhibitions central theme seems largely given injustice when using a Maciunas paradigm to explore it. For example, how does Maciunas’ dizzying design for Nam June Paik’s The Monthly Review of the University for Avant-Garde Hinduism! (Postmusic) (1966) (fig. 31) exemplify “the thing and the thought” aside from relegating it to Maciunas’ Fluxus principles of uniform typography and economic design? Further what is to be said of the Maciunas designed Perpetual Fluxus Festival poster (1964) (fig. 32) that presents Fluxus as a carnival act? With phrases such as “Hurry! Hurry!,” “Come one! Come All,” and “The Greatest Musical Show on Earth!” the tenor of the event is largely seen as a joke—a Maciunas paradigm for Fluxus as well.

Finally, one particularly contentious item included in this exhibition is Maciunas’ Manifesto, here titled Fluxus Manifesto. For one, this was never a “Fluxus edition.” Secondly, it seems to act outside of the purview of this exhibition’s aims. Its status therefore could be considered as a historical referent for understanding Fluxus in Thing/Thought, which is particularly troublesome given the controversy over the manifesto. Owen Smith, in his article “Developing a Fluxable Forum: Early Performance and Publishing,” writes:

...the Fluxus manifesto distributed during (Benjamin) Patterson’s Paper Piece in Dusseldorf was not the product of planning by the Fluxus group—indeed, it has never been accepted by the group as a whole. It was just one of many short-term responses to an immediate need. It was written, predominantly by Maciunas, not as a grand philosophical statement, but as a

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response to (concert arranger, Joseph) Beuys’ request that some kind of manifesto be presented at the performance. This reality - that Fluxus arose out of circumstances rather than as the product of a predetermined strategy - is part of the reason why many have rejected and continue to reject the idea that Fluxus was a movement.

Yet, *Thing/Thought* continues the thread that Maciunas had a set strategy for Fluxus and created a movement out of it. In a way, comparing these two exhibitions are almost like comparing the Fluxus definitions of Higgins and Maciunas themselves. *Essential Questions of Life* requires some framing, but largely allows for the objects on view to be perceived without any overarching narrative, such as Maciunas’ Fluxus ideas. Fluxus is treated as a broad idea, one that runs tandem with Higgins’ notion of it. *Thing/Thought* on the other hand, reflects Maciunas’ need for Fluxus to operate as a collective in order to achieve his own personal aims.

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106 Friedman ed., *Fluxus Reader*, 16.
Conclusion: United Fronts and Coffee Cups

“Fluxus is as Fluxus Does But Nobody Knows Whodunit”

- Emmett Williams\textsuperscript{107}

An axiom that reinforces the difficulties of aptly presenting an idea that resists presentation and definition seems an appropriate coda for this thesis study. Fluxus artists and scholars encompass a multitude of differing perspectives, motives, and agendas. Many of them, while seeing Maciunas as essential to Fluxus, despite ideological or creative differences – consider the final Fluxus newspaper headline, “Pope Maciunas Dead of Hart (sic) Attack” – have moved away from his vision of what Fluxus should be. I have argued here that Dick Higgins’ mode of thinking about Fluxus, evidenced by his Something Else Press and numerous writings and ruminations on Fluxus, provides a chaotic, yet ultimately more utopian understanding of what the group set out to do.

The Something Else Press and exhibitions such as \textit{Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life} are examples of notable alternatives to the general framing of Fluxus: a group of artists that took old Constructivist notions of blurring life and art but not necessarily at the behest of a narrowly political agenda. Alison Knowles’ \textit{Make a Salad} (1962) (fig. 34), an executed event score, effected social change though its presentation – supplying free (healthy) food – while also being engaged with a radical (at the time) mode of art making. Her work, and this piece in particular,

\textsuperscript{107} Emmett Williams, \textit{A Flexible History of Fluxus Facts and Fictions} (New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 2006), 151.
turned ideas rooted in Cage and Duchamp into a means of transmitting ideas. The minutiae of a daily act was elevated into the realm of art, in its elevation turning this highbrow activity – art making – into something anyone could do. Knowles aims were not to destroy art or the institution of art, but to broaden it.

Chapter One’s examination of Maciunas, viewed as a producer, revealed the conflict between the collectivist identity of Fluxus and the difficulty of keeping that identity cohesive. Maciunas’ personal sentiments on how to present the ideas laid out to him by Fluxus artists proved too specific and would change the idea of the artist for the sake of the collective. Further, his somewhat shaky notions of the relation between functionalism and the decorative in design (see Chapter One’s “The Fluxus Venus Problem”) and his personal disagreements with those who questioned his authority continued to illustrate his difficulty at handling an international group of artists. The unification of these artists with varying intentions and creative agendas could perhaps be seen as an enormous undertaking, and one that would run parallel to the mission that Maciunas himself outlined in his manifesto of promoting “non art reality to be grasped by all peoples.” In his efforts to disband institutions, Maciunas became one. He became canonized as “Mr. Fluxus,” a title that was fitting in representing his dedication to the group, and damning in terms of the hierarchical implications of the phrase.

Of course, beyond the problematic nature of Maciunas’ interventions, and despite his excommunications and personnel shifts, Fluxus acted as the “united front” that he aimed for, although not exactly to his specifications. Al Hansen’s Venus collages, Allan Kaprow’s performances and happenings at Rutgers University, and
Joseph Beuys’ self mythologizing, convey the ideas of making “Fluxus an important part of the new revolution”\textsuperscript{108} as much as Maciunas did himself. Indicative of this are Dick Higgins’ efforts with his Something Else Press, largely picking up were Maciunas fell short. Higgins’ activities encompassed logistically difficult projects and projects that removed the producer/publisher from the product. Chapter Two sought to trace Higgins’ efforts to expand Fluxus, with a wider net of artists, and in terms of its very definition, with the notion of Intermedia. Higgins summarized the origins of Fluxus in his essay “A Child’s History of Fluxus”: 

A lot of artists and composers and other people who wanted to do beautiful things began to look at the world around them in a new way (for them). They said: "Hey! - coffee cups can be more beautiful than fancy sculptures. A kiss in the morning can be more dramatic than a drama by Mr. Fancypants. The sloshing of my foot in my wet boot sounds more beautiful than fancy organ music." And when they saw that, it turned their minds on. And they began to ask questions. One question was: "Why does everything I see that’s beautiful like cups and kisses and sloshing feet have to be made into just a part of something fancier and bigger? Why can’t I just use it for its own sake?” When they asked questions like that, they were inventing Fluxus.\textsuperscript{109}

This passage shows Higgins understood Fluxus as the logical conclusion of a changing tide in thought. He saw it as embracing change, as something, like a happening, that just happens. This understanding of Fluxus could imply tolerance; it furthermore could account for the kind of poetic anarchy that Higgins espoused in his views about what Fluxus could do, and in his work and writings in general. The Something Else Press became indicative of his sentiments. Referred to initially by Higgins as “original Fluxus,” the Press released many Fluxus publications that,

\textsuperscript{108} Hendricks, \textit{Fluxus Codex}, 21.  
\textsuperscript{109} Higgins, \textit{Horizons}, 87.
largely unlike Maciunas’ editions, kept artists’ autonomy in tact in their
presentation, forgoing uniform design to keep the original idea in tact, and in a way
dismantling uniformity and “united fronts” as a Fluxus idea in general.

Emmett Williams’ point suggesting the myriad of nuances one must consider
in figuring out Fluxus’ essential questions serves as a metaphor for the open-ended
nature of Fluxus in general. I have argued here that Fluxus is best presented as an
organic entity, as opposed to a defined movement. To view Fluxus in this way does
not provide a clearer way to tell its story. However, a variety of different approaches
to Fluxus seems in tandem to its spirit. Maciunas and Higgins, with their Fluxus
publications that became evocative of both their agendas and personalities,
represent these different approaches, the former making chaos defined, the latter
letting it grow into something more elegant and open.


Hendricks, Jon. Fluxus Scores and Instructions: The Transformative Years: “Make a Salad”: Selections from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection (Detroit, MI: Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection, 2003).

- Horizons (Ubu Editions, 2007).


http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/atca/subjugated/cover.htm


Spoerri, Daniel. *Invitation to Daniel Spoerri’s Room No 631 At the Chelsea Hotel, March 3 – 15, 1965.*


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THE YOUNGEST SOLDIER’S STORY

The officer who takes the mountain before 1:50 went fast round the edge — and fell over it? *Provisonal agreement at a premium,* Pole in Scotland? No, in England. The courage to bear a sensalous: If returning, do find the day. An asthate is only a ham at heart? The very ideal. Intoxicators lacking body: “A number bent over, with scrabbling brushes, maybe,” Cops set away, and he’s thought to have done it. Teacher’s heart trouble.

Moles followed by Plowman: “But a kick on it may cause a paired shot?!” But the diplomat who claimed expenses for his romances? One person may win it even thought it ends in a draw. An A.D. march, transposed, had its B.C. value.

*A game insect despairing of ever falling in love, maybe standard normal context. . Advanced around the north, the

Figure 16:
Dick Higgins, Jefferson's Birthday/Postface (Detail), 1964, Book, 8 x 7 x 1.75 inches, Collection of Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
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Figure 18:
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In the Kidney Room, people come together to discuss revolution, that is, changing or transforming political forms which are repressive, exploitative, divisive, and oppressive. It is a simple outdoor space (a vague sheltering landscape), daytime light; a luminous green Nile River runs by. There are three large kidneys to sit on, made of stone; they form a mound on a grassy bank.

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