

# FLUXUS IS IN A PERMANENT STATE OF IMPROVISATION

Doctoral thesis in the field of art in the discipline of fine arts and art conservation

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# PREFACE<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As a deliberate gesture to avoid defining or summarizing “what Fluxus is”, I decided to give a voice to the common knowledge that one can easily find on the internet, from Wikipedia, and encyclopedia Britannica, to Chat GPT. The collage of repurposed fragments of the text that appeared as first in the search engine, takes on the most frequently repeated narrative rather than express my own understanding of what does Fluxus entail.



“Fluxus was an international, interdisciplinary community of artists, composers, designers, and poets during the 1960s and 1970s who engaged in experimental art performances, emphasizing the artistic process over the finished product.”<sup>1</sup> “Fluxus artists encouraged a playful and open-minded approach to art-making, creating a wide range of unconventional works, often using ordinary objects and actions to challenge traditional notions of art and engage audiences in interactive experiences.”<sup>2</sup> “Maciunas and the subsequent Fluxus preoccupation with jokes and gags as well as mass-production are best exemplified by Fluxkits: boxed multiples filled with inexpensive ready-mades, visual work, essays, games, and event scores (performance instructions).”<sup>3</sup> “More than 50 artists were associated with Fluxus, many producing a periodical anthologizing the latest experiments worldwide in art and antiart, music and antimusic, and poetry and antipoetry, and many taking part for the sheer collaboration opportunities and the built-in audience. Fluxus involved artists from around the world, including the Americans Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles, the Frenchman Ben Vautier, and the Korean artist Nam June Paik [...]”<sup>4</sup> “The Latin word Fluxus means flowing, in English, a flux is a flowing out. Fluxus founder Maciunas”<sup>5</sup> “like many of his avant-garde predecessors and peers, he chose to make his case known in the form of a manifesto”<sup>6</sup> that, “said that

the purpose of Fluxus was to ‘promote a revolutionary flood and tide in art’ [...]”<sup>7</sup> “For George Maciunas and the Fluxus artists, it was about merging cultural, social, and political realities into a single entity that will become the new face of action, revolution.”<sup>8</sup> “Following an ideology coined by Dadaism and inherited by Neo-Dadaism, Fluxus kept its urge to be anti-commercialist, divorcing its artworks from market-driven tendencies.”<sup>9</sup> “By staging most of its activities outside mainstream venues, Fluxus paved the way for numerous artistic styles that operate outside of galleries and museums, from land art to street art.”<sup>10</sup> “Fluxus was more than just an art movement; it was a revolutionary approach to art-making that sought to dissolve the boundaries between art and life. By prioritizing participation, collaboration, and the use of everyday materials, Fluxus artists challenged the traditional art world’s structures and hierarchies, leaving a profound and lasting legacy on contemporary art practices.”<sup>11</sup> “Its boundary-pushing ethos continues to resonate through contemporary incarnations of conceptual and performance art – Tracy Emin, Marina Abramovic, Damien Hirst, Rikrit Tiravanija, Banksy, and many others have drawn from and expanded upon the Fluxus philosophy.”<sup>12</sup> “FLUXUS is one of the most interesting things that happened to global culture after 1945.”<sup>13</sup>

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(accessed July 12, 2024).

7 “Fluxus”, Tate, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/f/fluxus>, (accessed July 12, 2024).

8 Angie Kordic, “What is Fluxus?”, May 11, 2016, <https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/what-is-fluxus> (accessed July 12, 2024).

9 Ibid.

10 “About Fluxus”, Sotheby’s, <https://www.sothebys.com/en/art-movements/fluxus>, (accessed July 12, 2024)

11 Open AI, Chat GPT, (accessed July 12, 2024).

12 “About Fluxus”, Sotheby’s, <https://www.sothebys.com/en/art-movements/fluxus>, (accessed July 12, 2024).

13 Original citation in Polish: “FLUXUS to jedna z najciekawszych rzeczy, jakie przydarzyły się światowej kulturze po 1945 roku”, „Grupa ETC RE//MIX Opery Fluxusu”, *Komuna Warszawa*, <https://komuna.warszawa.pl/spektakle/grupa-etcopy-fluxusu-2>. (accessed August 26, 2024).

1 “Fluxus”, Wikipedia: *The Free Encyclopedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fluxus> (accessed July 12, 2024).

2 “Fluxus”, *The Art Story*, <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/fluxus/> (accessed July 12, 2024).

3 Ann Cabelle, “Miniature Fluxus Museums: Fluxus and the Multiple”, *Bard Graduate Center*, <https://www.bgc.bard.edu/research-forum/articles/91/miniature-fluxus-museums-fluxkits-and> (accessed July 12, 2024).

4 Lisa S. Winewright, “Fluxus”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified September 4, 2024 <https://www.britannica.com/art/Fluxus> (accessed July 12, 2024).

5 “Fluxus”, Tate, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/f/fluxus>, (accessed July 12, 2024).

6 Karen Kedmey, “What is Fluxus”, *Artsy*, January 14, 2017, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-fluxus-movement-art-museums-galleries>

# INTRODUCTION

*“In those days, Ben Vautier came to Genova and said – some say Fluxus is nothing turned into something, some say the Fluxus problem is how to stop talking about Fluxus – some say Fluxus is dead archeology for sale – some say if Fluxus is about the importance of no-importance, why bother? Some say the best piece in this room is looking out of the window – some say ‘I am more Fluxus than you’ – some say that the cat Neron sitting on the steps is the best Fluxus artist – some say Fluxus is a mistake that works – some say Fluxus does not exist – some say Fluxus is everywhere.”*

A French Fluxus artist, Ben Vautier, wrote this in his distinctive handwriting on the wall of the Contemporary Art Museum of Villa Croce. This artwork was created using spray paint in 2002 for the “The Fluxus Constellation” exhibition. I saw this piece visiting Genoa twenty years later during the 60th Fluxus anniversary celebrations. I have just reminded myself about it, and if I could, I would probably finish my thesis here, as it is a quintessence of any attempt to dilate on Fluxus. If only it weren’t for its title that gives me chills: “Fluxus cannot save the world.”

On the 5th of June 2024, my Facebook wall was full of posts about Ben Vautier’s death. “Annie died at two in the morning at the hospital. Ben shot himself in the head. I loved you so, so much. I am devastated.”<sup>1</sup> He was one of a few Fluxus artists that I have never met personally, and this is not the first one the passing of whom I experienced, but there was something about this that touched me deeply. Maybe it was the post of my friend Charles Dreyfus, also a Fluxus affiliate, about Ben and his wife Annie Baricalla, that I cited above, or just an overall feeling that there are so few flux-people still alive on this planet. I often have compared

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1 Original text: “Annie est décédée à deux heures du matin à l’hôpital. Ben s’est tiré une balle dans la tête. Je vous aimais tant, tant.

Fluxus artists to war veterans. What will happen to their legacy when they are gone? Who will tell all their stories? But similarly to the accounts of former soldiers, we can only preserve words, not actions.

When I visited Alison Knowles in her loft at the end of November 2023, she said that her biggest dream is that other people would still perform her pieces, which would keep them alive when she is gone. But the truth is that “all the Fluxus people will be passing, and nobody will know what was what, and it will be defined by the people to come.” – told me Bibbe Hansen.<sup>2</sup> “I can’t even contact some of the people anymore. They are dead. – said Ken Friedman, perhaps the youngest of all artists associated with Fluxus (today a design researcher and lecturer, but also a strong Fluxus advocate) - Just a couple of months ago, Jean Dupuy died<sup>3</sup>, and then maybe three, four weeks after that, Olga Adorno. All the Fluxus people are going, or they are already gone.”<sup>4</sup> People talk about Fluxus usually in the past tense, how about present or future?

I don’t know whether Fluxus can save the world, but I am sure that Ben’s work will remain on the wall as long as the building of Villa Croce stands or at least till the museum there exists. Maybe this thesis could be an homage to all Fluxus people, or a way to preserve memory of them a bit longer. At least it would keep the diary of my journey with Fluxus when my memories start fading.

“On my bookshelves, I have around three meters of Fluxus literature, and I’m not collecting this. So, if you want to know something about Fluxus, it probably already exists. What is interesting is not what other people

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2 From an online conversation with Bibbe Hansen, December 14, 2023.

3 Jean Dupuy passed away on April 4, 2021 in Niece.

4 From an online conversation with Ken Friedman, September 15, 2021.

think about Fluxus but what it means to you, personally. You can collect opinions, texts, etc., from Fluxus (related) people (as far as they still live). They will be very different and often opposite. Much can be found in the literature already. I would say: forget that all. Make it personal.”

I found this message from Harry Ruhe<sup>5</sup>, a Dutch collector, publisher, and gallerist in my mailbox right after I had started the PhD program. And his words resonated with me since. And that’s true. I have read so much about Fluxus and have probably seen all the essential books and catalogs. Ken Friedman even shared with me his digital library, containing over 300 titles on Fluxus and intermedia art. But does it bring me any closer to understanding it? Not to say, “What is Fluxus?” One can get lost in the flood of attempts to put Fluxus in some art historical boxes. I think I know what it is for me personally<sup>6</sup>, which is pretty far from only admiring its impact on art. I think. But would my accounts be any interesting for somebody to read? Does it make sense to write anything if, as Ruhe pointed out, there are so many reports and opinions already published? And those are also wonderful personal stories from Fluxus artists<sup>7</sup>, like, e.g. Emmett Williams<sup>8</sup>, that may bring people closer to the “spirit of Fluxus”. But I also believe that Fluxus cannot be told purely with words. There will always be something missing<sup>9</sup>.

5 Harry Ruhe participated in my performance “Macinas Laughter (Choir Edition) at the Eye Filmmuseum in Amsterdam (October 8, 2019), together with e.g. a Fluxus artist Willem de Ridder and Frank Mandersloot.

6 When I said this to Philip Corner his reaction was “You do? I wonder if I should know that.”

7 E.g. Caterina Gualco, eds., *Fluxus in Italia*, (Genova: Il Cannello Editore, 2012); Harry Ruhe, *25 Fluxus Stories*, (Amsterdam: Tuja Books, 1999).

8 E.g. Emmett Williams, *My Life in Flux and Vice Versa*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1992) or Emmett Williams, *A Flexible History of Fluxus Facts & Fiction*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007).

9 If someone wants to deepen the art historical knowledge please refer to the publications in the bibliography.

## How did it all start?

I don’t remember the day when I heard about Fluxus for the first time or any particular moment I got fascinated by it, but I am pretty sure that it will become a part of my life/a part of me forever.

My first encounter with Fluxus was probably during art history class in high school. But I remember it vaguely, as if it was a memory told me by someone else. Like those things that happened to you in your childhood, and you think you remember them, but it’s only your family telling you the same stories repeatedly until they get embedded in your head strong enough to believe they are your own. And then there are the family photographs that certify the illusion. And the same happened to me with Fluxus. I have a blurred image of a classroom with a photo projected on the wall (at that time, there were still analog 35 mm slides used, which made it even more illusionary). Today, that image that I see in my mind, resembles the one taken in 1962 during the canonical Wiesbaden actions. But who knows?

I sometimes feel similar when listening to stories told by Fluxus artists, as if they were repeating accounts overheard somewhere rather than sharing their own experiences. Sometimes, they “copy” themselves, reproducing the records they wrote long ago or that exist in some of the published Fluxus memoirs. Probably, it’s a matter of age and the memory fading and failing<sup>10</sup>. Ken Friedman, in one of our

10 “One of the difficulties I had when I was in an active interview phase is that a lot of folks don’t remember things” - shared with me an art historian Natilee Haaren. Forest Trowbrige [see footnote 25] also told me that: “Twenty-one years ago when I was just about 60-years old, I was stricken with Multiple Sclerosis. [...] The disease has seriously impacted my memory function, and I am not sure of the accuracy of much of my ‘recollection’ of the past. In short, I don’t know when the Fluxus Carnegie Hall event occurred.[see footnote no. 24] All I can say is that it must have been when I was in New York in 1963 or 1964 and then



conversations, admitted that he doesn't remember things from the 1960s anymore. "I can answer questions in my own words, but I never remember the different stories the same way. [...] I have to say, it probably sounds dumb. I remember things, but if I am just trying to remember for myself, I don't remember like I used to. It's been half a century now."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Frank Trowbridge<sup>12</sup> confessed to me that his "memory is a little fuzzy. That was over 60 years ago! I vaguely recall traveling by train for a short ride to the outskirts of Cologne to meet Nam June Paik at his studio."<sup>13</sup> It may also be that over time, some of the memories became "colored up" by the false ones. But is it actually something bad?

I honestly don't remember much about Fluxus, besides the blurred memory of the slide, and something about Fluxus being an "important conceptual art movement." I am not really sure whether my art history teacher told it or I made it up by looking at the image showing a few people standing on the stage and wearing black suits. Nevertheless, several years later, being already a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań (today Magdalena

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again in 1965 or 1966 or 1967."

11 From an online conversation with Ken Friedman, September 15, 2021.

12 Today Forest Trowbridge. He participated in some of the early performances with other Fluxus members. E.g. "Festum Fluxorum Fluxus – Musik und Antmusik. Das Instrumentale Theater", Dusseldorf, 1963, where he performed Benjamin Patterson's "Paper Piece". He also recalls an event in Cologne: "I got to perform a Dick Higgins theatre piece with the ever so lovely Agna Smirnoff Reddemann right in our hometown of Cologne." As well as one at Carnegie Hall in New York City. "George Maciunas had booked Carnegie Recital Hall for a Fluxus event. When I heard about it, I contacted him, and he invited me to participate. [...] George gave me a museum replica of a sackbut lol and suggested I use it in place of my trumpet for one of my pieces. [...] I was pleasantly surprised to see Nam June Paik there as well as a few others who had traveled from Germany for the event. It was my last involvement with Fluxus, and how could I ever forget it?" However, I couldn't find any confirmation of his participation in both of those events in other sources

13 From an email from Forest Trowbridge, March 1, 2022.

Abakanowicz University of the Arts), I joined Jarosław Kozłowski's class, who later on became a supervisor of my master's thesis. It took me almost two years, I must admit, to dare to cross the threshold of his studio. I am unsure whether I was more intimidated because of his reputation (he is a well-known Polish conceptual artist), the clouds of smoke coming from the room, and the fact that he was wearing the same suit as those Fluxus artists from the very photo. And for a reason. Besides being a founder, with Andrzej Kostołowski of an international art network NET<sup>14</sup> (1971), he was also involved in Fluxus. Not being its core member himself, he knew many Fluxus affiliates, with whom he established contacts primarily because of the activity of the Akumulatory 2, a gallery that Kozłowski opened in 1972 in Poznań. Many avant-garde artists were shown there, including Fluxus peers such as Dick Higgins, Emmett Williams, and Geoff Hendricks. Also, in 1977, at Akumulatory 2 took place the Fluxus Festival, as it turned out later – the very last of all Fluxus festivals. No wonder then that when I defended my master's thesis in 2010 at Kozłowski's studio and had an exhibition there of my graduation project – that was an exhibition of a fictional artist named Ksawery Somiński that I invented – someone asked whether it was another Fluxus affiliate. I didn't consciously mimic the Fluxus aesthetic, but it just proves even more how much imbued I was with it.

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14 "In the aftermath of the Second World War the Iron Curtain cut across Europe, creating not only an East-West geographical divide but also systemic ideological and cultural borders. In 1971 artist Jarosław Kozłowski and critic Andrzej Kostołowski created what came to be known as 'NET Manifesto' and mailed it to more than 300 artists and art theorists worldwide. The manifesto called for the abolition of those carefully guarded borders by a free exchange of ideas, projects, artworks, publications, and other forms of expression that would also be made accessible outside of the official art circuit." From the press release of *Listening by Eye* at the Muzeum Susch in Suchs, Switzerland, Summer 2020.

Years later, the fact that I have known Jarosław and I was his student made it a lot easier for me to make contact with Jon Hendricks, the curator of Silverman Fluxus Collection at MoMA and “the right hand” of Yoko Ono, her manager and curator, and a former Fluxus collaborator. I visited his house in New York City to get official permission to perform Ono’s “Cut Piece” at the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg (2017)<sup>15</sup>. I hadn’t known Jon back then, and knowing how vital a figure he is, I was a bit nervous knocking at the door on Greenwich Street. I remember that that day, there were some Swiss students at his place doing a recording about him, so it was even more official. But as soon as I sat on a couch to wait until they finished, Jon asked me to tell him something about myself. Initially, I told him where I graduated from and that I did my diploma with Kozłowski, which happened to be an immediate icebreaker (even those young people from Switzerland expressed their admiration of him). Jon has been a good friend of Jarosław, and he showed me that he had just signed the petition to reinstate the studio manager position at the UAP in Poznań. This fact built his trust in me as a performer of Yoko Ono’s work, an artist, and most importantly - a friend. Besides subsequent visits to his small office on the ground floor of his house, with a beautiful view of a backyard garden filled to the ceiling with Fluxus books and ephemera, shared strolls along the streets and lunches in small tavern-like café in his neighborhood, I received one of the most beautiful compliments from him: “I like your unique way of thinking.” But it turned out that the visit about the “Cut Piece” was not the first time I met Jon. In fact, shortly after I arrived in New York in the Autumn of 2016 (I had been invited to study art writing at the School of Visual Arts), my friend Jeffrey Perkins asked me to

15 More in chapter “What about reenactment, reperformance, etc?”

assist him with recording an opening scene for his documentary movie about George Maciunas. It was a simple job to help with a cascade of ping-pong balls falling from the stairs<sup>16</sup>. It happened that he and his editor Jessie Stead were shooting a scene at Jon Hendrick’s house, and later he also pulled out some Fluxus boxes to record them for the film as well. I felt right at home.

I had met Jeff a few years earlier, because I was researching Maciunas laughter that I was doing at the art residency in Vilnius (Rupert). I was very disappointed that the only things I found there about Fluxus were a tiny room with some of their works at the Contemporary Art Center and a curator of the National Gallery of Art, Giedrius Gulbinas, who had shown an excerpt of Perkins’ movie a few years back, I contacted Jeffrey to ask him about some things about Maciunas. I knew that he was working on a documentary about the initiator of Fluxus, and as it turned out, has been very well informed and was friends with almost everybody associated with Fluxus one can imagine (and if not, he has had a story about this person from his taxi driver years<sup>17</sup>). A few years later,

16 Couple of years later I helped again with another cascade of ping-pong balls at the Eye Film-museum in Amsterdam. This time the stairs at the foyer of the museum were at last ten times bigger than the ones at Hendricks house.

17 Like the one about Charlotte Moorman that I heard many times already. This is one of its versions: “Charlotte was very friendly with Emily Harvey, and I happened to meet her in a special way; when I was driving the yellow cab, I stopped to make a call at a streetside phone, at 59th & 9th, and while talking I saw Charlotte walking out onto 9th ave in a beautiful dress with a wicker basket, and I ended the call and said to her <<Do you need a cab>>? She said <<Yes, how did you know?>> I said that my cab was just right there and that not only did I know that she needed a cab, and that I also knew where she was going, which of course surprised her, however I did know where she lived, so I opened the cab door and she got in. I may have told you that great story before. After that I became a favorite driver for her, and we had many meetings following, with her and her husband Frank Pileggi, whose brother was a famous writer about the NY Mafia. I remember one performance that she did on lower bway near Prince st. when she was rigged to be suspended in the air very high in the air, with her



in May 2016, we met for the first time in person in New York, and he joined me at a Maciunas-dedicated event that we did together at the Wendy's Subway in Brooklyn. That very contact initiated our long-standing friendship.

It was primarily because of Jeff Perkins that I was introduced to the New York Fluxus circle, especially people centered around the Emily Harvey Foundation and Gallery. This place still has a special place in my heart, not only because of its history of Fluxus exhibitions<sup>18</sup>, or because it's located in the old Flux-house and it's the very spot where Maciunas was almost beaten to death<sup>19</sup>, but also as I was invited myself several times to do something there<sup>20</sup>. I became friends with its then director, Christian

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cello. She was a great <<show woman>>."

18 "The daughter of a painter and a sculptor, it seems natural that Emily Harvey would choose art as a career path. But, when she first moved to New York in 1964, she worked a variety of jobs. It wasn't until 1977, while working at Poster Originals, that she met and married artist Christian Xatrec, and was introduced through him to the circle of Fluxus artists working in New York. This included Jean Dupuy, who would collaborate with her and Xatrec to open Grommet Gallery (later renamed the Emily Harvey Gallery). Carolee Schneemann once said of the SoHo space: "You can always hang around, have a coffee, use the typewriter or even sleep there... It's an art household—like a church—and we are co-religionists there." – from Cait Munro, "Legendary Women Dealers Who You Need To Know, Part Two", *Artnews*, March 31, 2014. (accessed September 18, 2024). The Emily Harvey Gallery Archive (1982-2004) was acquired by the J. Paul Getty Trust in 2022 and can be visited at the Getty Research Institute (GRI) in Los Angeles.

19 The story is told by Sara Seagull in Jeffrey Perkins's film: "George. The Story of George Maciunas and Fluxus", 2018. More in Thomas Kellein's book "The Dream of Fluxus. George Maciunas: An Artist's Biography": "On 8 November 1975, Maciunas' 44th birthday, the Chairman suffered a serious injury. In a dark stairwell on the way up to one of his lofts, he was attacked by strangers who set upon him with fists and crow bars. The electrical contractor Pete D. Stefano, as Maciunas later wrote, had sent two hired guerillas to teach him a lesson. He was admitted to St. Vincent's Hospital, where he was diagnosed with three fractured ribs, serious facial injuries, and the loss of sight in one eye." Thomas Kellein, *The Dream of Fluxus. George Maciunas: An Artist's Biography*, (London and Bangkok: Edition Hansjoerg Mayer, 2007, 147.

20 "Maciunas Laughter (Choir Edition No.2) in 2018, "The Perfect Journey (after James Lee Byars). An Homage" in 2019, "Close (to) the Sky" in 2022, and "Conductors' Ensemble" in 2023.

Xatrec, and some of the regular gallery-goers. Through Jeff, I also met Norman Ballard (today the director of Shigeo Kubota Video Art Foundation), who at that time had become an executor of Kubota's legacy and started to organize hers and Nam June Paik's things left at their loft. Together with his son, he wanted to digitize all her video works and to do so, they needed help cataloging endless piles of tapes, video cassettes, and DVDs. So I came to the top floor of 110 Mercer Street, where the apartment was located, to write down for several months those data in the Excel file. At that time, I learned a lot, not necessarily about the archiving system itself but rather some related side things. Such as, what to do with the unreadable handwritten notes that might be both a shopping list or a new idea for the work, or things that look like artworks thrown in the trash? How and if to archive email conversations? Etc.

In that very same building on Mercer Street also used to live a Japanese sound artist and musician, Yoshi Wada, who moved later to the same condominium that Perkins inhabits. I brushed him a few times in the Upper West Side neighborhood in Manhattan. Sadly, he passed away during the COVID pandemic at the age of 78, and I wasn't able to attend his funeral. But weirdly enough, during my several-year stay in New York, I attended the memorial services of Goeff Hendricks and Carolee Schneemann, who I hadn't known personally. Those kinds of ceremonies are pretty unique, and similarly to the work in the archive, they make you think of the legacy the artist leaves behind.

Today, on the corner of Mercer and Prince Street is the iconic Fanelli café, where many of Fluxus (and not only) artists from SoHo used to hang out in the sixties and seventies. Some of them still do it. One time, it was probably after an opening at the Emily Harvey

Foundation, I was sitting there with some people, and suddenly Simone Forti showed up at the door. She had just arrived from Los Angeles and the first thing she did after getting to New York City was to drop by the Fanelli for Nicoise salad and a glass of red wine. I also remember having a birthday martini with Alison Knowles (our birthdays are only two weeks apart); she asked me how old I was. After I told her (I must have been in my early thirties at that time; she was in her mid-eighties), she said, “You are catching up to me.” It cannot be denied. Not even 10 minutes walking from Fanelli is her loft, where her photo with President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama is on the bathroom wall, taken in 2011 during the event “A Celebration of American Poetry at the White House.” I also met her twin daughters Hannah and Jessica Higgins there and listened to Alison’s stories about her friendship, cooking with John Cage, and meetings with Marcel Duchamp.

Both Alison Knowles<sup>21</sup> and Yoshi Wada performed during subsequent events of the premier of the movie “George. The Story of George Maciunas and Fluxus” at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City. On the third and final evening, invited by Kathy Brew and Jeff Perkins, I presented for the first time my performance, “Maciunas Laughter (Choir Edition),” in which the musical choir performed a composition of sounds of Fluxus impresario’s laughter<sup>22</sup>. Over the years,

21 Alison performed that day the very same piece she did in front of Obamas, a wonderful performance “A Shoes of Your Choice” in which she simply asks people to come to the microphone and tell the story of the shoes that they are wearing.

22 “Fluxus was a joke!” – said George Maciunas on his deathbed. He had a very unusual sense of irony in him, which was also a quality of many of Fluxus’ works. Despite their playful attitude, Fluxus artists were serious about changing the balance of power in the art world. They did not agree with the authority of museums to determine “high art”. Constituted between the human and animal world, laughter is an atavistic feature, both gesture and language. Maciunas

that work was performed numerous times in various circumstances. For example, at the Emily Harvey Foundation, The Eye Filmmuseum in Amsterdam (together inter alia with a Fluxus artist Willem de Ridder and Harry Ruhe), at Port 25 in Mannheim, or during the Fluxus Festivalis in Kaunas. In February 2021, during the coronavirus pandemic, I organized its version online with many people associated with Fluxus, such as Eric Andersen, Bengt af Klintberg, Alison Knowles and Jessica Higgins, Jarosław Kozłowski, Billie Maciunas, Ann Noel, Charles Dreyfus Pechkoff, Jeffrey Perkins, Wim T. Schippers, among others<sup>23</sup>. One of the most outstanding achievements of this project was not only to get everybody together at the exact date and time (taking into account different time zones it was not an easy task), but making the space for those people to meet. I was beyond happy to see how excited they were to see each other, even if only on the computer screen. Believe it or not, some of those folks (as they like to call

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considered *it* to be the only form of human expression which transforms the whole body into a “corporeal concretism”. Laughter is a conceptual exercise, our unconscious performance, “an opening in which self unfolds”, and thus a way to evoke personality. Maciunas was a complex man, who until this day remains enigmatic and mythic. I decided to learn his laughter (to adapt it to my own rather than mimic) as I found it to be his feature that is the most constant, the part of his personality that hasn’t changed despite all of his – not always easy – life events (laughter is not a quality we learn over life, like speaking for example, but it is already embedded in our identities). ‘Storing’ his laughter in my body I can hand it down and share it with other people, meaning that the choir performs the laughter only after my tutoring (without hearing the original sound of Maciunas’). I have chosen to work with a choir as laughter never appears as a singular act but always as multiplicity, and communicates what could not be said with words. Thus, laughing together becomes a social practice, but also, a musical and spiritual experience.

23 The full list is: Eric Andersen, Alain Arias-Misson, Jeff Berner, Jacques Danguy, Charles Doria, Charles Dreyfus Pechkoff, Bartolomé Ferrando, Peter Frank, Ken Friedman, Coco Gordon, John Halpern, Kevin Harrison, Jessica Higgins, Bengt af Klintberg, Jarosław Kozłowski, Alison Knowles, Bob Lens, Patrice Leroc hereuil, Billie Maciunas, Ann Noel, Jeffrey Perkins, Norie Sato, Joshua Selman, Wim T. Shippers, Weronika Trojańska, Frank Trowbridge

themselves) haven't seen each other for 60 years. And from what I heard, some of them spent three hours talking on Zoom after the performance. It also proves how relationships are essential in Fluxus.

"I think the artists are the only interesting thing [in Fluxus]. I would like to say that people who are, as I like to say, touched by the Fluxus brush, contain a lot of artists that I am very enthusiastic about. Some friends and some that I don't know personally. I think it's a great international community that's very broad that may be subsumed under Dick Higgins's phrase *intermedia*," – told Philip Corner<sup>24</sup>. Deborah Walker, a fantastic cellist often performing Fluxus pieces (actually mostly Corner and Charlotte Moorman), told me once that for her, more than anything, Fluxus is about connections. Because of it, she has met so many wonderful people. And I couldn't agree more. It's not only artists associated with Fluxus but practically everybody interested in it somehow. Those links of interrelations often create exceptional relationships. It's a growing rhizomatic structure. Almost like an extended family. Fluxus relatives. Fluxatives.

I also try to keep in touch with those I met, whenever there is an opportunity. That was why I wanted so badly to stay in New York after I learned that I couldn't continue with the SVA study. And why, after returning to Europe in 2019, I was still traveling the world to meet them elsewhere, outside the United States. And that is also one of the reasons why I decided to pursue this PhD.

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<sup>24</sup> From an online conversation with Philip Corner, March 23, 2022.

# **PART ONE**

## What is this thesis not?

### 1) The paper

Writing this, I am not trying, by any means, to make another book on Fluxus (even if it may seem so or look like one) or claim that I know more than others or that I have discovered something groundbreaking. When I will be discussing Fluxus, you will still see the typical phrases and words repeated constantly, like a broken record. I am not trying to be revolutionary here, as Fluxus artists were. No art revolution is possible after Fluxus, but that's an entirely different subject.

Paraphrasing Natilee Harren, I am not going to be a Fluxus police because I don't have the right to be so.<sup>1</sup> However, sometimes it is tempting<sup>2</sup>. But after all, is there a good and bad way of performing or exhibiting Fluxus pieces?

It is also not an instruction for the application "Event Swirl" or how to use it (however, partially, it may be so, or maybe seen as one, and I am not mad about it).

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<sup>1</sup> "When I first started off my research, I told myself I am not going to be the Fluxus police, because I don't own that right. We have Hannah Higgins, there are people who were there. They can be the Fluxus police. But I think I've been working with material long enough that I feel I can be the Fluxus police to a certain extent [...]" – from my online conversation with Natilee Harren, July 6, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> I have a sense that more people would join its ranks. E.g. in the anonymous questionnaire I prepared for my research that was answered by more than 70 people, one of the questions was "What is the biggest misconception about Fluxus?" 29% of the respondents had no objections. For the rest the most common answers were that it is just for fun (joke, entertainment theater, simple and cheap, frivolous, tawdriness, "unserious", clownish, etc.), Dada or neo-dada, that George Maciunas was a leader, that Joseph Beuys was a Fluxus artist, and that it was a group or movement. Also in a number of my conversations this subject arose, e.g. in David Ross' opinion "a number of the artists who were central to [Fluxus], are still alive. They were identified as Fluxus artists when they were younger, and may still be identified as Fluxus artists, but I don't think Fluxus activity in that sense happens anymore. I think that is an academic version or academized version of Fluxus, which is not the worst thing, but it's the same thing." (from my online conversation with David Ross, May 16, 2022).

And finally, it shouldn't be forgotten that, as Peter Frank emphasized: "[Fluxus] is best understood by participating in it, as opposed to reading about it and discussing it. [...] There are ideas that Fluxus encourages us to think about, but I don't think Fluxus encourages us to think about Fluxus."<sup>3</sup>

### 2) The application

It is not an attempt to make Fluxus exist online or become a network on the World Wide Web. With the constant conundrum of whether it was a pre-internet communication system and if George Maciunas wanted to make Fluxus viral, Event Swirl could be seen as following such premises. But it is not trying to translate Fluxus online (to the internet world), but rather to use its features and mechanism to be used contemporary and describe presence. I deliberately try not to use the word Fluxus (or fluxus) by any means.

It is also not aiming to be a continuation of Fluxus. During the whole discussion on whether Fluxus ended with the death of George Maciunas in 1978<sup>4</sup> or it would have been active until the artists centered around it were alive, some people claim to be so-called continuators of Fluxus. Weirdly enough, there have been several online attempts to "reintroduce" and "revive" the spirit of Fluxus, e.g., still active Fluxlist<sup>5</sup> or by publishing Flux-inspired stuff in some Fluxus-like Facebook groups<sup>6</sup> or websites<sup>7</sup>. Fluxus can also be seen as a brand

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<sup>3</sup> From an online conversation with Peter Frank, March 10, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> In that same questionnaire I also asked "Do you think Fluxus is still active/alive today?". 67% of the interviewees said "Yes", arguing mostly that "some artists are still alive and some artists inherit the core spirit".

<sup>5</sup> Fluxlist.blogspot.com; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fluxlist/>; <https://fluxlisteur.ope.blogspot.com/>

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Fluxus (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/5172052401>; administered by Jarret Moran, adjunct lecturer at the City College of New York).

<sup>7</sup> E.g. <https://fluxusa.blogspot.com/>; <https://fluxnexus.com/>; <https://fluxmuseum.org/>



that may give someone recognition<sup>8</sup>. “People who call themselves Fluxus are doing a kind of exploitation, doing that for a reason, what you say, jumping on the bandwagon, to profit from the advantage of being associated with Fluxus.” – told Philip Corner. “Now it’s a label, which serves what you may call the useful purpose of being invited to concerts, exhibits, books, publications, and all that. And I must say, I’ve profited from it, too, and I think this interview is an example of it. You are calling me because I am quote and quote Fluxus, not Philip Corner. [...] I just came back from a concert with other musicians in Pistoia. – he continues. – And in the biography, they mentioned that I am associated with Fluxus. And I said, ‘I don’t have to be called the Fluxus artist every single time I do anything,’ you know?” And Billie Maciunas said to me: “My perspective is much more dominated now by the fact that [fluxus] has become a museum item, it’s in MoMA, people are imitating it, people are using the logo to sell clothes, and everything. And so it’s in a way dead. Except with the small “f,” that’s still alive. But Fluxus with a capital “F” became what George didn’t want it to be. So that’s ironic.”<sup>9</sup>

Fluxus was (is?) an open-ended structure, with tentacles spread almost throughout the whole world (or at least most of Europe, North America, and Asia). And because of this, even for people close to the Fluxus original circle, it is hard to pinpoint which artists were “The Real Fluxus”.

Philip Corner: I got a card; Harry Ruhe from Amsterdam organized a show in Antwerpen called something like “25 Fluxus for Holland”<sup>10</sup>, in other words - stories. [...] There was a list of the 25

8 I have to admit here that I have made a mistake of tagging on the internet my work about George Maciunas and some other things I have done with a hashtag #fluxus.

9 From an online conversation with Billie Maciunas from March 15, 2022.

10 An exhibition “25 Fluxus Stories”, Art Partout, Antwerpen, 2022.

people. Presumably all artists that were in the show were Fluxus. Eric Andersen, Bernard Aubertin, Julien Berthier, George Brecht, Stanley Braun, Philip Corner, Geoffrey de Beer, Willem de Haan, [...], Ken Friedman, Al Hansen, Piero Haliczzer, David Horvitz, Gerhard Jaschke, George Maciunas, Rob Malash, Willem de Ridder, Dieter Roth, Wim Schippers, [...], Paul Sharits, Daniel Spoerri, Floor Vanden Berghe, Ben Vautier, Vinkenoog, and anderen. That’s important, and others. I am used to being and others. [...] How many of these people have you ever heard of?

Me: I think a half or less than a half.

PC: Me too. Also, some people are only known in Holland, and others I’ve never heard of. That’s only 25, and there are people all over the world now calling themselves Fluxus: Fluxus East, West, North and South, New Fluxus, etc<sup>11</sup>.

I have never claimed or wanted to be the “contemporary Fluxus” myself or make a new version in the XXI century (even chat GPT fails to write Event Scores). Anyway, it would be completely impossible.

Last but not least, I am not trying to make it any more straightforward for people to understand what Fluxus was/ is (but I would be happy if they do). I believe there are as many “definitions” of Fluxus as many people speak about it. “So my answer to your question what is what Fluxus is, basically I would have to say I don’t have a clue.” – said Philip Corner during the same interview cited above.

11 Emmett Williams recalled in his memoir: “I remember a tender moment, when Wolf Vostell and I were examining the giant poster [for the Venice Biennale]. He put his arm around my shoulder, and said, <<Emmett, do you remember? In Wiesbaden in 1962 there were only seven of us? Now there are a hundred and twenty>>.” Emmett Williams, *My Life in Flux and Vice Versa*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 27.



## What is it then?

It is an attempt to summarize and record my experience with Fluxus and my own understanding of it.

It is my way of paying homage and expressing admiration for their “philosophy” and activities.

Hopefully, it will make people realize what Fluxus is for them, as it is something else for everybody, and it will make people get interested in the historical Fluxus and encourage them to do their own deeper research.

### 1) The paper

The paper is divided into sections describing particular characteristics of Fluxus, especially concerning Event Scores, including my understanding and experience and the features of an Event Swirl app.

I have talked to many people associated with Fluxus or its scholars and theoreticians, whose voices are also present in this paper. Most of the quotations come from my interviews with people I have known before or met throughout the Doctoral School program. I also based my research on practical activities, like returning to my experience in seeing and performing myself Fluxus scores.

An essential part of the research was also an anonymous questionnaire (Fluxionaire) that was sent out to people asking some nurturing me questions about Fluxus, such as:

1. Have you heard about Fluxus? Yes (go to question 2 and continue) No (go to question 11 and continue)
2. When did you first hear about Fluxus? It could be a date, exhibition, situation, etc.
3. Have you learned about Fluxus at school? No. Yes. If yes, what did you learn? How was Fluxus presented?

4. Can you name some Fluxus artists?
5. Name at least three characteristics of Fluxus.
6. In your opinion, when did Fluxus begin?
7. Do you think Fluxus is still active/alive? No. Yes. If yes, why?
8. Name a few artists who you think were/are influenced by Fluxus or in whose work you see some Fluxus influences (those could be names or artworks from past, present, or future)
9. What do you think is the biggest misconception you heard about Fluxus?
10. If Fluxus were a performance/artwork, it would be...
11. The first thing that comes to your mind when you think “Fluxus”? (it doesn’t have to be necessarily related to the historical art phenomena or art at all)
12. If you could ask ANY question concerning Fluxus, what would it be?

A significant step was a month-long residency at the Archivio Conz in Berlin. I was provided space and time to delve into several thousands of photographs of people associated with Fluxus and a chance to browse its extensive library. During this, I also got fascinated with some of Charlotte Moorman’s objects – remnants of her performances of John Cage’s “26’1.1499. For a String Player”. The result was a performance that I developed with Deborah Walker presented at Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin<sup>12</sup>.

An additional part is a chapter with records of other artists and musi-

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<sup>12</sup> As part of the exhibition “Holy Fluxus. From the Collection of Francesco Conz”, St. Matthew’s Church, Berlin (13.07.2024-8.09.2024).

cians, especially from younger generations, about how they see the relation of Fluxus to their work. The names of persons I contacted appeared in the answers to question nr. 8 in the fluxionary. I contacted those who were reachable by email or social media. Those are: Robert Blatt, Jaap Blonk, Stefan Burger, Joan Casellas, Christian Falsnaes, Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin, Rolf Giegold, Annika Kahrs, Het Kanaal, Christof Migone, Mehreen Murtaza, Steve Random, Jimmy Robert, Sijben Rosa, Kateřina Šedá, Maya Smrekar, Asli Sungu, Maya Verlaak, Jennifer Weigel.

## 2) The application

I wanted to create a project that would continue after completing the PhD program, and thus, I believe, could be achieved by an ongoing online presence. The initial idea was to create a chain of events in an email exchange, where one person answers to the sent event score with a photo, video, or sound, and then they create their event score and send it to the next chosen person. The next participant would do the same: answer the previous person's event score, create a new one, and send it to someone else. And so on and so forth. The starting points in the chains were some related to Fluxus artists (Eric Andersen, Philip Corner, Charles Dreyfus Pechkoff, Peter Frank, Bengt af Klintberg, and Ann Noel) to whom I sent out event scores created based on the answers from the anonymous questionnaire<sup>13</sup>. Surprisingly, most of the first contributions were in the text, but overall, I have received over thirty new event scores and have met many new people because of this exchange. One chain ended after the second contacted person stopped answering or

13 E.g. "A politicians quarrel", "An empty piece of paper with one sign", "The pen that lies under the radiator / and I haven't yet bend down to pick it up", "A handful of confetti thrown in the air", or "Misspelling and grammatical errors in George Maciunas' Fluxus manifesto that includes the word <<Europeanism>>".

didn't write a new score, but others collected from five to fourteen responses. Among them were many exciting performances and responses, and it could go on if it weren't for the fact that it turned out that it was not really what I was looking for.

After a long period of back-and-forth ideas, I have decided to create an internet application, as it turned out that it encapsulates many things that I found important when thinking about Fluxus, like, e.g., the idea of event scores, game, chance, everydayness, network, conviviality, performativity, or anti-institutionalism. Event Swirl is an attempt to create an innovative communication method *inspired* by Fluxus, in which each participant can take part in the game/event by responding to the task in the form of images, video, and sound.

The project is both a widely available app and an artwork. I see myself as its author and creator, initiating the process that takes on its own life. Bojana Kunst wrote in her book "Artist at Work, Proximity, of Art and Capitalism: "[...] the project delegates the singular gesture of the one who works, shifting the artist's authorship and creative gesture elsewhere. When making projects, we no longer work as authors but delegate our authorship to a multitude of evaluative, managerial, and organizational processes that projective temporality needs to be constantly subordinated to."<sup>14</sup> And "in many cases, the artist's absence can be more powerful, more palpable, more distinctive, and in some instances more personal than his or her presence."<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, a game as an art process "suspends certain artistic prerogatives."

14 Bojana Kunst, *Artist at Work, Proximity of Art and Capitalism*, (Winchester, UK and Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2015), 174.

15 Celia Pearse, "The Aesthetic of Play", *Visual Language: Fluxus and Legacy, Part 2*, Vol.40, No. 1 (2006), 70.

According to American game designer Celia Pearce, “creating something framed as a game expresses a certain attitude, a particular posture toward not only the work itself but the “audience, and the practice of art-making in general.”<sup>16</sup> When creating an artistic project in a form of a game, the artist invites the viewer/participant to co-create the work. On the one hand, the choice of a game-like character of an application resonates with Fluxus’s playfulness; on the other – creating social bonds by being part of something together. At the same time, the mechanism of a game and its performativity make it fun and more approachable for younger users, hopefully encouraging them to educate themselves about the historical Fluxus.

The basic format for the users of the Event Swirl App is instruction-like Fluxus Event Score. Each time, one person from the Event Swirl App network is chosen randomly (that refers to the common Fluxus idea of chance) to create a new score. The person may or may not accept the challenge. If yes, they have 12-72 hours to make the score. If not, the task is delegated to another person. When the score is ready, it is then sent to all users of the app, who decide if they want to participate this time or not.

People could share their interpretation of the score with anybody or only with the group of chosen people. They can also react to each other’s work, which relates as well to the participation of the audience in Fluxus’s actions. The relatively short time given to respond with the contribution encourages people to think quickly, which also refers to the nature of Event Scores, which were mostly unrehearsed performances. But it also requires the participants to be creative with what they have in their surroundings, thus referring to the means of everyday life in Fluxus’s work.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

Uploaded contributions will eventually disappear from the server, similarly to, e.g. Instagram Shorts that last 24 hours. It also refers to the idea that many of Fluxus’s works were event-based and focused on the process rather than the lasting object, emphasizing the experience of performative action.

The users of the Event Swirl App can invite people from their circle of friends and professional contacts (like email addresses or social media). Everyone can join the app network by accepting the invitation or signing up. The app will eventually become a network of people interested in Flux-like activities (not limited to people who know or have heard about Fluxus). According to Celia Pearce, “Networked games have created a kind of participatory <<global playground>> where people can now interact dynamically in real-time and build new and increasingly complex play communities that traverse geographical and temporal boundaries.”<sup>17</sup>

The interface is simple and intuitive, thus easy to use also by, e.g., older people (e.g. for Fluxus artists and their friends and collaborators).

In a way, Event Swirl aims to make people understand that everyday activities can be perceived as art. “Fluxus is a philosophy that encourages you to change your thinking about art. So, activating Fluxus should mean more of a conceptual thing, not an object. It should inspire you to make your performance piece. [...] Like snow, you must do something if you see the snow. It’s more like everyday life action.” – told me Midori Yoshimoto<sup>18</sup>.

It could also be seen as a way to engage with art at home and daily, as well as

<sup>17</sup> Celia Pearce, “The Aesthetic of Play”, *Visual Language: Fluxus and Legacy, Part 2*, Vol.40, No. 1 (2006).

<sup>18</sup> From an online conversation with Midori Yoshimoto, January 16, 2024.

to make a different use of the phone, e.g. only as a device for posting photos of the artworks for the likes. To use a cellphone as a medium to create and share art deliberately. The app is also designed in such a way to be able to use it both in a private environment and an art gallery space, for people to use it individually or by interacting with each other.



## **PART TWO**



## What is an Event Score?

### Drip Music (Drip Event)

For single or multiple performances.

A source of dripping water and an empty vessel are

arranged so the water falls into a vessel.

Second version: Dripping.

G. Brecht

(1959-62)

Event Scores were probably the most iconic art forms in the Fluxus universe one can imagine. It's usually a brief instruction (that may resemble a short poem or haiku) for an activity, often referring to things we do every day but encouraging us to try to do them in an unusual or even absurd or poetic way. "Event Scores involve simple actions, ideas, and objects from everyday life recontextualized as performance. Event Scores are texts seen as proposal pieces or action instructions. The idea of the score suggests musicality. Like a musical score, Event Scores can be realized by artists other than the original creator and are open to variation and interpretation.<sup>1</sup>" – explains Alison Knowles perfectly. "The way I see open scores and Fluxus is that they serve as tools or aids for being creative with others, inspiring them, and giving them the agency to be inventive." – said musician Elliot Simpson<sup>2</sup> - "In my case, that's with music primarily, but it can

also be with writing, theater, or performance, or visual art."

The invention of the Event Score is credited to the American artist and musician George Brecht and was cultivated by many (if not most of) the artists associated with Fluxus (e.g., Bengt af Klintberg, Ken Friedman, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, George Maciunas). However, as many people recall, some artists had been making instruction-like works before they started doing something under the common name of Fluxus. "That existed with Yoko [Ono], La Monte Young, and George Brecht. That existed before George Maciunas had ever heard of it," said Philip Corner<sup>3</sup>.

American mail artist John Held Jr. said everything started with a dancer and choreographer, Anna Halprin. "I was the only one who realized her importance to Fluxus. Nobody gets this. It's crippling to me"<sup>4</sup> – he told me. In the late 1950s she was doing dance workshops in her backyard that were attended by people like Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti, Robert Morris, or musicians such as Terry Riley and La Monte Young. "What Anna was doing was getting away from narrative dance and moving towards event notation." – said Held. Based on his account, La Monte Young gathered those Event Scores together with other scores, moved to New York City, and was about to publish them in "Beatitude East" magazine. But after meeting George Maciunas, they decided to include them in "An Anthology" (1962), the first collaborative Fluxus publication. Although there is no clear sign which scores were created by or with an influence of Halprin, the choreographer didn't hide her connection to Fluxus: "[...] I began to share scores. I would send a score to Yoko Ono, for example, and then she would

1 "Event Scores", *Alison Knowles*, <https://www.aknowles.com/eventscore.html> (accessed July 26, 2024).

2 I met Elliot Simpson during the Fluxus Festivali in Kaunas in 2022.

3 From an online conversation with Philip Corner March 23, 2022.

4 From an online conversation with John Held Jr. March 10, 2022

send me a score, and then we would interact with each other through Fluxus networks.”<sup>5</sup>

However, the tradition of open notations goes far beyond the beginnings of Fluxus or even Halprin workshops, and it is mainly associated with the world of music. Of course, the closest and direct reference would be John Cage<sup>6</sup> (for many considered a conceptual father of Fluxus). His experimental composition courses at the New School for Social Research in New York City, attended by many artists associated later with the core Fluxus members (e.g., Georg Brecht, Dick Higgins, Jackson MacLow, La Monte Young), are among the pivotal moments for Fluxus formation. During the course, Cage introduced them, e.g., to the work of American composer Earle Brown, whose one-page long graphic score was also published by Maciunas in “An Anthology.” Together with the work of another influential Fluxus composer, Christian Wolff, who pioneered the importance of indeterminacy and new ways of using improvisation in composition. But talking about it feels like opening a Pandora’s box that generates more possible inspirations and references.<sup>7</sup> And the more I try to systematize it in a similar way as Maciunas did in his diagrams, the more tangled it becomes.<sup>8</sup>

5 Samara Davis, “Anna Halprin”, *Artforum*, July 21, 2012, <https://www.artforum.com/columns/judson-at-50-anna-halprin-200625/>. (accessed September 28, 2024).

6 In 1969 John Cage published with a help of Alison Knowles “Notations”. The book consists of extensive compilation of graphic scores and facsimiles from the Foundation of Contemporary Performance Arts, featuring text contributions from 269 composers. Scores are composed alphabetically, giving everybody an equal space. (John Cage, eds., *Notations*, (New York: Something Else Press, 1969).

7 There is a whole chapter dedicated to it in Natilee Harren book “Fluxus Forms: Scores, Multiples, and the Eternal Network”; Natilee Harren, “Diagramming Form, from Graphic Notation to the Fluxus Event Score”, *Fluxus Forms: Scores, Multiples, and the Eternal Network*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022).

8 Maciunas designed many diagrams among which is “Fluxus (Its Historical Development and Relationship to Avant-Garde), 1966 in which he traces the influences of Fluxus from baroque the-

“Several recent pieces of instrumental music are linked by a common feature: the considerable autonomy left to the individual performer in the way he chooses to play the work.”<sup>9</sup> – observed Umberto Eco in his renowned book “The Open Work” that was published in 1962, the year of Fluxus famous performances in Wiesbaden. “Thus he is not merely free to interpret the composer’s instructions following his discretion (which, in fact, happens in traditional music), but he must impose his judgment on the form of the piece, as when he decides how long to hold a note or in what order to group the sounds: all of this amounts in an improvised creation.”<sup>10</sup> He gives an example of compositions by Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio, Henri Pousseur, and Pierre Boulez<sup>11</sup>. Focusing primarily on music and literature, he also refers to modern art, such as “Calder’s mobiles or by mobile compositions by other artists: elementary structures which can move in the air and assume different spatial dispositions. They continuously create their own space and the shapes to fill it.”<sup>12</sup> Fluxus was just forming at the time, but filling out a space with your actions sounds very familiar<sup>13</sup>.

For Eco, the openness of the work of art (also called “work in movement”) is a sign of contemporary times or even a trend in scientific thought.<sup>14</sup> “Multi-

ater to industrial product design. Interestingly, none of the composers I mentioned above, appear there, besides John Cage.

9 Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 1.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 12.

13 More about Umberto Eco’s “open work” in relation to Fluxus can be found in David T Doris, “Zen Vaudeville: A Me(d)itation in a Margins of Fluxus”, in *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman, (West Sussex: Academy Editions, 1998), 102.

14 “[i]t is not overambitious to detect in the poetics of the “open” work—and even less so in the “work in movement”—more or less specific overtones of trends in contemporary scientific thought”. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 14.

valued logics are now gaining currency, and these are quite capable of incorporating indeterminacy as a valid stepping-stone in the cognitive process.” “[I]t posits the work of art stripped of necessary and foreseeable conclusions, works in which the performer’s freedom functions as part of the discontinuity which contemporary physics recognizes, not as an element of disorientation, but as an essential stage in all scientific verification procedures and also as the verifiable pattern of events in the subatomic world.”<sup>15</sup>

### What about the authorship?

“More than simply an innovative aesthetic format, the adaptation of scores in primarily visual arts context transformed relationship of authorship, production, and distribution among artists and their work.”<sup>16</sup> If Event Scores are open-ended, allowing for the personal interpretation of the performer, who could be practically anyone that got hold of the score, who are their authors?

“In the early sixties, when the first generation of Fluxus artists were doing and giving away their experiences, it mattered little which of us had done which piece. The spirit was: you’ve seen it, now—very well, it’s yours. Now, you are free to make your own version of it if you like. The piece and the world will be a little richer for all that.”<sup>17</sup> – wrote Dick Higgins to George Maciunas. And even if it was allowed to enact fellow artists’ pieces, somebody still must have invented a specific score or instruction. Someone with an “author-function,”

as Foucault would put it. “Fluxus authorship was trans subjective as well as schismatic – writes Harren – regarding the practice of the individual artists.” Many (if not all) artists associated with Fluxus have had their art practice before, during, and after their involvement in Fluxus. Thus, everyone has had their own artistic identity, not wanting to become anonymous and follow the utopian dream of Maciunas to unify all Fluxus work under the common umbrella<sup>18</sup>. For instance, “Complete Works of Toshi Ichiyanagi was never published by Fluxus. There were copyright problems. Ichiyanagi was already committed to C.F. Peters, Publishers in New York and objected to Maciunas’ publishing his works with the Fluxus copyright.”<sup>19</sup>

“Even the idea of naming Fluxus artists or identifying a piece as a work of a specific artist is already anti-Fluxus,” Philip Corner told me<sup>20</sup>. Maciunas advocated for creating collective art, and to help with that, he emphasized the need for the artist to stay anonymous. In a 1966 letter to Dick Higgins, Maciunas wrote: “... By anticollectivism & individualism I meant- an absence of any effort or desire to promote Fluxus as a group. This applied to Emmett [Williams] when he did his Paris fest [‘Poesie Etcetera Americaine,’ Paris, October 9, 1963]. I just assumed that if he was not interested in promoting Fluxus as a Collective, why should Fluxus promote him?”<sup>21</sup> In an article “Fluxus Games and Con-

18 I have heard this from many people. Harren also writes about it her book: “Maciunas insistence on anonymous, collective production was seen as cowardly, insincere and rather too conveniently align with his desire to control final design and production decisions. Takako Saito has been one to argue that artists are ethically obliged to claim individual authorship of their work as a way of taking responsibility for what they have put into the world.”; in: Natilee Harren, *Scores, Multiples and the Eternal Network*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), 170.

19 Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, (New York: Harry N. Abrahms, 1988), 271.

20 From an online conversation with Philip Corner, March 23, 2022.

21 Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, (New York: Harry N. Abrahms, 1988), 37.

15 Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 15.

16 Natilee Harren, *Fluxus Forms. Scores, Multiples and the Eternal Network*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), 28.

17 Letter from Dick Higgins to George Maciunas, November 19, 1974. Jean Brown papers, Getty Research Institute; in Magdalena Holdar, “The Unlimited Performativity of Instruction Art: *Space Transformer* by Yoko Ono”, *The Power of the In-Between*, (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2018), 122.

temporary Folklore: on the Non-Individual Character of Fluxus Art” that Bengt af Klintberg has sent me by post, he wrote: “The concert took place at the Alley Theater on March 1-3, and all performers, except Dick [Higgins] and Alison [Knowles], were Swedes. [...] George Maciunas sent a telegram to Dick, forbidding him to use the name Fluxus when not all artists were present, but the poster was already printed.”<sup>22</sup> “However, [Maciunas] was not always consistent in this, sometimes naming artists as Fluxus artists and at other times crediting them with their copyright [...]”<sup>23</sup>.

What is the situation with Fluxus’ authorship rights, then? In a letter to Tomas Schmit dated January 1964, Maciunas wrote: “...In the future, all Fluxus concerts (concerts consisting of predominantly Fluxus materials) MUST be called Fluxus concerts. This is purely for propaganda purposes. If newspapers do not mention Fluxus, their reviews are worthless for publicity here in New York. That’s why we copyright compositions, so we can FORCE mention of FLUXUS (collective) rather than individuals. This is all part of an anti-individualism campaign...”<sup>24</sup>. Most of the published ephemera got the Fluxus copyright stamp designed by Maciunas<sup>25</sup>. “European Fluxbook must be copyrighted. I can do it easily in New York (for international copyright), or you can do it. In either case, it should be: © copyright by Fluxus,

all rights reserved. In the copyright office they may have on record that I and you are copyright holders ...” Here comes the detailed list of names of the artists whose works were about to be used in the publication.<sup>26</sup> And indeed, George Maciunas tried to secure legal protection for the intellectual property of Fluxus and its artists. Starting from the early activities of Fluxus (around 1963), he mutinously filed copyright claims with the Library of Congress for various creations produced under the Fluxus name. Although the authors were acknowledged on each piece, the primary copyright holder was always *FLUXUS, solely owned by George Maciunas*.<sup>27</sup>

What is interesting is that it proves to be the case with all printed material (whether in anthologies or as part of Fluxus year boxes, etc.) to which Maciunas kept all the rights when published<sup>28</sup>, including Event Scores, and the live performances themselves could be attributed to individual artists. In another letter to Tomas Schmit, he wrote: “The works will be copyrighted when published, which means their performances will be controlled by yourself through Fluxus, and indiscriminate copy prohibited.”<sup>29</sup> Once the works are made public by Maciunas, they are protected by the law. The artist-author would control how these works are performed or presented, but the copyright holder would have the exclusive right

22 Bengt af Klintberg, “Fluxus Games and Contemporary Folklore: on the Non-Individual Character of Fluxus Art”, *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, Vol. 62, No. 2, (1993), 116.

23 Stephen Wilmer, “Two Approaches to Nomadism: Fluxus and Théâtre du Soleil” in: *Performing Statelessness in Europe*, (Dublin: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 166.

24 Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, (New York: Harry N. Abrahms, 1988), 37.

25 For some reason Maciunas also often omitted the Fluxus copyright label when it comes to his own scores. “An early score of Maciunas, printed in blueprint and distributed by Fluxus, but without the Fluxus copyright” “Fluxus Codex”; in: Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, (New York: Harry N. Abrahms, 1988, p. 389.

26 Letter of George Maciunas to Willem de Ridder, August 12, 1964 in: Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, (New York: Harry N. Abrahms, 1988), 114.

27 “Press Release”, *George Maciunas*, <https://georgemaciunas.com/exhibitions/home/press-release-2/>, (accessed September 5, 2024).

28 “[O]nce you agree or decide to offer your works for publication and they are accepted, they can not be offered to and published by any other publisher”, Maciunas wrote to Tomas Schmit, end of December 1962 or early January 1963 in: Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, (New York: Harry N. Abrahms, 1988, 107. And even more: “Maciunas kept control of Fluxus production, receiving ideas from artists and, in a unique relationship, feeling free to alter and interpret these works—designing the labels and packagings—even varying the contents from copy to copy” (Ibid., 27).

29 Ibid., 107.



to reproduce and distribute the work in its printed form. Thus, once the score is published it is copyrighted by Fluxus, which means that theoretically, it also belongs to everybody in Fluxus. It's still puzzling to me, though, what he means by "performances will be controlled by yourself through Fluxus."

In today's art world, the expression of the idea is copyrighted and not the idea itself. "In conceptual art, the idea constitutes the work of art; the concept in conceptual art cannot be copyrighted. Only the form in which the concept is documented of fixed can be."<sup>30</sup> The same applies to performative actions. What is even more upsetting is that often, only the documentation is copyrighted. The photographer may be the only person with the work's copyrights. It is definitely more difficult or practically impossible to recreate a certain performance identically to how it was originally done, while producing e.g. a Plexiglass sculpture pretty much is. Thus, if "Drip Music" was not a Fluxus piece, it probably would be possible to produce any work involving dripping water to an empty vessel while doing it on the exact ladder as George Brecht and in the very same way (which is practically infusible anyway, don't deceive ourselves), not so much.

But is the Fluxus model any better? We can say that Maciunas found a way to protect the idea, but according to the arrangement regarding the copyright of the pieces, the authorship will be fully destroyed. They will become "totally anonymous-thus eliminating artists 'ego' The author would be 'FLUXUS.' We can't depend on each 'artist' to destroy his ego. The copyright arrangement will eventually force him to do it if he is reluctant."<sup>31</sup> Fortunately or not, practically none of the artists centered around Maciunas agreed with the idea

of anonymity for the sake of Fluxus. As a result, many of the works were attributed to the individuals.<sup>32</sup> Most of them decided for their works to be accessible and performed by anyone. But all this applies to the time when Maciunas was still alive and controlled the Fluxus activities, and until some of the Fluxus artists are still alive, it will probably remain that way. But what comes next?

"To assign an Author to the text is to impose the break on it, to furnish it with the final signified, to close writing."<sup>33</sup> – wrote Roland Barthes in his iconic essay from 1968<sup>34</sup> that also famously claimed that "the death of the Author must requite the birth of the reader." Adapting it to the Fluxus realities would suggest that the author's intention does not determine the meaning of the score/performance, but rather, it is open to the viewer's interpretation. And thus it might be up to us how the work is understood and what lies ahead.

### How to perform an Event Score?

According to George Brecht, Event Scores were "like little enlightenments [he] wanted to communicate with friends who would know what to do with them."<sup>35</sup> The strength of this kind of art form is that it could be interpreted and performed by musicians and visual artists or performers with no musical knowledge. And everybody can ap-

<sup>30</sup> Eric Schrijver, *Copy This Book. An artist's guide to copyright*, (Eindhoven: Onomatopoe, 2018), 13.

<sup>31</sup> Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), 27.

<sup>32</sup> Even though it was not as he initially intended, he found another way to benefit from the situation designing individual logos for each artist. That, as Benjamin Buchloh pointed, "turned each artists name into a kind of brand" (Harry Stendhal, eds., *The Avant-Garde. From Futurism to Fluxus*, (Vilnius: Jonas Mekas Visual Arts Center, Vilnius, 2007), 167.

<sup>33</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in: *The Rustle of Language*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 53.

<sup>34</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in: *The Rustle of Language*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 55.

<sup>35</sup> Ken Johnson, "Georg Brecht, 82, Fluxus conceptual artist, is dead", *The New Yorker*, December 15, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/15/arts/music/15brecht.html>, (accessed August 2, 2024).

proach them differently. “I think it was when I learned about George Brecht’s events (especially his Water Yam) that I realized the almost endless possibilities to create Fluxus performances alone or with friends, without stage, posters and audiences. This was a new insight, an eye-opener.” – wrote me a Swedish Fluxus artist Bengt af Klintberg<sup>36</sup>.

The openness also allows one to look at the score beyond the instruction for the performance. It could be an object or sound. It has physical and mental qualities. Theoretically, it could be performed anywhere<sup>37</sup>. On the stage<sup>38</sup>, on the street<sup>39</sup>, in the comfort of your house, or even in your head. When I invited Milan Knizak to enact a score for my email exchange chain, he wrote: “I’m too old to perform in reality. I can only perform in the space of my mind.”<sup>40</sup> Also, speaking with an art historian and curator, Midori Yoshimoto<sup>41</sup>, she often highlighted that the es-

entially open-ended attitude of Fluxus helps us broaden the notion of “interactive art,” encompassing both physical and mental interactivity. Thus fostering a richer “mental” interaction with the score and the audience.

“The Fluxus repertoire now consists of pieces which share a general non-individual character. Those pieces which have disappeared often were so personal that other Fluxus artists could not perform them.” – explained Bengt af Klintberg. He described his memory of Joseph Beuys<sup>42</sup> “Siberian Symphony” with a dead hare and prepared piano at the Fluxus festival in Dusseldorf. “It was a piece charged with magic, but apparently, it could not be performed by anyone else than Beuys. Therefore, it could never enter a collective repertoire. “On the other hand, such contributions as Brecht’s *Drip Music*, Maciunas; *In memoriam to Adriano Olivetti*, Thomas Schmit’s *Zyklus*, and Ben Patterson’s *Paper Piece* have been performed hundreds of times, often without the composer being present.”<sup>43</sup>

But anyone doesn’t mean anyhow. For Bibbe Hansen is the gravitas, intention, seriousness, and formal dress code. “When I am doing Fluxus performances, I almost always dress very formally. Not necessarily in a tux, but the jacket, slacks, shirt, or top. My posture is correct, and my manner and intentionality are precise. And those are things

36 From an e-mail from Bengt af Klintberg, March 10, 2022.

37 Speaking with Natilee Haaren she described Fluxus Events organized in 2018 at the Los Angeles Philharmonic where she highlighted that one of the “takeaways from that experience was that the [Fluxus] work doesn’t scale up very well, so I don’t know if there is a way to present Fluxus at the LA Phil. It’s like when Alison Knowles did her salad piece at the Tate Modern in London. I was a giant salad, but I am not sure how well it is working even there. So I’ve been happier with more modern kind of grassroots performances, where the size of the performance space, the number of audience, is like similar to what things have been like in the 60s and 70s.” From an online conversation July 6, 2022.

38 “It is quite a myth that concert halls and the streets were chosen and museums and art centers rejected as performance spaces. On the contrary. It was the visual art world that rejected us and we had to find places where we weren’t likely to be arrested.” In: John Lely and James Saunders, *Word Events. Perspective on Verbal Notation*, (New York and London: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 79.

39 “I was walking in New York with a bunch of poems on loose paper and it was extremely windy, and the wind blew the papers out of my hand and all over the place. I called that a Fluxus event. It was very personal and no one was there to see it, but I thought it was just great, poems all over the place. So there are many private instances like that where I experienced Fluxus subjectively, and liked it very much.” – recalls Billie Maciunas in our online conversation March 15, 2022.

40 From an email from Milan Knizak, April 4, 2024.

41 Midori Yoshimoto “is professor of art history

and gallery director at New Jersey City University. As art historian, Yoshimoto specializes in post-1945 Japanese art and its diaspora with a focus on women artists, Fluxus, and intermedia” (after <https://www.njcu.edu/directories/faculty-staff-directory/midori-yoshimoto>). We met when a Japanese Fluxus artist Mieko Shiomi invited me (for the second time) to participate in her work “Spacial Poem”, which contributions were presented at the Japanese Society as part of the show “Out of Bounds: Japanese Women Artists in Fluxus” (13 Oct 2023 – 21 Jan 2024).

42 There is another conundrum in the Fluxus universe, whether Joseph Beuys was a Fluxus artist or not. Opinion of are divided.

43 Bengt af Klintberg, “Fluxus Games and Contemporary Folklore: on the Non-Individual Character of Fluxus Art”, *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, Vol. 62, No. 2, (1993), 120.



that I associate with the Fluxus scores or Fluxus performance. One distinction between the core Fluxus people and the young people who are excited about Fluxus and want to do their work is that they think it's a gag. They are giggling, dress very casually, and their posture is casual" – she said<sup>44</sup>.

Natilee Harren shares a similar attitude. "I've seen a lot of performances of Fluxus scores that I conceive to be bad. [...] The prevailing idea is to do whatever you want with [the scores]. And that's the wacky spirit of Fluxus. And I don't necessarily agree with that. But that is often how Fluxus is presented to mainstream audiences because it's like a hook to get people in. So I am interested in people who take Fluxus seriously."<sup>45</sup> "It's not like that [Event Scores] require an immense rehearsal time, and maybe they don't have to be rehearsed at all, but it just seemed almost like there was no decisive planning and how things will be done." – she adds. "I think with many Fluxus works, it's not like they had to be done a particular way. It's just they were done a particular way," said composer and artist Robert Blatt.<sup>46</sup> "It activates these skills that most people already have, and I think that's empowering for the inner soul." – says art historian, a professor at the University of Exeter, Heike Roms<sup>47</sup>. "What you do with the score is just as correct as what I do with the score as long as we follow it. The difficulty is that sometimes one runs into someone who wants to load the score with other material. Such as dramatic presentation that doesn't have the minimal, blank, Zen appeal that Event Score does." – explained Alison Knowles in one of the interviews<sup>48</sup>.

44 From an online conversation with Bibbe Hansen, December 14, 2023.

45 From an online conversation with Natilee Harren, July 6, 2022.

46 From an online conversation with Robert Blatt, June 17, 2024.

47 From an online conversation with Heike Roms, March 21, 2023.

48 "Alison Knowles Interview on the History of Fluxus," Neuma Records, October

The Event Scores exist as written notations and live actions, whether done in front of public or in private. In some way, the performance records the verbal score and its different materialization. The documentation of an enacted event then, even if the evidence of it appears in some way in writing (as a review or a fragment of memoir), is usually in the form of a photograph. But the photo gives only a glimpse of what has happened, a fragmented image. Many existing Event Scores have never been documented, and many images showing Fluxus artists are evidence of some kind of action enacted, e.g., at a dinner party<sup>49</sup>. There are probably many works (scores) which we don't know whether they were performed. "Sometimes there is no score. We have played pieces just by seeing photographs or knowing that someone has performed it before, but probably most of the pieces we play there are something like a score or description. But not every time," said Henrik Kairies from the experimental vocal music ensemble Maulwerker, who also has performed several Fluxus pieces over the years<sup>50</sup>. "If we happen to have material, we look at everything, but it's different to develop a piece from a score than to

6, 2020. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OA2TlxL9g0o> (accessed August 20, 2024).

49 In my conversation with Billie Maciunas (March 15, 2022) she recalls: "All the performances that I did with George [Maciunas] were great, but one that we did at home, and at Judson Church in New York, was conceived by George, and it consisted of two people holding long cardboard cylinders. And then you make noises with your mouth into the cylinder into the person's ear. It could be very fun, because you could make e.g. fart noises, or anything you want. We performed that at home too at George's place in Massachusetts, with Jean Dupuy and Olga Adorno. Jean Brown was there too, and that was funny. And I liked it because it was so simple and so hilarious. Then another one was that we did at Halloween, also at George's Massachusetts home, there were a lot of Fluxus artists there. And just anyone in a room can make a noise at any time, very spontaneous. So Olga went ah, ah, ah and I went oh, oh, oh. And for some reason I loved the community of that, everyone laughed and it was great fun."

50 I learned about Maulwerker from Ann Noel, who told me about their elegant way of doing Fluxus pieces, and especially performances with her husband, Emmett Williams.

make its re-imagination by watching a video. It doesn't depend on chronology or how it was done earlier; it depends on the approach." another member, Katarina Rasinski, added.

I met with Maulwerker in Berlin in September 2023, just after I had finished researching piles of photographs of Fluxus artists taken by Italian collector Francesco Conz. I was particularly drawn to those images because of their descriptive and, at the same time, ambiguous character. What fascinated me is that it's often hard or almost impossible to distinguish which photographed scenes were performances *per se* and which "just" improvised actions. And whether the improvised action that was "performed" for the eye of a camera hasn't become another performance? It's impossible to differentiate which were scored and made up on the spot only by looking at the documentation or Fluxus photographs. But is it essential to make this differentiation?

Through Fluxus's somewhat "partisan" nature<sup>51</sup>, the images and documentation that are left are rarely staged or over-aestheticized. Even if it was so good as the photographs taken by Peter Moore, an unofficial court photographer of the New York avant-garde of the sixties and seventies (e.g., Fluxus and Judson Dance Theater), besides that, it often resembles accidentally collected photos taken by beholders, which echoes a bit the idea of photos taken today at the events with our iPhones and smartphones.<sup>52</sup>

I just love those images that Conz was

obsessively taking. Looking at them, it has something of a voyeuristic quality to it. No wonder, since Ann Noel told me that he would follow her husband Emmett Williams with a camera even to the toilet. I am still unsure whether I find it offside or funny, but there is some kind of quality of a family album in those photographs. Looking at them (especially the ones showing people I have met in person), I often had a similar feeling to the ones seeing photos of my grandparents when they were young. This slight tingling somewhere at the heart level.

I remember specifically the image of Alison Knowles sitting on a Thonet chair in an old apartment. Behind her is a display cabinet with some tableware, on top of which is a figure of an angel and a war bonnet. She is wearing a grey knitted sweater over a bright red turtleneck. Smiling. Her palms rested on her lap in a gesture as if she was trying to show something to them. Next to this image is a photo of people drinking wine at the table. There is Alison, Dick Higgins, and three other women whom I do not recognize. It looks like they are having a good time. The colors are a bit faded and warmer than in real life. Developed on a photographic paper 10x 15 cm with a semi-glossy finish. Only the description on the back of Alison's photo reveals that she is performing (together with Dick Higgins and Gerhard Jaschke) "Milano Poesia." It was in October 1989 in the Viennese apartment of Jaschke. I am not sure whether the handwritten inscription refers to the image on the photo and some kind of performance at Jaschke's "Wiener Wohnung" or to their appearance at the "Milano Poesia VII, *Festival Internazionale Di Poesia, Musica, Video, Performance, Danza e Teatre*."<sup>53</sup>

Somehow, this image brings me back

51 Many of Fluxus events and concerts took place e.g. on the streets, in public places, but also in "hijacked" concert halls, where Maciunas advertised Fluxus as "neo-dada in music" showing instead of classical concerts by young American composers, Fluxus performative actions that often shocked the people in the audience.

52 During the exhibition "Fluxus 1962-2022: Sixty Years in Flux" (curated by Caterina Gualco) I met a Fluxus photographer Fulvio Magurno, who told me that he was mostly using an I-Phone now to take photos.

53 Organized by Nuova Cooperativa Intrapresa, Ente Autonomo Milano Suono. Curated by Mario Giusti and Gianni Sassi.

to my walk with Knowles toward the Hudson River. I was there with Jeff Perkins, and we were probably walking from her Spring Street house. New York City streets are full of remnants of chewing gums. They cover the pavement, creating an almost granite-like structure. Suddenly, she slowed down and started admiring those marks and dots as if they were jewels besprent on the street. "It's a ready score," she said, almost jumping from one spot to another like a little girl. Until today, I can't stop thinking of stains of chewing gum on Downtown Manhattan streets as a perfect notation for music and/or performance, but also, it's very playful, almost like a game. I keep searching for similar patterns in Europe with no luck. I sometimes regret not taking a photo of this situation back then, but wouldn't it take something away from this moment? The company of Alison and Jeff, the fresh breeze from the river, and a ray of sunshine coming from behind the high buildings in Greenwich Village. And if I took a picture only of the pattern on the sidewalk, would I have the same emotional connotations looking at it as I had during that very stroll? Would somebody recognize in this photo a score if there was no description? Maybe the walk was already a ready singular composition and doesn't need to be repeated. Or even can't?

### **What about reenactment, reperformance, etc.?**

Re-enactment and re-performance became quite popular terms in today's performance scholarship (maybe even a bit overused) and seem to be the easiest, or at least the most approachable, ways of trying to reimagine the live action. Jules Pelta Feldman makes a distinction between those two terms. "[R]eenactment seeks to faithfully reconstruct and recreate a specific historical event (historical fidelity), reperformance's goal is usually the re-presenta-

tion of a specific act of performance under new circumstances, and often by a new performer (aesthetic authenticity) [...]. A reenactment is a collaborative exercise aimed not at merely demonstrating history but understanding it – even "experiencing" it – from the inside."<sup>54</sup>

While reperformance arose in art and the appearance of performance practice, reenactment had been mostly associated with reconstructing historical events. The former dates back to Ancient times, when Roman amphitheaters hosted spectacles where famous battles were recreated for public entertainment. But it became widely famous in XVII century Europe, where in 1638 in London, Lord James 'Jimmy' Dunn of Consiston is credited with orchestrating the earliest recorded reenactment. It was a staged battle featuring numerous performers in period costumes. The United States held training exercises and patriotic celebrations as early as the American Revolution (the first was annotated in 1778). The term reperformance emerged in the second half of the XX century, and today, it is mostly associated with practices of such artists, e.g., Marina Abramovic, and especially her "Seven Easy Pieces," in which for seven consecutive nights she performed in 2005 in Guggenheim Museum in New York City seven different works. Two were her own, and the rest were her interpretations of pieces by performance protagonists and waymakers Bruce Nauman, Vitto Acconci, Valie Export, Gina Pane, and Joseph Beuys. Today, in the context of art, the terms re-enactment and re-performance are frequently used interchangeably, always referring to live appearance. Reenactment, like restoration and reconstruction, usually requires extensive research and becomes

<sup>54</sup> Jules Pelta Feldman, "Reperformance, reenactment, simulation. Notes on conservation of performance art", 21: *Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual. Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur*, Bd. 4, No. 4 (2023).



a field for generating knowledge. “Re-performance strategies call into question the archive’s permanence, often displacing the document in favor of live re-enactment.”<sup>55</sup>

In this connection, can we talk about attempts to perform Fluxus score (by fellow Fluxus artists and other people) as a re-performance or re-enactment? As mentioned earlier, Fluxus was the most active in a different historical period to the one that we live in now, so trying to recapture its spirit nowadays will be only repeating an archival record of a past action (like in the case of any effort to repeat a historical art piece). Re-performing Fluxus’s actions 60 years later would rather preserve and conserve than give people an authentic experience of their work<sup>56</sup>. Hannah Higgins cautions that no matter how meticulously a performance is recreated, there is always a risk that the audience might mistakenly believe they have experienced the original work. The more accurate and detailed the recreation, the more likely viewers will think, “Now I have seen it just as it was back then.”<sup>57</sup>

Similar to those battle reconstructions, even with the most faithful and detailed equivalent of outfits and scenery, we may never truly understand how it was back then. People were different from today, and their perceptions or

beliefs differ. “The time that those pieces appeared is so vastly different from the times we are in now. The concept of audience that we have now is very different from what it was then. So for us, it’s exciting to see how these straightforward works, minimal works reflect the audience as well as ourselves,” – said Alison Knowles<sup>58</sup>. Thus, following Feldman<sup>59</sup>, it may be better to call an attempt to recreate something from the past simply “simulation” (not to say, speculation) “I like using the word realize instead [of reenactment], realizing on your own, with your interpretation or something. Fluxus is open-ended, so it can completely change its context or interpretation. You don’t have to restage or reenact.” – said Midori Yoshimoto<sup>60</sup>. “I call it reenactment because of that term and its currency, but actually, it wasn’t a reenactment because there was no attempt on our part to even find out what happened in the original.”<sup>61</sup> – said Heike Roms, describing her experience with some Fluxus scores that were historically performed in West Wales in 1968. “There is no documentation that would give you any idea of how the scores were interpreted, so we did our version. It gave me a real sense why certain scores were put together, what the rhythm of the event was, how certain kinds of audience focused scores then changed.” – she adds. According to Billie Maciunas ((a wife of George Maciunas and the author of “The Eve of Fluxus: A fluxmemoire”<sup>62</sup>), “the repetition of the scores and the

55 Megan Hoetger, “Re-Performance: History as an Experience to Be Had, X-TRA, <https://www.x-traonline.org/article/re-performance-history-as-an-experience-to-be-had> (accessed September 17, 2024).

56 Here it’s impossible not to mention the Bern University of the Arts initiative called “Activating Fluxus”. The research project “considering the transitory aspects of Fluxus forms not destined for preservation, and looking through a multidisciplinary lens of conservation, art history, performance studies, heritage studies and museology, our project will advance novel strategies for activating Fluxus through the reconstruction, adaptation and artistic reinterpretation of Fluxus forms” (after: <https://activatingfluxus.com/>).

57 Jules Pelta Feldman, “Reperformance, reenactment, simulation. Notes on conservation of performance art”, *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual. Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur*, Bd. 4, No. 4 (2023), 679.

58 “The Misfits – 30 Years of Fluxus”, a movie by Lars Movin, 1993. “The Misfits – 30 Years of Fluxus”, weird films archive, April 15, 2021, Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzQtWhdQQXs&t=3531s>, (accessed September 28, 2024).

59 Jules Pelta Feldman, “Reperformance, reenactment, simulation. Notes on conservation of performance art”, *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual. Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur*, Bd. 4, No. 4 (2023).

60 From an online conversation with Midori Yoshimoto, January 16, 2024.

61 From an online conversation with Heike Roms, March 21, 2023.

62 Billie Maciunas, *The Eve of Fluxus*, (Orlando and New York: Arbiter Press, 2010).

performances is very boring and very annoying.”<sup>63</sup>

Thus, I find statements like this disputable: “Fluxus artist themselves were constantly taking the instructional scores of their peers to construct their own re-enactment.”<sup>64</sup> Would we call Nam June Paik’s performance in “Zen for Head” a re-enactment of La Monte Young’s “Composition 1960 #10 (for Bob Morris)”<sup>65</sup>? Its score reads simply, “Draw a straight line and follow it.” What Paik did (first time at Stockhausen’s “Originale” in 1961 and then a year later during the FLuXuX Internationale FesTsPiElE NEUEsTER MUSiK in Wiesbaden) was to dip his hand, tie, and eventually hair in a bowl full of ink and use them as brushes to draw a line with the pigment on a few meters long sheet of paper lying on the floor. Tracing with the paint the movement of his body, a shape resembling a Japanese calligraphy was formed (thus the title “Zen for Head”). Photos taken during this action probably became one of Paik’s most iconic images, if not Fluxus. There is also a video documentation done in Wiesbaden by a German television showing Paik leaning over the papyrus-like piece of paper, concentrated entirely on the performance, while the audience in the background is bursting out with laughter and pointing their fingers at what is happening at the stage. And there is nothing wrong with it. How would they have known how to behave seeing things like that for the first (and maybe last) time in their lives? They probably haven’t seen the most-known today, Yves Klein’s “Anthropometries”<sup>65</sup> in which nude women, covered with paint, served as

“brushes,” applying International Klein Blue on the paper on walls and floor around them. Neither did he see the clip’s narrator, making sarcastic comments like “pay attention to the musical undertones,” by which he meant the giggling audience. Whether it was funny or not, that’s a different story. But watching this video again<sup>66</sup> made me realize that I do not know of any performance of the “Composition 1960 #10” done by its author (creator?) – La Monte Young himself. Or am I wrong?<sup>67</sup> At least there is no documentation of it. So how Nam June Paik could have re-enacted this piece if the only original version is the written score? Even the description on MoMA’s<sup>68</sup> website (the documentation of Wiesbaden’s “Zen for Head” is in its collection) states that “Paik *performed* La Monte Young’s text-based score.”<sup>69</sup> Is Nam June Paik’s “Zen for Head” still a performance of

66 “Fluxus festival (Wiesbaden 1962)”, au revoir simone, June 9, 2017, Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YibFHWZ66GQ>, (accessed August 12, 2024).

67 Probably the only record of that score executed by La Monte Young is when he decided to make its multiplication.

“In 1961 decided to repeat *Composition 1960* twenty nine times, with individual works evenly distributed to comprise a full year’s work. The resulting *Composition 1961 #1-29* premiered in March 1961 at Harvard concert organized by Flynt, in which Young along with his friend and collaborator Robert Morris arduously traced a line twenty-nine times using a plumb line. The piece was restaged in May at the Chamber Street series and eventually published by Maciunas as the book *LY 1961* in 1963. As Young recalls, <<It can be performed in many ways. At that time, I employed a style in which we used plumb lines. I sighted with them, and then drew along the floor with chalk... I drew over the same line each time, and each time it invariably come out differently. The technique I was using at that time was not good enough”. (in: Liz Kotz, *Words to be looked at. Language in 1960s art*, (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007), 85. “In a concert organized by Henry Flynt (and reviewed by Weber) at Harvard on March 31, 1961, Young drew a line on paper and repeatedly retraced it as precisely as possible; this constituted a performance of the entire *Compositions 1961*, including the twenty-two that had not yet been “written” (in: Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a straight line and follow it. The music and mysticism of La Monte Young*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 82.

68 Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

69 “La Monte Young with Nam June Paik”, MoMA, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/127631>, (accessed August 20, 2024). Italics mine.

63 From an online conversation with Billie Maciunas from March 15, 2022.

64 Helena Barrett, „Reinterpreting Re-performance”, *Helena Barrett Wordpress*, <https://helenabarrett1987.wordpress.com/january-2011-study/>, (access August 12, 2024).

65 A public performance of Yves Klein’s “*Anthropometry of the blue period* and *Monotone-Silence took place* in the Galerie Internationale d’art contemporain in Paris in March 1960.



“Composition 1960 #10” or just a work on its own rights?

Nevertheless, there is no denying that the latter has become almost an archetypal rendition of that piece often, times done similarly even by other Fluxus artists (like, e.g., Ben Vautier in Niece in 1964 and 1970 or Geoff Hendricks in 2012 in Chiasso in Italy). To my surprise, after typing into the Google search bar “Zen for Head,” the only contemporary piece that comes up is a video of Ashi Monitz from 2014<sup>70</sup>. The location is unknown. But if you dig a bit deeper on the internet, you can also find the documentation of Maulwerker doing this piece five years later in Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin<sup>71</sup>, as a part of the program of the exhibition “Local Histories” (performed by Katarina Rasinski).

If the score is open to anybody to perform, it means simply that it can be interpreted by the performers themselves (as Paik did with “Composition 1960 #10”). Opposite to many musical notated pieces or performance instructions, Event Scores are not about fulfilling the composer’s or author’s artistic viewpoint. “I think the composer’s vision – said Knowles – is to actually pass it over to the performer. And the precision of how it’s done is usually a direct measure of the success of the piece.”<sup>72</sup>

Philip Corner was complaining to me about the misinterpretation of his “Piano Activities” that was first presented at the same Wiesbaden 1962 concert as “Zen for Head,” during which a group

of Fluxus artists<sup>73</sup> smashed the piano on stage. He wasn’t there, and when he heard what had happened, he was struck, as his score did not intend for the instrument to be destroyed; it just involved unconventional interactions with a piano, going beyond the traditional playing techniques. Today, we know it as a shocking and iconic anti-art Fluxus piece, but according to Gunnar Schmidt and his book “*Klavier Zerstörung in Fluxus und Pop Kunst*,”<sup>74</sup> there was no scandal at the Wiesbaden performance. “The audience was delighted. The controversy arose afterwards, through critiques and television broadcast.” – recalls Corner.<sup>75</sup> “I heard Mrs. Maciunas, George’s mother, was among the nay-sayers, expressing dismay over what was done to the pianos of Chopin and Liszt – very typical bourgeois. I couldn’t help thinking, could all this anti-art be a reaction to something as simple as George’s piano lessons? It’s complicated, but at the end of the day, as the saying goes, if you don’t laugh, you cry”<sup>76</sup>. Not surprisingly, until today, for some, it is the most known of Philip Corner’s pieces. Some people have torn apart pianos and put them on YouTube, claiming there were realizations of his “Piano Activities.” “Some may relate to my original score, while others are just piano bashing. [...] other people have done artistic and personal piano destruction events. The best example is Carlos Santo’s, the Catalan pianist, who is a virtuoso and a famous minimalist pianist.”<sup>77</sup>

But actually, can we talk about reenactment when it comes to Fluxus at all? Isn’t it just the *performance* of the

70 “Nam June Paik 白男准: Zen for Head 禪首 Na-jing 2014”, Juan Wu, June 29, 2015, Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWlg8ECvqU>, (accessed July 20, 2024).

71 „Fluxus Intervention\_Maulwerker, Hamburger Bahnhof 2019, Tischgesellschaft, November 11, 2019, Video, 1:40 min, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxYW2xIXiRY>, (accessed July 20, 2024).

72 Alison Knowles Interview on the History of Fluxus”, Neuma Records, October 6, 2020. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OA2TlxL9g0o> (accessed August 20, 2024).

73 Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, George Maciunas, Ben Patterson, Wolf Vostell, and Emmett Williams.

74 Gunnar Schmidt, *Klavier Zerstörung in Fluxus und Pop Kunst*, (Bonn: Reimer, 2012).

75 From an online conversation with Philip Corner, March 23, 2022.

76 Ibid.

77 From an online conversation with Philip Corner, March 23, 2022.

scores?<sup>78</sup>. Is calling it a “first performance” or a “historic one” better? If Fluxus’s score resembles musical notation, do we reenact Beethoven or any other musical piece or just play (perform) it? And at the same time, can we call all Fluxus actions *performances*? American art historian and curator Jennie Goldstein explains that in the realm of performance and live art within the visual arts, the presence of an audience is crucial for the work’s significance<sup>79</sup>. For an action or event to be considered a true performance, it must have an audience, be a one-of-a-kind occurrence, and happen only once.<sup>80</sup> Maybe we should invent a new word for it, then? What if, e.g., “event score” was a verb? This verb form would imply the act of performing, creating, or assigning a repeatable instructional-based work (“I event-scored a “Composition 1960#10 during yesterday’s festival”).

However, it looks slightly different nowadays with the performances of Yoko Ono, whose lawyers have ensured that Studio Yoko Ono authorizes every public presentation of her work. “[She] wasn’t really fine with the fact that other people are playing her pieces.” - told me the Maulwerker, who performed on several times Ono’s “Cut Piece.”<sup>81</sup>

78 “[...] not to mention the entire history of scored works that are always iterations without an original”, in: Claire Bishop, *Disordered Attention: How We Look at Art and Performance Today*, (New York: Verso Books, 2024), 79.

79 Although the audience often played a crucial role in Fluxus actions and performances, many of the scores could be also performed for the performer themselves. In 1965 Tomas Schmit wrote a piece “Aktion Ohne Publikum” (“Action Without Audience”) that he performed at the Parnas Gallery in Wuppertal. Schmit envisioned that the action of his earlier work “Zyklus” would only be performed in the absence of visitors, allowing the activity to be invisible. Whenever the audience gathered, he would interrupt the pouring process, take a cigarette break, and engage with the guests. The action resumed only when he was alone in the room.

80 Jules Pelta Feldman, “Reperformance, reenactment, simulation. Notes on conservation of performance art”, 21: *Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual. Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur*, Bd. 4, No. 4 (2023), 679.

81 E.g. during *Fluxus Biennial* in 2010 in Rome, or *Fluxus-Konzert* at Schlosspark Museum Mors-

Although she had made many instructional works, this one is probably the most known of all and most frequently performed<sup>82</sup>. This pioneer performance of feminist and participatory art was first presented in 1964 at the Yamaichi Concert Hall in Kyoto. Thirty-one-year-old Ono, kneeling on the floor, invited the audience members to come on the stage to cut off pieces of her clothing with scissors. “In the 1960s, it wasn’t obvious that women artists performed such daring pieces. Understandably, ‘Cut Piece’ was recognized as an iconic feminist work. [...] I think ‘Cut Piece’ remains her most famous work and is Yoko Ono’s best performance. I have seen many others, but this one was truly profound.”<sup>83</sup> – recalls Jeffrey Perkins, who saw the performance at the Carnegie Hall in New York in 1965. Until 1966, Ono performed the piece herself at least two or three more times<sup>84</sup>. Her last known appearance performing “Cut Piece” was in September 2003 at a dim, small stage of the nineteenth-century Theater Le Ranelagh in Paris. Half a year earlier, the war in Iraq broke out. Nearly exactly two years before, almost three thousand people had died in the 9/11 terrorist attack at the World Trade Center in New York City, where she was living at that time. The Parisian version of “Cut Piece” was Ono’s statement against the political climate and hope for peace. This time, she invited people to cut out postcard-sized fragments of her elegant, black Chanel suit and send them to their loved ones.

“Cut Piece,” however, has always been a protest against a war. “A beautifully

broich in Leverkusen.

82 One of the recent performances took place in the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin in September 2023, as part of the 2nd Annual Performance Festival PERFORM! And Berlin Art Week.

83 From the interview I conducted with Jeffrey Perkins together with Anna Magalska for “Dwutygodnik”. Anna Magalska, “W Sieci Powiązań”, *Dwutygodnik*, <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artukul/10629-w-sieci-powiazan.html>, (accessed July 13, 2024).

84 Shogetsu Art Centre in Tokyo in 1964, Africa Centre in London in 1966.

dressed Japanese woman kneels, offering no resistance, while a series of armed white people methodically destroy all her possessions. What is being represented here? Hiroshima. Nagasaki. The firebombing of Tokyo.” – contemplates Louis Menand in the pages of *The New York Magazine*<sup>85</sup>. “Ono’s performance some twenty years later - echoes the psychic construction of *Nachträglichkeit*, the deferral of response to trauma, the trace of which is later energized into active awareness.”<sup>86</sup> – writes art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson in “Remembering Yoko Ono’s Cut Piece,” in which she insightfully dissects the relationship of photographs of people taken after the atomic bomb fell in Japan and the work by Ono. In her essay she reproduces even some pictures of the survivors in tattered clothing, which uncannily resembles the one taken of the “Cut Piece” itself<sup>87</sup>. A sad conclusion comes to mind that probably the most significant difference is that Yoko Ono’s score says that the performer may finish the piece whenever they want<sup>88</sup>. At the same time, those people from Hiroshima or Nagasaki had no control over how the situation in their residences would end.

In today’s socio-political climate, when the whole world feels again the threat of nuclear weapons hanging in the air, this connotation becomes even more powerful and unnerving. Every day, we are seeing in the news images of people suffering from the conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, or Sudan. The last known public appearance of “Cut Piece” occurred in mid-September 2023 (less than a

month later Hamas attacked Israel<sup>89</sup>) in the ~~Neue~~ Nationalgalerie in Berlin at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Performance Festival, PERFORM!, during the Berlin Art Week. Its curator, Klaus Biesenbach,<sup>90</sup> invited five artists<sup>91</sup> to interpret the historical piece. Sadly, I couldn’t attend the event myself, but even watching the documentation, one can sense the power of it even if 60 years have passed since its creation. There is a recording of a whole performance by dancer and choreographer Ante Pavic available on YouTube<sup>92</sup>, and even there, palpable tension between the performer and the audience is so evident that it moved me to tears—a peculiar tug-of-war of power and vulnerability. In one moment, an audience member feels the dominance while cutting off a piece of clothing and uncovering part of the performer’s body. Next, Pavic gives a significant look reminding that he has the power to stand up and leave anytime he wants<sup>93</sup>. Some people get creative by blindfolding him with a strip of fabric from his jacket tied to the back of his head, strapping down the scissors to his wrist, or cutting pieces of their clothing. Some feel almost ashamed of taking part of his attire. I have never participated in that “game” as a spectator, but I can empathize with the other side and imagine how possibly Pavic could have felt.

Still, it seems that my own experience with performing “Cut Piece” was somewhat different. I was invited<sup>94</sup> to do the

85 Louis Menand, “Yoko Ono Art. of Defiance,” *The New Yorker*, June 13, 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/06/20/yoko-onos-art-of-defiance>, (accessed July 18, 2024)

86 Julia Bryan-Wilson, “Remembering Yoko Ono’s Cut Piece”, *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2003), 108.

87 Ibid, 110.

88 The score says: “Piece ends at the performer’s option”.

89 On October 7, 2023.

90 Currently the director of the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin.

91 Ante Pavic, Jule Flierl, Claire Vivianne Sobotke, Natalia Torales, Sonya Levin.

92 “Cut Piece by Yoko Ono – Berlin 14.09.2023”, BERLIN-VISUAL.com, September 15, 2023, Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYXpLqykCKA> (accessed July 16, 2024).

93 I was surprised, however, that the performance ended precisely after one hour with an applause initiated by someone in the audience that didn’t look like a conscious decision of the performer.

94 The invitation came from a friend of mine and then-director of the Emily Harvey Foundation in

piece in May 2017 at the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg during the exhibition “A Feast of Astonishments. Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde 1960s-1980s”. Charlotte Moorman was a cellist and a performance artist (often collaborating with Nam June Paik) affiliated with Fluxus. The “Cut Piece” took place during that show because a close friend of Yoko Ono Moorman received lifetime permission to do this performance whenever she wanted. “Moorman claimed to have performed it more than seven hundred times. However, that is likely an exaggeration. In 1989, Moorman said: <<I have performed that piece for 25 years... Far more than Yoko ever performed it. I do ‘Cut Piece’ in every town I perform because it is so beautiful”<sup>95</sup>. She loved that piece so much that she even kept all the trimmed pieces of her gowns<sup>96</sup> in which she always performed. Moorman took to heart that Yoko was always wearing her best garment during that piece, so she also appeared each time in festive dresses that she wore eternally on stage (when she was not topless). Even though she knew the emotional and physical hazards that the piece might bring, the promotional material publicized it as “<<the unexpected is not a tread... it’s a welcome!>>”<sup>97</sup>. So Moorman eventually recalled it herself, describing people cutting out valentines or flowers. “<<They often give me

a little kiss after they cut”>><sup>98</sup>. One of the most touching records of Charlotte performing “Cut Piece” is the documentation done at her loft in 1982, right after she had been diagnosed with breast cancer. “Her friend introduced this performance, [...] Japanese member of Fluxus, Yasunao Tone, who is now known as an avant-garde composer and lives in New York City”<sup>99</sup>. The audience consisted of her close friends or associates, who hugged or kissed her after cutting a piece of her dress, often stifling tears. It all made this performance very special. This very video was on view at the exhibition “Feast of Astonishments,” next to a display of her cut frocks, and may have influenced the audience that came to see the “Cut Piece” that I had the pleasure to perform on an early Sunday afternoon. I was kneeling motionlessly in the middle of the gallery room, wearing not my best or most expensive clothes but the ones that brought the most memories to me. The people lined up against the wall politely waited for their turn to hold scissors. And as they approached me, I felt many of them were more tense than me. People often embraced or thanked me, just like in Moorman’s video, which was something I didn’t expect. And just like Charlotte, I have kept the torn garment afterward. Even though I haven’t experienced any slight hints of violence, some tension was in the air. It wasn’t, however, this feeling of “pulling the rope” between me and the audience (that I described earlier with Pavic performance), but rather a fusion of power and vulnerability at once. It’s a kind of feeling that I can’t compare to anything else one can experience

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New York City, Christian Xatrec, who knowing that the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg was looking for someone to perform the “Cut Piece” thought about me.

95 Lisa Graziose Corrin and Corine Granof, eds., *A Feast of Astonishments*, (Evanston: The Northwestern University Press: 2016), 11.

96 Lisa Graziose Corrin and Corine Granof, eds., *A Feast of Astonishments*, (Evanston: The Northwestern University Press: 2016), 158. Charlotte Moorman was known as a hoarder and it was very difficult for her to get rid of anything. “Charlotte stored these dresses in plastic garbage bags. Apparently there were many, many bags, but they couldn’t all be saved because the number was so overwhelming.”

97 Lisa Graziose Corrin and Corine Granof, eds., *A Feast of Astonishments*, (Evanston: The Northwestern University Press: 2016).

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98 Charlotte Moorman, interview with Paul Taylor, Yoko Only 25 (Summer 1989) in: Lisa Graziose Corrin and Corine Granof, eds., *A Feast of Astonishments*, (Evanston: The Northwestern University Press: 2016), 158.

99 “Resonance: Japanese, Korean Fluxus Artists and Charlotte Moorman”, *Asia Art Archive in America*, December 7, 2016, <https://www.aaa-a.org/programs/resonances-japanese-korean-fluxus-artists-and-charlotte-moorman> (accessed July 18, 2024).



in everyday life. In extremes, if it were a scene in a movie, it would probably be shown by having a gun pointed at a person holding another rifle directed at someone else<sup>100</sup>.

The statement for the performance of “Cut Piece” Ono did in Paris says: “Following the political changes through the year after 9/11, I felt terribly vulnerable – like the most delicate wind could bring me tears. [...] I always thought that I wanted to live forever and that I was the one person who was not afraid of doing so. But would I want to live surrounded by this world as we know it now?”. Today, I relate to it even more than when I read it a couple of years ago. When I performed “Cut Piece” in 2017 the world seemed a somewhat better place. At least the world around me that I knew back then. Writing this, I wonder how I would feel doing “Cut Piece” again in the current political and social affairs. In times of war, such as in Ukraine and Gaza, the constant tread of the climate crisis, growing reluctance towards migrants, or shift in the direction of far-right politics in more and more countries. To name a few. Cut Piece. It wouldn’t be my “hope for World Peace” as it was for Yoko Ono, but rather a statement on my present state of mind. Every cut fragment of clothing would represent my hopes being stripped every day by violence and political decisions and be an homage to all the innocent people who became victims of the global conflicts. At least there was not much I could do. It also reminds me of “My Body is the Scar of my mind” (1964), in my opinion, one of the most powerful scores by Yoko Ono.

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100 There is a beautiful one hour video recording of that performance in Salzburg that unfortunately I am not entitled to show anywhere and to anyone. Yoko Ono holds hundred percent rights to the documentation. As much as I am aware that it is Ono’s performance and not mine, and I was just there to enact it instead of her, I am still not sure whether I will ever be able to show it publicly or even place it in my portfolio. After contacting her lawyer, Jonas Herbsman, I have never got a clear answer from him.

I argued earlier that we should develop new expressions about Fluxus instructional pieces. What words should we use when talking about other people performing Yoko Ono’s works or even describing Charlotte Moorman doing “Cut Pieces”? To my mind comes a fragment of Claire Bishop’s latest book, “Disordered Attention,” when she talks about “delegated performance.” In which “visual artists hired performers to do the work on their behalf. [...] Informed by Fluxus and Conceptual art instruction-based works, delegated performance de-linked durational art from the singular charismatic artist [...]”<sup>101</sup>. This may probably apply when thinking about all the people who, e.g., have been hired to perform the “Cut Piece.” However, they are never there to purely replace Yoko or be so neutral that they are devoid of their personality. They usually add “their demographic identity or subject position.” They also have the freedom to interpret the original score. But because the emphasis of enacting is usually on being true to the historical performance from the 1960s, it’s closer to calling it a delegated performance than just the *performance*. But Charlotte Moorman was never hired by Ono or asked to perform “Cut Piece.” She was fascinated seeing it initially in New York in 1965<sup>102</sup> and decided to include it in her and Nam June Paik’s German tour program a year later. Moorman’s strong personality and distinct image on stage, sometimes even overshadowing the music, were naturally also pronounced when performing “Cut Piece.” On the one hand, giving it a bit of melodramatic character; on the other, making it her own genuine and original version (just like what Paik did to the “Composition 1960 #10”?).

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101 Claire Bishop, *Disordered Attention: How We Look at Art and Performance Today*, (New York: Verso Books, 2024), 86.

102 Joan Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014), 156.



Similarly to what Charlotte did, we still need to keep referring to the original scores. Not so much, though, that we could say that Fluxus is still active or alive. To store and preserve it in the bodies of people who perform their work, conserving a live action in a museum or a gallery is impossible. Archiving the photographs of it or used objects, and then exhibiting them, it's not an action per se. It's its documentation which is a different thing. Images show usually just very fragmented images of the whole performance. Even if there is a video, it is just the record of someone being there, seen through the lens and perspective of this very person.

If some objects are used during the performance, they are just the remains of the live action. What can they tell us? They usually look like old stuff that could be found in someone's grandfather's attic. But those dusted toys bring at least some recollections of their past owners. And the objects that are kept after the performance only bring memories to people who used them or saw the action live. Even exhibited in conjunction with the documentation of the initial historical event, they still feel a bit archival, not to say outdated. "What is staged is less a historical performance than an image of that performance; the performance appears as a simulation, designed to produce more images for circulation in the media."<sup>103</sup>

But at least, it's an attempt to preserve them more dimensionally. And this is something that the Fluxus score, in my opinion, asks for. To be alive. Can we store Fluxus's legacy in our body and hand it to the next generations? It resonates with my yoga teacher explaining that since the premises of practicing yoga were established, the human body has changed enough, so the yoga poses

must be adapted to the contemporary body's capabilities. Thus at the end of the day, we don't practice today the ancient asanas, but the ones from only around 150 years ago. What will Fluxus performance look like fifty years from now?

It's always astonishing that young people sometimes do very similar works to Fluxus without even knowing its existence. Is it because "everything has already been done," or do we know so much about the past that even Cage's idea of "4'33" seems so obvious, not to say overfamiliar? Or maybe, carrying it to excess, it is passed from one generation to another in a similar way to intergenerational trauma? In that sense, it would be not about the pain or distress caused by a traumatic event but simply certain mindsets or ideas that could be passed down to younger artists. Of course, it is impossible not to think here about the children of some of the Fluxus artists, who continue their parents' legacy in one way or the other. Like, e.g., Hannah<sup>104</sup> and Jessica<sup>105</sup> Higgins, the twins of Alison Knowles and Dick Higgins, or Bibbe Hansen, the daughter of Al Hansen, and now his grandsons Channing and Beck. There is no time and space here to get into that subject deeper, but I have seen a short video on social media showing "how generational trauma works" by pouring liquid from one glass to another. The first glass, "The Grandmother," was full of dark fluid resembling coffee. The person pours it into the next glass called "the mother." And then subse-

<sup>103</sup> Hal Foster, *Bad News Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency*, (New York: Verso Books, 2017), 172-75.

<sup>104</sup> Hannah B Higgins is a renowned art historian, and a professor of Intermedia and Avant-Garde and Culture at University of Illinois Chicago since 1994, where she is also a Founding Director of the interdisciplinary IDEAS BA in Art. And most importantly a solo author of a book "Fluxus Experience".

<sup>105</sup> An intermedia and performance artist, who also performed on many occasions Fluxus pieces, e.g. "The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989" at the Guggenheim in New York City (together with Mary Beth and Shiegeko Kubota), PPOW in New York "Newspaper Music (1965), mantra for Jessie (some help in sleeping) (1971).

quently to the glass captioned “you.” Pure water is poured into the last glass until the liquid becomes clear. The video aimed at explaining that traumatic event “gets carried through generations until someone is brave enough to face all the pain and clear out the pathway for the next generation.”<sup>106</sup> The video reminded me of a Tomas Schmit performance, “Zyklus for Water-Pails (or Bottles)” (1962), or instead, its iconic image of Schmit kneeling on the floor in the middle of a ring made of empty bottles, pouring some liquid to one of them. The “Zyklus” score simply asks to pour water from one vessel to the next until all the liquid evaporates or is spilled on the floor.<sup>107</sup>

Interestingly, in this piece, Schmit refers to the “interpreter,”<sup>108</sup> which in English means both a person who interprets something (gives their interpretation of a specific thing) or someone who translates spoken language in real-time. While the German version of the score refers to “der Interpreter” as well, it is also translated to singer, artist, and performer. Performing “Zyklus” for the first time in December 1963 at De Kleine Komodie in Amsterdam<sup>109</sup>, Schmit was an interpreter himself. So technically, it indicates that

106 The video was published on the Instagram account of former violinist, now mind-body coach “@biancamceruta”.

107 The full score: “The interpreter stands (kneels) in a circle of 10 to 30 water-pails (or bottles). One of them is filled with water (milk/beer/vin rouge/coca-cola), the others are empty. The interpreter seized the filled one and empties it into the next one (on the right). Then he puts the one to its place, seizes the (now filled) second pail (bottle) and empties it into the next one etc. .... until all the water (milk/beer/vin rouge/coca-cola) is evaporated or spilt.” From Marius Babias, Krisztina Huyna, Barbara Wien, eds., *Tomas Schmit: Werke, Texte, Dokumente / Works, Texts, Documents, 1962-1970*, (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter und Franz Koenig, 2024), 108.

108 “[E]very reception of a work of art is both an *interpretation* and a *performance* of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself”, Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 4.

109 During the “*Internationaal Programma Nieuwste Muziek*”, Nieuwste Theater, Nieuwste Literatuura”

there is no one right way of executing the written text. “[...] the interpreter decides how quickly he would pour the water, how sloppy he would be. He doesn’t state how you should do it or how fast. There is always a lot of room for interpretation.” – told me Krisztina Huyna<sup>110</sup>, one of the curators of the Tomas Schmit retrospective “Works, Texts, Documents, 1962-1970” at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein. The interpreter not only translates the text into a bodily language it also fills the gaps of what is there unsaid. They mediate between the score and bodies (the interpreter/performer and the audience). Schmit couldn’t have chosen a better word. The interpreter interprets the score in real time.

But what if the interpreter is not a human being? For the previously mentioned exhibition at n.b.k. in Berlin, Swedish artist Nina Cannell, often experimenting in her work with different aggregations of matter, made a reinterpretation of “Zyklus” being performed by the elements. “She placed 12 buckets, each containing 12 liters of water, [...] and set them into motion by vibrations through ultrasonic sensors, causing the water to evaporate gradually. Instead of moving the water between the vessels according to the original score, one liter of water escaped from each bucket for about an hour.”<sup>111</sup> “It was kind of a collective emptying,” noted Huyna. The work also resonates with an earlier reinterpretation of the same Schmit’s work by Harun Farocki<sup>112</sup>. In his 20-minute, seven-channel video loop “Re-Pouring Variations I” (2010), a robotic arm acts

110 From an online conversation with Krisztina Huyna, December 14, 2023.

111 Marius Babias, Krisztina Huyna, Barbara Wien, eds., *Tomas Schmit: Werke, Texte, Dokumente / Works, Texts, Documents, 1962-1970*, (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter und Franz Koenig, 2024), 20.

112 What is interesting, both Nina Canell and Harun Farocki knew Tomas Schmit personally. She, as being represented by his former wife, Barbara Wien, who has a gallery in Berlin, and Farocki was a longtime friend of Schmit.

as a performer, repeatedly tipping water into glass bottles. “Many of Schmit’s pieces arbitrarily involve the performer, featuring chance movements and how the material is interacted, intersected. It’s quite interesting also for early digital artists, as it relates to thinking about the algorithm and robotics.”<sup>113</sup>

What if we performed Fluxus scores using ‘thinking’ computer systems?

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<sup>113</sup> From an online conversation with Krisztina Huyna, December 14, 2023.

## **PART THREE**

## Why do we need Fluxus today?

29 April 1963

*Social Project 2*

*Find a way to end the war*

*Make it work*

*Jackson MacLow*

In May 2022, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, shared on his Twitter a handwritten note of a little boy who survived the deadliest siege in Mariupol that had happened two months earlier. “My two dogs have died, and my grandmother Galia and my beloved city of Mariupol also died,” wrote in his diary, an eight-year-old Yehor hiding from Russian bombs. Somehow, this image touched me extremely profoundly in the horror of the war events. Seeing this notice, I thought no artists would have said it better. “My beloved city of Mariupol died.” Maybe it’s a coincidence that a few days later, while talking with David Ross<sup>1</sup> (who was a curator of the famous Yoko Ono’s show at the Everson Museum “This is Not Here” in 1971), he brought up a story of young Yoko coming back to Tokyo for the first time after she had left it because of the bombing. “[...] she saw that Tokyo was gone. That it has been leveled. And it was empty. And that was an essential animating principle of her prac-

1 A chair of the MFA Art Practice Department of the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Formerly the director, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; director, Whitney Museum of American Art; director, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; associate director, chief curator, University Art Museum, Berkeley; deputy director, curator of video art, Long Beach Museum of Art; curator of video art, Everson Museum of Art.

tice. She didn’t know this then, but the fact that it was gone became so deeply embedded in her consciousness. [...] And it remained the core of who she is today.”<sup>2</sup>, he said. George Maciunas also fled Lithuania and settled as a refugee in The United States. “Fluxus is not political<sup>3</sup>. It didn’t have a political goal, and it wasn’t a response to the Second World War as Dada was to the First World War.” But “[...] Maciunas, as well as any of the people who suffered World War II in Europe and had refugee status, needed a different kind of world order. And in a way, Fluxus, the real Fluxus, was Maciunas’s fantasies about that.”<sup>4</sup>

In a book by Polish philosopher Monika Rogowska-Stangert,<sup>5</sup> I read about the concept of “naked death,” which refers to something that has died but refuses to fade, pass, or be reborn. The author argues that we live in a post-apocalyptic world marked by traumatic past events. She specifically quotes American feminist and physicist Karen Barad, who “in relation to the atomic bomb detonations in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, writes about <<the experience of an event that refuses to end, that decomposes over time, but will – forever – continue to happen anew [...]>>. But in the face of naked death – asks Rogowska-Stangert – aren’t we dangerously close to experiencing some kind of posttraumatic stress disorder, in which the trauma does not go away, but is still alive, always here?”<sup>6</sup>. The para-

2 From an online conversation with David Ross, May 12, 2022.

3 There is “the idea that Fluxus was not political enough because many of the artists rejected Maciunas’s narrow politics. I think it’s entirely absurd. I can be quoted on that. It is ridiculous, because it assumes that there are only two ways to organize an art movement’s politics. And that’s around a kind of series of axioms identified only with one side of the political spectrum.” Told me by Hannah Higgins during our online conversation August 2, 2022.

4 From an online conversation with David Ross, May 12, 2022.

5 Monika Rogowska-Stangert, *Być ze świata*, (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz/terytoria, 2021).

6 Ibid., 79-80.



dox is that we seem to be living in another apocalypse of global conflicts and climate change in this post-apocalyptic world of World War II, the Holocaust, the catastrophe of Chernobyl, etc., and the “posttraumatic stress disorder” of past generations is lived on again and again. Today, it feels somehow as if history is making a circle. The fear of the nuclear holocaust that existed in the 60s exists now. In the circumstances of constant threat, we should better invent an alternative global order as soon as possible. Fluxus pieces, especially those which engage and challenge the audience have this feature of imagining different ways of social organizing. “That is not necessarily circumscribed by our current minimal scope of thinking politically about what we can be. When I read in the news what is happening, and I am not hugely well informed, the right would drift around the world is just a perfect example of where people take their frustration because the politicians can’t imagine alternatives, people are manipulated,” told me, Hannah Higgins<sup>7</sup>.

Two weeks after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I also spoke with Billie Maciunas. And at some point, we started talking about the fact that George Maciunas was fascinated with USSR<sup>8</sup>, to the extent that in a letter to Emmet Williams from 1963, he wrote: “I believe Fluxus has best breeding ground in the Soviet Union, which was not spoiled yet by abstractionists (or at least Stalin corrected that!). So we must all work towards eventual Fluxus in S.U.

<sup>7</sup> From an online conversation with Hannah B. Higgins, August 2, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> More on this subjects writes e.g. Mexican curator Cuauhtémoc Medina in “Fluxus, Khrushchev, and the <<concretist society>>” in: *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 48, (2005), 179-192 and *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 49/50 (2006), 231-243; or Peter van der Meijden “Fluxus, Eric Andersen and the Communist East”, in: *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975*, Tania Ørum and Jesper Olsson, (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2016), 324-335; Astrit Schmit-Burkhardt, *Maciunas’ Learning Machines. From Art History to Chronology of Fluxus*, (Berlin: Vice Versa Verlag, 2003).

OK?<sup>9</sup> However, despite some attempts to write to some officials, like e.g. Nikita Khrushchev, suggesting an expansion of Fluxus in the USSR, Maciunas has never succeeded in organizing any Fluxus festival.

*Why do you think George insisted on this contact with the Soviet Union? Do you know anything about that? I saw some letters... I am just curious.*

*Billie Maciunas: Actually, I don’t think I can even speak about it because I don’t know. Lithuania was under Soviet control while George was alive. Maybe he wanted to introduce this new way of life to a country so stiff and embroiled in real politics. Could be.*

*I was also thinking about what it would be like now and how the world might be different if Fluxus had made it to the Soviet Union. Maybe the world would be a better place...*

*B.M.: I think so. What if Vladimir Putin would become a Fluxus aficionado? That would be interesting. He couldn’t conceive of invading Ukraine.<sup>10</sup>*

I have heard many (maybe even too many) times that great art comes from times of great stress and horror. But can artists respond somehow to the horrific events happening daily practically in every part of the world? On the one hand, art can serve us to understand (well, to be honest, it’s impossible to understand it anymore) or comment on reality. But it can also take us to a different world created by the artist and help us forget about the mundane atrocity. “With so much social, political, and actual violence happening currently, I don’t see many people feeling positive. And art has a chance to be simultaneously nu-

<sup>9</sup> Owen S. Smith, “Speaking Personally: Some Topics of Correspondence Between Fluxus Artists on Fluxus, *On Curating*, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-51-reader/speaking-personally-some-topics-of-correspondence-between-fluxus-artists-on-fluxus.html> (accessed August 6, 2024).

<sup>10</sup> From an online conversation with Billie Maciunas, March 15, 2022.

anced and critical but also positive in certain respects. [It] can be a lifeline to help us feel less disempowered and reiterate our connections,” Martin Patrick wrote in one of his emails<sup>11</sup>. And paradoxically, we may need Fluxus more than, let’s say, ten years ago, when the world seemed not to be on fire yet (at least in my understanding). Fluxus is an excellent example of being conscious of socio-political situations, but at the same time trying to escape a little bit into the absurdity, finding the beauty in aspects of everyday life. Through its playful character and its focus on mindfulness, it can help us escape the depressing news. And maybe what we lack now in today’s world and art is amusement that could bring us some relief. “And also [Fluxus] was a lifeline for many people. It was something to hold on to.”<sup>12</sup> “Another way to put that – said Hannah Higgins – is to know what we are fighting for, fighting for joy, love. Fighting for broader sensory experience. All that kind of stuff.”<sup>13</sup>

In that same conversation with Billie Maciunas that I quoted above, she also spoke about how Fluxus has become a way of life for her and how it has changed her. “Despite having a job and obeying my boss, all the annoying things in life remain funny and absurd. [...] I am not as afraid of living. That’s very personal, but even the thought of death doesn’t trouble me. It’s all just part of life. It changed me fundamentally. I am not as scared. I am less afraid of authority because that’s a part of the absurdity. I think in a situation as in the case of Ukraine, I would be less afraid of protesting war.”

“Fluxus was part of the survivalist mentality. Let’s create an ideal little world of our own where we don’t have to worry about Nazis. We don’t have to worry

about the Soviet Union and the Cold War turning into a Hot War.” – said David Ross<sup>14</sup>. So let’s try to invent now our tiny world where we don’t have to worry about the spreading of the conflict in the Middle East, Russia attacking a NATO country, Donald Trump winning the American election, or global warming causing environmental degradation.

One way that might be helpful is turning into mindfulness.

### Mindfulness

At some point in my research, I realized that I advocate the idea of “doing Fluxus” rather than reading about it,” but actually, I hadn’t had much experience with performing Fluxus scores myself. I enacted, e.g., already mentioned “Cut Piece” and “Leeds: A New Card Game” by Robert Filliou (together with Alexander Halpern, Alison Knowles, and Zhenya Merkulova)<sup>15</sup>, but not much more than that, to be honest. Thus, it was high time to see what doing some Fluxus scores in my private space was like without spectators or other people participating. I wanted to have an experience of how it could influence me personally. The task seemed pretty easy, as many of the historical scores are written for a solo performer or could be done individually, and they often don’t require any unique props or equipment. The real challenge is to focus. As mentioned earlier, there is no particular way one should do the scores, but they also cannot be done carelessly or in “whatever” manner. Let’s take the most iconic “Drip Music” (1959-62) again by George Brecht. If someone is familiar with this work, they usually have in mind an image of a man (the most known pictures show

<sup>11</sup> An email from May 16, 2024.

<sup>12</sup> From an online conversation with David Ross, May 12, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> From an online conversation with Hannah B. Higgins, August 2, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> From an online conversation with David Ross, May 12, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> During Touch the Sky: Evening of Cultural Activism, the event organized by Emily Harris and John DiLeva Halpern at the New School in New York City ((May 13, 2019).

Dick Higgins or George Maciunas) standing on a tall ladder and slowly pouring water from a pitcher to the big bowl on the floor. But the original score doesn't even ask about the ladder. It says simply: "A source of dripping water and an empty vessel are arranged so that the water falls into the vessel. Second version: dripping". So I used just what I had at hand: two glasses. One from which I was pouring water from quite a height, and the other collecting water was standing at the bottom of my sink. And because the score also says "For single or multiple performance" I decided to pour water from one vessel to the other, trying to spill as little as possible, as long as there will be no more water left in both vessels. The sound of pouring water alone resonating in the glasses had a unique quality. How often do you listen to the sound of water you pour into the glass multiple times a day? Does the sound, repeated many times in a row, have the same quality? And how do you feel and perceive your body in this repetitive action? "It invited the individual to be present for something that people are doing on automatic, that they are just doing robotically without experiencing it because they shut off," said Bibbe Hansen in our conversation<sup>16</sup>. That's precisely my experience with activating some Fluxus scores; they engage you to be present at the moment, but at the same time, they put you in a contemplative state of mind. "[E]vent scores, it was a way to join art and life, to break through that divine, and to turn everyday activity into an art exercise." – told John Held Jr. "This joining of art and life, it takes the mundane and raises it to a new level, to take care, to listen to the minutia of life. [...] Fluxus was operating in the gap between art and life. It wasn't completely a natural activity, and it wasn't completely art. It was kind of a cross. You conceive of an art action, and then you do it? Much as you

16 From an online conversation with Bibbe Hansen, December 14, 2023.

do anything else, but you do it with a different intention in mind, I guess."<sup>17</sup>

And probably because of the simplicity of everyday life and highlighting the essence of experience in Fluxus, a lot has been said about its Zen-like quality. "Because there is a Buddhist thread that runs underneath many Fluxus things. Bibbe Hansen - You're given straightforward tasks like Alison Knowles's 'Make a Salad'<sup>18</sup> or George Brecht's 'Three Lamp Events.' They are erasing a line between life and art, mindfulness, because we act intentionally. Like the Buddhist monk scrubbing the floor, polishing the great hall, or raking leaves as a repetitive task. But doing it mindfully transcends the activity, whatever it is, into an individual. It becomes a transcendent activity. The same is true when you put the name score on it and make it a score."<sup>19</sup> "Zen also refers to instantaneous illumination; something just clicks in your mind and brings enlightenment. – told me Billie Maciunas - There was a quality to Fluxus performances where suddenly you change. For example, I remember a Fluxus performance that I saw. I think it was Yoshi Wada, but I am not sure. He had an ironing board, put an electric guitar on it, and then ironed the instrument with an iron. And suddenly, you see housework from a different perspective, so it's an instant enlightenment."<sup>20</sup>

Another score by George Brecht<sup>21</sup> says:

broom

sweeping

broom sweeping

17 From an online conversation with John Held from March 10, 2022.

18 "Preposition. Make a salad" (1962).

19 From an online conversation with Bibbe Hansen, December 14, 2023.

20 From an online conversation with Billie Maciunas, March 15, 2022.

21 "Three Broom Event" (1963).



This is an act that billions of people have performed through the years in billions of places. And yet, brought to the level of being meticulously performed as a score, it attains almost an enlightening status.” When you’re sweeping your floor, you could say, I am performing George Brecht. When you’re making your salad for supper, I am performing Alison Knowles. When you turn on your lamp at night or turn it off to sleep, I am performing George Brecht. I think it has a genuinely uplifting quality because any form of mindfulness raises the whole of consciousness to a certain degree.” – continues Hansen. “When we are meditating and concentrating on the breath, it’s during that period of 5 or 20 minutes, but when you start to do that every day, it frames your entire outlook. You find yourself being more present. And I think, ultimately, the performative aspect of Fluxus and what’s unique about it is the absolute presence. But you also find this intense focus and intentionality in butoh, taiko drumming, kobuki, or noh drama. That’s very specific.”<sup>22</sup>

So I tried to perform Fluxus scores almost daily to see what happens. I specifically chose the ones that refer to the typical daily activities, omitting those designed, e.g., for the stage or with some musical instruments I do not own. My conclusion was that the aspect of mindful everydayness is one thing, but there are also Fluxus scores that are more abstract. That makes you use an ordinary utensil in a way you would never imagine and shifts your thinking about using some objects. Another application of a broom in Milan Knizak’s score is “Sunday Event” (1965), which says: “A broom (or some other thing) is tied to the end of a string about 3 yards long. Then it is pulled behind all over the busy streets on a Sunday.” One of my favorites is a series of Orange Events by Bengt af Klintberg, especial-

ly the score no. 8: “Eat an orange as if it were an apple.” Suddenly, you start wondering why we must use a specific thing in only one designated way. And who were the people who set those rules? This absurdity of Fluxus events reminded me of a circulating meme on the internet from an old print depicting a man unusually swinging on a chair. He is positioned with his knees and hands on the seat and backrest as if he’s crawling or balancing while the chair partially collapses. The caption above the image reads: “You aren’t doing it wrong if no one knows what you are doing.”

It turned out that Fluxus is a bodily practice for me (a person who has trouble sitting still and meditating and searching for mindfulness in movement, e.g., yoga or washing the dishes). I see it close to, e.g., Tai Chi, which was introduced in the U.S. in the 1960s<sup>23</sup> or 1970s<sup>24</sup> and has gained widespread popularity since then. Both focus on the process and experience rather than the final result, engagement with the present moment, and integration of body and mind. While in Tai Chi, practitioners are fully present in each moment, concentrating on their movements, breath, and internal sensations. By drawing attention to the here and now, Fluxus encourages them to engage deeply in the artistic process. Often features spontaneous, unplanned performances and actions, as well as immediacy and indeterminacy in their work. Similar to the fluidity seen in Tai Chi moves that require a sense of spontaneity in responding to one’s body needs. Although there is no documented evidence that specific Fluxus artists were practicing Tai Chi, based on their interest and influence of Buddhism and

<sup>23</sup> According to “Tai Chi in the Mainstream”, *Pacific College of Health and Science*, April 25, 2014, <https://www.pacificcollege.edu/news/blog/2014/04/25/tai-chi-mainstream> (accessed August 26, 2024).

<sup>24</sup> According to “Tai chi”, *Mount Sinai*, <https://www.mountsinai.org/health-library/treatment/tai-chi> (accessed August 26, 2024).

<sup>22</sup> From an online conversation with Bibbe Hansen, December 14, 2023.

Zen, one might infer that it could have been the case. While Tai Chi and Fluxus goals and contexts are quite different, it made me flirt with the idea that Fluxus may be seen as a contemporary mindfulness practice and a way to use art as such. “If you do Event Scores, you can go anywhere because you’ve activated the whole world.”<sup>25</sup>

### Attention economy

In her latest book “Disordered Attention. How We Look at Art and Performance Today” (2024), Claire Bishop states that we shouldn’t forget that nowadays, the usage of smartphones, constant being online and present on social media, and the short attention span that is associated with it, also affects the way we perceive art. “We are physically present at the performance but networked to multiple somewheres. Looking is hybrid, occupying multiple spaces and times simultaneously.” – writes Bishop. Today, “[t]he work is less self-important, less total; it grants us the space to be mobile and social, to react, chat, share, and archive as we watch. [...] The perpetual oscillation between here and elsewhere, consuming and commenting, is central to how we look at art and performance today.”<sup>26</sup> I brought up earlier the subject of why Fluxus scores may be perceived differently today due to different sociopolitical circumstances and changes in people’s focus and span perception.

The first performance of Emmet William’s “Opera” took place in 1959 in Darmstadt. Fifty-four years later, a Polish performative group, ETC, reconstructed that piece at Komuna Warszawa in Warsaw. The title of the performative and theatrical series within which this event took place, “OPERA // REMIX,” suggests that it

was more about interpretation than historical reconstruction. “I think staging William’s opera at Komuna Warszawa, which would last four hours or so based on our rehearsals, would certainly be interesting in some way, but the question is for whom? People would probably leave after fifteen minutes or two hours. And they did leave before the end.”<sup>27</sup> – said Klaudia Rachubińska, one of the members of the ETC Group. “The question is also, why do we do it? Is it to provide an experience for someone, to see for ourselves how it works, or to understand how it functions differently in a new context? I believe that staging the opera in its original form wouldn’t make sense at that time. People would get bored or frustrated and leave. We wouldn’t generate anything new.” – she added. “As someone who has performed a solo that entire opera at its original tempo, I can confirm that, yes, people do leave,”<sup>28</sup> – laughs Antoni Michnik.

Those longer Fluxus pieces, usually musical compositions, are based mainly on some conceptual premises (having, e.g., John Cage and Eric Satie as their predecessors). Often, they are composed of repeatable or organized elements like, e.g., many of La Monte Young’s pieces or Ken Friedman’s “Rational Music” (1987); the latter I had a chance to listen to the other night interpreted by a pianist Miroslav Beinhauer.<sup>29</sup> The performer is instructed to “Take the score of a symphony. Organize the symphony so that all notes of any given kind are played consecutively.”<sup>30</sup> This results in monotonous, repetitive sounds. From my own experience, this kind of piece makes the listener at first a bit surprised, then they try to figure out

<sup>25</sup> From an online conversation with Peter Frank, March 10, 2022.

<sup>26</sup> Claire Bishop, *Disordered Attention: How We Look at Art and Performance Today*, (New York: Verso Books, 2024), 5-6.

<sup>27</sup> From an online conversation with Klaudia Rachubińska and Antoni Michnik, November 13, 2023.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> As part of a program of the exhibition “Holy Fluxus. From the Collection of Francesco Conz”, St. Matthew’s Church, Berlin (13.07.2024-8.09.2024).

<sup>30</sup> Part of Ken Friedman’s “73 Events 1956-2009”.



the structure governing the composition. In the next stage, if you more or less grasped its premises (or you have an impression that you do), you get a little bored. This is when your mind begins to wonder, usually at first trying to entertain itself by pondering what to cook for dinner or how you should dress tomorrow—gradually starting to notice sounds coming from different sources, like a plane flying outside, people coughing or sighing, running fans, etc. By bringing attention to something else we hope for the time to run faster. “We have an almost complete lack of downtime, scurrying from one activity to the next because we cannot face tackling time that is ‘empty.’”<sup>31</sup> – wrote Norwegian philosopher Lars Svendsen. “Boredom is linked to a way of passing the time, in which time, rather than being a horizon for opportunities, is something that has to be beguiled.”<sup>32</sup> If you focus on something else long enough, you also get disinterested, and your perception goes back to the music still playing. I heard somewhere that you can truly start listening only when you are bored. At least from an assumption. Similarly to what, Dick Higgins wrote in 1969 that “boredom often serves a useful function: as an opposite to excitement and as means of bringing emphasis to what it interrupts, causing us to view both elements freshly”<sup>33</sup>. As German philosopher Fredrick Nietzsche stated, “For the thinker and all inventive spirits ennui is the unpleasant <<calm>> of the soul which precedes the happy voyage and the dancing breezes; he must endure it, he must *await* the effect it has on him.”<sup>34</sup>

31 Lars Svendsen, *Philosophy of Boredom*, (Reaktion Books, 2017), 23.

32 Ibid.

33 Dick Higgins. *Form and a Phenomenology of Love and a Science of the Arts as Seen by a Stalker of the Wild Mushroom*, (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), 103.

34 Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Joyful Wisdom”, *The Gutenberg Project*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/52881/52881-h/52881-h.htm> (accessed August 26, 2024).

The concept of boredom is fascinating today when we live in a world of constant distractions and a nonstop need to be productive. In times when we kill any sign of tedium with entertainment. People can practically not ride a bus, sit in a waiting room, or even wait for someone without scrolling their phones. “The problem is that modern technology increasingly makes us passive observers and consumers and less active players. This gives us a meaning deficit.”<sup>35</sup> – wrote Svendsen. Unsurprisingly, if we see a work at the gallery that doesn’t get our immediate attention or a video that seems too long, we often just go away. “We place greater emphasis nowadays on whether something is ‘interesting’ than whether it has any ‘value.’ To consider something exclusively from the point of view of whether it is ‘interesting’ or not is to consider it from a purely aesthetic perspective. The aesthetic gaze registers only the surface, and this surface is judged by whether it is interesting or boring. [...] The aesthetic gaze has to be titillated by increased intensity or preferably by something new, and the ideology of the aesthetic gaze is superlativism.”<sup>36</sup>

I spoke earlier about Tomas Schmit’s “Zyklus”, which is a perfect example of a repetitive, mundane activity that may get monotonous for both observer and beholder alike. If you do it in an open space, where people can move around and walk in and out any time (as if you saw a video), it has a different quality when they are “forced” to watch in a closed-sided theater, for instance. But, I imagine, exactly then your mind starts to drift and notice stuff hidden in its farther corners. And that is another state that could be compared to meditation, and the like practices. Going a bit further, maybe pieces of this sort came about while the artists experience a moment of boredom, and looking at

35 Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2017), 27.

36 Ibid.

some ordinary things around them, they have figured out new functions for them.

This kind of piece (both musical and performative) makes me think about whether they are created more for the performer or the audience. They usually require specific focus and execution of particular tasks by the person who carries them out, being often hard to watch or listen to for a long time. The question arises, whether someone isn't experiencing the same what Charlotte Moorman said while describing her playing one of the classical concertos<sup>37</sup>. "While I was playing that solo [...] I was wondering, had I turned the gas off in my apartment in New York? And I realized, my God, if my mind can wander like this while I am playing the solo..., can you imagine what the audience is [thinking]?"<sup>38</sup> I am not a musician myself, so I could only speak from the perspective of a beholder. Still, an Italian pianist, Agnese Toniutti (specializing mainly in playing pieces by Philip Corner or Mieko Shiomi), assured me that she performs Fluxus pieces "because every time they give something interesting and stimulating. They force you to be creative, as there is no single way to approach them. They require creativity but demand a significant amount of it from the performer. And this is a very great training for me."<sup>39</sup>

Surprisingly, many of Fluxus's works fit the contemporary attention economy quite well. Numerous Fluxus performances are simple-looking, very often short actions, and usually, a Fluxus concert consisted (consists) of several straight events. They were also typi-

cally funny and /or engaging the audience, so it kept people immersed and entertained. It matches the needs of contemporary society fed with constantly changing social media content, especially TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. To go a bit further, the event score format – usually one or few liners – could easily fit on the X platform feed. "But also something I found pleasurable as a viewer is watching people make decisions in a moment, which are not necessarily pre-meditated in a way they are in looking at rehearsed are. Something about people figuring out how to approach a task in all improvisation that I find interesting and pleasurable to watch,"<sup>40</sup> said Haike Roms.

In September 2022, in Genoa I saw a performance by Sean Miller and Craig Coleman in which they reinterpreted some of the Fluxus Event Scores using miniature objects. They placed on a table a suitcase, which is, in fact, a museum John Erickson Museum of Art (JEMA), an artistic project by Miller, that served that time as a space for performances. This miniscule exhibition space displayed past works by, e.g., Yoko Ono, Philip Corner, and Jack Massing inspired Fluxus artist Ben Patterson to create his work called "Nano Fluxus." As the name suggests, it was a miniature, tabletop version of some of his colleague's pieces. Paterson's re-interpretations were surprising, witty, and amusing. "Some of the events and scores Craig and I performed were directly following Ben's approach to Nano Fluxus; however, we also conceived of several new performances like Nam June Paik's One for Violin, Yoko Ono's Space Transformer, and we adapted a mini version of Ben Patterson's Paper Piece using a handheld shredder and slowly shredding paper that listed the years Fluxus has existed." – explained

37 „She had been playing the Kabalevsky Cello Concerto innumerable times with regional orchestras around New York”, in: Benjamin Piekut, "Murdered by Cello", in *Experimentalism Otherwise*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 144.

38 Ibid.

39 From an online conversation with Agnese Toniutti, October 20, 2022.

40 From an online conversation with Heike Roms, March 21, 2023.

me Sean<sup>41</sup>. As time went by, my memory also failed; thus I do not remember specific pieces anymore, but it was a lot of fun trying to guess which score they were realizing. I also remember that because of the entertaining character, the element of surprise, the very fast pace of the event, and the changes in its setup, I couldn't resist comparing it to scrolling through short videos or social media reels. And I can easily imagine those quick actions being viral on TikTok.

### Game / Play

I saw Francis Alÿs's show "Ricochets" this summer in a Barbican Center in London. There is a certain quality of his works that has constantly reminded me a bit of Fluxus. Especially how he looks at what is around him, the streets, the public space, trying to use the available resources. I remember him pushing a block of ice for nine hours on congested Mexico City streets until it dissolved completely<sup>42</sup>. Or they are taking a metal collector for a daily walk that looks like a geometric dog on wheels, dragging it on the streets gathering the trophies<sup>43</sup>. At the Barbican on view were his videos of children playing in different parts of the world. Besides the films, there was a panorama presenting children's games' history and development. From ancient to contemporary times. They show that the need for play has accompanied human beings since the beginning of civilizations. Traveling across the globe, Alÿs has been recording children's games since 1999. "[S]ome more universal, others developed in response to conflicts, poverty, and pandemics. [...] While the focus is on the rituals of play, the films inevitably reflect the world the children inhabit – bullet-riddled homes, streets devastated by bombs, a giant mining

slag heap, a city of high-rise blocks."<sup>44</sup>

That's the reality we live in, with too much devastating news coming every day, but games and play allow us to enact alternative visions and dream up novel scenarios for the future. As Alÿs aptly put it in the interview for the Guardian, "[a]dults will process those experiences through speech. Children will process them through games."<sup>45</sup> And the latter take play and games very seriously, and they can teach adults why games are so important. "In the play, there is something <<at play>> which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action. All play means something."<sup>46</sup> – wrote Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga in his brilliant book "Homo Ludens" (1944), describing the necessity and benefits of play for human beings. It is important to remember that the game and play are not exclusively for children, especially now when the world makes it easier to feel anxious and stressed rather than relaxed and playful. But at the same time, people prioritize work, seeing play as a waste of time. The truth is that while playing, you forget everything and become immersed in what you do now. "Play offers a reprieve from the chaos and challenges us to connect with key parts

44 Elizabeth Fullerton, "From Covid-inspired tag in Mexico to soccer with no ball in Iraq: Francis Alÿs on his joyous films of children's games", June 28, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/article/2024/jun/28/from-covid-inspired-tag-in-mexico-to-soccer-with-no-ball-in-iraq-francis-aly-s-on-his-joyous-films-of-childrens-games> (accessed September 6, 2024).

45 Another very interesting example of a game as a vehicle for communication with children is the Squiggle Game described by pediatrician/child psychiatrist D. W. Winnicott in his famous book "Playing and Reality". It is a drawing method using pencil and paper to gather insights into a child's thoughts and emotions. The Squiggle Game is particularly effective for engaging school-aged children who are typically too young to express their thoughts and emotions with words, but are also too old to find the play-based methods, like dollhouses or puppets, interesting enough. More in: Donald Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (London: Routledge Classics, 2005).

46 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. A study of a play-element in culture*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, Boston and Henley, 1949), 1.

41 From an email from Sean Miller, June 18, 2024.

42 In a video "Paradox of Praxis I (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing)", 1997.

43 "Collector", Mexico City, 1991-2006, in collaboration with Felipe Sanabria.



of ourselves that get lost in adulthood's responsibilities, especially during a crisis. [...] [It] is similar to meditation in that it helps you focus on where you're at at the moment and reset your busy, perpetually exhausted adult mind."<sup>47</sup>

"Practicing Fluxus," like playing games, deals with confronting reality. Both are also a way of entering a different world while simultaneously commenting on the surrounding one. "[W]e have to let go of the idea that we can't feel both playful in the moment and anxious about the state of the world. The idea isn't to ignore your negative feelings but to permit yourself to feel joy alongside the negativity."<sup>48</sup> The decisive advantage of Fluxus is to keep the spirit of the game and playfulness alive<sup>49</sup>. Like in a game where children turn simple, ordinary things and create their little universes, Fluxus imagines alternative purposes for everyday items, creating its worlds. "Formal elements were to a great degree borrowed from traditional game morphology."<sup>50</sup> – wrote Bengt af Klintberg. He referred inter alia to geometrical forms like a straight line (e.g., "La Monte Young's "Draw a straight line and follow it") or a circle (Tomas Schmit's "Zyklus"), but also a chance. Many of the Event Scores are based on indeterminacy and actions determined by the randomness of some external factors (e.g., George Brecht's pieces). "Many Fluxus pieces answer to all thinkable criteria of a game"<sup>51</sup>. Emmett

47 Kristine Wong, "How to Add More Play to Your Grown-up Life, Even Now", August 14, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/14/smarter-living/adults-play-work-life-balance.html> (accessed September 25m 2024).

48 Ibid.

49 There is a whole book in German on the subject of Fluxus games from the collection of Archiv Sohm published by Staatsgalerie Stuttgart: Ina Conzen, *Art Games. Die Schachteln der Fluxus-skuenstler. Sohm Dossier 1*, (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart Oktagon, 1997).

50 Bengt af Klintberg, "Fluxus Games and Contemporary Folklore: on the Non-Individual Character of Fluxus Art", *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, Vol. 62, No. 2, (1993), 123.

51 And what's typical for Fluxus and distinguishes it from other contemporary moments and trends of its time, like pop art or minimalism.

Williams's *Song of Uncertain Length* is one example: 'The performer, with a bottle or a glass balanced on his head, walks or runs about the stage singing or speaking until the glass or bottle falls off.' Many of Milan Knizak's pieces use the word 'game' in their title. For example, *Smile Game*: Say hello to a beautiful girl you meet. If she replies with a smile, you get a point. The one with the most points wins."<sup>52</sup>

I like the wordplay with the word „score," as in English, it refers to a musical composition and some points or goals in a game or competition. One of the events referring directly to the sport was a Flux-Olympiad conceived by George Maciunas, which consisted of many fun and absurd disciplines, like playing soccer on splits, slow speed bicycle races or in a rhythm of a metronome, Tennis, Basketball, and many more. The Flux Olympiad wasn't fully realized until the Tate Modern hosted a series of activities dedicated to it in 2008 at the Turbine Hall, programmed by Fluxus artist Larry Miller. But there had been earlier some smaller athletic events during other Fluxus festivals. "We had the first sports event in 1965, where we prepared ping-pong rackets in different funny ways. Like has a rock attached to it, making it very heavy, or a big hole inside. Things like that. We were preparing badminton rackets the same way [...], or trying shot put on roller skates. It's impossible. It goes nowhere, like a couple of feet from you. [...] They were taking existing sports and preparing them, like John Cage prepares the piano, so we could call it prepare sports."<sup>53</sup> – told Maciunas at the KRAB Radio in Seattle in 1977. A similar event happened in February 1970

52 Bengt af Klintberg, "Fluxus Games and Contemporary Folklore: on the Non-Individual Character of Fluxus Art", *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, Vol. 62, No. 2, (1993), 123.

53 "George Maciunas's Seattle Interview", The House of Hidden Knowledge, December 10, 2018, Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6U9DU0Dnug> (accessed September 9, 2024).

at Douglas College in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Like many Fluxus events, the Flux sports are a perfect example of participatory and communal activity.

“Score” is also strongly associated with today’s gaming world. Video game developers start the process by creating scoring and event systems. While the former may be more pronounced, as probably everyone can guess what is the role of scores for a gamer, the event system may sound more vague. However, it is a common feature that needs to be involved in interaction during game development. The event system can be used not only to send input actions (e.g., keyboard, mouse, touch) to the application in the form of events but also to respond to things that happen during the game that require the attention of other objects in the form of events. For example, opening the checkout or reward screen after a game victory.”<sup>54</sup> It activates game events based on player actions or pre-defined conditions, influencing the game’s flow. In that sense – as a set of commands generating actions – the Event System makes a solid comparison for an Event Score. Weirdly enough, being a short command, the event systems written for games resemble (even visually) a simple statement of Fluxus Event Scores. Among other features, the events in the game may instruct as well about the action of the player (e.g., jumping), involved objects (e.g., sword), or environmental change (e.g., water pouring, weather change). Various events in the game may increase or decrease the score of participants. Scoring systems play an essential role in-game mechanics, tracking a player’s achievements progress by assigning a numerical value (points) each time they complete the task in the game. When thinking about Fluxus, the word score usually relates to the musically

inspired set of instructions. Still, some art historians, like Julia Robinson, have shed a slightly different light, referring to “scoring” as creating a score that, in Fluxus’s case, is often structured “through lists and numeric orders.”<sup>55</sup>

Someone developing a game must fit into the constraints of a certain set of limited technical regulations and possibilities to create a set of imaginary events. Similarly, for Fluxus artists creating Event Score the format of it that is short, usually written instruction/notation could seem like a limitation to expressing their ideas. However, at the same time, these limitations could be surprisingly inspiring and freeing. “Constraint is, by definition, a negative thing. Its imposition prevents us from acting as we would like to because it restricts us in some important way.”<sup>56</sup> – says the authors of the book “Beautiful Constraint: How To Transform Your Limitations Into Advantages And Why It’s Everyone’s Business Now.” But at the same time, they claim that “[t]he beneficial power of constraints is all around us, whether we recognize it or not. [...] In the play we understand that the limitations our favorite game’s rules impose also give that game its unique character, energy, and pleasure; to relax those parameters means less of each.”<sup>57</sup> They also give an example of Todd Batty, a Canadian Creative Director at Electronic Arts, a leading video games publisher, who argues that when designers are given complete freedom, it doesn’t result in endless possibilities. Instead, it leads to predictable sameness.<sup>58</sup> This mannered and contrived effect was also something that Fluxus artists didn’t want, and thus, they

<sup>54</sup> “Event System”, *Cocos Creator*, <https://docs.cocos.com/creator/3.8/manual/en/engine/event/index.html> (accessed September 15, 2024).

<sup>55</sup> Julia Robinson, “Parsing Scores: Application in Fluxus”, *On Curating*, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-51-reader/parsing-scores-application-in-fluxus.html> (accessed July 26, 2024).

<sup>56</sup> Adam Morgan and Mark Barden, *A Beautiful Constraint: How To Transform Your Limitations Into Advantages And Why It’s Everyone’s Business Now*, (New York: Wiley, 2015), 2.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 29



turned into what is not fixed or precisely determined. “No matter what happens, the <<frame>> is radically indeterminate.”<sup>59</sup> Some general rules should be respected, and their instructional format may resemble a game. “The verbal score must necessarily be indeterminate. This is why it is used: to permit many situations.”<sup>60</sup> – explained Philip Corner. “The details cannot be exactly predicted, but the dedication, the competence, can. There is no room for free play.”

“Game structures are the skeleton of all spontaneous, improvisatory activities that go by ‘play.’”<sup>61</sup> Many Fluxus works require the interaction of a few performers or audience to be activated. They encompass from instructional pieces (usually in a form of Event Scores) to objects that often directly resemble games (e.g., some works by Takako Saito, Ay-O, or George Maciunas).

Last year, Midori Yoshimoto curated<sup>62</sup> an exhibition in New York City featuring Japanese female Fluxus artists<sup>63</sup>: Shigeko Kubota, Yoko Ono, Takako Saito, and Mieko Shiomi. “Out of Bounds, the show is a superb exploration of Fluxus art/music transported into today’s magnificent but mannerist milieu. Its non-pop experimental approach is refreshing—as it is full of the flames of free idiosyncratic impulses.”<sup>64</sup> – wrote Noah Baker for Whitehot

Magazine. “Certainly, we are over-mediated today, but these four Fluxus artists were well mediated too—the difference being that they handled media glut with an existential wry wit that gave it a nonsensical quality. In our often humorless times, where a cold shadow is cast over every joy and joke, Fluxus’ playful humor is salvation.” The beautifully designed show included the oeuvre of their works, showcasing Flux boxes ephemera, printed matters, Event Scores, objects, flux films, and performance documentation. I liked the idea that some of the works were replicated (e.g., Takako Saito’s “Sound Chess”) to be able to be freely activated by the audience.

While the objects-like interactive works were more welcoming to engage with<sup>65</sup>, Yoko Ono’s “Bag Piece” (1964), which required performative interaction, evoked more hesitation. The idea of the original piece is to get inside a large black bag made with Japanese cotton that allows one to see what is outside without being caught inside. What the performer or performers will do in the bag it’s up to them. The audience is welcome to guess what is happening under the coverage of the fabric. It seems like this piece can be pretty easy to participate in, as it doesn’t require the performer to be on stage or directly perform in front of the audience, but they are hidden inside. Experimenting with the idea of being on the verge of being visible and invisible may give a sense of protection. But Yoshimoto said that practically no one had been doing it. “People put that bag on just to see what it is like, and nobody stayed in it for a long time.”<sup>66</sup>, she mentioned. Maybe the problem lay, e.g., in the decision to place it on an uninviting concrete floor with insufficient space around or because it was organized by an institution with little experience

59 Julia Robinson, “Parsing Scores: Application in Fluxus”, *On Curating*, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-51-reader/parsing-scores-application-in-fluxus.html> (accessed July 26, 2024).

60 An email correspondence, June 23, 2022.

61 Natascha Lushetich and Mathias Fuchs, “Introduction”, in: *Performance Research*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (2016).

62 Together with Tiffany Lambert, curator and interim director of Japan Society, and Ayaka Iida, an assistant curator of Japan Society.

63 „Out of Bound: Japanese Women Artists in Fluxus”, Japan Society, New York City, Oct. 13 – Jan. 21, 2024.

64 „Out of Bound: Japanese Women Artists in Fluxus”, <https://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/japanese-women-artists-in-fluxus/6072>, (accessed: September 12, 2024).

65 E.g. “Music Shop”.

66 From an online conversation with Midori Yoshimoto, January 16, 2024.

with interactive art.<sup>67</sup> “There was a debate also about hiring performers to do the bag piece in that space, but I was a little against that because remembering how Marina Abramovic’s show at the MoMA was full of such realizations by hired performers everywhere, and it was more like a spectacle for people to watch. Fluxus is not about spectacle, so once you hire somebody and you’re just watching it, that’s completely different.”<sup>68</sup> It would then be like observing a game, not participating in it. It’s not a bad thing, though. It is just a different kind of fun.

As a philosophy professor, C. Thi Nguyen wrote, “[...] the rules and goals of games are not arbitrary at all. They are a way of specifying particular modes of agency for the player to adopt. This is what makes games a distinctive art form. Designers of such games do not simply create the gaming environments and obstacles. They designate goals and abilities for the player; they shape the agential skeleton the player will inhabit during the game.”<sup>69</sup> Just like in a “Bag Piece”. A specific agency of performers allows them to choose in a designated environment – the inside of the sack.

“Each one of us is a player on the playa.”<sup>70</sup> – This has been stated on the website of Burning Man<sup>71</sup>, the annual event at the Nevada desert dedicated to community, art, and self-expression. It is not traditionally considered a game, but it does have elements that could be associated with one, especially with

community engagement, creativity, and participation. It takes its name from a symbolic burning of a giant wooden effigy called “The Man.” It is more than just a festival. Each year, Black Rock City’s participative city grows on a barren, where tens of thousands of participants engage in different activities, including workshops, music, art installations, or performances. “Black Rock City is the stage: things are happening all over the place 24 hours a day, and we are all participants in this grand performance.”<sup>72</sup> “Look at Burning Man. It is reminiscent of Fluxus in many ways. Because it’s a self-contained world where everybody does these creative acts out of the desert for a certain period. And there is no external governance. The participants are their government. No one is really in charge. And that’s huge – much bigger than Fluxus ever was. Burning Man continues to be an enormous phenomenon.”<sup>73</sup> – told David Ross. “George [Maciunas] would likely have viewed it as competition or even accused it of stealing his idea. He was known for being quite protective of his concepts and artistic territory.”<sup>74</sup> Both as a cultural movement and an annual event, Burning Man continues to influence contemporary American culture.

“Play communities existed long before massively multiplayer online games; they have ranged from bridge clubs to

67 Oftentimes museums become mausoleums for Fluxus works. They were not meant to be only admired or “put on the fireplace” (however some of them, like Takako Saito, are extremely beautiful) but to use them and experience their sensory quality.

68 From an online conversation with Midori Yoshimoto, January 16, 2024.

69 C. Thi Nguyen, “Games and the Art of Agency”, in: *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 128, No. 4 (2019), 423.

70 “Performance Opportunities”, <https://burningman.org/event/participate/art-performance/performance-opportunities/> (accessed September 26, 2024).

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 From an online conversation with David Ross, May 12, 2022.

74 The dream of George Maciunas was to create a similar communal environment for Fluxus to e.g. Black Mountain College, thus his attempts to create a Flux-colony on Ginger Island or purchasing a property in the countryside in Massachusetts. “He was a Utopianist. He wanted a community surrounding him and found it in organizing performance festivals and producing flux kits with an international community of artists. He wanted a Flux Island. He wanted a concrete ship that could spread Fluxus among all the people. He pioneered a community of artists living and working in SoHo.” – recalls artist John Held Jr.; John Held Jr., “I’ve Ripened to the Genius of George Maciunas By John Held, Jr.”, *George Maciunas Foundation*, <https://georgemaciunas.com/essays-2/ive-ripened-to-the-genius-of-george-maciunas/> (accessed September 26, 2024).

sports leagues, from tabletop role-playing games to Civil War reenactments.”<sup>75</sup> – reminds Celia Pearce. The phenomenon of Burning Man is that it is still a live, entertaining event that happens in a real place, creating ties between real people. Nowadays, we often associate connections with the online world and the emergence of social media and other platforms. But that’s not necessarily a negative thing. On the contrary, “with the emergence of digital networks, new varieties of adult play communities have begun to appear [...] Networks amplify the scale, progression, and geographical reach of play communities, allowing them to grow much larger much faster than their offline counterparts. These phenomena give rise to new creative playgrounds, not only within discrete networked play spaces but also through real-world interventions [...], large group interactions enabled by mobile technologies, and other emerging forms of play that blur the boundaries between real and virtual, everyday life and imagination, work and play.”<sup>76</sup>

The format of an artwork as a game asks for the participant’s intellectual and literal engagement.<sup>77</sup> Just like “[b]y being in a bag, you show the other side of you, which has nothing to do with race, nothing to do with sex, nothing to do with, you know, age. Then, you become just a spirit or soul. And you can talk soul to soul. I like that idea. To become something totally different.”, says the “Bag Piece” description on MoMA’s website<sup>78</sup>. Isn’t it something that we

also do when playing games? We take up a player’s persona or the character it represents, and we emerge ourselves in a different world. In that sense, playing is close to performing – undertaking the role of a performer.

<sup>75</sup> Celia Pearce, *Communities of Play*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>77</sup> Paraphrasing Celia Pearce: “It asks for the viewer’s engagement not only intellectually but literally”, in: Celia Pearce, “The Aesthetic of Play”, *Visual Language: Fluxus and Legacy, Part 2*, Vol.40, No. 1 (2006), p. 70.

<sup>78</sup> “Yoko Ono. Bag Piece (1964), performed during Perpetual Fluxfest, Cinematheque, New York, June 27, 1965”, *MoMA*, <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/15/374> (accessed September 23, 2024).



# CONCLUSION



I received a notification on my phone from the Google Photos app yesterday. It said “The Last Anniversary”. The picture depicted two men standing close to each other in shallow water or on a big stone near the shore. It seems like a very sunny day. They are both shirtless, with one wearing shorts and the other swim trunks, holding each other’s hands as if in the gesture of camaraderie or friendship. They are smiling at the camera. In the background, someone can be seen swimming in calm, azure water. I sent the picture to my mum to convince her that Google doesn’t know much about me. “Dad recognized himself. He is the one on the right”, she replied. She may have been a little right. Francesco Conz looks a bit in this picture like my father when he was young. The person holding his hand is American artist Allan Kaprow, known chiefly for his happenings. It is one of the photos I quickly captured with my phone while researching at the Archivio Conz in Berlin last year. It is a great picture. Like many others that I took photos of during that time in the archive. They are so lovely that Google created even a whole memory album with snapshots of Fluxus artists, especially their feet, as I realized a score by Jessica and Hannah Higgins says: “It may be nice to take one’s shoes off.” I felt pretty touched that some kind of algorithm could have thought that these two men standing at the waterside may have had their anniversary. But it also shows, in a way, my attachment to Fluxus and the joy that revising all those last year’s photos gave me. But they are just files on my phone that will disappear one day due to storage or software issues.

What I have written in this paper is just a glimpse of what I consider to be my story with Fluxus, but if I wanted to write everything that I have thought or what I am thinking, it would have to be another hundreds of pages at least or I would just never stop. But I will leave it here as it is. Perhaps nothing can be

said about Fluxus, as at the end of the day, no one knows what Fluxus is. It “means many things to many people.”<sup>1</sup>

Fluxus, as the name implies, is in flux. It is an open work. It is in movement. “Fluxus is hard to develop because it is hard to define, and people insist on the right to change. After all, Fluxus means change. And it’s a rather good name for art that is devoted to change.” – said Dick Higgins.<sup>2</sup> And if change is involved, it means it is continuous and infinite. I think Philip Corner told me that Fluxus is not something you do. It’s something that happens to you. “There is no aim to it, no purpose, it doesn’t have a function, it’s not convincing anybody, it’s not trying to become a success, to change the world. It just takes place.”<sup>3</sup>

1 Ken Friedman and Owen F. Smith, “The Dialectics of Legacy”, in: *Visible Language*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2006), 1.

2 Ibid.

3 Eric Andersen in “The Misfits – 30 Years of Fluxus”, directed by Lars Movin, 1993. “The Misfits – 30 Years of Fluxus”, weird films archive, April 15, 2021, Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzQtWhdQQXs&t=3531s>, (accessed September 28, 2024).

# **AN EPILOGUE**

EMMETT WILLIAMS:

But I said long ago that it has never  
been invented.

MAN

And you want to invent it?

EMMETT WILLIAMS

No, I was hoping I'd be a part of it if it  
finally took place.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Back in the 1980s, George Brecht wrote, "Fluxus has fluxed." A few years later, Emmett Williams said, "Fluxus has not yet begun." They were both right." In: Ken Friedman and Owen F. Smith, "The Dialectics of Legacy", in: *Visible Language*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2006), 7.

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## Illustrations:

Figure 1. Together with Jarosław Kozłowski. “George Maciunas: Fluxstory”, The Arsenal Municipal Gallery, Poznań, October 27, 2021.

Figure 2. Together with Marzena Wiśniewska and Anna Magalska, „Wyobraź sobie... Spotkanie z Yoko Ono” (eng. „Imagine... A meeting with Yoko Ono”), CAC Znaki Czasu, Toruń, Poland, April 22, 2023.

Figure 3. Together with Christian Xatrec in the front of Emily Harvey Foundation, 537 Broadway, New York City, December 2023.

Figure 4. Alison Knowles and Jessica Higgins at Geoff Hendricks memorial service, June 30, 2018. Interior of Emily Harvey Foundation, 537 Broadway, New York City, July 11, 2017.

Figure 5. Remnants of the clothes I wore during the performance of Yoko Ono’s “Cut Piece” at the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg in May 2017, September 13, 2017.

Figure 6. Jeffrey Perkins and Robert Janitz at Janitz’s Studio in Queens, New York, recording a camera performance of Nam June Paik’s “One for the violin” for Perkins’s movie “George: The Story of Georg Maciunas and Fluxus”, September 20, 2017.

Figure 7. Yoshi Wada performing at MoMA during the premiere of Perkins’s “George: The Story of Georg Maciunas and Fluxus”, February 20, 2018.

Figure 8. A photo of Michelle and Barack Obama “To Alison. On behalf of First Lady Michelle Obama and myself, thank you for your leadership and support”, May 9, 2018.

Figure 9. Ping-pong cascade at the Eye Museum in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, October 8, 2019.

Figure 10. Henry Flynt, “What a communism? A talk”, Emily Harvey Foundation, New York City, April 7, 2018.

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Figure 12. A screenshot of my Zoom conversation with Philip Corner, March 23, 2022.

Figure 13. Alison Knowles with Christian Xatrec at Knowles loft on Spring Street during her birthday party, New York City, April 29, 2018

Figure 14. Me and Jeffrey Perkins after arrival to Kaunas for the Fluxus Festivalis, Lithuania, September 8, 2022.

Figure 15. Jeffrey Perkins holding a poster for his movie “George: The Story of George Maciunas and Fluxus” that was screened during the Film Program of Art Basel 2019, Basel, Switzerland, June 15, 2019.



Figure 16. Work by Ben Vautier on the wall of Villa Croce in Genoa, Italy, September 13, 2022.

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Figure 18. Sean Carrillo, Sean Miller, Philip Corner, and Bibbe Hansen, at the Villa Croce, Genoa, Italy, September 14, 2022.

Figure 19. Feet of Dick Higgins, fragment of a photo from Francesco Conz collection, August 4, 2023.

Figure 20. One of my rehearsals with local amateur choirs for the performance “Maciunas Laughter (Choir Edition)” that was presented at the grand finale of Fluxus Festivalis, Kaunas Lithuania, September 8, 2022.

Figure 21. “Avantgarde” Volkswagen Beetle by Charlotte Moorman, adorned with Paik’s bomb, as part of the exhibition “Holy Fluxus. From Collection Francesco Conz”, Kunstgewerbemuseum, Berlin, July 17, 2023.

Figure 22. A photo of a photo depicting some objects that Charlotte Moorman used for her performance of John Cage’s “26’1.1499”, taken at the Archivio Conz in Berlin, August 17, 2023.

Figure 23. Poster of Fluxus exhibition “Fluxus 1962-2022. 60 Years in Flux” on the wall of Villa Croce in Genoa, Italy, September 13, 2022.

Figure 24. Exhibition view, “Holy Fluxus. From the Collection Francesco Conz, St. Matthew’s Church, Berlin, July 16, 2023.

Figure 25. Ison Knowles and Jeffrey Perkins at her loft on Spring Street, New York City, November 26, 2023.

Figure 26. Poster of Fluxus Festivalis on George Maciunas house in Kaunas, Lithuania, September 10, 2022.

Figure 27. Sean Carrillo and Bibbe Hansen performing Fluxus as part of the exhibition “Fluxus 1962-2022. 60 Years in Flux”, Genoa, Italy, September 15, 2022.

Figure 28. Exhibition view, “Yoko Ono. Music of the Mind”, Tate Modern, London, Great Britain, July 31, 2024.

Hello Weronika,

Thank you for your email. It is nice to hear my work was mentioned in relation to Fluxus. I think there are some connections but it also depends on how you define Fluxus and which pieces of mine you would look at. I can imagine most people would connect my piece “Tape Piece” (<https://www.tapepiece.ricercata.org/>) with Fluxus. In relation to my more instrumental pieces, the connection would be more difficult to find. Some people say my work is conceptual because I have more attention for the concept when I make a piece of music, and each work I make searches for new techniques in relation to the concept. I don’t want to take anything for granted, I’m always critical of all existing techniques. I believe a making process should be related to the concept/main inspiration and not use techniques that I already know. Because of this, everything new involves researching the concept and also playfulness usually takes place within that research period, simply because I enjoy making things, it is fun and the playfulness enters automatically. During lockdown I for instance used the Zoom medium as inspiration for making new music: [https://youtu.be/c2MQgK0s9Zs?si=B-6x3eiWik96\\_9-M](https://youtu.be/c2MQgK0s9Zs?si=B-6x3eiWik96_9-M). This was extremely fun to do with the audience.

My work “A deviation for approximation” was recently compared to situationist art. I was however not aware of that connection while making the work. The piece was also composed during the pandemic in lockdown, I’m a composer with easy access to musicians and during this period I was not allowed to meet others so I created something I could do alone and therefore it became more personal. Usually when I compose a piece for someone else, I get my inspiration from the context, this can be the person or group I’m writing for or the space we are performing in, this time it was just me in lockdown, so my inspiration came from my own living situation at that moment. But again, I was not taking something I already knew, It involved questions and reflections and allowing myself to see everyday things from another perspective. This also happens in my instrumental compositions, I often question the standard working methods musicians work with every day. I make work so that musicians also have to question the standard working methods and together we can create work with an alternative perspective. <https://youtu.be/8PJosC03Mp0>

Good luck with the PhD!

All best,

Maya

**Christian Falsnaes**

Dear Weronika,

Thank you for your mail and interest in my work! I would be curious to know more about your research.

Regarding my connection to fluxus, I see different ways in which such a connection could be established. The use of instructions is one, the relation to/ inclusion of the viewer is another. I have also done a performance called “Opening” (2013), where one of the elements is a direct reference to Yoko Ono’s cut piece:

<https://christianfalsnaes.com/#/opening/>

I myself am quite inspired by the playfulness of fluxus, as well as the way in which a score or set of instructions can become a complex performance when enacted (in my case by the audience).

Another example of a work of mine that I would consider related to fluxus is “Available” (2015), where visitors can call me throughout the exhibition, and I develop instructions for them that they perform in the space while we speak:

<https://christianfalsnaes.com/#/available/>

Please let me know if you have any further questions!

Best

Christian

**Het Kanaal**

Hi Weronika,

I never heard of Fluxus before, but when I just googled it, it makes no sense that I didn’t know it. And I think it’s a compliment you got our name from that. Indeed our music/art has a lot of similarities. We also combine music with visual art, landscape art, neo-dada like poetry, theatre performances, informative personal stories about nature and interviews. We are also a group of friends as well as artists, who get stuck a lot in the process and struggle with making a finished product because we like to change and keep everything new and moving all the time. I don’t know how much this helps your research, but I am willing to talk to you and can ask around to the others if they have more knowledge about Fluxus and could say a little more. Anyway, thanks a lot for bringing it up, I think it’s good for us to do some research to this community and find inspiration there.

Greetings,

Janneke from Het Kanaal

Dear Weronika,

For me, Fluxus is an important influence but just one amongst many. I'm adamantly syncretic in that regard—and not consciously so but more because I have a predilection for eclecticism. An overt showing of influence or a pledging of allegiance to a particular school of thought both seem recipes for disaster, or at least runs contrary to my notion of artistic practice and research. Another way to put it, using terms you used, I see my practice as running in parallel *and* tangentially *and* intersectionally (I suppose I could also use circular or spiral analogies) to Fluxus (or any influence for that matter). This is not to say that I'm opposed to doing pieces that directly reference a Fluxus work (or any other pre-existing work), there's a benefit to make the connection and cultivate a dialogue, I guess I'm more resistant to people who align themselves more blatantly, it would be too single-minded for me. Well, that might sound like a bit of a rant I suppose, it's not intended to be. Hope this helps. Funnily enough, I recently wrote an essay on Ken Friedman's *Zen For Record* (1966). It was commissioned by him for a new edition of that work (I'm not sure of its status in terms of publication date).

Best,

Christof

**Stefan Burger**

Dear Weronika,

Thank you very much for your email and your interest in my arts practice.

In 2011, I was nominated for the FollowFluxus Award by Heike Munder (then Director of the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst) and was subsequently invited by the jury and the Nassauischer Kunstverein to spend some time in Wiesbaden. Up until 2011, I had been exploring the relationship between institutions and artists in various works, and there (especially in the field of photography) may have been connecting with strategies of Fluxus with a subversive agenda.

During my time in Wiesbaden in 2012, the 50th anniversary of Fluxus ("Fluxus: International Festivals of the Newest Music") was celebrated, and I engaged in an installation exploring the interaction of Fluxus as subversive art and its use in the city marketing of Wiesbaden that summer.

The wonderful thing about my time in Wiesbaden was that I had the opportunity to meet Benjamin Patterson which was really a wonderful person to meet and I also had the opportunity to encounter Alison Knowles. There was also a minimalist sound piece with a short recording of Alison Knowles in my installation at the Nassauischer Kunstverein at that time.

If you're interested, I'd be happy to provide you with more information about my project at the time. Or I would also be happy to have a conversation if you wish so.

Warm regards, and have a lovely Sunday

Stefan Burger

## **Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin**

Dear Weronika,

In the 70th, when we lived in Moscow in the USSR, we knew nothing about Fluxus. It was the time of the Iron Curtains between Russia and the West. We were conceptual artists who made strange objects. Rimma made the cubes (3-d conceptual poetry) that are sometimes compared to Fluxus. You can read about them in our book *Thought of Thoughts, Book 2: Trespassing*, from page 102:

[https://archive.org/details/thought-of-thoughts-book-2-trespassing-by-rimma-gerlovina-and-valeriy-gerlovin\\_20210417/page/n5/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/thought-of-thoughts-book-2-trespassing-by-rimma-gerlovina-and-valeriy-gerlovin_20210417/page/n5/mode/2up)

1980, we moved to New York City, and Rimma's work became much larger, see page 162, Ibid. In New York, we met many conceptual artists from all over the world, and, of course, Fluxus people. But nobody influenced us, for we were already mature artists who developed their own language. However, we agreed when we were invited to participate in the exhibition *Young Fluxus* (1982, in New York and Washington, D.C.). See the photo from that show on page 170, Ibid.

From the review on this show:

"Amid the fun and games, Rimma Gerlovin's piece, "Wandering Jew," comes as a surprise, though she manages to treat a serious subject tastefully within a game-like context: You move a little cube (titled "Wondering Jew") around on a person-shaped game board, each step representing a different country. In a separate work, husband Valeriy Gerlovin has created a whole universe of "Bread Insects" (all made from mashed bits of bread), which climb the wall nearby. Eating this colony of crawlies, he says, is the only method of biological control.

As two of the most imaginative artists in the show, the Gerlovins – recent Russian émigrés – make us curious to know more about the work of colleagues they have left behind. We don't have long to wait. The Gerlovins have organized an exhibition of contemporary Russian artists' books – known as Samizdat – which opened to enthusiastic reviews in New York last summer and will be shown art WPA in December. It is something to look forward to."

Jo Ann Lewis, "Art in Flux" (review on the international exhibition of "Young Fluxus"), *The Washington Post*, Saturday, Oct. 2, 1982.

We made a video about our friend Jean Brown, a collector of Fluxus, Dada, and Surrealism. In our interview for *Zoom* magazine, we described our Moscow and New York periods and our meeting with Jean Brown, p. 8:



[https://archive.org/details/zoom-interveiw-with-rimma-gerlovina-and-valeriy-gerlovin-by-michela-balzarelli\\_20210505/page/n7/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/zoom-interveiw-with-rimma-gerlovina-and-valeriy-gerlovin-by-michela-balzarelli_20210505/page/n7/mode/2up)

Video *Not Jean Brown*:

<https://archive.org/details/video-not-jean-brown-by-rimma-gerlovina-valeriy-gerlovin-and-mark-bloch-1985>

Valeriy's works in the Moscow period are shown in *Thought of Thoughts, Book 1: Believe*, pp. 90-99 (metal), 142-148 (earth)

[https://archive.org/details/thought-of-thoughts-book-1-believe-by-rimma-gerlovina-and-valeriy-gerlovin\\_20210415/page/148/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/thought-of-thoughts-book-1-believe-by-rimma-gerlovina-and-valeriy-gerlovin_20210415/page/148/mode/2up)

In New York, he did very different works, as shown in *Thought of Thoughts, Book 2: Trespassing*, from page 191:

[https://archive.org/details/thought-of-thoughts-book-2-trespassing-by-rimma-gerlovina-and-valeriy-gerlovin\\_20210417/page/n5/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/thought-of-thoughts-book-2-trespassing-by-rimma-gerlovina-and-valeriy-gerlovin_20210417/page/n5/mode/2up)

Our art was developed in parallel to Fluxus in Moscow. No influence whatsoever.

Our best,

Rimma and Valeriy

Dear Weronika,

If you review the material we sent you, you will definitely notice some similarities between our artwork and Fluxus. Our Moscow artwork was *parallel* to Fluxus, yet it was not influenced by it, for we had no idea of its existence. Because of this similarity, Jean Brown, a collector of Fluxus, Dada, and Surrealism, bought many of our early works. Now, they are in the Getty Institute of Art collection in Los Angeles, California. We wrote an article about Jean's collection and Fluxus movement.

[http://gerlovin.com/English/eng\\_jean\\_brown\\_revisted.htm](http://gerlovin.com/English/eng_jean_brown_revisted.htm)

Our case might be particularly interesting precisely because of the independent appearance of artwork similar to Fluxus in such an art desert as the USSR. Fluxus type of art seemed to hover everywhere in the air during those times. Or, to put it differently, our art was somewhat intuitively wired or subconsciously tuned to the cultural atmosphere in the West, where we moved in 1979 (to the USA in 1980). So, it is the *modus operandi* of our conceptual creativity, in fact, independent of any influence.

Kateřina Šedá

Dear Weronika.

I think that my work certainly has a number of things and motives in common with the attitudes of the artists in Fluxus (e.g. the opinion or attitude of the artist is more important to me than the classical exhibition gallery space, which I question

and often ignore, etc.), but it was created completely separately and in a different way dormitory. My work is entirely based on the small-town environment where I was born (a village near Brno) and I have tried to change the rules of its functioning since childhood. Since childhood, I have involved adult neighbors in children's games, and my attitude towards gallery operations is influenced by the fact that many people do not go there and I need to work with them.

A number of principles that I have come up with over the years in my work coincide with some of the intentions of Flux (and I really like Fluxus artists), but my work has not been influenced by them. I myself was later surprised that we intersected in some things, but I came up with them myself out of an inner need to respond to the environment where I grew up and a desire to change its functioning. This is what I said at the lecture when we won the FOLLOW FLUXUS prize in Wiesbaden, Germany in 2011.

Is clear that explanation?

Thank you! Kateřina

## **Sijben Rosa**

Hi Weronika,

Thanks for your email, I'm happy to hear my work is talked about! I would love to help you with your research, as it sounds interesting and is in my field of interest. I could imagine we could schedule a 30-minute video call to discuss your question. Would that work for you?

You'll probably understand that as a professional artist in a capitalist world, I need to take good care of my time and energy, as well as my financial health. To respond to your request and decide if I can give you my full yes for contributing, I need more insight into the financial context of your request. Could you give me more clarity about the budget you have available for my efforts? My standard rate for a short call like this, including preparations, is around 100 Euro (excl. tax). Do you think this would be within reach?

Warm regards,  
Sijben

## **Maja Smrekar**

Dear Mrs. Trojanska;

thank you very much for your kind words about my work and for your questions. Even though I usually don't specifically address Fluxus movement as an inspiration or a direct relation to my work, the methodology I use in my artistic pro-

cesses is definitely connected to their ideas and practices. To name a few: even though some of my projects seem “finished”, I always understand my work in terms of a process-based, continuous flow of intertwining contexts. The making of the work is stemming from the fact that the work is made for the public and I therefore consciously implement this parameter in every decision through the project’s process. Transforming personal into political is another part of my method, where I try to address universal themes that stem from my personal experience. Last but not least, the choice of medium and materials are always decided in the context of the content / message the art work is communicating to the audience.

I hope I answered with some clarity, but please do not hesitate to let me know if you’d have further thoughts or questions.

Thank you and all the very best;

Maja

## **Joan Casellas**

Dear Weronika,

For me, Fluxus as part of neo-dada and predecessor of Action Art is very important. In 1976 (on the occasion of Dada’s 60th birthday, with my fellow arts and crafts students we created the group DADÀ ATTACKS AGAIN and that’s how I got introduced to action art and conceptual art , which in Catalonia had an “important” movement within the dimensions of our country.

My solo exhibition in Barcelona was in space 10 of the Joan Miró Foundation in 1979 with neo-dada objects inspired particularly by Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray and Joan Brossa. In the 80s in NY (from 1986 to 1991) I met Printed Matter and other places with Fluxus publications and created with Juan Ugalde and Patrícia Gadea a magazine that changed its name in each issue: Chuc, Anyway and Estrujenbank. On my return to Barcelona I created the postal magazine (inspired by Mail art strategies). Aire (1992-1999) which would become the Aire (1992-2020) action art photographic archive. From 1991 I focused exclusively on action art, ephemeral and postcard art, self-publishing and contributed to the creation of a network of parallel art (parallel to official art) at the level of the whole Spanish State. One of the realizations of these interconnected networks was Red-Arte (1995-1998). Previously, with the poets Carles Hac Mor and Ester Xargay, we created the short-lived but very influential Revista Parlada de Viva Veu (1993-1995) in the Barcelona area. In 1994 I participated in a program of action activities within the exhibition EN L’ESPERIT DE FLUXUS at the Fundació Tàpies de Barcelona which was very decisive in my career, especially for the production of artist books as a spin-off of my action series. In 2002 with the artists Àngel Pastor, Pere Sousa, Carles Pina, Maria Cosmes and Xavier Sabater we created in Barcelona with a neo-dada spirit the OPEN KABARET (2002-2008) a space where anyone could come and do what they want without previous notices or the need to be an artist. In 2004 I met Emmet Williams and Ann Noel with whom I collaborated to make an action by Robert Felliú at the Macba (Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona). In 2008 I met Ben Patterson establishing a lasting friendship.

In 2012 I collaborated to work on a performance of his at the Kunts Verein in Wiesbaden and in 2016 I produced an action photo with him for the poster of the 12th Muga Caula (action poetry and performance festival I organized from 2005 to 2029). Unfortunately Ben Patterson passed away in June 2016, but we had already produced the poster that we were able to publish in September 2016. In 2021 I organized an exhibition about BEN Patterson at the Museu de l'Empordà, in Figueres with a selection of photos and videos I had taken of him over the 8 years of our friendship, as well as a second free version of Ben's Bar which he himself authorized for the neo-fluxus exhibition at the Lola Ventós Gallery in Figueres in 2016. That would be more or less my loose-neo-given relationship, spoken from memory. For any publication it might be necessary to revise some date or include some other detail that escapes me now.

### **Mehreen Murtaza**

Dear Weronika, my apologies for not responding sooner. I just came across your msg. Yes it would be good to talk actually and I'd like to share more about my experience with the "fluxus" legacy. Although interestingly I don't like to limit myself to art historical labels or categorisation and perhaps in one way that is quite a fluxus (self-reflexive) approach. Of course there are many more layers to be peeled and it would be great to have a chat with you. My email is is murtaza.mehreen2@gmail.com And I also run a creative space, creative community and publishing house by the name of Mantiq of the Mantis in Lahore @MantiqoftheMantis I'm curious to hear more about your interests and research as well We could connect on skype for a conversation ?

### **Steve Random**

Best regards for your studies into the topic of Fluxus.

For me all roads Fluxus lead to Jean Brown. I was lucky to have been introduced to her after a museum director (Richard Muhlberger) looked at my work and said I had to go visit. Fortunately I lived about a 45 minute drive from her archive. Prior to that visit I did not know about Fluxus or Mail Art, but I did have a couple of pieces that were very similar, most notably my Name Dropping Game. Jean said that we were like neighbors on the same street that didn't know each other. She wished that I had been in the Young Fluxus show that had recently taken place, I believe Ken Friedman and Peter Frank put it together in 1982(?). Jean took out many of the Fluxus items for me to investigate, such a treat to actually have my fingerprints on these items. To get me involved in Mail Art she gave me a copy of her mailing list with asterisks on the artists I should contact. In 1983 I escorted her to Fluxfest \*83 at SUNY Purchase and she introduced me to the Fluxus gang that attended. If you do not have a copy of Fluxus Means Change by Marcia Reed I'd highly recommend it, and of course going to the Getty Research Center online for the Jean Brown Papers. I visited Jean about a dozen times, but I used to go to NYC often and go to various gallery openings bumping into the various Fluxus artists and others.

I took part of an Artist's Talk on Art panel and one artist kept heckling me the entire time, jealous perhaps, so when asked about my recent mail art projects I said that I was going to mail the artist to the other side of the world and Ken Friedman stood up and gave me a dollar to get the project started. I also attended a few other Fluxus events, I'll attach some photos to this. If you use any for any purpose, please give credit, thanks. I'll also attach a brief history of artists I've met, Nam June Paik was one of my favorites as was going to Jean Dupuy's place/gallery where George Maciunas was beaten up by thugs and lost his eye. I have also collected Random Samples from various Fluxus events and actually own a couple of Fluxus items: George Maciunas Burglary Kit (reflux edition), Flux Deck of cards, and an Alison Knowles Bean Can found at a flea market for \$3 which I told the story to Alison and she laughed and laughed.

So, all of that said, I am NOT Fluxus, nor pretend to be. Nor am I part of the nouveau Fluxus. In 1982 Ben Banville and I invented Nebulism to counter all of the art "isms" that all claim to have the answers only to find out they don't. Nebulism doesn't pretend to know anything, it questions everything and provides no answers. I really don't know what it is either. Fifty years of artist activity and I still have no clue what I am doing, hahaha. Fluxus was a very organized group led by George Maciunas, I doubt I would have lasted long as part of the Fluxus gang, George would have thrown me out, like he did with many! But, with all of that I admire many of the Fluxus artists, Jean Dupuy, Nam June Paik, George Brecht, Ben Vautier, Alison Knowles and on and on. At times you can even see hints of their influence in some of my works, ideas so good that I must steal bits to bring my ideas to fruition, but not made as a copy of, or trying to directly rip-off, if that makes sense. Example: my work E Fontibus Haurire posted a while back on Instagram, the assembly was taken from George Brecht's Universal Machine, but is completely different. I'll never forget first seeing that work at Jean's, right up there with the memory of playing with her copy of Duchamp's Box in a Valise! You see, I'm still playing my Name Dropping Game, hahaha.

I hope this and the attachments help in your studies, feel free to write.

Regards,

Steve Random

**Jaap Blonk**

Dear Weronika,

About Fluxus: I have not been in direct contact with the movement. It was before my time.

Also, I am a performer and composer, not an art historian, so I cannot write anything general about the Fluxus movement.

But I can mention a few things I did that relate to Fluxus.

On my first solo CD "Flux de Bouche" I recorded piece by Fluxus artist Dick Hig-



gins: “glasslass” (<https://jaapblonk.bandcamp.com/track/glasslass>).

I composed a sound track for the film “Artype” by George Maciunas (<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/479242215>).

In my “YappiScope” show I sometimes project Yoko Ono’s film Nr 4 “Butts” combined with a recitation of Robert Wilson’s minimal poem “DINA SORE”, which you also can find on the “Flux de Bouche’ CD (<https://jaapblonk.bandcamp.com/track/dina-sore>).

John Cage was important for Fluxus. I sometimes perform 3 of his pieces: “Aria”, ‘Solo for Voice #64” and “4’33””.

My friend, the contrabassist Damon Smith sometimes performs Ben Patterson’s “Variations for Double Bass 1961” ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbr7MwVi3\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbr7MwVi3_A)).

We did a tour together in 2022, where Damon played this piece and I performed Kurt Schwitters’ “Ursonate”, and together we presented and improvised on Hugo Ball’s “Six Sound Poems, 1916”.

Another friend, the Italian sound poet Enzo Minarelli, was associated with Fluxus. He invited me once to a festival he organized in Bologna in the 1990s, where a number of Fluxus artists were present.

In 2004, at Beyond Baroque (Venice, Los Angeles) I was part of a group of people who recreated some Fluxus pieces. It was fun. I don’t remember which pieces we did.

I performed twice at the Wolf Vostell Museum in Malpartida de Cáceres, Spain (2007 and 2023).

That’s about it, I think. I was much more influenced by Dada than by Fluxus. But Fluxus of course owes a lot to Dada as well.

If you have any additional questions, please feel free to ask them.

All the best,

Jaap.

**Jennifer Weigel**

Dear Weronika Trojanska,

Here are some of my thoughts in response to your questions from Facebook:

> name artist/s who in your opinion are influenced by Fluxus

Keith Buchholz, Allen Revich, Bibiana Padilla Maltos, Allan Bukoff, John M Bennett, Chris Cathead Reynolds

> what is your relation to Fluxus?

I studied Fluxus art when working on my Bachelors of Fine Arts at Webster University, studying Studio Art with an emphasis on Alternative Media (namely performance and installation art). I later started attending the Fluxfest performance art festivals organized by Keith Buchholz and became involved in the mail art community and eternal network that way. I don't perceive of myself as a Fluxus artist but the movement has certainly influenced my work.

> how do you see your artistic practice in parallel with their legacy? If you can see any?

I am interested in making art accessible outside of the formal institutions and in blurring the distinctions between art and life. The act of living itself is art for me as much as making a concerted effort to create a work of art, as in painting or sculpting or writing or whatnot. All of it is interconnected, and my approach tends to be conceptual and multi-disciplinary rather than focused or expressing some level of mastery over a particular media. I also try to add a somewhat absurd element to my work, playing off of humor to draw attention to everyday things or actions in new and different ways. These methodologies fit well within some of the Fluxus and Dada practices.

Anyway, I hope that helps to clarify where I land in this discourse. Good luck working on your thesis and your research and thank you for reaching out to me.

Sincerely,  
Jennifer Weigel

**Asli Sungu**

In 1995, I was a 20-year-old art student in Istanbul, studying traditional painting at the Mimar Sinan Academy of Fine Arts. I was very curious about contemporary art but had little access, except for art magazines such as Artforum and Frieze; there was no internet at the time. 1995 was the year of the 5th Istanbul Biennial, curated by Rene Block. The exhibition included Fluxus artists such as Joseph Beuys and also contemporary artists. Their way of making art influenced me a lot. I became extremely curious about Dada, Fluxus, and con-temporary art and started to produce artworks that question the meaning of art or the way of making art.

As a parallel event, the great Fluxus artist Ben Patterson recreated the old Fluxus performances that he had made with Nam June Paik, George Maciunas, etc. I was one of the volunteers who took part in the performances. It changed my perspective, and I enjoyed it a lot. At the end of the performances, he gave me his card and told me to contact him if I ever went to Germany. Fifteen years later, I was invited to Nassauischer Wiesbaden Kunstverein as a Follow Fluxus scholarship holder. I had the privilege to exhibit with him in Wiesbaden and in Berlin.

After my graduation, I moved to Berlin and studied art at the UdK. I believe Dada, Fluxus, and conceptual art have brought me to a point where I stopped painting

and started to search for a different way of expressing my ideas. These art movements motivated me to read and think more about art, and most importantly, I found a way to combine life and art and to combine my personal existential ideas and observations with the universal.

As an art student in Berlin, I painted our studio's wall for four months, always on the rough parts of the wall until they became relief carvings. My aim was to hide the rough parts with thick paint, just like covering pimples with heavy makeup. But I wasn't successful. They enlarged themselves and stayed on the surfaces of the relief carvings. After a while, I started making videos. I took part in some of the videos. In one of my videos, I was wearing a blouse with the buttons at the back. I was trying to button it up correctly, but every time, I failed.

In both cases, it was very exciting to start with an aim and end with a result that reflects something from my personality, and most of all, according to my initial plan, the whole project was a failure, but in the end, it was a success. With the help of Fluxus, I started to produce artworks in which I could experiment, play, fail, and ultimately discover an aspect about myself and the whole.

### **Jimmy Robert**

Hi Weronika, I read your message on my way to sleep. I was thinking maybe the people who see a relation to fluxus in what I do should answer this! I reinterpreted Yoko Ono's cut piece and I even got a prize called Follow Fluxus but I never myself used the word as a ref when talking about what I do, not sure what you make of this or if there is a ground for a conversation here? I normally gravitate around what my practice is indebted to but in this case it's different. Let me know your thoughts on this. We could plan to speak on skype if still relevant...

### **Robert Blatt**

I am happy to be associated with Fluxus, though I don't see myself as a Fluxus artist. I deeply appreciate their work and have learned a great deal from it. That time period is significant to me, so I am glad for the connection, and I acknowledge it myself. However, I wouldn't go so far as to label myself a Fluxus artist. But there is plenty I could discuss about that relationship and aspects of their work that have informed what I do. One of the first things that I would think of is the process of score-making. It's not just about creating scores, but also how they've been treated by many artists identified with Fluxus. They touched on several important ideas that resonated with me. One of them is viewing the score as more than just a set of instructions for performance. It can be an object in itself, possessing materiality and meaning. Scores can facilitate interactions between artists, performers, and others, often blurring distinctions between them. And can even start to confuse whether those distinctions really exist. That's one element. Another is how scores, such as "Compositions 1960" by La Monte Young, function. Those pieces, like #15, "This piece is little whirlpools out in the middle of the ocean." , leave you wonder-

ing: is the work about finding it, creating it, or simply imagining it? And it leaves so much ambiguity, allowing for various interpretations and interactions. It allows for different ways that the score can interact with life and the performer. This has been really important to me. These are some key elements that I find significant.

*How did you first learn about Fluxus, and how did you come to discover these connections?*

It was a long time ago, and it happened gradually. It wasn't like a lightbulb moment. Of course, there is a lot of information online. I remember coming across a PDF version of "The Fluxus Performance Workbook". I think it must have been 15, 20 years ago. It was an eye-opening moment, there was so much great stuff there. Also, almost every major museum has something of Fluxus in its collection. For me, discovering text scores was particularly impactful. I come from a fairly traditional music background, so encountering these scores opened up a new perspective. I really identified with people like Nam June Paik, who transitioned from a very traditional music background to reinventing music. This approach to scores offered a radically different way to engage with notation, moving beyond conventional music. I think it was still fundamentally musical, but performed in unconventional locations, or using instruments in non-traditional ways. For instance, Nam June Paik dragging the violin down the street.

*Have you ever tried to perform some Fluxus piece?*

Yes, I have actually performed a number of them.

*What was your approach?*

I almost think there is a similar approach to the one found in playing music from Medieval or Renaissance times, or considering historically informed performance practice. I feel like there is definitely a similar approach here that one can take to performing Fluxus works, because like in early music there is a lot left unsaid which was tied to the conditions of the performers and the context of how it was performed. In early music, there are many elements of improvisation, ornamentation, and choices regarding instruments that were not explicitly notated. Similarly, Fluxus works often leave room for interpretation. The thing with many Fluxus works is that they don't necessarily have to be done in a particular way, it's more that they were done in a particular way. You can then choose whether to perform them in a historically informed way, how they were performed in the past, or to focus more on your own personal interpretation. I think you are really making a choice at that point. Especially with Event Scores, which are so short and leave so much up to interpretation, you as a performer have to decide which elements or combination of elements you will choose to focus on. Sometimes they are so open-ended that they almost allow for the creation of new works. This openness is a distinctive characteristic that enables such creative possibilities.

*And how did you interpret the scores when you performed them?*

I think it depends on the context in which I've done that. I participated in a series of events, with a handful of other artists, including David Pocknee, Michael Baldwin, Jorge Gomez Abrante, and others. We organized three events. One was with music and works around rocks and stones, one on works with paper, and the final one with scissors. A playful nod to a children's game. For one of those events, we per-

formed George Brecht's "Symphony No.1, Fluxversion 1", for which, to my knowledge, there was no existing documentation of its performance. The piece involves taking an image of musicians, cutting out the parts where their instruments are being played, and then putting your hands through the gaps to play "an old favorite." I imagine that originally, it could have involved something like a string quartet trying to play a well-known string quartet piece through the photograph. Or just some well-known tune, probably classical music. Since much of Fluxus' music often challenges the history of classical music. When we did the performance in 2014 or 2015, our interpretation involved taking a historical photograph of about five or six Fluxus artists. I am pretty sure it was taken during one of their performances in Germany, and it might have been a George Maciunas piece, the one with the lists. So there were like six Fluxus artists, all of them dressed in quirky, funny outfits, reading the lists together. What we did was to cut out the areas where their hands were, and each of us placed our hands in those holes. Then, each with a small pitcher of water and a basin on the ground, we performed George Brecht's well-known "Drip Music". One of the iconic Fluxus works. So, in a way, you could say that it was a mixture of this dichotomy. On one hand, it was historically informed, such as in some ways trying to play the way they did. On the other hand, reinterpreting these Fluxus works made it contemporary. That's perhaps an interesting example.

*You said earlier that while you are glad to be mentioned in the Fluxus context, you wouldn't necessarily label yourself as a Fluxus artist. Considering this, what are your thoughts on whether Fluxus ended with George Maciunas, or if it continues to exist until today? Do you see the spirit of Fluxus in contemporary art, or is it more of a historical phenomenon? How do you see the relevance of Fluxus in today's context?*

I think like many things, it's nuanced. Fluxus is of course very much identified with a historical period, and that's how I view it as well. During this 20-years period, let's say 1960s, 70s, and so on, a lot was going on. Especially with Maciunas organizing and publishing things. There are still a number of artists associated with Fluxus still actively working, like Alison Knowles or Philip Corner. I was even involved in a festival for Philip Corner's work last year, where we performed pieces written just a few years ago. So, in a way Fluxus is still alive, because the artists themselves are still around. There is no definite cut off for these things. It's more of a gradual shift where we come to see it as something we view in retrospect, rather than something actively happening now. And there are younger people who identify themselves with Fluxus, and that's fine in a way too. It's their choice and perspective. However, for me, it's like a specific time, place, and group of people.

*Thank you very much Robert.*

## **Rolf Giegold**

*What is that thing that constitutes the work to be related to Fluxus? I also very often get this comment that my work is fluxuesque or Fluxus, but what does it mean? And it probably means something different for everybody.*

Maybe we share the same question. I remember 20 years ago, when I came to Berlin in 2001 or 2002, I started collaborating with a young, American gallerist, who was



very much focused on Fluxus artists. Through this connection, I met Paweł Polus, Jarosław Kozłowski, Natalia Brandt, and Mikołaj Poliński. He always mentioned that my work had a connection to Fluxus or was influenced by it. But I never saw it that way myself. I wonder why he placed my work in that context, because I see it as much more conceptual. Of course, I was aware of Fluxus, as well as minimal art and other contemporary movements, but I would never have introduced myself by saying that here is the connection to Fluxus. So I think we share the question: what does the work contribute to this connection?

And I have tried really hard to find the answer. Before our meeting I took a look at your homepage, and noticed that some of your works, at least in terms of titles and content, are connected to certain names, like “Maciunas Laughter”. But from the brief glance I had on the website, I wouldn’t classify your work as Fluxus. And similarly with this work I made in 2006 an installation<sup>1</sup> referencing the famous performance by Joseph Beuys “Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt” / “How to Explain the Images to the Dead Hare” (in Düsseldorf 1965). You know it for sure. My installation was a big fenced area for hare. It was very luxurious for the animal. And a hare lived in this installation, where it was “taught” – by slide projection – through a series of words closely connected to Beuys, like fat, iron, bee, parallel process. The title was changed into “How the Dead Beuys is Explained to the Living Hare”. And of course you can say, Beuys and Fluxus, and so on, but for me this work is very conceptual. I can’t find any Fluxus elements in it, except that it references a work or an artist from the Fluxus scene. And the same impression I had with your work. That it appears to be a historical or theoretical reflection that creates a new work, but it is more conceptual than Fluxus.

*I don't think there is a contemporary artist who consciously follows the Fluxus aesthetic. It's probably impossible because we live in a completely different time.*

And this is the problem, I think, with every period in the art. When you mention Fluxus, you have, on one hand, a historical period with certain figures who represent it, along with its ideas and practices. Your work might be seen as closer to Fluxus, particularly because it includes elements of action and performance. You could argue that these elements have roots in Fluxus ideas from the 1960s and 1970s. But is it still Fluxus? Is it necessary to categorize it within it? Art has always been influenced by what was done before, but I wonder if it’s essential to make these connections so explicitly. While there are influences and knowledge about past movement, I question whether an artist today, in my generation or your, could rightfully claim to be a ‘Fluxus artist’. The work might be 70 years too late or it would be something different that may have elements or connections to Fluxus, but it is no longer Fluxus in the historical sense.

*Also related to this is the challenge of reperforming or recreating Fluxus works. It's quite difficult to make them contemporary. It often seems somewhat outdated. That may be due to the fact that people's mindsets have changed. Today, with so many distractions it's hard to focus on one action for a long time. Doing e.g. George Brecht's "Drip Music" would likely mean something entirely different now. But is it even necessary to make Fluxus works contemporary? Perhaps they should remain in their historical context. A bit problematic for me is also exhibiting Fluxus work, but that's a different topic.*

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<sup>1</sup> “Wie sich dem lebenden Hasen der tote Buys erklärt”, 2006

To see it now in exhibitions?

Yes.

Perhaps the main issue, though I am not an expert, is that historical Fluxus always involved a live presence. Many Fluxus works, when I see them in museums or at exhibitions, give the impression that the artist's presence is missing. This seems to be the characteristic of Fluxus. In many other epochs, or periods or "styles" the situation is different. The artwork itself is what matters, not the artist or their presence. In these cases, the artwork can be impressive on its own, regardless of where the artist is or whether it is present.

*I think I share this point of view. That's why there is something strange about reperforming those old works. What we see is not even true documentation, but graphic design of Maciunas. Boxes, or other ephemera. We still need someone to activate those works. Even if they are meant to be interactive, it usually doesn't work. As you nicely put it, the artist's presence is missing, and we can't fill that void. It will always be different. Even when people can engage in the works, there is something off about it. I am glad that Fluxus shows still happen, that there is a need to exhibit and educate people about it, and some of the objects are truly beautiful, but it's not the same.*

That reminds me of the famous John Cage piece "4'33". It's amazing that it was invented and performed, but if I saw someone performing it today, I'd probably think "I don't need this". It's an impressive piece, but maybe it was a unique moment that shouldn't be repeated and exhibited. And if you mention it, it's fine. The same goes for some Fluxus performances from the '60s – would they be interesting to see re-performed or performed anew today? I don't know. I've seen some, even in a Berlin gallery where the gallerist featured Fluxus or Fluxus-connected artists, like Ann Noel and Emmett Williams. I remember an opening where he performed a bit, and while it was clearly Fluxus, the time for Fluxus had already passed. Seeing it in the 2000s felt more like a historical reenactment.

*We have this expression in Polish "trąci myszką", which means something a bit outdated. I sometimes get this impression with Fluxus works, the way they are presented – you can clearly feel that they are from another time. It's fascinating, because there was definitely a completely different perception of these works 50 years ago. And as you said, it's probably impossible to feel the same way about them now. I mean, it is impossible. People, generations, time, even the atmosphere – everything was different.*

It's not just people who change. Our perception changes as well. Everyone's perception evolves over time. The way you see a piece of art in your youth is often very different from how you view it 20 years later. I've experienced this many times – seeing now works that I first encountered while I was in school, and visiting the same masterpieces in the same museums – my perspective on them completely shifted. This applies to contemporary art as well. Our daily lives, social and political environments, and cultural context change, that's the way we perceive art.

*The perception of time has changed, and that affects how we experience art. Even Beuys did performances that lasted the whole night, and people were eager to attend and enjoy them. But now, with the sheer number of events happening every night in places like Berlin, who has time to commit to something like that? Staying for an entire night at one event seems unrealistic, as there are ten other things to check out the same night. Another thing is that if young people encounter Fluxus for the first time*

*today, they won't find it revolutionary. The impact isn't the same, because so much in contemporary art has been influenced by those early art movements. Doing Dick Higgins's screaming performance just doesn't carry the same weight anymore – other things have already been built on those ideas.*

But what is revolutionary in our times, you might ask? I think we'd struggle to pinpoint something that truly is revolutionary. That's why I am curious – where does your interest come from? You mentioned you're writing a PhD on Fluxus. I would love to know more about what sparked your fascination with this subject.

*Fluxus? Probably from Poznań, so pretty early on. I think a seed was planted by Jarosław Kozłowski, but I wasn't particularly crazy about Fluxus back then. I knew about it, I knew that Kozłowski had worked with Beuys, but my interest was more in conceptual art. Then, in 2015, I was at an art residency in Vilnius. I can't say that I was initially interested to go there because of my interest in George Maciunas, who was Lithuanian, I just needed to come up with a project there. I started working on "Maciunas Laughter", and through the research I met people who were connected to Fluxus. And a year later, in 2016, when I moved to New York, I met some of them in person. Like Jeff Perkins, who was finishing back then a movie about George Maciunas. We became friends and he connected me with people from the Emily Harvey Foundation. I also met Alison Knowles, Yoshi Wada, and others. So that experience was a link to my early influence at Jarosław's studio. That's briefly my Fluxus story, but everyone has their own. For me, it's primarily about the people. I became and remained interested in Fluxus because of the individuals who created it and the connections and conviviality they shared. These relationships were really special. It has certainly influenced my work, along with other conceptual things, but those Fluxus people... There was something incredible about them. Sadly, many have passed, both in Europe and the US, so this feels like the last moment to really engage with the core members of Fluxus. The anti-institutional aspect of their work also resonated with me. I have always been interested in escaping the mainstream, and I have been trying to convince young people aspiring to be artists that there are other ways of being in the art works than just aiming for the blockbuster galleries. Of course, it's nice, but there are different art worlds within the Art World. And Fluxus, I think, created one of those unique worlds for themselves.*

## **Annika Kahrs**

*How do you see your connection to Fluxus? If there is any, because there are also different opinions.*

I am not surprised that someone mentioned me - that's for sure. Of course, my work is influenced by Fluxus, but the way I work wasn't at the very beginning with the intention to push Fluxus somehow further. It was more that curators and other people connected my work to Fluxus, which I accepted and recognized as a meaningful connection. This has enriched my work and helped me to understand its context better. From that I delved deeper doing my own research. But at the beginning it was not intentional. I think the strongest connection people see is in the way I work with music, or how I approach music in my work. I've been working as a professional artist for about 12 years. I graduated in 2012. And over that period

of time people have pointed out again and again that connection to Fluxus in my work. And I've been awarded the George Maciunas award, and had a show at Kunstverein Wiesbaden, both of which have strong connection to Fluxus. So, this association that people draw is something that happens to me a lot, and I can see that and obviously it makes me happy. While I wasn't very aware of it at the beginning, it's clear that my work aligns with Fluxus.

*What kind of elements of that do you see in yourself, in your work, that you can refer to?*

I am neither a composer nor musician, but I think the strongest connection to Fluxus is in how I incorporate music, and the way I use elements of performance and collaboration in my work. There is often an element of humor as well. The first time I used music, performance and video was in my work "Strings" from 2010. The video shows a string quartet playing the first bars of Beethoven's Opus 18n No. 4 in C Minor. After a few minutes they stop the music and change seats and therefore instruments and notation. They do this four times so each musician plays each instrument and a score. In that consequence the music being played changes dramatically and falls apart. That's definitely something that comes from a Fluxus tradition. I think the experimental, sometimes humorous approach in my work reflects a certain playfulness working with music. Although my approach to music has a certain playfulness, this does not mean that my artistic approach to music is not professional. I collaborate with a composer, Louis d'Heudières, who does all the compositions and arrangements for my work, because my background is rooted in the visual arts, not composition. So I think the way I work with music is blending professional and non-professional, introducing playful and humorous elements, with a strong emphasis on collaboration. For me, those elements are always connected.

*Thinking about Fluxus, particularly its historical aspect, there's a lot of debate whether it has finished with Maciunas or if it's an ongoing thing, considering that some artists are still active and Fluxus pieces continue to be explored. Are there specific elements or works from the Fluxus oeuvre that you still find particularly interesting or engaging?*

It would be a shame to pick just one. I think there are so many different elements and artists that I like. It really depends. It also depends on the work I am engaged in at the time. Even though my approach can be quite spontaneous, I still do a lot of research as well. So while one aspect of my work is tied to music and performance, I also engage deeply with scientific research in other projects. So that's like a different dimension of my art. And it often involves two or three years of research and collaboration, even with scientists. Last summer, we held a performance series within the framework of an exhibition about Nam June Paik's musical works. I particularly enjoyed working on his "Symphony for 20 Rooms" that had never been realized before.

*Where was it?*

It was in Dortmund, at the Museum Ostwall, and it was a beautiful show. It was great to see so many works I hadn't seen before, along with numerous research and collaborators. It was very inspiring. But they specifically invited us to work on that never realized piece. I really enjoyed that experience. Along with TinTin Patrone, Andy Ingamells and Louis d'Heudières, we performed every weekend for three or four weeks. Each performance incorporated elements of collaboration, music,

robots, and space. Integrating aspects of Paik's into our own creations.

*Can you say something about it more? How did you approach it?*

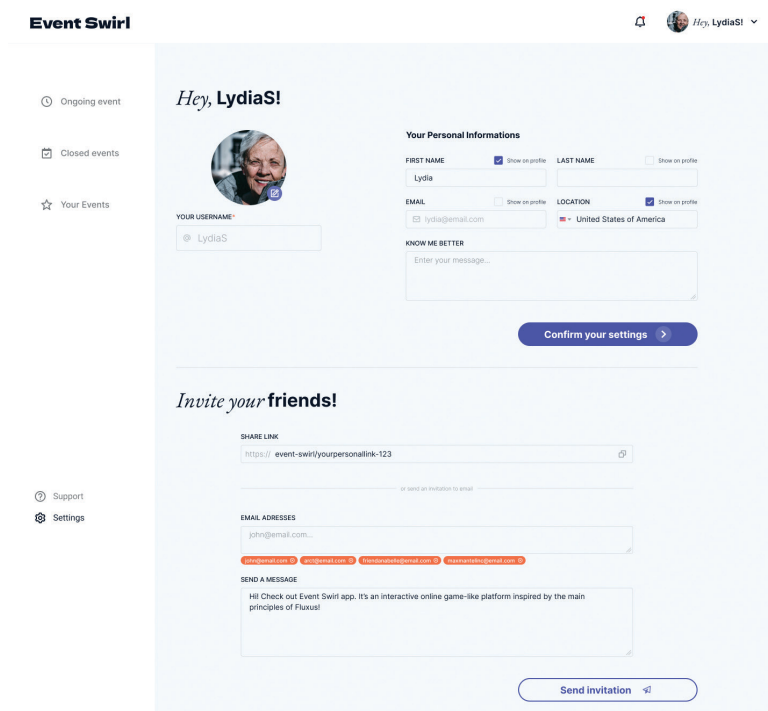
We didn't directly follow the performance instructions for one of his rooms. One exhibition space showed a big drawing he made outlining what should happen in each room. What we basically did was take a less direct approach, which is something I often do when I refer to another artist's work. I focus on that one element that inspires me and I go from there. And I can go very far away from the original work of art. I worked with four performers from Dortmund, who created live performances linked to their daily routine. We had a detailed schedule of what each performer heard during one day and incorporated that into the performance. For me it was all about a collaboration with people from the city and about the city they are living in.

Andy Ingamells is a great artist and performer, his inspiration came from Paik's idea to use the moon as a canvas. He invited members of the astronomers club to imagine what would actually be needed for using the moon as canvas, including all technical requirements. During the performance they used a microphone with a three-second delay, which made it difficult to understand, as you heard two voices simultaneously. Andy also used turntables and played two records slowly by hand. The three-second delay was meant to simulate the time it takes for radio waves to travel to the moon and back. TinTin Patrone worked with a robot, which was also connected to one of Paik's performances. And Louis d'Heudières did a performance connected to Wagner and beer brewing, which was very Fluxus in spirit. It was quite joyful. We ate cheese and drank beer. And to sum it up, our ideas all came from Paik's thoughts. We didn't start with a blank page. I discovered so much amazing material early in my career that has shaped and influenced my approach. Even though I work with various elements, the impact of Fluxus is still significant and integral to my practice.





## 1) Sign up and invite your friends / Zarejestruj się i zaproś znajomych:



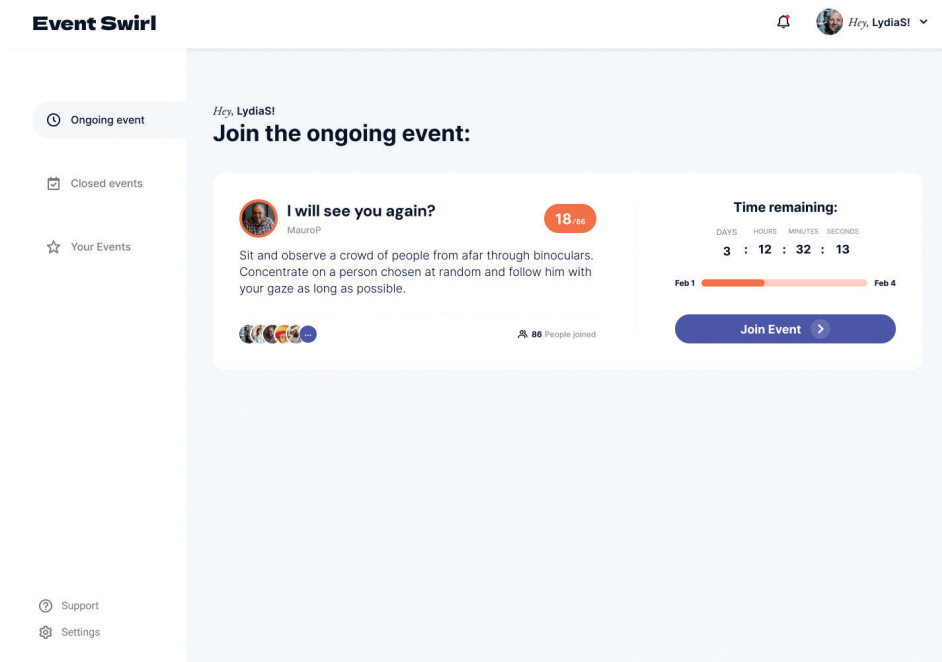
The screenshot shows the 'Event Swirl' registration and invitation interface. On the left is a sidebar with navigation links: 'Ongoing event', 'Closed events', 'Your Events', 'Support', and 'Settings'. The main content area is titled 'Hey, LydiaS!' and features a profile picture of a woman. Below the picture is a 'YOUR USERNAME' field with the value 'LydiaS'. To the right is a 'Your Personal Informations' section with fields for 'FIRST NAME' (Lydia), 'LAST NAME' (empty), 'EMAIL' (lydia@email.com), and 'LOCATION' (United States of America). There are checkboxes to 'Show on profile' for each field. Below this is a 'KNOW ME BETTER' section with a text input field. A 'Confirm your settings' button is at the bottom right of the form. Below the form is an 'Invite your friends!' section with a 'SHARE LINK' field containing 'https://event-swirl/yourpersonallink-123'. There is also a 'SEND A MESSAGE' section with a text input field containing a pre-written message. A 'Send invitation' button is at the bottom right of the invitation section.

You will be asked to provide your personal data. You can decide whether you want to make them public. In this step you can also invite your friends (but you can also do that later on).

Zostaniesz poproszony o podanie swoich danych osobowych. Możesz zdecydować, czy chcesz je upublicznić. W tym kroku możesz również zaprosić znajomych (ale możesz to zrobić również później).

## 2)

### a) You can join an ongoing event / Możesz dołączyć do trwającego wydarzenia:

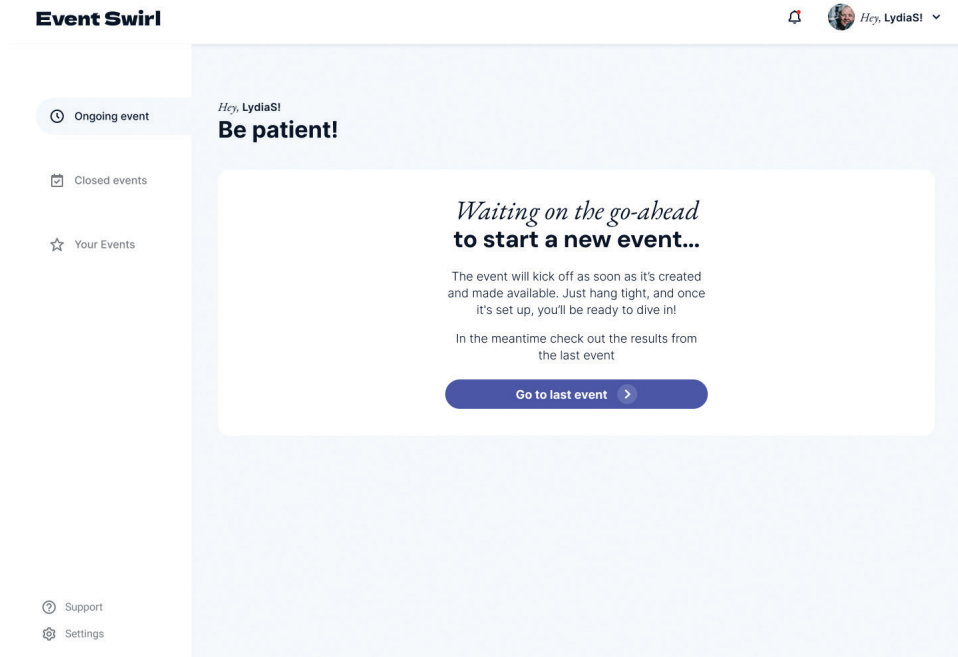


The screenshot shows the 'Event Swirl' ongoing event interface. On the left is a sidebar with navigation links: 'Ongoing event', 'Closed events', 'Your Events', 'Support', and 'Settings'. The main content area is titled 'Hey, LydiaS!' and features a 'Join the ongoing event:' section. Below this is a card for an event titled 'I will see you again?' by MauroP. The card includes a description: 'Sit and observe a crowd of people from afar through binoculars. Concentrate on a person chosen at random and follow him with your gaze as long as possible.' There is a 'Time remaining:' section with a progress bar showing '3 : 12 : 32 : 13' (Days, Hours, Minutes, Seconds) and a 'Join Event' button. The card also shows '86 People joined'.

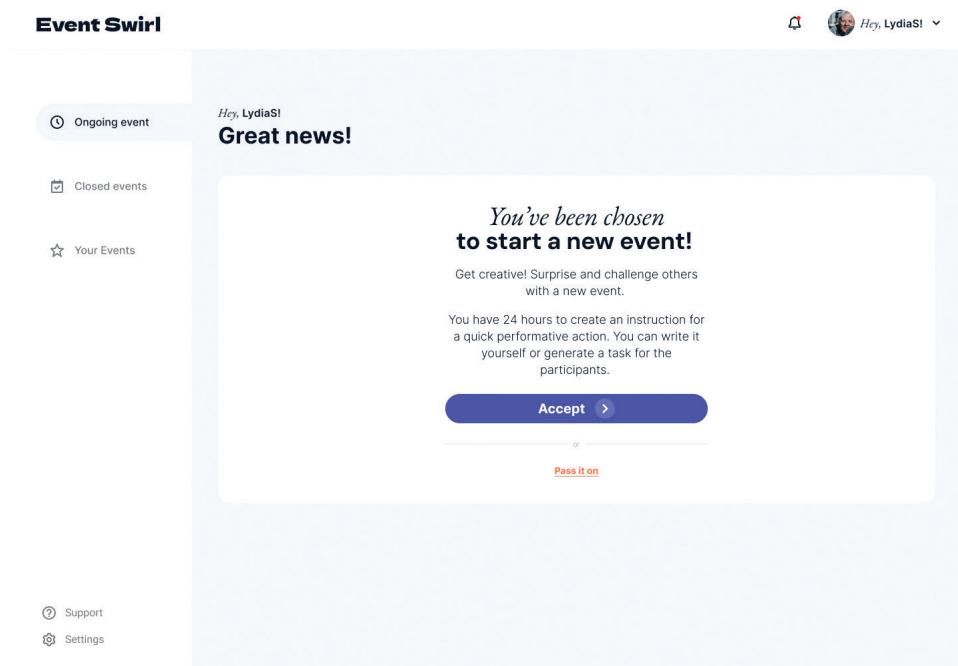
On your right you will always see how much time is left to the end of the event. One can set up an event from 12-72 hours.

Po prawej stronie zawsze zobaczysz, ile czasu pozostało do końca eventu. Można ustawić wydarzenie na 12-72 godziny.

b) If there is no ongoing events you will have to wait until the new event is created / Jeśli nie ma żadnych trwających eventów, trzeba będzie poczekać, aż nowe wydarzenie zostanie utworzone.



c) It may be you to be chosen to create a new event! / Być może to właśnie Ty zostaniesz wybrany/a do stworzenia nowego eventu!



### 3) Create your event. / Stwórz nowy event.

The screenshot shows the 'Set up your Event' form in the Event Swirl application. The form is titled 'Set up your Event' and includes a 'Go back to the list' link. It has a 'Generate' button and a list of instructions: 1. Set up instructions for an event (up to 250 characters), 2. Share it with others, and 3. Anticipate their response. There are input fields for 'SUBJECT' (with placeholder 'Enter your event subject') and 'INSTRUCTIONS FOR AN EVENT' (with placeholder 'Enter your directive...'). A 'Set a time range' section shows three buttons: '24h', '48h' (which is highlighted with a red border), and '72h'. At the bottom, there is an 'Accept & Share' button and a link 'Resign & Pass it on'.

You can also read some provided tips / Możesz również przeczytać kilka podanych wskazówek:

The screenshot shows a modal titled 'More inspirational tips' with a close button. It contains seven numbered tips for creating an event:

- 1. Start with a simple idea or action.**

Think of an everyday activity or a unique concept. Examples: pouring water, making sound, touching object, imagine a cloud.
- 2. Keep it minimal.**

Your instruction should be concise, but it should leave space for interpretation and creative execution.

**Example:**

Too detailed:	Better:
Pour 100 ml of water to a tall glass and stir it three times with a spoon.	Pour water into a glass and stir.
- 3. Use clear, accessible language.**

Even when you write about abstract ideas. It should be easy to understand, with no jargon or complex theories.

**Example:**

Touch the floor and listen to the sound.
- 4. Invite interpretation.**

Write instruction that allows for multiple interpretations by different people. This encourages creativity and makes each performance of the score unique.
- 5. Embrace chance and the everyday.**

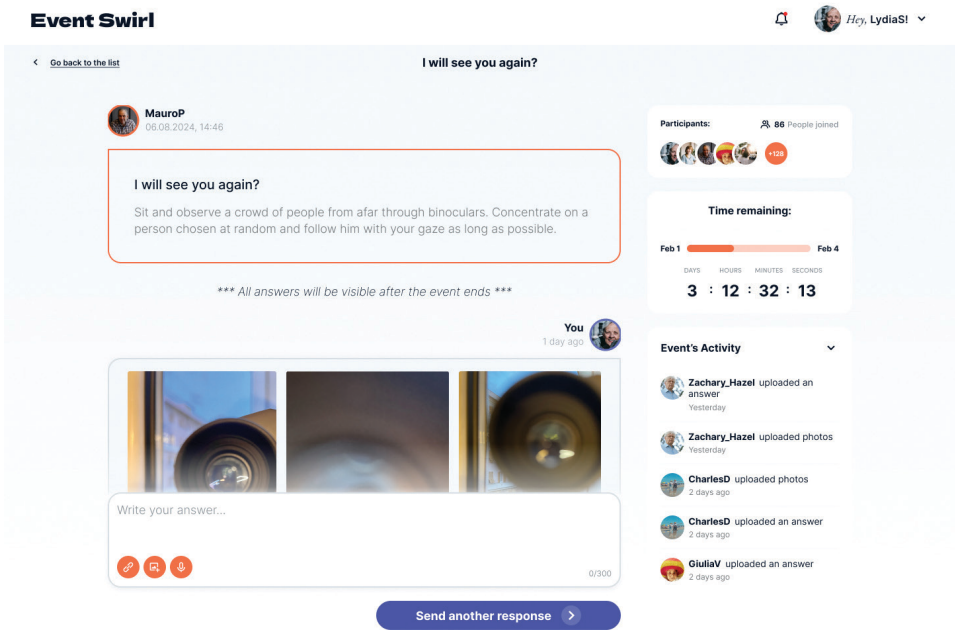
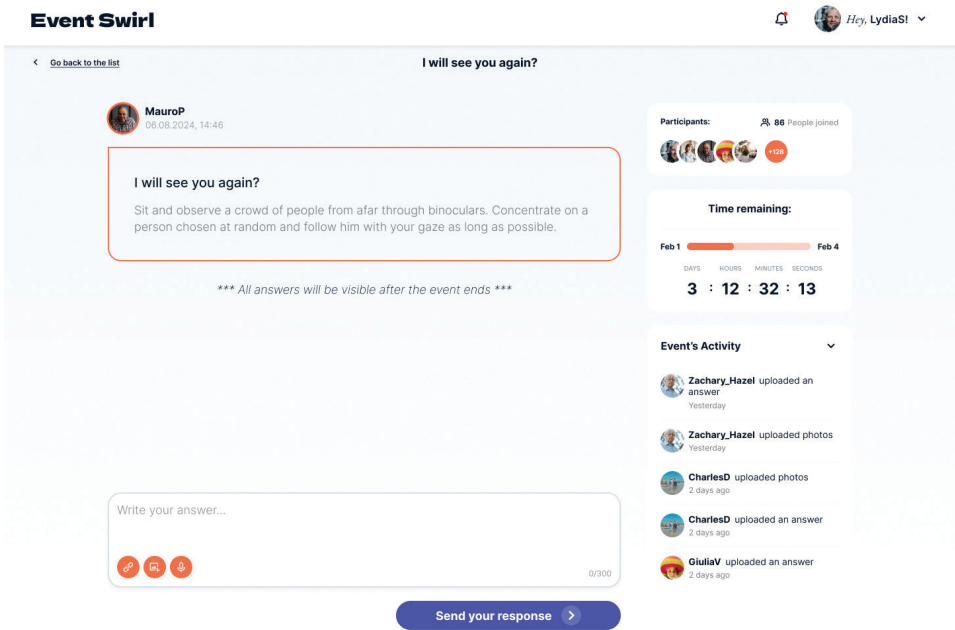
Incorporate elements of unpredictability or the mundane to the score to connect art with everyday life.

**Example:**

Watch the boiling water.
- 6. Focus on experience over outcome.**

The Event doesn't need to result in a spectacular outcome. The experience or process of performing/doing an action is often the point, not its result. The uploaded documentation is more to see how other people approach certain task rather than being a polished work of art. Think about it more as of a reels/shorts that last 24h than a properly designed post on social media.
- 7. Share and perform it!**

4) After creating an event, you will see an event panel with all its participants, but at this point other contributions are invisible. / Po utworzeniu partytury wydarzenia zobaczysz jego panel ze wszystkimi uczestnikami. W tym momencie inne wpisy będą niewidoczne.





5) You will see all the replies to the score once the event is finished. / Po zakończeniu wydarzenia zobaczysz wszystkie odpowiedzi dotyczące eventu:

Event Swirl

Hej, LydiaS1

Go back to the list

WALKING BACKWARDS FORWARD

JeffP

08.08.2024, 14:46

WALKING BACKWARDS FORWARD

CharlesD

2 days ago

Reversing the text produces, "drawkcab drawrof gniklaf"

I have chosen to translate the reversed text as literal instructions to execute.

Draw cab: Easy enough. I'm feeliny lazy though so I'll have it done by stable diffusion instead and attach the renders below.

Draw Rof: In Icelandic, a "rof" is a break, severance, or rupture


Gink Law: Rather than draw a foolish or contemptible law I will list one that i Find particularly contemptible. It is still currently illegal for healthy individuals seeking to donate their kidneys out of altruism to be in any way compensated for their act of goodwill. This is obviously to prevent a disproportionate amount of poor Americans from rushing to give their kidneys way for quick cash. I suggest offering compensation in the form of an income-bracketed tax break to compensate for this problem.

9

7

35

Leave your reaction



3


6

20

Leave your reaction

Zachary\_Hazel

Yesterday



Reversing the text produces, "drawkcab drawrof gniklaf"

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Leave your reaction

Participants:

86

People joined

Time remaining:

Feb 1

DAYS

HOURS

MINUTES

SECONDS

Feb 4

3

:

12

:

32

:

13

Event's Activity

GiuliaV

reacted on the answer of Zachary\_Hazel

48 seconds ago

CharlesD

reacted on the answer of Zachary\_Hazel

2 minutes ago

You

reacted on the answer of Zachary\_Hazel

10 minutes ago

Zachary\_Hazel

uploaded an answer

Yesterday

Zachary\_Hazel

uploaded photos

Yesterday

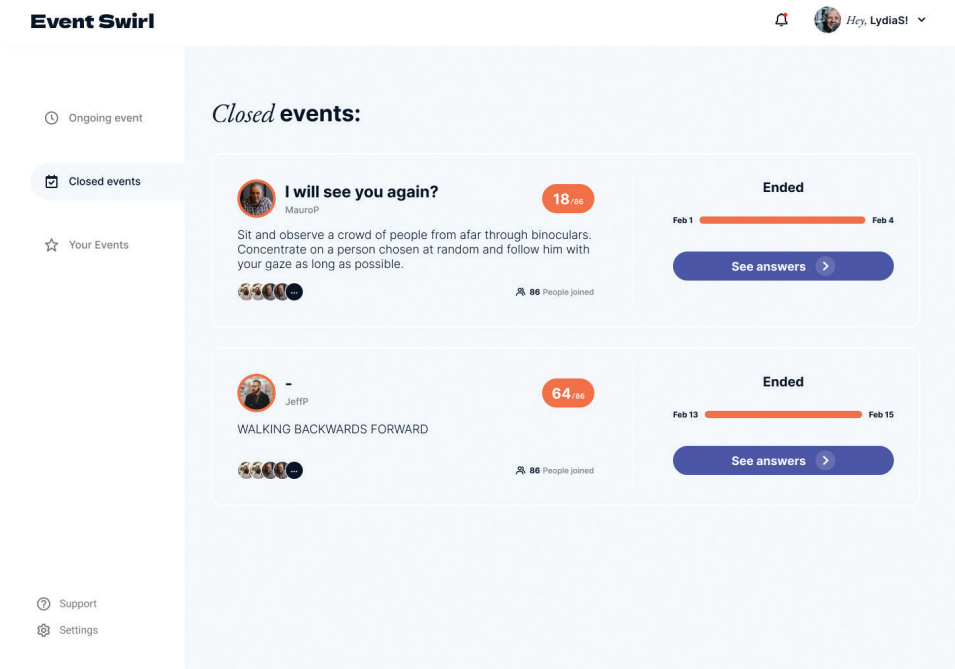
CharlesD

uploaded photos

2 days ago

93

6) Closed events will appear and could be viewed for a limited amount of time under the dedicated bookmark / Zamknięte wydarzenia będą wyświetlane przez określony czas i będzie można je przeglądać pod dedykowaną zakładką:



# Detailed instruction how to use an application is available here / Szczegółowa instrukcja korzystania z aplikacji dostępna jest tutaj:

🕒 Ongoing event

📅 Closed events

☆ Your Events

🔗 Support

⚙️ Settings

## How to start?

1. Sign up to an Event Swirl App by entering your email address and setting a password.
2. Click "Create New Account" and verify your email address through a code sent to you.
3. Set up your profile by choosing your username and uploading a profile picture.
4. Provide your personal information. You can choose whether it will be visible in your profile or not.
5. Invite your friends by sharing the available link by email.

[How to start?](#)

[What is an Event?](#)

[How to create a New Event?](#)

[How to join the Event?](#)

## How to create a New Event?

1. After completion of an event, one person from the Event Swirl network is automatically and randomly chosen to create a new one.
2. Chosen person may or may not accept the challenge.
3. If not, the person is asked to delegate the task to a person of their choice. The person may accept the vent or delegate it to the next one, until there is someone who accepts the challenge.
4. If a person accepts the challenge, they have 24 hours to create a new event.
5. This event is send out to all members of the network who decide whether they participate in an event or not.
6. The documentation of performed action will be visible to everyone in the chat.

## What is an Event?

An Event consists of written score for a performative action and the executions of that score by other participants. To start an event one person creates a set of instructions or guideline that outline an action or situation that can be interpreted and performed by anyone. It can be a direct task or more abstract directive. The "score" does not have to necessarily result in a traditional performance. They could be enacted or simply exists as conceptual ideas. The emphasis is on an interpretation of the instruction. Relatively short time for a response encourages to use resources available at hand, and thus it often challenges one's view on art and life.

It is inspired by a format of Fluxus Event Scores. Fluxus begun in 1960s as a network of artists and composers who shared similar attitude towards art. As a vibrant international community, Fluxus by blurring the division between art and life, tried to push the boundaries of traditional art forms, and encouraged audiences to reconsider their views on art.

Some of the noble artists connected with Fluxus are: Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, George Brecht, Ben Vautier, Emmett Williams, or Ben Paterson.

Event Score is the most iconic format of Fluxus work (initiated by George Brecht) was the written instruction for a performative action (often based or simple gesture or on the contrary, quite abstract, haiku like one); meant to exist similarly to musical score as a notation that could be perform/done by anyone repeatedly.

## Examples of the Event Scores:




**"Make a salad."** (*"Preposition"*, 1962 by Alison Knowles)

**"In a closed room passed over 2 hours in silence. (They may do anything but to speak)"** (*"<music for two players II>"*, 1963 by Mieko Shiomi)


**"Please wash your face"** (*"Instruction no.2"*, 1965 by Benjamin Paterson)

## How to join the Event?

1. After signing up you will see on your dashboard an ongoing event. You may join in or wait for a new one.
2. Information about the new event will appear in your notifications. By clicking on it, you may accept or decline the challenge.
3. After accepting it (joining in), you will have a certain time to realize the event. The time is set by the author of the event and may differ from 12 to 72 hours. You should upload your files within designated timeframe (you will see how much time is left on the timeline).
4. Your response to the event may be done by using photos (jpg.), video (mp4.), sound (mp3.), or text.
5. You can follow the activity of every member of the community, but the final results of their actions (uploaded files) will have been visible after the event finishes.
6. You are able to react to other people responses or send them a message.

**Event Swirl**   

*Hey, LydiaS!*



YOUR USERNAME\*

@ LydiaS


**Your Personal Informations**

FIRST NAME☒ Show on profile


Lydia

LAST NAME☐ Show on profile

EMAIL☐ Show on profile

 lydia@email.com

LOCATION☒ Show on profile

 United States of America


KNOW ME BETTER

Enter your message...

Confirm your settings >

*Invite your friends!*



SHARE LINK



https:// event-swirl/yourpersonallink-123 

or send an invitation to email

EMAIL ADDRESSES


john@email.com...

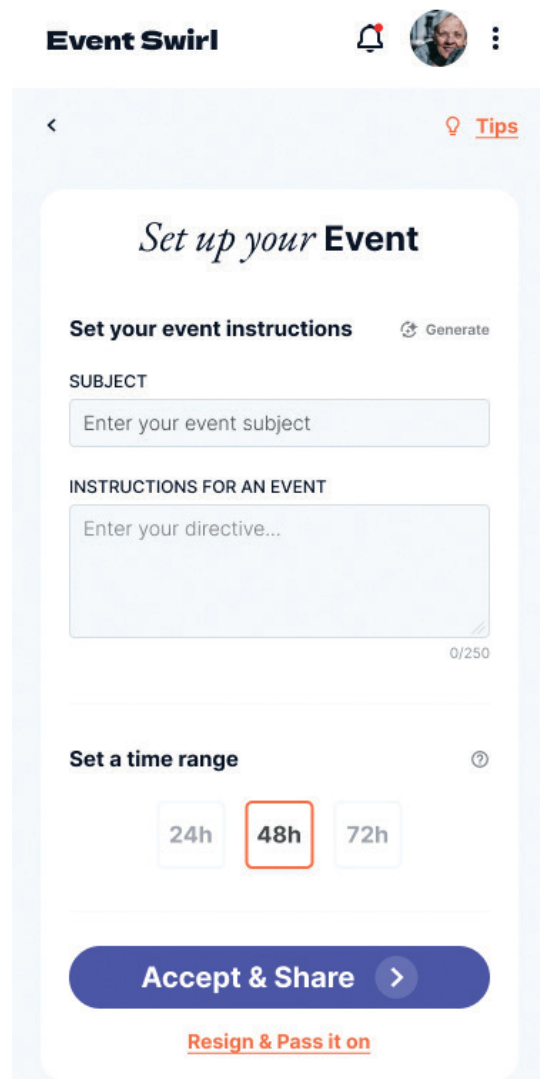
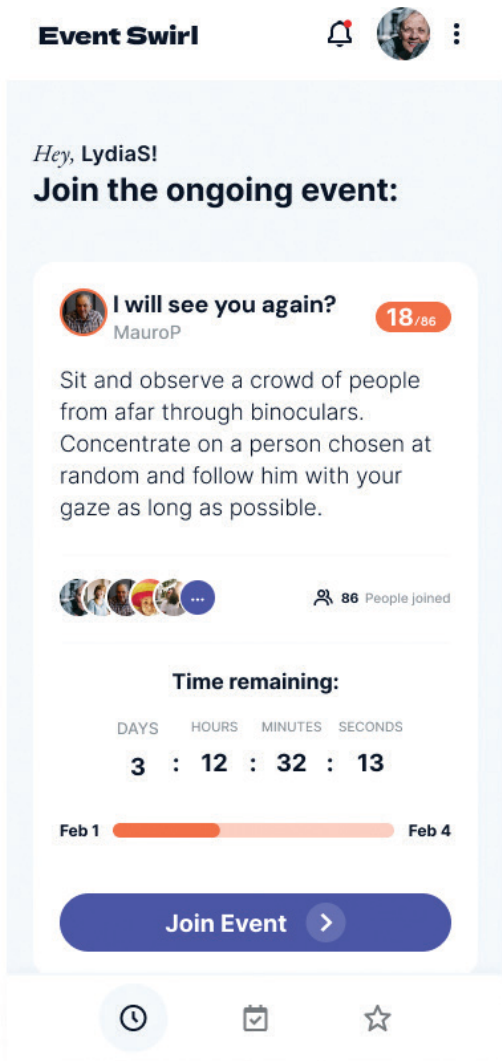
john@email.com  arct@email.com 

friendanabelle@email.com  maxmantelinc@email.com 

SEND A MESSAGE

Hi! Check out Event Swirl app. It's an interactive online game-like platform inspired by the main principles of Fluxus!

Send invitation 





1



2



3



4



5



6



7





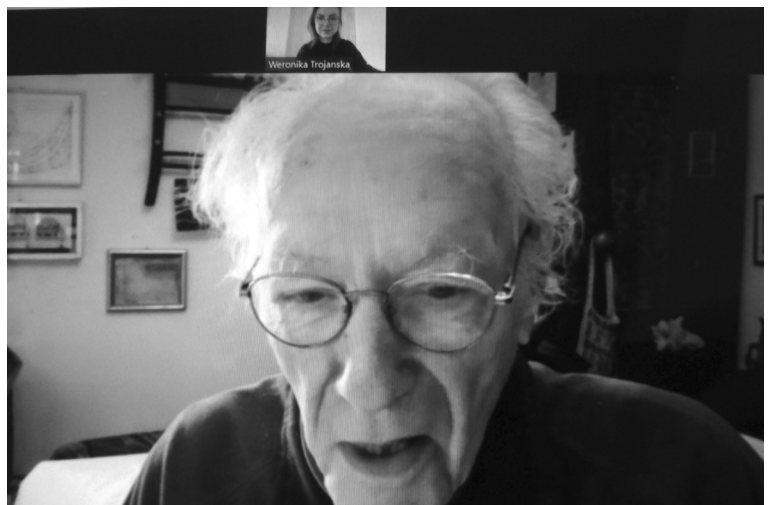
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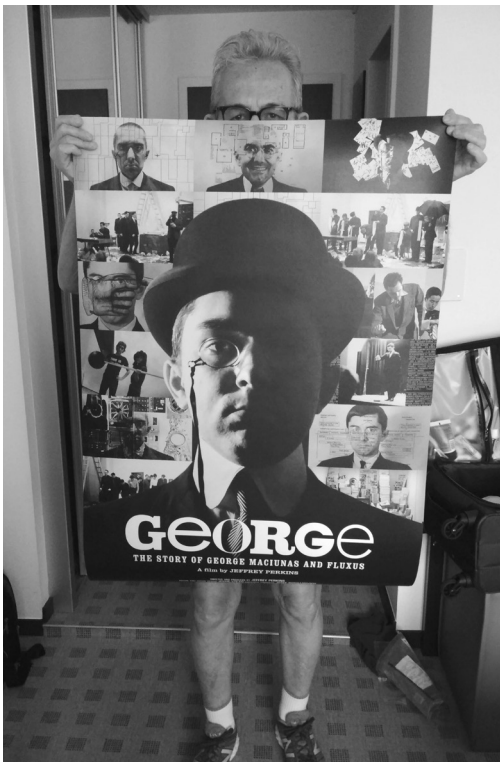


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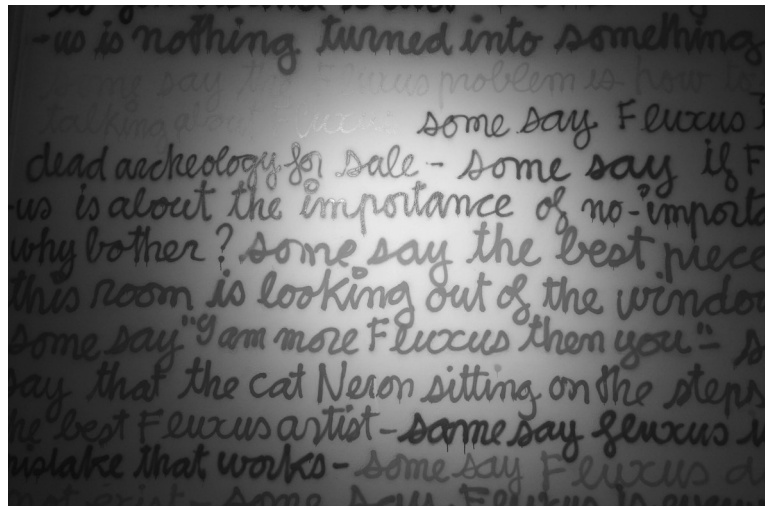


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