

Manifesto I

FLUXUS: MAGAZINES, MANIFESTOS, MULTUM IN PARVO

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Manifesto:

2. To affect, or bring to a certain state, by subjecting to, or treating with, a flux. "*Fluxed* into another world."
3. *Med.* To cause a discharge from, as in purging. flux (flŭks), *n.* [OF., fr. L. *fluxus*, fr. *fluere*, *fluxum*, to flow. See FLUENT; cf. FLUSH, *n.* (of cards).]
1. *Med.* **a** A flowing or fluid discharge from the bowels or other part: esp., an excessive and morbid discharge: as, the bloody *flux*, or dysentery.
b The matter thus discharged.

Purge the world of bourgeois sickness,
"intellectual", professional & commercialized
culture, PURGE the world of dead
art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art,
illusionistic art, mathematical art, —
PURGE THE WORLD OF "EUROPANISM" !

2. Act of flowing: a continuous moving on or passing by, as of a flowing stream; a continuing succession of changes.
3. A stream; copious flow; flood; outflow.
4. The setting in of the tide toward the shore. Cf REFLUX.
5. State of being liquid through heat; fusion. *Rare.*

PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD
AND TIDE IN ART,
Promote living art, anti-art, promote
NON ART REALITY to be
fully grasped by all peoples, not only
critics, dilettantes and professionals.

7. *Chem & Metal.* **a** Any substance or mixture used to promote fusion, esp. the fusion of metals or minerals. Common metallurgical fluxes are silica and silicates (acidic), lime and limestone (basic), and fluorite (neutral). **b** Any substance applied to surfaces to be joined by soldering or welding, just prior to or during the operation, to clean and free them from oxide, thus promoting their union.

FUSE the cadres of cultural,
social & political revolutionaries
into united front & action.

George Maciunas' choice of the word Fluxus, in October 1960, as the title of a magazine for a projected Lithuanian Cultural Club in New York, was too good to let go when that circumstance evaporated. In little more than a year, by the end of 1961, he had mapped out the first six issues of a magazine, with himself as publisher and editor-in-chief, that was scheduled to appear in February 1962 and thereafter on a quarterly basis, to be titled *Fluxus*.

The projected magazine might well have provided a very interesting overview of a culture in flux. Maciunas planned to include articles on electronic music, anarchism, experimental cinema, nihilism, happenings, lettrism, sound poetry, and even painting, with specific issues of the magazine focusing on the United States, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and Japan. Although its proposed contents reflected a contemporary sensibility, its emphasis on the publication of essays on those topics suggests that the magazine would have been relatively conventional in presentation. But the seeds of the actual *Fluxus* magazine that was eventually published were nonetheless present, even in the first issue of the projected magazine, since it was intended to include a brief "anthology" after the essays.

This proposed anthology would have drawn on the contributors to La Monte Young's publication *An Anthology*, the material for which had been amassed in late 1960 and early 1961, and which George Maciunas had been designing since the middle of 1961. In fact *Fluxus* was "supposed to have been the second *Anthology*." But the anthologized works projected for the first *Fluxus* were radically different from the articles, since they were printed artworks and scores—as were most of the pieces in *An Anthology*, which was finally published by La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low in 1963.

After interminable delays, *Fluxus 1* finally appeared late in 1964. But during this three-year gestation period it had evolved dramatically and become virtually an anthology of printed art pieces and flat, or flattened, objects; the essays had practically vanished. At the same time, the appearance of the idiosyncratic graphic design that Maciunas was to impose on Fluxus gave the magazine a distinctive look. The presentation of *Fluxus 1* had also become more radical, for not only did it consist of diverse formats and small objects, often in envelopes, but these components were also fastened together with three large metal bolts. In addition, the magazine was mailed in a wooden box branded or stenciled with its title. The quarterly magazine had also been superseded by the concept of Fluxus yearboxes. Whether or not *Fluxus 1* lived up to George Maciunas' intention that it "should be more of an encyclopedia than...a review, bulletin or even a periodical," it certainly met the original definition of the word "magazine": a storehouse for treasures—or explosives. This format was also very influential, affecting the presentation of several "magazine" ventures later in the decade. (The original meaning of "magazine" was exemplified even more emphatically by the truly three-dimensional successors of *Fluxus 1*, such as the *Fluxkit suitcases* and the *Flux Year Box 2*, containing innumerable plastic boxes, film loops, objects, and printed items.)

When George Maciunas consulted his dictionary he found that the word "flux" not only existed as a noun, a verb, and an adjective, but also had a total of

seventeen different meanings. At the head of his *Fluxus...Tentative Plan for Contents of the First 6 Issues*, issued late in 1961, he rearranged five of these definitions to explain the use of the term Fluxus, bringing to the fore the idea of purging (and its association with the bowels). By 1963, these selected dictionary definitions of “flux” could no longer encompass the developing intentions of Fluxus, and Maciunas began to promote three particular senses of the word: purge, tide, and fuse—each not amplified by his own comments. These amounted to new working definitions of the three senses, and were refined to the point where they could finally be incorporated into a collaged, three-part *Manifesto*, together with photostats of eight of the dictionary definitions.

The aims of Fluxus, as set out in the *Manifesto* of 1963, are extraordinary, but connect with the radical ideas fermenting at the time. The text suggests affinities with the ideas of Henry Flynt, as well as links with the aims of radical groups earlier in the century. The first of the three sections of Maciunas’ *Manifesto* reveals that the intent of Fluxus is to “PURGE the world of dead art...abstract art, [and] illusionistic art...” What would be left after this purging would presumably be “concrete art,” which Maciunas equated with the real, or the ready-made. He explained the origins of concrete art, as he defined it, with reference to the ready-made objects of Marcel Duchamp, the ready-made sounds of John Cage, and the ready-made actions of George Brecht and Ben Vautier.

The first section of the *Manifesto* also states that Fluxus intends to purge the world of such other symptoms of “bourgeois sickness” as intellectual, professional, and commercialized culture. In one of a series of informative letters to Tomas Schmit, mostly from 1963 to 1964, Maciunas declares that “Fluxus is anti-professional”; “Fluxus should become a *way of life* not a *profession*”; “Fluxus people must obtain their ‘art’ experience from everyday experiences, eating, working, etc.” Maciunas is for diverting human resources to “socially constructive ends,” such as the applied arts most closely related to the fine arts, including “industrial design, journalism, architecture, engineering, graphic-typographic arts, printing, etc.” As for commercialism, “Fluxus is definitely against [the] art-object as [a] non-functional commodity—to be sold and to make [a] livelihood for an artist.” But Maciunas concedes that the art-object “could temporarily have the pedagogical function of teaching people the needlessness of art.”

The last sentence of this section of the *Manifesto* reads: “PURGE THE WORLD OF ‘EUROPANISM!’” By this Maciunas meant on the one hand the purging of pervasive ideas emanating from Europe, such as “the idea of professional artist, art-for-art ideology, expression of artists’ ego through art, etc.,” and on the other, openness to other cultures. The composition of the group of Fluxus people was exceptional in that it included several Asians, such as Ay-O, Mieko Shiomi, Nam June Paik, and Yoko Ono—as well as the black American Ben Patterson and a significant number of women—and in that it reached from Denmark to Italy, from Czechoslovakia through the United States to Japan. Interest in and knowledge of Asian cultures were generally increasing in the West at the time, and, in this context, are evidenced by Maciunas’ tentative plans in 1961 for a Japanese issue of *Fluxus*, which would have included

articles relating to Zen, to Hakuin, to haiku, and to the Gutai Group, as well as surveys of contemporary experimental Japanese art. (Joseph Beuys rather missed the point when he altered the 1963 *Manifesto* in 1970 and read: “Purge the World of Americanism.”)

The second section of the *Manifesto*, which initially related to flux as “tide,” is really the obverse of the first: “PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD AND TIDE IN ART. Promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART REALITY to be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals.”

Maciunas’ third section was “fuse,” and read: “FUSE the cadres of cultural, social & political revolutionaries into [a] united front & action.” Inevitably most of Maciunas’ time was spent trying to fuse cadres of *cultural* revolutionaries, though not all the Fluxus people saw themselves in this way. One of his tactics was the employment of the term Fluxus beyond the title of the magazine as a form of verbal packaging, whereby Fluxus people would benefit from collective promotion.

Toward this end, Maciunas established *Conditions for Performing Fluxus Published Compositions, Films & Tapes*, which ruled that a concert in which more than half of the works were by Fluxus people should be designated a Fluxconcert, whereas in a concert where fewer than half of the works were by Fluxus people, each Fluxus composition should be labeled “By Permission of Fluxus” or “Flux-Piece” in the program. In this way, “even when a single piece is performed all other members of the group will be publicized collectively and will benefit from it,” for Fluxus “is a collective never promoting prima donnas at the expense of other members.” Maciunas, therefore, was for the “collective spirit, anonymity and Anti-individualism,” so that “eventually we would destroy the *authorship* of pieces and make them totally anonymous—thus eliminating artists’ ‘ego’—[the] author would be ‘Fluxus.’”

Two years after the 1963 *Manifesto*, George Maciunas produced another manifesto, significantly different in tone. But in this new statement Henry Flynt’s ideas once again seem evident. Maciunas introduces the topic of “Fluxamusement,” which appears to be an adaptation of Flynt’s “Veramusement,” one of the “successive formulations of [Flynt’s] art-liquidating position.” While Maciunas still aspires “to establish artists nonprofessional, nonparasitic, nonelite status in society” and requires the dispensability of the artist, the self-sufficiency of the audience, and the demonstration “that anything can substitute [for] art and anyone can do it,” he also suggests that “this substitute art-amusement must be simple, amusing, concerned with insignificances, [and] have no commodity or institutional value.”

Later in the year, in a reformulation of this 1965 *Fluxmanifesto on Fluxamusement*, Maciunas added that “the value of art-amusement must be lowered by making it unlimited, massproduced, unobtainable by all and eventually produced by all.” He further states that “Fluxus art-amusement is the rear-guard without any pretension or urge to participate in the competition of ‘one-upmanship’ with the avant-garde. It strives for the monostructural and non-theatrical qualities of [a] simple natural event, a game or a gag.”

The 1963 *Manifesto*, with its talk of purging and revolution, did not include any mention of amusement or gags, and yet the element of humor was not something introduced suddenly with the 1965 manifestos; it had been an integral part of Fluxus from its beginnings. Talking to Larry Miller in 1978, George Maciunas observed: "I would say I was mostly concerned with humor, I mean like that's my main interest, is humor... generally most Fluxus people tended to have a concern with humor." (Ay-O summed up the matter concisely when he said: "Funniest is best that is Fluxus.")

In this same interview, Maciunas made another intriguing remark, explaining that Fluxus performances—or concerts or festivals—came about first because they were "easier than publishing," and second "as a promotional trick for selling whatever we were going to publish or produce." Even as early as the falloff 1963 he was able to say that festivals "offer [the] best opportunity to sell books—much better than by mail."

However, in spite of these beginnings, one might say that ultimately the purest form of Fluxus, and the most perfect realization of its goals, lies in performance or, rather, in events, gestures, and actions, especially since such Fluxus works are potentially the most integrated into life, the most social—or sometimes, anti-social, the obverse of the same coin—and the most ephemeral. And they are not commodities, even though they may exist as printed prescriptions or "scores." But when such scores and other paraphernalia are encountered in an exhibition, rather than activated and experienced through events, a vital dimension of Fluxus is missing. There are some Fluxus works that can be experienced simply by looking, because they work visually, and there are others that can be performed by an individual as mind games. But many more works require that they be performed through physical activity by one or more persons, with or without onlookers. When works or scores such as these are seen or read in an exhibition, experience of them can only be vicarious.

But Maciunas also said, in 1964, that "Fluxus concerts, publications, etc.—are at best transitional (a few years) and temporary until such a time when fine art can be totally eliminated (or at least its institutional forms) and artists find other employment." He also affirmed that Fluxus people should experience their everyday activities as "art" rather than such phenomena as Fluxus concerts, for "concerts serve only as educational means to convert the audiences to such non-art experiences in their daily lives."

Although Maciunas himself, even by 1973, was referring to the years 1963-68 as the "Flux Golden Age," Fluxus concerts, publications, and so on, however "transitional," actually lasted more than "a few years," for Fluxus did not come to an end until the death of George Maciunas in 1978. By that time the exact composition of the Fluxus group had changed many times: some had left early; some had returned; others had arrived late.

A few Fluxus people and neo-Fluxus people believe Fluxus is still a flag to follow, while others believe that "Fluxus hasn't ever taken place yet!" George Brecht may have put the matter to rest recently, when he declared that "Fluxus has Fluxed." But the elusive sensibility that emerged from a world in flux in the

late fifties and early sixties, and which George Maciunas labeled Fluxus, has weathered the seventies and eighties and is fortunately still with us. Today it goes by many names and no name, resisting institutionalization under the name Fluxus even as it did while Fluxus packaged pieces of it decades ago.