

Maciunas

Eccentric Artist and Seminal Influence

S. E. WILMER

ABSTRACT

Fluxus was an inspirational movement based in New York in the 1960s that consisted of a group of more than fifty loosely connected artists from various disciplines, who made significant experiments to develop music, conceptual art, visual art, performance art, video, and film. They participated in eclectic concerts, media, performative events, and installations in the USA and Europe. In this paper, I want to examine how George Maciunas, a Lithuanian exile and its nominal organiser, had a seminal influence on avant-garde art in America and Europe and, despite avowing an open attitude towards what could be art, he also enforced draconian ideas about what could be included and what could not. In particular I want to emphasize his influence in Scandinavia because most of the literature on Fluxus has focused on his work in the USA and Germany.

KEYWORDS

Maciunas, Fluxus, avant-garde, performance, music, conceptual art, Scandinavia, Lithuania

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Fluxus was an inspirational movement based in New York in the 1960s that consisted of a group of more than fifty loosely connected artists from various disciplines, who made significant experiments to develop music, conceptual art,¹ visual art, performance art, video, and film. They participated in eclectic concerts, media, performative events, and installations in the USA and Europe. In this paper, I want to examine how George Maciunas, a Lithuanian exile and its nominal organiser, had a seminal influence on avant-garde art in America and Europe and, despite avowing an open attitude towards what could be art, he also enforced draconian ideas about what could be included and what could not. In particular I want to emphasize his influence in Scandinavia because most of the literature on fluxus has focused on his work in the USA and Germany.

Maciunas owed something special to his upbringing in Eastern Europe, to the influence of his Lithuanian father and Russian-born mother, and to his friendships with other Lithuanians, such as Almus Šalčius,² with whom he ran the AG gallery in New York in 1960, Jonas Mekas, who would work alongside him as a major experimental film maker, and Vytautas Landsbergis, a friend from primary school in Kaunas, who would become a professor of music in Vilnius Academy and later lead the Lithuanian struggle for independence.

George Maciunas, who was originally called Jurgis, grew up in a bourgeois household in Kaunas, but his family fled to Germany when the Soviet Union invaded Lithuania during the Second World War. They had a difficult life during the war, while Jurgis' father worked in Frankfurt, almost being killed by the Allied bombing in Germany on several occasions. After the war they lived for a couple of years in a German camp for displaced persons, where his father got a job as an electrician with the US army and his mother worked as a domestic.

¹ In conceptual art, the idea is more important than the material form that it takes, and may consist only of a written description or set of instructions.

² Almus Šalčius was the nephew of Petras Šalčius, the founder of the Lithuanian farmers' cooperative movement in the 1930s. He was a fellow professor at the University in Kaunas with Maciunas's father and influenced both George Maciunas and Jonas Mekas with his ideas for cooperative working methods.

When they were allowed to emigrate to the US because they couldn't go back to Lithuania, they settled in Long Island and his father lectured on electrical engineering at the City University of New York. George studied art, graphics, architecture, and art history in New York before working as an architect in Manhattan and helping to develop the Fluxus movement. Like some others associated with Fluxus, he attended experimental music classes at the New School of Social Research in the late 1950s that were given by John Cage and Richard Maxfield.³

Creation of Fluxus

In 1960, Maciunas and Šalčius decided to lease an art gallery for six months at a prestigious venue on Madison Avenue and 73rd Street in Manhattan. With his mother as receptionist and secretary and using the name Fluxus for the first time, Maciunas exhibited the early work of Yoko Ono as well as that of experimental music composers such as La Monte Young, Jackson Mac Low, and Dick Higgins. Unfortunately, he ran out of money after only six months and had to declare the gallery bankrupt. During the following year, Maciunas escaped his creditors by taking a job as an architect and graphic designer at a United States Air Force base in Wiesbaden, where he organised the first major international Fluxus event, with concerts held over several weekends by a number of artists including Nam June Paik, Emmett Williams, Maciunas, and various other performers including Arthur Køpke from Denmark and Lars Werle from Sweden. Many of the performances seemed silly or absurd to the audiences, such as Maciunas' aleatoric *In Memoriam to Adriano Olivetti* which, according to his biographer, Thomas Kellein, "exploited the numbers produced by an adding machine. During performances of this piece, the musicians have to read the numbers and respond to them in time to a metronome, with prescribed reactions, usually raising and lowering a bowler hat."⁴

This particular work was restaged several times over the years and varied from one performance to another. For example, Owen Smith described its performance in Dusseldorf in 1963 as follows: "In this, performers are each assigned a number as well as a specific action that they are to perform. Using the adding-machine tapes as a score they execute their assigned action each time their number occurs [including] the following actions: opening and closing an umbrella, blowing a whistle, sitting and standing, bowing, saluting and pointing."⁵

The press reactions, including a German TV feature, were generally hostile, gleefully quoting the graffiti plastered on one of their posters that "the lunatics have escaped".⁶ To make matters worse, some of the composers of electronic music, who performed in the first concert, abandoned the festival

³ Maciunas attended Maxfield's rather than Cage's classes. See *The Avant Garde from Futurism to Fluxus*, Jonas Mekas Visual Art Centre, 2007, p. 164.

⁴ Thomas Kellein, *The Dream of Fluxus*, Edition Hansjörg Mayer, London and Bangkok, 2007, p. 43.

⁵ Owen Smith, "Developing a Fluxable Forum: Early Performance and Publishing" in *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman, Academy Editions, Chichester, West Sussex, 1998, p. 4.

⁶ Kellein, *Dream of Fluxus*, p. 65.

after disagreeing with the artistic aims of Maciunas and the other artists.⁷ Following the Wiesbaden festival, Maciunas organised Fluxus concerts in quick succession over the next year in London, Copenhagen, Paris, Dusseldorf, Amsterdam, and Nice as well as at Carnegie Hall in New York, as he tried to provide performance and publishing opportunities for a variety of artists.

The common theme of Fluxus was to undermine the commercial value placed on art, to produce random, cheap, ephemeral, and frequently comical art works and events, to break down the barrier between arts forms, and between art and life, and to propose that “everyone is an artist”.⁸ Maciunas did not like abstract art, and instead he promoted concrete art. Differentiating between the two, he wrote, “Now in Music let’s say if you have [an] orchestra play, that’s abstract because the sounds are all done artificially by musical instruments. But if that orchestra is trying to imitate a storm say, like Debussy, or Ravel does it, that’s illusionistic now. It’s still not realistic. But if you’re going to use noises like the clapping of the audience or farting or whatever, now that’s concrete.”⁹ Julie Henault further explains the notion of concrete art as follows: “Why paint a tomato? Just take the tomato and leave as it is! Concretism comes from life itself, without any modifications.”¹⁰ According to Ken Friedman, who led Fluxus West, the twelve main characteristics of Fluxus were: Globalism, Unity of Art and Life, Intermedia, Experimentalism, Chance, Playfulness, Simplicity, Implicativeness, Exemplativism, Specificity, Presence in Time, and Musicality.¹¹

Fluxus in Scandinavia

Like the inaugural Wiesbaden event in August 1962, the Fluxus concert in Copenhagen two months later was a multi-day¹² event. Called Festum Fluxorum, it took place mainly in a deconsecrated church (Nikolaj Kirke) under the auspices of Det Unge Tonekunstnerselskap (DUT), the Danish section of the International Society for Contemporary Music. New music enthusiasts had been prepared for the festival’s novelty by Nam June Paik’s experimental concert in Copenhagen during the previous year. Festum Fluxorum featured “action music” on the first night by Alison Knowles, Dick Higgins, Emmett Williams, George Maciunas, Wolf Vostell, Arthur Køpke, and “a minor army of Danish performers.”¹³ The Danish press helped to attract a packed audience of spectators and journalists including Danish Radio by publishing photos of a destroyed piano from the Wiesbaden concert and a manifesto by Maciunas on concrete art that promised to “unite the cadres of cultural revolutionaries from

⁷ See Owen Smith, “Developing”, p. 8.

⁸ See, for example, Ken Friedman, “Fluxus and Company,” in *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman, Academy Editions, Chichester, West Sussex 1998, p. 247.

⁹ J. Hendricks, ed. *Fluxus etc. Addenda 1* (catalogue), INK., New York, 1983, p. 20.

¹⁰ Julie Henault, “From America to Lithuania: The Fortunes of the Development of the Fluxus Movement in a Post-Communist Country”, *maitrise*, 2005, p. 22.

¹¹ For a discussion of these characteristics, see Friedman, “Fluxus and Company”, pp. 244-251.

¹² See Eric Andersen’s errata comments (following p. 132) in Petra Stegmann, ed., *The Lunatics are on the Loose...: European Fluxus Festivals 1962-1977* (Potsdam: DOWN WITH ART!, 2013), that the last two of the planned six concerts did not feature Fluxus artists.

¹³ Stegmann, *The Lunatics*, p. 131.

all parts of the world.”¹⁴ On the second day, the performers were reinforced by the American Jazz musician Ben Patterson and the young Danish composer Eric Andersen. The press reporting was merciless after the first night, and Ib Nørholm, who would later become one of Denmark’s leading composers, and had initiated the invitation with help from Knud Pedersen and Arthur Køpke, called the festival “the boldest, funniest and scariest thing he has ever experienced.”¹⁵

After the Danish festival, according to the editors of a book on Fluxus, “the international Fluxus train moved on, but as was the case in most cities and countries, Fluxus left behind a local presence as well.”¹⁶ According to Peter van der Meijden, “Starting in March 1963, Denmark saw a long series of locally organised performances that were sometimes, but not always, called ‘Fluxus’ and had some, but not all, of the characteristics of the Fluxus events organised by Maciunas.”¹⁷ For example, Køpke, Andersen, and other Danish artists like Henning Christiansen and Knud Pedersen participated in “dozens of other concerts and festivals until the end of the 1960s. From 1962 to 1966 alone, between 25 and 30 events took place.”¹⁸ In 1964 Andersen performed in Fluxus-style events all over Europe. The effect of these events was “to involve the spectators directly and individually in the action” indicating “a radical break with the traditional division between stage and auditorium and fostered a preference for performing among the audience.”¹⁹

Fluxus concerts also took place in Stockholm and Oslo, organised by Bengt af Klintberg. The Stockholm event was more modest than in Copenhagen because Maciunas was too ill to attend. Klintberg recalls, “The three Fluxus concerts which were arranged in Stockholm in March 1963 attracted only a handful of visitors and had no immediate influence on the Swedish cultural climate. It was not at all like in Germany and Denmark, where the concerts had been well-attended and caused a scandal and made a deep impact on a whole generation of young artists.”²⁰ By contrast, the Oslo concert organised for students by Klintberg had more impact, especially because of a piece called *Concert for Two Heads of Lettuce* in which two heads of lettuce exploded. Klintberg confessed, “The reaction was vehement; I had to leave the concert hall through a back exit and returned to Stockholm by train the same night.”²¹ Despite their apparent failure, Ken Friedman has commented on the importance of Klintberg’s impact as a Fluxus artist: “Bengt af Klintberg was a pioneering artist in performance and intermedia. In the early 1960s, his work helped to

¹⁴ Stegmann, “Lunatics”, p. 129.

¹⁵ Stegmann, “Lunatics”, p. 124.

¹⁶ Stegmann, “Lunatics”, p. 11.

¹⁷ Tania Øram and Jesper Olsson, *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975* (Leiden: Brill/Rodopi, Leiden, 2016), p. 506.

¹⁸ Stegmann, “Lunatics”, p. 11.

¹⁹ Stegmann, “Lunatics”, p. 11.

²⁰ Bengt af Klintberg, ed., *Svensk Fluxus/ Swedish Fluxus*, (Rönnells Antikvariat: 2006) p. 7.

²¹ Bengt af Klintberg, “Fluxus Games and Contemporary Folklore: on the Non-Individual Character of Fluxus Art”, p. 118, https://monoskop.org/images/9/97/Klintberg_Bengt_af_1993_Fluxus_Games_and_Contemporary_Folklore.pdf

shape central aspects of the event structure and performance art around the world.”²²

Fluxus in Lithuania

In addition to Western Europe, Maciunas also wanted to reach across the Iron Curtain to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union. He contacted Vytautas Landsbergis, a boyhood friend from Kaunas, and tried to interest him in Fluxus by sending him numerous tapes and materials which Landsbergis used in his music classes and lectures in Vilnius. He also invited Landsbergis to contribute some art work as well, and Landsbergis responded with several ideas including a comical Fluxus work called *Yellow Piece*, which was advertised in the poster for the 1963 Carnegie Hall concert but not performed. According to Landsbergis, “*Yellow Piece* was a piano piece, played not on the keyboard, but played with the pedals, which are usually yellow. Yellow, like brass, and the bottom of the piano is of course always yellow as well. The piano is black, the bottom is yellow, the strings are yellow. And the performer crawled on the floor to the piano in order to touch the pedals, and then played the pedals, and at the end of the piece, he did what he wanted for some time; slower, more sound or less sound, from the free improvisation he did one thing or another. Of course, the visual perception was also interesting – what was this crazy person doing – and the final point should be a kick at the bottom of the piano. Then, of course, the sound would be very harsh, rough, and all the strings would sound – tutti, a mighty tutti – and my idea was that if we had some special equipment and preparation, there could be a fountain of beer as well... From the piano, it could run through the audience, at the same time as this step and great sound.”²³

Landsbergis also organised a Fluxus concert with his music students in Vilnius in 1966 with many enigmatic and ludic features. Announcing the concert, Landsbergis wrote: “Anti-art is the only real, folk, and social manifestation of man’s aesthetic sense. It’s real because it does not try to create a meaningless illusion of reality, intellectual puzzle or vain abstraction... We will re-find aesthetic pleasure in such simple actions as drinking water, spitting into a well, the natural act of blowing our nose... Today there will be several experimental non-art pieces performed here.”²⁴

Fluxus Eclecticism

As Fluxus developed over the years, the events moved further away from the format of music concerts towards all kinds of performances, installations, performance art, experimental video and film, and the unconventional packaging and distribution of artworks. Although based in New York, the outreach of Fluxus

²² Ken Friedman, “The Case for Bengt af Klintberg”, *Performance Research*, vol. 11, 2006, (pp. 137-144), p. 137.

²³ Landsbergis interview by Petra Stegmann, curator, *Fluxus East* (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007), p. 73.

²⁴ Petra Stegmann, curator, *Fluxus East* (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007), p. 209.

was international, staging events all over North and South America, Europe, and Asia, and attracting such international figures to their ranks as Joseph Beuys, Nam June Paik, and Yoko Ono.

Maciunas maintained a data base and mailing list of the artists associated with the movement and created an elaborate chart to indicate the influences on these individual artists. Amongst those that Maciunas identified as having a creative impact on Fluxus were the Dadaists, Marcel Duchamp, John Cage, and the Happenings of Allan Kaprow. Like the Dadaists, Fluxus adopted an anti-bourgeois aesthetic and the idea of nonsensical and absurd artworks. Like Duchamp, Fluxus used the notion of the readymade, or found objects that were given an artistic value. Like John Cage, who was loosely associated with Fluxus, they applied a radical approach to musical performances that featured prepared pianos and other altered musical instruments and aleatoric methods (in other words, performances that were determined by decisions made by chance, such as in Maciunas' *In Memoriam to Adriano Olivetti* that used the arbitrary numbers from an adding machine to determine the sequence of performative actions). Like the Happenings by Allan Kaprow and others that were taking place contemporaneously, Fluxus created surprising interventions in galleries, concert halls, and public spaces in which the audience often became participants and their performances often involved the destruction of musical instruments.

Maciunas also worked closely with his friend Jonas Mekas, providing the graphics for Mekas's film magazine *Film Culture* and later collaborating on performances with Mekas at Mekas' Film-Makers' Cooperative and Film-Makers' Cinemathèque (which developed into the Anthology Film Archives), where they encouraged the early film work of Andy Warhol, Jack Smith, Richard Foreman, and Carolee Schneeman. For example, Maciunas encouraged Foreman in his first productions for his Ontological-Hysteric theatre company, using live actors interacting with live and recorded video.²⁵ Foreman remembers the late 1960s as formative for his subsequent career, "Basically, Mekas and Maciunas were my two gurus... They taught me how to make my own way in the world."²⁶

In characterising the Fluxus movement, Maciunas differentiated the role of the artist from the Fluxus non-artist: "To justify [the] artist's professional, parasitic and elite status in society, he must demonstrate [the] artist's indispensability and exclusiveness."²⁷ By contrast with the Artist, "Art-amusement must be simple, amusing, unpretentious, concerned with insignificances, require no skill or countless rehearsals, have no commodity or institutional value. It is the fusion of Spike Jones, Vaudeville, gag, children's games and Duchamp."²⁸

Maciunas as Ideologue

²⁵ Roslyn Bernstein and Shael Shapiro, eds., *Illegal Living* (Vilnius: Jonas Mekas Foundation, 2010), pp. 90-98.

²⁶ Bernstein and Shapiro, *Illegal Living*, p. 90.

²⁷ Quoted in Emmett Williams and Ann Noel (eds) *Mr. Fluxus. A Collective Portrait of George Maciunas 1931-1978* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd.), 1997, p. 18.

²⁸ Quoted in Williams and Noel (eds), *Mr. Fluxus*, p. 18.

Ideologically, one can see Soviet and socialist influences on Maciunas. Influenced by his study of early Soviet Art theory and urged by Joseph Beuys to clarify the aims of Fluxus for an event in Dusseldorf,²⁹ Maciunas drafted a Fluxus Manifesto in 1963 that revealed his attempt to proletarianize art and promote equality amongst artists from all parts of the world. "PURGE the world of bourgeois sickness, intellectual, professional & commercialized culture, purge the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art, illusionistic art, serial art, purge the world of Europeanism [i.e., Eurocentrism]. PROMOTE a revolutionary flood & tide in art. Promote living art or NON ART-REALITY to be fully grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals. FUSE the cadres of cultural, social & political revolutionaries into a united front & action."³⁰

Emmett Williams, who was associated with Fluxus but was expelled by Maciunas, complained that Maciunas was trying to link Fluxus with the communist party against the wishes of other members of Fluxus. Not only was his approach anti-capitalist but it was also communitarian and internationalist. Maciunas tried to create a community of artists who could collaborate on projects and live in communal housing. In addition to his graphic design and architectural work and organising and publicizing artistic events, much of his energy was devoted to providing communal housing for artists in SoHo in Greenwich Village, such as in lofts and co-ops, and creating possible places of artistic retreat in the United States and abroad.

In addition, Maciunas brought to Fluxus a somewhat arbitrary totalitarian approach, attempting on various occasions to purify the movement of extraneous influences or wayward personalities. He wrote, "such [a] front must constantly be purged of saboteurs & 'deviationists' just like the communist party."³¹ Williams, commented, "There were so many purges, through the years, that most of us were in effect outsiders looking in, a situation that in general provoked more laughter than tears."³²

Thus, although it was such a revolutionary movement that some of its affiliates called it a non-movement,³³ it was clearly motivated and partially controlled by Maciunas. Maciunas held extreme views on waste and complained bitterly about artists he considered to be wasteful including Allan Kaprow and his happenings (which he compared to baroque excesses), and Carolee Schneeman for her *Meat Joy* performance in which performers writhed on a floor filled with butchered meat. He also helped organise highly contentious boycotts of certain artists such as Stockhausen who came to the United States to perform in 1964 in an avant garde festival organised by Charlotte Moorman,

²⁹ Owen Smith, "Developing a Fluxable Forum: Early Performance and Publishing" in *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman, Academy Editions, Chichester, West Sussex, 1998, p. 6

³⁰ Maciunas to Friedman, 28 February 1967, quoted in Kellein, *Dream of Fluxus*, p. 117

³¹ Owen Smith, "Developing", p. 16.

³² Williams, "Introduction" in Williams and Noel (eds), *Mr. Fluxus*, p. 9.

³³ Emmett Williams referred to it as a "non-movement". Williams, "Introduction," p. 9. Owen Smith has argued, "This reality – that Fluxus arose out of circumstances rather than as the product of a predetermined strategy – is part of the reason why many have rejected and continue to reject the idea that Fluxus was a movement at all." Owen Smith, "Developing", p. 6.

calling it “cultural imperialism”.³⁴ However, as the other Fluxus artists were all radical in their practice and unwilling to be moulded into a single way of doing things, one could view Maciunas as a herder of cats rather than sheep, who would as easily desert him and perform in rival events or publish their work in alternative publications. According to Owen Smith, “Fluxus became a shifting group based around a core of works that were constantly being added to and changed as artists and performers did or did not participate with the group.”³⁵

Maciunas was constantly over-estimating what he could deliver and what he could afford. He relied on the cooperation of fellow artists who were also mostly impoverished, and frequently let him down. He was also plagued by ill-health and was consequently unable to meet deadlines. Maciunas never seemed to have much money and was extremely frugal with his expenses and eating habits. He was constantly running into debt because of his ambitious plans and avoiding creditors. In 1976, he suffered a punctured lung, several broken ribs and lost an eye when hired thugs beat him for not paying a bill. Much of what Maciunas tried to achieve fell short of his goals, and shortly before he died in poverty, he concluded in an interview about the Fluxus movement, “We came out to be a bunch of jokers.”³⁶

Despite his eccentricities, Maciunas had an important influence in organising artists at the time and his effect can still be recognised in the United States and Europe. In assessing Maciunas’ impact on the avant-garde, it is important to recognise that Fluxus did not remain static in its aims and projects but, as its name implies, was continually developing, changing, and experimenting with new methods and combinations of art forms.³⁷ Maciunas also became less dictatorial after the mid 1960s, facilitating the proliferation and continuing influence of Fluxus by allowing new forms of production and distribution, and encouraging regional outposts such as Fluxus West (Ken Friedman in California), Fluxus South (Ben Vautier in Nice), Fluxus East (Milan Knížák in Prague), and Fluxus North, led by Per Kirkeby, a well-known Danish artist in Copenhagen.

Maciunas: Success and Failure

Perhaps George Maciunas’ most high-profile event was a retrospective exhibition of Yoko Ono’s work at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York in 1971 that doubled as a peace demonstration against the Vietnam War. Titled *This is Not Here*, and advertised in a clever poster made by Maciunas of

³⁴ Many of the artists as well as the *New York Times* music critic were confused as to whether the boycott was real or part of the event. Allen Ginsburg was quoted as saying that he was picketing with his friend Maciunas, but he would be taking part in the event anyway. Joan Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist: The Improbable Life of Charlotte Moorman*, (MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.), 2014, p. 100.

³⁵ Owen Smith, “Developing”, p. 9.

³⁶ Quoted in Kellein, *Dream of Fluxus*, p. 9.

³⁷ Another form of Fluxus art was mail-art, where artists would write to each other or would all write to the same person from all over the world, sharing ideas, aspects of their life, etc. like an early form of Facebook. “It was created from Fluxus because it is connected to art-life and it is a way to avoid institutional means of communications between artists such as art galleries.” Henault, “From America”, p. 27.

overlapping images of Ono's and John Lennon's faces, it also featured Lennon as a guest artist as well as art work from other artists. It attracted a peace camp of 5000 people, as well as celebrity guests at the opening, such as Ringo Starr, Andy Warhol, John Cage, Bob Dylan, and Jack Nicholson, and was widely rumoured to be an occasion to bring the Beatles' band back together again.³⁸ Despite its success, Maciunas managed to upset Yoko Ono by billing himself as the designer of the exhibition rather than as producer, and for mismanaging the finances. Yoko Ono wrote Maciunas a six-page letter setting out her complaints "for padding the bills, [and] by taking more credit than you should."³⁹ Upset by Ono's complaints, Maciunas left the exhibition in a huff, refusing to communicate with her for the next five years.⁴⁰

Today, we can see that Fluxus arrived at a time when bourgeois art and the role of art in society were being questioned by numerous artists such as the Letterists⁴¹ and Situationists in France, the experimental music scene of John Cage and Richard Maxwell at the New School of Social Research, the Living Theatre, the Bread and Puppet Theatre, and the Pop Art of Andy Warhol in New York, the Vienna Actionists, Tadeusz Kantor and Cricot 2 (especially with its 1967 *Panoramic Sea Happening*) in Poland, and Joseph Beuys in Germany. Beuys joined the Fluxus movement with great enthusiasm in 1963, attributing all his artworks from 1947 to Fluxus, even though Fluxus had only existed for a couple of years by then.⁴² Although he moved away from them after a few years, Beuys continued to practice Maciunas' minimalist aesthetic and concern for socially constructive projects, promoting ecological politics and helping to found the Green Party in Germany in 1979. Beuys wrote about Fluxus, "The importance of our relationship – and this was the fundamental motivation of the entirety of the Fluxus movement – lay in the way we were involved in developing something for the future, something that was directly connected to human society... the form that Fluxus was trying to promote was first of all a form of openness."⁴³

More recently Fluxus aesthetics has influenced the Neue Slovenische Kunst and Emil Hrvatin (Janes Jansa) in Slovenia, Christoph Schlingensiefel in Germany, Group No 99 in Estonia, and Nomedas and Gediminas Urbonas in Lithuania. According to *Fluxus East*, the Urbonas duo "feel a particular affinity to Fluxus because of their concern for the community, negation of the aesthetic, and their praxis of playful intervention into public space."⁴⁴

Conclusion

The aesthetics of Fluxus have continued to resonate, especially in Denmark. According to Eric Andersen, "Denmark has hosted two major Fluxus manifestations: the Festival of Fantastics, in Roskilde in 1985 and Excellent, in

³⁸ George Harrison had also planned to attend the opening.

³⁹ See Kellein, *Dream of Fluxus*, p. 122.

⁴⁰ See Bernstein and Shapiro, eds., *Illegal Living*, p. 174.

⁴¹ Ben Vautier, for example, has acknowledged his debt to the ideas of Isou.

⁴² Kellein, *Dream of Fluxus*, p. 67.

⁴³ Quoted in Williams, *Mr. Fluxus*, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Stegmann, *Fluxus East*, p. 270.

Nikolaj in Copenhagen in 1992.”⁴⁵ The seven-day Festival of Fantastics, in which the city of Roskilde was taken over by a series of events, led to the creation of a Contemporary Art Museum there and to a flood of invitations from abroad: “One and all wanted to host Fluxus jubilees...and in the following year we circled the world to attend jubilees.”⁴⁶ In addition to those two Fluxus festivals, Andersen organised a three-day intermedia event in 1996 for Copenhagen’s “Cultural Capital of Europe” including “parachuting, helicopters, mountain climbing, live sheep and 500 singers walking on water.”⁴⁷

In 2007, the Vilnius Municipality established the Jonas Mekas Visual Art Center (JMVAC) and purchased a major Fluxus collection for a price of approximately five million dollars.⁴⁸ The collection, which consists of “about 2600 pieces, 2100 of which are unique and not found in other Fluxus collections”,⁴⁹ had been owned by the Lithuanian filmmaker Jonas Mekas. According to the Mayor of Vilnius, who promoted this enterprise in somewhat grandiose terms, “New York City has always been home to the avant-garde and two of its most influential figures have been Lithuanian. The international resonance of the Fluxus world that they created will provide the impetus for Vilnius to become the world’s center for the avant-garde.”⁵⁰

He has written and edited twenty books (five of which were about Finnish theatre) and was editor of *Nordic Theatre Studies* from 2017-2019. Among his latest books are *Performing Statelessness in Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan), 2018.

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⁴⁵ Eric Andersen, “What is...?”, <http://what-is-eric-andersen.net/PERFORMANCE-FESTIVAL-ODENSE.htm>

⁴⁶ Andersen, “What is...?”

⁴⁷ Stegmann, *Fluxus East*, p. 258. Also see Andersen’s description of the event in “What is...?”

⁴⁸ Skaidra Trilupaityte, “Guggenheim’s global travel and the appropriation of a national avant-garde for cultural planning in Vilnius”, *International Journal of Cultural Policy* Vol. 15, No. 1, February 2009, [pp. 123–138], p. 130.

⁴⁹ Trilupaityte, “Guggenheim’s global travel”, p. 130

⁵⁰ The process of welcoming Maciunas home began in the 1990s with a major international Fluxus exhibition in the Contemporary Art Centre in Vilnius in 1996 and subsequently the installation there of a permanent exhibit of a Fluxus cabinet.

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