

A CHILD'S HISTORY OF FLUXUS

by Dick Higgins

Long long ago, back when the world was young - that is, sometime around the year 1958 - a lot of artists and composers and other people who wanted to do beautiful things began to look at the world around them in a new way (for them).

They said: "Hey! - coffee cups can be more beautiful than fancy sculptures. A kiss in the morning can be more dramatic than a drama by Mr. Fancypants. The sloshing of my foot in my wet boot sounds more beautiful than fancy organ music."

And when they saw that, it turned their minds on. And they began to ask questions. One question was: "Why does everything I see that's beautiful like cups and kisses and sloshing feet have to be made into just a part of something fancier and bigger? Why can't I just use it for its own sake?"

When they asked questions like that, they were inventing Fluxus; but this they didn't know yet, because Fluxus was like a baby whose mother and father couldn't agree on what to call it - they knew it was there, but it didn't have a name.

Well, these people were scattered all over the world. In America there were George (George Brecht) and Dick (Dick Higgins) and La Monte (La Monte Young) and Jackson (Jackson MacLow) and

plenty of others. In Germany there were Wolf (Wolf Vostell) and Ben and Emmett (Ben Patterson and Emmett Williams) who were visiting there from America, and there was another visitor in Germany too from a very little country on the other side of the world, from Korea - his name was Nam June Paik. Oh there were more too, there and in other countries also. They did "concerts" of everyday living; and they gave exhibitions of what they found, where they shared the things that they liked best with whoever would come. Everything was itself, it wasn't part of something bigger and fancier. And the fancy people didn't like this, because it was all cheap and simple, and nobody could make much money out of it.

But these people were scattered all over the world. They sometimes knew about each other, but they didn't see each other much or often. And they spoke different languages and had different names for what they were doing, even when they were doing the same thing. It was all mixed up.

Well, La Monte had a pal - another George, George Maciunas: his name looked strange but sounded easy enough - "Ma-choo-nuss". And George Maciunas liked to make books. So La Monte said, "Let's do a book of-our kind of thing." And his friend Jackson agreed. And they did it. La Monte collected the things for the book, and George Maciunas put it onto pages, and after a while, they were able to take it to a printer and have it printed. They called

the book An Anthology which is a fun word for a collection. No fancy name. Not "A Fluxus Anthology", because Fluxus things weren't named yet. Just An Anthology. It was a beautiful book and you can still buy it and look at the beautiful, simple things in it - ideas and piles of words and ways for making your own life more wonderful. Well, it costs money to make books, and if you spend your money on one thing you can't spend it on another. George Maciunas had rented a beautiful big room in the fanciest part of New York City, and there he had an art gallery where Fluxus kinds of things were shown and shared or allowed to happen. But when there was no money to pay for all that, once the book was done, George Maciunas had to give up his AG Gallery, as he called it; and he decided to go to Germany. With him he took some big boxes all chockablock full of leftover things that La Monte and the others had collected, but which didn't fit into the Anthology.

George Maciunas' idea was to get together with the people in Germany who were doing the same kind of thing, and to do something like a book and something like a magazine - it would be printed every so often, and it would always change, always be different, always be really itself. It needed a name. So George Maciunas chose a very funny word for "change" - Fluxus. And he started taking Fluxus things to the printers in Germany, to make his magazine. To let people know about this kind of book, he decided to give some Fluxus

concerts there, so the newspapers would write about them and people would find out about his books. So in September 1962 the first of the Fluxus concerts happened in a little city where George Maciunas was living, in Wiesbaden, Germany (you say that - "Veess'-bodd-en"). Dick went there from New York, with Alison (Alison Knowles) his artist wife, and they took with them lots of pieces by other American people who had been finding and sharing Fluxus kinds of things.

The concerts certainly did get written about! They were on television too. Poor George Maciunas' mother! She was an old-fashioned lady, and when the television showed all the crazy things that her son George was doing at the Fluxus concerts, she was so embarrassed that she wouldn't go out of her house for two weeks because she was so ashamed of what the neighbors might say. Oh well, you have to expect that kind of thing. Actually some of the neighbors really liked the Fluxus concerts. The janitor at the museum where the Fluxus concerts were happening liked them so well that he came to every performance with his wife and children.

By and by other museums and public places wanted Fluxus concerts too. So Fluxus concerts happened next in England and Denmark and France. And new pieces kept being found or done - Fluxus people sent things from Japan and Holland and all kinds of places. Fluxus got famous.