

# The Fluxus Newspaper Enlivened an Exuberant Era With Absurd Reporting and Ebullient Layouts

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**There are those who say the *Village Voice*** — with its wide-ranging coverage of culture and politics, writers battling each other in print, essential apartment and Help Wanted classifieds, outré advertising, and provocative graphic design — was the Internet before the Internet. Well, another ink-and-paper contender for that dubious honor might be *The Fluxus Newspaper*, which featured a visual cacophony allied to an editorial absurdity that certainly chimes with the sizable chunk of the Information Superhighway that prizes dazzling eye candy and eyewash alike.

The paper was the brainchild of Cooper Union grad George Maciunas (1931-78), and all 11 issues of the publication have been gathered into a single volume, available from Primary Information. Other than a bit of back-cover commentary, the editors have let the fervent typography, snippets of news, Frankenstein-esque conglomerations of photos and clip art, mix-and-match quotations, promo listings for various purveyors of the Fluxus arts — “ROBERT WATTS: rocks in compartmented plastic box, marked by their weight \$3” — all presented in cleverly rambunctious layouts, do the talking. The first issue, dated January 1964, features a portrait of portly white guys with canes, top hats, and whiskers looking like a class reunion of robber barons, under the headline “NEW FLUXUS EDITORIAL COUNCIL.” On that issue’s last page, a row of passport-size photos of women with pronounced hairstyles foreshadow the bewigged band members on the Rolling Stones’ die-cut *Some Girls* album cover, from 1978. Such cultural ebbs and eddies flow through these black and white pages, with stolid diagrams from the past — one front page features an 1896 patent drawing illustrating some sort of mechanized hat “for executives, diplomats, businessmen, lawyers” — offset by the freewheeling ethos of the 20th century, such as a Fluxus concert at Carnegie Hall, which included “George Brecht: Symphony No. 3 ‘On the Floor’ (upon conductor’s signal orchestra falls off their chairs),” an event documented in photos in Issue No. 7.

**Maciunas encouraged artists, designers, musicians, and free thinkers of all stripes** to collaborate in musical, sound, theatrical, video, and/or street performances, to cull new concatenations of visual art from the surrounding culture, and to, as he proclaimed in 1963’s Fluxus Manifesto, “PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD AND TIDE IN ART ... to be fully grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals.” One wonders just how far into his cheek Maciunas had planted his tongue, since Fluxus relished the absurd *über alles*, welcoming such aesthetic provocateurs as mail-art virtuoso Ray Johnson, video

pioneer Nam June Paik, social shaman Joseph Beuys, one-time Velvet Underground percussionist Angus MacLise, and many other cultural rabble-rousers into its loosely regimented ranks.

The final issue arrived in 1979 as an irreverent send-off to Maciunas, who had died the previous year. A lengthy article on the front page reads like a Burroughs cut-up, including a reference to a farm in Massachusetts, where Maciunas spent his last years and welcomed like-minded spirits, including John Lennon and Yoko Ono:

Flux Pope George Maciunas died last year after collapsing with a heart attack at his summer palace in New Marlborough. Earlier doctors fought to save the 92 years old spinster after being beaten and gang raped. He was given the last rites and the Flux Council appealed for world-wide prayers for his life.

“She suffered horribly,” said a Scotland Yard man. “The people who did this were animals.”

A sobbing spokesman announced the news “with profound anguish and emotion.” Crowds wept in the main square outside the palace....

That last issue was boosted from the usual 4 pages to 16, in part because it was chock full of cheeky sympathy notices from Fluxus purveyors around the globe. The spirit and continuing legacy of Fluxus is well summed up by a missive in that farewell issue from Ben Vautier, a French Fluxus stalwart born in 1935, who name-checks various Fluxus stars using the wild 'n' wooly spelling, syntax, capitalization, and punctuation typical of the movement:

### **A short history of Fluxus.**

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1960 in a fog in Paris Filliou pisses on George Maciunas's Shoes they meet

1963 Wostell eats all George Maciunas salad by mistake they meet

1964 Malewitch reads about Maciunas in the Pavda they meet

1964 Marcel Duchamp fines all his pieces cut in two by George Maciunas they meet

1978 St Peter and God decide to give a Fluxus Concert in heaven and call to them Maciunas — they meet.

A fastidious editor might append a half-dozen “[sic]” notations to the above, but that was never the point. As Vautier hand-scrawled at the bottom of his typeset farewell, “PS: You can add more meetings.”

With its emphasis on bypassing galleries, disrupting concert halls, selling cheap multiples, and just having some fun amid the always long faces of the art world, Fluxus looked back to the Dadaists making mischief after World War I and forward to the DIY aesthetics and push-button gobbledygook of our own age of anxiety. ❖

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