George Maciunas, Architect

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I. Architect, Designer, Social Planner

George Maciunas had several careers in his short, active life. One of these was architecture. George was first of all an architect.

The art world has neglected George's work as an architect, social planner, and designer in favor of a dramatic but somewhat inaccurate role as the singular founder and chief impresario of Fluxus. This image is inaccurate for many reasons. The dramatic narrative represents Fluxus as a flying circus rather than a laboratory, or – even less accurately – as a group of willful geniuses brought together as an "art movement" by the single-minded impresario whose death in 1978 brought their communal work to a close. Even less accurately, Fluxus seems to become the cranky, cartoon version of an art movement in which George plays the part of a latter-day Andre Breton, flavored by touches of Tristan Tzara, Joseph Stalin, and Napoleon. The themes and variations behind these stories position George as sole founder and central figure in Fluxus.

Despite its dramatic charm, this story and its variations are misleading. Geore was a co-founder of Fluxus and one among several central figures.
The dramatic misrepresentation diminishes the rich virtues and qualities of the actual George Maciunas. It also diminishes the community of artists, architects, designers, and composers who worked together in Fluxus as a laboratory of intermedia, social creativity, art, and music. Most of all, it fails to capture the nature of a complex social network that was by turns both artistic and experimental.

In George's own mind, he was an architect. He had a vision of city planning, housing, and the distribution of social goods for the common well being of all citizens. He was a social planner. A deep, underlying vision formed the basis of George's work with Fluxus or his cooperative housing projects. While some of George's hypotheses and ideas were unworkable, his vision was profound. While his ideas about the nature of a good life never found expression in workable media, he practiced the life he preached in the best tradition of social experimenters from Thoreau to Gandhi, from the now vanished Shakers to the still-thriving Amish. George lived his theories. He tested them, changing his approach, modifying and expanding his views. If George had not died an early death from cancer in 1978, I am certain that he would have continued his experiments, finding ways forward and developing new projects to test and refine his ideas.

By the time that I met George in 1966, he was already quite different to the George Maciunas others described. He was not the mercurial, intolerant zealot that they sometimes portrayed. He was open-minded, easy to work with, and he supported what were then new approaches to Fluxus. People spoke to me about a George who demanded that everyone do things his way. I met a man whose most frequent expression was, "Do it yourself." Along with the advice to "do it" came the implicit understanding that each of us should find our own way forward, developing our own skills and thinking to get it done.

George did not agree with me on everything. George brought me into Fluxus when I was sixteen years old, and George often thought I could do things in a better way than I did. Even though George believed I ought to find my own way to do things, he gave me the advice that an experienced craftsman would give to a young colleague. Today, I see that he often gave me the advice I'd have given myself if I could travel back in time or write a letter from my present self to the young man I was then. Like George, though, I tried things full out. Some things worked and some didn't.

In a famous eulogy delivered to the Commons, Winston Churchill stated that we don't have the privilege of knowing in advance the results of our actions. We can never finally determine our historical legacy. Actions that seem grand at one moment appear foolish the next. Historians revise their views in the light of mounting evidence. What seems unworkable at one moment may prove to have been a valuable contribution while what seemed essential may prove to be a minor sidetrack.

Churchill's conclusion was that we must live according to our conscience. We do the best we can with what we have. That's the measure of a human being. George attained this admirable standard, demanding of himself as much as he asked of others. In the end, that is the measure of a human being.

II. Art and Anti-Art

Some artists separate work and life, manufacturing art as a kind of fungible commodity. While George and most of us in Fluxus found it impossible to separate art and life, some find it possible to do so.

The case of planning is different, along with its distant cousin, politics. We do not respect an architect who builds things she does not want to inhabit nor do we respect someone who plans a world for others in which he does not intend to live. Like Gandhi and the Shakers, George tried to live in the world he envisioned. This quality gave an authentic, ethical foundation to George's life and work.

Art was a distraction to George. He felt that art distracted the world from what it should be doing. As a result, he felt that he could revolutionize contemporary culture by attacking and overturning the social and economic patterns of art and music.

The straightforward way to achieve George's social goals would have been to follow a path blazed by such pioneering architects and designers as Buckminster Fuller. Fuller understood the decisive role of science, technology, and innovation in a future shaped by the long span of human history and the short length of a human life. He also understood the quarter-century time lag between many conceptual and technical innovations and their implementation in the artifacts of daily life. Because of this, Fuller was patient in a way that George was not, and he applied his effort to processes that would take a grip in ways different to the kinds of innovations that George attempted to create.

Nevertheless, George's ideas were not wrong and many of his contributions were pioneering. Some of George's ideas still echo today in ways that resonate with contemporary culture, reshaping and enlivening the world in which we live. Time scales and social factors made a difference, but that's a story to be told another time. Here, I consider George's work as a planner: planning social change through art or anti-art is difficult. What happens in the art world cannot bring about the massive social and cultural change that George hoped to achieve.

While the art market plays a large role in today's experience economy, most individual artists are insignificant in the social ecology of the market. This has always been then case. Artists who seem to be major cultural figures at one moment are forgotten a decade later. The average career for the hundreds of thousands of students that graduate each year with art degrees shows that most artists barely achieve local recognition in the world's satellite markets. The career attrition rate shows that most graduates today will leave art within a decade. Few achieve Warhol's fifteen minutes of fame, and most who do last little longer in the spotlight than their proverbial quarter hour. The reason for this is the nature and structure of art markets. The role of art in human culture is mediated by the social systems of the art world, and the economic structures of the art market control most of those systems.

George had the insight that one could change contemporary culture by revolutionizing the art world. Dadaists and Surrealists held this notion before him, as did the Futurists and others. Without a broader social and economic theory of art in society, it was easy to believe that this might be so. Regardless, bringing large-scale change to culture and society through art was impossible in the 1920s and 1930s, and it remained impossible in the 1960s and 1970s. Art exerts a modest influence on culture and society. Society and culture – in the anthropological sense of the word – exert a decisive influence on art.

This was difficult to see in the 1960s. Few social and economic theories at that time could account for relations among the different elements of an art world – or series of art worlds – that can now be described as a social ecology of complex adaptive systems. Few theorists described the linkages and effects of art as a series of multiple networks located in a larger society. The nature of that system was not as clear as it seems to be today, and we lacked many of the concepts and tools that have emerged in the years since George died. Complexity theory, behavioral economics, and design theory help us to understand far more about human choices and cultural interaction than we knew then.

Even today, no one has offered a comprehensive sociology or economics of art. We still have much to learn about how art, aesthetics, and creativity affect different kinds of cultural structures.

Art, aesthetics, and creativity are more powerful and vital as processes than they sometimes seem to be. Despite this fact, the markets that mold artistic careers pay little attention to the deep and resilient processes that make art a factor in human social life and culture. This denatures many of the properties that might make art the force that artists often hope it will be.

To work and earn a living, most artists allow the market narrative to shape their artistic practice. While many hope to earn a living, most fail to do so. The systemic effect of this position subverts them. At the same time, artists that refuse to meet the needs of the market fall outside the system, often entirely outside. They have no effect because they have no platform. As Archimedes observed, one must have a place to stand to move the earth, a fulcrum as well as a lever.

The factors that make art significant on a deep level embed it in a resolutely stable network of patterns and behaviors. Some are deep and possibly necessary issues that involve all humans that create art. We examine these issues in the anthropology of art and aesthetic anthropology. Other issues are located in specific societies and cultures. The specific patterns and behaviors of art and art markets are historically contingent. We study these in art history, and in the sociology of art and the economics of art.

These contingent forces are far from universal or rooted in generic human behavior. Therefore, they may only affect the art we produce in specific societies, in our case, modern and contemporary art in our industrial and post-industrial societies. Nevertheless, they influence art production and reception in the art markets of the developed world. This is also true of most of the forms and media to which they gave rise. Like an iceberg, only a small part of the larger system is visible. The largest portion lies beneath the waterline, out of sight, subject to the physics of inertia.

George Maciunas made a brilliant intuitive leap in seeking ways to use the cultural inertia of art worlds to shift the larger culture. George's mistake was that this was impossible. Deflecting the course of an iceberg does not change the ocean currents that move the iceberg from one part of the planet to another.

In a profound sense, however, George was more right than wrong in his intuition. As Buckminister Fuller did, George based his work on the profound insights of an inventor and scientist. He put these insights to work in what scientists might label a toy world. His contributions and discoveries are still bearing fruit. George's main problem was that he died too soon to harvest his best ideas, refining them for the next step.

III. Ecce Homo

George Maciunas was a genius, a man of passionate moral zeal, intellectual vigor, and artistic strength.

He did not see the world as it is. He saw it as it might have been – or ought to be.

George possessed astonishing power, depth, and insight in the fields that he understood, and he understood nothing at all about other things. The strength and clarity of his focus often gave him what seemed to be a unidirectional, even narrow vision.

George created astonishing effects with simple elements of type and image. He created a stunning modern design program with a range of elements from medieval woodcuts to Japanese calligraphy and outline maps. Because color printing was expensive, he used little color. Instead, he developed a colorful design sensibility primarily using black and white.

If this was his strength, it was also his weakness. It was typical, perhaps even symptomatic that he used only black and white for most of his productions. He saw the world in sharp, moral terms, not in moderated shades of gray. Awake to the myriad logic forks of a chess game, he was insensitive to the hundreds of thousands of colors that human eyes distinguish. Someone once told me that George was color-blind. Perhaps it was true. If so, I can understand it.

George had a sly, complex sense of humor. He was famous for his love of vaudeville jokes, sight gags, and music hall entertainment. He also had a sense for subtle elegance.

George's two favorite composers were Claudio Monteverdi and Spike Jones. George embraced these two polarities, and they embraced him. He could equally enjoy and honor the sublime and the ridiculous, a sixteenth century Italian master and a twentieth century clown.

George lived as much in the realm of the intellect as in the realm of the senses. He interpreted sense through the eye and the mind, not through the body. He was famous for the odd, intellectually oriented diets that he devised on principles of economy and efficiency rather than choosing food to lose weight, taste good, or provide more than basic nourishment. George's diets were as enigmatic and perplexing as they were uninteresting and austere.

I met George during an all-orange-juice season. Another time, he spent some months eating crackers six days of the week and stuffing himself at an all-you-can-eat-for-a-dollar Scandinavian Smorgasbord on the seventh day, maintaining that this cycle was simple, cost-effective and nutritious. I also recall hearing about a year of dried fish and grain Vodka.

George's art offered an ironic mirror to his diets. He went to amazing lengths to prepare food works. Once, for example, he found a way to liquefy and distill all the elements of a meal. He reduced soup, salad, vegetables, meat and desert to clear, flavored liquids that he served in flasks and test tubes. His food pieces were part of a major Fluxus tradition of feasts and food events, but only Alison Knowles with her beans and tofu ever went to George's extremes.

Emmett Williams once told me about a lunch that George hosted for Daniel Spoerri, an artist with a second life as a chef and gastronome. To Daniel's horror, George served a lunch of crackers, peanut butter, and yogurt, accompanied by soda water. It was neither an art event nor an ironic gesture. It was George's way of living the simple life.

George was not the self-assured character that some feel his public persona suggested. Quite the contrary. His zealous, sometimes rigid positions could only have been mistaken for self-assurance from a distance. In retrospect, I suspect that George lacked confidence. He protected himself from the world by adopting an austere and sometimes doctrinaire approach where others might meet life with a warm, hearty appetite.

This did not bother those who knew and loved George. Fluxus was a crowd of misfits. Most of us were out of touch with aspects of the world around us. It was the 1960s, and it seemed that dedication and an astonishing idea could change the world. That's true, of course, but creating social change also requires a robust set of tools and skills, and the nature of these tools was not as apparent then as would be the case today.

George had a passion for taxonomy, catalogues, and structures that paralleled his black-and-white mentality. Confident people see life and change as an opportunity. George was fascinated by change, but he often wanted to control and structure every possible change. I see that sort of response to the ebb and flow of life as a fear of losing control. At one point, this resulted in George's famous attempts to purge Fluxus by expelling those who failed to meet his expectations.

While those expulsions were mistaken, they weren't as arrogant as some felt them to be. Exclusion is a characteristic tone of arrogance, but George's early and much publicized expulsions were a defense mechanism. George was not truly arrogant. It would be more accurate to say that he suffered a profound existential anxiety.

George wanted things to be orderly and under control. He was warm and friendly to those whom he knew, shy and nervous toward almost everyone else. Since he didn't know how to deal with colleagues with whom he disagreed, he simply removed them from the category of colleague.

Work was everything for George. Work was more than a way to make a living. For George, work was life itself. George gave himself completely to his work and when he admired others and respected their work, he gave his love and admiration unstintingly to their work as well as to his own. This was an intellectual passion. He didn't further Fluxus because he loved the people. His love of the work drove him to do so much for Fluxus, and George loved work best of all, at least until he met Billie.

George Maciunas was one of the most intriguing figures in twentieth century art. He ranks with Alfred Jarry, Le Douanier Rousseau, Tristan Tzara, and André Breton as a memorable avant-garde character.

IV. Meeting George

In August of 1966, Dick Higgins sent me to meet George Maciunas for the first time. I had been corresponding with Dick to make radio programs based on the Something Else Press books of Daniel Spoerri, Ben Patterson, Emmett Williams, Alison Knowles, Ray Johnson, Robert Filliou, and others for my programs at Radio WRSB. This was a college-based radio station in Mount Carroll, Illinois. Dick and Alison invited me to stay with them for a while at their home in New York, a few blocks away from the press. I was sixteen years old. I'd just finished the first two years of college, and I was in New York to look around.

George's telephone directions brought me to his fifth floor walk-up apartment on West Broadway in a decaying industrial section of New York City that was then part of Little Italy. Henry Flynt later took over George's apartment, and the neighborhood became the Soho art district. Then, it was a tenement in a worn-out working class neighborhood. I walked up the stairs to find a black door covered with violent, emphatic NO! SMOKING!!! signs. I knocked.

The door opened a crack, and a pair of eyes framed in round, wire-rimmed spectacles peered out. That was George Maciunas.

George was a small, wiry man with a prim, owlish look. He was dressed in a short sleeve business shirt, open at the neck, no tie. He wore dark slacks and black cloth slippers. His pocket was cluttered with number of pens. In current jargon, we'd call him a "nerd" or a "geek." He'd fit right in with the computer jocks, engineers, and architects at Carnegie Mellon University, his alma mater.

George ushered me into his kitchen. It was a steamy, New York summer day, but the apartment was cool. It smelled like rice mats. I recognized the smell. It reminded me of a Japanese store I used to frequent as a youngster in New London, Connecticut.

The apartment contained three rooms. To the right was a compact, well-designed office and workroom. The floor was covered with rice mats. George said not to go in without slippers, so I looked in from the door to see drafting tables, desks, shelves, and an astonishing clutter of papers, projects, notebooks, and files. It was the most orderly clutter I've ever seen, the opposite of my own chronological layers of projects.

The first time I saw George's workspace, it was rigged out with a marvelous contraption that enabled him to reach up and tap a weight to summon items he wanted. By means of a counterbalance and some strings and rods, whatever he wanted would float into his grasp. At least, this is my memory. I am not sure if I actually saw the working device, or a prototype, or if this is just a memory of a planning diagram that George showed me.

To the left of the kitchen, George had what looked like a huge, walk-in closet or a small storage room. The room was filled with floor-to-ceiling shelves, like an industrial warehouse. In fact, it *was* an industrial warehouse, the comprehensive inventory of Fluxus editions in unassembled form. The shelves were loaded with boxes storing the contents of Fluxus multiple editions, suitcases and year boxes. When an order came in for a Fluxbox, George would go to back of the closet, select the appropriate plastic or wooden container, and march through the room plucking out the proper cards and objects to emerge with a completed work. He'd select the proper label, glue it on, and have a completed edition ready to mail.

The kitchen had a sink, windows, stove, table, and chairs. These were all quite ordinary except for the refrigerator. George had a bright orange refrigerator. When he opened it, I could see he had filled it with oranges from the bottom clear to the top shelf. The top shelf, on either side of the old-fashioned meat chest and ice tray, held four huge jugs of fresh orange juice. He offered me a glass of orange juice.

Maciunas peppered me with questions. What did I do? What did I think? What was I planning? At that time, I was planning to become a Unitarian minister. I did all sorts of things, things without names, things that jumped over the boundaries between ideas and actions, between the manufacture of objects and books, between philosophy and literature. Maciunas listened for a while and invited me to join Fluxus. I said yes.

A short while later, George asked me what kind of artist I was. Until that moment, I had never thought of myself as an artist. George thought about this for a minute, and said, "You're a concept artist."

It always pleased me that I became part of Fluxus before I became an artist.

I usually worked with George from a distance, so I couldn't say much about his work habits. I do recall the way he kept all the parts of Fluxus items stored in neat cubbyholes, and compartments.

George Maciunas was consumed by a rage for order. Rather than organizational ability, though, this was planning ability linked to boundless energy and an obsessive-compulsive mania. Organizational management requires leadership, but George lacked the ability to convince and persuade. He had organizational ability in the sense of organizing closets and organizing plans.

Despite this, people loved working with George. He had the ability to lure people into projects, charming them with wonderful ideas. People worked with George as a fellow artist, attracted by his energy and the dynamic vortex of his activities. No one followed him as an organizer. George and I got on well and worked together for many years, but I sometimes think this is because we worked in New York and California, several thousand miles apart.

George's ideas and plans astonished me. He was a constant source of inspiration and energy. From the time we met through the early 1970s, I called George two or three times a week, wherever I was. George always used to tell me that I should save money by writing rather than calling, but I valued our dialogues. George didn't always have time to write back – something he often complained of. Conversation enabled me to learn from him and sometimes to debate with him. This was not always as expensive as the notoriously frugal George feared. In the 1960s, the telephone company – then a monopoly controlled by ATT – tried to increase long-distance usage by creating wide-area telephony for large volume purchasers. Many universities purchased wide-area contracts, and San Francisco State College was one of these. My office at San Francisco State College Experimental College had a phone that allowed me to call anywhere in North America for roughly the price of a local call. It was not as cheap as Internet telephony today, but it was much cheaper than the long-distance rates individuals had to pay. As I traveled from place to place, I also found similar phone services at other universities. It helped that George was nearly always at the apartment that served as his home and office. Whenever I could find a phone to call him, he was there. George never quite believed me when I told him the cost was low – and when I phoned from home, I did run up huge bills. Even when I had to pay, I loved listening to George and it was worth it to me.

George had traits that caused his friends to shrug their shoulders and say, "Well, that's George." It was the flip side of his organizational mania. George was a whirlwind of charts, plans, demands, and categories. He had the ability and energy to get a great deal done even when it was just George doing things. If he sometimes failed to follow through or interact when it came to working with others, his ability to make things happen anyhow, and make them happen often, made him a legend.

This legend was as much built on George's eccentricities and failings as on his achievements. George's real achievements have not yet become well known. People became much more devoted to the dead George Maciunas than they were to the living man.

Unfortunately, George's legend has obscured a genuinely innovative thinker, not George Maciunas the eccentric artist, but George Maciunas, the architect and planner. One example of this is the misinterpretation of George's learning machines.

V. The Architecture of Learning

A few years ago, art historian Astrit Schmidt-Burkhardt organized an exhibition titled *Maciunas's "Learning Machines" From Art History to a Chronology of Fluxus.*

While the exhibition was beautiful, accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue depicting George's historiographic and socio-cultural charts and diagrams, the focus was artifacts and outputs rather than the conceptual, process-oriented idea behind Maciunas's learning machines.

As an architecture student at Carnegie Mellon Institute, George understood the difference between a machine and a chart. A machine is something that can change states.

Learning is a state change. When we learn, we are different to what we were. We change in one or more dimensions as compared with the state we occupied before learning. Learning involves multiple processes anchored in experience, time, and memory. The notion of a learning machine involves two possibilities, each related to the other. One is the idea of a machine that can help others to learn. The other is a machine that can undergo learning, that is, an artificial intelligence machine. Today, these have come together in the computer and in the myriad versions of information technology now changing our world.

The Carnegie Mellon Institute – now Carnegie Mellon University – was an important early center for research on computers and information technology. Knowing this, it is easy to understand George's vision of the learning machine – and it is easy to understand why art critics and art historians have missed a crucial issue.

A learning machine is an information system. Entering information in the system enables a person to combine and manipulate the information in different ways to create different kinds of outcomes. In what we now call a computer, this activity would involve writing a program, entering inputs, and deriving an output, a result.

But George's learning machines were not computers. They were not mechanized or digital engines powered by an external source. They were physical prototypes that assisted human beings in learning. The idea of the learning machine involved creating tools to help human beings change their internal states of experience and awareness.

George built a number of learning machines in physical form. When I first heard from Astrit as she planned her exhibition, these are what I thought she meant.

Instead, the exhibition featured George's charts, graphs, and diagrams. These might be labeled learning machines in a conceptual sense, but these were not the learning machines that George discussed with me.

George's physical learning machines were filing systems in which he created different kinds of storage units, drawers, or other containers for different kinds of information.

I do not know whether he ever wrote about or described these. Many of George's ideas and inventions took physical shape or formal shape without an articulate description of his concept and purposes. Some of these had no description at all.

My assumption is that the physical learning machines were lost or destroyed during George's moves or after his death. They would have looked very much like boxes or shelving units. If the contents had been moved, it would have been easy to mistake the learning machines for empty shelves or filing systems without contents.

One version of the learning machine concept survived after George's death. George built a system of storage and filing cabinets for Jean Brown that resembled his grand learning machine concept. Jean's archive was sold to the Getty. I do not know whether they also purchased and shipped the shelving units that he built for her. This was not exactly a learning machine, but it resembled one version of the learning machine concept.

Unless George left writings about the learning machine concept, it would be difficult to say what he knew about similar projects and what he intended finally to realize.

There are several parallels to the learning machine idea, however, and George knew about them.

One was the concept described in Nam June Paik's 1964 Manifesto, *Utopian Laser Television*. This manifesto predicted a broadcast medium that would resemble the World Wide Web in many ways. Paik conceived it for the technology of television. Today, we have something much like it in terms of desktop computers and World Wide Web with broadband access. The interface remains a television screen or a computer screen cognate.

However, a landmark 1945 article by Vannevar Bush titled "As We May Think" described a device much closer to the concept of Maciunas's learning machine. This conceptual machine was the Memex. While the Memex was a stand-alone learning machine, the technology it foreshadowed is the World Wide Web.

I don't know if George knew about Bush's work, but it seems likely. Bush was a professor at MIT. As a professor, and as Franklin Delano Roosevelt's science advisor, he had rich connections and strong influence at Carnegie Mellon. It is conceivable that George knew about the Memex.

What made George's learning machine significant was the fact that was a physical, three-dimensional prototype rather than a digital artifact. Because of this, the learning machine could model activities and processes that were not possible in the digital computers of the time. Interestingly, the use of physical models still has value today. Pelle Ehn, professor at Malmo University College, has been doing remarkable work with simple physical models to prototype and test user interaction with different kinds of information systems.

George's system also resembled the physical-mechanical information system devised by the Belgian Paul Otlet – the Mundaneum. George's system was more specific in its focus, while Otlet's system was universal in purpose, a physical, paper-based Memex using file cards rather than bits or bytes. The Mundaneum preceded the Memex concept by many years. Built in Brussels in 1910, it comprised over 12,000,000 file cards that occupied a building with 150 rooms by 1920 before ending its life span in 1934. Otlet's Mundaneum long predated the concept of the Memex from the 1940s and the World Wide Web of the 1990s and since. Only known to library and information science specialists until recently, it has now become prominent in the archaeology of the information age. In the 1960s, I doubt that George would have known of it.

George's learning machines captured one revolutionary feature of the Mundaneum and the Memex. They were designed to create a network of relations among the items populating the universe of the machine. What made the learning machines revolutionary and quite distinct was the fact that George's machines incorporated artifacts and objects in full, physical form. They were a relational database organized around physical rather than digital artifacts.

The learning machines were also related to three concepts that George knew about, but I don't know whether he considered these in terms of the learning machine.

One of these concepts was Jorge Luis Borges's concept of the universal library. Borges discussed the idea of a library that would contain all the books ever written, all that could ever be written, and all possible variations and permutations on these books. Alas, the vast scale and scope of the library meant that it was impossible to find anything in the sea of information.

George's learning machine offered a conceptual solution to the problem of Borges's universal library. The learning machine is a heuristic device that allows us to capture information topically in a theoretically open system while permitting us to structure the elements of a universal library for human use.

Borges's story dates back to the 1940s. I think George learned about it from my 1972 book, *The Aesthetics*, where I discuss Borges's concept.

Another concept in *The Aesthetics* is my concept of the "gestalt essay." The gestalt essay is an installation in the form of an information structure. The gestalt essay involves selecting texts and concepts. These are printed or otherwise prepared as cards, documents, or other kinds of representation. The essay is a physical space in which the texts and concepts fill the space in different relationships to one another.

In turn, the gestalt essay owes a debt to George. While cards and texts on cards or loose sheets of paper always had a place in my life, George's Fluxboxes and the Fluxkits taught me a new way of thinking about the physicality of cards and texts, and the way they could occupy space.

George would have known one more of my works, a 1968 score titled *Paper Architecture*. This score involved modeling potential environments on paper at full scale before building them. Like Ehn's cardboard computers, it allowed people to test concepts conceptually with some forms of physical interaction before creating working prototypes.

George's learning machines had aspects or attributes of all these systems. I do not know whether he ever intended to realize the learning machine concept in a more elaborate form, with mechanical or audio-visual components. As I saw it, the concept offered a path toward conceptual modeling and information storage systems that could be used in different ways to work with large assortments of information. Because the learning machines were highly adaptable open systems, they could be used for a rich variety of purposes.

While the term or the rubric of the learning machine is connected to George's work, there seem to be no extant proposals, drawings, or models for physical learning machines. Except for the Jean Brown archive, I do not know if any of the actual machines survived George's death. While I hope some sketches or other notes might exist, none seem to have been published.

Instead, George's diagrams and charts have been mistaken for learning machines. The confusion here is simple. The charts and diagrams are to a learning machine what a printout is to a computer.

What is important is the fact that some versions of the learning machine concept took physical form in three dimensions. This is natural in the work of a man who was an architect as well as a graphic designer. George built spaces, buildings, and physical models, and he held several patents on devices for prefabricated housing. The learning machines formed an important conceptual bridge between his two-dimensional structures and the larger three-dimensional projects that he attempted. What makes them special is that they were conceptual information systems, taking the information base from which he built his charts and diagrams into a three-dimensional form.

George also built another kind of physical learning machine. While these are well known, we do not label them learning machines. These are the physical Fluxus kits and boxes.

Most Fluxus boxes are physical artifacts that a human being manipulates to bring about a state change. In doing so, the person who changes the state of the tool undertakes an action that creates an experience. We can describe the result of this experience as learning.

VI. Architect, Planner, Builder

Fluxus was never able to support George Maciunas. George supported Fluxus. This took George's do-it-yourself ethic to the farthest limit possible. He wanted to create an organization that would shape a revolution in social consciousness, and he did it himself. What he earned as a designer, he spent on Fluxus.

While George bankrolled Fluxus, he was not the only one to bankroll Fluxus. Several others also supported Fluxus activities, projects, exhibitions and centers out of our own resources. Dick Higgins spent almost half a million dollars on Something Else Press between 1964 and 1974, more than three million dollars in today's money. Ben Vautier bankrolled Fluxus activities in Nice. René Block underwrote many important exhibitions, projects and publications in Germany, first through his own gallery and later as an independent organizer and curator. I supported Fluxus West and the projects that grew out of it, often by cooperating with other publishers or institutions as well as supporting publications and projects from the proceeds of my business activities. The total cost of my projects between 1966 and today may be larger than the total for Something Else Press, but I didn't pay it all out of pocket the way Dick did.

George did undeniably important work. One thing that made his work important – and durable – was the fact that he was part of a larger community. Many people supported Fluxus in large ways and small. It was a community enterprise.

In this sense, George was more successful than he might have hoped. Fluxus was never a collective or an art movement, but it became a durable community. That is as much to George's credit as anyone's.

George has been on my mind lately. I moved from working as a research professor in Norway to working as a university dean in Australia. As a professor in Norway, I often worked in my home office looking out over a village bay on the Oslo fjord. In Melbourne, I focus on taking care of people more than focusing on my own research. Buildings, publishing projects, and networks are on my mind every day.

At one point, we began to plan a major building covering most of a city block on one of Melbourne's most valuable pieces of real estate. While the global financial crisis delayed our plans, we are still working on master plans for our campus. Whatever facilities we manage to build – or to repurpose – we hope to create living laboratories for sustainable construction, and we are working to incorporate model learning spaces into our curriculum our research programs, enabling us to learn from the process – and into to share what we learn.

The lessons George taught me have been valuable over the years, and they remain valuable today. Buildings and projects such as our are not built by single architects – they are built by communities of practice, including designers, architects, planners, financiers, political leaders, university leaders, managers, and many more.

It is not possible to do this with pre-fabricated housing, but by asking the kinds of cultural questions that George asked. These questions have too often been overlooked in books and catalogues on George's work and life.

George has been neglected as a thinker and designer at the same time that his role in Fluxus has been misinterpreted in ways that he would not have approved.

Many Fluxus artists have been marginalized by attributing their work and ideas to George. In many narratives, this made George the central and single figure in Fluxus. To me this makes him smaller than he was.

George was a creative and vital figure in a laboratory of ideas. Laboratories – like universities – gain stature by attracting and retaining a strong cohort of important thinkers. The more outstanding members a community can attract, the greater its stature. The fewer significant members, the smaller and less impressive a laboratory or university is, even when the community gathers around one smart person or two.

By making Fluxus and George Maciunas nearly synonymous, thin scholarship made Fluxus small. It also made Gorge smaller than he was. This diminished vision of the man and his work places much of George's work in a shadow.

It is time to restore George's legacy as an architect, planner, and designer.

About Ken Friedman

Ken Friedman is University Distinguished Professor and Distinguished Professor of Design at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia. Friedman served as Dean of the Faculty of Design at Swinburne, where he now leads the Research Group on Design Thinking and Complexity in the National Institute of Design Research. He is Guest Professor at the Tongji University College of Design and Innovation, Adjunct Professor at the James Cook University School of Creative Arts, and a Fellow of The Policy Lab of Boston, Massachusetts, and. He is Chief Investigator of Capacity Mapping for Integrative Design, a Flagship Collaborative Fund project for the Future Manufacturing Flagship of CSIRO, the Australian Commonwealth Science and Industrial Research Organization.

Friedman has worked with national design policy in Australia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Wales, and state design policy for Victoria. He was Advisor to the Federal Interdepartmental Committee for the Design Policy Scoping Process for the Office of the Arts in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and he served as Co-Chair of the International Advisory Group of the pilot project for DesignGov, the Australian Centre for Excellence in Public Sector Design.

Ken Friedman works at the intersection of three fields: design, management, and art. He works with theory construction and research methodology for design, focusing on strategic design for value creation and economic innovation. Friedman has done research in philosophy of design, doctoral education in design, knowledge management, and philosophy of science. Friedman has developed international research networks and conferences in design research. He is an editor of the *Journal of Design Research* and the journal *Artifact*, an editorial board member of *Design Studies*, *International Journal of Design,* and *Design and Culture,* and an editorial advisor for *Visible Language*, and the *International Journal of Design Creativity and Innovation*. He helped to establish the Design Research Alliance, an alliance of eight leading universities in design research, serving as Vice Chairman of the DRA from 2011 to 2013. Friedman is a Council Member of the Design Research Society and a member of the executive board of The Interaction Design Foundation. He co-chaired the La Clusaz Conference on Doctoral Education in Design in 2000, the European Academy of Management Conference in 2006, the Design Research Society Conference in 2006, the Cumulus International Conference in 2009, and the Hong Kong Conference on Doctoral Education in Design in 2011, as well as chairing international conferences on Design Thinking in 2009 and Strategic Design: Value Creation for Business and Industry in 2012.

In 2007, Loughborough University honored Friedman with the degree of Doctor of Science, honoris causa, for outstanding contributions to design research. The award citation appears at:

http://www.lboro.ac.uk/service/publicity/degree_days/2007/Summer/Friedman.html

In 1990, Friedman created the first course in strategic design in Europe for the Oslo Business School, one of the first in the world. From 1994 to 2009, he was Professor of Leadership and Strategic Design at the Norwegian School of Management, where he worked on the knowledge economy, culture, and leadership. From 2003 to 2009, he held a research appointment at Denmark's Design School and the Danish Design Research Center in Copenhagen.

Ken Friedman is also a practicing artist and designer active in the international laboratory of art, design, music, and architecture known as Fluxus. He had his first solo exhibition in New York in 1966. His work is represented in major museums and galleries around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Tate Gallery in London, the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, and Stadtsgalerie Stuttgart. The University of Iowa Alternative Traditions in the Contemporary Arts is the official repository of Friedman's papers and research notes. The Silverman Fluxus Collection at the Museum of Modern Art, Archiv Sohm at Stadtsgalerie Stuttgart and the Mandeville Department of Special Collections at the University of California also hold extensive archives on Friedman's work of the 1960s and 1970s.

In March 2013, the James Cook University School of Creative Arts opened an exhibition of Friedman's event scores titled *Events*. This exhibition will go on international tour from September 2014 accompanied by a major book.

Ken Friedman at Academia.edu – Selected Publications in PDF

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