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Fluxus: The Significant Role of Female Artists

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Abstract

The Fluxus movement of the 1960s and early 1970s laid the groundwork for future female artists and performance art as a medium. However, throughout my research, I have found that while there is evidence that female artists played an important role in this art movement, they were often not written about or credited for their contributions. Literature on the subject is also quite limited. Many books and journals only mention the more prominent female artists of Fluxus, leaving the lesser-known female artists difficult to research. The lack of scholarly discussion has led to the inaccurate documentation of the development of Fluxus art and how it influenced later movements. Additionally, the absence of research suggests that female artists' work was less important and, consequently, keeps their efforts and achievements unknown. It can be demonstrated that works of art created by little-known female artists later influenced more prominent artists, but the original works have gone unacknowledged. If recognition and credit is not given to innovative artists without bias, then the subsequent literature on this material will be skewed.

To address my research question, I conducted my research through traditional methods used in the field of art history. I gathered information about each artist that I studied, their works of art, and the contexts in which they worked in relation to both the Fluxus movement and future art movements. I carried out my research using scholarly journals, books on Fluxus, relevant artworks, primary sources relevant to the Fluxus movement, and catalogues of subsequent retrospective exhibitions. I found that the likely explanation for the absence of scholarly literature about the female artists was due to either their exclusion by George Maciunas from the movement, lack of collaborative participation, or association with other art movements that hindered their perceived presence in Fluxus. I also found that the performative works of female Fluxus artists were pivotal in the development of performance

art as a medium and the feminist art movement. These artists' notable absence from the scholarly literature has been a topic that art historians are just beginning to address.

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What is Fluxus? An Introduction

In the literature on Fluxus, there has been a debate about how to define this movement in twentieth century art. Was it art or anti-art? Was it even a movement at all? Fluxartists, a name the artists gave themselves, also argued over the definition of Fluxus. Dick Higgins, a prominent Fluxartist, claimed that Fluxus could simply be defined as the name of the group of artists who collaborated with each other and held similar ideologies.¹ He stated that Fluxus was not a movement as it did not have a consistent manifesto or propose to “move” art in its direction, but this idea can be contested.² Some authors have used the writings of the artist George Maciunas for a definition of Fluxus. Many consider George Maciunas to be the founder of Fluxus because he organized events, reached out to potential new members, and even formally started and named the group. Maciunas held the authority to include or exclude whomever he wanted in Fluxus, and therefore, his point of view held a lot of clout. Because his contribution to Fluxus is held in such high esteem, the fact that he created his own manifesto for Fluxus can be seen as an intentional endeavor towards the creation of Fluxus as a movement.

Fluxus stemmed from other modernist avant-garde movements, notably Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, and specifically, the works of Marcel Duchamp. It formally began in 1962, under the supervision of George Maciunas, and is widely thought to have ended with his death in 1978.³ Fluxus began as a small group of artists with like-minded artistic practices. Fluxus was not intended for individual artists to explore artistic practices through self-expression, but rather aimed to be simple and objective. Many Fluxartists wanted to

¹ Dick Higgins, “Fluxus: Theory and Reception,” in *Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman (Hoboken: Wiley, 1998), 220-221.

² *Ibid.*, 221.

³ Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 159.

reveal the beauty of life and the everyday as artistic in itself.⁴ Alongside Maciunas, artists such as Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, and Nam June Paik, were pivotal in its inception and came together to help gain momentum for Fluxus. In the following years, more artists joined from Europe and Japan, including Yoko Ono, Takaka Saito, and Joseph Beuys, mainly because their previous works aligned with Fluxus ideology.

If one considers Maciunas to be the instigator of Fluxus, then the movement could not have gone on without his organization and effort. That is not to say that one cannot create Fluxworks even today. Although the criteria for Fluxworks are not definitive, Fluxartists Ken Friedman and Dick Higgins agreed that to be considered Fluxus, a work must have some element of globalism, intermedia, experimentalism, simplicity, and specificity.⁵ If this is true, an artist could carry on the Fluxus ideology through their works even today.

Fluxworks took several forms and the most common forms can be defined. Fluxus is probably best known for its events, or in other words, performative presentations. It is important to distinguish Fluxus events from Happenings, which are a separate art form. Fluxus events are often incorrectly categorized as Happenings. Events were performance-based works that were experimental in nature and often centered around the minimal use of music, whereas Happenings were more similar to theatrical performance. To further clarify, events were typically constituted as “scores,” arranged simply on a card with a few lines of texts. Rather than present an object to the audience, an artist would use linguistic instructions to display a work, in a haiku-style, through body performance and sometimes spoken word. While performance was a large aspect of Fluxworks, the production of

⁴ Yukio Hasegawa, “Performativity in the Work of Female Japanese Artists in the 1950s-1960s and 1990s”, in *Modern Women: Women Artists at The Museum of Modern Art*, ed. Connie Butler (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 340.

⁵ Ken Friedman, “Introduction,” in *Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman (Hoboken: Wiley, 1998), ix.

publications were also an integral part of the movement. Fluxus publications and their regular newsletter, the Fluxus Newsletter, perfectly demonstrated the collaborative element that the movement pushed. These publications would include the works of both regular and less active Fluxus members. Fluxworks also took the form of objects. These sculptural objects became more popular after the initiation of Fluxus printed matter and performed events. By the mid-1960s, their production increased. They were usually made of utilitarian materials such as wood and plastics to represent everyday objects as art objects. These works were easily made, similar to Duchamp's "readymades," and were sometimes mass-produced by Maciunas. Furthermore, a specific form of object were kits, or Fluxkits. The Fluxkits consisted of multiples and printed items, sometimes reflecting the collective work of the group, and other times centered around a specific theme, such as travel or jewelry. The idea was to demand an audience to reconsider and contextualize aspects of everyday life, ranging from our actions to the objects we often use without thinking about them.

Ultimately, the goal of Fluxus was to blur the line between art and life. Maciunas wanted to "purge the world of bourgeoisie sickness," therefore the "anti-art" sentiment aimed to reach a wide and not necessarily art-centric audience.⁶ Fluxus was essentially art for all. It is no wonder that a group that strived for inclusivity would acquire a diverse group of artists. But the practices of leading Fluxus artists, such as Maciunas, did not always conduct themselves in the most inclusive way towards women, and therefore, the representation of these female artists has suffered in art history.

⁶ George Maciunas, 'Fluxus Manifesto' (1963), in Jacquelynn Baas ed., *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life* (Hanover and Chicago: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, and University of Chicago Press, 2011), 22.

Literature Review

As Fluxus was coming to a close, the attempts to chronicle the timeline and membership were extensive. Not only are there numerous books and journal articles dedicated to the subject, but a few museum retrospective exhibits have taken place. Between 1977 and 2008, Gilbert and Lila Silverman undertook the near-impossible task of the complete documentation of activities and of every work to come out of Fluxus.⁷ This collection archive has since been acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Fluxus is noted as being one of the most influential avant-garde movements in modern art history, thus, there has been extensive and thorough research into this niche group. While there is a considerable amount of text on Fluxus theory, conceptualism, and artists, I have found that detailed information on the numerous female fluxus artists is still lacking. The membership of Fluxus was diverse and included many women, people of color, and queer-identifying artists. Fluxus was more inclusive of women than any other avant-garde movement in Western art history.⁸ Therefore, the lack of focus on the role female artists played not only in the Fluxus movement, but in the general scope of art history, is unsatisfactory. I will first briefly outline what has been written concerning this issue, and then address what I believe is still lacking in the research.

Although much has been published about Fluxus, there are few writings that adequately address the problem of representation of female Fluxus artists. Some art historians and writers have directly confronted this issue, but it is almost always discussed in relation to performance art. While this is a good start, performative works are not the only medium through which Fluxus women produced art. Female Fluxus artists created events, objects, and

⁷ Ken Friedman, "Fluxus Performance," in *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Buttock and Robert Nickas (New York: Plume, 1984), 39.

⁸ Kathy O'Dell, "Fluxus Feminus," *TDR (1988-)* 41, no. 1 (Spring, 1997): 43.

publications alongside their male peers, but those contributions have not been adequately recognized. Kristine Stiles' essay, "Between Water and Stone," written for the retrospective exhibit at the Walker Art Center, *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, in 1993, discusses the performative aspects of female Fluxus work and how it fits into the movement.⁹ Stiles argues that the climate of the 1960s, regarding gender, sexuality, politics, and social experiences, was extremely influential in the development of performance art. Although performance art did not originate in the Fluxus movement, this medium was reconsidered under Fluxus, especially with the contributions of female artists. She also explains how women's contributions can be viewed as a precursor to the feminist movement that arose in the 1970s. Stiles gives several examples of memorable pieces by women, such as Alison Knowles' early 1960s piece, *Glove to Be Worn While Examining*. This piece can be interpreted as a sensual attitude towards a vaginal or anal probe which reconsiders the context of routine medical practices through a feminine lense.¹⁰ Stiles also examines Shigeko Kubota's famous 1965 piece, *Vagina Painting*, in which Kubota attached a paintbrush to her underwear to create the illusion that she was painting with her vagina. She argues that Kubota is referencing male action painting and pieces, like Yves Klein's *Blue Period* (1960), rejecting the idea of female as a muse and recovering woman as her own source of artistic inspiration. The piece can be read as a proto-feminist performance, but Kubota has stated that she did not intend the piece to be perceived as feminist.¹¹ The main point Stiles is trying to confront in her essay is that

⁹ Kristine Stiles, "Between Water and Stone; Fluxus Performance, A Metaphysics of Acts," in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, ed. by E Armstrong and J Rothfuss (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993), 65.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

“Fluxus originated in the context of performance,” and therefore the nature of Fluxus is performative, hence her emphasis on the importance and relevance of female performances.¹²

Most writing on female Fluxus works discusses pieces such as Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece* (1964) and Shigeko Kubota’s *Vagina Painting*. These performative pieces seem to have caused the most controversy for two reasons. First, at the time they were quite explicit and sexually provocative; and second, because some Fluxus artists and historians do not consider them to be Fluxus works.

Ono’s *Cut Piece* is arguably the most well-known work by a female artist to come out of Fluxus. The score invites the audience to grab a pair of scissors in front of the performer and to cut a small piece of the the performer’s clothing to take with them, while the performer remains motionless. The piece has been interpreted as political and as a response to the possibility of global annihilation and the treatment of the body, specifically the female body, in times of war, as stated by art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson.¹³ While Bryan-Wilson asserts that *Cut Piece* generates a feminist political interpretation, Kevin Concannon’s essay, “Yoko Ono’s ‘Cut Piece’: From Text to Performance and Back Again,” argues that it is not specifically about gender because Ono always intended the piece to be performed by men or women.¹⁴ This hinders the notion that the piece is explicitly displaying violence towards the female body. He notes because the intent of the work has been debated and the role of performer/creator challenges what art is and who made it, therefore, the piece is conceptual in

¹² Stiles, "Between Water and Stone," 65.

¹³ Julia Bryan-Wilson, “Remembering Yoko Ono’s ‘Cut Piece,’” *Oxford Art Journal* 26, no.1 (2003): 116.

¹⁴ Kevin Concannon, “Yoko Ono’s ‘Cut Piece’: From Text to Performance and Back Again,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 30, no. 3 (September 2008): 91.

nature.¹⁵ Fluxus was not intended to be conceptual in this manner, thus, the debate about whether *Cut Piece* can even be conceived as Fluxus is justified. This study will examine these issues in more detail, as I do not believe present writings have thoroughly analyzed this aspect of women's Fluxus works, and I believe it needs to be further explored.

Kubota's *Vagina Painting*, which I briefly introduced earlier, has similarly been read as feminist in nature. Although Kristine Stiles argues that it is the "most aggressive" proto-feminist Fluxus performance, Kubota did not think of it as such, as previously mentioned.¹⁶ Rather, she described the work as a play, herself, a sculptor, and the piece itself a result of action painting.¹⁷ Kubota explains that her fellow Fluxus peers, mainly the men, were angered by the piece for its aggressiveness. Although Kubota continued to work under Fluxus after the controversial performance, it was her first and only performative piece.

It is important that some art historians have pointed out these exclusionary practices of Fluxus, most prominently, by George Maciunas. I will later investigate why I believe Fluxus is perceived as exclusionary and how this hindered women's recognition, but first I want to address the theories proposed by other art historians. In Stiles' essay, she notes the boundaries within Maciunas' exclusionary Fluxus model. His creation of charts and programs were biased, but because of his role in Fluxus, were widely accepted and they subsequently were used to define the nature of Fluxus performance and events.¹⁸ Therefore, if a female artist upset Maciunas, he could simply ban her from Fluxus. This biased practice set a

¹⁵ Concannon, "Yoko Ono's 'Cut Piece,'" 90.

¹⁶ Stiles, "Between Water and Stone," 82.

¹⁷ Shigeko Kubota, interview by Miwako Tezuka, *Oral History Archives of Japanese Art*, October 11, 2009.

¹⁸ Stiles, "Between Water and Stone," 68.

precedent for the critical reception and recognition of these works in art history, one that altered the perception of a movement's history through omission.

This was the case for several of the female Fluxus artists, even those personally close with Maciunas. Although the artist Carolee Schneemann worked in Europe and her work was mostly considered Flux-inclusive, she was excluded from the group in the United States. Maciunas called her a “terrifying female” and banished her from Fluxus.¹⁹ He claimed her work was “neo-baroque,” and justified her exclusion under the guise that her performative work was the exact opposite of “flux-haiku-style events.”²⁰ Alison Knowles, one of original Fluxus members, was once excluded by Maciunas for presenting a concert that did not follow exclusively Maciunas' list of events.²¹ This “ruling” by Maciunas was not final, as she later continued to work under Fluxus. Another artist, Kate Millett, who was officially affiliated with Fluxus, was not formally excluded, but stopped being included in collaborative works by Maciunas and other Fluxartists. It is theorized that her exclusion was due to her provocative, and, therefore, “not-Fluxus” relationship between body and text.²² This can be interpreted as a rejection by Maciunas of the exercise of agency in her work. In a letter written by Maciunas regarding Charlotte Moorman, he states “Moorman is on a Flux-blacklist which means that I boycott and do not cooperate with any exhibit, gallery, concert hall or individual that ever included her in any program or show, past and future.”²³

¹⁹ Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 189.

²⁰ Kristine Stiles, “Anomaly, Sky, Sex, and Psi in Fluxus,” in *Critical Mass: Happenings, Fluxus, Performance, Intermedia, and Rutgers University, 1958-1972*, ed. Mead Art Museum (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 69.

²¹ O'Dell, “Fluxus Feminus,” 44.

²² *Ibid.*, 49.

²³ Harry Ruhé, *Fluxus, the Most Radical and Experimental Art Movement of the Sixties*, (Amsterdam: “A,” 1979), n.p.

These Fluxartists, along with other women, were excluded for their provocative work which did not largely differ from the sexually explicit work of their male peers.²⁴ This leads one to assume that gender and the perception of women's bodies were a factor in the exclusionary practices. Kathy O'Dell, writer of "Fluxus Feminus" asserts that it is precisely the relationship between body and text in women's performative work, which is the reason for their excommunication.²⁵

In the literature on Fluxus, one begins to recognize a rotation of a few names. For the women, one will most often read about Yoko Ono, Alison Knowles, Shigeko Kubota, Mieko Shiomi, Takako Saito, and even Carolee Schneemann, a figure who is still not fully considered a Fluxus artist. All of these women created notable works that seem to have a transformative impact on the art at the time and even caused tensions among other Fluxus members. One finds repeated references to these women over and over, and although I am not attempting to discredit their contributions and efforts, if Fluxus has really been the most progressive avant-garde movement, then surely there were more female artists active in the community than just the ones I have previously mentioned. So, where are they in the literature? What exactly did these other women do, and who were they?

Artists such as Simone Forti, Anne Tardos, Nye Ffarrabas, Alice Hutchins, Carla Liss, and Kate Millett contributed extensively to Fluxus and worked both directly with George Maciunas and on their own. Sadly, these contributions require a bit of effort to find, and even then, are not accompanied with much description or analysis. What we can find are their individual works, which have been catalogued through extensive research efforts that have taken place over the last few decades. For example, Jon Hendricks' *Fluxus Codex* lists every

²⁴ Stiles, "Anomaly, Sky, Sex, and Psi in Fluxus," 71.

²⁵ O'Dell, "Fluxus Feminus," 45.

identifiable Fluxus work based on the correspondence of George Maciunas, primary source documents, and all known Fluxus publications.²⁶ Additionally, *The Fluxus Performance Workbook* is a collection of event scores performed by Fluxus artists.²⁷ Compiled by Fluxus artist Ken Friedman and researchers, Owen Smith and Lauren Sawchyn, and similar to Hendricks' catalogue, this workbook documents each relevant work categorized by individual Fluxus artists. Possibly the earliest of these compilation books was La Monte Young's *An Anthology*, the first publication to compile scores of Fluxus members.²⁸ All of these resources have provided readers with a comprehensive view of female artists' work, thereby proving exactly how involved female artists were. These artists and their work constituted an integral part of the movement. The issue, then, lies in the way these artists and their works have been largely excluded from the literature on the history of art.

The only comparable physical examination of female artists' work lies in the Museum of Modern Art's 2010 exhibition, *Experimental Women in Flux*.²⁹ Organized by Sheelagh Bevan and David Senior, the exhibition featured women who embraced different forms of intermedia art. The organizers pointed out the prevalence of women's work in Fluxus, as they worked at the forefront of the feminist movement and utilized the forum of Fluxus to redefine how women could make art. Probably the most pervasive collection of women's work, the exhibition showcased a wide range of intermedia. It even ventured out into the arenas of

²⁶ Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), 28.

²⁷ Ken Friedman, Owen Smith, and Lauren Sawchyn, ed., *The Fluxus Performance Workbook* (Performance Research e-Publication: 2002): 1-2, accessed February 20, 2018, <http://www.deluxxe.com/beat/fluxusworkbook.pdf>.

²⁸ "Experimental Women in Flux: Selective Reading in the Silverman Reference Library," MoMA online, accessed January 17, 2018, <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/womeninflux/>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Nouveau Réalisme and Happenings, movements at the root of performance art, in which female artists have also been neglected. Some of these intermedia were action and performance works in print, such as works by Charlotte Moorman at the Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal in 1965, in which she alone participated in the a twenty-four hour Happening that was documented in *24 Stunden*. It also details textual scores and instructions, visual music, different forms of writings and publications, and finally, performative works. Regarding visual music, the organizers noted that this format was a crucial tool for women. Events and scores were often composed by their male peers, who would in turn employ their female peers to utilize their bodies to complement the work. Eventually, women began to oppose this practice of objectification when they produced these types of works themselves. Some examples include Alison Knowles' piece, *Blue Ram* (1967), a composition of four performers and sound objects, and Mieko Shiomi's composition, *Lyric Suite* (1973), one of six collages in her visual music portfolio, signifying her preference for music as experimental medium. *Women in Flux* often cites the contribution of the Silverman Reference Library as essential in compiling women's work in each media category.³⁰ This exhibition, however, was not included in a central part of the museum, rather, it was held off-site from the main building in the library. The fact that an exhibition highlighting the issue of the lack of female representation was pushed "off to the side" by a major art institution, especially the Museum of Modern Art (which was founded by prominent women), is ironic. It is telling that there is still much progress to be made in the portrayal of female artists in the art world.

I have given several examples of texts that directly address the problem of sexism within Fluxus. However, these publications are not the majority. Several of the major books about Fluxus written within the last two decades do not address this issue at all. Women's

³⁰ Ibid.

work is discussed much less than men's, and when it is discussed, it is only work by the same hand-picked artists like Yoko Ono, Shigeeko Kubota, and Alison Knowles. Therefore, considering the major scholarly publications on the Fluxus movement, there is still a lot to be explored about the rest of the women artists of Fluxus.

I have briefly discussed some of the common issues that have been written regarding female Fluxus artists' work. I do believe that several interpretations of women's performative works have been insightful and are beginning to address the lack of recognition of these works in the art historical literature. However, as previously stated, Fluxus works were not just performative. Female artists contributed to every other form of Fluxus work and it was not all necessarily feminist. I want to assess the works of other female artists and their specific art pieces under Fluxus, those which I believe to be significant, but have for some reason been almost erased from art history.

I also aim to further expand on the idea as to why many of these Fluxus women's works were considered feminist. I do believe that female Fluxus artists' contributions to art did help to increase the future number of women artists from the 1970s onward. However, I think it is important to assess how this happened. It is essential to view women's work from two viewpoints, as both feminist and not. Seen through both lenses, one can ask: how did Fluxus women pave the way for future women artists? And, does a work need to contain feminist elements in order to be considered significant?

The Problem with Fluxus

If we look at Fluxus as George Maciunas' Fluxus, then his opinions on what exactly constitutes as Fluxus inclusion is necessary to understand. I previously examined several examples of Maciunas' exclusionary practices, but I want to further analyze the motives behind his actions to conclude whether or not they were deeply rooted in a gender bias. It is crucial to understand the formative theories of Fluxus as a collective in order to determine whether or not Maciunas' justifications for exclusion were justified by Fluxus standards.

Fluxus endeavors were intended to constitute a collective group effort. In letters written to colleagues, Maciunas defined Fluxus as a "social (not aesthetic)" group.³¹ Fluxus was not the forum in which an artist could push their individual practice or style. Rather, the strength in Fluxus was rooted in its collective spirit.³² In addition, Maciunas was strongly opposed to art that was solely intended to promote an artist's ego and art that was exclusively Eurocentric, a prior focus of the avant-garde.³³

If we look at the different forms of intermedia in Fluxus, we see that both collective and collaborative "spirit" are applied. Fluxkits and publications inherently embody a collective work, often comprising of the work of more than one Fluxartist. Flux performances, especially, employ collaborative efforts, often of several Fluxartists to comprise one Fluxus event. In this way, Fluxus was not designed to promote the individual agendas of an artist. This becomes tricky when an artist utilizes their artistic platform in a individually socially conscious way, and in the case of female Fluxus artists, there are Fluxworks that could be viewed as pushing a feminist ideology.

³¹ Stiles, "Between Water and Stone," 69.

³² Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, 37.

³³ *Ibid.*, 37.

Looking back at the instances of exclusion by Maciunas, we must further analyze his motives and justifications. With Kate Millett, Charlotte Moorman, and Carolee Schneemann, we see the reason for their exclusion was presented under the guise that their work was interpreted as too provocative. Maciunas' argument could be that this provocation is a facet of individualism, for which Fluxus did not strive. However, a pattern emerges when several works that deal with the female body and female sexuality are denounced. The misogynistic undertones of this are difficult to ignore. We must understand his treatment towards his female colleagues in relation to these criticisms.

I do not believe that George Maciunas was overtly misogynistic in his overall practices. The evidence of his long-lasting relations with his female colleagues and frequent collaborations with female Fluxus artists display how extensively he encouraged them to join the movement. Many female Fluxus artists joined the movement after meeting Maciunas at Fluxus events. Takako Saito moved to the United States from Japan where she soon met Maciunas and the two began a longstanding professional relationship, and Maciunas even allowing Saito certain levels of creative leadership for the group. Maciunas and Carla Liss traveled together to Greece, after which he helped to mass-produce her Fluxkits. Fluxartist Mieko Shiomi remembers Maciunas as open and progressive, and that the movement did not discriminate on the basis of nationality and gender.³⁴ Even though Maciunas later had a falling out with Millett, he supported several of her works, like her Flux furniture, which he intended to mass-produce.³⁵ She has claimed that she never felt personally excluded by him,

³⁴ Moderated by Midori Yoshimoto, featuring Alison Knowles, Carolee Schneemann, Sara Seagull, Barbara Moore, transcribed by Brynn Wein Shiovitz, ed. Midori Yoshimoto and Alex Pittman, 2009, "An Evening with Fluxus Women: A Roundtable Discussion," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19, no. 3: 369–89.

³⁵ O'Dell, "Fluxus Feminus," 49-50.

but did notice a lack in support from the Fluxus movement over time.³⁶ Maciunas supported the work that was not explicit in displaying the female body with its own agency, especially if that meant embracing sexuality.³⁷

While I do not think Maciunas discouraged the progression and work of female Fluxus artists, the problem lies in his justifications of exclusion and the types of work he denounced. The works that often displeased him were ones that dealt with the female body. Works that were inherently feminist in nature were the ones that he did not consider a part of Fluxus. One can argue that his justification that these works existed out of the realm of Fluxus, but there are several works by male Fluxus artists that were equally provocative. Instead of discouragement, these works were able to run without scrutiny.³⁸ Nam June Paik made several sexually provocative works, including *Young Penis Symphony* (1962), in which ten men were to stick out their penises through a large piece of paper to face the audience. Ben Patterson's *Lick (Whipped Cream Piece)* (1964) asked the audience to lick whipped cream off a person's body. Other Fluxus members enjoyed this piece.³⁹ These works are both humorous and do not deal with social struggles that are more prevalent concerning the reception and treatment of women's bodies. So then why did works that were more serious, displaying issues central to a woman's body, receive backlash from Maciunas and other Fluxus members?

If Maciunas criticizes work involving women taking agency over their own bodies as "animalistic" and "provocative," then it is hard not to assume that there is an explicit gender

³⁶ O'Dell, "Fluxus Feminus," 49-50.

³⁷ Stiles, "Anomaly, Sky, Sex, and Psi in Fluxus," 71.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

bias. This attitude suggests that Maciunas may not have been as progressive as some of his female colleagues remembered. To react to this form of artistic interpretation of the female body in this way insinuates that there is an automatic sexuality that is applied to the naked female body. It is possible that Maciunas was uncomfortable and not prepared with this practice being used in the realm of Fluxus. To him, it may have been seen as these artists going against the collective spirit in favor of individualism.

A Closer Look at Female Fluxus Artists

I now want to pay special attention to a few female Fluxus artists that I believe were integral to the development and progression of Fluxus, but have been largely excluded from the existing literature. This is not an attempt to discredit the works of more prominent female Fluxus artists, as their work was equally important and they have rightfully received both scholarly attention and public praise. Let us not forget that Alison Knowles was the first woman to participate in any Fluxus event, helping to break ground for future female Fluxus artists.⁴⁰ This was a milestone in Fluxus history, and the praise towards Knowles' exhaustive contributions to the movement have been justly given. Unfortunately, not all of her colleagues have been treated similarly in the realm of art history.

Many of these artists enjoyed prosperous careers within the Fluxus circle, and some furthered their art past this movement. Several of them worked closely with Maciunas and other prominent Fluxus figures, creating notable Fluxworks central and integral to the movement. However, what these women share is a lack of notoriety in the scholarly literature. It is possible that because some of these women were not formative members of Fluxus, arriving in its mid to later years, that they have not been considered as influential as their other colleagues. However, while some may have only contributed a few works, their participation was significant, especially to their colleagues. Several of these women worked outside the realm of performance, contributing to the production of publications, Fluxkits, and other intermedia. It is important to highlight these forms of intermedia, as performance is often the initially assumed medium for women of the movement.

⁴⁰ Mari Dumett, *Corporate Imaginations: Fluxus Strategies for Living* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 273.

Nye Ffarrabas (Formerly Bici Forbes Hendricks)

Nye Ffarrabas, known in Fluxus as Bici Forbes or Bici Hendricks, began her studies in film studies, production, and postproduction.⁴¹ She has been listed as part of the “first generation” of Fluxus artists that formed from 1964-1966 as stated in the Fluxus catalogue for the 1970 exhibition, “Fluxus and Happenings,” which took place in Cologne.⁴² Fluxartist and Fluxus art historian Ken Friedman described her artistic inclusion in the movement as one that “integrated life in a deep and peculiarly Fluxus way.”⁴³ Throughout her Fluxus participation, she created several works on her own and with other Fluxartists such as George Maciunas, Peter Moore, and Geoff Hendricks.

Several of her works utilized found objects often centering around food and eating practices of the everyday. With this concentration, she related to Fluxus with food itself as its own visual focus. Works like, *Breakfast Event* (1964), *Milk Festival* (1966), *Egg/Time Event* (1967), and *Colored Bread* (1969) took aspects of everyday life, and forced the audience to reconsider their role as both utilitarian and as separate objects. She was also fascinated with the concept of time as it relates to ice, which she manifested in her ice pieces like the ice jigsaw puzzles and ice candles. One of her more notorious events was a collaboration between her and her ex-husband, Geoff Hendricks, for *Fluxus Divorce Event*, which took place on June 24, 1971. Ffarrabas and Hendricks cut up and chopped several household

⁴¹ Pilar Aumente Rivas, “Mujeres Artistas del Entorno Fluxus: Pioneras del Arte de Acción,” *Arte Y Ciudad: Revista de Investigación*, no. 4 (October 2013): 144.

⁴² Friedman, “Fluxus Performance,” 39.

⁴³ Ken Friedman, “A Game without Rules,” in *Nye Ffarrabas: a walk on the inside - 50 year retrospective*, ed. C X Silver Gallery (Brattleboro: C X Silver Gallery, 2014), 19.

objects, furniture, and their wedding documents, thus officially disseminating the institution of their marriage that saw husband and wife as two parts of a whole.⁴⁴

Her Fluxus works were prolific and included a wide range of intermedia. Ffarrabas also worked closely with Maciunas on collaborative works. Besides her events, she also began to make publications, which led her to found *Black Thumb Press of New York* in 1965, with the intention of publishing interdisciplinary works, in which the notable *Statement of Aims and Purposes of the Black Thumb Press* (1966) came about. Her work ranged from playful to political. Her word boxes and punctuation poems displayed a simple, light-hearted disposition. Conversely, *Defrost the American Flag* (1966), which displays an American Flag encased in a block of ice as it melts, demonstrates Ffarrabas' political argument against the United States' aggression toward Vietnam during the war.⁴⁵ Some of her other Fluxus work includes *Sky Event* (1966), in which she calls on the participant to: "Lie on your back in a green place that is pleasant and quiet."⁴⁶ In *Language Box, Box Language* (1966), Ffarrabas creates a book as a "game without rules."⁴⁷ It calls upon the impulses of children, using a sandbox allowing the reader to act upon their own creative instinct; it is up to them how to follow or not follow Ffarrabas' instructions. Her works demonstrated Fluxus ideology and allowed her close and personal interactions within the greater Fluxus endeavors.

⁴⁴ Natasha Lushetich, *Fluxus: The Practice of Non-Duality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014): 177.

⁴⁵ Rivas, "Mujeres Artistas del Entorno Fluxus: Pioneras del Arte de Acción," 144.

⁴⁶ Bici Forbes Hendricks, "SKY EVENT," *Fluxus Debris!: artnotart* (website), last modified June 18, 2003, accessed January 20, 2018, <http://id3419.securedata.net/artnotart/fluxus/bhendricks-skyevent.html>.

⁴⁷ Karl Ruhrberg, Klaus Honnef, Manfred Schneckenburger, and Christiane Fricke, *Art of the 20th Century, Part 1* (Cologne: Taschen, 2000), 521.

Simone Forti

Simone Forti's name is well known to those who study dance, but in the field of art history, her work has been relatively undocumented.⁴⁸ She was an early contributor to the Fluxus movement, and had immense influence on Fluxartist and dancer Yvonne Rainer and the Judson Dance Theater. Having trained with the pioneer of postmodern dance, Anna Halprin, Forti began to explore dance improvisation, focusing on motion directed by an awareness of the body's composition. Although Forti considers herself closer to the dance community, her influence on Fluxus was instrumental in the development of body performance. She presented her seminal body of work, *Dance Constructions*, in May of 1961 at Yoko Ono's Chambers Street loft. Forti performed "Five Dance Constructions and Some Other Things" as a concert of experimental dance.⁴⁹ She played on everyday actions while paying attention to the structure of her movements. Forti performed these motions amongst simple, utilitarian objects like rope and wood.

Except for her brief collaborations with La Monte Young in 1961 for his hanging rope constructions, Forti did not regularly participate in group performances. It is speculated that this is the reason for her marginalization in the literature and museum representation of her contributions.⁵⁰ It has also been suggested that the perspective of dance as a more feminized discipline, one that is based more on expression rather than conceptual thought, has led to her omission from academic literature.⁵¹ It should be noted that in addition to her dance works,

⁴⁸ Virginia B. Spivey, "The Minimal Presence of Simone Forti," *Woman's Art Journal* 30, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2009): 11.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

Forti published, *Angel*, in 1978, a self-published book of short prose poems and photographs that examine the progression of her work and its relationship with her life.

Mary Bauermeister

Mary Bauermeister began her artistic career focusing on design and painting. Her role in the formation of the Fluxus movement has been widely ignored. It was at her studio in 1970 in Cologne where she held a series of meetings for some of the most notable Fluxus artists, including John Cage, Merce Cunningham, George Brecht, and Nam June Paik. These gatherings constituted some of the earliest Fluxus events, which led to her nickname, the “mother of the Fluxus movement.” Artists, dancers, and musicians convened to present original readings, performance, and concerts. Her intermedia works, specifically, are a vital point of discussion in the relationship between the art of Europe and the United States.

In the early 1960s, she and her partner, composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, were pivotal in the formation of the avant-garde of post-war Germany.⁵² Bauermeister participated in Stockhausen’s composition course in Darmstadt and collaborated with him for the notable theater work, *Originale* (1961), along with Nam June Paik. After attending the New York Fluxus Festival organized by George Maciunas in Wiesbaden, Germany, Bauermeister became interested in the Fluxus movement. This prompted her to move to New York City to further situate herself within the group. She and Stockhausen presented *Originale* again at the New York Avant-Garde Festival, organized by Charlotte Moorman in 1964. The festival, as well as their performance, was protested against by Maciunas and other Fluxus artists for its “cultural imperialism.”⁵³ This instance and Bauermeister’s other collaborations with Stockhausen have been cited as a point of unrest for Maciunas. Bauermeister believes that it

⁵² Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 11.

⁵³ RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art* (Madrid: Destino, 1996), 133.

confused him as to what exactly her affiliation was with Fluxus.⁵⁴ What has resulted from her affiliation with Fluxus are numerous works of intermedia including drawings, texts, and structural objects. While Bauermeister's status as a Fluxus member is debated, her role in the establishment of the movement is significant. It is possible that her tense relationship with Maciunas explains her oversight in Fluxus literature.

Carla Liss

After moving to New York in 1967, Carla Liss became involved in Fluxus activities the following year upon meeting Maciunas, at a point when the movement had already been well-established. Liss was a close colleague to Maciunas, travelling with him to Greece when he sought to expand the Fluxus community in 1972. Although interested in cinema, it is from this trip that she was inspired to create her notable conceptual works.⁵⁵ In the years following the trip, she created Fluxkits containing items from the trip.

Island Flux Souvenir (1973) is a plastic box with a label made by Maciunas that contained souvenirs of their trip. The contents are shells, rocks, plant fibers, a greek stamp, a coin, and a small box of sand. *Travel Fluxkit* (1973) is another plastic box with a label made by Maciunas, but contains "obsolete tickets stubs and schedules" from their excursion. Both works signified memorabilia as well as conceptual documentation. This act of creating a Fluxkit is a foundational aspect of Fluxus ideology, of experience and encounter. Her later piece, *Sacrament Fluxkit* (1979), is a plastic box with two labels, both designed by Maciunas, containing nine vials of water from different sources such as "lake," "faucet," and "pool." The "holy" water gives the audience the choice whether to apply a "sacramental" experience

⁵⁴ Rivas, "Mujeres Artistas del Entorno Fluxus: Pioneras del Arte de Acción," 146.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

to our interactions with water.⁵⁶ Liss' Fluxkits present actual items from an experience, and when presented to an audience, allows for their personal feeling of participation, offering the viewer a first-hand experience.⁵⁷

Kate Millett

Kate Millett became involved in the New York art scene before her inclusion in Fluxus. She was immersed in the Abstract Expressionist movement, but was discouraged by the blatant misogyny she experience from the group.⁵⁸ Looking for new inspiration, she moved to Japan and became involved in the Japanese avant-garde scene when she met Yoko Ono.⁵⁹ This prompted her to move back New York to further pursue the Fluxus movement there. Millett was quickly immersed in the group, working with Maciunas on collaborations with her Flux furniture. Maciunas was supportive of her work, even intending to mass produce her furniture sculptures.⁶⁰ One work he particularly liked was *Stool* (1967), a simple sculpture with a wooden stool top with legs in the shape of women's legs with stockings and shoes.⁶¹ He also appreciated her series *Food for Thought* (1966-1967), which she described as

⁵⁶ Jacquelynn Baas, "Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life," in Jacquelynn Bass ed., *Fluxus and the Essential Qualities of Life* (Hanover and Chicago: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, and University of Chicago Press, 2011), 48.

⁵⁷ Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 10.

⁵⁸ Laurel Fredrickson, "Trap: Kate Millett, Japan, Fluxus and Feminism," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19, no. 3 (November 2009): 343.

⁵⁹ Andrea Terpenkas, "Fluxus, Feminism, and the 1960's," *Western Tributaries* 4 (2017), 4.

⁶⁰ Terpenkas, "Fluxus, Feminism, and the 1960's," 4.

⁶¹ Fredrickson, "Trap: Kate Millett, Japan, Fluxus and Feminism," 339.

“art as simple as the metaphysical food... metaphysical poems.”⁶² Maciunas photographed the series, furthering its Fluxus credibility.

Another important work, *Trap* (1967), anticipated her future political expression in her art. Conversely to *Stool*, this piece was not “happy” or a representation of a “visual pun.”⁶³ Rather, *Trap* was a large installation consisting of segments with themes central to the treatment of women. One segment, “City of Saigon,” demonstrated through legs sticking out of a wall of urinals, her disgust with America’s role in the perpetuation of prostitution in Vietnam during the war.⁶⁴ Another segment features a torso of a female figure, inspired by the true story of the kidnap, torture, and murder of the teenager, Sylvia Likens.⁶⁵ Likens’ body was carved with the inscription: “ I am a prostitute and proud of it.”⁶⁶ The installation examined the perception of prostitution and its relation to women’s sexuality, specifically how these attitudes are prescribed for them, not by them. The piece also acted as a voice for the victim, Likens, using art as a medium for this representation. This work and her 1969 book, *Sexual Politics*, helped to formulate her position in the feminist movement, which I will further discuss later.

In a letter to Fluxartist Ben Vautier, she asserts her participation in Fluxus, citing her collective endeavors with other Fluxus members, specifically in the Fluxus exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. She explains how the “heritage of Dada and Duchamp and Cage”

⁶² Ibid., 339.

⁶³ Kate Millet, “Art Lecture on Sculpture,” transcript, n.d., in Kate Millet Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections LIBrary, Duke University, Durham, NC.

⁶⁴ O’Dell, “Fluxus Feminus,” 49.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 49.

influenced her understanding of Fluxus and that the movement gave her guidance when she was still finding her footing as an artist. While she and Maciunas did enjoy a good relationship for a time, Millett seemingly disappeared from Fluxus publications and programs.⁶⁷ It is speculated that this occurred as her involvement in the feminist movement took off, diminishing her presence in Fluxus history.⁶⁸

Annie Vautier

Annie Vautier is another example of a Fluxartist who worked closely within the Fluxus circle, but is difficult to research because of how seldom she has been written about. Annie Vautier was married to fellow Fluxartist Ben Vautier and had a close relationship with Maciunas who encouraged her conceptual pieces.⁶⁹ She often collaborated with her husband, notably on the piece, *Sweet*. This score was indicated for a Fluxus concert in which candies would be handed out to the public, the music of the piece being the noise that came from unwrapping the wrappers. This piece exemplifies the Fluxus idea that a work is dependent on the audience in order to be fully materialized. Another event score, *Piano Piece N° 1 of Annie*, calls on the performer to sit at a piano, lift the lid, and take a harmonica out to play a salute. One of her more memorable pieces, *Flux Mobile* (1966), was a conceptual work that combined installation and performance. In this piece, Vautier scattered pot and plants around a gallery and water them every day of the exhibition. Maciunas was pleased with the piece, and had planned to make and edit labels for Vautier, but his participation was never realized.⁷⁰ Vautier's work has been considered neo-futurist in nature.⁷¹ Her exercises are playful and

⁶⁷ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁶⁹ Rivas, "Mujeres Artistas del Entorno Fluxus: Pioneras del Arte de Acción," 145.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 145.

properly exhibit Fluxus concepts through their simplicity and whimsical observation of mundane tasks.

Yvonne Rainer

Yvonne Rainer is mostly associated with dance and performance and was inspired by the work of Simone Forti. Rainer established herself in the Fluxus movement early on, participating in Yoko Ono's works in 1961. She also participated in a series of interdisciplinary concerts organized by La Monte Young and George Maciunas in 1961 called "Literary Evenings and Musica Antiqua et Nova." From this time until the mid 1960s, Rainer would continue to participate in several Fluxus events and performances including *Yam Festival* (1963), *Spring Events* (1963), and *Evenings: Theater & Engineering* (1966).

Her own dance and movement pieces demonstrate her understanding of the body and its association with the mind. Her 1966 piece, *The Mind is a Muscle*, exhibits the connection between consciousness and the "intelligent" body.⁷² *Some Thoughts on Improvisation* (1963) displays spontaneity and decision making process that comprises performance.⁷³ This idea of quick decision making is also demonstrated in *Three Distributions* (1971), a piece that calls on the audience to declare themselves performer or audience. Throughout the piece, the performer is forced to decide what role they want, animate or inanimate, and in the role of the audience, one must continuously make decisions that reflect what kind of observer they wish to be. Rainer's work aims to provide the audience with awareness of their own bodies, their actions, and the place these bodies hold in life.

Alice Hutchins

⁷¹ Michel Delville, *Food, Poetry, and the Aesthetics of Consumption: Eating the Avant-Garde* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 114.

⁷² Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 242.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 242.

Originally from California, Alice Hutchins moved to New York in 1967 when she was fifty-one where she quickly became involved in Fluxus after meeting George Maciunas and Dick Higgins that same year. She had become involved in art a decade earlier, while living in Paris, with a focus on painting. However, she grew dissatisfied with painting by the mid-1960s and wanted to venture into new media. Right before she moved to New York, she began experimenting with magnets and made three-dimensional works.

With her newfound interest, she continued to create magnetic work, keeping in mind a Fluxus perspective. *Group I Model K* (1968) consists of small washers clustered around tubular magnets. *Flux Moon* (1968/80) is a sculpture of a metal base with magnets holding in place a plexiglass dome. Multiples of her *Jewelry Fluxkit* (1969) were made; plastic boxes containing magnets, springs, bolts, bells, and other hardware parts. For Hutchins, magnetic objects were an untested medium that she was able to utilize in different forms of intermedia including sculpture and Fluxkit. Also, the idea of these as multiples implies a inclination toward accessible art.⁷⁴ The magnetized metals allowed for direct interaction with the audience. It invites their creative expression, granting them a direct, hands-on experience with the piece. Similar to Fluxus events, Hutchins re-contextualized the role of the viewer, but in this case with objects rather than performance. Her objects are therefore dynamic and redefine the audience's role in the piece's development.⁷⁵

Anne Tardos

⁷⁴ Kathy O'Dell, "In the Field with Alice Hutchins," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19, no. 3 (2009): 411.

⁷⁵ Rivas, "Mujeres Artistas del Entorno Fluxus: Pioneras del Arte de Acción," 147.

Anne Tardos studied a variety of media including painting, sculpture, and cinematography. She was one of the few Fluxartists to utilize video as its own form of intermedia. After living in Europe, Tardos moved to New York in 1966. Prior to her relocation, she had already situated herself inside the Fluxus circle, collaborating in performances with Fluxartists Jackson Mac Low, whom she later married, and Emmet Williams.

She enjoyed a good relationship with George Maciunas and even dedicated a piece to him, the *Portrait of George Maciunas*. This piece was a video in which she projected photos under a monitor while simultaneously manipulating the tape.⁷⁶ Her other video works enlisted Fluxus members, like *Statue* (1977/99), which captured the development of Simone Forti's dance work.⁷⁷ Another video piece, *Apple Eater* (1973), displays her shared interest in the relationship between performance, body and food. In this work, Tardos invited other Fluxus artists and friends to pose for her while they ate an apple. The piece is not only conceptual in nature, but acts as a documentation of those integral to the Fluxus circle of the early 1970s.

Tardos was interested in the documentation of simple actions that occur in our everyday lives, sometimes not related to us as people. For instance, *Pipes* (1974) is an audio recording of the sounds generated by pipes in her apartment, and *Refrigerator Defrosting* (1975) is the recorded sound of water dripping onto a metal plate inside a refrigerator. Her recordings are presented almost as musical scores, demonstrating to us the artistic quality that we ignore in our ordinary surroundings.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 149.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 149.

Fluxus as a Basis for Feminist Art

Fluxus had a direct influence on the subsequent feminist art that came about in the 1970s. Not only did the Fluxus conceptual practices of performance, publication, and object-based art anticipate that of future decades, but artists themselves from the group became pioneers of feminist art. Several female figures, one whom I have not previously discussed in great length, utilized their knowledge and platform as Fluxartists to do so. Kate Millett, Yoko Ono, and Carolee Schneemann integrated performative, sculptural, and literary intermedia to introduce proto-feminist elements into art. A link has been drawn between the sexual liberation of the 1960s and the anticipation of the feminist movement, resulting from more open views on the female body and sexuality.⁷⁸

The different interpretations of Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*, described previously, demonstrate that there was no clear agreement about the work's intent. Although Ono, as creator of the piece, may not have intended for it to be perceived as overtly feminist, the result was that the piece generated a great amount of discussion and literature on the piece as one of the most groundbreaking performance works of all time. The nature of the phenomena was caused by feminist associations prescribed to *Cut Piece*. Some view the piece as a response to the treatment of women's bodies "stripped bare" due to the war in Japan, specifically how Asian bodies have been assaulted in these circumstances and viewed as submissive.⁷⁹ Ono's demeanor during the performance, as passive and motionless, has been considered symbolic of female passivity, especially in the vulnerability of sexual violence, displayed by the surrendering of herself to the audience.⁸⁰ The relationship between artist and

⁷⁸ Stiles, "Between Water and Stone," 77.

⁷⁹ Bryan-Wilson, "Remembering Yoko Ono's 'Cut Piece,'" 116.

⁸⁰ Yoko Ono, "Cut Piece," *Re.act.feminism: A Performing Archive*, accessed March 15, 2018, <http://www.reactfeminism.org/entry.php?l=lb&id=121&e=a>.

audience is distinctly Fluxus in nature, because of the reliance on audience participation to fully realize the work. I believe that even though it may not have been Ono's intention to be perceived as overtly feminist as it has been, it can not be ignored that the act of removing clothing from a woman's body connotes both sexual and power dynamics. In the piece, Ono's role can be interpreted as one that reclaims the power of the female body by allowing the public to control the actions. Her invitation reverts the supposed subordination of female sexuality and autonomy. The piece has been the basis for several variations and Ono has performed it again in recent years, asserting the long-lasting influence of the piece.

Another one of her Fluxus works, *Conversation Piece* (1962), an event score from her book *Grapefruit*, calls on the performer to bandage a part of their body and to tell a story about it. The idea is to continuously bring the attention back to the bandage and to not talk about anything else. This work can be seen as a physical representation of psychophysical tension.⁸¹ There is an underlying, proto-feminist notion in the the role of speaking versus listening as a woman.⁸² Women have been characterized, as opposed to men, as suffering internally because it is not socially acceptable to openly express emotion and pain.⁸³

The works by Kate Millett mentioned previously, *Trap* and *Stool*, share similar themes to that of Ono's. They represent women who cannot express the situations they are in, specifically that of sexual oppression. I want to address Millett's other Fluxus works of proto-feminist nature that anticipated her position in the second wave feminist movement, in which she gained more notoriety. Her "throw-away" *Dinnerware* (1966), a disposable dining table set including plates and cups, was immediately seen by viewers as a piece with

⁸¹ Stiles, "Between Water and Stone," 81.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 81.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 81.

gendered associations. The piece can be seen as a rejection of women's traditional household duties.⁸⁴ It has also been described as the antecedent of the famous feminist work, *Dinner Party* (1974-79) by Judy Chicago.⁸⁵

Arguably Millett's most well-known work, *Sexual Politics*, is a book she created in 1969 during her Fluxus involvement that addressed societal standards that lead women to feel trapped by their sexuality.⁸⁶ In this book, Millett outlines the political element of sex based on the concepts of power and domination that are often at play. She analyzes the social relationship between men and women, identifying the underlying patriarchal components of heterosexual relationships by studying sequences of sexual domination in history and literature.⁸⁷ These patriarchal concepts, she argues, can be considered political in nature. Art historian Katie O'Dell argues that Millett's presence in Fluxus was the reason for the influence of Happenings and events on feminism and other social movements of the time.⁸⁸ This work was instrumental in the development of radical feminist thought which propelled Millett to the forefront of the movement, where she became a member of several feminist groups including the National Organization for Women and New York Radical Women.

Although Carolee Schneemann's Fluxus membership was contested by Maciunas, her affiliation with other members of Fluxus and Happenings placed her well within the movement, even if it was only for a brief period. Her famous piece, *Eye/Body* (1963) was a performance that merged her body with the environment of her physical work, in this case her

⁸⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁸⁶ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press: 2000), 123.

⁸⁷ O'Dell, "Fluxus Feminus," 50.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 50.

paintings and constructions. By doing so, she literally immersed herself into her work as an extension of the construction, making her both the artist and the artwork. The fact that she was nude for the performance was intentional. She claims that an “artist’s sexuality is an integral part of art.”⁸⁹ This declared her right to display herself in such a way, even if that way is to be seen as erotic. Schneemann’s assertion of this right was groundbreaking at the time and allowed her to change the perception and ownership of her body.⁹⁰ The work set an imbalance in a culture that associated femininity as passive, since Schneemann was presenting herself as unapologetically female.⁹¹ This notion influenced female artists and feminist activists alike in the acceptance that the female body could be both sexy and actively creative at the same time. Even though Schneemann’s involvement in the Fluxus movement did not develop further, she continued to create influential feminist performative works that have affirmed her role in the development of conceptual art.

The works of female Fluxus artists were able to pave the way for future female artists, specifically those in the feminist art movement. The notions of the “performative, explorative, self-investigatory, humorous spirit and Fluxus” outlined the different forms of intermedia in which artists could demonstrate their work in this manner. While performative works have arguably been the most instrumental in the passage from Fluxus to feminism, we see that sculptural and literary works from the movement were also forms that were able to be recontextualized toward this ideology.

⁸⁹ Stiles, “Anomaly, Sky, Sex, and Psi in Fluxus,” 68.

⁹⁰ Elin Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996), 164.

⁹¹ Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, 36.

Conclusion

The lack of information that we have on female Fluxus artists is the result of two problems: how these artists were treated in primary documentation and by their contemporaries in the Fluxus movement, and how they have been overlooked in the existing art historical literature on Fluxus. It is important to understand not only the work that these artists made, but why exactly were these women left out of the discussion. These artists created a multitude of intermedia art, combining sculpture, poetry, performance and other various media, introducing the rest of the art world to foreign artistic practices. In order to properly understand the impact Fluxus had on the art world, credit must be given to each of its innovative contributors. Specifically, Fluxus had a large influence on the progression of performance art, a medium central to development of the feminist art movement that followed.

It is encouraging to see more attention being paid to these artists in recent years, but in order to accurately document and discuss this art movement and its subsequent influence, the analysis and writing about female Fluxus artists must continue. If art historians concentrate their research on these women, it will further the public's understanding of the Fluxus movement and its significance. The achievement of these artists may continue to influence future artists and a more accurate and balanced assessment of the Fluxus movement as a catalyst for the feminist art movement will be recognized.

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