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This is George Maciunas speaking, talking about
Fluxus History. This history will be presented in
chapters with the first being, each chapter will cover
a pre-determined period within Fluxus. In this chapter
will include a period that is called pre-Fluxus or
proto-Fluxus, covers the dates of 1900 to 1950.
This talk has been made on the 1st of April 1981.

THIS IS GEORGE

MACIUNAS SPEAKING

TALKING ABOUT

FLUXUS HISTORY

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This is George Maciunas speaking, talking about Fluxus history. This history will be presented in chapters each one hour long. Each chapter will cover a characteristic period within Fluxus. So ^{the} first cassette will include a period that is called pre-Fluxus or proto-Fluxus, covers the dates of 1960 to 1961. This talk has been done on the 20th of April 1978.

In 1960 my activities were rather limited. They were mainly in architectural and graphic design. I was working for Knoll Associates. I also was very interested in musical polichrony, or color in music, and had organized a group of musicians to play Renaissance music, for whom I had obtained replicas of Renaissance instruments, such as krumphorns, sackbuts, ^u ~~delcians~~ dolcians, ^{sp. sp.} shawms, ^{sp.} ~~shawms~~ cornetts, viola da gambas, flutes, theorbos -- we had twelve different instruments. One of them was a musical director who orchestrated or wrote the instrument parts, and I was the sorts of general manager of the group. We had no place, however, for neither rehearsals or performances.

My third interest in musical color was leaning towards electronic music and music of John Cage. The first time his music attracted me was sometime in

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early fifties when I attended Carnegie Institute of technology and heard a concert of his for prepared piano. For me the prepared piano was another device to extract musical color from a very, let's say, colorless or abstract instrument. During the same year I met a friend, another Lithuanian, by the name of Almus Salcius, who had a gallery in Great Neck but was interested in opening a gallery in Manhattan. So we got together and found a second story gallery somewhere in the seventies. I think it's the same address as later Multiples Gallery used. Now the scheme was to have the artists that Almus has found to pay the rent for the gallery. In other words, subsidize their own exhibits by paying the rent or the cost of it. That, of course, eliminated a possibility of obtaining first rate artists. We ended up with a lot of third rate artists/ who were rich enough to pay the high rent which was something in the range of \$600 a month in those days. Now, Almus was going to take care of organizing of the art shows and I was going to be in charge of programming. Now, my first plan of course, was to have my group of twelve musicians to play Renaissance music which they promptly

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did. First, they were like public rehearsals. Later they were small scale concerts. This was all happening in late 1960's like December, and early 1961, I'd say, around January and February. At the same time, another Lithuanian friend of mine, Jonas Mekas, who had already by then established a large film distribution and screening organization called Film-Makers' Cooperative and Film-Makers' Cinematheque. He was interested in showing non-commercial, poetic films, experimental films by people like Stan Vanderbeek, Brakhage, Peterson, Maas, and so on. And he was always short of screening places. So I offered that he organizes some screenings at our gallery. I remember we had an evening of just Stan Vanderbeek films that he had made up to 1960 or let's say early 1961 which was a very exciting program. He used 3 screens showing simultaneously 3 films. Most of his films then were of what I'd call collage type -- he would cut pieces from newspapers and move them about to make them like animated films and they contained a lot of humor. And one of my characteristics was I was always in favor of humor whether it was in film or music or art or even architecture.

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At the same time I was attending class at the New School that that was given by Richard Maxfield on electronic music. Now, in those years, Richard Maxfield was about the only really good electronic music composer in the States. Not too well known, but his art was all first class. And he was quite popular among the avantgarde composers. Now, I didn't know anybody else except Richard Maxfield, at that point. But early in 1961, must have been by January of that Year, in his class I met La Monte Young who was another avantgarde composer just arrived from California and he in 1960 had composed a lot of what one could call action music pieces -- in other words, compositions that not necessarily involve any sound at all, like watching fire burn, or letting a butterfly free fly away. One of his very famous pieces is to play fifth interval for a very long time, like three hours. Another famous piece of his is where nothing was happening or where the performers sat on the stage and just watched the audience. La Monte Young was interested in my gallery, I was interested in his type of compositions and he promptly introduced me to a lot

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of other composers. At that time he was running a series of concerts at Yoko Ono's studio on Chambers street. Those concerts were continuing between 18th of December of 1960 to 3rd of June 1961 and included such pieces as piano pieces of Terry Jennings, various compositions by Toshi Ichiyanagi who was a student of John Cage; various pieces like jazz; Flynt music, improvisations, poetry, contest by Henry Flynt; music by Joseph Byrd; a lot of indetermined poetry and poetry for multiple performances by Jackson MacLow which included in his program his Biblical poems, Rush Hour for Pianissimo pieces; Tona Rita (?) Pigs & Lamas (???), *Letters for* to Iris (????), Night Walk, Stanzas for Iris Lessak (????), ~~Any~~ Assimetries, ^hTanks ~~agrad~~, and many others. He was a very prolific poet and did most of his work in ~~him~~ the fifties , oh, like starting early fifties through 1959. Then there were several concerts of Richard Maxfield, of his electronic music, also his electronic together with instruments. Then La Monte Young compositions, especially his composition 1960 #10, and all of his 1961 compositions, twenty nine of them, in fact, which included drawing a straight line. Every one of them

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meant to be a straight line drawn as accurately as possible. He had an assistant with all kinds of surveying instruments and was just drawing the lines, 29 times. Then there was a performance by Simone Morris [Simone Forti] , of her dance constructions, and in spring time there was an environment by Bob Morris which consisted of a giant spiral corridor. You entered at full height into a corridor of about 2 or 3 foot wide and as you continued it kept turning to the left and got shorter, lower and lower, and narrower and narrower, until you had to crawl and finally you couldn't go any further and yet you could see it . continued on. That was a very amusing environment. Then the whole series ended with Lindberg's lights, which was sort of a play of lights on the audience.

This series of La Monte Young at Yoko Ono's loft . got me in touch with various composers such as Yoko Ono, Toshi Ichianagi, Henry Flynt, Joseph Burd, Jackson MacLow, and Simone Morris. Henry Flynt in those days had developed the so-called concert art idea which now is being copied by literally thousands of artists under the name of conceptual art. One of his

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first concert art pieces he composed in 1954 which consisted of replacing the words of a normal sentence with dictionary definitions. In other words, let's say, just a choice sentence "let's say" would be changed to "let's" -- what the dictionary defines as "let us" with the whole dictionary definition and then "say", the whole dictionary definition of that. Then he would take each word of the definition, look up again in the dictionary, and include the definition of that word again, and expand it til the whole two word sentence can be expanded to include the whole book.

Among the friends of La Monte Young -- even though they didn't perform in this series -- I met such composers as Dick Higgins, Walter de Maria, Ray Johnson, and Iyo. This whole idea of the series gave me sort of an idea to imitate it and make it even more extensive series at our new gallery, incidentally, which was called A/G ^{case} snf the meaning of it could be read in many ways. "A" could stand for Almus and "G" for George, that's our first names. Or it could mean for Avant Garde. Or it could mean for Akzien Gesselschaft, which is in German Stock Company. But we never stuck to any particular meaning

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of it. Just used those two words.

Our series at A/G Gallery started on March 14th 1961 and continued right through ~~through~~ the 30th of July 1961 when the Gallery went bankrupt. At first it started with some events by friends of Jonas Mekas, like poetry evening of Ken Jacobs, a vaudeville evening by Frank Kuenstler. Then, it continued with 3 concerts of Richard Maxfield which included his complete production. There was the electronic music concert of John Cage where we played his Williams and Fontana Mix. There was another electronic music concert by Storm De Hirsch, then a piano concert by Toshi Ichiyanagi where he played his piano pieces #1 to #7. Then a very long evening of various works by Jackson MacLow of his indetermined poetry that usually has to be performed in groups. Then a concert by Dick Higgins which was, I would say, a true action music that I've seen so far. It included his In Memorium, Constellations #2,3,4,6 & 7, Do Everything in Season (???), Danger Music #2; Sounds of Animal Dying (???); Fishes Quadrilateral (???), Concerto for Politics; and several other pieces.

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Then followed a concert by Joseph Byrd where he played music for voices, a Mass, Spring Dragon, and Strata #2. Then another concert of Jackson MacLow but this time of his electronic music. And another electronic music concert by John McDowell (????), another electronic music concert by Johnson; John Fisher,, Bob Morris, Pamela Davis, Earl Brown. Then followed two famous concerts by La Monte Young. One was composition \$7 which involved holding the fifth interval for a very long time. We decided we were going to hold it for 3 hours on 7 ⁶ ~~vilas~~ ^{de gambas}. The sound was beautiful because the bowing was unequal so there was no rhytym to it, it was just continuous 5th interval. Unfortunately there were only 2 in the audience and we had decided that, well, since it's so tiresome piece to play, we were going to quit as soon as those 2 left. But the 2 audience ~~was~~ just stayed on and on for 3 hours, so we had to play the whole piece right to the end. The next piece of La Monte Young was his composition #3 which called for nothing to happen. And this time we had an audience of about 40. They all sat down peacefully on chairs, we collected money from them, \$2 each I think, and then we were too frightened to stay

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there so we just left the Gallery and waited to see what happened. Fifteen minutes passed -- nothing. Then, about half hour, we could hear in the street all kind of noises and breaking sounds. We were still afraid to go back in, so we just stayed away for couple hours till all audience had cleared out. Then when we returned to the Gallery we found the Gallery in a mess. Broken chairs, all kinds of grafitti on the walls. Anyway, that was his composition #3. Then next on July 16 Henry Flynt was going to give a lecture. He called it Exercise Awareness States. And I remember he told me he needed a very clean table for that. So I thought, well, I'll wash it, scrub it, as good as I can, with soap and rinse it with water. He came before the lecture, looked at the table, very sceptically, ah, ah, wasn't satisfied. He took out of his briefcase a completely brand new plastic film which was sealed in an envelope. He unsealed the envelope, took the film out, covered the table with it. I thought, well, sure he's going to have some kind of biological experiment that he needs a completely sterilized table. But the next thing he did, ~~in~~ he just took his notes out, layed them out on the table, he just

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couldn't have his notes pick up dust from anywhere. Then, when the lecture started, we couldn't understand a single sentence of his lecture. It went like six feet above our heads. The whole audience just sat there with open mouths, didn't know what to make out of it. Was it a joke, or a serious lecture. It obviously was serious, and it went on like for 3 hours. He could have talked Chinese, we would have understood just as much. That particular year Henry Flynt was well known for his very difficult lectures. He later overcame that and started to write in a very clear and articulate, concise and very easy to understand style.

Next memorable show was by Walter de Maria which he called Boxes, Ropes, Explicit Directions and Demonstrations. That was on July 23. One of my favorites: there was a card on the wall which read: "After reading this card go to the opposite wall" and on the opposite wall was exactly the same card. He then had several boxes. One of them was a Hand Box where you stuck your hand in and found all sorts of surprises inside. That idea, incidentally, later was expanded a lot by T. Iyo. He had boxes, sort of mysterious boxes, tall ones, about 8 feet high, with a ball on top which couldn't be seen,

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and it said that, well, he knows that the ball is there, but we don't know, we just have to believe him that it's there.

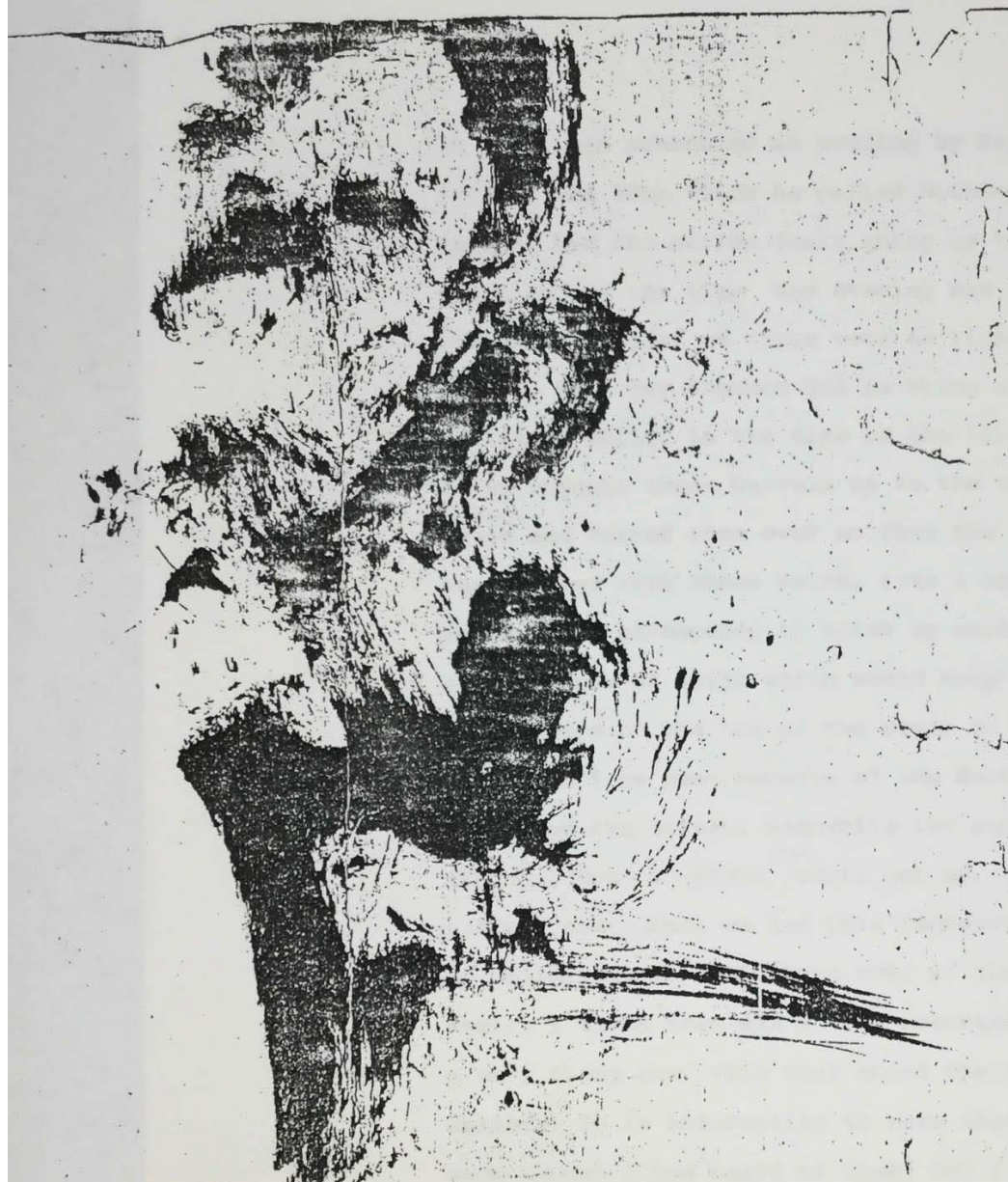
He had the trow-like boxes with balls rolling in them. And several other boxes.

By that time my partner Almus Salcius had run out of paying artists who could pay for their shows. So we figured, well, we are nearing bankruptcy. I may as well put up a show of my own choosing. So I asked Yoko Ono to put a two-week show of her paintings and drawings, which included some very interesting things like her "do-it-yourself" paintings, or paintings that looked like ... oh, just cleaning rags that ~~were~~ were hung on the wall; and abstract calligraphy, paintings with holes in them through which you could look or stick hands through; it was a very successful show but we didn't sell one single painting. During her show I met Iyo, I believe, who became later a very important artist in collaboration with Fluxus movement.

After her show the gallery was already so bankrupt that Con Edison had shut off our electricity. And yet

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PAINTINGS
&
DRAWINGS
BY
YOKO
ONO
JULY
17-30
1-6 PM
EXCEPT
FRIDAY
AT
AG
925
MADISON
AVE
(74)
PREVIEW
3-5 PM
JULY
16
SUNDAY

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we still had scheduled an evening by Ray Johnson on July the 30th which he called Nothing. Now the gallery had the narrow stair going up to the second floor and by the time the evening was scheduled it was already dark, so there were no lights in the stairs. What Ray Johnson did is bring a large barrel of little dolls, to the size of the little finger. So we brought those barrels up to the top of the stair and turned them over so that the whole stair was covered with those dolls, like a small incline. Now anybody attempting to climb up would just produce an avalanche of dolls which would keep coming down. . Now we were on the top of the stair in the gallery, we couldn't be seen because of the dark, we could just hear the noises. Meanwhile the audience kept coming and not a single ^{one} could get up. They were all sliding down since we had this inexhaustible supply of dolls. that we could turn over at the top of the stair. I think that was a very successful show and a very funny one. With that ended the life of A/G Gallery. It is interesting to note that at this time, even though I had heard of them, but I had never met

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yet George Brecht, or Bob Watts, who played such an important part in later Fluxus history. And I unfortunately missed the environment of George Brecht called Ice-Dice which was performed between May and June 1961 at Martha Jackson Gallery. At that time, and in fact later, too, my interest never really expanded to include the so called Happenings people, like Allan Kaprow, Red Grooms, Jim Dine, Robert Whitman, Al Hansen, Claes Oldenburg, even though later I did a project with Claes Oldenburg, though it was never realized. So I have personally missed all ~~the~~ of their happenings.

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P.S. by Jonas Mekas:

It should be noted, that at least two ~~important~~ ^{were} events that took place at A/G Gallery ~~are~~ ^{were} omitted ~~---~~ ^{was Robert Rauschenberg} for whatever reason -- ~~from~~ in the above account of the history of A/G Gallery. One is the show by George himself which took place either immediately after Yoko Ono's show, or immediately preceeding it. One day I walked into the gallery and I found George on the floor, stretching canvasses, and he engaged me in helping him. We prepared some 20 canvasses ~~of various~~ ~~sizes, from 12 x 18 to 24 x 30~~ -- if my memory is correct -- ^{of} exactly same sizes, c. 24 x 30. Next, George brought a bucket of water and ~~spashed~~ ^{poured it} over the canvasses. He then ~~picked~~ ^{poured} up a can of black ~~paint~~ ^{ink} and began dripping it on the canvasses. In fifteen minutes or so he had 20 brand new "abstract" paintings ready for a show. He said, he had completely forgotten that he had a show announced and there were some critics coming next day to see the show. So he said, he decided to produce ~~the~~ ^{an instant} show. ~~When he said~~ ^{he thought it was a very good joke,} The show remained for a few days, and ~~George's joke was~~ for years to come, he used to say -- ~~boy~~ I am not sure, ~~now~~ ^{it} was a truth or a joke -- that the whole show ~~was~~ sold out. He charged only a dollar or two on top of what it cost him to produce ^{the 'paintings'.}

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Another event, not mentioned in the account, is one that I should mention here especially, because it plays such an important part in George's letters reproduced in this collection. It was an afternoon event, a reading by Adolfas Mekas of his short story called Boredom. George liked the story so much that he decided to include it in Fluxus editions. He began working on it in Wiesbaden, in 1962, and we sent him \$2000, in several install~~ments~~^{ments}, for its publication. However, George used ~~all~~ the money for his European Fluxus Festival -- that's what kept it going, ~~and kept delaying the publication of Boredom~~^{was postponed.} Actually, this postpon~~ments~~^{ments} went on and on, for next ~~twenty~~^{fifteen} years... The project kept expanding, he wanted the book enclosed in^a shoe binding, and kept collecting old shoes, leaving, ~~after~~ by the time he died, several boxes full of them. The ~~man~~ book itself -- ~~and~~ together with another ^{short} story ~~sqf~~ which he wanted to publish, Quiritare, also by Adolfas Mekas, ^{was left} leaving ~~it~~ in semi-finished, ~~and~~ ^{was} ~~un~~uncompleted, states.

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