

The

FLUXUS

Reader

EDITED BY KEN FRIEDMAN

AE ACADEMY EDITIONS

THE FLUXUS READER

Edited by KEN FRIEDMAN

First published in Great Britain in 1998 by

ACADEMY EDITIONS

a division of

John Wiley & Sons,

Baffins Lane, Chichester,

West Sussex PO19 1UD

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Other Wiley Editorial Offices

New York • Weinheim • Brisbane • Singapore • Toronto

ISBN 0-471-97858-2

Typeset by BookEns Ltd, Royston, Herts.

Printed and bound in the UK by Bookcraft (Bath) Ltd, Midsomer Norton

Cover design by Hybert Design

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A book is always the product of a team. A book on Fluxus must certainly be so. Several individuals made this book possible. Thanks are due first to George Maciunas. Back in 1966, he proposed that I prepare a history of Fluxus. Thanks are due also to Nicola Kearton. She welcomed the book to Academy Press and shepherded it through development and preparation. Without her, this book would never have been possible. Thanks, finally, to Mariangela Palazzi-Williams, senior production editor at John Wiley & Sons. She made this book the physical reality you hold some thirty-odd years after George suggested it.

Much Fluxus research has been made possible by four individuals who have been responsible for publishing the three largest series of publications of Fluxus material: objects, scores, and multiples, books and catalogues. George Maciunas' Fluxus editions launched Fluxus publishing as an organized phenomenon. Dick Higgins' Something Else Press books brought Fluxus to the larger world. Gilbert Silverman and Jon Hendricks are responsible for the catalogues that have become the largest series of Fluxus research documents.

Several collections are central to the research on Fluxus. Three major collections are now readily accessible. Hanns Sohm's Archiv Sohm is now located at Stadtsgalerie Stuttgart and Jean Brown's collection has become The Jean Brown Archive at the Getty Center for the History of the Arts and Humanities. The collections and archives of Fluxus West and my own papers have been distributed among several museums and universities. The largest body of material is located at Alternative Traditions in Contemporary Art at University of Iowa, the Tate Gallery Archives in London and the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College. Substantial holdings that once belonged to Fluxus West are now part of the Museum of Modern Art's Franklin Furnace Archive Collection, the Museum of Modern Art's Performance Art Archives, the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, the Ken Friedman Collection at the University of California at San Diego and the Henie Onstad Art Center in Oslo. All of these holdings are available for research, publication and exhibition under the normal conditions of research archives and museum collections. A number of important private collections are available under restricted access or by special appointment. Most notable among these are the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Foundation in New York and Detroit, Archivio Conz in Verona, and MuDiMa in Milan.

The documentation section was edited by Owen Smith. I developed the first versions of the documentation at Fluxus West in 1966 and supported improved versions over the years since. Project scholars and editors included Nancy McElroy, Kimberley Ruhe, Matthew Hogan, Judith Hoffberg, Giorgio Zanchetti, and James Lewes. Hoseon Cheon, Dick

Higgins, and Jean Sellem contributed to key bibliographies. The Fluxus Reader documentation team at the University of Maine consisted of Mat Charland, Patricia Clark, Christina Coskran, Christeen Edgecomb-Mudgett, Beth Emery, Jennifer Hunter, Stosh Levitsky, Carol Livingstone, Patricia Mansir, Tim Morin, Trevor Roenick, David Shoemaker, March Truedsson, Margaret Weigang, Emily Worden.

The Norwegian School of Management has been generous with resources, time and freedom for research and publishing. The poetic and playful dimensions of Fluxus often involve intensely practical phenomena. We wanted to work with industry. Our experiments in media and industrial production, successes and failures both, led me to doctoral work in leadership and human behavior. Our ideas on design, manufacturing and marketing took me to Finland and then to Norway. This is the place to thank Lisa Gabriellson and Esa Kolehmainen who brought Fluxus into a working industrial organization at Arabia in Helsinki, and this is the place to thank John Bjørnbye, Ole Henrik Moe and Per Hovdenakk, who brought me to Norway, together with the American Scandinavian Foundation, which funded a year of research.

Professor Johan Olaisen, my department head, has encouraged me to deepen my thinking on the arts as a supplement to scholarship in management and informatics. Professor Fred Selnes, my recent dean, encouraged me with solid collegial support that made it a joy to work with him. Professor Pierre Guillet de Monthoux of the University of Stockholm School of Management invited me to join the European Center for Art and Management at a time when I was ready to stop my research in the arts. Instead of leaving the field, he urged me to consider how Fluxus ideas might apply to management theory. My work on this book is a step in that direction. The freedom to explore problematic concepts is at the heart of the academic enterprise. It is interesting to note that the world of management and industry is often more open to revolutionary thinking than the world of art and culture. This idea, in fact, was at the heart of George Maciunas' view of Fluxus. The bridge between art and the world of social and political production is a central issue in the work of two people who have been vital to my thinking on art, Christo and Jeanne-Claude. My esteem and affection for them cannot be measured.

Here, I thank also Ditte Mauritzon Friedman. Canon and deacon of Lund Cathedral, psychotherapist-in-training, and wife, Ditte has enriched my perspective on Fluxus and on life. And I thank Oliver Mauritzon, walking companion, philosopher and the first taster of whatever I happen to be cooking for Ditte.

Another wise man made this book possible in many ways. He was the secret patron of Fluxus West. The Fluxus West projects in San Diego, San Francisco and around the world did more than anyone thought possible on limited resources and money. As creative and resourceful as it was possible to be, however, money often ran out. That was when our patron stepped in. He made it possible for me to follow my passion for knowledge. He helped me to organize and preserve the collections that are now housed in museums and archives around the world. He was profoundly generous, the more profound considering that he was a patron of the arts on a college professor's salary. I dedicate this book to an outstanding human being: advisor and patron, friend and father, Abraham M Friedman.

THE CONTRIBUTORS

The scholarly content of *The Fluxus Reader* has been the product of a laboratory of ideas, a virtual colloquium. It has been my pleasure here to work with a number of the leading scholars now writing on Fluxus. The authors of the history chapters wrote doctoral dissertations on various aspects of Fluxus. **Owen Smith** is associate professor of art history at the University of Maine. He wrote on George Maciunas at University of Washington. Simon Anderson is head of art history, theory and criticism at the School of the Art Institute Chicago. He wrote on Fluxshoe and British Fluxus at the Royal College of Art. **Hannah Higgins** is assistant professor of art history at University of Illinois at Chicago. She wrote on the interpretation and reception of early Fluxus at University of Chicago.

The authors of the theory chapters have specialized in different aspects of intermedia. **Ina Blom** is doctoral research fellow in art history at the University of Oslo. She has written extensively on Fluxus and intermedia. Craig Saper is assistant professor of criticism at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. He has written on intermedia, multimedia, artist publishing and visual poetry. **David Doris** is a doctoral fellow in art history at Yale University. The chapter on Fluxus and Zen was adapted from his award-winning master's thesis at City University of New York.

The chapters on critical and historical perspectives have been written by three internationally renowned scholars in art history, art theory and literary theory. **Stephen Foster** is professor of art history at University of Iowa and director of the Fine Arts Dada Archive. **Estera Milman** is associate professor of art history at the University of Iowa and founding director of Alternative Traditions in Contemporary Art. **Nicholas Zurbrugg** is professor of English and head of the department of English, Media and Culture Studies at De Montfort University.

The section titled 'Three Fluxus Voices' is the result of two unique collaborations. The first is an extensive interview between Fluxus artist **Larry Miller** and Fluxus co-founder George Maciunas. Made just before Maciunas's death in 1978, it sheds important light on Maciunas' view of Fluxus. The second is the only known interview with Maciunas' wife, Billie. This interview was recorded by **Susan Jarosi**, doctoral candidate in art history at Duke University. The section ends with Larry Miller's own thoughts on what it is to think about Fluxus. Here, I beg the reader's indulgence. There could have been, perhaps there should have been any number of other views, other chapters. Time and space limit every book. I selected these three voices because they are unique and because they form a conceptually elegant triad. If there is a clear message in the sections on history, theory, critical and historical perspectives, it is that there no way to encapsulate Fluxus in any neat paradigm. On another occasion, and for other reasons, I will present other voices: here, time, a page limit and circumstance dictate a useful choice that makes available an interview with ideas that have never before been published.

The section titled 'Two Fluxus Theories' makes available the thoughts of two Fluxus artists who have attempted to theorize Fluxus and place it in a larger intellectual and cultural framework. The first is by **Dick Higgins**, Fluxus co-founder and legendary publisher of Something Else Press. The second is my own: as editor of this book, I feel obliged to put my thoughts on the table here, too.

FLUXUS READER WEB SITE

The World Wide Web is making a vital difference to many fields of human endeavor. The arts and scholarship have been particularly well served by this medium.

One of the most important developments for research and writing on Fluxus is a consortium of five major universities and museums with a key focus on Fluxus and intermedia. These five are developing a Web-based series of virtual resources for scholarship and reflection on contemporary art. University of Iowa's Alternative Traditions in Contemporary Art, the University of California Museum of Art at Berkeley, Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth, Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and Franklin Furnace in New York maintain the site. ATCA at University of Iowa will be hosting a wide variety of scholarly and pictorial materials that dovetail with the material in this book, and a portion of the site will be dedicated to expanding and reflecting on the specific chapters presented here.

The URL is: <<http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/spec-coll/resources/atca.html>>. Please visit the site.

INFORMATION AND IDEAS

I welcome queries and idea on any of the subjects covered in this book. If you have questions or thoughts you would like to pursue, please contact me at:

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KEN FRIEDMAN: INTRODUCTION: A TRANSFORMATIVE VISION OF FLUXUS

A little more than thirty years ago, George Maciunas asked me to write a history of Fluxus. It was the autumn of 1966. I was sixteen then and living in New York after dropping out of college for a term. George had enrolled me in Fluxus that August. Perhaps he saw me as a scholar, perhaps simply as someone with enough energy to undertake and complete such a project.

Not long after, I grew tired of New York and I was ready to move back to California. That was when George appointed me director of Fluxus West. Originally intended to represent Fluxus activities in the western United States, Fluxus West became many things. It became a centre for spreading Fluxus ideas, a forum for Fluxus projects across North America – outside New York – as well as parts of Europe and the Pacific, a travelling exhibition centre, a studio in a Volkswagen bus, a publishing house and a research programme. These last two aspects of our work led George to ask me once again to take on a comprehensive, official history of Fluxus. I agreed to do it. I didn't know what I was getting into.

This history project was never completed. In part, I lacked the documentation, and despite gathering documents and material for years, I never did accumulate the material I should have done to carry out the job. Moreover, I found that it was the ideas in Fluxus that interested me most, far more than the specific deeds and doings of a specific group of artists. While I am a scholar in addition to being an artist, my interest in Fluxus does not focus on documentation or archival work.

The documents and works I did collect have not gone to waste. They found homes in museums, universities and archives, where they are available to scholars who do want to write the history of Fluxus, as well as to scholars, critics, curators and artists who want to examine Fluxus from other perspectives. The history that I never finished gave rise to several projects and publications that shed light on Fluxus in many ways. This book is one of them.

The key issue here is explaining a 'how' and 'why' of Fluxus. Emmett Williams once wrote a short poem on that how and why, writing 'Fluxus is what Fluxus does – but no one knows whodunit.' What is it that Fluxus does? Dick Higgins offered one answer when he wrote, 'Fluxus is not a moment in history, or an art movement. Fluxus is a way of doing things, a tradition, and a way of life and death.' For Dick, as for George, Fluxus is more important as an idea and a potential for social change than as a specific group of people or collection of objects.

As I see it, Fluxus has been a laboratory, a grand project summed up by George

Maciunas' notion of the 'learning machines'. The Fluxus research programme has been characterised by twelve ideas: globalism, the unity of art and life, intermedia, experimentalism, chance, playfulness, simplicity, implicativeness, exemplativism, specificity, presence in time and musicality. (These twelve ideas are elaborated in the chapter titled 'Fluxus and Company'.) These ideas are not a prescription for how to be a Fluxus artist. Rather they form a description of the qualities and issues that characterise the work of Fluxus. Each idea describes a 'way of doing things'. Taken together, these twelve ideas form a picture of what Fluxus is and does.

The implications of some ideas have been more interesting – and occasionally more startling – than they may at first have seemed. Fluxus has been a complex system of practices and relationships. The fact that the art world can sometimes be a forum for philosophical practice has made it possible for Fluxus to develop and demonstrate ideas that would later be seen in such frameworks as multimedia, telecommunications, hypertext, industrial design, urban planning, architecture, publishing, philosophy, and even management theory. That is what makes Fluxus so lively, so engaging and so difficult to describe.

We can grasp the phenomenon through the lens of several disciplines. One such discipline is history, and there is a history of Fluxus to be told. While the core issues in Fluxus are ideas, Fluxus ideas were first summarised and exemplified in the work of a specific group of people. This group pioneered these ideas at a time when their thoughts and practices were distinct and different from many of the thoughts and practices in the world around them, distinct from the art world and different from the world of other disciplines in which Fluxus would come to play a role. To understand the how and why of Fluxus, what it is and does, it is important to understand 'whodunit', to know what Fluxus was and did. History therefore offers a useful perspective.

Fluxus, however, is more than a matter of *art* history. Literature, music, dance, typography, social structure, architecture, mathematics, politics ... they all play a role. Fluxus is, indeed, the name of a way of doing things. It is an active philosophy of experience that only sometimes takes the form of art. It stretches across the arts and even across the areas between them. Fluxus is a way of viewing society and life, a way of creating social action and life activity. In this book, historians and critics offer critical and historical perspectives. Other writers frame the central issues in other ways.

The ideal book would be three times as long as this one is and impossible to publish. I therefore chose to focus on issues to open a dialogue with the Fluxus idea. Rather than teaching the reader everything there is to know about Fluxus, this book lays out a map, a cognitive structure filled with tools, markers and links to ideas and history both.

Fluxus has now become a symbol for much more than itself. That companies in the knowledge industry and creative enterprise use the name Fluxus suggests that something is happening, both in terms of real influence and in terms of fame, the occasional shadow of true influence. Advertising agencies, record stores, performance groups, publishers and even young artists now apply the word Fluxus to what they do. It is difficult to know whether we should be pleased, annoyed, or merely puzzled.

Tim Porges once wrote that the value of writing and publishing on Fluxus rests not on what Fluxus has been but on 'what it may still do'. If one thread binds the chapters in this book, it is the idea of a transformative description that opens a new discourse. A new and

appropriately subtle understanding of Fluxus leaves open the question of what it may still do. That's good enough for me.

Owen Smith and I were discussing this book one afternoon. We reached the conclusion that it is as much a beginning as a summation. If, as George Brecht said in the 1980s, 'Fluxus has Fluxed', one can equally well say what someone – Dick? Emmett? – said a few years later: 'Fluxus has not yet begun.' There is an on-line discussion group called Fluxlist where the question of what lies between those two points has been the subject of much recent dialogue. One of the interesting aspects of the conversation has been the philosophical subtlety underlying the several positions. Those who believe there is a Fluxus of ideas and attitudes more than of objects feel that there is, indeed, a future Fluxus. This Fluxus intersects with and moves beyond the Fluxus of artefacts and objects. This vision of Fluxus distinguishes between a specific Fluxus of specific artists acting in time and space and what René Block termed 'Fluxism', an idea exemplified in the work and action of the historic Fluxus artists.

Beginning or summation, this book offers a broad view of Fluxus. It is a corrective to the hard-edged and ill-informed debates on Fluxus that diminish what we set out to do by locating us in a mythic moment of time that never really existed. Fluxus was created to transcend the boundaries of the art world, to shape a discourse of our own. A debate that ends Fluxus with the death of George Maciunas is a debate that diminishes George's idea of Fluxus as an ongoing social practice. It also diminishes the rest of us, leaving many of the original Fluxus artists disenfranchised and alienated from the body of work to which they gave birth. In the moments that people attempt to victimise us with false boundaries, I am drawn to two moments in history.

The first moment occurred in sixth-century Chinese Zen. It reflects the debates around Fluxus in an oddly apt way, and not merely because Fluxus is often compared with Zen. It involved the alleged split between the Northern and Southern schools of Zen. The real facts of the split seem not to have involved the two masters who succeeded the Sixth Patriarch, one in the North and one in the South, Shen-hsiu and Hui-neng. The long and tangled stories of schism seem rooted, rather, in the actions of Hui-neng's disciple Shen-hui and those who followed him. It has little to do with the main protagonists who respected and admired each other to the point that the supposedly jealous patriarch Shen-hsiu in fact recommended Hui-neng to the imperial court where he, himself, was already held in high renown. This is like much of the argument around Fluxus. It seems that the protagonists of one view or another, the adherents of one kind of work or another, those who need to establish a monetary value for one body of objects or another, seem to feel the need to do so by discounting, discrediting or disenfranchising everyone else. That makes no sense in a laboratory, let alone a laboratory of ideas and social practice.

The other moment I consider took place a few years ago, when Marcel Duchamp declared that the true artist of the future would go underground. To the degree that Fluxus is a body of ideas and practices, we are visible and we remain so. To the degree that Fluxus is or may be an art form, it may well have gone underground already. If this is true, who can possibly say that Fluxus is or isn't dead? We don't know 'whodunit', we don't know who does it and we certainly don't know who may do it in the future.

PART IV
THREE FLUXUS VOICES

SUSAN L JAROSI: SELECTIONS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH BILLIE MACIUNAS

Almost twenty years after George Maciunas' death in May 1978, Billie Maciunas speaks here for the first time about her nine-month relationship with George Maciunas and their three-month marriage. The two met in the summer of 1977 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, where George had retreated from New York City. The couple was married twice in February 1978: first by civil ceremony in Massachusetts and then by Geoff Hendricks in New York City as part of the Fluxus New Year's Cabaret (25 February 1978). The following interview took place at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, in two sessions – 9 October and 27 November 1996.

Susan Jarosi: Tell me how you first met George.

Billie Maciunas: How I met George was that I had been in New York and I was doing temporary work and I had gone there with this fairly romantic notion of writing poetry. But I met a woman who had me do some medical transcription, and she eventually suggested that I needed to get out of New York and she knew this place that I could go. She knew George. So I called up this number and learned that the only thing he cared about was that I was quiet and I didn't smoke. So I went up there [to Great Barrington, Massachusetts]. I owned nothing. I arrived on a bus with one bag of clothing. When I got off the bus in this little town, George just said, 'That's all you have?' He had that one lens covered. I said, 'Yes.' And he, as was his very characteristic style, just began efficiently bustling around getting things organised and doing things. He didn't really seem to question extraneous circumstances like 'Why don't you have any belongings', or 'Where are you coming from', or anything like that.

SJ: What was your motivation for going up there? To write?

BM: Just to move. To move out of New York. I always wanted to write. I did finally produce a book. It is a book that came out of the aftermath of George's death, so it has a lot of stuff about George in it. I stayed first in an outbuilding there that used to be a machine shop, and I fixed it up. Then as winter closed in, George told me I could come live in the attic. I had no money at all. I didn't know about Fluxus. I didn't know what George was doing. I knew he was an interesting person, that's about it. But I really kept to myself and just went about my own business as much as possible.

SJ: Do you think something connected you to George on some other level? Hypothetically a lot of the people who came together to form the group known as Fluxus were misfits or outcasts. Do you think maybe there was an element of that? Why do you think George attracted people like that?

BM: Because he was a refugee himself. He had to make himself at home in a totally new place. And that must have been difficult. Lithuanians are a small, very clannish and ethnically identifiable group in terms of culture and language. I think the Fluxus group in a certain sense was a family for him. I remember reading something that he told Hollis [Melton], Jonas' [Mekas] wife at the time, that home-making was the highest art. And what did he do? He went to Soho and made all these homes for these artists. He gave me a home. Really he gave a lot of these people a core place to identify with. I think he was a home-maker in the highest art sense of the word too. I think he wanted to care for people. Maybe that's why so many people identified him as a dictator, because they resisted and didn't like it; he wanted to organise and had a certain way of looking at things and doing things, and I think he was fairly patriarchal, being strong-minded and having a code and a set of values that he would like to carry through. But I don't think he was a dictator in any sense of the word.

SJ: Do you think you might have been attracted to that aspect of him, in that he was a home-maker, he knew how to provide and bring people together and make them feel comfortable or safe?

BM: What attracted me to him, I remember at one time being in the kitchen and seeing him and actually feeling, suddenly seeing myself as a person who was very afraid of strangers, and particularly men. I think George was so cultured he didn't try to impose himself on me. He didn't have any of those normal games of trying to dominate or impress. George just sort of hung back and would do small things. He invited me to a harpsichord concert; we went to a movie. I just found he was more interesting, more interesting to talk with, more lively, more ... you can imagine. He was the first intelligent person that I'd ever met, that's how I've often described it. I didn't really know what an intelligent person was until I met George. I think George was protective, really. He just saw me as a person who needed protection, and he did it.

He did that for me, and I don't know what I would have done if he hadn't. In some sense it was idyllic. He was amused by me; he was amused by my naiveté and ignorance. I remember one time I was walking across the yard, and I wasn't aware he was on the porch, but he was there, until he called my name. And I looked up. It was very bright outside and the porch was dark, so I had to actually go up to the screen and look in to see that he was there. He invited me in, so I went in and sat down. He loved Monteverdi operas, and that was playing on the stereo. It was beautiful. But I was in another world really. I was sitting with my back to him, and he said, 'This is being sung by nuns'. I just kind of turned around – I couldn't make anything of the comment. So I shrugged and turned back around. And he laughed! I was struck by the fact that he laughed at what I now see as insouciance, but also total non-culture, that I couldn't appreciate ...

SJ: But why should that be anything that you should have appreciated, that it was sung by nuns?

BM: Well, that's the thing that I couldn't figure out at the time. *[Laughs.]*

SJ: I cannot figure it out now.

BM: *[Laughs.]* I don't know. It meant something to him. But maybe a normal person would have said, 'Yes, and ...' Or, 'Were you ever in a choir?' or 'Did you grow up with this music?' So, I wasn't used to someone finding that delightful, amusing or funny and showing it.

SJ: Did you feel strange about participating in George's fantasies at first?

BM: I did feel, as he got sicker, that it was fairly overwhelming and it was happening very quickly. He was very sick. I had learned some sort of relaxation body techniques that I was trying. Doing that, because it required him lying still and just free-associating, he began to tell me more things.

SJ: So this accelerated as he got sicker?

BM: Right. I wrote to a psychiatrist, I think, that I knew from whom I'd learned this relaxation technique. I wrote and told him that I was a little bit frightened that this was happening. He said, 'Run. It's evil, blah, blah ...' Of course I was not going to run. I had, one, a lot of compassion for George and interest in his situation, and I felt that I was really the only person around that was helping him. Now, I see that someone else would have, but I didn't know that at the time. He said I was helping him and there was no one else around and that was enough. And, two, I didn't know really where to run to. So I stayed there, and as it turned out Hala Pietkovicz came into the kitchen one day. She was another sort of a caretaker. Anyway, she was a friend of George's, and she was one of the few friends of mine after George died. She came and said, 'George wants to get married so that his social security won't be wasted after he dies.' I said, 'Well, I'll marry George if he comes to me and tells me that he loves me and he wants to get married'. She said, 'Well, now don't make it too difficult for him'. *[Laughs.]* So I said, 'Well, okay, at least some kind of indication that it's more than social security.'

SJ: Did you have those kind of feelings for him?

BM: Um. I did. I ... let's put it this way ... I felt life was easier with George. George was one of the kindest people that I had known. I had had a very hard life. He didn't treat me as stupidly as many others have. He seemed to care about me. He needed me. I thought he was a gentleman. I thought he was a gentleman and cultured and a lovely person. And I would agree to marry him because ... just because of that. It was a sort of humane kind of decision. That's the level I wanted it at. I didn't care about social security. That may be part of my romanticism. But, at any rate, he did come and say that he would be very pleased if I would marry him – he didn't talk about social security or anything like that. So, we did it.

SJ: Do you think it was something he felt he had to do before he died?

BM: I do. He got very sick. Actually, I went to Maryland to visit my family at one point. He had told someone there as he got sicker (and he was in terrible pain) that he wanted to wait until I came back to go to the hospital. But he did not wait. He went. There he was diagnosed as having terminal cancer. I only found out about all this when I came back. But we had already agreed to marry. I remember as I was saying good-bye, I kissed him very little like, gentle little kiss on the lips, and he said, 'My

first kiss'. You know, he was a virgin and he died a virgin. He had not had a sexual relationship with anyone.

SJ: Did George tell you, 'This is how I want to get married. This is what it's going to be like'. Did you have any indication?

BM: No. Well, we decided to do it simply, you know, and we had just the civil ceremony in Great Barrington. So we did it legally too. I don't know whose idea it was to do it legally, but of course that would have been important for social security. After George died, things changed very, very rapidly. People that had not seemed mean before were suddenly mean. His family, especially his sister, and Bob Watts were calling and telling me that George owed them vast amounts of money, that he'd been a bum all his life, that they had given him all this money. I was saying, 'I don't know anything about that; put it in writing; don't bother me; I'm grieving'.

Barbara Moore was upset that I might be throwing things away in the house that would be valuable. Everyone seemed to be sort of invading. And I was fairly ignorant, that much is true. I didn't know the history of Fluxus. I didn't know the value of things in the house. George hadn't clued me in on it. His papers came back from the hospital after he died covered with figures, chaotic figures of him trying to figure out what his debts were to Bob Watts. It was really pathetic. But he had told me that he didn't feel that he owed Bob anything. I think he ended up making money for everyone around him. Including me. But he did not leave a will. I only benefited because by law in Massachusetts the wife inherits two-thirds of the estate. But at the time his works were being sold for a couple of dollars a piece in Barbara Moore's gallery.

What ended up happening is that I got caught up in this sort of scavenger hunt for George's things. I had a vague notion they were culturally valuable, but they didn't appear to be financially valuable and it didn't matter. Nevertheless, I was angry at the way I was being treated. Barbara was saying, 'Well, you don't know anything about Fluxus'. People were saying these things to other people, actually not directly to me. Nijole, George's sister, was telling everyone that George had said he was disappointed in me before he died. That came back to me. Jean Brown told me that on the phone. They were selling the house that I was, you know, as I was living there. I was upstairs in the attic, and I heard footsteps and went down to investigate. They said, 'Well, we're moving in. The house has been sold'. So, with Hollis' help I packed everything up and escaped in the middle of the night, and it was just like being an outlaw.

SJ: Who had sold the house?

BM: I guess Bob and Nijole considered it theirs and they arranged to sell it. I did stay as a so-called caretaker for a while, but I couldn't take care of it. I had no idea what to do and I was totally overwhelmed. I had no money to take care of the place. The pipes froze in the house and broke. It was like a glacier in there. A part of me did not care – I didn't feel I was being treated well and that life was impossible. Basically life became better with George and after he died it reverted back to what it had been. While it was possible with George to be spiritual in the highest sense of the word – to do things for love – other people would not be able to see that. George's sister, for example, thought that I was an adventuress who had taken advantage of him. This was really disillusioning and heartbreaking for me, because I wanted them to be my family. I was

really crushed. However, I did have some experience with being on my own, so I just fought back. I did get out of there and went up to upstate New York. I hired an attorney. It was a mess. No one knew what anything was; no one knew where anything was. I had not looked in all the boxes. When I did I found original posters by John Lennon. All sorts of things that I did recognise; many things I didn't. But I kept it together. I received some welfare checks in upstate New York, but I also got things out of those boxes like the posters and went to New York and sold them. I sold them very cheaply, to live. I sold a bunch of posters for like \$2000 to Jean Brown's son's gallery there. Of course, shortly after that John Lennon was killed, so they were worth a lot. But I never asked for what they were worth.

So, somewhere in there I decided [to write] the manuscript. Then I took it to George Quasha in Rhinebeck, New York, who said he would give me 500 copies in exchange for George's IBM composer. I said, 'Deal.' So that composer was the composer that George typed all of his posters and graphic design work on. And I went to Portugal. I chose Portugal, because in George's collection of music there was a tape called *Portuguese Harpsichord*. I just thought, 'Portugal – well, don't know what's going on there; it's not industrial; it sounds quaint; I know it will be poetic.'

SJ: How soon after George died did you go to Rhinebeck?

BM: Maybe about a year. I stayed in Portugal about two years. In that amount of time, the lawyer discovered George still had a loft in New York on Green Street. He'd never told me. I don't even know if he remembered. So they sold the loft. I came back. Suddenly I had some money. I used the money to educate myself. I started my undergraduate education at age thirty-four, and I went to Brown. That was also a stroke of luck: it's the only school I applied to; I didn't know it was an avant-garde school; I chose it because they taught Portuguese and because it was in a nice Portuguese-speaking area. I used George's money to finance my life while I did that.

SJ: Was George's sister close with him?

BM: There were huge gaps in her knowledge of George. I was stunned when I was learning that she felt George owed them vast sums of money and essentially that he was a ne'er-do-well. It's as if she didn't really . . . He must have protected her or kept her out of it in some way as he had with me in the beginning. Unless you knew what to ask him, you would not find out.

SJ: So with certain parts of his life he was very private?

BM: Yeah, it seemed to be confined to the group. He didn't extend it into his family life. I gather that his mother was disappointed that he wasn't an art teacher. You know they could only imagine a very straight life and that he wasn't. That's the picture I get. And so I think they could only imagine the readily available myths about me. They could not imagine that someone might show up in his life that actually . . . that they could not imagine all of this as a romantic piece, for sure. [*Laughs.*] I was thwarting their access to valuable property that I didn't even know about but they knew about, and what Nijole said to me was, if I remember right, 'You came at the last minute and messed everything up'. I think that was an element in George's plans. I think he intended to mess everything up. I believe in a certain sense that I was an object in George's death piece. It's no surprise that he would choose someone with no visible roots with some kind of poetic aspirations.

SJ: When did you realise that that might be the case?

BM: Fairly soon, but I wasn't able to articulate it really well. I tended to be more of a romantic than I am now. And I had a certain way of looking at it all. I saw the symbology in the *Black and White* wedding piece – as a highly romantic blend of love and death in the same thing. I think it was that on one level and that was okay with George that I saw it that way. The summer I was up in Massachusetts I read all of Dostoevsky. George had it in his collection. He was keen that I read *The Idiot*. He said he thought Myshkin Prince was the most attractive character – that's the character who strays into these bourgeois and complicated situations, who doesn't know what is going on, who commits *faux pas* all over the place and ends up being friends to a murderer and a madwoman. In other words, the fool. I think that was the role I played there, and that I did commit *faux pas*, but that it was revealing of what the Fluxus group had become at that point too.

SJ: How did you feel about that? Did you feel like a pawn or did you feel like you were helping George by playing this role?

BM: I felt like I was a part of something bigger. I acquiesced to what George was doing. I thought he was a very poetic person, and the whole piece was poetic, the whole wedding and everything. I played it out as honestly as I could with whatever resources I had.

SJ: You indicated that part of this poetic purpose was to expose what had happened to the Fluxus group. You seem to be aware of that, but you took it a step further and used it more as a way to model your life.

BM: Let's see now. I don't think I was extremely conscious of myself as a Fluxobject at the time, or that I was exposing anybody by being a Fluxobject, but I think that's what happened. Now I look back and it seems in retrospect that George could see a lot more than I did. He could see me in the role of the idiot. I had to puzzle it all out. I was truly naive about all of it. But I was a very wilful and strong person as well. And when I became suspicious, I just did it the way I could. Now I can see it more, I can see it in fuller terms – less on the romantic side and more on the Fluxus side. There's an Ay-O letter that's so important. It's a thank-you letter, because before I moved from Massachusetts I had ... down in the basement was this rainbow room that Ay-O had done. I had found out what it was and called him up and said, 'What would you like me to do with this?' He said, 'Well, with your permission I would like to come to the farm and burn it'. So I said, 'Wow, great,' because that was to me, that was something, that was an antidote to all this. 'Don't touch a thing, don't throw away anything that George has signed'. You know, all this fetishistic behaviour, which wasn't like George at all. So he [Ay-O] did come to the farm with a friend of his. We hauled it up to the meadow, and we burned it at night. It was wonderful. There was a product that came out of it – a Japanese ritual/funeral/ceremony. We went the next day and collected ashes and put them in boxes with chopsticks. I think I had it signed by Ay-O, and it's now in the Silverman collection. But he sent me a letter on rainbow paper thanking me for that, and he called it *Romantic Piece for George Maciunas*.

SJ: You don't have any contact with Ay-O any longer? He seems to be one person who was 'nice' to you.

BM: Yes. He was nice to me, but beyond that, he put things back in perspective. You know, it was like, 'I can do whatever I want with this. It's not great art, it's my creation, you know, and I'm offering it up to George.' But again, the romantic element: the ritual, the funeral celebration, and also the celebration of the wedding – the marriage – by including me in it and calling it *Romantic Piece for George*. He reaffirmed for me the fact that I could do what I wanted. I wasn't a pawn of these people.

SJ: How did George come up with the idea for the Fluxus Cabaret?

BM: He thought about it and one day he just said, 'Well, let's do this.' Let's do this piece. The Cabaret was not planned out step by step. Everyone who came would do a piece. He would say, 'We should have a Renaissance party'. A week later we'd be doing it, but not just a little party. With costumes, and music, and food, and fascinating people, and dancing. I had never seen anything like that. Or, 'Let's have this Halloween party', and there would be all these amazing people there in wonderful costumes.

SJ: You were happy and willing to do the *Fluxwedding*?

BM: I thought it would be . . . well, interesting is a neutral word, and yet fun doesn't cover it. It was a symbolic and poetic thing. I thought it was a beautiful idea. I knew anything that I did with George would be right. It's hard for me to tell really how people were reacting to me because it was a public gathering and a performance atmosphere, and I don't know that in that scheme of things I was necessarily of great interest as much as the piece itself. George and I had already gotten married, so that was old news basically. Everyone was into the performances of the artists there.

SJ: Do you know why George picked certain people to have these roles?

BM: I don't know that George picked them as much as everyone came forth and picked their own roles.

SJ: Was this decided the day of the Cabaret?

BM: I don't know all the makings that went into it. They'd had lots of practice with this kind of thing and it just, as they say, came together. But I know Geoff [Hendricks] was responsible for the wedding album afterwards. He had already done a divorce album for him and Bici, in which they cut everything in half, including the album. But Geoff, I think, is obvious because he's gay, and he was openly gay at the time. So it seemed clear that he should be officiating at such a wedding. And the others, I don't know why they chose these roles. Alison [Knowles] always dressed in this way – she was not a frilly or a so-called feminine dresser. So that was not unusual for her either.

SJ: I want to know first of all why you both wore wedding gowns in the *Fluxwedding* – why George wanted to be a bride – and then, why you were also a bride and not a groom.

BM: One of George's fantasies was that we travel in Europe as elegant sisters, as he put it. So he always saw us as two women – as a couple. I think he just wanted to wear a dress too. [Laughs.] I could do whatever I wanted, really, and I didn't think about wearing men's clothes. I just accepted the way that we'd already established – that we were two women together.

SJ: Do you think that this might relate to the Romanian folk tradition known as the wedding of the dead – where if a girl dies before she is married, the community gives her both a wedding and a funeral. I'm thinking of this in relation to George wanting to

be a bride. For him it might have represented a special rite of passage that needed to be fulfilled before he died.

BM: I think he was very tied to Lithuania. I'm not sure why. He would sometimes wake up, speaking Lithuanian – ask me what time it was in Lithuanian. So the language was still something really present to him. I think this custom, this myth, might have been known to him and forgotten, or it could be something unconscious ... I know that death is represented as a bride in different cultures. And sometimes wearing white. I think that this was very much a subtext going on at the wedding, as well as the exchange of clothes [in *Black and White*]. Because when George ended up with the white dress, basically he was going into death, and I was staying behind really in the place of order and reality and taking on a lot more than I started out with, a lot more baggage.

Fluxus has this element of humour and I get the impression that for some people that's all it is – it's just who can make the most elegant joke. But that's what keeps people guessing about what it is, because there are so many layers and levels – it's just like a poem – and every age it's able to be reinterpreted. George was, I think, one of those who was deceptive, in fact, my name for him was the Trickster. He was like Vulcan. He could make things out of nothing. He could present one side, but really be another thing. He seemed asexual, seemed almost to some people like an autocrat and a dictator, seemed almost like he was simple-minded, but the levels at which he thought belie that characterisation, in my opinion. Just the *Black and White Wedding* piece shows that, for me. He may have gotten very serious at his death, but it all had to be there somewhere anyway.

SJ: Did you realise that there would be ramifications because of doing this piece publicly, that people might have a window into your private life?

BM: I knew there would be ramifications from the beginning, because George was coming out with something that had been hidden. I remember a very funny event that happened when his sister was at the Massachusetts house, and George was *very* sick. He was lying down in the living-room on a pallet he had there. He had all these cabinets on the walls with closed doors and in one of them were wigs on pegs. His sister went over and opened one and there were all these wigs in there and she just closed it. She didn't say anything. She didn't say, 'What are these wigs doing here?', or anything. So that's why I call it denial rather than ignorance.

SJ: After you did the piece publicly, did it have any effect on what George did privately after that? Did he continue to cross-dress, or did he stop, or was he getting too sick?

BM: He was getting too sick. I put those clothes ... I packed them up, and I think I gave them to Barbara Moore, if I'm not mistaken. He started to lose interest even in music and became more and more detached from things. He was so concentrated on his pain. I was trying to help by cooking things that I thought would help prolong his life. I mean, I actually thought he was going to live in spite of everything. I was almost spending all my time making soybean things. They were probably the worst thing. I mean, he probably couldn't digest it. But the doctor kindly told me that I might have prolonged his life by a week or two by doing that.

SJ: Can you talk about how George gradually introduced you to the cross-dressing? Up until the public piece.

BM: I was looking for some warm clothes in the closets. Because the house was a twenty-room manor house and was full of closets all over and things, odd things all over the place. One of the oddest things was that there were all these women's dresses in the closets. So I said, 'Why are there all these women's clothes?' He told me, 'Well, I like to dress up; and anytime you want a dress you can take whatever you'd like.' And we began to dress up together. We did things like both dress in dresses and heels . . . I considered it drag for myself also . . . go into New York and walk around Canal Street where people knew him, but seemed not to bat an eye. He didn't disguise his voice; he wore those glasses. They were saying, 'Hi, George!' But no one seemed to question or give us strange looks. It was the time of my life. I had a great time with George.

Either then or some point [later] he told me he liked to be beaten and would I beat him. There was a ritual. He said he was masochistic. I did find in his belongings one of these sado-masochistic correspondence things. That was sort of forbidden and adult to me at the time. It was just one of those pornographic . . . Well, it was like a magazine that had addresses of people who were into this, photographs . . . The first time it happened I was up in the attic. I didn't know he was coming up there. I heard this clonk, clonk, clonk as he came up the three flights of stairs and then he was knocking at my door. I opened it and there he was. He had this dress with heels, and a wig, I think, and this old mustard-coloured sweater that he always wore around there over top of all of it. He had a little whip, a little horse whip that you use with a buggy or something. He asked me if I would please tie him to the bed and hit him with the whip. And I did. I hit his legs mostly.

SJ: Did he explain to you why he wanted you to do this? What the ritual had to be?

BM: We didn't do it a lot. He said he was masochistic. He asked me if I would sometimes slap him in public. If he found it erotic I was willing to do it. It was a fun and interesting kind of role for me to play. I think it was at that time that I wrote to the psychologist, because I was a little nervous about it. I don't know whether I mentioned cross-dressing to him. But I was half shocked and half amused at [the psychologist's] response. I just thought he was over-reacting. I think I wanted some advice I could use. Something more sympathetic and with a more thorough understanding of the whole situation. He was the person who had taught me this [relaxation] technique, so I thought he could possibly have some other ideas. I don't know whether he had ever dealt with a person who had cancer or was that much in pain before. It was in that sense a call for help. I saw that he was not a person who was going to be able to help me. But, again, if George was all right with it; and I wasn't afraid of George. He was totally harmless. But I did start to have weird images more connected with my own childhood or something, of scary people in the attic and fears of being pushed down the stairs and things like that. Ghosts and bad spirits and that sort of thing. At any rate, I just decided to get into it as a role and to do what he asked.

SJ: Did he ever indicate how this came to be for him? What role it fulfilled, or what kind of pleasure he got out of it?

BM: I sensed that the exploration of his feminine side, including the cross-dressing and the masochism – although I would be reluctant to associate masochism with feminine necessarily – had something to do with his childhood. I know one time he had

appendicitis and had to be operated on without anaesthetic, and he was just put on a table in the home and cut open. He remembered it as extremely painful and frightening and traumatic, and he talked about it several times in relationship to enjoying pain. He also said he was in so much pain that the beating distracted him from the pain, the internal pain. So both those things were going on.

SJ: How many times did this happen?

BM: Two or three times. One of the things he wanted to do that he didn't was to produce a deck of cards with this theme, with he and I and others as the characters on the cards. Peter Moore actually came up and Larry Miller and Larry's girlfriend at the time [Sarah Seagull], who's also an artist. There were photographs, and Peter probably has them. There is me in a corset with a whip and others. I don't know how far we got. That was never a realised project, but I think the photos are around somewhere.

SJ: You said you started to have fearful images of bad things happening in the attic and falling down stairs, so it must have been touching your psyche on some level.

BM: Well, George was a very incongruous sight. You know, dressed up. He wasn't professional. He did it very haphazardly. One of the things he liked me to do after that was put make-up on him to make him look better. But he could be a little bit bizarre, just showing up at your door like that, and the sound of the footsteps coming up stairs, things like that, you know, uninvited. [*Laughs.*] It was a huge house. It was cold. Long winter, so dark a lot. Just the two of us. All this was new. It was a, say, anxiety-producing situation, so these images . . .

SJ: How did you account to yourself for the fact that the intimate part of your relationship didn't continue after he came back from the cancer treatments in Jamaica? Was he just too ill?

BM: Yeah, it was really heartbreaking for me to be left out. He was going to leave from his family's house to go to Jamaica, and I was not invited down to visit with the family at Eastertime. I was not asked if I wanted to go to Jamaica. I was bewildered mostly, and hurt. I could not for the life of me figure it out. It would not occur to me right off the bat that these people had their own reasons for doing it, and that they were degrading themselves. What I felt was that there was a problem with me, that I was not acceptable. He was on his way out the door to Jamaica. I was there to say good-bye, and I was crying. The tears were just . . . George was so tender, and he said, 'Don't cry. I'm going to be back soon, and I'll come back well'. And there were times when I thought he really would be well. But I don't know whether somehow other factors coming in, Watts' demand for money, his sister's demand for money, and other things were making him think that he needed to be responsible.

SJ: But you stopped giving the therapy.

BM: I did because the time that I was doing this therapy, was sort of a clutch at straws. It was not meant to cure, it was only meant to help him relax. But he took them as erotic experiences. After he was diagnosed it just didn't seem to make any sense. He was taking morphine, which was like that was the only hope. That was what was going to help him relax. I think he was just like I was – pulled into a really ugly place by all of these importunate people and that he couldn't see his way to dying peacefully.

SJ: From what you knew of the group, did you think sex had a role in Fluxus?

BM: Apparently very little. Well, there was Shigeo Kubota's *Vagina Painting*, and Kristine [Stiles] wrote about the sort of women who were involved and their performances that explored their sensual world in relationship to objects. But I think that was just . . . it was very minor. I'm not saying their work was minor – it was extremely important, but it wasn't a part of the larger, on-going conversation that I heard.

SJ: Would you suspect anybody else in the group was hiding part of their sexuality?

BM: [Laughs.] No, I'm laughing because I imagine most people hide something of their sexuality. Let's see. What would I say to that? I don't think anyone wanted their ideas of who George was disturbed at that late date. They wanted it to be neat. That's why I think it has a very, in the history of George's activities, it has a minor or almost a footnote quality. But it's extremely important because it shows him as ahead of Fluxus, basically – much more willing to explore those forbidden boundaries than anybody else was. Nobody else cross-dressed except at the wedding.

SJ: Let's talk about what George saw in the cross-dressing. Was it an aesthetic thing? Was it part of his philosophy of Fluxus?

BM: Well, he told me he'd been doing it since nine. So it couldn't have been a philosophy about Fluxus *per se*. But I think he worked it in, certainly in the *Black and White* piece. I think it was an aesthetic and erotic thing for him. By the time of the wedding it had become clear that George was a cross-dresser to anyone who had any sense.

SJ: And exploring boundaries.

BM: Exactly. I think his family had sort of very bourgeois pretensions, so it was not like it would have been something really accessible to him. He talked about other fantasies like having a torture chamber with medieval torture instruments to be on exhibit, things like that.

SJ: As a piece.

BM: Right. He would have I think explored this to a greater degree if he had lived longer. It just became something that was accessible to him at that point.

SJ: How do you think the group would have reacted to him if his work had moved in that direction? Carolee Schneemann, for example, was doing explorations of female sexuality and never was embraced by the group. You can only speculate, but . . .

BM: I think the degree of sexism in Fluxus was due to the times. There were many assumptions that were played out that remained unexplored. George's cross-dressing was an over-exploration of some of these assumptions. I found him to be one of the least sexist people I knew. But still he was upset that I didn't use his name. So there were these surprising pockets of conventionality. I think some people would have raised their eyebrows and said, 'What is going on? This is that horrible woman's influence', or whatever. But there were people who really trusted George's ability like I did; they would have come along.

SJ: I wonder if cross-dressing would have ever been accepted as a Fluxus activity?

BM: I think . . . he may have become something other than Fluxus. Or else either Fluxus would incorporate this or else he would start on another branch. Yeah, I don't think he would abandon it just because they wouldn't like it. I doubt that seriously.

SJ: Do you think cross-dressing in any way took the place of intercourse for George?

BM: I'm not really sure. I don't know what prevented him from having a sexual

relationship. People said he was dominated by his mother; maybe he was afraid to marry someone and take that step, that right of passage into separation from his family. Fluxus and his family were separate. Or he didn't find it necessary, or he found it too much trouble because he was too busy with Fluxus. I don't know the answers to those questions. We didn't have intercourse, but we contemplated it. I think he was just really sick. But whether it actually would ever have happened I have no idea. I know for myself I really wanted sex with George. I wanted to have a real sexual relationship with him. And that was part of the sense of loss when he died.

SJ: Could you tell me where you are now, after almost twenty years have passed since these events.

BM: Well, the estate money is spent. I don't have very many objects. I was bent on getting an education and I got it, the whole thing. Fluxus has been a sort of part of it, but not a big part of it. I'm applying for a grant to go and translate poetry in Portugal. I chose a poet who's extremely feminine and passionate and lyrical and doesn't fit any modernist mode, including anything related to Fluxus. If I do get this grant to go to Portugal it seems to me to be the end of a cycle, because that's kind of where I started. That's the first direction I had ... George's influence ... I was fairly, let's say, not nihilistic as a philosophy, but I had some self-destructive tendencies from a bad childhood. And George's influence made me decide to value myself. The practical application of his statement enabled me to get an education. I've gone through a huge socialisation process. He was a very, very important person in my life. I don't think it would have turned out as well if I hadn't met George. I went to Portugal to escape all the madness after he died, and if I go back this time it will be under very different circumstances: knowing the language, having a project, being able to produce a book of translations, having contacts and some money. It's sort of summing up of a whole process. That's how I would view it. So I'm still a Fluxobject and I'm still being processed. Well, George was a Fluxobject to me too. He's an object – he's a poetic object, a poetic subject. And that's why the marriage was a marriage for me. That is why I see it as a marriage. It doesn't make any difference to me that it was three months.

SJ: You said you haven't had many contacts or ties with the group. Do you feel like you will be moving even further away from Fluxus with your work? Is that what you want?

BM: I'm not really running away from Fluxus, it's just that there wasn't anything for me to do there, and I didn't like the role that seemed cut out for me after George died. I had my own agenda, and I've been following that. It's like Gayatri Spivak said, 'You cannot not want legitimisation'. I'm much less of a rebel than I was. I've got this all important education; I have been validated in other ways for my own intellectual achievements. I think now I can see Fluxus as an interesting and not exactly past, but historically past part, but in my own mind a continuing process because he [George] was the impetus for all this Portuguese poetry development. But when that phase is over, I'll write my own poetry as I always have since I was a child. So I'm not running away from Fluxus at all, not bitter about it or anything. But I guess I still see myself as [a] footnote kind of.

SJ: As opposed to what?

BM: A part.

SJ: Do you feel strange about doing an interview like this now?

BM: No. I love it. I think it's great. I'm really glad to have the opportunity to talk about George's eroticism and to validate it, in my eyes, as a positive thing. George had told me I understood what Fluxus was by the end, the spirit. That it was an anti-art movement; that it was not to be taken as seriously as death. Ay-O helped me get that clear. It's only gradually coming clear to me why people were so afraid, why Barbara was so guarded. The things that were withheld from me, and the strangeness of people's actions made me hang in there and be determined to get the full story. Otherwise I might have just gone on someplace. I did feel I owed something to George because he'd done so much for me. So I started taking a little bit of control. Moving to Portugal was part of that. I had a whole series of miraculous events that really changed my life, starting with George and being accepted at Brown. So he helped me in a big way. And I thought, I'm not a disappointment to George's memory. Which I could have been. When I'm in trouble, I actually still pray to George. I know that he's up there helping me somewhere. This sounds very funny, but I don't even bother with God, I just go straight to George.