The *Festum Fluxorum* in Copenhagen 23–28 November 1962

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Abstract

In November 1962 the Nikolaj Kirke in Copenhagen hosted the second Fluxus festival to be held. It was planned by George Maciunas, the inventor of the word “Fluxus”, but organised locally by the visual artist Arthur Köpcke, the Danish section of the International Society for Contemporary Music (Det Unge Tonekunstnerselskab, or dUT) and Knud Pedersen, who had his art library at the Nikolaj Kirke. From Maciunas’s and Fluxus’s perspective it represented a step in the development of Fluxus from an encyclopaedia of “concretism” in the arts to a specific artistic endeavour, while for Copenhagen and Denmark it was both a shocking manifestation of avant-garde radicalism and the beginning of a longer-lasting Fluxus presence in the country and the region.

The fact that Copenhagen became the host of the second and probably best-attended Fluxus festival that the world has ever seen was completely due to circumstances. The festival, which took place on 23–28 November 1962, was the first of three called *Festum Fluxorum*, Festival of the Fluxes; the other two took place in Paris (3–8 December 1962) and Düsseldorf (2–3 February 1963). It had been planned by George Maciunas (1931–1978), more about whom below, but was sponsored and supported locally by Det Unge Tonekunstnerselskab (dUT), the Danish section of the International Society for Contemporary Music. dUT had earlier organised concerts by the American pianist David Tudor, who played works by John Cage and Sylvano Bussotti, and by the Korean composer Nam June Paik, all of them names that feature in the prehistory of Fluxus, and in Denmark the Fluxus festival was experienced a sequel to these performances. Other protagonists in the history of the Copenhagen *Festum Fluxorum* were Arthur Köpcke (1928–1977), an artist from Hamburg who had lived in Copenhagen from 1958 onwards, and Knud Pedersen (born 1925), the director of *Byens billede* (The Picture of the City), a display case where art was shown to passers-by, and *Kunstbiblioteket*, an “art library” where one could borrow an art work for the price of a packet of cigarettes a week. Pedersen rented the nave of the Nikolaj Kirke, where five out of the six concerts comprising the Copenhagen Fluxus festival took place (the fifth one, on 25 November 1962,
took place at the Allé Scenen theatre in Frederiksberg), and Køpcke had found shelter there after the closure of his successful avant-garde gallery Galerie Køpcke. Køpcke’s contacts and Pedersen’s willingness to support Fluxus played an important role in the history of the festival as well.

As the list of people and organisations involved shows, the Copenhagen Fluxus festival, like all Fluxus events, fell between various stools. In this case, backing was provided by the worlds of music and the visual arts, but there was also interest in Fluxus among the worlds of theatre and poetry. The intermedial character of Fluxus is also illustrated by the festival’s subtitle, “Musik og Anti-musik, det instrumentale teater, 6 pro- et contragrammer”. The word “instrumental theatre” refers to the inclusion of visual elements in musical performance by such innovators as the Argentine composer Mauricio Kagel (1931–2008), whose text Über das instrumentale Theater (1961) was reprinted in a special issue of DUT’s magazine Dansk Musiktidsskrift devoted to the Fluxus festival. Even though Fluxus had partly sprung from the world of music, it had always concerned itself with issues that were of interest to artists from every discipline and had therefore always attracted people from very different backgrounds.

Fluxus was never a stable entity, whether geographically, conceptually or as a group or network. When writing a history of Fluxus, it is tempting to focus on the originator of the word, the American-Lithuanian art historian, architect and designer George Maciunas. The image of Fluxus that emerges when one does so is that of a project that started as an idea for a publication (first a magazine and then a series of yearbooks) in New York in 1961–1962, developed into a travelling performance train in Europe in 1962–1963 and settled down in New York from 1964 onwards as a publishing house, primarily of multiples. However, this dynamic image of Fluxus ignores the effect it had when it arrived somewhere and then left again. Fluxus was to a large extent dependent on local centres of Fluxus- or Fluxus-related activity for the organisation of festivals, the sale of publications and the dissemination of information. These centres determined, at least in part, how Fluxus was presented and received and often preserved some aspects of it for local use as well. It is the aim of this article to describe the Copenhagen Fluxus festival from both angles: the international and the local, the dynamic and the static. It should be borne in mind, however, that Fluxus was never just one thing or the other, but was always a mixture of the two; it was an international phenomenon that manifested itself in many different places and left its mark there.

The incarnation of Fluxus that was presented in Copenhagen was one that was under transformation. The first time Maciunas had used the word “Fluxus”