KLAUS VON NICHTSSAGEND GALLERY

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Art in America

Wedding in Denmark

Fluxrites are the Fluxus activities that involve people at large. They are the least exclusive of all Fluxforms, the closest to an ideal of work or play that anybody can do. The first such event I went to was Geoff and Bici Hendricks's *Fluxdivorce*, which took place on June 24, 1971, at their house in Manhattan. The Hendrickses had two children and had been married for 10 years. Included in the event was a division of property in their bedroom—wedding documents, clothes, double bed, wicker loveseat and so forth. The items were all literally cut in half with paper cutter, scissors, ax and power saw. A political text was implicit in the motive and outcome of the event: a same-sex (re)identification for each partner, best symbolized by a tug-of-war in their backyard as Hendricks and his wife were separated, the men pulling on a rope secured around him, the women on a rope around her. *Fluxdivorce* was followed by a life as gay and lesbian, respectively, for the two principals. (Relics and memorabilia of this *Fluxdivorce* are on view in a vitrine in the touring exhibition "In the Spirit of Fluxus.")

Sometime in 1977 George Maciunas reminisced with Hendricks about the *Fluxdivorce*, and told him now there should be a *Fluxwedding*, which he was thinking of performing with Billie Hutching (a woman), and he wanted Hendricks to officiate as "Fluxminister." Maciunas was terminally ill with liver cancer. The wedding took place Feb. 25, 1978, at the Grommet Art Theatre (the loft of Jean Dupuy and Olga Adorno on Broadway in Lower Manhattan, now the Emily Harvey Gallery), following a civil ceremony at City Hall. Maciunas died three months later, on May 9. Then Hendricks organized a *Fluxfuneral* for Maciunas, serving again as Fluxminister.

Early in 1993 Hendricks, who knew I wanted to get married in Denmark to Ingrid Nyeboe, my Danish partner of 13 years, suggested a way to do it. An exhibition of his work—his first retrospective—was being organized for the Kunsthallen Brandts Klædefabrik in Odense, Denmark, to open June 25, 1993. Included would be objects, paintings, installations and performance documentation representing a 30-year preoccupation with the sky and with life processes, especially those demarcating rites of passage. Hendricks suggested incorporating a *Fluxprocession* and performance/reception the day after his opening, following an official wedding ceremony at City Hall. The procession would take us a half mile or so through the main street of Odense (a walking street, no cars) to the Kunsthallen.

In 1989 the Danish parliament passed a same-sex partnership law providing most of the legal rights of heterosexual couples in marriage. It was the first country to do so. The law was the result of a 40-year campaign by gay-rights advocates. On Oct. 1, 1989, 11 male couples were legally joined in a group ceremony in Copenhagen. The absence of women was due at least in part to their objection to that portion of the law which forbids the right to adopt or obtain joint custody of a child (the same prohibition that applies to unmarried heterosexuals). By now, between 400 and 500 same-

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sex couples have married, three quarters of them men. One partner must be Danish, and I would be the first foreigner to marry under the new law.

June 12, the day before I flew to Copenhagen, a friend asked me if I thought being married would change things. I said I didn't know. I did know that as a Danish spouse I would qualify for advantages unheard of in America—access to all the benefits provided by a high-level social welfare system.

Ingrid and I were staying at her Aunt Else's house in Svendborg, a big town on the island of Fyn—conveniently just 25 miles south of Odense, where we were scheduled to marry. At a family dinner one evening, Hans Henrik, a family friend, said when they all got the invitations they tried to look up Fluxprocession in the dictionary, but couldn't find it.

I was slightly apprehensive about Geoff's plans for our event at the museum. He had mentioned wanting to do Ben Patterson's famed Lick Piece, first performed at Fluxus Concerts in New York in 1964 and numerous times since, calling for a naked body to be covered with whipped cream, and for any number of people to lick it off. Unsurprisingly, the body always turned out to be female and the lickers mostly male. Geoff also had said that Eric Andersen, the Danish Fluxus artist who was to collaborate on the Fluxprocession, planned to appear outside City Hall in drag. I said nothing about that, but told Geoff I didn't want anybody naked at the procession/reception, and we could forget about Patterson's Lick Piece. In the end, Andersen came with his 30-person blue dress, which several of Ingrid's teenage cousins and others got into.

Most everything that happened was a surprise, some of it to Hendricks himself, who assembled all the elements but wasn't always sure when and in what order they were to take place, or even what some of the particulars were. One surprise element was the appearance of Ben Patterson himself, invited up from Wiesbaden where he lives, to provide the music. All Ingrid and I had to do was put on our white shoes, shirts and pants (we wore ribbons of our national colors through our belt loops), drive to Odense from Svendborg, arrive at the Raadhuset—City Hall—on time for the 9:45 a.m. official ceremony in the wedding room, look happy, and follow instructions.

At precisely 9:45 the dramatis personae assembled, including Eric Andersen's friend the Danish artist Kirsten Justesen, who presented us with double bouquets linked by a red ribbon; Hendricks's American assistant Laurie Steelink, bearing what Hendricks called the "wedding chair"—a child's-size red one he found in a Copenhagen flea market and outfitted with two little bells and two small sky paintings; Hendricks himself and a German student, Kord Schepke, causing a small sensation as they appeared body-painted in (sky)blue, Hendricks's waist surrounded by branches and flowers, weighing his pants down dangerously; Lise Seisbol, the curator of the Hendricks show at the Kunsthallen, who had assisted us in the legal paperwork required for our marriage; Charlotte Bellamy, my only American friend who was able to come; and 20 of Ingrid's relatives, some of whom had driven and ferried that morning from Copenhagen, a three-hour trip. All crowded into room #103, the small wedding room, along with some strangers who had heard about the event.

The actual ceremony, conducted in English by a female justice of the peace, flanked by two witnesses, lasted a minute. Out on the City Hall plaza, then moving in slow motion toward Odense's main walking street, the

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Fluxprocession gradually organized itself. Patterson was pulling a cart loaded with two boom boxes, one serenading the public with the overture to Lohengrin, the other playing the story of Bambi in Danish. The cart was also filled with long-stemmed chrysanthemums, which two Kunsthallen students handed out to people on the street as we went along. In front of Patterson and leading the procession was a Great Dane, handled by two young women. Ingrid and I followed Patterson, flanked by our two sky-blue escorts. Somewhere behind us were the cousins and others engulfed in Andersen's 30-person blue dress, then the whole wedding party of friends and family, and bringing up the rear a male violist in tails playing classical Danish folk tunes. Ingrid said she overheard a stranger commenting, "It's a crazy wedding."

Once we entered the Kunsthallen, some 20 minutes later, Patterson removed the boom box playing the Lohengrin overture from his cart and carried it into the museum; there it began to play the bridal march, which accompanied our climb up the broad and tall flight of stairs leading to Hendricks's exhibition, titled "Day into Night." Confetti rained down on us as we climbed. I liked this part the best. As we stood on a platform with Hendricks in front of one of his big three-panel sky paintings, Sky to the East, it seemed we were literally a part of his show.

In his catalogue Hendricks calls himself an "atypical Fluxist, more a painter than just about any Fluxist artist . . . ." Certainly his attention to skies has developed in a painterly way over the years since he first covered a chair with some sky that was part of a landscape in 1964. At that moment he decided to leave landscape behind and just do skies. Realistic as many of his skies look, he has also treated his canvases, like many things he has sky-painted—boots, shirts, pants, shovel, car, etc.—as objects, not just a surface for illusion. In his sky-bundles, for instance, he tied one canvas painted with sky to another, and painted the rope that binds them to match. Like no other Fluxus artist, Hendricks has crafted a paradoxically traditional oeuvre. His skies are as nature-observed as Constable's, as attentive to changing light as Monet's, charting in series various heavenly movements.

As an overt autobiographer since recording his Fluxdivorce, Hendricks has been somewhat anomalous in Fluxus. As a leader in the various Fluxrites, he has had no peer in Fluxus, or for that matter in the art world generally. Hendricks relishes the role of shaman or alchemist, midwife or change artist, mediating rites of celebration and transformation. By bringing our wedding into his retrospective he added a critical element from his life work that would have been missing had the show consisted only of paintings, objects, relics and installations.

On the platform in front of his sky painting, decorated and daubed like an aging Pan, he whipped out his "medicine kit" of objects for the event: a bottle of champagne and two wine glasses he had had blown especially for the occasion and into which he poured some champagne, offering them to us as "sanctified" libations. We handed him our wedding rings so he could hand them back and we could exchange them. Also on the platform was the little red chair that his assistant had carried ceremonially overhead from City Hall and that he now sawed in half, reversed, and had us lash back together with strips of cloth. Finally, we were instructed to enter Hendricks's Sky Car (1979). A VW bug painted sky blue with clouds (and part of the exhibition), it had been tied up with a white ribbon that made a big bow on top; a "Just Married" sign was taped to a window. Once seated in the car, we threw our wedding bouquets into the crowd.

Hendricks went behind the VW and created the tra-

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ditional sound of a wedding car embarking for points supposedly unknown by kicking some tin cans tied to the fenders. Ingrid's bouquet was caught by a Norwegian woman who said later she was so happy and that her whole life would change. Mine was caught by a man who said he had just celebrated his 25th wedding anniversary. A young man ran up to us to enthuse over the event, saying, "It was the marriage of the future," meaning, I supposed, the form of it, not (necessarily) the political aspect.

The political aspect was in question for a moment, from my point of view, when I discovered that the video artist hired by Hendricks to shoot the event bypassed a scenario in which Ingrid and I posed with her family for group photos. Instead, he zoomed in on the wonderful table of erotically shaped Fluxfood, made by Kunsthallen students, with possibly the most unusual wedding cake ever created—a pyramidal jumble of cake chunks topped by two marzipan brides. When I saw the video without the family portrait, I told Hendricks we had to insert a still photograph of it. At first he objected. Apparently the real family wasn't part of his script, only the "art family" who helped create the event. But when I said the family scenario was "political" (signifying a state-of-the-art gay and lesbian identity), he agreed to put it in. (I also wish that we had shots of Ingrid opening the family gifts, including the heirloom silver spoons given to us by her Aunt Else.)

Since my own family was unable to fly to Denmark for the event, I had brought along 80 slides of my daughter, son and grandchildren, shown with Ingrid and myself in America over the past 13 years, to project continuously during the reception. The gallery Hendricks designated for showing the slides was the one where he had installed various "Memorial boxes with objects" dedicated to Brian Buczak, his partner of 10 years who died of AIDS in 1987.

One evening sometime after the wedding, we were in Nakskov, a large town on the island of Lolland where Ingrid grew up, being entertained by the man who succeeded her father to a college presidency. I began to feel inauthentic as he and his wife raved about their son's grand wedding in the Philippines. Neither Ingrid nor I mentioned our own wedding. Back in America, Ingrid received a letter from this man. He said that after our departure he had seen a write-up in a newspaper about our wedding; he wondered if we had thought he and his wife were too "square" to hear the news, and he warmly congratulated us.

If you don't think Denmark is the best country in the world, imagine finding anywhere else a social democratic queendom where the streets are clean, the houses are cozy, the buses, trains and ferries are always on time, the social welfare laws are so deeply assimilated that they've become habits of mind, and everything is arranged to convenience all the people.

- Jill Johnston