

POSTFACE

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by Dick Higgins



SOMETHING ELSE PRESS
New York Nice Cologne

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for the greatest of no-sayers, whose work
I understate through accident rather than
intention, for Wolf Vostell

Ambr. 9-10-66 55.61

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i - preamble

When it was slow in the printing shop where I was working, like the others, I was reading a book. My boss came up and said, "I'm sorry but business is pretty slow. Friday I'm going to have to let you go." I understood, useless though such understanding was. And what was the book I was reading? Horatio Alger's, *Ragged Dick*.

From now on, the act of reading Alger is going to strike me as being very ironic.

My point is that art is inexorably bound up in the situation where it is produced and where it is experienced. You can emphasize this, or you can emphasize where it is produced or experienced: you can even equate them, and emphasize the equation. The relationship exists in any case, and, either as artist or as audience, we are in a situation analogous to a swimmer who may fight the surf, dive through it and struggle against it till he gets out beyond where the surf is noticeable: or else this swimmer can roll with the waves.

This situation seems relevant to what is happening in the arts today, and to my own work in particular. And so I am writing an essay for these five reasons: 1. I want to suggest critical criteria that are more pertinent to current art work than those that are in general use. 2. I want to describe the flow of things and where I am in it. 3. I want to suggest differences and similarities in work which is not only usually suppressed or minimized by the large media but usually lumped together, partially to separate out what I do and what I want to do from what others are doing. 4. I want to locate much of the social implications of what is being done in the arts within the larger, social flow. And 5. By clarifying all this, I want to help break down the Going Thing in the various arts and help cause, as it is said, a hundred flowers to blossom and a thousand schools of thought to contend.

It amazes me how little variety there is in the best work that is being done today. There is remarkably little difference between the work of William Carlos Williams and Leroi Jones, although the former poet must have been nearly a half century older than Jones. Similarly, although most of the prominent younger poets are trying to develop their own "sound," which is their word for "poetic diction" (and an improvement on it, I think), everybody's sound turns out to be the same. Ron Loewinson, Paul Blackburn, eleven years difference in age, from the Philippines and Vermont respectively, surely one could expect a little more variety. Part of the reason for this is our implicit acceptance of types.

The image that one has of what we are and what we are doing almost stereotypes our activities. These days dancers and poets don't seem to get enough variety into what they do because they know too well what dancers do and what poets do. There is an implicit love of professionalism that is, I feel, extremely dangerous. Perhaps

it is an attachment formed by the fact that most artists, particularly those who write for performance, get lots of honors and almost no cash for their efforts. But that is just conjecture.

These images are very strong with us - we expect a lawyer to be like we think a lawyer ought to be. But what a shame for the lawyer to think that and to conform to an image of lawyers in general. We type suburban housewives, militant negroes, ambitious jews, AFofL craftsmen, and so on, and in many cases these characterizations are negative. Then it is particularly sad for a person to conform to such an image. It is also very frustrating when he tries not to conform to it. An interesting case in point of this last is that of Carmine De Sapio. He was an Italian district leader in New York politics whose responsibility was primarily the sensitive one of giving promotions on the basis of seniority. Because of an eye disease in his youth, he must wear dark glasses - he may damage his eyes severely by not wearing them. Now, all of us know from our native-born red-blooded American cradles, most Italians belong to the mafia and are incorrigible criminals. And prominent criminals wear dark glasses as a matter of course. Conclusion: this harmless old De Sapio must be a very sinister man. It happened that the head of the corruption-riddled administration of New York, Mayor Wagner, belonged to the same party as De Sapio, and, perhaps in need of more financial support, coveted De Sapio's position. At the same time, the people of New York were beginning to complain about the corruption in the city under Mayor Wagner's administration. A reform movement began to develop. And, knowing our willingness to type people, Mayor Wagner waged one of the dirtiest campaigns in our history, by sheer innuendo and sly publicity he played up to our prejudices. They say that De Sapio kept a whole staff of lawyers on guard, waiting for Mayor Wagner to make a specific accusation, so that De Sapio could accuse Mayor Wagner of libel. But Mayor Wagner while I think he is personally honest is very shrewd, ruthless, and unprincipled, not to say demagogic. And so because of our prejudice, De Sapio is out. And Mayor Wagner now heads the reform movement to clean up his own mess. And the fortunes are still made in tearing down good buildings and putting up bad ones. The only difference is that you used to pay the cop five dollars a month to park where it was forbidden, and now it costs fifteen. Where is the extra ten going?

This story has a lot to do with why there isn't very much variety. I don't think that this characteristic is confined to America at all. Two well-known characters might be taken as the prototypes of our artists today: Faust and Schweik. Faust who makes a gnostic religion or way of life or even mystery out of art is the older style. He is beautifully described in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, which is said to be based on the life of Alban Berg. Mahler, Schoenberg, Stockhausen, Paik - I think of these people as Faustian.

The other type of image is even more poetic than old Faust. Schweik is a character in a great novel by that name by Hasek. Schweik is a soldier. The world explodes, but he endures. His country crumbles, but he sells dogs. He is forced into the army. He is buffeted and thrown around here and there. But he is too naive and too fine a person to pay any attention to all that. He is, perhaps, above it. At the end of the novel he wanders off into no man's land, in pursuit of a beautiful butterfly. He may have been captured or shot: we do not know.

Right now this is the more popular kind of image. Most artists are behaving as if they had set this image for themselves. I think some consciously have. And to me, the terrible thing is that anyone behaves as if they had set any image for themselves.

Schweik is poetic. But to live up to one's image is sheer Madison Avenue. And Madison Avenue is sick, don't you think? Madison Avenue may plant the trees on Park Avenue every Christmas, but Madison Avenue is available to the highest bidder.

And so is living up to the image of Schweik being for sale at the noblest phrase.

But that is to get ahead of the story.

These two images have produced a dual Going Thing. To do the right thing in the Faustian mode, you must be terribly noble, in the sense that you must not be influenced directly by your public or by anything save what you think is true. You must work seriously, preferably at night, you must regard yourself as the greatest man since Adam, and you must reveal yourself, preferably in the nude, in every thing you do. Violence, scandal, action, assumedly as the ex-

pression of good will taking a revolutionary-for-the-sake-of-revolutionary form (which is these days the commonest kind of anarchism), these are all implicitly in the Faustian mode.

It is hard for me to describe the Faustian mode sympathetically. I really do have respect for it, but I do not like it. In my country it has been responsible for my people's highest artistic achievements: Whitman, Pollack, Lindsay, and abstract expressionism

On the other hand, as the social situation has deteriorated in this country over the past few years, many of us have more and more come to insist on values that belong more to the Schweikian mode. We like quite ordinary, workaday, non-productive things and activities. In contest, they take on great something-or-other. While Rome burns, I work with butter and eggs for a while, George Brecht calls for:

* at least one egg

and Alison Knowles makes an egg salad and La Monte Young plays B-F sharp on a fiddle hour after hour. This is our kind of insistence, towards which many of us, especially the young ones, seem to gravitate. It has one main thing in common with the Faustian mode: It suggests great nobility.

It is true that these modes are not mutually exclusive. Some of the beat poets have taken up George Brecht - much, I suspect, to his surprise. But his work is so magnificently lucid that it appeals to a great variety of people.

But I do not understand this great emphasis on motivation that is implied by a stress on nobility. The nobility of one's motives is no guarantee of a good thing being done. Surely it is somehow a degradation of nobility to attach any particular value to it. A good thing is done for its own sake, because one has good will or because one has bad will or because one has no will at all but just wants to do something. I think that nobility is not a value but a state of being. If it might be, for the moment, equated with saintliness, we can quote Gertrude Stein:

A saint a real saint never does anything, a martyr does something but a really good saint does nothing, and so I wanted to have Four Saints who did nothing and I wrote the Four Saints in Three Acts and they did nothing and that was everything.¹

Or again:

I always remember during the war being so interested in one thing in seeing the American soldiers standing, standing and doing nothing standing for a long time not even talking but just standing and being watched by the whole French population and their feeling the feeling of the whole population that the American soldier standing there and doing nothing impressed them as the American soldier as no soldier could impress them by doing anything.²

Perhaps a state of being, whether attained or acquired, is a set of coordinates that give your position here with respect to there. Perhaps a state of being, such as nobility, is simply where you are, which is itself relative. You can be north or south, noble or ignoble, active or inactive, but if you hurt someone, he is hurt, and your being does not matter a hell of a lot to him. There is therefore no particular value in nobility. Perhaps this is why the Japanese zensters used to insist that there was no value in the enlightenment which is the whole direction of zen training. Again, there is the story I read somewhere that after the last world war Samuel Beckett was walking around Paris and was stabbed by an Algerian. He was a robust man, Beckett, and he managed to get the knife out of himself and into the Algerian. They were taken to the hospital together, in a state of shock. After weeks of lying in adjacent beds, Beckett was strong enough to ask the man, "Why did you do this thing?" The man answered, "I do not know, Monsieur."

And so I do not see any value in nobility in the arts. Satie's *La Divane de l'Empire*, which is a hack dance written for a cabaret, is just as interesting as the *Nocturnes*, written for the most selfless of motives. Hans Wahlgren's dance band arrangements suggest more noble values than his countryman Bo Nilsson's very noble utterances. And on the same grounds.

So down with motivation, I say. Leave motivational research to Madison Avenue. The only way to get anywhere with motivation in art might be to deemphasize everything else. And that is in a time honoured tradition of the hollow modern - find a convention, knock everything else out, and look how original you are.

So what I am going to do is let my discussion of common points in the two modes be, and talk about 1. values in what is happening, 2. what other people are doing, 3. what I am doing, and 4. points of movement and confluence.

ii - from the theatrical to the theater

A theater is a place made for things to happen in. If nothing really happens, then the theater is not being used for the purpose for which it is intended.

In a regular drama, a pretense takes place. What is being done is not really being done. It is being pretended. It is very charming, very smart to emphasize the pretense. Alternately, by now it is practically a cliché to draw attention to the pretense at all. In any number of works somebody comes down from the stage and harangues you.

Ah, but that's the easy way out. Much less facile to question the necessity for a stage, for a distinction between the performers and the audience, even to question the necessity for a performance, as

such at all. This is nearly as fascinating a literary-philosophical pastime as the pretense. But it is equally a sham. Well, maybe that's too hard a word. It is, at any rate, unsatisfying save to him who does it. The artist sees his reflection in the mirror, and since he is doing what he please himself and sees his reflection doing what he himself pleases, he says, "Oh, what an intelligent, interesting person." Any number of plays turn the stage in on itself, giving us the reflection of a reflection of a reflection of a reflection. To then measure the exact physical properties of this reflection by such an aesthetic means as removing separations between audience and performer is to make form one's subject matter. And that is best done in school. It is the worst find of academicism. It is Pirandello or Gelber. It is what I mean when I say formalism.

The theater, as an institution, is dead. It has been for a long time. They have forgotten to bury it. But then they have forgotten to bury a lot of things. Not all the rhetoric of Albee, the bombast of Williams, or the formalism of *The Living Theater* is going to bring the old institutional theater alive. Albee, *The Living Theater*, this kind of thing - it seems to exist in several arts - it has the beauty - or is it fascination? - of molds growing on a dead thing, consuming the remains of the body that threw it up to light. The theater of the Becks - *The Living Theater* - is the apotheosis of narcissism. Of their recent productions, their biggest success was the one about self-pity and junk - *The Connection*. Others were Pirandello's *Tonight We Improve*, Mac Low's *The Marrying Maiden*, Brecht's *In The Jungle of Cities*, Gelber's *The Apple*, and W.C. Williams' *Many Loves*. *The Connection*, *Tonight We Improve*, and *Many Loves* are all essentially plays within plays, where the audience is required to be conscious being itself and to concentrate on that from time to time. But the *Living Theater* is New York's avant-garde theater: it represented us at the *Theater of All Nations*. That in itself should speak for itself. The theater as such cannot use much of that. When we are looking for a theater in which things happen, it is all right to use any means to get something to happen, I suppose, even the use of an oversized text. But to reduce the theater to a forum for the display of one's ego is going off somewhere altogether different. It will be observed that the leading lady (unless she is the director) is always Mrs. Beck (Judith Malina). Do you suppose there is any connection between the vehicles they choose in their "search for a style" - to quote Julian Beck - and the presence of a part for Mrs. Beck,

who is distinctly a specialist? The question is for you to answer for yourself. My own conclusions are libelous. However, in their defense it should be said that the snowshoe tracks to the future or to the theater are sure to show the peculiarities of the wearers. If one assumes that a troop of performers is bound to reflect the personalities of the troop's most powerful members. Nevertheless, almost all the old members of the troop are gone now. Now, why should that be, when some of them became very proficient? Is this the best, even in traditional theater, that we can put together? I can show something about the Becks too when we take up Pirandello.

Look at Pirandello. Just look at him. He's a hero to a good many people because he seems so staunch and experimental and honest, and because he seems to reflect their own despair. Lots of people take naturally to any weeping laugh, or any Void, or any facile pun on reality. Actually the root of all this in Pirandello isn't hard to find. He started out as a hack novelist who ground out umpteen novels in just a couple of years. The plots of these novels start out very interesting, but soon they get involved in puns on what-you-think as opposed to what-is. And that is all he had to say, it's right there in those hack novels. But as time went by he just had to do more. So he wrote those novels over again, over and over again, this time for the stage. But because he is concentrating on this situation in only one form, the only context he ever puts it in is an upper middle-class one that gets more and more monotonous as you plow through those plays. He wasn't a very courageous man - if you don't believe me, read the last interviews he gave, in the late nineteen thirties. There's one in *Atlantic* for example. There you see that this man, living in Mussolini's Italy, was perfectly game to go along with Mussolini's military policies, even with his local suppression of civil rights in Pirandello's native Sicily - of which Pirandello was perfectly well aware. There isn't an ounce of nerve or zip in this cowardly interview. And this is the trouble with Pirandello. Except for scenes with "lower class color," like the bar scene in *Tonight We Improve*, all his plays are about, for, and by the most backward part of the Italian middle class. There is a sort of sick mysticism involved in the mix-up of one reality with another where we see that on the one hand Pirandello knows that it's not very important which one is the real one or really even whether both are, but on the other hand, it's the only thing he knows how to write about, so he goes on and on. Henry IV, for example, depends

for its impact on the question of who is mad, Henry or his people around him. If you read Pirandello's comments on that play, you'll find he thought of it as an attack on middle-class smugness. But it's a pretty feeble attack. And if you like the actor who plays Henry, all the peregrinations of his wife have no impact on you at all since they are so drawn-out, and you are lost to the play, except that you sympathize with the actor playing Henry and so a realistic element is introduced that Pirandello never even meant should be there. If you, as a member of the audience, know anything about disorders that could cause the kind of delusions Henry has, then the shock impact of his madness is removed and the text seems a morbid prying into a medical case. Yet Pirandello buffs like to cite this as one of his greatest (though lesser-known) plays. Or how about *Right You Are If You Think You Are*. To me there is one inexplicably funny moment in that play: the butler carries in a papiermache chicken to the assembled company, and says, "The fowl, sir." I don't know why that is so funny to me. Perhaps it has to do with the contrast between that and the dialogue that has been going on. The people seem to be playing a sort of twenty questions, trying to figure out who they are and what their relationships are to each other. Many interpretations are possible, and Pirandello assumes 1., that we adamantly refuse to accept that these people may both be right about who is who and who has done what to whom, and 2., that we are endlessly fascinated by this sort of problem. No wonder Pirandello isn't awfully popular any more. It is very difficult to broaden one's experience on understanding with all these questions about who is whose wife or daughter. My theory is that the play qualifies as intellectual matter, and it's avant-garde because it is off-beat, facile, and existential. And so, to *Tonight We Improvise*, which I think most people probably think of as Pirandello's most ambitious, "radical" if you will, play. Even its fraud is very stilted and contrived. Technically it's a lot less experimental than *Hellzapoppin* (is that how you spell it?), a musical of the same period in the USA. The Living Theater production of *Tonight We Improvise* received rave reviews, though qualified by, for example, the following kind of remark (by Brooks Atkinson): "*Tonight We Improvise*... is the sort of script that ought to be experimented with, although it will probably interest only people who are fascinated with the anatomy of the theatrical process. ...It takes a lot of work and skill for a company of actors to conduct the experiment. But Mr. Beck and his associates have done the work well. Although the play is valueless...

the inquiry is interesting." The Living Theater very kindly gave me a ticket to their production. Part way through the first act, at a time when most of the action is in the audience, Judith Malina (Mrs. Beck) came down the aisle, took one look at me and said, "You're in my seat!" I decided if this was improvisation, I'd best get in the spirit of the thing and do something. If she'd pretend this was my seat, I'd pretend I was a gentleman and give her my seat. So I stood up and offered it to her. She just kept on yelling, "He's taken my seat!" But she would not accept that seat. She just wanted to yell, maybe, or she didn't want to sit down. What do you think? Here's another: during intermission the actors joined the audience in the lobby. Coffee was served. A friend of mine spilled his coffee on one of the actresses' dresses. She just moved away without complaint and talked on. A performer was seated in the audience to heckle the performance. But you couldn't talk to him. He was too much a performer for that. And each night he did it the same way. He had a beard at the time, which once I pulled in the intermission. He pouted at me and walked away. Now, either the production or the play was inconsistent. I think it was the latter. For my part, I improvised: I left both times I attended before the end.

But if Pirandello is a pretentious charlatan, in his case it should be noted that he is deliberately that, which does give him some charm. He makes his own charlatanry his subject matter. It is not his charlatanry, ultimately, which I scold him for. It is the moral and imaginative weakness that renders his theater irrelevant, even useless, intellectually and morally and emotionally. His refusal to say anything more than he did is not inspiring, like so many refusals. It just seems kind of pale and very professional. Genet does better.

Genet - there's an interesting figure. His negativism seems like a conscious, clear-cut rejection of his emotional and moral environment, and it even takes on a certain degree of heroism that makes him inspiring. He is a puritan on the other team from Bunyan. *The Blacks* is a courageous play. The sad thing about Genet is his not finding a more satisfactory environment for his work. One is too conscious of being in a theater, of the thing being theatrical. Can a situation be too theatrical for the theater? I think so, if its context and thus its environment remove it from the most useful environment it might have been placed in. One might do *The Blacks* in the

street during a civil rights march. But Genet would most likely find that vulgar and too unambiguous. If the older artists of this century have a hobbyhorse - like Uncle Toby says all men do - it is the love of ambiguity, so much of a rapture that it becomes a sort of eccentric disease of the soul. One is here and one is there at the same time, one is this and one is that. And this condition is never accepted, it is dwelt on. Perhaps this is true of such Europeans as Joyce, Helms, Pirandello, and Genet more than of the Americans: they, more than we, seem to feel disinherited. But I wouldn't swear to it. It is all a speculation, and why not? I wonder if Genet doesn't get this ambiguity more from Pirandello than from anyone else. He seems to prefer not to relate to the immediate present except in a literary way. When his work is read, it seems like history. Only when it is read does it seem relevant. The atmosphere of intellectual contrived ambiguity seemed the whole game. One expects that of Anouilh, Ionesco De Gaullicus, and Giraudoux. But for Genet one hopes the best. I love Notre Dame des Fleures, even more than the other novels. They are meant to be read. But the dramas are too theatrical to be read. Some day there may be a medium of the order of three-dimensional television which is read, imagined, and realized all at once. *The Blacks* belongs in this medium, not in the theater. It is very embarrassing to see middle-class negroes attacking the same people they ape, to the detriment of their own people. And if the play were performed by really poor people, it would not be Genet any more. *The Blacks* is a contradiction of its own intents and messages: I think Genet has done that deliberately, but I think he should not have done it. I think Genet wanted to throw a good, healthy load into the faces of his sick countrymen, but he got so amused by his load - hypnotized by it, you might say - that his load acquired all the sickness of his country. Then too, the act of protesting almost implies that one is protesting to a hostile audience. But we are not hostile. In my country at my time, we are impressed enormously and therefore largely led by our black people. We identify with them. It affects an enormous number of us. The Negroes sit in at City Hall. Some of us join them. Almost all of us support them. In the past this would have marked us as being from a peculiarly liberal background. It would have seemed rather bohemian. But in this summer of 1963 a new generation has appeared which refuses to be as sick as our fathers, even as our older brothers. Older generations used to complain about their fathers, and "revolt against them." Our older brothers have collaborated with

our fathers to make a world in which there is no room for the young. Our older brothers listen to rarified jazz that had lost any trace of social relevance. They made their gestures by swallowing "sacred poisons" that enlightened them about the air. And they kept their lousy, hip, beat mouths shut while unemployment skyrocketed among the newly graduated, and automation, poorly handled, took away the possibility of our contributing, on an ordinary level, to society. The Leroi Joneses - are they the Joneses we should try to keep up with? - concentrated on Cuba, while their younger brothers rode in the front of Alabama busses. The Allen Ginsburgs told how they wanted to be God while the unions shut my generation out, as surely and as cruelly and as completely as any employer ever did. To concentrate on A-bombs and peace movements is surely worthwhile but not so much to the point as recognizing the economic basis of our conflict with the East, and then working for peace through economic means.

What I am saying is that any sacrifices that are made are going to be made by my generation. And for what should we be sacrificed? We refuse. And therefore we hate our older brothers. And I mean hate. Go sit in a candy store in Greenpoint for a few weeks, and talk with one of those teen-agers who says he wants to be a movie star when he grows up, or who makes poor Paul Goodman cry because he says he doesn't want to be anything. Get through his veneer of so-what. One day you will suddenly come on an expression of hate so deep and so violent that you will be amazed at the human capability of nourishing it. Nobody asked to be born doomed. The civil rights struggle come from this. And the explosion of the young, which may well surpass all historical precedents - and which will destroy or at any rate be directed not against a people, such as the Jews, a class, such as the bourgeoisie, or a race, but against, purely and simply, older people. It will be very difficult to head this off. We are not non-participants, like the beats were: we are arming to take to the barricades.

And therefore Genet seems passe, like an old antivivisectionist, grown fat in the service of his cause.

Same with most of the crusading nihilists - the Tennessee Williams - William Inge - Edward Albee kind of writers - how could their ilk possibly have anything to do with us in our situation?

Soon, I guess, Albee will write some poems for Kulcher and Diane di Prima's plays will be printed by the Grove Press.

What do you use a Williams play for? Are they pertinent social criticisms, like Sartre? Or does he merely harp on grim things for their decorative effect? Take *This Property Is Condemned*. In a way, it is one of the greatest one-act plays. The two characters are both extraordinary lively depictions. Their interests vary. And the piece seems to lament that this girl is, like her house, condemned. But it is uncharacteristic Williams. Its best points assume a common point of view. Take also *Orpheus Descending*, which is a reworking of an earlier play, and therefore has stronger ideas than Williams's later things (I have a theory about that, and I'll get back to it in a little while). The ideas are incredibly effective. And that is that. Williams simply revels in the nymphomania of the girl. And a weird, half-mad negro wanders around giving a weird indian whoop. So you are shocked. So he does a lot of the right things. It is very theatrical theater. Still, it is the easy way out. Now, comparing both plays, in each he raises questions. In each he shows a sick society. But in each, he depends on that same society for its impact. And in each he seems to tacitly approve of it. You can write of sick situations, like Ibsen, without being sick. But that does not often happen.

Finally, Williams, like Genet, develops his brilliant theatricality out of shock values, by exaggerating what is common to his society. But these values change. If Kinsey were to concentrate on, for example, sexual attitudes in my generation, I think he'd be in for a surprise. The inarticulate people, who seem not to have been extensively covered, have a way of life that is extremely more promiscuous than that of ten years ago. Kinsey should take a walk up the fire escape of the building where I was working until this last week any lunch hour. This is something which has developed in the last few years, according to the older workers.

My theory I mentioned before is that the personality changes with the environment, in such a way that if the personality ever becomes fixed, as the environment that produced it fades away, so does the core of the personality so that we are left with a hollow shell with the manners and none of the living matter of the original personal-

ity. I think that any artist, such as Tennessee Williams, who makes up his mind without taking into account the shifting environment stales. And so it is not a good idea for an artist to depend on his own flair or knowledge to carry a work off. He should always take into account all changes in sociology, environment, even in his own physique.

So, Tennessee Williams, you've had it. You committed yourself to shock people, and, as time goes by, you have to be more and more bizarre till, in *Suddenly Last Summer*, you come to cannibalism. If you are depicting cannibalism, do you think it is a depiction of our society? I may say, in all good faith, that I've never been a cannibal. And if you are trying to shock us to our senses, then don't you think it's a pretty sick appeal?

And Albee is considered more avant-garde. But he is more facile, even, than Williams. From the *Zoo Story* one comes to think that he is interested in a new psychological theater. But his idea of what psychology is the same old thing. How can anyone in good faith cover the same old psychology with effective sauce and serve it, piping hot, on a silver platter. Answer: I do not think Albee is acting in good faith.

It is not enough to say the same old thing effectively, when you might mean the same old thing but say something new effectively. That's assuming that you want to say something effective anyway.

But there's no doubt that Albee seems most interesting in displaying psychological effects. His characters are so spectacular. They seem to have nothing to do with daily living. In the *Zoo Story*, what would happen to Jerry if he went to work in the printing plant where I was?

But Albee has one very interesting aspect. In a way he is the end of naturalistic theater. You could not go farther than he has, emphasizing abnormal psychology and heaving fluff with violence. It is the end of a line of evolution, one in which great attention was given to details and very little to what was actually going on. Wedekind, O'Neill, Williams, Albee - it is easy to see what drama historians can prepare their doctoral dissertations on for the next few years.

There is a sort of dramatist who simply makes gentle twists within the context of the given theater. The writers of this style whom we know best are Pinter, Ionesco, and the early Adamov (since, much improved). Pinter writes for the British tradition, Ionesco for the ruggedly individualistic (why are all rugged individualists the same, meek, conservative individual?) Gaullist clerk, usually named Berenger, who forms a united front with the intelligentsia and dukes who constitute Ionesco's natural audience, and the Adamov of cruelty-and-I'm-through-with-your-wife, -I'll-pass-her-on-to-Joe, -but-don't-you-dare-insult-the-whore-I-love. To be a writer of this style, you should assume that everybody comes from the same bland background and then shock them by isolating extraordinary factors in life and isolating them in such a way that only this factor is important. In Strindberg's *A Spook Play*, there's an old mummy who lives in a cupboard and who screams out from time to time. Shocking? Yes, in an easy, Breton-surrealism way. The others, Pinter, Ionesco, and early Adamov take this as Standard Operating Procedure, and, mechanically, they go on proceeding, always with great hoop-la about how modern this is. Such work, I assert but don't bother to demonstrate, really appeals to the worst in us, and so we like it in a decorative way. But basically it is safe. It poses no threat to anybody. Safety in the arts is not necessarily perjorative, of course. But in this case, it seems an escape from anything one might be called on to do. We can always daydream how sad we are in our cupboards, and, in this way, be too absorbed to worry about screams of help from the next cupboard.

Really, the trouble with the institution of Theater today is that it just isn't itself, and it can't be. The theater is just not being a place where things happen, because nothing happens there.

It is all literature.

If you read Horatio Alger, who hated the theater as a waste of attention, you find that in his time the bootblacks and the millionaires used to rub shoulders at Tony Pastors and other places on the Bowery. At that time the Theater was not so self-conscious and it did not concentrate on theatrical effects. It simply catered to everybody's imagination and sensibility, i.e., to two healthy faculties, rather than to their sense of the bizarre. In one of the Ragged Dick series there is a description of a play with dragons, done without

illusion, which delighted the newspaper boy-narrator because he had never thought about being in the same room as a dragon. For all his distrust of the theater, in *Jed the Poorhouse Boy* an alcoholic actor helps Jed escape from his poorhouse and puts him on the road to being a useful member of society. This all takes place in little villages in upstate New York. Do you think that the part that the Theater played at that time was purely the low-grade crass entertainment that one gets from the Ed Sullivan show? I don't. I think that in the Theater one enjoyed a vicarious glory and dreaming to which there is simply no contemporary parallel. One had a sort of glimpse of anarchic freedom and of ideals that were bound up in specific activities. I would like to see this situation exist again.

People are people, a man is a man. I haven't much to say about Brecht's theater or similar theater which deals with these problems, because I have never seen a Brecht play properly performed; though I have read a good many of them, I have never seen a good translation of any except for the Charles Laughton Galileo, which is, as a piece, too much of a tour de force for my taste. I would like to see what would happen if somebody did *Die Mutter* in New York as it is prescribed in the Berman edition. I doubt our institution of Theater, where our highest tradition is that you cannot whistle in the dressing rooms, would recover from the impact.

When these ideas are handled in a more Aristotelian context, the facelessness of the most vivid characters seems overwhelming. It is years since I've seen or read *Waiting for Lefty*, and I remember how unreal the summer stock actor made the lead, though I also remember this lead - is his name Mac? - matching coins while his world came apart. A realistic situation in which an unreal person is involved.

For this reason I make a distinction between a persona and a character in my own work. Who you are, your social position, the name of your second cousin, and the color of your hair - that is the persona. What you like, what you do, your personality, how you behave, - that is character. I like to give the performer a minimum persona and ask him to develop a maximum character, which may and usually does coincide with his own. The same approach we find in Shakespeare - what sort of guys are Lorenzo and Graziano in *The Merchant of Venice*? Not to mention interpretations of Hamlet, of course.

But in recent drama, from Ibsen to Ionesco, from Albee to Odets, this liberty is denied in that to take it is to violate the spirit of the play. When characters are thought of as fixed and unchanging, the absurd is reached, inasmuch as the realistic is being denied. If to love the unrealistic is sick, then only the sick, from their society, go see plays by O'Neill and Albee.

From this the Theater has died: it has become too theatrical. The Going Thing mentality has affected it. The only way to revive the Theater is to dump the professionals, all those who profit by the Theater's exclusiveness and who thrive in this Going Thing situation.

When you do the right thing, when you avoid danger, you are acting as a machine and denying your manhood.

The new theater has nothing to do with the institutional Theater of the last eighty years. We cannot afford profiteering. We are always too young.

The new theater is any art in any medium that happens, and in its narrower sense, it is a synthesis of ideas already obvious in other art media. But there is not a single thing that we can learn from the Albees and Ionescos of this world, from their work or from their experience. The old theater must die with them before the new can be born. So let's bury them.

There are, however, ideas which were offered to the theater but never accepted by the theater on a large scale. These were put forward by Artaud and by Marinetti. A couple of Artaud disciples have become very prominent - Decroux and Barrault. But Decroux is a fine mime technician with a taste for the Czarist aesthetic of dance, and, though he has taught many skillful mimes, he never has done anything to hold our attention. And Barrault is a powerhouse with Decroux's taste and no mind whatsoever. Together they seem to comprise a French Living Theater. Perhaps they'll do some plays by Ashberry, Koch, and O'Hara.

Artaud's ideas are so ingrained in what I say that I have a hard time separating them. His manifestoes constitute my main core of theater technique. His aesthetic, the love of the lurid and bombastic and

pure melodrama, seems excessively Faustian, to me (the real School of Artaud is Paik), but his images haunt me. There is his idea, for example, that the theater can be like a plague and, by burning itself out, purge you. You will never forget that idea.

Marinetti, on the other hand, first conceived of the dramatist as one who provoked events rather than produced them. At one point he did theatricals by filling tents with evil-smelling rags and chasing the audience through them at night, screaming. Finally, he developed a notion that in the theater, you could emphasize speed, and compress an intense situation or experience into a couple of moments. One thing I greatly admire about Marinetti is that he could develop three such different (but not mutually exclusive) ideas.

But that is one of the things about Marinetti: he develops ideas simultaneously that have nothing to do with each other. There is absolutely no connection between Marinetti's theater and his acceptance of fascism, except that he always kept trying to be as modern and as Italian as possible. His point of view is unbelievably simple, in fact. Those two aims explain everything he ever did.

His fast plays are compressed into a couple of lines at the most. This was not a new technique. Carlo Beni wrote the tragedy of Rosmunda in five lines, back around the middle of the nineteenth century, for the same reasons as Marinetti. Verlaine wrote a couple of tiny plays. But Marinetti extended the compression idea to include plays about nothing, i.e., everything, with any possible form of experience thrown in.



Any Lester Trimble who gets the idea this kind of theater has any connection with dada is all balled up. Marinetti's plays in this form, like my own and Ray Johnson's, are poetic, experimental processes and activities. They are not existential analyses of the Ball and Huelsenbeck sort, nor are they Tzara gestures. The name Marinetti gave this kind of theater sounds very odd in English: "Synthetic Plays." But since there really is no need to duplicate terms, no matter how awkward, so that everybody can have a term that seems nice in the context of his own work, I suggest that little compressions of experience into processes and activities be stuck with the name of "synthetic plays."

Actually, the spirit of dada is lots farther from what I, Hansen, Joe Jones, and the others of my generation are doing than the general spirit of futurism, whatever exceptions there are to this. To be delighted by ambiguities and absurdities as such is more for our older brothers and sisters than for us. The Diane di Primas, like the Tristan Tzaras, seem to be out on strike, once and for all, in this world, but it is not a strike with picket lines. It is no more than absence and refusal, now and forever.

Personally, I think that you have to have a joy in something happening to have theater. But that is a matter of taste. Taste: It is something that fits with Marinetti like salt on hamburger. For me, the thing about Marinetti isn't that he's a great dramatist, because he risks so much he always loses. It's that he's such a ringleader. He really suggests some great ways to do things. When the rest of the theater goes into the mist and has nothing to do with what is going on, even in the theater, there are these words of this manifesto, written half a century ago, in Camille Gordon's fluent translation:

Manifesto:

"After the Synthetic theater and the theater of surprise we are going to have the antipsychological abstract theater of pure elements and the tactile theater.

"In the synthetic theater we don't concern ourselves about "dramatic principles." We have always new juxtapositions of humor and earnestness, of real and unreal people, time and space relationships, simultaneities, dramas of objects and presences, scenic dissonances, picture-stage enclosures, show windows of ideas and gestures.

"If, today, a new Italian theater exists with mixtures of the comic, the serious, and the grotesque, fictitious persons in concrete surroundings simultaneities and time-space relationships, - then our synthetic theater is to be thanked.

"The theater of surprisetakes as its aim the arousing of amazement with all means, situations, ideas, contrasts, which will now have never yet appeared on the stage, with juxtaposed effects that will shake our human sensitivity.

"For us surprise is a fundamental element of art. Any work of art is autonomous. It resembles only itself and appears as a wonder. Botticelli's "La Primavera" had, at the time of its appearance, - like many other masterpieces, - quite apart from its complex values of composition, rhythm, volume, and colors, the value of surprising originality. Our knowledge of the picture and its copies and imitations have destroyed this value of surprise. The cult of the "great work of art" (gauked-at, imitated, reproduced) is fatal for fresh zeal and, besides, it is lazy and absurd.

"Raphael chose for his frescoes a particular wall of the vatican which, a few years previously, had been painted by Sodoma. He had the marvelous work of this painter obliterated and painted the wall anew to flatter his creative pride, for he was convinced that the main worth of a work of art lay in its new and surprising appearance.

"Surprise is an essential element in contemporary art - so much so that work which once was surprising after all these years has become completely genial - and it is now hard to surprise.

"In the theater of surprise the direction to which the author hastens his strength of invention must be to:

1. drive the sensibility of the audience with fortuitous surprises into chaos.
2. suggest a sequence of other notions - as a stone, which is thrown into the water, sends out wider and wider circles.
3. summon up in the public unheard of words and gesticulations, so that each surprise arouses new surprises in the loge, in the balcony, late in the evening, the next day, on and on.

"I will stop a moment to attack the theater of psychology in its three basic forms:

1. the antique, scientific-documentary psychological theater.
2. the parasitic semi-futuristic, fragmentary, feminine, ambiguous psychological connection (eg., Proust).
3. the Italian, modern Psychologism with its powerful, directed, heavy-handed, moralistic, professional, pedantic analysis of basics - haunted by the age-old weaknesses of the Hamlets - 'to be or not to be,' living and dreaming about this, and the philosophical dialogue without any plastic synthesis and movement, dressed up as futurism.

"These three psychologisms are all similarly analytical, boring, without transparency, without poesy, monotonous, vexatious, depressing, and anti-Italian, that is, opposed to the beautiful, poetic, spiritual, explosive, improvisation-loving, fiery, colorful character of our people.

"Therefore we have made two new kinds of theater and performed on tour in eighteen Italian cities:

1. The abstract a-logical synthesis of pure elements, which offer the public the force of life in motion without psychology (the abstract synthesis is an irrational, surprising combinations of typical experiences).
2. The tactile, muscular, athletic, mechanical synthesis without psychology."³

iii - poetry and things that happen

I looked out the printing plant window. White feathers floated by through the air. I do not know why.

It struck me that this was a very poetic thing. I do not know why.

It struck me that to see this thing happen was its poetry. To write about it was not to hold the poetry of the moment. I do not know why that either.

Surely, if one is working in a medium that allows things to take place, there is room for a sort of work where the driest of words bring about many marvelous moments. I hope the world has room for this kind of work.

And so a poetic element can be discovered in a lot of work where it was not intended, and thereby we can explain marvelous things that we have seen, and we can also notice the deadness of a lot of situations.

One of the most wonderful moments I recall in a concert of American Vocal Music in May, 1960. The piece was Charles Wuorinen's "On the Raft." One singer was very large, the other was rather small, but both were pretty girls. They hugged the edge of the piano when they sang, both of them half-smiling, both exactly together. It was a marvelously absurd sight, and they sang very well. Somehow I think the composer was a ringleader in the situation.

Then there is the opposite kind of development. When David Tudor performs Busotti - and many others - he puts on gloves and/or arms himself with toys and mallets and goes playing all over the piano. As a result, the situation becomes rather faceless. It was a piano but now it is just being used as a reverberating object. Formerly one thought one might hear all kinds of interesting things. But the situational aspect is half the fun now. And yet, always this confounded piano, which seems to become a symbolic object in many of these Tudor performances, just as the Tudor manner - ultracool, ultracalm, ultraprofessional - becomes a symbolic manner. The piano is the grand instrument of the last century. Tudor's manner is the extreme exaggeration of a professional manner. And both seem rather out of the spirit of these situational compositions. They detract from the poetic situation. If only Tudor would let loose with a good loud "Oomph," or stop a moment and wipe his forehead. I summed up this in a piece I wrote this summer called "Interjection for David Tudor." It goes like this: "Laugh when you do something funny," and it is to be inserted into any piece by any composer as desired. The only catch is that I have no idea if anything strikes David Tudor as being funny while he is playing.

But back to my point: I like pianos to be pianos, and when they are something else to be something else. And these are things that do seem to happen in performances.

There is a kind of Persian poetry where sense, form, and even language are ignored. The shape of the words, some of them non-existent, is the only consideration.

But these days our poets do not seem even to consider these things. It strikes me that Diane di Prima, Jonathan Williams, Edward Dorn, and Gary Snyder are all furiously at work on the same poem.

How is it possible that so many people as those in, for example, Donald M. Allen's *The New American Poetry* could all have such similar intentions? The only two poets of the generation of the anthology who seem to have any interest in doing anything besides the Going Thing are Jackson Mac Low and Tuli Kupferberg, neither of whom is in the anthology.

This is the Going Thing style: you first look for your own, indivi-

dual sound (i.e., poetic diction). The sound comes before all else. Even so, a few kinds of sound are acceptable only. There is the declamatory style used by Ginsberg in his best-known pieces, whose closest precedent is Christopher Smart in the eighteenth century. It has many many exclamations and pile-ups of nouns. Diane di Prima and Michael McClure use this style extensively, though their typography differs and makes their things look a lot more different than they really are. The second sound is the hermetic free verse with lots of proper nouns. The master of this style is Charles Olson, whose lines really move. But, since his influence began to appear, in the early nineteen fifties at Black Mountain College, in the *Black Mountain Review*, he has come to recapitulate himself into mannerisms. And the Kochs and O'Haras and Mc Clures who use Olson's manner have come to a sound that can only be described as privacy in the Manner of Poesy. I am not, please remember, speaking of subject matter just yet, merely of the superficial sound of this kind of verse. Finally, the third Going Thing style is the well-formed line of conversation, picked up mostly from William Carlos Williams' *Desert Music* and from some 1920's pieces of his. This sound is phrased according to the Going Thing sort of jazz. The result is elegaic and (Creeley's *Air: "Cat Bird Singing,"*⁴ or Oppenheimer's *"The Rain"*⁵) occasionally very powerful. The end of *"The Rain"* shows what I mean:

There are Africans
believe the sun
female. This
is not my way.

The sound of those lines gives the strength much more than the meaning or the image. There are probably not many of us for whom african totemism is a particularly important subject. But the sound of this kind of verse makes everything seem quite significant.

Having gotten his style, the Going Thing poet feeds in either of the following material: survivors of atomic wars, early history, a natural analogy, fellatio, and Cuba-and-junk (which are not usually separated, though I think this is more a phenomenon than an intention). Now these matters are, of course, national preoccupations of ours, and ones about which there is a great deal of hypocrisy. But howabout labor reform, urban renewal, liquor, civil rights, industrial

techniques, food, quietness, and plants? Is it that these are more complex matters and that they require great specificity? Or is it, perhaps, that the "Going Thing" poets prefer phony revolutions, ones which, it can safely be assumed, will never take place?

Finally, having brought up these matters, the Going Thing poet merely takes an exaggeratedly liberal view on each, throws in a little nostalgia, and calls it quits. The poem is then sent to his best friend's magazine, read by other friends, and referred to in a poem six years later.

It is not permitted to assume a real radical point of view on anything, although this is not admitted. It would seem humorless. Very characteristic is the title of a Joel Oppenheimer book: "The Love Bit," which suggests a good deal of alienation from one's own feelings.

Radicalism is more than an intensification of liberal tendencies. More than anything it is a conviction that something must be done. This is a foreign vein to our Going Thing poets. They scream and they holler, but they never sum up. They express great excitement at a safe distance, but it is only the facade of concern. Like my scholar in Nicopolis 1396 they are fighting the turk by praising the lord and being good Christians.

Yet this is work which very very often is topical and is filled with political references. But its radicalism is phony. It has a few concrete suggestions, many regrets. And so I think that the voice of the radical kind of Going Thing poetry, of the McClures, and the Di Primas and the Lamantias, is the voice of the disowned czarist, mourning his lost homeland and acting up in the meantime in front of a mirror.

This is why the Going Thing poets seem so absurd in comparison with a Neruda or a B. Brecht. When an Oppenheimer writes an Un Bel Di, on the other hand, which is prose intoned in the manner of poetry, he uses the style consistently for what it is best suited: a sensuous lyrical love story.

Twenty years ago there was a strong school of Eliot. But many, even in the generation that belonged to that school, had nothing to do with it and, without dashing off into the misty past (like Bly is

doing today, out of dissatisfaction with the Going Thing present, I suppose), these people began what is today the Going Thing style.

But the Going Thing has no Eliot, no masters, save, perhaps, Olson, and, with a nod from half a century ago, William Carlos Williams. And neither of these men is papal. And so the only master the Going Thing has is the opinion of other members. This has become the source of the problem. The opinion of one's fellows ought not be so important. Le Roi Jones ought not to be teaching himself, Di Prima and McClure to classes at the New School for Social Research. He ought to be suggesting what can be done and things that have happened. In poetry classes, even historical ones, the trick should be to open minds, not to close them.

And so it goes on. This poetry, which might have become extremely popular and have helped reshape a mass culture, this poetry is just crumbling while its practitioners more and more concentrate on doing the right thing. But where there is no danger, there is no life. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

That is what I think about the Going Thing.

Much more interesting, I think, is the work of Jackson Mac Low. For around ten years he's been working with raw language. He uses coins, nails driven through magazines, all kinds of methods of randomizing words. These are then put where he wants them, into a stanza, or onto an index card, or into this part of a concert hall while other words are thrown into the time dimension in another part of the concert hall. The result is a pile-up of units (or a breakdown of them) which acquires any meaning according to what is already moving through the mind. In order that the possibility of meaning may continue to exist, Mac Low seldom goes below the word unit, into morphemes, syllables, phonemes, and tonemes. In order that the musical aspect continue to be prominent, Mac Low only occasionally randomizes larger units than a word or ideas as such (as, for example, I do in the angel's speech at the end of Adam and Eve or in "The Youngest Soldier's Story") with the result that, if poetry is music applied to language, then this is as pure a poetry as possible. The movement of the consciousness through this flow of words and their connotations constitutes in its own right a poetic experience.

When work like this is sustained for any amount of time, one fights it and becomes bored, or one surrenders to the movement and enjoys it. It is difficult to imagine this sort of thing becoming very popular, but who knows? The principle that leads to enjoyment is so simple that, once understood, enjoyment happens rather than is worked for. In a way listening to this kind of poetry is for the lazy and the leisurely, because there is no idea to grasp, except, occasionally, a structural one. The ideas just come in and go out freely. This in itself is perhaps a moral point. Because Mac Low does it, can one assume he does what he thinks is right, so that there is a value judgement bound up in this exemplified behavior?

I suspect so. Once I thought that the motivations involved in Mac Low's work had simply to do with accepting what is done, and that there was no more reason in the work than the basic one, why did the chicken cross the road? Or why, for that matter, did Bodhidharma come over the mountains from India? That if one was to face the work, it would be faced, plain and simple and that was all there was to it.

But the work is so consistent, and this stream of words is, however placed in space on the page or in the room, however mingled with silence until the silence is absorbed into the poem, or however filtered by meter, rhyme, and so on, this way of the words of behaving is the way people should in a room or community or world together; I cannot but think that there is a very strong moral current.

Actually, Mac Low himself sometimes behaves like the words in his poems. I mean that within the corpus of his work there is an incredible variety, as if he had decided, now I'll be here, now there.

That seems like a very natural way of behaving; now you do this, and now that.

Perhaps because each work is so autonomous and so separate from the feelings of the poet, it seems a more consistent corpus than that of any other artist I know. Because one exercises one's freedom of movement, one remains free.

This variety is even one of taste and aesthetic. For example, I think I remember a film scenario where Mac Low suggests pointing

a camera at a tree and starting the camera and shooting roll after roll of film all day long. If that isn't by Mac Low, it might have been, because he sometimes does things like that. Except for the one aspect that fighting the movie you would become bored and surrendering you would be fascinated, except for this the film is way away from the poems, it has constant change and variations in lighting and coloring, by dust on the screen, by grain in the film, and so on. As for what would happen when a bird flew across the screen, crisis!

Finally, one technique that I first know of in Mac Low is that of composition by intention. When you work like this, you say what you intend and you leave the specific realisation up to the performer. It is a nice way to work because it both allows for no mistaking you what you are trying to do, and it also allows the performer to do what you want in the way which is most in accordance with what he wants and what he can do. This sounds like indeterminacy, but really it comes out quite differently, since indeterminacy is a method of structuring materials while intention simply points in a direction and says, "Go!" Mac Low first told me about this structure by intention back in the winter of 1960, although I have yet to see any pure intention pieces of his. A good example of what comes from this way of working is my "Celestials for Bengt af Klintberg."

Really, there's just nothing going on in written poetry: It never seems to come to a head until it is performed. This is true to a large extent with Mac Low, and in Europe it is true of Dufrene and Gysin and Filliou, of Emmett Williams and of Bengt af Klintberg. There is simply no comparison between any two of all these people. If only there were more activity as a whole, though. There is no serious avant-garde literary magazine in this country at the moment, no forum for the printed page, and so the orientation of the best poets, like those above, seems to be towards the best rostrums they have, which are the stage and the podium. It is questionable whether the current evolution of poetry towards the performance in time and space would take place with such decisiveness if there were more effective means of giving what one has done to the world.

Perhaps it would be a good idea to describe some of the work of these people, since it is not well known here, and since world li-

terature today is international at its best, although as provincial as ever at its worst. Bengt af Klintberg is a young swede who does happenings, in the technical sense of the word, as poems, ignoring any statement that he might make or seem to make and concerned almost exclusively with the poetic images that appear in the situations that he provokes. He is the opposite of the man who listens to what he is saying.

I will talk more about af Klintberg later on.

Dufrene is the ultimate in punsters. His work is an outgrowth of letterism. His largest work, TPL (Le Tombeau de Pierre Larousse) consists mostly of musical forms taken from exaggerated accents in proper nouns which may or may not mean anything. His other large work, D'Inutiles Notules, is almost entirely a mass of puns occasionally provoked by and very seldom relevant to the photographs which it accompanies. These photographs depict the man of a thousand faces, Daniel Spoerri, wearing a collection of eyeglasses which he built, acquired, and amassed. Apart from these and an old film scenario, Dufrene's work seems to be a collection of patterns of howls and screams and squeaks that have almost all vanished into thin air. Only the two large works are available in print, so far as I know.

There is no comparison between reading Brion Gysin's cut-up poems and hearing them. He has made concert tapes of "I Am that I Am" which show what he does best, and there's no comparing it with the things in *The Exterminator* or *Minutes to Go*.

Filliou is another very versatile man. He had an art gallery in his cap for a while. I wonder that he never put a theater there. He did poems by wrapping things up and by chaining blocks of wood together with hooks, on each block he wrote a word, and he hung the chain on the wall. Another time he began to think that maybe we spend too much of our lives measuring and reevaluating things, and so he reduced that to absurdity in his own joyful way by measuring things with objects. He found that Emmett Williams is sixty-five and a quarter matchboxes high: this is demonstrated by observing sixty-five and a quarter match boxes neatly glued to a board. Another discovery is that the German magazine, *Der Spiegel*, is exactly one french hammer high. He himself is six and a half featherdusters high. There is a bridge over the Singel canal at Amsterdam

which is thirty-four billion inflationary marks long: Emmett Williams told Robert Filliou this, and Robert was delighted. But I do not know whether this has become a poem yet or not. Robert Filliou is very young, he is only five trips to London old. And so on. Another poem-thing he did at London: there was an exhibition at London in which Filliou, Kjøpcke, Williams, Spoerri, Ben, Metzger, and Page were included. Filliou built a bowling alley, labled the balls "When you see Filliou," or "When you see Kjøpcke," etc., and then labled the pins, "Think of spoerri," or "Think of Ben." It was a very nice game because there were no winners and every time you bowled down a pin you were offered an idea. And yet, Filliou's work runs the gamut from very eccentric melodrama (eg., *Pere Lachaise No 1*, un poeme de 53 kilos)⁷ to an excellent long political (?) drama (I've never seen it, but Emmett Williams says it's tremendous) and to the object and activity poem-things I've described.

Williams is an expatriate american whose work, like Filliou's runs an extraordinary gamut from surrealistic novels to geometric progressions of letters (which sometimes are printed with rubber stamps and amount to being graphic books), mathematical permutations and displacements of words and letters through the alphabet, and, recently performance pieces. The most striking thing about Williams' things to me are their lovability. They appeal to the best in us and we love them for it. For example, Williams has an opera for forty-eight Marias, each of whom is given a Latin name or title. A master of ceremonies calls out the Maria's name by hailing her, "Ave Maria Dolorosa," and the Maria summoned up enters and, with great politeness, greets all the other Marias present. The piece ends when all the Marias are on the stage and everyone has shaken everybody else's hand. The social aspect of his piece is perfectly enchanting, with all this greeting and arriving and all these people seeing each other. If Williams suffers some from the extraordinary limitation of his pieces to the most elegant conceivable kind of activities, still his being able to attain such elegance is quite amazing, and it accounts for a good part of his artistic personality.

If only we had something of the variety going on here that is happening in Europe. Is it that our soil is only capable of nourishing one kind of plant at a time? Shouldn't we allow ourselves not only a crowd of maverick weeds but a whole forestful of different kinds of trees, shrubs, flowers, and strange growths? Are the reasons we

have such slight variety economic? Or does it have to do with our literary jingoism, with the unwillingness to accept all kinds of eclectic materials without absorbing them?

Surely it's just because our literary scene is dull and stupid, more than at any time since the eighteen eighties and nineties, that literary possibilities are ignored in all the other arts, that our theater is done by painters and musicians rather than by our Columbia M.A. Going Thing poets.



iv - moving and happening

So much has been going on, in the past few months, among the people I have been discussing, that all this activity seems more automatic than done out of well considered decisions or even out of any feeling of necessity. It seems a sort of Brownian movement that happens in order to conceal the vacuousness behind the quantity of activity. It is difficult to be both busy and depressed or discouraged.

Or perhaps it is simply that last winter was so very cold. People

just sat around and thought a while. Then, one day, it was spring, and one could get around a little more, so one did.

Performers had been squeezed up, and now they sprung, like so many watch movements. There was the Yam Festival, the dance concerts at the Judson Memorial Church, Yvonne Rainer's great dance recital, various Philip Corner activities, the Pocket Follies, the goings-on at Hansen's Third Rail Gallery by Hansen, Vostell and others. It was the only year I have ever experienced that had no summer. The performances at the Gramercy Arts Theater, the Pocket Theater, and Judson Hall kept on taking place. This fall there will be a lot of events.

I wonder, will there be so much activity in Europe? In a way I hope so. People seem to believe, more so than I, in a concert way of life. It is a harmless, though rather useless, belief, and, besides, it keeps them out of trouble. Personally, I prefer occasional bursts of activity, separated by long periods of time that are reserved for daydreaming, planning, speculating. But also, one hates to miss a marvelous moment. I go to many things that I doubt I will like, looking for little things, like the clarinet player a couple of weeks ago who was playing a very eminently undistinguished piece but could never stop grinning while he played.

A lot of this activity is happenings and event pieces, and so I may as well turn scholar a few moments so that what I say can be safely forgotten but a little clarity remain.

If you take a collage and add more and more diverse things to it, you have something of the order of Rauschenburg's combines, which are paintings-with-objects and, for me, violations of the spirit of working with objects, but since he is a very good painter, he comes out with very good paintings. As this collage develops, you add more and more things to it, until it surrounds you. You penetrate it, you are within it. That is an "environment." For a while, five or six years ago, Allan Kaprow and Robert Whitman used to do environments. The movement of the environment is fascinating, both as you move through it, and as it changes. To speed up these changes you may decide to motorize this environment and/or to introduce live performers (can you call them that?) into it. Then you have what is called a "happening." Nowadays anything that happens deliberately

is called a "happening," but this is more thanks to the stupidity of the ladies at Time Magazine than to anything else. When I say "happening," I am talking about a series of events designed to take place in an environment. Other things I call event pieces or music-things or performance pieces or just situations, according to what seems the best phrase for the particular piece.

Of course I have given these things in what seemed to be a sensible order, but it does not follow that they always happen in that order. For example, Ay-o (Takao Iijima) of Japan has done environments, but no happenings. Same with Addi Kjøpcke in Denmark. Bengt af Klintberg has done happenings but no environments.

It is said that just after World War I a friend of Bragaglia who had been expelled from the futurist movement put up a tent outside Lucca, hung rags and strange tactile objects there, invited his audience to come at night, and then chased them through the tent labyrinth on a motorcycle. I have been unable to find out more than that, but if this is what happened, then this was the first happening. Of course, late futurism is contemporary with dada, but it is supremely different from it. Futurism of that period often is an attempt to stimulate a concrete aesthetic mentality. Dada, even in its French phase, is still an outgrowth of expressionistic tendencies, and thus expresses its mentality less in a work of art than in a gesture. There is no denying that dada, perhaps because of its inclusiveness and its sense of change, is the more interesting of the two movements.

Somebody once suggested to me that the perfect dada objects are Ilse Koch's lampshades, made of the tattooed skin of concentration camp inmates.

After all, there is such confusion as to what the dadaists did. This is really inevitable in a movement in which the spirit and the gesture are more important than the physical productions.

Actually in Paris a sort of vaudeville was usually mounted, similar to the Pocket Follies sort of show that our dancers produce. With extraordinary international ballyhoo very elegant presentations took place. Several people spoke simultaneously or threw things at each other or made strange noise. The response of the public had more to do with the spirit than the work. Eventually this taste for

vaudeville disappeared into the modern ballet. It has come down to us, through the dancers, and gives us the standard taste that we find among dancers and International Style composers, for the refined, the slapstick, the vaudeville, Duchampiana, and so on.

If only Paris had died a little more, and a touch of the Berlin dada had survived. The Berlin dada, for all its fussiness, conventions, and bombast, nevertheless seems less to deny its own existence.

In a sense our environment is the world and the most ambitious happenings are our lives. Works of art can be in the world or can fight it, they can allow the world to come through them or they can transcend their karmas. The conventional taste for Duchamp does not seem to take this into consideration. It is another instance of the myth and hearsay and typing taking over from the work. One thinks of the chevalier Duchamp, who painted a chevalier's moustache on the Mona Lisa, who denied his own "Roue de Bicyclette" (was it too common for his taste?) by putting it behind glass in a large piece, whose phial of Paris air will surely not be thrown out even when it cracks and there is only plain old Philadelphia air left, and so on. It is easy to ignore the death-absorbed Duchamp, of the melted teeth, the cover of the "First Papers of Surrealism," and the "Unhappy Ready-made," who intended that his largest work would destroy itself, and whose pyramid, in "A regarder d'un oeil" at the New York Museum of Modern Art, is cracked. In fact the work of Duchamp has a good deal broader interest than the Duchamp of the smile. But it is this conventional view which seems to have come down as our idea of the Paris dadaist. Rather than Tzara, idle in the cafes, hating America as the "homeland of work,"⁸ playing with communism and writing poems for workers in limited editions costing fifty dollars a copy, - which is, of course, more what dada was like. Duchamp is a highlight, and did a good part of his "dada" output with Picabia before Dada came to Paris. Still, to return to the Duchamp of the most elegant pieces, it seems more lively to include one's environment in the work than to try to shut it out hermetically by denying one's own taste in favor of an impersonal one. Best to leave tracings in the sand for future people to come along, if they care to, and decipher, until the waves have obliterated them.

I am advocating a revolution of taste: let us accept what we find, accept ourselves as we really are. More than anything else I miss

into our magazines or concerts. I miss being able to say, this one makes his living as a television repair man, this one is just nutty about dancing on his knees, this one doesn't like blond people, this one is afraid of the dark, and this one likes it when very fat musicians play on little tiny instruments very softly. There is so much mistrust of the eccentric, the exceptional, all the crazy little things that go on, in and out of performances. There's a line in Fitzgerald: "He wants me to be on an ivory pedestal, but all I want to be is Mickey Mouse." Am I clear?

And so this is the environment in which the happenings have come about. In the winter of 1959 Kaprow published the first text for a happening, *The Demiurge*, in a student magazine at Rutgers University in New Jersey. It contains everything that he has used in his happenings since, though it is too comprehensive, too expensive to mount. A copy fell into my hands, and I liked it very much. I met him, and tried to help him put together his first New York happening, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, to be done at the Reuben Gallery in the fall. In connection with this we went on television, for the publicity, with a collage of a section of his *18 Happenings* and two of my *27 Episodes for the Aquarian Theater*. This is the only happening I have ever done, although there is a text in *100 Plays* that I wrote at that time. I thus helped out in happenings from the beginning in New York, and I did do the one, but I do not think of myself as closely involved with them, and my one was a small thing, a reworking from an older play and performed not alone but simultaneously with Kaprow's work.



Most happenings, whether by Kaprow or Oldenburg or Dine or Whitman or Hansen, have taken place in lofts or stores in industrial parts of the city. Because of the environment structure, the happening is very improbable in a confined area such as the proscenium stage. The audience has to be in the midst of the action, and this, for the most part, precludes the possibility of any seating arrangement being good for more than one happening, in spite of the general usefulness of the theater - where you have an audience that can see the show, where all kinds of lights can be used, and where there is a proscenium to which all kinds of things can be attached. Granted that a stage has its confines, it is a painterly prejudice that keeps the happening away from the conventional theater, with the result that in many cases the audience is crowded away from the performance almost entirely, and only the scholars, artists, and critics are able to obtain access to the performance, with which they are not very deeply involved. As a result, Kaprow and the others have made an art form which is chiefly accessible to scholars, artists, and critics and therefore only pertinent to them. Of course one might equally well attach a value to the portability of the work (taking portability as the opposite of an environment) and become fascinated by the difference between a performance here and one there. But if one likes this concept of building an environment for your piece, it is simply a limitation imposed by accepting the medium, and I doubt whether there is any solution to this.

Another painterly hangover that became particularly striking for a while was the interest in the temporary and the impermanent. This was almost implicit in the abstract impressionist style, - slap, dash, let your work grow while it can and it's too intense a situation to worry much about materials. Kaprow made mountains of sculptures and environments out of newspaper. When one was through



looking at this, it was thrown away. Oldenburg made some of the most wonderful objects I have ever seen out of newspaper and corrugated cardboard and chicken wire. They were not thrown away: most of them simply took nature's course. It was implicit that unless one wanted to perform a happening in an environment and then abandon the room, the environment would have to be destroyed. And so these materials were particularly suitable for this kind of work, for making environments. Why build environments of fine carpentry and glass when chicken wire, rags, polyethylene, newspapers, scraps of anything, in fact, would do as well? In fact, however, in Kaprow's case, there is a complication. His work requires his presence, at least most of the time, and, at performance, all the time. This is so because when he isn't there, his work doesn't look like it does when he works on it, a sort of violently out-of-kilter Levittown slum. But this means he is limited by his own technique, by the weight-load of the floor (no motors and machinery in this art gallery please), by the mechanics of ~~sure-I'd-like-to-use-that-but I-haven't-time-to-find-it-cheap-and-I-can't-afford-it-expensive~~, by the whim of the lighting man who doesn't understand how Kaprow wants his light set (or unset) and quits. As a result, his work very often has an improvised look that occasionally makes it seem extremely narrow in intent, as opposed to Robert Whitman, whose environments are made at his own pace and usually serve to extend the scope of the experience of his piece enormously, though he has nothing like Kaprow's imagination. The result of all this is that Kaprow's work fails and has plenty of danger of failing any time: therefore it is alive. You come, you have a sense of excitement in that what you see may well be quite dead or it may be wonderful. 18 Happenings and Spring Happening are - or were (since they're over now and will never happen again) - marvelous pieces. The pieces Kaprow did at the Maidman Theater (in the furnace room there), at the Bleeker Street Hotel (up a patio forty-feet high), and at the Paris Bon Marche, none of which I saw, sound like great Kaprow epics - for he is a maker of epics, more than anything else, which limits his scope a little. On the other hand, he did a piece on a beach at Long Island and another one at George Segal's farm in New Jersey, the first with mermaids and torches at night, with yelling psychiatrists drinking beer and a girl in polyethylene dragging herself to the sea, and the other with a forest of people moving in howling masses at a haystack, on which La Monte Young plays jazz, and automobiles knocking down haystacks (so far so good) but then Siegfried Kaprow

roars up the haystack, heroically "slays" the evil musician, drinks all the water from the beerbottles on a tree, saws the tree down, collapses, and dies. Somebody should hide Kaprow's copy of the Golden Bough. Still, who but he would take the risk of trying such a piece? Nor is there any particular change in his work. Fragments of The Demiurge might have been used at Segal's farm. From what I have heard, the very first happenings Kaprow did, in New Jersey in the spring of 1958 and the spring of 1959, were no different in spirit. Is this a limitation of his? Or is it how things are? Or is it how he likes them to be?



Dine and Whitman aren't in the air just now. Whitman is a virtuoso who has marvelous moments - in his happening, *A Flower*, women walked around wearing multi-skirts that could be pulled up as blouses or dropped as skirts, in the primary colors, blossoming and blossoming. Again, shreds of cloth were hung from the ceiling and tied in bunches. When each tie was cut the shreds spread apart, and we were in the woods. Still, most of the time we were watching a movie of his girl waking up in the morning. And Whitman allows himself to be seduced by the materials he works with. In *The American Moon* there was a rag fight very similar to that in *A Flower*. He has a bizarre affinity for rags. There's no question that his environments profit from this: He always maneuvers marvelous surroundings into existence. But what happens is sometimes surreal, and sometimes too private, and only rarely do those wonderful moments take place. James Dine's *The Smiling Workman* is a legend by now: it was a rare thing, this humming man, writing, "I love my work. Help me,"

with paint, then drinking the paint, dumping it over his head, and leaping through his painting. I was listening to my tape recording of it a couple of days ago: it is terrifically exciting, as a regular vaudeville play and as an epitaph for abstract expressionism. But it was not a happening. It was an independent play which used a prop, just as his other famous happening, *The Car Crash*, was a play that had nothing to do with the environment except to take place in it - oh yes, the costumes and make-up were the same silvery white as the environment. Dine's own make-up was metallic, and he looked like a car. He and the other performers raced around, stammering, while a lovely, chalk-white girl standing on a stool in a matching white gown that stretched to the floor. Suddenly the performance became more inarticulate, and there was nothing the performers could do, and they crashed. These were not goings-on in an environment: They were a fine, personal melodrama. It was structurally not much different from Pinter or Kopit. So really, though Dine did those two marvelous things, he never did a happening any more than I did, and these two performance pieces, though marvelous, are no more central to his work than the fine performance pieces by Rauschenburg, Picasso, Kjøpcke, Rousseau, etc. Shortly afterwards he gave up this line of thinking altogether and went on to revive *Die Neue Sachlichkeit*, though a handle was borrowed from Pierre Restany for the occasion, *The New Realism*, which was much more suitable as a term to describe what Hains, Spoerri, Klein, Christo, Deschamps, and the rest had in common with each other.

Actually, I am trying to steer clear of talking about visual artists, since to bring them up would break my circuit, since it involves other kinds of thinking and being and doing that those I am going through. So I will not talk about the marvelous work of Spoerri (except briefly, later), Hains, Kjøpcke, Vostell, or even the non-performance pieces of Brecht, Oldenburg, and Hansen, no matter how much any of these people are in the air.

Oldenburg has a remarkable concentration in his pieces - he directs the attention so that a particular kind of mood appears. In *Snapshots from the City* he suggested streets and a crazy kind of cardboard dance that looked pretty painful. It was very dirty, it was illuminated only by flashes of light so that you caught only phases of the activity. Something very simple was going on, this shifting and changing and flashing of lights. It was very basic and realistic,

but there's really no more you can say about it. That is true of most of the Oldenburg happenings. I've seen plenty of them by now, just not enough. And they are impossible to talk about, even to describe what went on. He only uses one or two kinds of things at a time - for example, in *Injun*, he used the traditional images of Tobacco Road and an indian. First two girls slept on a pile of rags, a man came by and, a little suggestively, put stickers on their thighs. Then Oldenburg, in a loin-cloth, appeared, "killed" the man, "scalped" first one girl, chased the other up the wall, and "scalped" her and went away. However all this went on a long time, and it was absolutely unclear if there was any sort of narrative line. I only figured that part out much later. As a result, the piece behaved like a dance environment. Another happening, in the same series, had a typical Oldenburg enigma: a lovely girl, high over the place where the audience was jammed, sorted fish onto a window made of heavy polyethylene, so that we saw her through the fish. In the meantime, a little girl in a party dress walked among some display tree-branches. It was a fine moment, just fine. The relationship it has, experimentally was as if you drove down a street and saw all this happen, then recalled it: it would then be happening simultaneously and it would seem to go together since you had seen it all together. But I really do not know Oldenburg's intentions. Sometimes, when I see pictures of his famous giant hamburger, I think of it as a fat man's dream (I have never seen that hamburger). And that seems natural. And again, when most artists decide to "do" a store, I think they would paint a picture of it. Oldenburg, very characteristically, rented a store, filled it with plaster imitations of things (sometimes wildly out of scale or distorted), and, for a while, sold these things



as the objects in a store, thereby recreating the situation of the store and concentrating on the situation (by not selling real hams, just plaster hams). I have still a bright blue and yellow candy bar (in plaster) that I bought for a nickle. But what he means to do, and what I see him as doing, I think are probably quite different. His only large statement that I have seen, in the catalogue for a show two years ago, "Environments, Situations, Spaces," gives as a clue a list of common, urban objects which he says he's for the art of. But why he does one thing rather than another remains an enigma. Perhaps it is not important. Perhaps he just wants the innocent eye, to see and to notice and to do. Very hard to tell. But this I know: I haven't any idea what he's up to but I'm all for it, whatever it is.

v - towards musical activity

It's always seemed to me that music is more a matter of activity than anything else. What is done is done. When the sound is gone, the string ceases to vibrate, the bell stops its resonating, and the activity is over. Unlike a poem or a painting it has no life without a constant activity taking place.

Of course one could debate that paintings have their identity when they are not being looked at.

But musical activity takes place in time, and it seems to me that anything that just breaks up time by happening in it, absorbing it, is musical.

It is when we come to analyze what is going on in time, and when we find that what is happening is not just going on, for its own sake, but being used to indicate a static entity, in its essence, that other kinds of thinking become more prominent and seem more suitable. When a static, verbal point becomes particularly prominent, in the sense that the idea is more prominent than the fact that something is happening, that a literary element has entered. When this is combined with purposeful activities and impersonations and recreations

of what is going on as drama. Or if there is an all-inclusive stress on breaking up time with the consciousness of one's body (which may or may not be a movement between points) that once considers dance elements.

It would seem then that a piece, a notation, a score all these things belong to a situation in which the maker of the thing provokes some sort of activity. Suppose there is more than one maker?

Can a work provoke itself?

Do we need a provoker?

These are essentially logical questions, and I do not propose to answer them, since the answer does not affect music but only the metaphysics of the mind. It might also be noted, however, that all kinds of questions of this sort might be used as provocation notations (like, for example, some of my Danger Musics) in which one answers the question or follows the principle, any way, and by doing something that seems relevant to this, the performance takes place.

So when I say that any emphasis on things simply happening is theatrical, this concept that I have just described should be added to it. Then the semantic identity of what is going on is seen in its perspective as a qualification.

I propose that in approaching any work of art one consider these things and form any conclusions about a work according to its essential appropriateness (or relevance).

One might profitably spend one's days considering the essence of any goings on, in or out of art or one's life (is there a consistent distinction?).

The situation in what is being done in music today is perhaps more complex and has more potential interest than in any other of the arts, in spite of the extraordinarily tight control that the International Style composers have over musical institutions.

As you look at a book, the letters form words. You back up, and the letters dissolve into a blotch, and, continuing to recede, they form

paragraphs and finally merely discolorations on the page. It is only to be expected that to a flea on one leg of a "V" the difference between the leg of the "V" and the other is significant.

But to the eye, the only significance is that both legs exist. The eye notes that a "V" is formed, within a word. Of course, if one looks from too great a distance, the word seems vague, and so one must choose a proper distance. This is precisely the situation in which one must examine the International Style in order to see the geography and clear the air.

In effect, it is all one style, whether it is the Official Swedish (Hambræus-Nilsson-Welin) or German (Stockhausen-Kagel-Kolnchen) or American (Feldman-Carter-Babbitt) or English (Cardew-Von Biel) or Italian or what-have-you. No matter how diverse the notations look, the performance always comes out the same: dry, contrasting volumes, timbres, and effects with a mathematically alternating pulse of as many kinds as possible. Of these people I have mentioned the number of roads they take to get to the same place is perfectly incredible. Hambræus's, Stockhausen's, Feldman's and Babbitt's ways of getting where they go, i.e., their notations and methods of provoking musical activity vary enormously. But why does Feldman use a graph-paper score to write something that sounds like Stockhausen (albeit softer)? And why the great shadow-boxing between Babbitt's computers and Feldman's brand of indeterminacy? Isn't it like the competition between two beer companies, the same final from Boulez and Stockhausen to Feldman and Pousseur and Nilsson. The number of IMPORTANT avant-garde festivals in Adenauer's Germany is greater than in socially-conscious Italy, in France than in social-democrat Sweden. There is no question that the concerns of the International Stylists are considered the most harmless and therefore the most worthy of patronage by those forces who know best and have the most to fear from any real artistic ferment. When the International Stylists evoke Webern, it is the many shadows invoking the body in the name of the light that produces them.

This reduction of the situation to the personal level is, I think, in the same manner as the excessive concern with form and technique as ends in themselves, a defense mechanism established by the International Stylist to ward off uncomfortable attacks on the real content of the work. It is for this reason that, in such a serious com-

posers' organ as *Die Reihe*, which is the main rostrum for the International Stylist, the attacks are never on the essence of the work, always on their mathematics or their methodology. In all the copious quotes in *Die Reihe*, in all the precise analyses of Stockhausen and Pousseur (et al, et al, et al) nobody ever questions the situational or philosophical basis of anything or any piece. All attacks, or the critiques, or the praises, are always on the basis of the means used to reach an ignored end.

Or, alternately, one becomes very excited about irrelevant matters, and indulges in useless ranting that avoids any real issues, but which appeals to the exponents of military monopolism who support this kind of International Stylism, as in this quote from It Is:

"Recently I heard news from Europe that Boulez is adopting the chance techniques of John Cage and perhaps myself (Feldman). Like Mathieu, he is going to show us Katzenjammer kids how an ambitious Frenchman can really do it. It was easy for Napoleon to reach Moscow. And it will be curious to observe Boulez straggling home to Darmstadt."

This is a good display of jingoism of the cheapest kind, as if all Europe did not know that Cage was American but accepted him mostly as Cage. The assumption is that all Europeans are oriented towards Darmstadt and all Americans towards Cage and Feldman, that deviations are not only condemned but doomed to failure. It is a monopolistic division of the world into zones of fashion design, mostly out of wishful thinking, and partly out of a desire to form a united front against anyone who might hit on the real question, how do you stop worrying so much about the techniques of producing events and start concerning yourself a little more about what is going on.

It ought to be clear to anybody that any of the things that happen when such a piece as "Projection 4" (by Feldman) is performed might with equal judiciousness and economy have been achieved using conventional notation. The two reasons that I can see for going to such a generalized notation as is used in this piece are, 1., that such a notation requires very little effort, knowledge, or exertion to compose, which means that practically from whole cloth the possibility of a marvelous experience arises, and this is therefore a better rea-

son than 2., that the use of this sort of notation, because of general placements of sound, over a number of performances tends to emphasize the general composition as frequency in time. This last I find not so interesting because one cannot listen to all these performances over time simultaneously: each time one is hearing something that is the same, variation-replete sort of thing that has been going on since 1909. Plus ça change, plus ça change. The fact that Feldman's pieces are played softly is no less a mannerism than Boulez's skyward gestures. The ideal or spiritual values which Feldman seems to be intending to suggest in his music are 1., not musical values and are therefore difficult to attribute to (or to involve in) music, and 2., are not so simple as to be achieved merely by scoring all pieces mp or pp or, like his enemy Boulez to whom he is so similar, by pointing all the movements upwards.

Essentially the problem with such pieces as "Projection 4" is that the analogy between quietness and a state of grace has been mistaken for an equation. The a priori, idealistic approach has led to a new situation where the main spiritual value required is the restraint on the part of the audience to keep from being annoyed by the piece. Naturally there will be many people also to whom quiet sounds are the only beautiful ones, and to them the music will be soothing, a sort of good liquor to go with one's after-dinner benevolence. But if one likes all sounds and goings on that don't actually hurt, if one considers the possibility that any sound can be lovely, then the piece is conventionalized and standardized, no more or less marvelous than any other International Style piece.

With Stockhausen's kind of International Style a slightly different situation often prevails, in which the mathematical relationship (it is usually a static form of mathematics, never a procedure, progression, array, or operation) is the determining factor in the piece. However two things can be noted: 1., the mathematical exemplification may be important to the composer, but it is by no means apprehensible to the listener, who is conscious only of the constantly changing, dessicated sound, the groupings of which are slightly less clear than in Feldman's work, and therefore suggest a more complex version of the same thing, which is, in fact, the case. Mathematics is used to obtain material, no more, no less. The logic of the behavior of frogs may be subject to basic principles of psychology but it is not subject to theories about mass hysteria. The mathematics

which is used is of too complex an order to be perceived in a clear, mathematical way. The result is that the piece as it appears may be justified in mathematics but one does not see mathematics justified in it: the sound is usually identical to that in such a randomized piece as Cage's Music of Changes, except that the Cage piece occasionally appears to crystallize for a moment while Stockhausen merely gets going a little faster or slower, higher or lower for a while, giving the effect of a constant irrational stream decorated by change.

2., one begins to wonder if the search for mathematical relationships does not blind one to the possibilities of musical development. That is to say, if the time that were spent investigating mathematics were instead devoted to developing new procedures for provoking musical events, conceivably mathematical ones, the overall situation might develop into something quite rewarding. Of course there is always the question of whether one is so responsible for what one does not do as for what one does; after all, not-doing is merely another aspect of doing. But even so, I think that part of the unimaginativeness of the music of Stockhausen (and Kagel and the rest) is primarily due to their assumption that the musical event is thoroughly explored and completely subject to the usual methods of mathematical investigation. The question of whether the mathematical knowledge of the composer is drawn on to disguise an inferior acoustical imagination I will not raise: I am assuming that technique is not more nor less than the ability to realize one's intentions, and that one knows enough to intend anything that seems suitable at the moment.

In any case, the problem is that the mathematical approach is not giving a noticeably dissimilar result from the graphic one, and that, taken in aggregate, Feldman and Babbitt, Byrd and Nilsson, Pousseur and Cardew, Stockhausen and Berio all sound the same, all arrive, by any number of different routes, at the same place. Is this desirable?

There are very few independents, very few who just follow their own course, such as Earle Brown (who, as Cage once remarked, fills in a time-unit the way a painter fills a canvas, with the result that everything in his work is a clear, aural presence and no more) or Christian Wolff (who makes listening very hard and therefore rewarding, usually by separating his sounds with incredibly long silences, whose music seems to be all about listening and not at all

about composing) or Philip Corner (who works, usually through graphics, with relative momentums and weights, sculpting his sounds, so that an extraordinary variety of things become possible at any time: one day I would like to detail his work more fully).

The International Stylists, however, dominate our avant-garde concerts and musical life to the exclusion of everybody else; it has been like that for some years now, and perhaps it should continue, since the result has been to encourage all tendencies that emphasize activities rather than just sound, and has led to the present situation. The only difference between what prevails now and what went on before is that now their dominance is more accepted, while then, though their days of being open were over and the style was formed, the generation of composers of the 1920's still seemed dominant.



At that time Al Hansen, George Brecht, and myself met in John Cage's composition class at the New School for Social Research. The year was 1958. Kaprow had studied with him the previous year. For us, it was an odd coming together from many ways of many very different people.

Hansen was - and is - a most striking individual. I think of him as a soldier for whom the wars will never end until every man is articulate. He sometimes is the soldier on leave and sometimes the soldier fighting. But the only reason I can find evidence of in his work is his love of articulateness. This gives him a great deal in com-



mon with all non-artists. But it is the real core of his work, as I see it. In fact he got into the army at the tag end of World War II, saw duty overseas, came home, and had a good many adventures, in the course of which he began his drift into art and acquired his lovely little daughter Bibbe for whom "Bibbe's Tao" and "Car Bibbe" are named. He reentered the armed forces, this time the Air Force, and became an exhibition paratrooper. When Hansen becomes nostalgic, it is parachute jumping that he talks about. When he came out he went to Pratt Institute, married, and began to be not merely an artist but a very serious artist. When I first knew him he was living in a loathesome middle-class housing project, one of those Palaces of Poverty, in Queens, making a living as a commercial artist, and trying hard to enjoy it. Of course it could not last, considering the personality of the people involved. One day at Pratt somebody played him a Cage composition. Its anarchy appealed. "It was just a mess, a racket. It made no sense. I loved it," and, totally undeterred by the fact that to this day he cannot read a note of music, he seriously took up musical composition with Cage.

Brecht, at that time, still described himself as "you might say, a painter," though most of his work was already marvelous objects, usually with moving parts, things for adults to play with. He made a living as a scientist in the suburbs in New Jersey, in Metuchen,

and his life and his aesthetic seemed connected with that. For hours in class he would talk with Cage about the need for spiritual virtu-



osity and abdication from technical virtuosity, both of which were very attractive to Cage.

I was a skeptic from New England, fat and nervous. I had fled the north in order to see what goes on down on earth. I wanted to make a career in musical theater, which was to be based on calypso. For the moment I was working for a Public Relations firm which I felt was a little immoral. I could write my quadruple fugues with any textures or affections desired. I wanted to synthesize within myself all the techniques I could master to make an art form along the lines of Brecht-Eisler or Brecht-Weill, but based, as I have mentioned, on more indigenous materials from calypso to rock-and-roll. My own ideas bored even me, so I became restless. I had, a few years before, experimented with hoisting many many hunks of iron and metal up in the trees on either side of a valley in Vermont and raising one hell of a ruckus at five o'clock one afternoon. Once I had put on a crazy set of goings-on in a barn, amid a mess of hung cloth and animals (it would be called a happening today). But these were essentially entertainments and I felt no great urgency about them. However I had begun my habit of taking notes and developing them into pieces, compressing them back into notes, expanding these, and so on. My whole output consists of workings of a mass that is constantly on the back of my stove. I had discovered the old Gallimard edition of Artaud, - not the translation (which is excellent but not Artaud) - and had, as a result, begun a play about people with horrible diseases wearing diving costumes, and some surrealistic farces that consisted of collaged fragments. Some of this stuff wound up in *Stacked Deck*, *The Ladder to the Moon*, and *27 Episodes for the Aquarian Theater*.¹¹ I came to take Cage's course because I couldn't think what else to do. What I got from it was a sense of general

activity and a taste for my own direction, to which previously my own skepticism had been very unkind. I agreed with much of Cage's aesthetic, but not with his taste. When he and Brecht took off for spirit and nobilities yet uncharted, I made wisecracks that there was no difference between spiritual virtuosity and any other kind of virtuosity.

But Cage used to talk about a lot of things going on at once and having nothing to do with each other. He called it the autonomous behavior of simultaneous events: I called it independence.

In fact, the beauty about studying with Cage was that he brought out what you already knew and helped you become conscious of the essence of what you were doing, whether or not it was noble (and, thus, acceptable to him). Though my own inclinations were always rather antithetical to Cage, I was able, through him, to become conscious of my love of autonomy, variety, some sorts of inconsistency, rationalism, etc.

In the same way Brecht picked up from Cage an understanding of his love of complete anonymity, simplicity, and non-involvement with what he does. And Hansen got his anarchy enforced and accepted his own love of letting people be just as they are. Is Hansen the ultimate in philanthropists?

To us, Cage's ideas about indeterminacy and all that seemed very democratic and just fine, because we had each other and all of us seemed to think a little the same way. We even took indeterminacy farther than Cage without his ever having told us about it. About the second meeting of class Cage, who had previously written down all aspects of performances he could think of, passed out pencils and paper and asked us to write pieces, since none of us had done our homework and brought pieces to class. The pieces we wrote were done with words. Perhaps they were about the first notationless non-improvisatory music. They were all different and all left something unsaid except me, I was not indeterminate. I lined up adjectives opposite Cage's list of aspects of performances, which made him tell me that nothing had any inherent qualities other than physical ones and that therefore psychology was an illusion: this led to my 17th-century-cum-Artaud book of characters, *Stacked Deck*.

Cage had to go on tour, so he turned over his class for two meetings to Feldman, who said taste was everything, and Maxfield, who had just completed his first electronic pieces. Maxfield was then very lively - he was interested in really using all aspects of the electronic media. Later he went metaphysical, and became obsessed by the idea of notationless music per se; but first he just did what he made, mixed his cut pieces of tape in a salad bowl, spliced them together, and did any superimposing that seemed necessary. I thought it was a very natural way to do things, and so I invited Maxfield to do *Stacked Deck* with me. It was to be the first electronic opera, and I think it was, though I wouldn't swear to it. Maxfield liked to be an electronic composer because there was no separation between the composer and the performance. The original score was the most gorgeous electronic music I have ever heard. In later scores he allowed theoretical notions to win out - besides, he was suspicious of the beautiful aspects of the early score - so he mixed them all up together and got a piece with too much unity and universality and compromise to it. He wound up with a justification rather than a manifestation. But nobody else has ever done such interesting electronic music. Only Maxfield has succeeded in doing electronic music in which one is conscious of the latter word rather than the former. In such more recent music as *Night Music* and *Italian Folk Music* he just suggests sounds with sounds, and he rapes the very basis of the Feldman-Stockhausen International Style. If only there were more of his pieces! But the economics of electronic composition are very harsh, and such resources as are available in the field are taken up by those who specialize in getting them rather than by composers.



In that fall of '58 not much seemed to be going on. In the theater one hoped that the Living Theater would open (it opened many months late). I had so much hope for the operation that I painted the ladies' room myself to help speed things up. Hansen did some obscene geometrical items and a portrait in which he worked weeks painting each hair but never did paint in the face. Brecht stayed in New Jersey. But we were all up to doing things. I wrote six hours a day and began most of the things in *100 Plays*. Also there was my unpublished novel, *Orpheus Snorts*, and a series of graphic notations for theater and music (or either) called *Graphis*, each a separate work, which by now numbers nearly 120. I also filled up two notebooks with ideas and notions which have since turned out to be lectures, graphisses, poems, constellations, concertos, and the like. Hansen, late that fall, cut out a bunch of holes in pieces of card stock, wrote numbers on them in verticle and horizontal lines, and did his first really Hansen-ish piece by handing the performers these cards and just telling them to use them as notations for events. A week or so later he did *Alice Denham* in *48 Seconds* which was the result of an interesting accident: he found three or four sets of numbers on the street all of which happened to add up to 48. He wrote them on a piece of paper in a square. In his hand he had a magazine. It had a pretty nude in it, a red-head by the name of *Alice Denham*. It also had a very fine short story in it by her. This piece has been done a good many times now, forty or fifty. Once I answered the phone: it was *Alice Denham*. She'd read that this piece was being performed and wanted to know what was going on, had Hansen used her name or was it a coincidence? Poor girl. But she finally did catch up with Hansen, they got along fine, and I've never met her but I understand she comes to his things from time to time. The whole affair, the titling of this piece, is itself a Hansen composition.

Hansen wrote the numbers on the wall, and he wrote an arbitrary set of numbers on the diagonal. He gave everybody toys to use as instruments - guns, battleships, whirlers, helicopters, etc. It was one of the good things, this first *Alice Denham*.

But that winter Hansen began his way of life that he has since held to and it seems very appropriate to his work.

Every winter when the rich go to Florida, Hansen lives in the subways for a month. It is his vacation. He knows which latrines he

can be locked into, and what places will give him something to eat. In the spring there is a knock on the door, and you open it, and there is this vile-smelling, unshaven man, and you say, "Hello, Al." He shaves and he showers, and he goes and gets some clothes, and he looks great. He gets a job, and there are any number of places that will hire him since he's a wonderful worker. But then, spring ends. He does his pieces, they don't interfere with his activities, which in turn don't interfere with his job, but when summer comes, Hansen takes one look at the blue sky and one breath in the hot air, and it is time for the beach. So he goes to the beach from time to time till he loses his job. When he has lost his job it is fall, and he has done his performing for the year. He writes some new pieces, but mostly he just takes apart whatever studio he has acquired, leaves his things here and there, and, when the snow falls, Al disappears. And you know that somewhere under the city Al Hansen is riding, dreaming about his new activities and maybe smiling a little.



The way I am writing this might be mentioned at this point. I have over a hundred and fifty pages of notes, indexed by number, to relate to an outline. I have a quart of beer. And everything I write, I say out loud. I don't mind using lots of jargon and slang, because the written language of tomorrow will probably have more to do with our spoken language than with our written one. And this is a well-outlined conversational ramble. If only the typewriter were a tape recorder and there would be no separation between the intoned sentence and the odd-looking sentences that appear. I go on swig-

ging and collating my notes and reflecting in an organized way, knowing where I am heading but taking my own sweet time about getting there.



That winter the Epitome coffee shop opened up. Lawrence Poons, the painter, took care of it, though he had two nudnik partners. All three were painters, but Poons was the rough diamond of the lot, and they all did a sort of geometric iconoclasm, but the other two wound up showing swastikas in Greenwich Village while Poons developed the notion of read painting. This coffee shop became a good display place for work that was not the Going Thing, although for commercial reasons the Epitome had Joel Oppenheimer, Allen Ginsberg, and others to attract tourists - Ray Bremser, Ted Joans, etc. Hansen read his poem, "A Requiem for W.C. Fields," there, and a Hansen movie that included lots of W.C. Fields materials was projected on his chest. I did various concertos and read from Orpheus Snorts and Machines in the Wind and various of my poems. We gave a concert there at five in the morning and others at night. We did lectures and read dada, lettriste, and Iliadz texts. In the spring I gave my first New York performances; Al Hansen did my last instrumental piece there (his only appearance, so far as I know, as a conductor) To Everything Its Season,¹² and we did Alice Denham, along with some of my Aquarian Episodes.¹¹ David Tudor did a Wolff piece and Cage's Music of Changes. My pieces were very badly performed, but the music critics said nothing about that, one just said it sounded like a flea typing the collected works of Macrobius and Paul Henry Lang, more seriously, said it was a rejection of all music since the beginning of the Christian Era. Hansen's piece was attributed to the BBC (Broken Bottle Chorus) Orchestra and we were surprised that we

didn't get an irate letter from London. Also that Spring we did a television performance for Henry Morgan on which I, who climbed out of a bathtub and stomped ink on rolls of paper, was compared to Charles Chaplin, which was very nice but very incongruous flattery. All summer long things were quiet. In the fall the Happenings began, and in December Hansen exhibited his "Hep Amazon," a 200 lb. monster of tiny motors that slowly got cued in and out, provoking blinking lights, turning wheels, even a vacuum that seemed like a fellatio machine. That was the end of Hansen's geometric and neoplastic work. Brecht had his Toward Events show, where he displayed medicine chests, card games, pingpong ball drop-boxes, and so on. That was very exciting. And in February the Judson Church had its Ray-Gun happenings, presented by Oldenburg with Dine helping, at which Dine's Smiling Workman, Oldenburg's Snapshots from the City, Hansen's multiple projector collage movie of parachutes and pursuits, a Kaprow happening about football, a Whitman rag-happening, and my own Cabarets, Contributions, Einschluss,¹¹ and a collaboration intermission piece all were done. That was the end of something: it made the people involved well-known in a young-man-to-watch-sense, and for two of us it started a success syndrome that drove their work away from any danger, experiment, or imagination.

Shortly afterwards I did Saint Joan at Beaufort at a little theater on MacDougall Street, which I still think of as Beaufort. The play is about almost nothing, it avoids anything relevant to the performance situation, any articulate sequence of sentences, words, or, occasionally, phonemes, any purposeful activity, anything in its usual context. It suggests that history is non-sequential when it is considered at any moment in an orderly way, and that random examination of the past gives sufficient understanding of the present. Except for this historicism it was an experiment in gratuitousness. But I was not interested in historicism so I went on and wrote Design Plays, which is a large mechanical nothing, about nothing, for nothing, and good for nothing, although rather attractive to look at in an innocuous way. Therefore it is my favorite of the pieces I wrote of that sort. I'd sure like to see it. That spring Stacked Deck was finally done, but as a very messy melodrama, which raised issues I had not intended. At the end of the Spring I married Alison Knowles, who did wonderful paintings, silk screen work of all kinds, and, more recently, extremely concrete performance pieces.



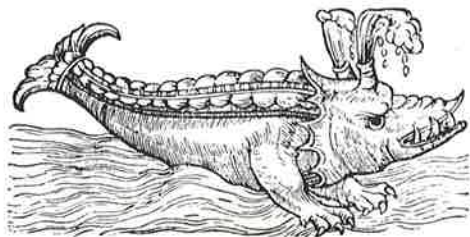
Around May of 1960 I began to be conscious of La Monte Young's activities out on the west coast. He sent copies of A Vision and Poem for Tables, Chairs, and Benches. A Vision was very technically involved, but easy to hear. I liked his lengthiness, and suggested he expand the piece enormously. I would like to see it published burned into sheets of lead. However, La Monte complained that it was boring: this suggests something very interesting in him. He is fascinated by a lot coming from a little. The Poem is very concrete. One drags the objects over the performance area at given rates, as described in the text. La Monte answered a remark I sent him, that everybody ought to do the Poem pretty often, with the reply that everybody was doing the Poem, did I know anyone who wasn't but that it was too entertaining and so he wasn't interested any more.



These pieces were followed by the best-known pieces, clear-cut sentences that are simply provocations for events, usually reflecting a taste for the most poetic sorts of imagery and almost always implying an orientation towards either useless or extraordinary activities. Throughout 1961 the same piece, "Draw a straight line and follow it," was written over and over twenty-nine times, and also a sort of jazz that he liked, indian ornaments and modal effects over extremely monotonous rhythmic patterns, usually a triple time of some kind, and a drone; this sort of jazz has almost completely taken over his attention. Except for new ways of looking at the earlier pieces and the "Death Chant" I do not know of anything new he has been doing for a couple of years now. He cooks, and he plays his jazz with a drone and a drum-player and a soprano saxophone. This music seems part of his life, which is deliberately alienated, if not outside, the social environment of our times. My only objection to his work is that it makes a body feel insulated against the world, which is a sensation I do not care for.

There is just enough of his work to give you a taste for it. Then it stops.

We in the states didn't know that already at that time Benjamin Patterson was beginning to do marvelous pieces in Koln, such as the "Paper Piece for Five Performers," the "Sextet" from Lemons, and the pieces in Methods and Processes. Patterson's pieces are the most concrete of dissociated pieces, the most dissociated of concrete pieces. You get nothing out of doing any of them that doesn't disappear afterwards. While they happen, they are a joy to do, but afterwards, who knows why? I remember liking a piece called "Stand Erect," doing it several times, writing to Patterson that it made me feel religious, and then I forgot about it. Last winter I wrote a piece called "Gångsång." It turned out to be nearly a duplication of "Stand Erect." Occasionally Patterson makes pieces that are simply entertaining, such as the "Variations for Contrabass Viol," in which the



performer, working with a bass viol, attaches things (eg. clothespins) to it, shoots with it, and writes a letter, among other things. A piece like this has some appeal to one's sense of the fantastic, but since it depends primarily on the visual aspects of the actions, no matter how short, it always seems too long, since the ideal length of time for any of the particular events would be no longer than it takes to recognize what is going on, and any longer amount of time is not very economical.

Appeals to surprise, shock value, the audience's sense of amazement, or of iconoclasm, these are not things which endure. If there is any weak aspect in Patterson's work, it is this kind of appeal. So much depends on surprises, and the effect is sometimes like a joke told in too many words. Often it is not necessary to see or perform the piece, merely to hear about it suffices.

But Patterson, more than hardly any other composer, seems to understand that for a composer to divide activities into musical and non-musical, what-I-do and what-I-do-not-do is to accept the dualism of good and evil, of black and white, and, ultimately, to place one's work on a level of purely theoretical relevance. Patterson goes for the grey, and he seems to accept, even to encourage, the non-memorable, disappearing aspect of his work. In pieces such as "A Lawful Dance," where you follow the directions of a traffic light from corner to corner, back and forth, ad lib, till you are through performing, Patterson gets somewhere that nobody else is. Marvelous things happen to you while you cross the street. The last time I performed this piece at Times Square I met and was, briefly, joined by Bea, Lindy, and Shirley, three overdeveloped young ladies with colossal hairdoes. They saw me (and a group of others) crossing back and forth, and it occurred to them that it would be fun to join in. So they did, no questions asked.

And afterwards the piece blurs, crossing the street is remembered as crossing Times Square, it is inexorably connected with Bea, Lindy, and Shirley. Or was Lindy really Jackie? Have I forgotten their names?

So far we are from Germany. Patterson did these things for maybe two years before any of us heard about them. Cage and Brown made their trips there, and I asked them what was going on, but it was

always officially Stockhausen and the International Stylists: Cage never told about Paik till I had read about him and asked specifically. And very few people had any idea at all what Patterson was doing. Only Paik and Vostell really cared. And so Patterson married and went to France, as he had gone from the U.S. before, where he did not want to be a "negro artist" but just one Hell of a good one and, among other things, a negro. Only James Baldwin and Benjamin Patterson have ever attained that proportion. Actually Patterson's way of using periodic repeats and the blues feeling that this produced being so ingrained and natural struck me so much that when he first sent me a copy of methods and processes I wrote to him and guessed he was a negro. But considering this does not get one very far with what he does. The main thing is that his work acquires a remarkable unity with our lives as we absorb it and forget it. It seems oddly ethical, oddly concrete.

Paik and Patterson: Faust and Schweik. Paik is the legitimate school of Schoenberg and Artaud. For him his work seems to come as a revelation. When it is not being expressionistic, it is still at least expressing him, in a most personal way.

Around 1959 or 1960 Paik began to do those pieces where he chops John Cage's necktie off or knocks the piano over and operates on it. In 1961 he began to think about moving the audience around, visiting this or that display of sounds. He did - or began to talk about (which for him, like Spoerri, is about the same thing) - his "Symphony for Twenty Rooms," and his "Omnibus Music No. 1" in which the sounds sit down and the audience visits them.

These things have to do with the phenomenon that fascinates La Monte Young too - that you can really get inside a sound. In the same way, I used to say, when I played bridge, that I liked to get inside the cards. It is all the same phenomenon, and it is very much in the air.

In 1961 he did his last big performance piece, "Simple," for Stockhausen's Originale. Here he peeps, covers himself with shaving cream, works with an ancient Norwegian phonograph, and dumps water over himself in an old tin bathtub. Also he did a piece - is it called "Solo for Violin?" - where a violin is raised very slowly above his head - then it is suddenly smashed onto a table and shat-

tered. In 1962 he worked on "Bagatelles Americaines" which were a set of pieces in what he thought of as the american spirit, implicitly unimpressive, uninspiring, unentertaining, perhaps very boring, and with specific relationships to the work of Brecht, Young, Patterson, and myself. Hansen, of course, is not known in Europe.

The only two examples I have of this series are these, his impression of what I was doing: "Danger Music No. 1 for Dick Higgins," - "Creep into the VAGINA of a living WHALE!" and (written when I remarked that there was no real danger when there was no risk that I might be able to do this) "Danger Music No. 2 for Dick Higgins," - "Walk the Metro-Tunnel of PARIS from Franklin Roosevelt till Stalingrad. If you feel suffocated, think of WARSAWA-Resistance." What he has done since these pieces, or, more accurately, since Fluxus, I will get to later.

Actually what he has done is to achieve a lot of the spirit of action painting in the medium of performance. The work is almost the exact opposite of Patterson. For Paik, art is a gnostic mystery that is revealed, the complete antithesis of daily activities. He tells a story that is very revealing: he saw Cage's Music Walk, which is a dancery event-piece, and he loved it and began to think about indeterminacy. Then, taking this very seriously, he decided to meet Cage. He visited Cage at his hotel room. Cage was polishing his shoes, Paik was shocked that Cage was not above such things. And from that moment he has been opposed to indeterminacy and dailiness which, for him, is the source of the best of current activities, and the intellectual pool from which all our ideas are supposed to come. Most European critics, of course, feel that way - they do not see that only Hansen and Brecht have anything at all to do with indeterminacy, that I am a moralist in the school of Bunyan and perhaps Genet and that my techniques have nothing to do with indeterminacy, that Patterson's medium is experience and his style is, like his message, disappearance, that Young takes things aesthetically and avoids anything at all mechanistic. As an observer and thinker Paik is totally commonplace with a bizarre style and a joy in the perverse, a German outlook on the current scene and a fascination for himself, the Artist, imposing Platonic ideals on implicitly hostile (or is the word "philistine"?) society.

If you assume to impress and assume shock, secrecy, and hostile-

ity as your tools what do you do when your audience understands you? And, horrors, when it approves and is delighted? Do you kill yourself or pretend you didn't hear? There is no need to answer the question, all answers come out the same.

Of course, Paik knows all this. Once he wrote to me that he was old-fashioned inasmuch as he felt like Schiller and Delacroix, that his ideal was the same, that he liked Beethoven more than anybody else, (and, incidentally, hated Schubert).

In Paik, as in abstract art, art (or anti-art) becomes not just a way of life but a form of suggestion, necessary to bring up short those who might otherwise be very complacent. At best this turns people on. At worst it makes enemies of those who might have been persuaded by other means. In the middle between these ends lies the typical, - newspaper articles appear which pretend to be shocked (even when the reporter knows better), word gets around, the sort of activity becomes typed (thus blinding observers to what is actually going on), - and so the artist who does this kind of thing finds



himself merely being exploited in his most bizarre aspects for his newspaper-selling ability.

Nevertheless it is a very strong tendency and might almost be said to characterize many of the best artists of this day, many of the Fluxus people, and certainly Paik. Everything in art which suggests this tendency - or function - is viewed almost exclusively this way. For example, an ideal is created of disorder, deliberately opposed to rational order. This led Paik, in building his great Wuppertal exhibition, to break up and renail objects which had, as a matter of economy or speed, been nailed too symmetrically, too thriftily, or too strongly. It is this tendency which leads some observers, such as Hans Helms, a semantic letterist in Cologne who is the poet laureate of the International Stylists, to feel that this kind of work tends to fascism, through its love of violence for its own sake and through its implicit hostility towards daily chores and the earning of daily bread. Of course, a critique like that is like the blind man's description of an elephant as a kind of large snake with a hollow head. Nevertheless, the necessity to view this tendency in perspective is very great.

Another little story, as an example of something or other: once when I wrote Paik a letter that didn't mean much but which I thought was pretty funny, Paik wrote back that I was very Platonic. Perhaps I had implied some of the above-described tendencies. But Paik's remark was very surprising to me.

Once somebody, Jackson Mac Low, I think, explained that "Plato" means "broad one" in Greek, while my name, "Dick," means "fat" in German - and therefore I sometimes like to become very fat and really be Dick. So I have this one thing in common with Plato anyway. But my point is that because of Paik's concern with this tendency, he sees it whether it is present or not.

And so one sits in the audience, and one observes. One may or may not be annoyed by the self-consciousness of the presentation, by its slickness (they are the same thing). For all his messiness, is Paik any different from Tudor? There is so much ballyhoo, so many people writing down what is going on, there are so many photographers, big-wig Herr Doktors, document-makers, etc. But the orthodox will be denied, possibly without useful implications, but surely in an in-

spiring way. Something ordinarily secret will be revealed. A new way of looking at something may be suggested. The presentation will be at least unorthodox, and possibly cathartic.

But we didn't know much about Paik or Patterson. Starting in 1961 we knew only of their existence, and descriptions we knew of Paik's performance which Earle Brown used to tell us. La Monte Young contacted Paik for his Anthology. I knew about Spoerri's Material and put Young in touch with Rot, Williams, and Bremer. But none of us knew, as yet, anything about Spoerri. That came later.

Around this time, Al Hansen composed his Bibbe's Tao and his piece with a thirty-word name known as "Hi-Ho Jack Paar Moon." These are completely simultaneous pieces in which the performers just do what they can with the physical materials available and the environment. Since Hansen does not write out his pieces I am not sure what the difference is, although I have seen both twice. They are super-duper Hellzapoppin blow-ups of life in a busy city inhabited by cruel and lovable perverts. A special piece of this sort was performed in Brooklyn, where Hansen was living for a while, in the back yards of the ring of houses on Hansen's block.

Hansen hung the back yard of his particular house with huge sheets of polyethylene. He built a throne, and set pieces of furniture behind some of the sheets of polyethylene. Once these preparations were made he went looking for performers and rehearsed them. When they were ready, the performance was announced. About a thousand people were sitting on their roofs and in their windows, many swigging away at a bottle, some playing cards while they watched, and so on. During the performance, a very pretty chinese girl sat on her throne reading aloud from time to time from a chinese newspaper. A couple of girls made lesbian love on a sofa while a man yelled Maoist slogans. A girl tried to get the audience to eat dirt and grass, offering it as very good for one. Occasionally a light flashed on the roof of Hansen's studio, a sort of shed behind the audience's backs, and a girl danced a peculiarly violent belly dance. Phonographs flicked on and off. A group painted with spray paint on the polyethylene sheets from both sides - "Zap" and "Zowee," the traditional sounds of childrens' space-man ray guns, were the most frequently written words. The solvents in the paint dissolved the polyethylene, which tore and hung in shreds, exposing the les-

biens and the maoist, who stopped their activities and indulged in an extraordinary Pepsi-Cola fest. Finally, when the polyethylene artists had retreated about as far as they could go, with a loud clatter the belly dancer fell through the skylight of Hansen's studio. "I'm hurt, I'm hurt," she screamed, but nobody believed her. We all thought it was part of the piece, till Hansen, looking in his window, saw the girl was lying in a pool of blood. He called an ambulance, which came, together with the police. The audience could not leave, since we would have to go through the studio. To keep us quiet, Lawrence Poons began to yell, "Roar! Roar! Roar!" Tzara's best piece. The people in the windows and on the roofs took up the cry and roared back. The end of the piece - after one hundred seventy-six roars, one asks, "Who still considers himself quite charming," a characteristically Narcissid statement for Tzara the Pseudo-anything-ist, was completely drowned out. When we left, nearly an hour later, the children were still roaring "Roar" at each other over the fences. My own feeling about this piece, I might add, is that it was the most exciting expression of nihilism I have ever seen. It was very actual, concrete, even moving, though I felt it was a little thin on hope, and therefore it struck me that for all its excellence, its total effect was not quite salutary. But I cannot deny that this was unquestionably the most brilliant happening that has ever been done, that it came perilously close to going to pieces, and therefore risked all, and thus was able to succeed where the more facile venturers crack their noggins open in falling.

Another Hansen happening might be described here, a less baroque piece called "Car Bibbe." A hundred cars came to the beach at twilight, when people might well be going home. They filled up the beach parking lot. They flashed lights, and honked horns, drove forward and back again rapidly and jerkily, now ten feet forward, now five feet back, now ten feet forward, now twenty-five feet back, wherever there was room to go. To one puppeteer, a teacher whom I know, it was the most maddening thing he had ever seen. He ran up and down the dunes screaming. In the midst of the cars there was a single car with twenty-five people on and in it, all singing and having a fine old time. On the roof one of the people had a broken leg. He fell off and cracked his cast and rebroke his leg. There is almost always plenty of physical danger in a Hansen piece as well as intellectual danger. I love his riskiness. Perhaps fools walk in where angels fear to tread, but I think not. "Nothing ventured,

nothing gained." I have heard that attributed to everyone from Benjamin Franklin to J. Rockefeller Sr. to the brothers Gracchi to Maxim Gorki. All I know about the line is that more and more as I live I find it to be true. It is our only answer to the intellectual critics of our own activities, from Raoul Hausmann to Morton Feldman to Henry Flynt. We cannot answer them directly, since we do not think so fast and cannot match their subtlety. But there is no question that limiting the risk limits also the potential. Better to come up with a magnificent flub than a charming nothing.

And that is why one prefers a Hansen, none of whose things will ever be perfect, to a Robert Sheff, to name one who is no International Stylist but who still plays it safe, and who is all with but no wits.

In the spring of 1961 George Maciunas turned up. He had an art gallery on Madison Avenue, where terrible modern art was shown, but he wanted a good series of goings-on, and people put him in touch with other people, who put him in touch with still others, till he wound up presenting the most interesting performances I have ever heard of, and he has never stopped. Eventually he got stuck with the debts from his gallery and fled to Europe, which is why Fluxus began there. As I will tell in a while, Fluxus was quite an interesting and wonderful experience there, and I like it that it developed out of economic necessity.

At the AG Gallery, Maciunas did concerts of Maxfield, Mac Low, Flynt, myself, and Ray Johnson, among others.

Ray Johnson I haven't yet talked about. He is the thoughtful collagist, also he does synthetic dramas and some poems, which very often make use of the mails. He knows all about things like knives and poisons, rats and clocks, air and packages, glue and ink, Brooklyn and belly-dancers. For his "Nothing" concert at the AG, Johnson covered the stair-case up to the gallery with cut-up dowels, and he turned the lights off. People came, tried to climb the stairs, and were rolled down. It was unlikely, that anyone would stay at the top, once he fought his way up, since the gallery was shut, there was no light, no anything to do, and only one way to go - down. It was a parable, just as most of Ray Johnson's things, no matter how carelessly tossed-off they seem (he meticulously hides his earnestness) are really parables or at least ironic comments on something. Many



of his collages were once brightly colored, but he has ripped the colored materials, the paint, the words off, till only a half-rough grey sheet remains. He has nothing left to sell. And many of his pieces are blank. Not one, a four minute thirty-two second hymn, as in Cage's case, but many many, many of them pre-dating Cage and there is some possibility that it was he who first taught Cage about empty things. Johnson is conscious that a hole in the ground, a hole in the doughnut, and a hole between the walls of a room are not the same thing. He is actively conscious that the emptiness of a sheet of paper makes it useful for writing on. He is conscious that it is stupid to say something when you don't want to or when you have nothing to say, and some of his blank pieces seem to be memos to that effect. Perhaps Ray Johnson runs deeper than any other living artist.

Around that same time Young was invited to guest edit an issue of a magazine, in which he decided to collect those in New York plus those in Europe who were moving along allied lines. The magazine went broke, but Young had recruited lots of material, which he de-

cided to turn into An Anthology. Maciunas was interested in publishing it. He worked very hard on the Anthology, but he did not want to see it all end there. So he began to think about building a magazine, to be called Fluxus, to appear irregularly. Not long afterwards, Maciunas had to flee the country. The structure that he left behind for performances collapsed. He went to Wiesbaden, Germany. Here he planned the first of the various Fluxus Festivals, or more properly, Festa Fluxorum. His idea was of a collective, doing festivals and publications. The basis of the collective was that the work had to be realistic and concrete. On both these grounds it was implicitly opposed to the International Style in music, the Going Thing in poetry, Abstract Expressionism in painting, and so on. There was no creed, no possibility of a "Fluxus Group" - which would probably have driven every one of us away - nothing but the rostrum and the material. We were very excited about this.

Brecht's work had changed very much by now. He was no longer using directions and making spiritual processes. He had begun to merely isolate things that appealed to him or particularly occurred to him. These were usually very daily things, and they took a very simple form. I used to say, a propos of some of my more involved directions, that lots of things looked complicated on paper but were simple in practice. But Brecht said that depended on what you meant. If you meant something simple, it was simple, in every respect. I liked that, and since then I don't do things that look complicated very much, even on paper.

I wanted to get out of New York, mostly to see what was going on. I had done a lot of performing and had finished my movie, *The Flaming City*. I wanted to perform in Europe, and also I was a little afraid of what performers with "professional instincts" might do to my pieces (and Brecht's, Young's, etc.). So Alison Knowles and I went.

Alison Knowles and I got to Germany, met Patterson, Williams, Paik, and Vostell; and the Wiesbaden Fluxus had already begun. The previous week-end, in line with his ideal of Fluxus being a united front, Maciunas had invited a bunch of International Stylists to perform: Von Biel, Rose, and a couple of others. But they did not like some of the pieces Maciunas was doing and quarrelled with him, and they had a style of living that was too self-indulgent to be concrete with the lively aspects of Fluxus. So he kicked Von Biel's crowd out and Rose left.

The Wiesbaden Fluxus was the most ambitious of all. It lasted a month, with three, four, or five performances each week-end. The other festivals were smaller. The beauty of the Wiesbaden festival was that we had no worry for time - we could do many terrific long pieces that could not be fitted into other festivals. We did Emmett Williams's German opera, "Ja, es war noch da" in English: it was the longest three-quarters of an hour I have ever spent, since it is mostly tapping on a pan in regular rhythms a prescribed number of times. We did a one-hour version of La Monte Young's B-F sharp held, unvarying, sung and accompanied by Benjamin Patterson's bass viol. We invented a piece by a mythical Japanese and improvised it for an hour (on the same program as the Young) - it became very beautiful. Vostell came down from Köln - a gigantic blond potato, three hundred pounds, with the tiniest feet in the world, so that he glided lightly. He said, "Arghh," hammered some toys to pieces, erased a magazine, broke some light bulbs on a piece of glass, and heaved cake at the glass. Finis Sahnetortis, and he went right back to Köln. It was a beautiful mess. We did lots of old things of mine - I avoided the new ones mostly, for no particular reason - and we did Brecht, Watts, Patterson, Young, Williams, Corner, all galore. We did *Danger Music No. 3* by shaving my head and heaving political pamphlets into the audience and *Danger Music No. 16* by "working with butter and eggs for a while" so as to make an inedible waste instead of an omelette. I felt that was what Wiesbaden needed. For a while eggs were flying through the air every couple of minutes. A very smartalec sculptor named Viebig reached out his hand to dare me to throw egg - I did (splat) up his arm to his face. During Emmett Williams' opera some college boys came up out of the audience and stood, holding pine bows, singing college songs. We did Maciunas' metronome-rhythmic "In Memoriam Adriano Olivetti" by raising hats, popping fingers, gasping, sitting up and down, waving heads, and so on. For three weeks this went on. We did Corner's "Piano Activities" by taking apart a grand piano and auctioning off the parts. Most of my "Requiem for Wagner the Criminal Mayor" was done, to the delight of the house super, who left in the middle and came back with his whole family, they liked the goings-on so much. Paik did "Simple" and Patterson did his "Variations for Contrabass."

Because of its scope, difficult to duplicate elsewhere since Maciunas' facilities were at Wiesbaden, the Wiesbaden Fluxus was all that

might be hoped for such a series. Our audiences varied from enormous to tiny, from explosive (we had two riots) to docile and indifferent to sympathetic.

There was talk about other Fluxus festivals happening immediately after Wiesbaden, but they did not seem very promising. Vostell was invited to have a show at Amsterdam of his Decollages, and the resulting situation, while not done by Fluxus, was relevant to it, since it included so many Fluxus people.

Vostell's work is mostly decollages. These are the opposite of collages. They involve ripping off or erasing, they suggest dying and metamorphosis. Their quality is dependent on Vostell's artistic eye, which is excellent. The result is not dissimilar to good painting in the sense that Rauschenberg's combines are paintings. Vostell also edits Decollage magazine, which is the best forum for avant garde ideas in Europe—by default, in the world. It appears irregularly, is ordinarily given away rather than sold, and is a newsletter in that Vostell likes to keep Decollage appearing and on the move. Since Fluxus is organized on an international basis but each issue is a national anthology, there is no real basis for conflict with Decollage, which is International in every issue and much more limited in scope, even though Vostell publishes some of the same people. The first issue of Fluxus, for example, has been in the works for two years, contains only American materials, is about four hundred pages long, and is not yet in circulation. No Decollage is more than fifty pages long, and no really major works are included. However, a fight simmered between Vostell and Maciunas from the beginning, occasionally breaking out into the open (for example, a crisis was provoked when Henry Flynt, whose complete works were planned for publication by Fluxus, submitted an essay to Decollage, not realizing that Fluxus does not reprint anything), and leading to a final rupture, the details of which I do not know, at Düsseldorf.

At Amsterdam, in connection with Vostell's show, the gallery owner invited Vostell to arrange a program of happenings, so Vostell announced performances of Busotti, Cage, Brecht, Caspari, Patterson, Paik, Williams, Riley, himself, Maciunas, myself, Young, Knowles, Hülsmann, and Gosewitz. Maciunas and Patterson withdrew immediately, Cage, Brecht, and Riley were not consulted, and only Cage was performed, of these: I did his "Solo for Voice." Caspari

was at Amsterdam, but he seems to have been frightened away. Gerd Stahl and a couple more Germans were added to the program to make up the lacks. And Tomas Schmit appeared for the first time, not to do a piece of his own, because so far as I know he had not yet written any, but to perform Paik's "Moving Theater No. 1." Willem de Ridder and Jac K. Spek were listed on the program, from Holland, but I do not remember that either did anything. First Jean-Pierre Wilhelm introduced us all. Then I sang the Cage, and next Diter Hülsmann began to read some shove-it-into-him pornography. The audience was all jammed into a little tiny art gallery, with German art on the walls, and with all this blatant pornography they began to get a little restless. It was all so German. Then Alison Knowles came and did Paik's "Serenade for Alison," a melodramatic striptease for amateurs only, which relieved the air. But when Stahl dragged in a bed, and began a very very very long metaphysical-erotic tape played on the bed, the dutchmen became very upset. "How can you do this in Holland?" one asked me. The jittery room was too much, by now. The remaining pieces that were to be done inside were cancelled, and the audience went outside, where I did my american-accent french cabarets, "Cabarets Exotiques et Sentimentaux. While this was going on a man showed up with a small crane for Vostell's piece—a juke box playing rock-and-roll was to be listed high into the air and dropped. This was too much for the audience. A large pile of papers that someone had brought were ignited. Alison Knowles tried to do her street paintings. The head of the gallery became very upset and retired to nurse his poor little nerves, while his wife, who was the brains of the outfit, tried to get the fire put out. The juke box was hoisted up, but it wouldn't come detached from the crane: Vostell kept yelling "Arghh!" but the jukebox was only slowly lowered. I tried to get the audience to stop feeding the bonfire, but a group of students had decided this was a demonstration against German art and they would not stop. A girl shoved a burning paper at me, I slugged her, and was told that in Holland men don't hit ladies (I suppose they get their moustaches burned off instead?), that I should go back to Germany (to Berlin in 1933 perhaps? there are parallels), and if I hadn't gotten rough there would have been real trouble. But I did, and Paik and two others backed me up, so we kept the students at bay. Now the cops showed up. They cancelled the rest of the performance. Our m.c., whose name I don't recall, was drunk and tried to measure the angles of the cop's head with a protractor. He was jailed and then

given twelve hours to leave Holland. Vostell had planned to make a large decollage: he had brought a twenty-foot billboard from Germany with posters, thirty deep on it. The cops told him to remove it immediately to wherever he had found it. All the while the gallery director was wiping his forehead while his wife tried to calm everybody. At last we took off across the back streets, chanting something a little Tibetan. When we crossed one canal, Paik floated a flaming violin with a radio on it down the canal. At another canal, Tomas Schmit took a swim. Later on, Emmett Williams measured the bridge that I mentioned before with inflationary marks in such a way as to simultaneously perform his composition for millionaire and one-eyed poet (Filliou has only one eye). Williams was the millionaire and Jed Curtis was the one-eyed poet (wearing an eyepatch). I did "Danger Music No. 17." All in all, it was an amazing collage of pieces and all too concrete with Dutch nationalism. However, it started me thinking about nationalism and how I hated its blindness: therefore I wrote my series of *Vanity Fair*, *Germania Unveiled*, and the rest.

In London Williams, Spoerri, Kjøpcke, Filliou, Page, Metzger, and Ben Vautier were cooperating on the show where Filliou did the pieces I described. Ben (he does not use the Vautier) exhibited himself as a work of art. He is the master of the Nice Academy, whose members are their work. They do not produce objects or aesthetic interest except by interesting (to them) viological processes. A baby might be considered a masterpiece of Ben, especially if the baby dies.

And so, in London, and in Mayfair in particular, where the Down-With-The-Bombers marched (since it was not made in Her Majesty's Angellonde) and the Rolls Royces purred and the overdressed Elite ran galleries of pornography, Ben showed himself, Kjøpcke set up things to steal (called "presents"), Spoerri made a labyrinth in which you stumbled among textures in the dark, Page did some moveable Junk pieces, Metzger made objections (he is a dogmatist for auto-destructive art) and slowly withdrew, Kjøpcke glued books together and sprinkled pigment around, Williams attached rubber stamps to a white wall (by means of chains) and, instead of stamping on the wall himself, invited the spectator to do so, leaving stamp pads of colored ink around - I was interested that he assumed that people would not tie up the chains or write with lipstick on the walls (which they did do) - perhaps he thought such noble thoughts about what people might

do reflected well on him (which they did) and hated to appeal to anything but the best in people (which he did). Spoerri arranged for a series of performances to happen, and everyone, even Metzger, did something. Metzger made things fluoresce, dissolved nylon with hydrochloric acid while wearing a gas mask, and removed items with magnets that would have been more easily removed by hand. I performed my "Fourth Symphony." Spoerri had a sculpture contest. Emmett Williams did his Alphabet Symphony. Kjøpcke put Scotch Tape on a record, played it, and cleaned up the mess left over from Patterson's Paper Piece." Every time the needle hit the tape, Kjøpcke stopped picking up, began the record again, and then went back to work. When the stage was all clean, the piece was over. Outside, the Cuba crisis was on. Peace Marchers ran up and down the street, chased by bobbies with clubs who knocked them down with theoretically un-English violence. Inside, Alison Knowles performed her Proposition, in which she made a salad for two hundred people. Schweik. Robin Page kicked a guitar around the block.



I did a performance of some of my pieces at Köln not long afterwards. Tomas Schmit performed, with Jed Curtis, Frank Trowbridge, Agna Redemann, and Paik and Vostell. Schmit mentioned writing pieces but he did not show me any. In London I had bought a notebook, in which I began to write down copious notes on pieces to put together when I got back to the USA. Pieces in Jefferson's Birthday written before September 1962 were written outright, while I was working on the movie. I simply thought along and when I came to something that seemed important I wrote it down. But the ones written after September were written into this notebook, usually with supplementary notes, then collected and organized when I came home. That was March. Now it is September, and I have yet to finish the last

of these note-organizings. Because I travelled so much it seemed like the thing to do to sit and ride and think and speculate. Ordinarily I do not think so much, and so I don't come up with so many pieces in so little time.

The next big thing that happened was the Fluxus Festival at Copenhagen. It took place in the Nikolaikirke, a sixteenth century church. As it happened, the Danes were very glad to have us there, and we had audiences of four and five hundred every night. Resources seemed to be unlimited: - we were given fine rooms in fine hotels. When items needed for performance were difficult to get, one of our danish friends went and helped us. The result was that the Copenhagen Fluxus was extraordinarily smooth and well-organized. We did La Monte's Piece for Henry Flynt - 566 slow crashes on the piano - and his fifth piece on the organ. We did the Knowles' "Proposition," and a wonderful thing happened. An impatient Dane came to snatch a carrot. I banged him on the head with a salad spoon. The bowl of the spoon flew off, hit a lady who had been making a lot of noise, and settled into the hands of a man who had dozed off. I laughed and the Dane ate his carrot. Another thing: there was an Ichianagi piece that was just form: things happened now, now and now, and they had to do with a piano, (it was called "Piano Piece No. 5"). Rather than play a now and then note, we thought of holding the pedal down and throwing things. Patterson suggested the darts for his "Sextet." The result was very beautiful: the upright piano was alone on the stage, pedal depressed, side to the audience. From the wings darts flew in and struck the sounding board, producing a considerable variety of vibrations. Another beautiful thing: we did my second of Two Contributions for the Theater, in which you pick something to happen, wait for it to happen, and go away. A young man named Eric Andersen, then a refugee from Darmstadt and the International Stylists, now writing process pieces with a decidedly philosophical bent, this guy chose to wait till everyone else had left the stage. Emmett Williams sat down behind a lecturn and chose the same. Neither knew of the other's choice. For forty-five minutes they waited. Then someone told them that there would be an intermission in five minutes, assuming that they would stay there for the rest of the concert and perhaps beyond. But they understood that they were to leave in five minutes and did. So the only reason they left was because of a misunderstanding. But that was a marvelous fifty minutes, because what was happening was very

interesting, the relationships between the two men waiting and the audience was always changing, it could be seen and figured out and even anticipated. Patterson did his Frog Pond, where you make one, two, or three syllable squeaking answers, questions, or exclamations when a mechanical frog, released by another system, hops into one of the three columns given each performer of eight in a square divided into thirty-six squares. Williams did his Litany for which I wrote a piano piece, Kjøpcke did "Music while you work," Williams did his Alphabet Symphony and the Ave Maria piece I described before, and so on. One performance was in a baroque theater. Alison Knowles did Patterson's "Solo for Dancer" - a rope was strung over the proscenium arch lighting bar. Knowles tied her foot up with the rope and pulled herself up the arch all the way to the top. She did Paik's "Serenade for Alison" and Patterson did his "Variations." I did a couple of walky pieces, Graphis 118 was designed for this stage. And we did some good Japanese pieces, alas, no Shiomis (isn't it interesting that Japan's best composer should be a girl, when Oriental girls have been given a raw deal for so many hundreds of years), but we did do Tone's Anagram, as sort of chronic Bartok glissando for double basses, Kosugi's Micro I and Anima I (where you rool up a rope on the floor till you mummify yourself in it), and some Ichianagi things. We did my Requiem for Wagner the Criminal Mayor which very much surprised the Danes and produced some interesting situations.

All in all, it was probably the most interesting Fluxus that we did.

It was followed by the Paris Fluxus, which was a very poetic fiasco. This began just a couple of days after the Copenhagen one, so most of us had to rush down from Copenhagen and we were very tired. A diletante poet who is the common bank roll for a large number of Paris poets and artists had been entrusted with the publicity and arrangements, although people whose basis of existence is challenged by a project should not be trusted at all. This diletante was given 5,000 posters to mail and an evening of himself and his friends to arrange. Of course, he did a mailing of his own evening, and ignored the 5,000 posters. The hall was almost empty every night but his, when it was full. The result was that we had to cope with the problem of how to handle a nearly empty house. Emmett Williams' "Counting Piece," in which he counts the audience, came into its own and took on an extraordinary irony and majesty. We tried lots

of long slowpieces. There was a very fine surrealist poet, not well-known in this country, by the name of Gherasim Luca, who said some of the most beautiful things we had ever heard about some pieces—mine, La Monte's, Maxfield's seemed to appeal to him particularly. In spite of our loathing of surrealists and their fascistic "ism" we were deeply moved by the old man's enthusiasm. I, for one, felt that the Paris Fluxus was worth all its financial catastrophe and its ridiculousness just because of this wonderful old man.

And so it came to pass that we lost most of what money Maciunas had left for Fluxus magazine in Paris, where many things have fallen before us, later to be accepted even there. But it was not all loss.

For one thing we got to know Daniel Spoerri, who is a real magician. He has never done a painting, yet he is a visual artist. He has glued things onto tables and hung the tables on the walls. He has devised any number of theatrical notions (alas, he feels that to devise a thing is enough, that it is not absolutely necessary to execute it in order to show what can be done. We most emphatically disagree, but each of his ideas is almost unbelievably relevant and concrete). These days he is particularly interested in the culinary arts, although, unlike Edward Lear and myself, he is not at all hung up on the fantastic element in cookery.

Is there anything more glorious than a cool breeze on a hot day?

Too bad that we lost our shirts, but we made it up in experience. Alison had many times received marvelous Christmas cards, so we decided to spend Christmas in Germany. This resulted in midnight coffees and bad performances of the J.S. Bach Christmas Oratorio, with none of the Christmas trees and processions that we hoped for. If only we had had the good sense to spend Christmas in a muslim country!

So Alison and I were glad not to have to see too many of the wonderful people we love at Christmas, but Germany was just like I say it was in Germania Unveiled. So we fled to Turkey. Now Turkey is something else.

For two hundred years we smug westerners have laughed at the turks,

because they were not as rich as we were. But today, only Turkey, Japan, and Malaya are industrial powers in the whole of Asia. Turkey, more than Isreal (which Turkey, I hear, was the first country in the world to recognize) belongs to the twentieth century.

So we went to Turkey, the land of a great people, who if they ever forget the wrongs that have been done them by the english, the greeks, and, before 1917, the russians, will be numbered among the few great peoples of the world. We travelled 1800 miles in Turkey, I grew to love those dour, sincere people, ungiven to witty or tactful wise-cracks. We went to big towns, to little sehirs, to wild mountains and to gentle hills. The greater part of Jefferson's Birthday, my present work, dates from this trip through Turkey. I loved Hami, Nevzat, Samil, Mehmet, Mr. Naki, Sayram, Suat, Ali, Kemal, Sinan, the twenty or so Turks that we got to know well. No matter what they do, Turks are honest, proud ecclectics. What goes on at Mersin is not their fault.

One village we visited was so small that the local school was let out to examine us honest-to-goodness flesh-and-blood yanks. We found it very inspiring that in little villages where, ten years ago, nobody could read, today everybody can, and does - they read at least two things, treatises on thermodynamics and Mickey Mouse.

I could go on for great length about our visits to wonderful little villages, and probably I will, one day. This is, after all, a people who did geometrical abstraction 1350 years ago, and who did



Duchamp 700 years ago. However, having gone by devious routes via Ankara, Konya, Akşehir, Selifke, Mersin, Yenice, Ulukışla, Niğde, Kayseri, Ürgüp, the Goreme, Sultanhırsar, Sivas, various towns in Paphlagonia, Samsun, Trabzon, along the Black Sea (whose sands really are black) to Istanbul.

Istanbul depressed us. It had no sense of breakneck progress, like Ankara and Sivas do. It was a seedy, European provincial capital. But all the other cities in Turkey - except Mersin, which was a little too wild - we loved. In Istanbul we received a telegram from Vostell, telling us to come at once to Germany, since the Düsseldorf Fluxus was about to happen. So we brought some Turkish pastry and -

We went. There we found that the concerts consisted only of small pieces. What big pieces there were were collaged into simultaneities. This represented a step backwards, in that it was a concession to facile taste rather than a tactical progression, even though the Düsseldorf concerts were programatically the most successful we ever did.

After Düsseldorf we did a show in Cologne, Knowles, Kjøpcke, Vostell, and I. Knowles did an environment that included a quiet chair away from any fuss. I did three see-saws, called "troubles," in that their implications were troublesome - one was painful, one squeaked but had little else to distinguish it, and the third had enough flowers so that it could not be used as a see-saw. I also stuck a shoe in front of an easel on a wire with the caption, "The subject matter that an artist uses is always more interesting than what he does with it." I was much criticised (perhaps correctly?) for my poor display of technique and my disinterest in anything but what I was saying. Kjøpcke used whatever was in the place where we did the show, mostly glueing things down and spraying them a color he called "Silver - it's stupid." He did well. Vostell hung fish and suggestive items and toys in front of white canvasses, and lungs and chickens in front of two pieces. These last, naturally decollaged themselves, so that the gallery stank and could not allow the usual publicity activities, let alone any prolonged viewing and savoring of the show.

From Germany we fled, via Hamburg (with Kjøpcke) and Copenhagen to Stockholm. There we worked with Bengt af Klintberg, Stafan

Olzon, Lars Gunnar Bodin and Svante Bodin and Mieceke Heybroek, and others, on a preview of a hypothetical Fluxus festival, which turned out to be not Fluxus concerts but two of the best concerts - or was it four? - along those lines that I have ever seen. The language of the Swedes made Emmett Williams's Tag come alive. It is a very dancy language. And I did my Graphis 118 and Graphis 117



in a theater borrowed from Mr. Ingemar Bergman, which was a pretty glamorous situation. Alison did Patterson's "Solo for Dancer" and I wrote - and did - my "Gangsang," not realizing, as I think I mentioned before, how close it was to Patterson's "Stand Erect." But one of the great things that happened was this. When we got to Stockholm, the Baltic Sea was frozen over, even the river that flows through Stockholm was frozen solid, so that the newspapers were full of worries for the ducks that live in the river. But the day after we arrived it began to thaw. It was the coldest winter in forty years, but the spring came. And a few minutes before one of the concerts we found the first balloon man of the year. In Sweden you know it is Spring when there are men selling balloons. So we bought up most of his balloons, and did Bob Watts' "Event 13" in which balls are rolled down a ramp, and every time a ball hits the bottom, a balloon is released. It was a wonderful way to welcome in the spring, and every time one of the balloons flew up, the Swedes cheered.

But one cannot remain out of one's country forever. So we came back to the states from Sweden.

It was colder here than in Sweden. And we had to visit and see people. So the rate at which I made notes and filled in my notebook dropped abruptly. In the month after our return we did only one concert, and in the six months since then we have done only one. So there is a natural

separation between my activities included in Jefferson's Birthday and those which I will start into the works soon. We did some things at Douglass College in April, we did some things at the Yam Show, I did some things at Segal's Farm in May. Since then I have been working over the Jefferson's Birthday stuff, making some new pieces - including two movies, and being a good husband and hopefully a good printer. You can only be a good artist and a good worker too if you are as much a good worker as a good artist. Of this I am convinced.



vi - all kinds of conclusions

Now I have described where many of us came from and where we are. We do not want the same things, that is clear.

The remaining thing for me to do is to try and extend my observations on my own activities.

Since the emphasis in my work is on simple things that happen or on moral and philosophical notions that catch my attention, there is no reason for me to emphasize one kind of work more than another. I am as much a composer as a poet or dramatist or, for that matter, printer.

Naturally when something takes one's attention, one ordinarily keeps on thinking about it till one is through with it. Therefore, it seems natural for me to make a whole string of works along the same lines. There is a series of constellations, of concretions, of musical process, of contributions, of suspension plays, of danger musics, of lectures, and so on. These are not necessarily forms - my forms arise from my - or occasionally from my performer's - intentions. My names for each series are of no importance whatsoever except to signal that this piece probably has something to do with that. But since something of my orientation might be clarified by explaining them, I think I will. A constellation is simply my image of a group of things happening simultaneously - whether or not they begin or end together, at some point they overlap. A concretion is a physical manifestation of an intellectual structure, concept, or point of view. I used to just think about ways of things happening, in the abstract, and so I did a lot of constellations and concretions. But I do not think like that much any more, and so I do not call pieces "constellations" or "concretions" any more. I picked up the terms from common parlance, used them for my own purposes, and now they don't seem relevant any more.

My notion of a "contribution" was of something that neither opposed nor directly derived from the structure of and simultaneous events in its vicinity. This relationship was precisely that of butter and bread. I have digested this relationship pretty much, and no longer do pieces that emphasize it exclusively.

A lecture, taken aesthetically, seemed to me to be any didactic statement of a point or point of view in which there was a distinct difference between the teacher, the person being taught, and the material being taught. For me it was an unattractive situation, to be used only if none other seemed capable of making one's point. Therefore I have done very few lectures. Even an essay is too close to lecturing, so I do very few essays. But there is no question that it is an effective way of putting ideas into the air, so perhaps it is best not to avoid it entirely.

A musical process is simply any way of putting events into time abstractly - i.e., with the narrative and/or causal structure concealed. It is implicitly where I began, and is at the basis of so much of the things that are going on. However when the emphasis is no longer

on the system being used but on the particulars of what happens, then the musical process aspect of the activity may be assumed but it is less important to note it than something more specific.

A suspension play for me is one in which causation and sequence are suspended. I usually do this by setting the events which take place into correspondence with lighting or other environmental cues. A performer takes his cues not from something someone else says but from the change of light, from the fact of someone's asking him a question, from the warmth of the air, or from how well he likes something he smells. These events may take place over and over, and they take their context from proximity. The result is that rather obtruse intellectual points can be made very striking. The quality of the piece, as in any other sort of manufacture, artistic or otherwise, depends on the quality of the material used and on the workmanship with which it is used. In a didactic piece written this way, for example most of the longer pieces in Jefferson's Birthday, the method of working is to select fragments which, 1., seem to exemplify the points one wants to make, and 2., are capable of adding up cumulatively into an effective statement of one's point. I seriously question whether this is any different from the method used in writing any other kind of didactic piece. However the peculiar suitability of the suspension play for didactic use does not mean at all that it cannot be used for any other kind of theater piece. My first work in the form was *Stacked Deck*, a sort of procession out of a seventeenth century book of characters. My second, the *Tiger Lady* episode in the *Ladder to the Moon* is simply poetic and cumulative, without any particular end in goal - thus emphasizing the musical process aspect of the form. It is only with *The Tart* or *Miss America* that I began to develop the didactic potential of the form. There I first started to suggest people as presences, to insist that a man is as he does, that he has not the slightest existential being. One thing I like best about *The Tart* is that the people we see change their being almost completely every time they are in a new situation or persona. They are more like the people that I know than the people in any sort of narrative drama. Since that time I have used the suspension play principle to make critiques of perversions of love (*Vanity Fair* or *Yezhovchina*), heroic interpretations of history and rugged individualism (*Tamerlane I and II*), various national characteristics, the cultural effect of war (*Nicopolis 1396*), urbanism (*City of the Dead*), and so on.

All the same, there exist, side by side with these didactic suspension plays in Jefferson's Birthday pieces such as *Lavender Blue* or the middle section of *Adam and Eve*, equally based on my insistence that if you add people up they become factions while if you take them apart they become lies, and yet less anti-psychological than deliberately structured, cool, and autonomous, no more purposeful and no less than a Bach fugue.

The nature of purposelessness interests me very much. It is a great source of mental refreshment to do something for no particular reason, especially when it is not interesting or refreshing. One simply becomes very conscious of nothing in particular. That phenomenon is implicit in a lot of my work. I am not so interested in the possibility of doing something gratuitous, like Paik, or in the "purpose - "that comes before the "-lessness" (without which the concept is impossible, as I am in finding a fish somewhere.

Somewhere in his *Magnalia Christi Cotton* Mather complains that when he preaches to his congregation about how they had come to this continent to begin a land of righteousness and to found the kingdom of god on earth, someone in the back piped up, "Nonsense, we came to catch fish."

That brings me to my danger musics. The first tells how I began doing them. But of course, it was just the accident of my thinking about the kinds of danger in the arts and in our times at the point when I was hoisted up that determined the entire series. The series is mostly finished now. I am not so interested in doing more pieces as I was.

But the danger musics are a sort of arbitrary group - a choice was made, to think about danger, and it happened, the pieces became thought up, and after a while they weren't thought up so much any more. They are, then, a sort of extension of my older idea of concretions.

"Concrete" means: "Real, no ideal; Of or pertaining to immediate experience; physical, not abstract or general." If one wants one's work to be immediately striking and to avoid any of the dichotomy of an extraordinary situation, such as going to an expensive concert, as opposed to a daily sort of situation, such as walking around the house,

if one wants this, one might well try to do the most concrete possible work.

Whether or not such work is or is not art is a purely academic question; it is surely something. Nor is it, as one sometimes hears, anti-art, since it is not an attack on art but a simple entity in its own right. It is, perhaps, non-art just as a baker is a non-welder or a shoe is a non-vegetable, but to call such work non-art is not particularly relevant. When I make a piece, such as "Danger Music Number Twenty-One (Comb Music)" which consists solely of the one word, "Colored," I am suggesting a great many associations and possibilities, even the possibility of provoking perhaps a beautiful vaudeville, so that we are back in the situation where beautiful art may be provoked by my non-art, which is the traditional relationship between a painter and his subject matter, to choose an obvious example.

Since the point of many other pieces is not aesthetic but intellectual, these might be described best as non-art producing more non-art using means conventionally associated with art. But more to the point is just not to pay much attention to the art-ness or non-art-ness of work. I think art is as art does, and that's that so far as I'm concerned. There is no relationship between the degree of concreteness of work and its quality or its effectiveness. On the one hand, one project I have going at the moment is a collection of games that are suggestive of social points of view - Tag, in Jefferson's Birthday, is one of these - I have as another project a large set of fugal textures for the theater called just that, Fugal Textures. I am not sufficiently interested in formal consistency to allow any technical consideration to keep me from doing whatever seems appropriate at a given time. I do not care deeply what I do so long it seems constructive, or, even more, suitable.

That is why I like to think of what I do as just sort of generally a folk-cultural activity, like the songs we all have sung and the games that we have played.

One very warm April day in 1959, I was sitting, scarcely even thinking. Over the rooftops the smoke came slowly up from the factory chimneys. There wasn't much sense to it, but it was very quiet and hot and nice. I was reflecting that not all axioms apply to art

all the time. In art the whole does not have to be greater than any of its parts or equal to their sum. I began to think about doing a piece which, by its directions, was independent of the numbers of people doing it, of its duration, even of its own quantities of material. It should be free to grow and to shrink and to use its own life for its own suggestions. I did the piece very simply. I wrote simple material on cards, and I wrote directions separately. If a lot of performers want to do a long performance, they can look over the cards on which the material is written, see what kind of things are used, and do more of the same. Or the pack can be divided among a large number of people and repeated extensively. On the other hand, one performer might like to do a very short performance. So he can perform just one card. Either is equally a good way to do the piece. I was thinking about all this, and my idea split. One half later became the very boisterous theater piece, *Clown's Way*. The other half, *Some Quiet Chimneys*, turned out to be a poem that simply reflected the quiet of the day and the rooftops and the smoke.

I know what I want to do next - more movies. Movies are completely untapped as yet. The narrative movie begins to become increasingly hackneyed, no matter how fine the acting or how gorgeous the color. The art movie is isolated from its society because it assumes an ethic that is hostile to any socially productive activities. I have in mind a whole slew of people from Jack Smith to Truffaut, from Stan Brackhage to Resnais. The violence of universal sexuality, of a life devoted to poetic activity, and of the severance of personal feelings is both the underlying tie between these people and the reason why this work seems rather limited in its scope, more suitable to those who advocate a life of violence for its own sake - leading perhaps to a march on Rome - than to any sort of devotion to the end of giving all men meaningful lives through meaningful and rewarding work. The art movie has come to wear a black shirt, its philosophy is Nietzsche. So standardized this is that any film which does not insist on the sublime, the universal sexuality and poetic violence is stigmatized as an anti-film. It is very easy to run around waving a camera, shooting the dead, the destroyed, and all kinds of exhibitions of emotionalism short-circuiting. The resulting kind of apocalypse seems more vital than it is because of its nervous energy. But when the result is not charming or titillating or raucously funny (fine qualities, I think, but rare) it is socially nauseating. There is nothing revolutionary in refusing to say no (or yes

either), in denying that the sky is blue because one claims to speak a different language. This is, in fact, precisely what the makers of the art films are doing, and it is precisely what the Goldwaters and Welches, like the Hitlers and Mussolinis before them, would like them to do. There is no challenge to the mind in boasting of one's social impotence. The Smiths and Brakhages I predict will wind up supported vigorously by the Fords and Rockefellers for a while, until the fashions change.

The result is that the film has yet to begin. The film, as an art, is not a mauled and scorched, chemically and physically altered raped object, so much as it is a means of documenting what can be seen by a single, objective-by-definition eye-lens. One shows the eye what one loves, what one hopes and dreams, what is terrible or beautiful, anything, anything at all. A camera is innocent. It just keeps on looking, so long as one winds it up or flicks its power switch, while the film maker just notices and thinks and considers.

Therefore I am going to do lots and lots of film work, among other things.

One hopes to draw the mud, somehow, from the water.

But a century which began with the end of the US Civil War and the supremacy of a kind of culture suitable to another age is fast ending. This is the time our fathers hoped for. We flowers thrive on compost heaps. And some of us may turn out to be trees. The more trees, the bigger the forest.

We have many lives to live, among us.



FOOTNOTES

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1. John Macolm Brinnin, *The Third Rose* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1959), p.324.
2. Gertrude Stein, *Narration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1935), p.19.
3. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Doppo il Teatro Sinetico e il Teatro della Sopresa..." in *Noi, Rivista d'Arte Futurista*, Numero speciale (Rome, 1924).
4. Robert Creeley, "Air: 'Cat bird singing..." in *Black Mountain Review VI* (Black Mountain, No. Carolina, 1956), p. 164.
5. Joel Oppenheimer, "The Rain," in *Black Mountain Review V* (Black Mountain, No. Carolina, 1955), p. 34.
6. Joel Oppenheimer, "Un Bel Di," in *Evergreen Review*, Vol. VII, No. 28 (New York, 1963), p. 86.
7. Robert Filliou, "PERE LACHAISE NO. 1," in *phantomas 38-40* (Brussels, 1963), p. 22.
8. Tristan Tzara, in "Inquiry among European Writers into the Spirit of America," in *Transition XIII* (Paris, 1928, p. 252.
9. Morton Feldman, "Dr. Schuller's History Lesson," in *Kulcher 9*, (New York, 1962), p. 88
10. Morton Feldman, "Sound, Noise, Varese, Boulez," in *It Is. 2* (New York, 1958), p. 46.
11. Dick Higgins, *100 Plays* (New York: Richard C. Higgins, 1961.
12. Dick Higgins, *The Musical Wig* (New York: Richard C. Higgins, 1961.

New York City
April 13th, 1963

Please turn book upside down.
Then please start in from the other end.
Thank you.

NO PIECE