4 Seeing, hearing: Fluxus

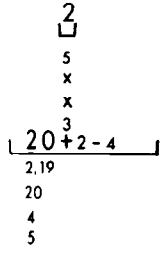
For Cage *4'33"* was a public demonstration that it was impractical, if not senseless, to attempt to retain the traditional separation of sound and silence. For the audience it perhaps proved something else: as their attention shifted from listening to something that wasn't really there, to watching something that was (Tudor's restrained actions) they must have realized that it was equally senseless to try and separate hearing from seeing. The theatrical focus of the silent piece may have been unintentional, but nevertheless Cage knew that 'theatre is all around us,' even in the concert hall. In the same year, 1952, Cage arranged an event which deliberately moved out beyond 'pure' music into what was unmistakably theatre. This was the so-called Happening at Black Mountain College, the first post-war mixed-media event.

For this star-studded occasion Cage provided a rhythmic structure, a series of time-brackets, or what Michael Kirby has called compartments. Once a performer's compartment had been signalled to start, he was free to act in it for as long as and in any way he liked. The separate compartments were arranged to overlap one another so that a complex of differently timed, completely independent activities, each in its own time-space, was produced. (This was the precedent for all the 'combinings' Cage has produced – from the simultaneous performance of the 'time-length' pieces and the various combinations possible with *Concert*, to *HPSCHD* (1967) and *Musicircus* (1968) which guarantee Cage's ideal of unfocused, interpenetrating multiplicity.)

The activities which the 'happening' contained were as follows: Cage was up a ladder delivering a lecture which included programmed silences; poets M. C. Richards and Charles Olson went up another ladder at different times and read; at one end of the hall was a movie and at the other end slides were projected; Robert Rauschenberg played an old hand-wound gramophone, David Tudor was at the piano and Merce Cunningham and other dancers moved around the audience, while some of Rauschenberg's white paintings were suspended above the proceedings. The seating arrangement was special, consisting of a square composed of four triangles whose apexes merged towards the centre but didn't meet; movement took place in the large centre space and in the aisles, although the larger part of the action happened outside the square.

Overtly visual material begins to appear in Cage's compositions from this time onwards. *Water Music* which 'moves towards theatre from music' is a poster-sized score large enough for the audience to see, 'since we're involved with seeing now,' and contains instructions for the pianist to make sounds which involve water in some way – pouring water from one cup to another, using a whistle which only produces sound when it is filled with water, and so on. In *34'46.776" for a pianist* Cage introduces a bunch of auxiliary noises which stand out from the piano sounds, and for his lecture *45' for a Speaker* he chose 32 'noises and gestures' of an everyday physical kind (cough, lean on elbow, laugh, etc.) which were subjected to chance operations to determine at which points during the reading they were to be made. Two pieces, *Sounds of Venice* and *Water Walk*, which Cage made for and performed on Italian TV in 1959, both use a large number of stage props.

Theatre Piece of 1960 is the culmination of these theatrical activities expressed in terms of his current 'scrambling' notations, which take the task of supplying specific materials out of Cage's limited hands.



Cage's *Theatre Piece*

The piece may be done by any number of performers from one to eight, of any type – musicians, dancers, actors, mimes, etc. – who each work out their own programme of events according to the numerical 'clusters' The large figures within brackets refer to a gamut of twenty nouns and/or verbs which the performer has chosen and written on separate cards; these are then shuffled. The smaller numbers refer to the introduction of new elements into the gamut (+) from another shuffled deck also placed face-down; and the removal of an old element to a reserved deck (–). Each performer may be involved in anything from fifty to a hundred actions. The square bracket refers to the amount of time the performer has to make an action, to be measured by any of the transparent rulers provided, or by others made by the performer. The vertical figures relate to questions which may 'arise as to what is to be done', and which must be asked in such a way that a number between one and twenty will provide the answer; x, no answer, gives the performer free choice.

The cards are laid out so that the performer can read the numbers; he is now in a position to make a thirty-minute programme of action according to the particular numbers in the score (of which he may use as much or as little as he wishes, vertically or horizontally). In this way he should, if he followed Cage's directions, 'arrive at a complex situation. But what people tend to do is to get ideas of what they think will be interesting and these, of course, are a limited number of things, because their imaginations are lazy, and they do fewer things rather than more and they are satisfied to do one thing over an inordinately long duration.'

Some kind of natural social complexity arises from the constant crisscrossing of the individually programmed action sequences, each potentially different in style and content. One performer may choose such

20 George Brecht's *Spanish Card Piece for Objects*

SPANISH CARD PIECE FOR OBJECTS

From one to twenty-four performers are arranged within view of each other. Each has before him a stopwatch and a set of objects of four types, corresponding to the four suits of Spanish cards: swords, clubs, cups, and coins.

One performer, as dealer, shuffles a deck of Spanish cards (which are numbered 1-12 in each suit), and deals them in pairs to all performers, each performer arranging his pairs, face up, in front of him.

At a sign from the dealer, each performer starts his stopwatch, and, interpreting the rank of the first card in each pair as the number of sound to be made, and the rank of the second card in each pair as the number of consecutive five-second intervals within which that number of sounds is to be freely arranged, acts with an object corresponding to the suit of the first card in each pair upon an object corresponding to the suit of the second card in that pair.

When every performer has used all his pairs of cards, the piece ends.

G Brecht
Winter, 1959/60

nouns and verbs as painting, bathtub, dismantle, spirals, run, Queen's Park Rangers, while another list may include Africa, catch, flowers, fishing, innocence, Mao Tse-tung. Each is realized in any way the performer feels fit since 'each performer is who he is' e.g. performing musician, dancer, singer – Cage chose this approach so that nobody would have to do something he could not do. But he insists that the performer bears in mind that this is a piece of theatrical music.

In this way Cage hopes to parallel particular kinds of 'reality models': 'If you go down the street in the city you can see that people are moving about with intention but you don't know what those intentions are. Many things happen which can be viewed in purposeless ways'; and the more things happening the better since 'if there are only a few ideas the piece produces a kind of concentration which is characteristic of human beings. If there are many things it produces a kind of chaos characteristic of nature.'

For George Brecht, on the other hand, 'the occurrence that would be of most interest to me would be the little occurrences on the street.' While Cage invokes the total, unpredictable configuration, permanent flux, and seems (theoretically) not interested in the quality of individual things, Brecht isolates the single, observed occurrence and projects it (via rectangular cards of assorted sizes in a box entitled *Water Yam* (1960–3)) into a performance activity, which he called an 'event'.

Brecht was a painter who in the early fifties formulated a number of chance methods to break out of the blind alley of abstract expressionism and who, in 1957, wrote an authoritative monograph, entitled *Chance-*

21 Brecht's Bach

BACH

- **Brazil**

THREE GAP EVENTS

- **missing-letter sign**
- **between two sounds**
- **meeting again**

To Ray J.
Spring, 1961
G. Brecht

22 Brecht's *Three Gap Events*

Imagery, of the history and use of random procedures in 20th-century art. In 1958 he enrolled, along with Dick Higgins, Jackson MacLow, Al Hansen, Allan Kaprow and others, in Cage's class at the New School of Social Research.

At this time he was writing musical pieces such as *Candle Piece for Radios* and *Card Piece for Voice* which used game materials, such as playing cards, as musical scores. Brecht found that these 'turned out to be quite theatrical when performed, as interesting visually, atmospherically, as aurally' Becoming less interested in the 'purely aural qualities of a situation' he *observed* his first event in the spring of 1960: 'Standing in the woods of East Brunswick, New Jersey, where I lived at the time, waiting for my wife to come from the house, standing behind my English Ford station wagon, the motor running and the left-turn signal blinking, it occurred to me that a truly "event" piece could be drawn from the situation.'

The result of this chance observation was *Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)*: a number of cars gather at dusk, engines are switched on, and the drivers (performers) act according to the directions on a set of instruction cards. Of the forty-four types of cards each performer has twenty-two, and half of these indicate silence while the other half ask the performers to activate different components of the car – some purely visual (various lights to be turned on and off), others purely aural (sound horn, siren, bells, etc.), others a mixture (open or close doors, etc.). The duration of each action depends on a count chosen by the individual, measured at a rate agreed by all the performers.

Other pieces included in the *Water Yam* box use similar methods in a less public sphere; the title of *Spanish Card Piece for Objects* speaks for itself, and in *Mallard Milk* each of the three performers has to play 'a conventional musical instrument, a toy, and a common object or set of objects' Toys figured largely in the New School class, since they could be played without any specialized training, produced unhackneyed sounds, and could be picked up at dime stores on the way to the class. *Comb Music* and *Drip Music* are both simple unitary processes using common objects – a comb, each prong of which is successively plucked, and a source of water dripping into an empty vessel. These can be done by individuals

23 Brecht's *Comb Music (Comb Event)*

COMB MUSIC (COMB EVENT)

For single or multiple performance.

A comb is held by its spine in one hand, either free or resting on an object.

The thumb or a finger of the other hand is held with its tip against an end prong of the comb, with the edge of the nail overlapping the end of the prong.

The finger is now slowly and uniformly moved so that the prong is inevitably released, and the nail engages the next prong.

This action is repeated until each prong has been used.

Second version: Sounding comb-prong.

Third version: Comb-prong.

Fourth version: Comb. Fourth version: Prong.

G. Brecht
(1959-62)

or groups, and *Comb Music* is especially effective when played with a number of combs: delicate, tinkling fragments, produced in irregular patterns, barely discernible out of the silence. Brecht once wrote of a 'borderline art' – 'Sounds barely heard. Sights barely distinguished. (It should be possible to miss it completely.)'

David Mayor has pointed out that Brecht's *Two Exercises* may be compared with one of the pre-Zen 'Centering' texts: 'Feel an object before you. Feel the absence of all other objects but this one. Then, leaving aside the object-feeling and the absence-feeling, *realize*.' While *Instruction* ('Turn on a radio. At the first sound, turn it off.') is quite close to another 'Centering' text: 'Just as you have the impulse to do something, stop.'

While the discipline involved in performing the minimal event activities make *Water Yam* 'a course of study for experimental musicians' (Cardew), the box is at the same time a central document in the history of Fluxus. Fluxus was an indefinable movement about which misunderstandings arose, according to Brecht,

> from comparing Fluxus with movements or groups whose individuals have had some principle in common, or an agreed-upon programme. In Fluxus there has never been any attempt to agree on aims or methods; individuals with something unnameable in common have simply naturally coalesced to publish

24 Brecht's *Two Exercises*

TWO EXERCISES

Consider an object. Call what is not the object "other."

EXERCISE: Add to the object, from the "other," another object, to form a new object and a new "other." Repeat until there is no more "other."

EXERCISE: Take a part from the object and add it to the "other," to form a new object and a new "other." Repeat until there is no more object.

1961

and perform their work. Perhaps this common something is a feeling that the bounds of art are much wider than they have conventionally seemed, or that art and certain long-established bounds are no longer very useful. (1964)

According to George Maciunas, the chief protagonist of Fluxus (at least as a publishing movement), Fluxus events 'strive for the monostructural and nontheatrical qualities of the simple natural event, a game or a gag. It is the fusion of Spike Jones, vaudeville, gag, children's games and Duchamp.' Thus Brecht's events may be simultaneously gags and quite serious exercises to reduce things to their essence. Some deal with musical instruments as objects over and above (or below?) their normal use as sound-producers. *Organ Piece*, whose sole instruction is 'organ' isolates the one feature common to all organ music, the instrument. *Piano Piece 1962* ('a vase of flowers on(to) a piano') fondly draws attention to a genteel habit, the mute piano as an item of furniture, a curiously shaped table. Others are double-takes, puns on objects rather than words, gently steering the audience's expectations away from conventional hazards into hitherto unlit zones. A performer comes onto the stage, dressed for the occasion, holding his instrument, and proceeds to take his flute to pieces and put it together again in *Flute solo* ('disassembling/assembling'); in *Solo for Violin* to polish the

25 Brecht's *Drip Music* (*Drip Event*)

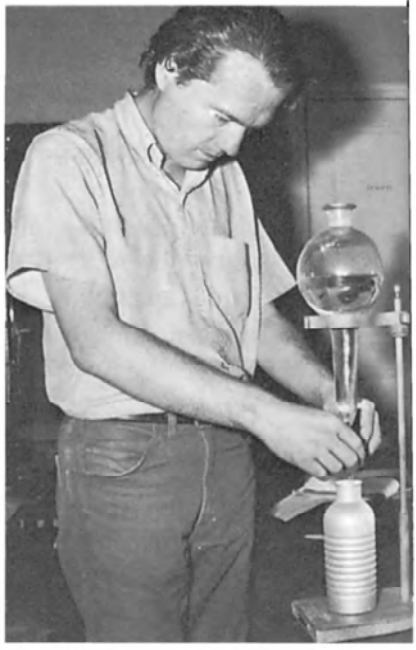
DRIP MUSIC (DRIP EVENT)

For single or multiple performance.

A source of dripping water and an empty vessel are arranged so that the water falls into the vessel.

Second version: Dripping.

G. Brecht
(1959-62)

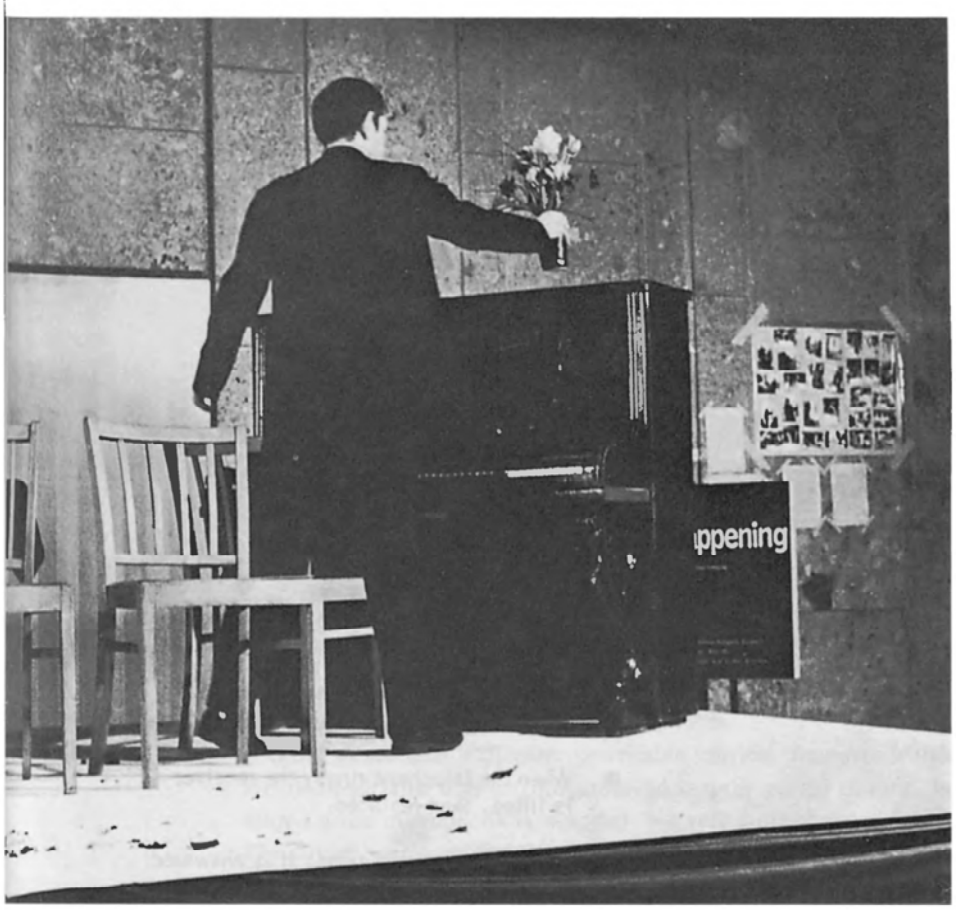


26a *Solo for Violin*: George Brecht
26b *Drip Music*: George Brecht

instrument, while *String Quartet* ('shaking hands') reduces this normally tempestuous activity to a single gesture of friendly solidarity.

A number of rather elaborate versions of Brecht's events made – most likely not by Brecht himself – for the Fluxorchestra in 1966 emphasize their gag potential at the expense of their spiritual qualities. For instance in *Concerto for Clarinet* ('nearby') the clarinet is suspended by a string tied to its centre so that it holds a horizontal position about six inches above the performer's mouth. Without using his hands, the performer has to attempt to play a note, either by swinging the reed end down or by jumping up to it and catching the reed with his mouth; and in *Symphony No. 1* ('through a hole') a number of musicians position themselves behind a full-size photograph of another orchestra, with their arms inserted through holes cut in the photograph at the shoulders of the photographic musicians. 'Performers may hold instruments in the conventional way and attempt to play an old favourite.'

Just as important as the event as gag is the event as duration. Brecht devised a whole series of natural 'clocks' with which to 'unmeasure' passing time. *Candle Piece for Radios* lasts as long as the birthday cake candles last; *Comb Music* ends when the last prong has been plucked. The duration of the second of the five piano pieces that make up *Incidental Music* (see p. 21) depends on the performer's balancing skill and the laws of gravity. In other events duration may be defined in terms of colour in *Two Durations* ('red/green' – which may refer to the variable lengths of



16c *Piano Piece*, 1962: George Brecht

change of traffic lights); or perhaps in terms of a change of physical state, in *Three Aqueous Events* ('ice/water/steam'); or in the unspecified interval *between* things – 'between two sounds', 'between two breaths' on the small scale, and in *Three Telephone Events* on a (potentially) larger scale.

Brecht's events function on a number of different levels. They are truly what Dick Higgins called *intermedia* – not a piling up of media but something that falls *between* different media. They inhabit the area between poetry and performance. For poetry they offer observations, and for performance they offer observations as instructions or material for performance or art-objects. Thus 'discover or make', 'on(to) a piano' are typical instructions in a Brecht score. 'Event scores are poetry, through music, getting down to facts' Brecht once noted. But there is nothing in an event-score to insist that an event must be a public performance: *Three Telephone Events* could equally well be a mode of organizing or experiencing time in one's own life. For Brecht, like Cage, sees no difference between 'theatre' and any other of his actions; he would agree

27 The second piece from *Incidental Music*: George Brecht

THREE TELEPHONE EVENTS

- **When the telephone rings, it is allowed to continue ringing, until it stops.**
- **When the telephone rings, the receiver is lifted, then replaced.**
- **When the telephone rings, it is answered.**

Performance note: Each event comprises all occurrences within its duration.

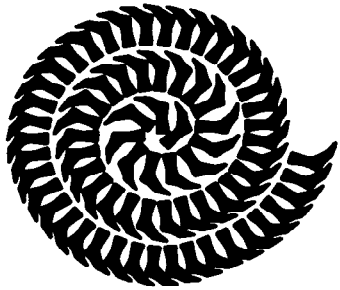
Spring, 1961

28 Brecht's *Three Telephone Events*

with Cage that 'theatre takes place all the time wherever one is and an simply facilitates persuading one this is the case.'

Most of Brecht's events were written between 1961 and 2, although he continued to notate them occasionally ('the later ones became very private, like little enlightenments I wanted to communicate to my friends who would know what to do with them'). The event scores of Takehisa Kosugi were written for a later period of Fluxus, 1964 to 5, although Kosugi had organized the first happenings, events and activities in Tokyo in 1960 with the Ongaku group. The notions of physicality, space and time presented in Kosugi's scores reflect a specifically Japanese sensibility. In *Anima 1* space as a potential for action is deliberately confined and experienced directly. In *Theatre Music* the performer is concerned with a simple unity of time, space and bodily movement. This persistence ('keep', 'intently') takes on a savagely physical character in *Music for a Revolution*.

29 Kosugi's *Theatre Music*, *Music for a Revolution* and *Anima 2*



THEATRE MUSIC

Keep walking intently

T.Kosugi

MUSIC FOR A REVOLUTION

Scoop out one of your eyes 5 years from now and
do the same with the other eye 5 years later.

T.Kosugi

ANIMA 2

Enter into a chamber which has windows.
Close all the windows and doors.
Put out different part of the body through each window.
Go out from the chamber.
The chamber may be made of a large cloth bag with
door and windows made of zippers.

T.Kosugi

Other pieces deal with more practicable musical processes which are also realizable over a (comparatively) lengthy period of time. In *Micro I* a live microphone is wrapped in a very large sheet of paper. The microphone amplifies the creaking and crackling of the paper as it unfolds gradually of its own momentum. In the three compositions Kosugi entitled *South* the whole word 'south', or parts of the word are subjected to extension or slow-motion procedures; in *South No. 2*, for instance, the whole word is to be pronounced 'during a duration of more than 15 minutes', so that the transitions between the letters are as effortless and smooth as possible.

John Tilbury's account of performing *Anima 7*, which I quote on p. 15, shows that when an everyday action is subjected to a slow-motion process all kinds of unforeseen, near-crippling problems are thrown up. This is also true of the transients of the word 'south'. Kosugi seems to have used these processes not as a means of taking the performer outside himself, but of making him more intensely aware of interior actions which he normally performs quite instinctively. As a result he is drawn outside the universe of his known physical functioning. *Distance for Piano* (for David Tudor) is an extreme example of this: the performer is forced into an unpredictable relationship with the piano because obstacles are placed between him and the instrument. The pianist positions himself at a fixed point some distance from the piano,

and produces sounds, not directly but by manipulating the objects placed between him and the piano (the whole of which is used as a sound-source). These objects are not extensions of his pianistic technique but impediments to it, for Kosugi is less concerned with producing new sounds than with extending the performer's awareness of the process of making sounds.

Another approach to the direct experience of unmeasured time within a monostructural framework is found in the *Compositions* that La Monte Young produced in 1960 and 1961. Young had been working on the west coast of America during the fifties and he did not come into contact with Cage's music and ideas until 1959 – ironically in Darmstadt, the European mecca of serialism. Young acknowledges the influence of Cage in the use of random digits and 'the presentation of what traditionally would have been considered a non- or semi-musical event in a classical concert setting'. But like Brecht his approach was reductionist: whereas Cage's pieces 'were generally realised as a complex of programmed sounds and activities over a prolonged period of time with events coming and going, I was perhaps the first to concentrate on and delimit the work to be a single event or object in these less traditionally musical areas'

He moved into these unitary activities by the same route as George Brecht – multiple activities using chance techniques. In *Vision* (1959) Young took a time period of thirteen minutes during which eleven sounds, 'described with insistent precision' (Cardew), had to be made, whose spacing and timing were to be worked out by consulting a random number table or telephone directory.

The first version of Young's next piece, *Poem for Chairs, Tables, and Benches, Etc., or Other Sound Sources* (1960), involved dragging, pushing, pulling or scraping these items of furniture over the floor according to timings determined by the same methods as *Vision*. Once a decision has been made as to what sized units are to be used to measure the available time – a quarter of a second, hours, days, years – random digits determine the duration of the performance, the number of events, their individual length, the points at which they are to begin and end and the assignment of each sound source to the selected durations. Instruments – anything that can be dragged across a floor, or any other sound source – their articulation, location and touch are left free; any sort of floor surface may be used and sounds may be made at any point inside or outside the performance space.

The comprehensiveness of *Poem* led, after its early performances, to this situation described by Cardew:

> The work developed into a kind of 'chamber opera' in which *any* activity, not necessarily even of a sound variety, could constitute one strand in the complex weave of the composition, which could last minutes, or weeks, or aeons. In fact it was quickly realised that all being and happening from the very beginning of time had been nothing more than a single gigantic performance of *Poem*.

Composition 1960 #2

Build a fire in front of the audience. Preferably, use wood although other combustibles may be used as necessary for starting the fire or controlling the kind of smoke. The fire may be of any size, but it should not be the kind which is associated with another object, such as a candle or a cigarette lighter. The lights may be turned out.

After the fire is burning, the builder(s) may sit by and watch it for the duration of the composition; however, he (they) should not sit between the fire and the audience in order that its members will be able to see and enjoy the fire.

The composition may be of any duration.

In the event that the performance is broadcast, the microphone may be brought up close to the fire.

5 · 5 · 60

30 Young's *Composition 1960 No. 2*: George Brecht performing.

The compulsive universality of *Poem* is at the opposite pole from George Brecht's minuscule intersections with reality, his universe made up of separate occurrences. Young's single, all-embracing metaphor was continued in the unitary presentations of his Fluxus period. Early in 1961 his interest in the 'singular event' led him to write all his 1961 pieces 'in a singular manner' He wrote (and gave a variety of dates to) the same composition twenty-nine times: 'draw a straight line and follow it.' This was, in fact, his *Composition 1960 No. 10* which he performed at the time by sighting with plumb lines and then drawing along the floor with chalk. He drew the same line every time though it invariably came out differently: 'the technique I was using at the time was not good enough.' (Other Fluxus people noted Young's obsessions. George Maciunas' *Homage to La Monte Young* of 1962 instructs that lines previously drawn at any performance of *Composition 1961* should be 'erased, scraped and washed,' another version adding any other lines previously encountered, 'like street-dividing lines, ruled paper or score lines, lines on sports fields, lines on gaming tables, lines ruled by children on sidewalks, etc.')

Like *Poem*, the line piece becomes an extended metaphor. For a line is a 'potential of existing time' and is therefore relevant to music. Thus in Young's *Composition 1960 No. 7* the notes B and F sharp are 'to be held for a long time' But a line can also be taken as a condensation of any number of mono-directional, undeviating linear activities – walking, education (perhaps), marksmanship, Catholicism, La Monte Young's career, etc.

31 Young's *Composition 1960 No.5, Piano Piece for Terry Riley No.1, Piano Piece for David Tudor No.1* and *Composition 1960 no.7.*

Composition 1960 # 5

Turn a butterfly (or any number of butterflies) loose in the performance area.

When the composition is over, be sure to allow the butterfly to fly away outside.

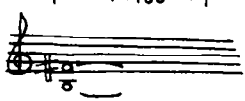
The composition may be any length but if an unlimited amount of time is available, the doors and windows may be opened before the butterfly is turned loose and the composition may be considered finished when the butterfly flies away.

Piano Piece for David Tudor #1 — 6 · 8 · 60

Bring a bale of hay and a bucket of water onto the stage for the piano to eat and drink. The performer may then feed the piano or leave it to eat by itself. If the the former, the piece is over after the piano has been fed. If the latter, it is over after the piano eats or decides not to.

October 1960

Composition 1960 #7



to be held for a long Time

La Monte Young

July 1960

Piano Piece for Terry Riley #1

Push the piano up to a wall and put the flat side flush against it. Then continue pushing into the wall. Push as hard as you can. If the piano goes through the wall, keep pushing in the same direction regardless of new obstacles and continue to push as hard as you can whether the piano is stopped against an obstacle or moving. The piece is over when you are too exhausted to push any longer.

2:10 A.M.
November 8, 1960

Young's 1960 compositions fall into a number of categories, some like the line piece, uniquely his, others in line with the prevailing, often destructive, mood of other Fluxus artists. There is the obscure poetry of *Piano Piece for David Tudor No. 3* – 'most of them were very old grasshoppers'. Or his full-frontal presentation of natural phenomena: a fire is built in front of the audience (*Composition 1960 No. 2*) and butterflies are turned loose in the concert hall (No. 5). This springs from his fascination with the poetry of nature: 'Being very young, I could still take something so highly poetic and use it without the fear I would have now – that it would be trampled on . After all, a butterfly is only a butterfly is only a butterfly.' Young was at that time presenting nature directly rather than analogizing natural processes. If the fire piece needs any justification then it lies in Young's statement that it is good for someone to 'listen to what he ordinarily just looks at, or look at things he would ordinarily just hear'. (George Brecht, performing the fire piece,

extracted an 'event' from Young's naturalism: he carefully built a pile of matches on a glass on a plate on a cloth on a stool.)

Along with other Fluxus composers La Monte Young was fascinated by the audience as a social situation. Three of the 1960 compositions are ostensibly 'audience pieces'. In *Composition 1960 No. 3* listeners are told that for some specific time or other they may do anything they wish. In *No. 4* the audience is told that the lights will be turned off for a time; the lights are switched off, and at the end an announcement may (or may not) be made 'that their activities have been the composition' *No. 6* reverses the performer/audience relationship – performers watch the audience in the same way as the audience usually watches the performers. Non-performers are given the choice of *watching* or *being* the audience. All these pieces may be of any duration – as with Cage's pieces the performance lasts any chosen length of programmed time.

The audience, as an object of experimental curiosity, as something less than passive spectators, figures in other Fluxus events, at times treated respectfully (by Young), but their participation is quite often engaged by a deliberately aggressive gesture as it is in the *Audience Pieces* of Ben Vautier. In one of these the audience is locked in a theatre, the event ending when they find their way out; in another tickets are to be sold between eight and nine pm, but at nine pm an announcement is made that the play has already started and will end at twelve pm, yet at no time will the audience be admitted.

At the same time as this apparent maltreatment of audiences, there are events which involve that re-evaluation of the function, purpose and identity of the musical instrument discussed in Chapter 1. Young's *Piano Piece for David Tudor No. 2* (1960), his *X for Henry Flynt*, his line pieces, are concerned (as are many of Kosugi's pieces) with persistence. In *Piano Piece for David Tudor No. 2* the pianist is asked to open the lid of the piano and let it fall without making any sound, and he can try as many times as he likes until he succeeds (perhaps this is a preliminary exercise to a possible repeat performance of Tudor's version of *4′33″*). But this work is also part of the Fluxus trend towards violence, destruction, or just plain disinterest in the cultural values enshrined in musical instruments, which are treated unmistakably as 'something else'

This treatment may be gentle, for example the flower vase placed on Brecht's piano, or some of the 'incidences' of *Incidental Music*: 'The piano seat is tilted on its base and brought to rest against a part of the piano' and 'Three dried peas are dropped, one after another, on to the keyboard.' Many events are what Duchamp would have called Reciprocal Ready-Mades: 'Use a Rembrandt as an ironing board.' In Young's first Tudor piece a bale of hay and a bucket of water are brought on to the stage, and the piano is fed, or left to feed itself. In Robert Watts' *Duet for Tuba* coffee is dispensed from one of the tuba's spit valves and cream from the other. In Ay-O's *Rainbow No. 1* soap bubbles are

blown out of various wind instruments. The *12 Piano Compositions for Nam June Paik* (1962) by George Maciunas begin with piano movers bringing the piano on to the stage, and end with their carrying it off; between these events the pianist has (among other things) to place a dog or cat (or both) inside the piano, play Chopin, stretch the 3 highest strings with a tuning key till they burst, place one piano on top of another. Maciunas' *Solo for Violin* (also 1962) proposes that an old classic be played on a violin and that where pauses are notated the violin is to be maltreated – by scratching the floor with it, dropping pebbles through the f-holes, pulling the pegs out, and so on. And in a performance of Richard Maxfield's Concert Suite from *Dromenon* La Monte Young quietly set fire to his violin while the other instruments were playing away quite happily.

Boredom, violence, danger, destruction, failure and meaninglessness all seem to be inextricably tied up in these phenomena; when some tasks are, on the surface, so easy, some other quality has to be introduced or extended to guarantee excitement or the unexpected. Dick Higgins has said of the opening bars of the last movement of Beethoven's *9th Symphony* that they come 'as close as one could come, within the harmonic concepts of the day, to simple hysteria, and they work because they take the risk of degenerating'. 'Today' (1966), he says 'a sense of risk is indispensable, because any simple piece fails when it becomes facile. This makes for all the more challenge in risking facility, yet still remaining very simple, very concrete, very meaningful.' He goes on to say: 'The composer is perfectly well aware of the psychological difficulties which his composition may produce for some, if not all, of the audience. He therefore finds excitement in insisting on this, to the point of endangering himself physically or even spiritually in his piece.'

To emphasize this effect he wrote, between 1961 and 3, a series of compositions called *Danger Musics*, 'each of which emphasized one spiritual, psychological or physical danger that seemed appropriate to the general aesthetic I was using . It is very tempting sometimes to see not how much one can get away with, but how much one can use the challenges that *are* there.' The best-known, *Danger Music No. 5*, was in fact written by Nam June Paik; it instructs the performer to crawl up the vagina of a living female whale. (Comments Al Hansen: 'I don't think Paik has ever performed this because he is still with us.')

Paik it was who (again in Hansen's words) would 'move through the intermission crowd in the lobby of a theatre, cutting men's neckties off with scissors, *slicing coats down the back with a razor blade* and squirting shaving cream on top of their heads'. *On one occasion he did this* to the father-figure himself, John Cage (the piece is called *In Homage to John Cage*); 'this sort of thing has led Cage to wonder whether his influence on the young was altogether a good one' comments Calvin Tomkins primly.

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32 Advertisement for Fluxus concert.

Violence was always an integral part of the unclassifiable performances of the sensational duo of Paik and the cellist Charlotte Moorman. Between 1964 and 5 Giuseppe Chiari wrote a series of word pieces, each one nicely calculated to suit the style of the performers they were dedicated to. These are often theatrical in the conventional sense of the word, prescribing a series of programmed actions and events to be worked through. *Don't Trade Here*, the Paik-Moorman vehicle, is, naturally, the most histrionic. First a sentence has to be repeated 122 times over a period of ten minutes, after which, the score runs: 'Shout. Complain. Like a beast. Take a microphone. Bring it near your throat. Play with the intensity level of the amplifier arriving alternately and simultaneously at such a high level as to cause very sharp frequencies in this loud speaker. Reduce to lowest the level of the amplifier. Vomit. Or cry. Cause the vomiting or tears mechanically or chemically.' And so on.

Moorman's cello has surpassed any other instrument, in any era, in the number of uses it has been put to. It is attacked when a recording of aerial bombardment is played; it is fought with in a large bag with zippered orifices; it is frozen in a block of ice, and then the ice bowed until it melts and Moorman can get at the cello;* Paik's back is bowed as if it were a cello, and the instrument itself is used as a sexual organ.

Paik's *Opéra Sextronique* was an attempt at the sexual emancipation of music; as a result of the first performance in New York in 1967 Moorman was arrested on a charge of public indecency for playing bare-breasted. The poster for the performance carried the following manifesto:

> After three emancipations in twentieth century music (serial, indeterminate, actional) I have found that there is still one more chain to lose. That is PRE-FREUDIAN HYPOCRISY. Why is sex a predominant theme in art and literature prohibited ONLY in music? How long can New Music afford to be sixty years behind the times and still claim to be a serious art? The purge of sex under the excuse of being 'serious' exactly undermines the so-called 'seriousness' of music as a classical art, ranking with literature and painting. Music history needs its D. H. Lawrence, its Sigmund Freud.

This person still has not been found and Paik has given up the search in favour of experimental television systems. Television, he says, 'has not yet left the breast'.

* This was performed in London at ICES in August 1972 without the cello.