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Objects Without Object:

The Artwork in Flux, 1958-1969

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Art History

by

Natilee Omann Harren

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Objects Without Object:

The Artwork in Flux, 1958-1969

by

Natilee Omann Harren

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor George Thomas Baker, Chair

This dissertation examines the late-20th-century transformation of the art object through the practice of Fluxus, an international, neo-avant-garde artist collective founded in 1962 and centered in New York. Focus is given to three key figures: George Maciunas (Lithuanian-American, 1931-1978), George Brecht (American, 1926-2008), and Robert Filliou (French, 1926-1987). It traces chronologically these artists' development of three central Fluxus formats—the event score, Fluxbox multiple and Fluxshop—as they confronted established object categories pertaining to the mediums of music, painting, and sculpture; the emergent category of the multiple; and prevailing economic models of the commodity and the store/gallery.

Fluxus was informed by the aesthetics of music, in particular the work and teaching of experimental composer John Cage. Chapter 1 thus provides an historical analysis of graphic

notation in the 1950s in order to fully articulate the implications of the score model taken up by Fluxus artists in 1958—here seen as the foundational “diagram” for the Fluxus object. Chapter 2, focused on Brecht, examines the interrelation between the artist’s event scores and object practice centered on readymade objects, here newly defined as “notational objects.” Chapter 3 turns to Maciunas’s production of Fluxbox multiples and that format’s relationship to the medium of sculpture, the emergent market for artist multiples, and 1960s commodity culture, elaborating a theory of the Fluxbox as “transitional commodity.” Finally, Chapter 4 considers the aesthetic and political potential of Fluxus’s “unworking” by the late 1960s through experimental forms of distribution and community-building modeled in the under-recognized work of Filliou.

The project thus moves from an articulation of the origins of Fluxus’s unique object model to a theorization of how the group’s “objects without object” (to borrow the title of a work by Filliou) amounted to a radical statement about postmodern subjectivity and community formation. It provides a new account of Fluxus and of a crucial moment within the paradigm shift in postwar artistic practice toward the conceptual, ephemeral, and performative art forms that have come to define the post-medium condition of postmodern and contemporary art.

The dissertation of Natilee Omann Harren is approved.

Miwon Kwon

Liz Kotz

Roger Savage

George Thomas Baker, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

for Michael and Augie

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Vita

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Selected Publications

“*La cédille qui ne finit pas*: Robert Filliou, George Brecht, and Fluxus in Villefranche,” *Getty Research Journal* 4 (2012): 127-143.

“*Fluxmouse No. 1, 1973*,” *Preserved!: The Culture of Preservation*, ed. Petra Lange-Berndt and Mechthild Fend, University College London Department of History of Art, 2012. <http://www.preservedproject.co.uk/flux-mouse/>. (Accessed April 2, 2013).

“Los Angeles Stays Itself” and “A Conversation with Chris Lipomi,” *BOUNTY* (Los Angeles: Gyre & Gymbble Publications, 2012).

“Side A: *Caveat Auditor*,” *All Time Greatest* (Los Angeles: Fellows of Contemporary Art, 2010).

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Selected Presentations

“Earle Brown, Ambiguity, and the Emergence of a Notational Neo-Avant-Garde.” Paper presented at Beyond Notation: An Earle Brown Symposium, Department of Music, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, January 18-19, 2013.

“The Fluxus Virtual, Actually.” Paper presented at the 100th Annual College Art Association Conference, Los Angeles, CA, February 22, 2012.

“*La cédille qui ne finit pas: Robert Filliou, George Brecht, and Fluxus in Villefranche* (deregulation version).” Paper presented at the symposium No Rules: Negotiating Art and Deregulation, The Cooper Union, New York, NY, October 22, 2011.

“Objects Without Object, Artworks Without Artists: The Unworking of Fluxus.” Paper presented at the 9th International Spring-Academy of the International Consortium of Art History, Kunstgeschichtliches Institut, Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, May 20, 2011.

“The Topological Object of Fluxus.” Paper presented at the symposium Transformationen: Entgrenzung in den Künsten, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, Germany, October 22, 2010.

“Virtually Fluxus: Reconsidering Nam June Paik.” Invited lecture at the symposium The Neutral Zone of Digital Images, Chonnam University, Gwangju, South Korea, April 9, 2010.

Selected Academic and Professional Experience

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 2012 | Part-time Instructor, Art History Department, UCLA |
| 2012 | Off-site Research Assistant, Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid. |
| 2008-10 | Research Assistant, Collection Development, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. |
| 2006-8 | Teaching Fellow, Art History Department UCLA |
| 2005 | Course Reader, Art History Department, UCLA |

Selected Honors and Fellowships

- President’s Fellowship, UCLA, 2012-13.
Dissertation Year Fellowship, UCLA, 2012-13.
Getty Research Institute Predoctoral Fellowship, Los Angeles, 2011-12.
Art&Education Papers Prize, 2011.
J. William Fulbright Graduate Fellowship to Germany, 2010-11.
Lenart Dissertation Travel Fellowship, UCLA, 2010.
Center for European and Eurasian Studies Dissertation Grant, UCLA, 2010.
Edward A. Dickson Fellowship, UCLA, 2009-10.
Patricia McCarron McGinn Memorial Award, UCLA, 2009.
Art Council Endowed Scholarship in Art History, UCLA, 2008.
Art History Graduate Research Endowment Fund Award, UCLA, 2007.
Chancellor’s Prize, UCLA, 2005-2009.

Prelude

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 (1959-1962)

We can begin by saying that Fluxus began with a drip (Fig. I.1).

Or, better to say that it began with several drips, as a drip seldom appears alone. A drip always comes as part of a series of drips drip-drip-dripping along in their incessant way.

We can begin with a work by George Brecht, *Drip Music (Drip Event)*, a genre of performance instruction referred to by the artist as an “event score.” It seems to be a simple and direct text. The wording and layout are precise in their minimalism, the primary incident being the transmission of water from one container to another. This work has become known as part of the standard repertoire in the concerts of Fluxus, the international neo-avant-garde artist collective founded by the Lithuanian-American artist-designer George Maciunas in 1962. We can trace in photographs a history of the life of *Drip Music* as it was performed throughout the first European Fluxus concert tour between September 1962 and the summer of 1963, when “Chairman” Maciunas introduced the Fluxus collective’s work to the public for the first time

along with a shifting cast of co-conspirators including Benjamin Patterson, Robert Filliou, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Emmett Williams, and Tomas Schmit. The inaugural tour began with a month-long series of performances held at the lecture hall of the Museum Wiesbaden, Germany, and then continued to various sites across Europe: Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Paris, and Düsseldorf.

In Copenhagen's Nikolajkirche in late 1962, Higgins, dressed in concert attire, climbed halfway up a wooden ladder and poured water in a slight arc from a teapot into a large aluminum tub on the floor (Fig. I.2). The details of this performance, conducted with utter seriousness, seemed designed for maximum comedic effect. *Drip Music* performed in this way continued to appear in subsequent concerts and has come to constitute the work's standard presentation.

In February 1963, the Fluxus tour traveled to Germany for a two-day concert series hosted by Joseph Beuys at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where *Drip Music* was performed twice more under the direction of Maciunas. Constituting a kind of supplemental score for Brecht's piece, Maciunas wrote in advance to Beuys saying he would need: "1. A free-standing ladder, as high as possible"; "2. a water bucket, large or small"; and "3. a can."¹ As a second-order articulation of the work, Maciunas's list indicated his understanding of the score's language as a generic and flexible outline for an action defined by a set of loose coordinates of time, space, and materiality. His first performance was an exaggeration of the way Higgins had done it (Fig. I.3).² Standing yet higher on the ladder, the artist's small frame made a further joke of the scale of his oversized pitcher. In a second version, he acted as conductor for a nearly silent orchestra of

¹ Letter from George Maciunas to Joseph Beuys, c. January 1963, reprinted in Emmett Williams, *My Life in Flux—And Vice Versa* (Stuttgart: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1991), 73.

² Higgins and Maciunas's decision to stage the work in this way recalled the legendary first happening in 1952 at Black Mountain College, where John Cage, M.C. Richards, and Charles Olson read texts while perched atop ladders.

eye-droppers held aloft in the hands of seven performers including Williams, Schmit, Nam June Paik, Arthur Köpcke, and Daniel Spoerri (Fig. I.4).

Brecht's own first public performance of *Drip Music* would not come until April 1963 during a concert of "Happenings, Events, and Advanced Musics" at Rutgers University (Fig. I.5). His unpretentious gestures there would do everything to countermand the ironic grandiosity of the European performances and the threat of convention ossifying the work or neutralizing its potential for variability. Dressed modestly in black and standing on the ground at the level of his audience, Brecht steadied himself with a hand on the knee as he bent forward, obscuring his face, to pour water from an elegant pitcher into a teacup at no significant height at all. Maciunas's Amsterdam performance a few months later in June seemed to have understood Brecht's version as a silent protest against the conventionalization of his piece (Fig. I.6). Standing on the ground, Maciunas held out a glass bottle and released a slight stream of water that fell into a shallow pan at his feet.

It was around this time that Maciunas wrote to Nam June Paik: "We can't just perform the same think [sic] over & over & over & over. We try to vary every piece in each performance."³ Indeed, by the time Maciunas began drawing up plans for a 1966 Fluxfest in Prague (never to materialize), he proposed a version of *Drip Music* that threatened to be a complete rewriting of the piece: "First performer on a tall ladder pours water from a pitcher or pail very slowly down into the bell of a french horn or tuba held by the second."⁴ Paik was among the Fluxus artists to take Maciunas's directive most seriously. His well-known Wiesbaden

³ It is possible that Maciunas's spelling meant to call up the idea of performing the same interpretational concept (*i.e.* "think") for a piece over and over. Letter from George Maciunas to Nam June Paik, c. 1962, Jean Brown papers, 1916-1995 (bulk 1958-1985), The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 890164.

⁴ George Maciunas, "Proposed Program for a Fluxfest in Prague," 1966, Lawrence Alloway papers, 1935-2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2003.M.46.

performance *Zen for Head*, in which he painted a line of ink and tomato juice with his head, hands, and necktie, was in itself a realization of La Monte Young's *Composition 1960 #10 to Bob Morris* ("Draw a straight line and follow it") (Figs. I.7-8). This manner of realizing a work beyond the bounds of reason, convention, or authorial intention was central to the Fluxus project as summed up in a 1963 manifesto crafted by Maciunas from a dictionary definition of flux, which called for "a revolutionary flood and tide in art" propelled by continuous movement and change (Fig. I.9).

We begin to realize, then, that the wording of *Drip Music* is precisely *imprecise*, as ambiguous as possible, a minimalization of text designed to open out meaning to the widest of interpretational possibilities. The performance of the work can be single *or* multiple; there may be multiple drops, multiple water sources, multiple vessels, or multiple performers. In addition, the language of objects employed here—"source," "vessel"—is neutral but problematically vague. As if Brecht's choice of language was not reduced enough, a second version written into the score prescribes simply this: "dripping."

The score-based practice that would establish the Fluxus work's transitivity, variability, and complicated relationship to authorship can be traced to Brecht's participation in Cage's experimental composition course at the New School, which he attended during the summers of 1958 and 1959.⁵ His experience there coincided with a turning point in Cage's practice toward his first fully indeterminate scores. Brecht was thus able to observe how scores could operate in an indeterminate or ambiguous relationship to their realization. Brecht developed the event score

⁵ John Cage taught composition at the New School from 1956-59. See Bruce Altshuler, "The Cage Class," in *FluxAttitudes*, ed. Cornelia Lauf and Susan Hapgood (Gent: Imschoot Uitgevers, 1991), 17-23; Rebecca Y. Kim, "In No Uncertain Musical Terms: The Cultural Politics of John Cage's Indeterminacy" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2008), 128-164.

format within the context of Cage's class as a means of sketching out performance works without recourse to traditional musical notation and to incorporate perceptual phenomena beyond sound. Whether imperative or merely propositional, the event score involves the arrangement of objects and actions in spatial and temporal relationships. Above all, it is open and generative, embodying the potential for an immense range of actions to take place in its wake. The innovation of the event score was to re-imagine the artwork not as a fixed material entity but as a perceptual "event" framed by the artist—a multi-dimensional, multi-sensorial phenomenon carved out of lived space-time in order that it may be recast as art.⁶

In Brecht's account, the inspiration for his first so-named event score was a rather ordinary experience:

In the Spring of 1960, standing in the woods in 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 wholly "event" piece could be drawn from the situation. Three months later the first piece explicitly titled an "event" was finished, the "Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)."⁷

This story should remind us that Brecht's notion of the event was not only indebted to Cage (the

⁶ The origins of the event score may also be traced to the 1960-61 work of La Monte Young. In contrast to the literal and figurative fluidity of Brecht's *Drip Music*, however, Young's compositions, such as the well-known *Composition 1960 #10*, eventually led to a practice engaged in the pursuit of experiences of transcendence and eternity through the imposition of static, all-encompassing perceptual conditions. For Young, who would come to violently dissociate his work from Fluxus, the group's alliance with the vicissitudes of the everyday came to be seen as worthlessly banal: "It is to be noted regarding Fluxus vs. Stasis: Change, or flux is inevitable. Stasis, or remaining the same, is impossible. Therefore, to achieve the static state is the goal, while the state of flux, variation, or contrast, is unavoidable and thus unnecessary as a goal." Young, "Why I Withdrew from Fluxus," in *Fluxus Scores and Instructions: The Transformative Years*, ed. Jon Hendricks (Roskilde, Denmark: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 53. In her account of the emergence of the event score in the work of both Brecht and Young, Liz Kotz has remarked on Young's obsession with the "singularity of the event," a "programmatically monotony [that] reduces a structure to a single basic element, which is extended or repeated, potentially endlessly." Kotz, "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the Event Score," in *Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 83. For a detailed overview of the early years of Young's practice see Henry Flynt, "La Monte Young in New York, 1960-62," in *Sound and Light: La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela*, ed. William Duckworth and Richard Fleming (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1996), 44-97.

⁷ George Brecht, "The Origin of Events" (1970), in *Happening & Fluxus*, ed. Hanns Sohm (Cologne: Koelnischer Kunstverein, 1970), n.p.

piece was in fact dedicated to him); it was also an extension of the Duchampian readymade liberated from its affiliation with the everyday object in order to frame everyday experiences as art. To Brecht's approval, Maciunas would later describe the event scores as "temporal readymades."⁸

By 1961, Brecht began to copy the scores by mimeograph onto variously sized pieces of paper and send them to artist-friends through the mail. At this early moment they also appeared in literary journals, the compendium of experimental notation *An Anthology of Chance Operations* edited by Young, and they were performed in the earliest proto-Fluxus concerts. Following the launch of Fluxus in 1962, Brecht's scores would be regularly included in Fluxus publications and collected in the first monographic Fluxus anthology *Water Yam* (1963), a matchbox-like cardboard container enclosing sixty-some of Brecht's scores individually printed on white and orange card-stock (Fig. I.10). Brecht's event score became one of the first models for the Fluxus group's multi-dimensional practice, with Brecht retaining close ties to Maciunas and other Fluxus artists throughout his lifetime. It offered a strategy and language for transgressing the medium barriers imposed by modernism, a means to unite phenomenologies of time and space, and a logic with which to navigate the multi- and intermedia landscape of the early postmodern moment.

I shall repeat, like a drip, that drips rarely come in singles. For during this time Brecht was to imagine ever more drips (Figs. I.11-13). *Three Aqueous Events* (summer 1961) was a bulleted list of the words: "ice," "water," "steam." *Three Dances* (summer 1961) gave three

⁸ Sometime in 1963 Brecht wrote in response to Maciunas, "I hadn't thought of them [the event scores] as temporal readymades, but that description certainly fits." Letter from George Maciunas to George Brecht, c. 1963, Hanns Sohm Archive, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. More recently, Liz Kotz has theorized Brecht's event as a "perceptual readymade." Kotz, "Language Between Performance and Photography," in *Words to Be Looked At*, 177.

instructions: “1. Saliva / 2. Pause. Urination. Pause. / 3. Perspiration.” There was also an untitled score of a mere two words: “raining” and “pissing” (c. 1962). And of course *Drip Music*, with its repetitious “Second version: Dripping” was multiple from the start. Brecht compiled lists of phenomena that retained what he imagined as drip-like qualities: “urinating, spitting, arranging events, brushing teeth, seeing shadows, drinking water, heaving stones over telephone wires, reading a book, hearing tree-sounds, shaving.”⁹ If this was not enough, Brecht was keen to claim other artists’ prior drips as realizations of his score too, observing in his notebook, “The second version of *Drip Music* includes the Pollock paintings of ca. 1947-51.”¹⁰

The artist had long been thinking in terms of drips and flows. From 1953-1962 he worked full-time developing patents in the personal products division of healthcare products manufacturer Johnson & Johnson. By the end of his career there he held five patents and two co-patents for tampons and tampon applicator designs, the outcome of his studies of “the properties of menstrual fluid and the mechanics of fibrous absorption systems.”¹¹ “Out of my 27 years of being interested in science, of which 15 were as a professional chemist,” Brecht once recalled, “I had only learned two fundamentally important things: how to pour something from one container to another without spilling.”¹²

Brecht’s connoisseurial interest in drips brought together a whole constellation of

⁹ George Brecht, “Statement for James Goldsworthy” (July 11, 1960), in *George Brecht—Notebooks*, ed. Dieter Daniels and Hermann Braun, vol. 5 (Cologne: Walther König, 1998), 151.

¹⁰ George Brecht notebook no. 8, June 1961-September 1962, Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 144. Cited by Julia Robinson, “In the Event of George Brecht,” in *George Brecht: Events: A Heterospective* (Cologne: Walther König, 2005), 32 n. 28.

¹¹ George Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, ed. Dieter Daniels and Hermann Braun, vol. 4 (Cologne: Walther König, 1998), 109. Four of Brecht’s patented designs appear in Robinson, *George Brecht: Events: A Heterospective*, 190. The earliest is dated February 11, 1958, just five months before Brecht’s first enrollment in John Cage’s experimental composition course.

¹² Letter from George Brecht to Robert Filliou, n.d., Hanns Sohm Archive, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Germany.

phenomena defined by transient and shapeshifting form, form set into relation with other forms, form unsettled from any one fixed, material locus. It is thus quite logical to imagine the other drips found throughout Brecht's practice as alternative versions of *Drip Music*, making of his *oeuvre* a complexly interwoven aesthetic system or a recursive pathway, like a spiral.¹³ Such a constellation of drips demonstrates how *Drip Music* evolved beyond its role as an originary textual source to become nothing like a source at all but merely one realization among many non-hierarchically relatable, possible realizations of a work that would continue unfolding apart from the oversight of the artist continuously, ceaselessly, dripping its way into existence... For in the universe of Fluxus, an artwork could become a string of words, and this string of words could become a man on a ladder dripping water from a pitcher, and this dripping water could become a sopping rag, and this sopping rag could become a leaky faucet, and this leaky faucet could become a scientific instrument—and on and on and on, unceasingly. Artistic form re-imagined after the model of the score in the final instance no longer relied on a piece of paper or a text but on the idea of a transmutable and resilient form that *travels*.

* * *

¹³ This aspect of Brecht's work would correspond, in his own view, to the transition c. 1915 to a Duchampian paradigm of artistic practice in which the development of an artist's work would no longer proceed as a teleologically developing narrative but as a circuitous traverse of an expansive field of inquiry. In the artist's words, "We've been talking about a change in paradigm or about the way a new paradigm began to emerge around 1915 and we've been calling it the Duchampian paradigm, just for want of something better, right?...[it's] important to notice the way the Duchampian paradigm seems to show up in the kind of development that's typical of an artist's work. Take Monet, for example, or any artist between Monet and Duchamp, including Picasso, and there's a straight line quality in the development of his work when it's considered as a whole. With Duchamp...The works are like points scattered off into many different directions...like a spiral. Duchamp's work no longer develops along a straight line but distributes itself through a series of points that lie on a spiral and you can intuit the center but you can't see any straight line development at all." Henry Martin, *A Conversation with George Brecht* (Bologna: Exit Edizioni, 1979), 40-42.

My work really comes from music more than from visual art.
—George Brecht¹⁴

Art history often tells us that Fluxus made its public debut in an ambitious four-week concert series held at the lecture hall of the Museum Wiesbaden, Germany, in September 1962. Yet the launch of Fluxus was actually, much like George Brecht's *Drip Music*, a kind of dripping in and of itself in which the idea of Fluxus was disseminated slowly, commingling with other emergent neo-avant-garde practices of the time until by 1963 it had escalated into a flood of internationally visible events and projects. It was through these events, described by Maciunas as “neo-dada music and theater”—and thus situated within the frameworks and aesthetic structures of those time-based and collaboratively instituted forms—that Fluxus performance instructions such as Brecht's model event scores would find their first audiences.

We could trace an earlier moment of Fluxus visibility to October 19, 1961, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, where Fluxus was mentioned for the first time to a large public during the panel discussion convened for William Seitz's exhibition *The Art of Assemblage*. Seitz, leading the panel as moderator, sat alongside curator Lawrence Alloway, historian Roger Shattuck, Dada artists Richard Huelsenbeck and Marcel Duchamp, and the “neo-dadaist” Robert Rauschenberg. Maciunas was in the audience. During the question and answer period Seitz selected one of Maciunas's write-in questions, introducing its author as the editor of Fluxus magazine. The question was directed at a remark made by Shattuck that had dismissed

¹⁴ Henry Martin, “An Interview with George Brecht” (1967), in *An Introduction to George Brecht's Book of the Tumbler on Fire* (Milan: Multhipla Edizioni, 1978), 80.

contemporary neo-dada art as a lesser reprisal of historical Dada strategies.¹⁵ “When depreciating the neo-dada works,” Maciunas had written with veiled aggression, “did Mr. Shattuck refer also to the significant examples of American and West European neo-dada music and theater?”¹⁶ The provocation was an implicit defense of the time-based practices with which Maciunas was aligned as much as it was an effort to distinguish those practices from the more conservative version of neo-dada represented by the abstract, compositional assemblages featured in Seitz’s exhibition. In response, Shattuck doubled his critique of object-based neo-dada works, unexpectedly allying himself with the art of Maciunas’s defense as if intuitively to grasp or to have a premonition of (if not yet a satisfactory language for) the aesthetic codes that would become the basis of Fluxus:

I don’t think we’re at all concerned with a creative act. We’re concerned with an enormous *seepage* of art into life. All these Happenings that we’ve been talking about, the Readymades, everything else, have to do with something *dripping* back into life in terms which we are not quite able to reckon with....This is what is disappointing to me in the show upstairs, because all the frames are rectangular as they “ought” to be, sealing art off which shouldn’t be sealed off.¹⁷

Maciunas’s question to Shattuck reflected his understanding of neo-avant-garde practices as being beholden not only to the object model of the Dada readymade but also to developments in experimental music and theater, which, as Shattuck describes, had brought about the temporal

¹⁵ The first uses of “neo-dada,” a term which emerged in the 1950s to describe assemblages of readymades such as in the work of Rauschenberg and Johns, were decidedly derogatory. For a history of the emergence of the term neo-dada in regard to art of the postwar period, see Catherine Craft, “Constellations of the Past and Present: (Neo-)Dada, the Avant-Garde and the New York Art World, 1951-1963,” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1996); and Craft, *An Audience of Artists: Dada, Neo-Dada, and the Emergence of Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2012). Shattuck’s position would be formalized in Peter Bürger’s controversial criticism of neo-avant-gardisms, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

¹⁶ The transcript of the event has been published as Lawrence Alloway, Marcel Duchamp, et. al., “The Art of Assemblage: A Symposium” (1961), in *Essays on Assemblage*, ed. James Leggio and Helen M. Franc, *Studies in Modern Art*, vol. 2 (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992).

¹⁷ Alloway, et. al., “The Art of Assemblage: A Symposium,” 147, italics mine.

extension of the artwork, a “seepage” and “dripping” of the work as an ontological entity in time and an author-work relation that differed fundamentally from the autographic arts of painting and sculpture.

Indeed, Brecht’s proto-Fluxus work, which was foundational to the development of the Fluxus group’s common formats, was being presented not in a visual art context but as part of a fledgling new music scene. “A Concert of New Music” at the Living Theater, March 14, 1960 included the first two compositions he had written for Cage’s experimental composition course. *Candle Piece for Radio* (June-August 1959) and *Card Piece for Voice* (July 1959) were presented alongside works by Cage, Rauschenberg, Allan Kaprow, and Richard Maxfield (Figs. I.14-15). In early 1962, Brecht appeared on the program of a concert to raise funds for the important publication *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, which was designed by Maciunas.¹⁸ *An Anthology* contained an astonishing variety of performance instructions, manifesto-like statements, concrete poetry, and graphic notations from a group of artists whose practices would soon enough be sorted into the separate categories of experimental and electronic music, Fluxus, dance, theater, performance art, poetry and the like but which at this transitional moment appeared as part of one continuous milieu. At the fundraiser, held on January 8 at the Living Theater, Brecht performed his *Comb Music (Comb Event)* (1959-1962) (I.16), a companion piece to *Drip Music*, shortly before the evening’s pièce de résistance: Earle Brown personally conducting his most highly abstract, graphically notated score *December 1952* (1952), realized in concert by sixteen performers including Byrd, Jennings, Mac Low, Forti, Young, Charlotte

¹⁸ The anthology was edited by La Monte Young, co-published by Young and Jackson Mac Low, and designed by Maciunas. *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, ed. La Monte Young (New York, 1963), n.p.

Moorman, and Philip Corner (Fig. I.17).¹⁹

The initial alignment of Fluxus with developments in music and theater were reflected in other moments of Fluxus visibility: Maciunas's AG Gallery at 925 Madison Avenue, opened in early 1961, home to performances of works by composers and artists including Cage, Young, Brown, Maxfield, Mac Low, Dick Higgins, Toshi Ichihyanagi, and Walter De Maria under a series entitled "Musica Antiqua et Nova."²⁰ Maciunas himself led a three-part lecture-demonstration course on "musical concretism" through the ages, from polyphonic medieval and Renaissance music (charmingly referred to by Maciunas as "polychrome" music) to Anton Webern, Edgard Varèse, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Cage, and ending with magnetic tape music from the United States, Europe, and Japan. The advertising mailer for the series included the first mention in print of a FLUXUS magazine whose publication would be supported by proceeds from Maciunas's course.

Performances based on the signature Fluxus format of the event score at AG Gallery would never come, however, for the gallery would fold that very summer, with Maciunas fleeing the country and his debts to take up a graphic design post with the United States Army in Wiesbaden, Germany. And yet in West Germany there had already been concerts of a number of proto-Fluxus event scores, namely those of Brecht. In 1960, David Tudor had presented Brecht's work within the context of the region's vibrant new music scene, performing *Incidental Music* (known at the

¹⁹ Jackson Mac Low describes his participation in *December 1952* and its importance to his practice in Mac Low, "How Maciunas Met the New York Avant Garde," in *Fluxus: Today and Yesterday*, ed. Johan Pijnappel, *Art & Design profile* 28 (London: Academy Editions, 1993), 43.

²⁰ The AG Gallery took its name from the first initials of Maciunas and his partner, a fellow Lithuanian-American named Almus Salcius. Maciunas intended to fund the gallery through a string of ultimately badly failed business plans, including the dealing of antique musical instruments and the importation and distribution of fine European canned goods. In fact, the gallery was funded and greatly cared for by Maciunas's mother, who lived with him in New York since becoming widowed in 1954. Leokadia Maciunas "My Son," c. 1979, typed manuscript translated from the Lithuanian, Jean Brown Papers.

time as *5 Piano Pieces*) alongside works by Cage, Wolff, and Young at a renegade concert series held at painter Mary Bauermeister's atelier in Cologne (Fig. I.18).²¹ *Incidental Music* lists five actions to be conducted on or around the piano that produce sounds only incidentally to their performance. Among other simple activities, the performer drops beans or peas onto the keyboard, taping them down where they land (and pressing the keys in the process), and builds a tower of wooden blocks inside the piano until it falls over, sounding the strings. Tudor reprised *Incidental Music* for a much larger audience at the Darmstadt Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik (IFNM) in a famous late-night concert in September 1961. Here, *Incidental Music* appeared alongside Young's infamous *To Henry Flynt* (1960), in which Tudor sat hitting a tam-tam at the rate of one strike per second, 566 times, instigating one audience member to call an ambulance to stop the apparent madness.²²

Once abroad, Maciunas connected immediately with a west-German network of experimental musicians and artists including Patterson, Williams, Nam June Paik, and Wolf Vostell, some of whom had encountered Tudor and Cage at Darmstadt. As early as mid-December 1961 Maciunas was in conversation with the Museum Wiesbaden about holding a concert series there.²³ But parts of the Wiesbaden Fluxus program had been leaked ahead of time, presented before a German audience in a concert co-organized by Patterson and Maciunas, the

²¹ Bauermeister had invited Tudor to organize the presentation as an oppositional "counter-festival" to the conservative, "terrible music" being presented at the annual festival of the International Society for Contemporary. Letter from Bauermeister to Tudor, May 12, 1960, cited in Amy C. Beal, *New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 116.

²² Amy C. Beal, "David Tudor in Darmstadt," *Contemporary Music Review* 26, no. 1 (February 2007): 84. See also Alvin Lucier, "Denken in Pyramiden: An David Tudor erinnern," *MusikTexte* 69/70 (April 1997): 86-87.

²³ By the late 1950s, west Germany was established as a center for new music due to the presence of the Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in Darmstadt and the electronic music studio established at the radio station WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk) in Cologne.

“Kleinen Sommerfest – Après John Cage” held at Rolf Jährling’s Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal on June 9, 1962.²⁴ Here, again, “Fluxus” appeared only in print as the name of Maciunas’s yet-to-appear publishing project (Fig. I.19). And here, again, it was allied with a presentation of experimental time-based art forms as mapped out by Maciunas in both a text, “*Neo-Dada in den Vereinigten Staaten*” (Neo-Dada in the USA) read aloud in German by Arthus Caspari, and in a giant paper banner spanning the stage in which neo-avant-garde practices occupied positions along a continuum of time-space arts (Figs. I.20-21).²⁵ The names of many artists who would become known under the figurative banner of Fluxus appeared there—Brecht, Mac Low, and Patterson—crowded under the categories of music, theater, and graphics, categories further subdivided into those of “space-time” and “time-space arts,” including “graphic literature,” “graphic music,” and “diagrammatic music.”

This is all to say that before any artwork by the name of Fluxus had appeared, the conditions of the Fluxus object’s complex, mercurial existence had been set. Fluxus would be based in a notational practice enabling the work to adapt to varying contexts. The format of the event score would facilitate the work’s shuttling between the abstract and concrete, passing through a symbolic medium like language so that the work could be iterative and widely distributable, better able to organize a concrete arrangement within an infinite variety of situations. Maciunas called for an art form that would be, much like a musical score, “an ‘automatic machine’ within which or by which, nature...can complete the art-form, effectively

²⁴ Jon Hendricks, “Fluxus: Kleines Sommerfest/Neo-Dada in der Musik/Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Neuester Musik/Festum Fluxorum Fluxus,” in *Stationen der Moderne: Die bedeutenden Kunstausstellungen des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1988), 493-499. See also Astrit Schmidt-Burkhardt, *Maciunas’ Learning Machines: From Art History to a Chronology of Fluxus* (Berlin: Vice Versa Verlag, 2003), 15-16.

²⁵ This essay, also known as “Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art,” has appeared in multiple slightly differing versions. All citations of this text refer to the version published in Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss, *In the Spirit of Fluxus* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993), 156-157.

and independently of the artist-composer. Thus the primary contribution of a truly concrete artist consists in creating a *concept* or a *method* by which form can be created independently of him.”²⁶ By the fall of 1962, works like Brecht’s *Drip Music*, exemplary of such an artwork-in-flux without fixed object-status or form, would carry the name Fluxus all over Europe, reinventing itself over and over again.

The Brechtian event has been reclaimed as a crucial innovation for artistic practice beyond the context of Fluxus, signaling, as some scholars have argued, the first moment of a “conceptual turn” in postwar artistic practice that announced itself also as a linguistic turn in which artists began to harness language as the basis for works that were indexical, iterative, performative, and critically immaterial.²⁷ It was unacceptable to a generation of artists coming of age in the wake of Abstract Expressionism that the art object had to be singular, unique, precious, materially discrete, beholden to one given medium, and the product of an individual author.²⁸ This shift toward conceptual-linguistic practices (the terms have come to be employed almost interchangeably) was motivated by a questioning and critique of all forms of artistic conventionality, from materials to institutions, that had come to ensure the art object’s cultural and monetary value.

In its format and function, however, the event model proposed by Brecht was neither

²⁶ Maciunas, “Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art,” 157.

²⁷ Julia Robinson, “From Abstraction to Model: George Brecht’s Events and the Conceptual Turn in Art of the 1960s,” *October* 127 (Winter 2009): 77–108; and Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At*. Kotz and Robinson’s accounts provide the prehistory to the language-based conceptualism famously historicized by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh in his essay, “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions” *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 105-143.

²⁸ The paradigmatic example of this generational shift would be Allan Kaprow’s essay, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (composed in 1956 and published in *Art News* in 1958), a clarion call to artists seeking a way beyond abstract expressionist painting. Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 1-9.

limited to its appearance as language nor was it informed primarily by the histories of poetry and literature. It was a form of advanced musical notation that set the terms for an *allographic* and intermedia art practice based in an iterative model segregated from the author's hand, which stood in dramatic contrast to the prevailing basis of art (and art's value) in an autographic model—perhaps the earliest symptom of post-structuralist thought in artistic practice.²⁹ As Liz Kotz has indicated, post-structuralist theories of language were not received until later in the decade. When they did appear, their debts to post-serial and aleatoric music were readily acknowledged. In Roland Barthes' essay "From Work to Text" (1971/1977), it is the Text that is theorized after the model of the post-serial score and not vice versa:

We know that today post-serial music has radically altered the role of the "interpreter," who is called on to be in some sort the co-author of the score, completing it rather than giving it "expression." The Text is very much a score of this new kind: it asks of the reader a practical collaboration. Which is an important change, for who executes the work?³⁰

It is the necessary executability of the musical notation that marks its difference from the mere readerly qualities of the Text and accounts for Maciunas's two-dimensional schema in which the time-space arts of neo-dada instrumentalize abstraction toward an expression of the concrete.

Kotz explains the difference well:

In their direct invitation to enactment and performed response, event scores could seem like almost absurd literalizations of 1960s' critical claims for reading as an "activity of production." Yet the concrete, operational dimension of such scores engages an overt *transitivity*, a potential acting on materials, completely counter

²⁹ The terms allographic and autographic are borrowed from Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art*, which is critically engaged in Chapter 1. Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), 113-114.

³⁰ Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" (1971), *Image—Music—Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 155-164. Remarkably, Barthes' well-known "The Death of the Author" essay was first published in English in *Aspen* 5-6 (Fall/Winter 1967), an issue which also included scores and phonograph recordings of Cage's *Fontana Mix* and Morton Feldman's *The King of Denmark*, as well as a recording of Duchamp's lecture "The Creative Act" of 1956.

to the self-enclosed activity of the irreducibly plural “text” proposed by Roland Barthes in his 1967 call for a kind of writing, “intransitive” and “performative,” in which “only language acts, ‘performs,’ and not me.”³¹

The focus on the rise of language in art historical accounts of the 1960s, informed by structuralist and post-structuralist theory, has reinforced a persisting repression of the visual and material qualities of work from this period, despite efforts launched in the late 1980s around the emergent field of visual studies to reclaim the necessity of a semiotics of the image.³² My account is neither a rejection of linguistic readings, nor, on the other hand, a recuperation of Fluxus for the field of visual studies. However, it does propose a model for reading this work that recognizes the porousness of the textual and visual at this moment.³³ The proto-conceptual impulse in neo-avant-garde art of the 1960s announced itself through artists’ turn to graphic notations, diagrams, and sketches as much as it did through recourse to the written word. While experimental notations and event scores have been associated with the indexical and symbolic qualities of language, graphic notations schematic or diagrammatic in nature qualify as iconic

³¹ Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At*, 62 (italics hers). Kotz is citing Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image—Music—Text*, 143.

³² This debate can be traced through a number of works by W. J. T. Mitchell, including *Iconology: Images, Text, Ideology* (University of Chicago Press, 1986) and “The Pictorial Turn,” *Artforum* (March 1992): 89-94, as well as critiques of “semiotic idealism” such as Dieter Freundlieb, “Semiotic Idealism,” *Poetics Today* 9, no. 4 (1988): 807-841.

³³ Subtending my argument is the recognition that spatial mappings have always played a central role in structuralist theory even in regard to language. We need to think only of the crystalline diagrams of relation employed by figures from Lévi-Strauss to Lacan, or Rosalind Krauss’s turns and returns to the Klein group. This manner of spatial thinking tends to be suppressed when our model of a structuralist hermeneutics comes mainly from the linguistic structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure, which describes meaning as arising out of binary systems of difference. Correspondingly, art historical accounts that follow this model wholly identify the artwork with its appearance as text, whereas in Fluxus the text was integrated with graphics and indexed to a temporal unfolding. Hubert Damisch’s understanding of structuralism serves as a good reminder: “For me structuralism is not to be found in a binary model but in the Lévi-Straussian model, which is three-dimensional. It’s the model from the *Elementary Structure of Kinship* in which the relationships cannot be thought in two dimensions. In working on this book Lévi-Strauss constructed little cardboard models that are still in his study through which he thought about kinship relationships—about how women circulated, for example. You can’t map this two-dimensionally, you need three coordinates. You can’t think it without a coordinate that is the equivalent of time.” Hubert Damisch, “A Conversation with Hubert Damisch,” Yve-Alain Bois, Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, Hubert Damisch, *October* 85 (Summer 1998): 7.

representations, corresponding to a system of meaning that privileges analogies, relations, and correspondences over difference.³⁴ Nonetheless, Brecht's event scores have been mobilized as part of a repression of the iconic, metonymically standing in for the Fluxus score with the result of obscuring the wildly variant, highly graphic examples developed by other members of the group.³⁵

The innovation of the new notational forms introduced by Brecht and his peers was not limited to their turn to written language; in fact, many of them were highly graphic and visual. More consequential was their establishment of a score-based model of artistic practice that carried forth a set of problematics inherited from musical aesthetics and a new way of conceptualizing artistic form as not merely visual but fully *operative*. This model would become the basis of Fluxus activities from performance to objects.

The importation of a score-based model of artistic practice into the visual arts, which in the 1950s was still securely based in the production and circulation of unique, precious objects, entailed a fundamental redefinition of what constituted the work of art. And yet if Brecht's event was a crucial move toward a practice more conceptual in nature, materiality was not disavowed. Material form would be arrived at, but differently. If one art historical reading has credited the event scores' flexibility and iterativity to the material and conceptual properties of language, language was neither the beginning nor end of works like *Drip Music*, for there were at least as many performance and object versions of this work made before and after the writing of the text. Preliminary sketches of the work that appear in Brecht's notebook of April 1959 reveal the artist

³⁴ See Frederik Stjernfelt, "How to Learn More: An Apology for a Strong Concept of Iconicity," *Diagrammatology: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Phenomenology, Ontology, and Semiotics* (New York: Springer, 2011).

³⁵ The astonishing visual variety of Fluxus scores has been surveyed in Hendricks, *Fluxus Scores and Instructions: The Transformative Years*.

coming to the idea first through material forms (Fig. I.22). In a sketch titled *Burette Music*, named after the laboratory mechanism which enables the precise control of the rate of liquid flow—known in scientific parlance as *flux*—the artist depicts a contraption in which droplets of water released from a burette would travel through crumpled foil set into a drinking glass.³⁶ In yet another version detailed on the page, water would tumble down strips of paper and foil which section off a string like the tail of a kite. Years later, a photograph taken in 1964 at the New York Fluxshop/Fluxhall, a second-floor loft space at 359 Canal Street that operated for a time as the group’s headquarters, shows a wet rag hung over the handle of a watering can and an adjacent, misspelled sign reading “Goerge Brecht Drip Music,” seemingly in the looping handwriting of French Fluxus associate Ben Vautier (Fig. I.23). A strange hybrid between sculpture and performance, this arrangement of props seems to be a sculpture that performs, or conversely, a performance in sculptural form. Brecht, too, would make a series of performative sculptures, also called *Drip Music*, including a 1966 version in which a burette is mounted on a wooden stand to release water into a bottle below (Fig. I.24). Even later, the artist fabricated a version for the garden of collector and publisher of multiples Wolfgang Feelisch, in which a tall metal pipe surmounted by a petite faucet could be adjusted to drip water at varying frequencies into a bowl on the ground. The work’s ludicrous tallness carried forth the drama of Higgins and Maciunas’s performances (Fig. I.25).

While we cannot reduce Fluxus to an art of linguistic proposition it is fair to say that

³⁶ From June 1958, at the start of his participation in Cage’s experimental composition course, Brecht kept detailed notebooks of his ideas for artworks and performances. These notebooks continue well after he left the course in August 1959. The connection between Brecht’s sketches for *Burette Music* and his later event score *Drip Music* was first identified by Gabrielle Knapstein in *George Brecht: Events: Über die Event-Partituren von George Brecht aus den Jahren 1959-1963* (Berlin: Wiens-Verlag, 1999), 29. Douglas Kahn has provided his own archaeology of drips in avant-garde art and music in “Water Flows and Flux,” in *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 242-289.

Fluxus practice aspired to the conditions of literature—if, that is, we take our definition of literature from Barthes. For Barthes, literature was the utopian, “stubbornly unrealistic” project of representing the real by means of makeshift systems of abstraction.³⁷ The Fluxus project sought to wear thin the divide between art and life through a dialectical engagement with abstract forms and means only so that the artwork could more fully identify with concrete objects and experiences. As Maciunas explained in his Wuppertal lecture, “Since artificiality implies human pre-determination, contrivance, a truer concretist *rejects pre-determination of final form* in order to perceive the reality of nature, the course of which, like that of man himself is largely indeterminate and unpredictable.”³⁸ Grounded in the score model, Fluxus was an attempt to map the concrete of reality back onto itself through the abstract construct of art. As Robert Filliou would succinctly put it: “Art is what makes life more interesting than art.”

* * *

Staged at the turn of the sixties, Seitz’s *The Art of Assemblage* exhibition formally introduced a young generation of American and European artists in the US and Europe whose work revived early 20th-century Dada and Surrealist strategies centered on the found object. This revival was part of a critical response to Abstract Expressionist painting, modernism’s mandate of the separation of mediums, and the expanding fetishization and commoditization of art. The neo-avant-garde work acquired a variety of names, among them Happenings, New Realism, Pop, Minimalism, and, of course, Fluxus, a group whose turn to the everyday was uniquely

³⁷ Roland Barthes, “Lecture,” trans. Richard Howard, *October* 8 (Spring 1979), 8.

³⁸ Maciunas, “Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art,” 157.

performative. Novel ways of engaging the spectator were tested on every front via a multitude of new object-formats, suggesting that the “crisis of the object” first declared by André Breton in 1936 did not truly see its moment until this time.³⁹ The artwork was enlarged into an engulfing environment, it was made to move, it solicited the viewer’s touch, it was made more widely distributed and available, it was brought out into the streets, and finally, it sought to evade or abandon the art world altogether. For their part Fluxus artists scripted scores for everyday actions and constructed assemblages of quotidian objects with which audiences were invited to interact. Informed by the iterative structure of music and positioned against the longstanding ideal of the artwork as the unique, precious creation of a singular author-genius, Fluxus’s collectively produced artworks were made from the dross of everyday life and maintained a shifting, transmutable material status. This radical object model—what I call the “artwork in flux”—posed a profound threat to conventions of artistic ontology and value and ensured Fluxus’s marginalization. The artwork in flux was a complex marriage of conceptual form with concrete materiality. It reconfigured not only the artwork as a material entity, but also artistic authorship, labor, and the systems of art’s distribution in ways that have been carried forth by later generations of artists and which now, post-Internet, can be seen as newly prescient for their time.

This dissertation provides a historical narrative and theorization of Fluxus’s foundational contribution to the late-20th-century transformation of the object-status of art. To this end, focus is given to three key figures: George Maciunas (Lithuanian-American, 1931-1978), George

³⁹ André Breton, “Crise de l’objet,” *Cahiers d’art* 1-2 (May 1936): 21-26. Jeffrey Weiss has recently offered a latter-century narrative of the crisis of the object extending from Minimalism and conceptualism to the present that, in typical fashion, omits Fluxus altogether. Weiss, “Things Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art,” *Artforum* (March 2013): 221-229.

Brecht (American, 1926-2008), and Robert Filliou (French, 1926-1987). The chapters trace chronologically these artists' development of three central Fluxus formats—the event score, Fluxbox, and Fluxshop—as they confronted established object categories pertaining to the mediums of music, painting, and sculpture; the emergent category of the multiple; and prevailing economic models of the commodity and the store or gallery. This study provides a new account of Fluxus and of a crucial moment within the paradigm shift in postwar artistic practice toward the conceptual, ephemeral, and performative art forms that have come to define the post-medium condition of postmodern and contemporary art.

My project contributes to revisionist art historical studies that have reclaimed the 1960s neo-avant-gardes, once denigrated as a lesser reprise of early 20th century strategies, as a crucial turning point in postwar art history when visual artists, poets, musicians, and dancers worked in close proximity and collaboration. My focus on the object in relation to Fluxus, as opposed to existing accounts which privilege the group's performance practice, is aimed at furthering our understanding of the group's role in this important intermedia moment. Fluxus works have been read either in phenomenological terms as means of provoking perceptually transformative experience or as a text-based, proto-conceptual art. The event score, for example, would be seen primarily as a mediating device that indexes our attention to everyday phenomena. In contrast, this project addresses the *material* nature of these works and their implications for the future of artistic objecthood and for our notion of what constitutes the work as a material entity. While art history has only recently affirmed the importance of Fluxus in the history of postwar art, we still lack a thorough analysis of the place of the *object* and its complicated existence across the collective's diverse output. This lack has become only more apparent as Fluxus works

increasingly enter museum collections *as objects*, however ephemeral they may be. What happens to the art object when it is pressured by unrestrained exchange and translation, collective authorship and touch? What happens to our notions of authorship and artistic labor? What happens to the artist as subject?

Each chapter that follows is devoted to a moment in the life of Fluxus, to a format that advanced the Fluxus project, and to the artist whose practice did the most to advance that format. The project as a whole is not a monograph on any individual artist, and it does not aim at a totalizing or definitive reading of Fluxus. Any scholar of Fluxus must concede the latter project to be impossible by the design of the artists themselves. However, the difficulty of summarizing the Fluxus project (like the inscrutability of Dada and Surrealism in former times) and its overshadowing by late-'60s conceptual practices that reinstated the singularity and intentionality of the artist as author has resulted in the group's unfortunate marginalization in histories of postwar art. My aim of articulating a coherent Fluxus project is an attempt to situate the group art historically in a meaningful, lasting, and—in regard to histories of postwar art—profoundly central way. While in the chapters that follow I often speak of Fluxus in terms of the outsider, of gaps and of holes, this is not to further the collective's marginal status but to insist that such positioning was a deliberate intervention on the part of the artists and their work even if the visibility of the critical effects of their practice have taken over fifty years for us to see.

In acknowledgement that the emergence of Fluxus is heavily indebted to the work and teaching of experimental composer John Cage as well as to music history, theory, and aesthetics, my first chapter ("The Fluxus Diagram: The New York School and Graphic Notation"), a prequel of sorts, provides an archaeology of graphic notation in experimental music since the 1950s in

order to fully articulate the implications of the event score model taken up in 1958 by artists who would form the core of Fluxus. Beginning with the first highly spatialized, grid-based graphic notations of Morton Feldman produced in 1950, the chapter applies an art historical lens to the highly visual notations of Feldman and “New York School” colleagues Earle Brown and John Cage in order to isolate a diagrammatic or diagram-like order of visualization that links them to other significant moments in the history of art, including Kandinsky’s theories of form and drawing, El Lissitzky’s *Prouns*, and Dada’s diagrams or mechanomorphs. In these diagram-like works, the organizing principle of form is owed to a structure of force relations maintained despite changes in scale and materials, rather than the conventional art historical tropes of visual mimesis or composition. What these graphic notations or musical diagrams singularly impart to the art object is the operative, iterative, allographic nature of the musical work—that is, the fact that they are meant to be performed or to be put into operation, over and over again. This understanding of form behaving in the manner of a guiding diagram for a multitude of performed or materialized manifestations becomes the founding “diagram” of the Fluxus object based on a score model. However, even as New York School graphic notations are reconsidered under the figure of the diagram, this chapter examines where and how, by 1958, certain scores, particularly Cage’s highly indeterminate *Variations* series, begin to depart from that model. Alongside Cagean models of chance, it argues for the importance of Brown’s notion of ambiguity to the event score, particularly as seen in the works of Brecht. Eventually we see the score model released from its attachment to a founding text and turned into an operation or activity of reading in which any material whatsoever may be appropriated as a notation to be interpreted.

The second chapter (“The Fluxus Event Score: George Brecht and the Notational Object”) takes a focused look at the fundamental interrelation between Fluxus scores and objects. Taking as its primary example the work of George Brecht, I argue against accounts which have tended either to isolate the two modes or to claim a chronological succession in which scoring practices were eclipsed by the production of objects.⁴⁰ A return to Brecht’s participation in Cage’s experimental composition courses of 1958-1959, coincident with his first New York gallery exhibition, offers an exemplary view onto the dialectical co-development in his practice of 1) scores characterized by an object-like quality of language and 2) objects, designated here as “notational objects,” that suggest score-like qualities of enaction. Expanding upon the first, the neutral language that came to characterize Fluxus scores is discussed in relation to Dick Higgins’s notions of the “blank image” and “exemplativism” as against Robert Morris’s notion of “blank form” associated with Minimalism. In regard to the second, the interactive, performative qualities of the Fluxus object are owed to the score’s enactive logic even when a score may not be present—a unique advancement of the logic of the readymade according to the Fluxus philosophy of the “concrete” that refuses to divorce the everyday object from its original functions.

Chapter three (“The Fluxbox Multiple: George Maciunas and the Transitional Commodity”) focuses on the central format of Fluxus object production, the Fluxbox multiple, typically a small container enclosing castoffs and trinkets that can be scuttled about within its compartmentalized interior. Maciunas, who saw Brecht’s scores as paradigmatic for Fluxus,

⁴⁰ Recent scholarship has worked to distance Brecht from Fluxus even as his event scores and object arrangements became the very models for the group’s performance practice and material production. See Robinson, “From Abstraction to Model: In the Event of George Brecht & The Conceptual Turn in the Art of the 1960s” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2008) and Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At*.

applied the iterative quality of the score to the invention of a format that imagined the artwork as an interactive, miniature collection. In this chapter, I argue that the Fluxbox manifests the event score's diagrammatic principles of connectivity and transmutability by promoting the endless exercise of matching objects like-to-like, as if difference could eventually be made to disappear. For example, when we open Ben Vautier's *Fluxholes* (1964) as designed/interpreted by Maciunas, we do not know whether we will find metal washers, straws, a sink strainer, or a photograph showing the cavernous bell of a tuba. Fluxboxes demonstrate a boundless, promiscuously taxonomic model of thought that encourages us to locate ever more holes in our surroundings and defies the very principle of containability that the boxes seemingly propose. Moreover, we constantly encounter holes not only in Vautier's boxes but across countless works: holes to look through, holes to penetrate, holes through which things may enter or fall out. This should not be surprising, for one definition of Fluxus appropriated by Maciunas for his 1963 manifesto reads: "A flowing or fluid discharge from the bowels or other part; esp., an excessive and morbid discharge; as, the bloody *flux*, or dysentery." As a corollary to the Fluxboxes' logic of endless connectivity and indiscriminate taxonomies, I argue that these many Fluxus holes manifest transitional experiences and, to borrow a psychoanalytic concept, behave as transitional objects. They also point to the threat of entropy, absence and loss. They call attention to the absolute material presence of the thing-at-hand, reminding us that the artwork like the body will eventually deteriorate and disappear. Thus, if the Fluxus artwork seeks to evade a finite materiality by its dispersal through a network of forms, it also provides a powerful model of the Fluxus subject: intersubjective and mortal, it gains meaning and value through its participation in a system. A discussion of Maciunas's publishing activities will provide the opportunity to address

the work of other important Fluxus artists that have not yet figured into the project, including Knowles, Patterson, Vautier, Robert Watts, Dieter Roth, Ay-O, Mieko Shiomi, and Takako Saito. By way of analyzing the Fluxboxes, this chapter will also address the format's relationship to the medium of sculpture, the emergent market for artist multiples, and commodity culture of the 1960s.

While Brecht and Maciunas have figured centrally in existing studies of Fluxus, the contributions of French artist Robert Filliou have been woefully overlooked. Trained as an economist, Filliou's aesthetic theories were elaborated through writings and artworks such as his suspense poem series and the sculpture *Object Without Object* (1969), after which this dissertation is named. My final chapter ("Objects Without Object: Robert Filliou and the Unworking of Fluxus") visits one of the temporary, international outposts of Fluxus with which Filliou was involved: a mail-order art shop in the south of France called La Cédille qui Sourit (The Cedilla that Smiles) that Filliou and Brecht ran together from 1965 to 1968. Brecht and Filliou's activities at the Cédille will be discussed alongside Filliou's aesthetic theories, writings and artworks, which I argue are a crucial component in the Fluxus project to refashion the art object and its means and systems of both production and *distribution* in the postwar period. While many of Filliou's undertakings (alone and with Brecht) were clearly parodies of the art and commodities markets, I will argue that they in fact amounted to a radical gesture of dropping out, a seemingly un-Fluxus-like moment of *non*-participation that led to alternative forms of connectivity that could not register in advanced artistic circles of New York. In collaboration with Brecht, Filliou attempted to forge an alternative system of ethics counter to the logic of capitalist exchange. If Maciunas's Fluxboxes can be seen as models of the Fluxus subject,

Filliou’s “objects without object” modeled the precariously disjointed yet surprisingly robust network of Fluxus artists and practices, a capacious community without community that has continued to reproduce itself into the present. To this end, this chapter will consider Filliou’s Fluxus work under the conceptual rubric of *désœuvrement* (unworking, idleness) from the work of French theorists Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy, which posits the political potential of unproductivity and its relationship to the absence—death—that lay at the heart of every community. For despite Maciunas’s attempts to build vast artist communes to house his cohort, the Cédille exemplified the social solution more realistically adopted by Fluxus artists by the late 1960s and marked the beginning of the end of Fluxus as Maciunas had imagined it.

* * *

We began with *Drip Music* because it demonstrates the problems and possibilities of form established in Fluxus work from the very start and carried through the incredibly diverse array of the group’s practices. For in the wake of Fluxus, the artwork would no longer be a singular object made by a singular individual in a singular form out of singular materials of a singular medium. No, against all of that, against every conventionality of aesthetic value that has accrued to the category of art since its separation from Church and State, against the inviolable categories of Painting and Sculpture, against the neo-Kantian ideal of modern art’s medium specificity, the Fluxus artwork would be multiple, relational, transitive and criminally ambiguous. This dissertation will unpack what all that means, but for now, consider this: Beyond *Drip Music*’s drawn-out gestation period, 1959-1962, the work would continue to be worked and unworked

through various presentations in the form of texts, objects, and actions, a kind of artwork on slow-release that would disclose aspects of itself drip by drip, one droplet of actuality at a time. And like so many Fluxus works, as we will see, it has continued to reveal itself in this way, generously, relentlessly, perhaps even a bit annoyingly, without end.

Emblematic of the Fluxus artwork, *Drip Music* has become a continuous flow or flux, emerging as a continuous series of appearances across multiple spatio-temporal and material coordinates. Each time the work has been performed, each time that Brecht crafted a new apparatus under this name, each time someone would recognize the dripping song of freshly watered flowerpots (as Brecht's mother would do, to the artist's delight), the artwork showed to the world another dimension of its formal possibility, another valence of its potential meaning.⁴¹ The event score made this possible. It enabled a dialectical marriage of the abstract and concrete, a turn to language only so that the artwork could be perpetually remade for the present, a work enabled by the score format to remain in-becoming, forever as-yet. And this artwork-in-flux would—or *will*, we should say—never be final, for someone or something will drip tomorrow, and the day after that, and so on and so on and so on. Without end. No actualization shall be prioritized over another, and yet each is, in its own right, correct and singular. As Brecht himself once assured us, “No catastrophes are possible.”⁴²

The rule of such deviant, score-based works is contradictory. An iterative work should become better understood the more realizations of it that exist, and yet its complete revelation

⁴¹ In a letter from Marianne Filliou to Robert Filliou, she writes, “This afternoon, the mail arrived at the gallery with a marvelous letter from George's mother, who said she has a piece like his drip music—five flower pots different sizes that she washed with water from a hose, that dripped in different tones from her window sill.” Brecht's handwriting interjects: “She's starting to understand what I'm about!!!!” Late fall 1966, Hanns Sohm Archive.

⁴² George Brecht, “Notes on shipping and exhibiting MEDICINE CABINET (ALTERNATIVE TITLES: MEDICINE CHEST, CABINET),” letter to the Museum of Modern Art, 1960. Reprinted in Robinson, *George Brecht: Events: A Heterospective*, 230.

can only be approached asymptotically since no number of realizations will ever exhaust the possibilities of a topological form initiated as an unforfeitable potential object. This points to the paradoxical operation at the heart of Fluxus: as connections multiply and one action or object is rendered equivalent to or exchangeable with another, the artwork dissipates, devalues, perhaps almost disappears. Works are held in perpetual transformation, subjected to purposeless or object-less play, progressively *unmade* through time.

Andreas Huyssen once ventured to describe Fluxus as “the master-code of postmodernism” in that its relationship to late capitalist culture was apolitically affirmative and that it was the first postwar art movement to concede the failure of avant-garde strategies of the early 20th century.⁴³ In this view, Fluxus responded to the postwar institutionalization and capitalization of avant-garde art with a self-defeating, pathetic mimesis, eagerly taking on the task of commoditizing and clownishly promoting itself. We are left to wonder what lasting models of artistic practice Fluxus might have contributed to the field of postwar art.

The answer is this: the Fluxus contribution lies in artists’ adaptation and extension of the score format into what we might call a *score model* for object production that allowed for the transformation and deregulation of the art object. While Brecht’s notion of the event began as a personal language, the score as a format—really, a language of thought in its own right—allowed for Brecht’s event concept to become available and transmissible to other artists. It is, in fact, this score model that provided the operative ground for the event’s appearance, a model crucial to understanding how visual artists’ turn to scoring practices at the turn of the 1960s transformed the art object in the nascent years of postmodernism before the rise of post-Minimalism,

⁴³ Andreas Huyssen, “Back to the Future: Fluxus in Context,” in Armstrong and Rothfuss, *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, 142.

conceptualism, media art, and deconstruction would fully announce the post-medium condition of contemporary art.⁴⁴ As described by Rosalind Krauss, we have arrived at a moment in which the artist's medium is defined not around a set of fixed materials but as a recursive structure made and remade by the artist in a kind of rule-based improvisation.⁴⁵ My project argues that Fluxus—not Pop or Minimalism, as we are commonly told—marked the crux of this transformation.⁴⁶

Fluxus artists were deeply aware of their transgressive cross-pollinations. The October 1962 announcement for their Festival of Misfits in London explained, “We make music which is not Music, poems that are not Poetry, paintings that are not Painting, but music that may fit poetry, poetry that may fit paintings, paintings that may fit...something, something which gives us the chance to enjoy a happy, nonspecialized fantasy.”⁴⁷ This reconceptualization of the artist's relationship to his or her medium is, as we shall see, indebted to the score format, which laid the ground for a new kind of artwork-in-flux capable of evading established categories of materiality while paradoxically upholding its status as art. It proposed a way beyond the rigid conceptions of medium and form upheld in Clement Greenberg's influential theory of modernism and provided a pathway for art to engage the multimedia landscape of the early postmodern moment, a logic in which artistic engagements with the phenomenologies of time and space became deeply

⁴⁴ See Rosalind Krauss's two volumes “*A Voyage On the North Sea*”: *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000) and *Under Blue Cup* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

⁴⁵ Pamela M. Lee parses the meaning of *recursion* in terms of the broader cultural context of the 1960s in *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 59-62.

⁴⁶ Hal Foster, “The Crux of Minimalism,” *The Return of the Real: Art and Theory at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 34-69.

⁴⁷ Festival of Misfits announcement, October 1962, cited in Williams, *My Life in Flux—and Vice Versa*, 62-63.

interlinked.⁴⁸ And yet the score model proposed here opposes readings that submit Fluxus works to the synaesthiac elisions of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or reduce them to an exercise in the translatability and transmutability of language without regard to material specificity. The broader historical implication of the project at hand is that Fluxus contributed in a major and heretofore under-acknowledged way to establishing a logic for the kinds of contemporary practices we have seen in recent decades in which artists move fluidly between an array of formats, guided by a unifying conceptual trope.⁴⁹

Existing accounts of Fluxus have argued that Brecht's notion of the event prepared the way for a work of art that, based in a post-structuralist understanding of language, is participatory or interactive, structured and thereby constituted by the beholder's experience. The project at hand asks instead the question of what becomes of the artwork as an object, and in turn, what becomes of artistic form in the wake of such a transformation. For if anything is certain, in spite of the Fluxus group's claims to an anti-art or anti-object practice, the object in Fluxus in the wake of the event score did not simply disappear. Rather, the score model provided a framework through which the artwork could survive as an entity through myriad translations at the same time that its variability enacted a dismantling, unworking, and reconstruction of the very meaning of form.

After the score model, artistic form would not be rendered visually, it would be scored. It

⁴⁸ Fredric Jameson has argued that postmodernism was marked by the onset of a concern with space that eclipsed modernist thinkers' concern with time. This was arguably the case from the perspective of avant-garde and experimental music; however, from the perspective of art history, it could be argued rather that the shift from modernism to postmodernism was marked by the increasing perception of the art object as a *temporal* experience. Jameson, "The End of Temporality," *Critical Inquiry* 29, no. 4 (Summer 2003): 695-718. See also Lee, *Chronophobia*. Of note here is the founding of Fluxus in 1962, the year in which, as Thierry de Duve has argued, Greenberg was forced to confront the limits of his own theory in the example of the readymade monochrome of the blank canvas. De Duve, "The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas," *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

⁴⁹ This phenomena has been described by George Baker as a "dual articulation" or "radical sharing" of forms in his essay "Reanimations (I)" *October* 104 (Spring 2003): 29-70. More recently, David Joselit has argued that such artworks have assimilated characteristics of the digital image broadly speaking, in particular its ability to migrate through different formats. Joselit, *After Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

would become transitive and operational, based in the exacerbation of musical notation's inherent yet traditionally repressed qualities of relationality, mobility, and ambiguity. It has been the score that has remained the most visible and robust Fluxus format, emerging first in relation to performance activities and then adopted as the template for the group's object production and as a crucial instrument in its ongoing organization. The score provided artists nothing less than an alternative model of form that would become the operative model for the Fluxus object and a radical, parallel notion of the Fluxus subject. Form is mobilized so that it may wend its way through different objects and authors. Nevertheless, form can be traced, even if in order to trace it, it must be defined differently.

The Fluxus Diagram: The New York School and Graphic Notation

The Event Score

As we have seen with the example of *Drip Music (Drip Event)*, the event scores of George Brecht are minimal, ambiguous texts. Typographically arranged by means of bullet points and parentheses, they read as performance instructions or experiments in prose. What began as thought pieces scribbled in his notebooks of 1958-1959 were printed modestly on small pieces of paper and sent to friends in the mail beginning in 1961. At this early moment, the scores also appeared in literary journals, in the ground-breaking compendium of experimental notation *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, and were performed at proto-Fluxus concerts. Soon they were included in Fluxus publications and collected in the edition *Water Yam* (1963), a matchbox-like cardboard container enclosing 73 of Brecht's score cards in loose arrangement.¹ Whether imperative or merely propositional, the scores involve the arrangement of objects and actions in spatial and temporal relationships. Above all they are open and generative, embodying the potential for an immense range of actions to take place in their wake.

Brecht's ideas surrounding the event coalesced gradually in the latter half of the 1950s, achieving a critical breakthrough with his participation in avant-garde composer John Cage's experimental composition courses at the New School in the summers of 1958 and 1959. By 1960

¹ My description of *Water Yam* is based on a first-edition example containing 73 scores held in the Jean Brown papers. The box is cardboard and designed like a large, sliding matchbox of 15 x 17.3 x 4.6 cm. The number of scores included in *Water Yam* differs from printing to printing, and it is also likely, given their assembly by multiple people in multiple locations, that there are differences in the number of scores contained in different *Water Yam* boxes of the same edition.

Brecht had written his first pieces explicitly called “events.” His innovation with the event score format was to imagine the artwork as a perceptual event framed by the artist, a multi-dimensional, multi-sensorial phenomenon carved out of lived space-time in order that it may be recast as art. Seizing upon this aspect of Brecht’s events, in early 1963 leading Fluxus organizer George Maciunas wrote to the artist that he considered the events “temporal readymades.”² Indeed, the Brechtian event was an advancement upon the Duchampian readymade, liberated from its affiliation with the everyday object and keyed to address experience in general as art.

For the entirety of his career, Brecht continued to refine various dimensions of the event concept, devising ever new ways of articulating the idea through texts and arrangements of readymades and slightly altered found objects. Meanwhile, the event score was adopted widely by Fluxus artists to organize performances and the production of temporally inflected or performative objects. If the event remains the central term in Brecht’s individual practice, it was rather the format of the score that made such an event-based practice possible for other artists, introducing a set of aesthetic implications that had significant repercussions for the conception and evolution of form in artistic practice in the 1960s. It would certainly, at least, have profound implications for the emergence and organization of what has become known as Fluxus.

If the event was the idea, the score was the vehicle, entailing a history, structure and ontology rooted in the field of music. It is widely understood that Fluxus was born under the influence of the work and teachings of Cage—we are pointed again and again to Cage’s turn to chance and indeterminacy—and yet it has remained less clear what the larger and quite

² Letter from Brecht to Maciunas, c. early 1963, Hanns Sohm Archive. The readymade aspect of Brecht’s events distinguished them from the more theatrical Happenings orchestrated by Allan Kaprow, although the two genres—Happening and Event—have been often grouped together. And although Brecht’s events were presented in concert hall settings during the 1962-63 Fluxus festivals, in Brecht’s mind it was not necessary that they be presented in this manner or even performed publicly at all.

problematic terrain of music at that moment imparted to the fledgling collective, whose project was founded upon a format called not an instruction or a script or a poem, but an event *score*.

The aesthetic problems and possibilities of the score format provided the key terms for a deeply consequential model for artists seeking new modes of production and practice in the late 1950s and into the 1960s: a model for artistic production that would be based on the operative structure of the work of music—iterative and allographic rather than singular and autographic. This “score model” capitalized upon musical notation’s inherent qualities of mobility, ambiguity, and relationality, providing an alternative model of form that would inform the design and production of Fluxus objects. Form in Fluxus is mobilized, not dematerialized, with the score functioning as a mediating force that shuttles form between the abstract and concrete. We shall turn, then, to developments of experimental music notation in the 1950s to show how certain aspects of the musical score were retained in the the event score format as it coalesced in 1962, the year zero of Fluxus.

The Spatialization of Notation

So much space equals so much time.
—John Cage

At the time of Brecht’s encounter with Cage in the New School class of 1958, Cage, along with peers Morton Feldman, Earle Brown, and Christian Wolff, known as The New York School, were in the midst of a project to completely renovate music from composition to performance.³ Already in 1952, Cage’s *4’33”*, a work composed of three movements of silence, had done two things: redefine music as pure duration and subject the final form of the work to

³ Important also to this group was the figure of David Tudor, a versatile pianist sympathetic to the composers’ experimentations, who approached the performance of their work with utter seriousness and commitment.

chance (inasmuch as the piece is constituted in performance by the incidental sounds occurring within its timeframe). Musical notation in turn had undergone a series of radical transformations and breakdowns. The New York School sought ways beyond what philosopher and music theorist Lydia Goehr has referred to as the Beethoven paradigm—Western music’s basis in the composition of masterworks defined by an expressive, pleasing, teleological, and thematically organized tonalism and which exist as discrete entities composed by individual authors to be performed in dedicated concert halls according to scores that govern the works like a law.⁴ In the language of music aesthetics, the performance “complies” with the score or “belongs to” it; it is the score’s possession.⁵

As Goehr demonstrates, this highly regulated understanding of the musical “work,” which dates to 1800, coincides with the inauguration of the modern notion of the artwork as a unique, original object produced by an individual creator. Under this paradigm, the musical work, whose replication in performance is guided by the 19th-century novelist and music critic E. T. A. Hoffmann’s notion of *Werktreue*, is conventionally understood as “a composer’s unique, objectified expression, a public and permanently existing artifact made up of musical elements. . . . A work is fixed with respect, at least, to the properties indicated in the score and it is repeatable in performances. Performances themselves are transitory sound events intended to present a work by complying as closely as possible with the given notational specifications.”⁶ Its origins in this moment, Goehr explains, are manifold:

(1) the articulation of the concepts of Fine Art and of the autonomous

⁴ Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 186. See also Roman Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity*, trans. Adam Czerniawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁶ Lydia Goehr, “Being True to the Work,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 55.

work of art in the mid to late eighteenth century and the subsequent inclusion of music under these concepts; (2) the emancipation of musical sound from poetry and the religious word, and the subsequent rise of absolute or purely instrumental music; (3) the specific and highly complex interplay between Enlightenment, Romantic, and Idealist thought notably in German and French aesthetic theory; and (4) the emergence of a new sort of marketplace for musical works.⁷

This paradigm is exemplified by the “enduring products” of composers such as Schubert and Beethoven, the latter of whom had, in Cage’s opinion, “shipwrecked the art [of music] on an island of decadence”—an island on which it remained until well into the 20th century.⁸

By mid-century, and coincident with Cage’s coming of age as a composer, the system of inscription for metrical staff notation was incommensurate with musical practices which had begun to incorporate the entire spectrum of sound via electronics and other unconventional instruments (*e.g.* Cage’s prepared pianos, which introduced screws, bolts, and rubber slabs into the body of the instrument). Cage anticipated the problem in a manifesto-like lecture, “The Future of Music: Credo,” delivered at the Seattle Arts Society in 1937: “The present methods of writing music, principally those which employ harmony and its reference to particular steps in the field of sound, will be inadequate for the composer, who will be faced with the entire field of sound.”⁹ The introduction of magnetic tape, for instance, gave composers greater control over all aspects of the composition and performance process at the same time that it recast music simply

⁷ Goehr, “Being True to the Work,” 55. For a critique of the socio-historical limitations of Goehr’s analysis see Roger W. H. Savage, “Social *Werktreue* and the Musical Work’s Independent Afterlife,” *The European Legacy* 9, no. 4 (2004): 515-524; and Savage, “Social *Werktreue* and the Subjectivization of Aesthetics,” in *Hermeneutics and Music Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁸ John Cage, “In Defense of Satie” (1948), in *John Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Praeger, 1970), 81.

⁹ John Cage, “The Future of Music: Credo” (1937), in *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 4.

as “the organization of sound.”¹⁰

The score’s obsolescence in the face of new sound technologies freed it from the burden of being the primary transmission vehicle for musical works. As the emergence of photography in the 19th century had instigated an ontological crisis in painting, the new recording technologies revived debates about the ontology of the musical work and the necessity for its representation in live performance. Richard Maxfield, a student of Cage who taught electronic composition at the New School, was one to defend the new level of control:

Working directly with sound with his new sensitive electronic tools, [the composer] has no further need of the universal but obsolete symbols on score paper (do-it-yourself performance recipes suitable for voluminous publication). By this means, his terminal art product is no longer just plan but definitive realization in recorded form which can be trotted out like a piece of sculpture to show anybody. It thus becomes far easier to present his work publicly or privately not having to depend on the patronizing publisher and the dutiful performer.¹¹

Cage, on the other had, seeking not to be replaced by an ensemble of machines, saw the dystopian limits of a fully administered electronic music and pursued the other line toward complete indeterminacy—not to embrace a more rigid control over form but to further loosen the relation of identity between composer, score, and performance in an exploration of the limits of form and compositional intentionality, so that music could more properly “imitate nature in her manner of operation.”¹²

In a process of theoretical and practice-based deconstruction, Cage broke down musical

¹⁰ Cage, “The Future of Music: Credo,” 3. See also Kotz, “Proliferating Scores and the Autonomy of Writing,” in *Words to Be Looked At*, 13-57; and Alex Ross, “Infernal Machines: How Recordings Changed Music,” *Listen to This* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 55-68.

¹¹ Richard Maxfield, “Composers, Performance and Publication,” in *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, ed. Young.

¹² Cage, *Silence*, 194. This notion is borrowed from Ananda K. Coomaraswamy’s text, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (New York: Dover, 1956). On the quality of anarchic multiplicity in Cage’s work see Branden Joseph, “Chance, Indeterminacy, Multiplicity,” in Julia Robinson, et. al., *The Anarchy of Silence: John Cage and Experimental Art* (Barcelona: Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2009), 210-238.

composition and its basis in sound into their component parts. Musical composition was defined as a combination of separately determined parameters of structure, form, material, and method. Sound, he reasoned, could be measured in five continuously scalar dimensions: frequency (pitch), duration, amplitude (volume), timbre, and morphology.¹³ The most fundamental element, common to both sound and silence, would be duration—“4’33” (1952) was Cage’s most succinct demonstration of this. The next problem to be raised was how to notate this new music.

The moment of 1958-1962 is commonly seen from the perspective of art history as marking a radical temporalization of the arts, giving rise to Happenings, Fluxus, kinetic art, and other forms of performative and interactive practices. But while time and its various avatars—theatricality, process, kineticism, destruction, and decay—launched an irreversible crisis in the visual arts, a contemporaneous crisis was brought to the field of music by the incursion of spatialization in multiple forms. The postwar availability of magnetic audio tape allowed for the measurement of musical time in inches rather than the metrical bars of staff notation. Electronic and aleatoric compositions began to be notated in highly visual, newly invented graphic systems. Performers and audience members were subjected to experimental arrangements in the performance space, ensuring that there would not be any one ideal point of reception. During Cage’s famed *Theater Piece No. 1*, the historic first Happening which took place at the experimental arts school Black Mountain College in 1952, the audience was arranged in a full circle around the performers while imagery was projected onto the ceiling, texts were recited from the tops of ladders, and performers circled in and out of the crowd. In 1958, Karlheinz

¹³ John Cage, “Experimental Music” (1957), *Silence*, 9. The course listing for Cage’s experimental composition course made reference to this definition: “Whereas conventional theories of harmony, counterpoint and musical form are based on the pitch or frequency component to sound, this course offers problems and solutions in the field of composition based on other components of sound: duration, timbre, amplitude and morphology.” Brecht, “Footnotes,” *George Brecht—Notebooks*, ed. Dieter Daniels and Hermann Braun, vol. 1 (Cologne: Walther König, 1991), n.p.

Stockhausen and others would lecture on the spatialization of sound in Germany at the Darmstadt Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik (IFNM), an important gathering site for composers and performers of new music. In his lecture “Music in Space,” Stockhausen declared, “more and more...all musical ideas are becoming increasingly spatial.”¹⁴

Conventional notation’s symbolic alphabet, organized toward the articulation of discrete pitches, was seen as inadequate for representing the physical reality of sound, as Cage’s experience working with magnetic tape in works such as *Williams Mix* (1952) demonstrated (Fig. 1.1). In contrast to magnetic tape, which physicalizes time as a spatial continuum, conventional notation was likened by Cage to an awkward walk across steppingstones: “This cautious stepping is not characteristic of the possibility of magnetic tape, which is revealing to us that musical action or existence can occur at any point or along any line or curve or what have you in total sound-space.”¹⁵ The most obvious way to score a tape music piece would be simply to measure the tape, replacing a symbolic measure based on metrical time with a straightforward

¹⁴ Karlheinz Stockhausen, “Music in Space,” trans. Ruth Koenig, *Die Reihe 5* (Bryn Mawr, PA: T. Presser in association with Universal Edition, 1961), 70; originally published as “Musik im Raum” in *Die Reihe 5* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1959). So too did literature at this moment acquire a newfound awareness of the spatial in dialogue with developments in music, enabled in part by the contiguous orbits of poets and musicians associated with Black Mountain College. The poet Charles Olson, who was one of the performers in *Theater Piece No. 1* to orate from a ladder-top, published in 1950 the manifesto-like tract “Projective Verse,” which describes the poem as a field or “high-energy construct” in which “all the syllables and all the lines must be managed in their relations to each other.” Olson’s text was first published in *Poetry New York* in 1950 but received wider reception with its reprinting in Donald Allen’s *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* (New York: Grove Press, 1960). The text was embraced by, among others, William Carlos Williams, who added portions of it to his revised autobiography in 1951. Olson’s imperative that poetry ought to be read aloud and thus written to facilitate its reading called for renewed attention and experimentation to its layout on the page. Free-form use of punctuation marks, breaks, and negative space—another version of the idea “so much space equals so much time”—signaled the work’s performative nature. See Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 196.

¹⁵ Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At*, 43; Cage, “Experimental Music,” 9. *Williams Mix* was completed in collaboration with David Tudor and Earle Brown and named after architect Paul Williams, who funded the experiment. As metrical notation was wholly incompatible with the reality of tape editing, the arrived-at score was laid out, as Cage describes, like “a dress-maker’s pattern.” *Williams Mix* was realized along with others scores by Wolff, Feldman and Brown, including Feldman’s *Intersection for magnetic tape*, for which the team superimposed one of his graph pieces with 1,097 fragments of tape. Sebastian Claren, “A Feldman Chronology,” *Morton Feldman Says: Selected Interviews and Lectures 1964-1987*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 262. See also James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 90-91.

measure of space: “Since so many inches of tape equal so many seconds of time, it has become more and more usual that notation is in space rather than in symbols of quarter, half, and sixteenth notes and so on.”¹⁶ The notation of new music entailed a necessary conflation of the dimensions of space and time.

These advances toward graphic notation by The New York School were a fundamental tactic in the composers’ larger project of redefining music apart from Western ideals of tonality and harmony given notation’s key role in the consolidation and transmission of musical works. Indeed, by the 1950s, metrical notation had become a highly coded written language akin to an inviolable Text (absolutely opposed to the Barthesian sense) that is “composed,” “written,” and/or “read.”¹⁷ Of staff notation Cage complained, “*Sounds are no longer just sounds, but are letters: A B C D E F G.*”¹⁸ Elsewhere, he described scores as a letter written from composer to performer.¹⁹ It was this regime of modern notation, designed to communicate precisely the contours of a fully fleshed-out musical object, to which Cage and his cohort sought alternatives. In the face of electronic and non-musical sounds or noise, standard notation was a barrier, an outmoded sign-system repressive of the very qualities of sound and the vicissitudes of the performance experience that experimental composers found most interesting. Indeed, the sophistication of staff notation as a language of description allowed scores to be consumed entirely apart from the performance experience. The limits of metrical notation as an abstract symbolic system had instituted a musical regime in which the means of transcription of musical

¹⁶ Cage, “Experimental Music,” 11.

¹⁷ Barthes, “From Work to Text.”

¹⁸ Cage, “45’ for a Speaker” (1954) *Silence*, 165.

¹⁹ John Cage, *Sound on Paper: Musical Notations in Japan* (New York: Japan House Gallery, 1981), 6-8.

works entailed a regulation of musical thought.²⁰ In contrast, the freedom of experimental and graphic notation, as Feldman described, was that “sounds no longer had an inherent symbolic shape.”²¹

In the new forms of notation, as we will see, sound elements were freed from the confines of the stave and spatialized to extend across the entire surface of the page in a unified plane of diagrammatic pitch-time relations, rendering the musical work into an iconic, schematic visual form. In these iconic aspects, graphic notation in fact marked a surprising return to the earliest forms of notation that emerged in the 10th century (a history of which the New York School was well aware), in which the score served as a mere “skeletal” structure for performance.²² In the mid-first century CE, early theories of harmony were illustrated with diagrams of stringed instruments indicating the position of notes on the body of the instrument. By the 2nd century, cantors relied on a form of notation known as the Guidonian Hand, in which pitches were indicated by pointing to different areas of the palm. The most important innovation in early notation, made by Italian composer and music theorist Guido d’Arezzo circa 1030 CE, was to indicate half-notes by placing notes *between* the lines, thus transforming notation from a picture of gestures to be performed into an abstract representation of pitch-relations. With this final departure from the score’s ideographic function, staff notation would become, by the 12th century, the basis of depiction of the modern diatonic scale and a universal standard in the

²⁰ While for this group of composers at this time the faculties of writing and drawing were seen as ideologically opposed, one could argue, as Serge Tisseron has, that writing too in its most experimental, formative stages partakes of the same anti- or proto-symbolic characteristics of drawing. Tisseron, “All Writing is Drawing: The Spatial Development of the Manuscript,” *Yale French Studies* 84 (1994): 29-42.

²¹ Morton Feldman, *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B. H. Friedman (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 2000), 6.

²² Earle Brown for one had spent time studying medieval notation. See Brown, “The Notation and Performance of New Music,” *The Musical Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (1986): 180-201; and Jane Alden, “From Neume to *Folio*: Mediaeval Influences on Earle Brown’s Graphic Notation,” *Contemporary Music Review* 26, no. 3-4 (2007): 315-332.

Christian world.

Following d'Arezzo's innovation, notation was continuously improved towards an advancement of its logical organization and codification. The next innovation would be the introduction of vertical bar lines into the horizontal structure of staff lines circa 1500, which broke up the flow of the score into discrete measures. Hannah Higgins has shown how such changes, equivalent to the invention of linear perspective in painting, coincided with a shift in the role of music in Western society from being the catalyst of "collective experience" associated with religious worship to the institution of a "newly sovereign ego."²³ This regime of notation, affiliated with the Beethoven paradigm, worked to repress interpretational ambiguities inherent to the scoring process such that by the 20th century, as musicologist Peter Gradenwitz has described, "a page in a Mahler or Schoenberg score contained as many dynamic and agogic marks as notes proper."²⁴ The score had become the musical work's legislator, the absolute law that all performances must obey. In turn, language adopted by musicology and analytic philosophy to describe the relationship between a score and its performance has reflected this ideology. Nelson Goodman, for example, has argued for the necessity of score "compliance" for a performance of a work to count as a true realization. "A score must define a work, marking off the performances that belong to the work from those that do not."²⁵ In this view, as we have said before, the performance "belongs to" the work, is its possession.

Musical discourse has long deployed spatial metaphors to address compositional and

²³ Hannah Higgins, *The Grid Book* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 116. On the history of musical notation I have relied upon Higgins's helpful chapter, "Notation," 99-123. See also Daniel K.L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁴ Peter Gradenwitz, "The Performer's Role in the Newest Music," *The Chesterian* 34 (1959): 61.

²⁵ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 128.

harmonic structures, but the imagination of music in spatial terms was most radically literalized in the compositional processes and notation of modern, 20th-century serial and atonal music. It was by such radical amplification of notation's visual qualities that musical forms and ontology would become available to artists not trained in reading or writing music, such as those involved in Fluxus and other intermedia tendencies of the early 1960s. In the first pages of Brecht's notebook from Cage's summer 1958 course, we can see that music was defined for the composer's students as "events in sound-space."²⁶ According to Dick Higgins, Cage would merely say of notation, "So much space equals so much time."²⁷ Thus we can begin to understand the radical nature of the redefinition of music from which Cage's course, and the first stirrings of Fluxus, began.

The New York School and the Emergence of Graphic Notation

The working out of new models for the musical work in the 1950s was a decidedly collaborative endeavor. Cage's advances were the outcome of a period of intense exchange between a group of composers that included Feldman, Brown, and Wolff, all of whom were beginning to explore the realm between the musical and the visual. This prolific "pressure group," known as the The New York School, was in dialogue with visual artists who were

²⁶ Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 1, 4.

²⁷ Dick Higgins, "On Cage's Classes," in *John Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz, 122. "So much space equals so much time" was an instruction first used by Cage in the prefatory notes to *Winter Music* (1957), dedicated to Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, a score of twenty unnumbered pages with segments of staff notation bearing chance-derived cords to be played in any order.

regulars at the Cedar Tavern bar and the Artists Club where Cage occasionally lectured.²⁸ Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt, and Mark Rothko were all in this orbit. As Feldman recounts, “There was very little talk about music with John... But there was an incredible amount of talk about painting. John and I would drop in at the Cedar Bar at six in the afternoon and talk with artist friends until three in the morning, when it closed. I can say without exaggeration that we did this every day for five years of our lives.”²⁹ The composers were drawn to this artistic milieu because it provided a support for their work that was lacking in the music community. Cage would remark, “I had early seen that musicians were the people who didn’t like me. But the painters did. The people who came to the concerts which I organized were very rarely musicians—either performing or composing. The audience was made up of people interested in painting and sculpture.”³⁰

The emergence of graphic notation can be traced to one particularly momentous exchange that occurred in 1950. The setting was Cage’s loft on Monroe Street overlooking the lower East River, sparsely furnished with one couch and a grand piano, a carpet of straw matting on which his guests would sit, and nothing on the walls—all the better to draw attention to his enormous plate-glass windows with their view onto the surrounding urban landscape.³¹ Cage tells this story:

²⁸ Following Rebecca Y. Kim, I adopt this term from an early piece of criticism by Virgil Thomson in order to deflect the inaccurate stereotype of the New York School composers being a tight-knit group led by John Cage. “Pressure group” better reflects their non-hierarchical and collegial yet independent relations. See Virgil Thomson, “The Abstract Composers,” *New York Herald-Tribune*, February 5, 1952, reprinted in *Writings About John Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Kim, “In No Uncertain Musical Terms,” 79-81. Cage presented his “Lecture on Nothing” (reprinted in *Silence*) at the Artists Club in August of 1950.

²⁹ Feldman, *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, 5.

³⁰ John Cage, Michael Kirby, and Richard Schechner, “An Interview with John Cage,” *The Drama Review: TDR* 10, no. 2 (1965): 67.

³¹ “Cage’s Studio-Home,” in *John Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz, 84-85.

Morton Feldman went into the room with the piano and I stayed at my desk which was in the bedroom with David Tudor. Shortly, Morton Feldman came back with his first piece of graph music where on graph paper he simply put numbers and indicated high, middle, and low, how many high notes, how many middle notes, how many low notes, and nothing else. There were squares of the graph that he left empty so there were no notes there at all. After he showed it to me and to David Tudor, David Tudor went to the piano and played it. It was a great experience.³²

What Feldman composed that day became *Projection I*, the first of a series of scores that appropriated gridded paper as the plane of notation, now become a visual composition populated not with individual sound-points but swaths of unspecified pitch and dynamics ranges (Figs. 1.2, 1.3).³³ The precise notes were left to the discretion of the performer so long as they maintained, in sum, the basic relations set forth in the score.³⁴ The work's title, *Projection I*, was a recognition of the various interpretative possibilities for its performance, a recognition that any performance would simply be one projection of many possibilities for the score. The result was a kind of schematic mapping of the musical work often described by the composers in plastic terms. Feldman called the graph works "rhythmic shapes" or "time shapes," while Cage

³² John Cage, *I-VI* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 238-40.

³³ Feldman's boxes have since been incorporated into standards of metrical notation as the very symbol of indeterminacy: boxes drawn around segments of notation indicate sections open to improvisation or the performer's choice. Kurt Stone, *Music Notation in the Twentieth Century: A Practical Guidebook* (New York: Norton, 1980), 152-154.

³⁴ For a detailed analysis of how certain graphic notations by Feldman and Brown were performed by David Tudor, see John Holzaepfel, "David Tudor and the performance of American experimental music, 1950-1959" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1994).

described them as “form conceived in terms of a continuity of various weights.”³⁵

Earle Brown quickly advanced upon Feldman’s graphic breakthrough in a series of works written between 1952 and 1954, beginning with *October 1952* and *November 1952* (“*Synergy*”) (Figs. 1.4, 1.5). These first two lacked clef signatures or bar lines, making the piece scalable to any extremities of time and pitch. In the performance note for *November 1952*, in which staff lines have been multiplied into a grand weft of horizontals, Brown explains, “Either space (vertical or horizontal) may expand, contract, or remain as it seems to be here.”³⁶

What came next, *December 1952*—the work that would take pride of place in the *An Anthology* fundraising concert program ten years later—took the idea of scalability to its very limit. According to Brown’s prefatory note, “The composition may be performed in any direction from any point in the defined space for any length of time and may be performed from any of the four rotational positions in any sequence.” The score is a scattering of horizontal and vertical graphic lines of varying thicknesses, the placement, direction, length, and width of which were determined with reference to random number tables. Gone are all conventional signifiers that would associate the notation with the performance of music.³⁷ Staff lines, bar lines, and notes have either disappeared or magnetically consolidated so that each mark or “element,” as Brown called them, carries the significative weight of multiple dimensions of sound at once (pitch,

³⁵ Morton Feldman and La Monte Young, “A Conversation on Composition and Improvisation (Bunita Marcus, Francesco Pellizzi, Marian Zazeela),” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 13 (Spring 1987): 159. Cage, “Composition as Process: II. Indeterminacy” (1958) *Silence*, 36. Cage’s language is in fact borrowed from Feldman, who wrote: “What determines the initial conception of my *Projections* and *Intersections* is a weight either reminiscent or discovered. Weight for me does not have its source in the manipulation of dynamics or tensions but rather resulting from a visual-aural response to sound as an image gone inward creating a general synthesis.” Feldman’s statement was submitted by Cage along with contributions by himself, Wolff, and Boulez under the title “Four Musicians At Work” to the magazine *Transformation: Arts, Communication, Environment* 1, no. 3 (1952); the text has since been reprinted in Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 104.

³⁶ Earle Brown, “Prefatory Note,” *Folio and 4 Systems* (New York: Associated Music Publishers, 1961), n.p.

³⁷ Earle Brown, “On *December 1952*,” *American Music* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 2.

duration, and volume), all made relative within a unified structure readable from any direction. Brown called this score a “sonic image.” The piece is “not composed,” he explained; rather, “suggestions of relationships are all that is given.”³⁸

Faced with the wholly abstract nature of notations like *December 1952*, which consolidated all aspects of the graphic language of metrical notation into a matrix of rectilinear forms, critics grasping for precedents for this work turned to the history not of music but of visual abstraction from Paul Klee to Piet Mondrian to Joan Miró.³⁹ Brown, however, preferred to see his method as Constructivist, connecting his work to a tradition of abstraction conceived as deeply linked to notions of the concrete.⁴⁰ Indeed, that *December 1952* can be read in any direction indicates a morphological and theoretical similarity to El Lissitzky’s prototypical constructivist artwork, the proun, rotatable for viewing in any orientation. The proun, which took its name from the Russian acronym for “project for the affirmation of the new,” offered nothing less than a revised perceptual order to replace the illusionism and pictorialism of easel painting. For Lissitzky the fact that the abstract Suprematist compositions of his mentor Kazimir Malevich must be hung in relation to a fixed axis problematically implied the existence of a horizon line, even if it was not depicted.⁴¹ In contrast, the proun proposed a Constructivist vision that would

³⁸ Brown, “On *December 1952*,” 4.

³⁹ John Evarts, “The New Musical Notation: A Graphic Art?,” *Leonardo* 1, no. 4 (1968): 405-412.

⁴⁰ Earle Brown, “Form in New Music,” in *Source: Music of the Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 24. Brown’s essay first appeared in a 1965 issue of the *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik* dedicated to the very topic of “Form in der Neuen Musik”: *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik* 10 (1965): 57-69.

⁴¹ El Lissitzky, “Proun,” trans. John E. Bowlt, in *El Lissitzky* (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1976), 65. Lissitzky’s text, composed in 1920-21, was delivered as a lecture at the Moscow Institute of Artistic Culture (INKhUK) on October 23, 1924. See also Yve-Alain Bois, “El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility,” *Art in America* (April 1988): 161-181; Yve-Alain Bois, “From $-\infty$ to 0 to $+\infty$: Axonometry, or Lissitzky’s Mathematical Paradigm,” in *1890-1941 El Lissitzky: Architect, Painter, Photographer, Typographer* (Eindhoven: Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990); and Maria Gough, “Tarabukin, Spengler, and the Art of Production,” *October* 93 (Summer 2000): 78-108.

take into account the extensions of real space: “It has become a construction and like a house,” proclaimed Lissitzky, “you have to walk round it, to look at it from above, to study it from beneath.”⁴² Similarly, the notation for Brown’s *December 1952* eschewed staff notation’s rectilinear, narrativizing order of time. It could be entered into from any direction and moved through visually, emphasizing that the eyes, in their scanning, were likewise proceeding through dimensional space.

Cage’s movement toward graphic notation was markedly more cautious, given his suspicion of improvisation and notational ambiguity. Seeking ways of unhinging the composition process from the articulation of an ideal musical form and turning structure over to chance, Cage organized his sound material by means of what James Pritchett has called “a two-dimensional representation of the gamut.”⁴³ This method was an outgrowth of Cage’s gamut technique begun in the late 1940s after the serial method of Webern and Schoenberg, in which a body of notes or musical passages composed in advance would be organized according to an independently determined structure.⁴⁴ That is, notes the art historian, Cage incorporated into his process the readymade matrix of the grid. Unlike Feldman, however, Cage first turned to the grid merely as an alternative organizational device rather than as a feature of his finished notations. For example, *Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra* (1950-51) was composed by populating a sixteen-by-sixteen-square lattice with musical content and then ordering the units by

⁴² Lissitzky, “Proun,” 66.

⁴³ Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, 62.

⁴⁴ Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, 40-45. Stephen Drury’s “A John Cage Dictionary” defines a gamut as “the total fixed collection of single notes, intervals, chords and aggregates which constitute the material of a composition. Selection from the elements of the gamut to create melodies, harmonies, or passagework can be made by the composer or the performer.” <http://www.dramonline.org/albums/john-cage-edition-vol-23-the-works-for-violin-4/notes> (accessed March 30, 2013).

charting a route through the grid as if it were a game board.⁴⁵ Describing his method to the avant-garde composer Pierre Boulez, Cage excitedly wrote, “A new idea entered which is this: to arrange the aggregates not in a gamut (linearly) but rather in a chart formation....I then made moves on this chart of a ‘thematic nature’ but, as you may easily see, with an ‘athematic’ result.”⁴⁶ The gamut-chart method was a step toward evading the composer’s imposition of a predetermined developmental structure to which all sounds must conform.

Cage’s next major work, *Music of Changes* (1951), was also composed by means of a grid, but this time his path through it was determined in an aleatory way by numbering the spaces and deciding their order with reference to the *I Ching*, an ancient Chinese divination system.⁴⁷ This turn recognized that notation, a form of mediation between the composer and his work, already subjected the musical work to a certain amount of risk. Whereas that risk had come to be systematically repressed in Western music under the Beethoven paradigm, Cage’s method sought to make risk and differentiation a formative part of the work’s appearance.⁴⁸ Moreover, by pairing aleatoric methods with a series of charts, Cage recognized staff-based musical notation as a relative of the abscissa and ordinates of the grid even if notation’s second dimension had been

⁴⁵ While this series of compositions is most often referred to in the Cage literature as his “chart” compositions, for my purposes here I refer to them mainly as grids. Cage’s earliest use of the grid was *Chess Pieces* (c. 1944), an ink and gouache painting of musical notation in alternating black and white squares that give it the appearance of a chess board. Although not yet functioning as a chance structuring device, the idea was implied.

⁴⁶ John Cage, letter to Pierre Boulez, May 1951. Nattiez, *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence*, 90.

⁴⁷ Known also as the *Book of Changes*, the *I Ching* contains a catalogue of sixty-four hexagrams, abstract symbols comprised of a combination of six broken and unbroken lines, which are consulted by means of a random selection system such as sticks, dice, coins, or marbles. Cage was introduced to the *I-Ching* by Christian Wolff, who gave him a copy of the volume released by his father, a publisher.

⁴⁸ In this way, Cage’s chance process aligns remarkably with the painterly drips of Jackson Pollock. Form is determined by a chance procedure in which the introduction of a spatial gap into the composition process subjects the allocation of materials to the whims of gravity.

de-prioritized in favor of a linearized model that emphasized narrative progression.⁴⁹

Cage's spatialization of compositional material across a gridded space to be reordered by way of chance effectively abolished the possibility for thematic harmonic development and a musical narrative imposed by the composer. It also dispensed with the axiomatic composition methods of serialism. What Cage sought figuratively—to compose music without a thematic through-line that would also engage an expanded field of possible sounds—he would achieve by a literal transformation of the compositional space from the continuous line into the two-dimensional grid, extending out in all directions over the composition page.

In Cage's 1950-51 works, the employment of grids as a compositional technique indicated the conceptual transformation of the space of composition from a linear continuity into a unitary spatial field, even if that space was not yet visible in his final notations. By 1952, however, Cage would go further with the grid, making the crucial leap of adopting the grid's abscissa and ordinates as the very matrix of notation, thereby introducing indeterminacy and ambiguity into the scene of performance. In *Music for Carillon No. 1*, Cage made note-points on quarter-inch quadrille paper by inking through an improvised template of constellations of holes made at the intersections of random folds in a sheet of paper (Fig. 1.6). Cage's use of the grid in this case was a radical simplification of notation to its most basic function: the designation of pitches in time. The left-to-right axis would be a single continuity of time; top-to-bottom would be a single continuity of pitch, similar to Brown's *November 1952*. The score's page became a unified field of sonic possibility consistent with Cage's revised conception of music. As Pritchett

⁴⁹ Anton Webern, an earlier student of Schoenberg, had made early advances toward such an approach by treating the vertical bars separating measures more as "a frame for the structuring of the musical space than a metrical division." Paul Paccione, "Time-Space Synthesis: The Relationship of the Grid to Twentieth-Century Music," *ex-tempore* V, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1989) <http://www.ex-tempore.org/paccione89/PACCIONE.htm> (accessed March 30, 2013).

writes of this innovation, “All of the points in the space were equally possible; pitch and time were treated as the continua that they truly are. In this respect, the new method was an improvement over the chart technique, which had only dealt with sounds that sprang from Cage’s imagination, and not directly from the totality of acoustic possibilities.”⁵⁰ In a deliberate segregation of musical structure and material in the composition process, Cage began with a mere scattering of points, a constellation of raw sound materials that were only secondarily brought into relation by a common grid. A more expedient version of that technique, referred to by Pritchett as Cage’s “point-drawing system,” was used for Cage’s eighty-four part series *Music for Piano*, 1952-1956. Here, readymade constellations of notes were obtained by marking a random number of imperfections on the drafting paper directly, onto which staff lines—a partial grid—were subsequently superimposed, producing notations resembling the traditional metrical form.

The notation methods used in *Music for Carillon* remained Cage’s most extreme, a paradoxical alignment of drawing with a desubjectification of the composition process and reduction of the musical work to its most basic constitutive elements. For Cage, a true concretism of sound began from the reduction of notation to a succession of individuated note-points. Of these rapid techniques of marking notes, Cage explained, “I wanted to have a very rapid manner of writing a piece of music. Painters, for example, work slowly with oil and rapidly with watercolors.”⁵¹ Cage employs here the graphic language of metrical notation—points and lines—without regard to its regular function as part of a symbolic language of musical communication. Two important transformations resulted: first, a shift in compositional method

⁵⁰ Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, 92.

⁵¹ John Cage, *For the Birds: John Cage in Conversation with Daniel Charles* (Boston: Marion Boyers, 1981), 44.

from the writing of music to its *drawing*; and second, the musical material, represented by a schematic rendering of points, was laid down first and only afterward brought into common relation by the matrix of the grid, resulting in the chance finding of form. Form here is merely a byproduct of the graphic materials of composition, an after-effect of process.

Composers would soon begin to invite the performer to partake in the chance ordering of the work by means of rearrangeable pages or sections as in Earle Brown's *Twenty-Five Pages* (1953), Boulez's *Third Piano Sonata* (1955–57/63), and Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI* (1956). The implications of this move were decidedly political, as Boulez explained:

Why compose works that have to be re-created every time they are performed? Because definitive, once-and-for-all developments seem no longer appropriate to musical thought as it is today, or to the actual state that we have reached in the evolution of musical technique, which is increasingly concerned with the investigation of a relative world, a permanent 'discovering' rather like the state of 'permanent revolution.'⁵²

Graphic notation's basis in the grid brought to the field of music the same irrevocable transformation or "permanent revolution" as the grid's emergence had done to mark the inauguration of modernist abstraction—a transformation we have seen performed over and over again in the art of cubism, de Stijl, Russian Constructivism and beyond. The grid has stood, according to Rosalind Krauss's landmark account, as a "paradigm or model for the antidevelopmental, the antinarrative, the antihistorical."⁵³ "The grid announces, among other

⁵² Pierre Boulez, "Sonate, que me veux-tu?" (1960), in *Orientations: Collected Writings*, ed. Jean Jacques-Nattiez, trans. Martin Cooper (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 143-154.

⁵³ Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 22.

things, modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse."⁵⁴

Certainly these were among Cage's goals for his music. The grid is, however, a deeply paradoxical emblem of modernism. At the same time that the grid concretely maps the surface of its support or is coextensive with it, the grid's logic represses that materiality in that it stands for an abstract, transcendent order of rationality and even, as Krauss notes, a certain spirituality. For this reason, by 1960, the crossbars of the modernist grid had become for a young generation of visual artists an aesthetic and ideological prison, and so we begin to see its lattice populated with anti-transcendent content (Krauss points us to Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns) or its boundaries exceeded (Allan Kaprow). The New York School's slightly earlier engagement with the grid should also be brought into this fold, for it brings an altogether different and fundamentally post-modern valence as well as an alternative possibility for its meaning. If the grid was culpable for "walling the visual arts into a realm of exclusive visuality," for a medium like music, beholden in performance to a linear temporal unfolding, it provided multiple escape routes.⁵⁵ In the charted-out compositions of Feldman, Brown, and Cage, the grid was effectively *put to use*, serving to de-subjectify the artist in relation to his work and granting the grid a newfound capacity as autonomous production machine. The grid was not a mythic signifier of Being, Mind, Spirit, or of the artist's originality; it was employed rather as an operational playing field. In other words, the grid of graphic notation was not a repressor of change but its very agent, showing us that the

⁵⁴ Krauss, "Grids," 9. I am not the first to read graphic notation in terms of Krauss's theory of the grid. Rebecca Y. Kim has provided a pathbreaking theoretical analysis of the ethical dimensions of indeterminacy's intervention into the musical discipline. While I am indebted to Kim's research, my engagement with Krauss and aims for doing so differ significantly in that I am tracing for art history a theory of form that passes from Cage to the visual arts. See Kim, "A Staircase to the Universal and the Precipice of Life: Grids, the Human Variable, and Ethical Action," in "In No Uncertain Musical Terms," 75-127. See also Roger W. H. Savage's analysis of Cagean aesthetics and ideology, *Structure and Sorcery: The Aesthetics of Post-War Composition and Indeterminacy* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989).

⁵⁵ Krauss, "Grids," 9.

grid is not merely “what art looks like when it turns its back on nature” but that it can be employed to reveal the chaotic indeterminacy of life.⁵⁶ The notational grid was absolutely opposed to the rhetoric of modern painters like Mondrian and Malevich, for whom the grid was “a staircase to the Universal.” If these musical grids dallied in abstraction, it was only as a radically anti-transcendental means of delivering the listener back to the concretism of sonic materiality.

The Score as Drawing

One of the earliest meanings of the word “score” is “a stroke, mark; a line drawn as a boundary.”⁵⁷ If we have so far labored over the entry of the grid into notational practices in music, it is because this entry marks the first moment of a crucial turn in compositional practice that began to interest visual artists and is therefore of concern to the art historian.⁵⁸ The grid initiated a transformation of the act of musical composition from the detailed transcription of an ideal, fully formed musical work using a highly developed symbolic language into the free mapping of sonic relations across the composition page, something more akin to the activity of

⁵⁶ Krauss, “Grids,” 9.

⁵⁷ “score, n.,” OED Online, June 2012, Oxford University Press, <http://oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/173033> (accessed August 23, 2012).

⁵⁸ The crossover and intermingling of ideas between practitioners of the so-called New York Schools of both painting and music has been more closely studied in the field of music than art history, perhaps because the impact of that exchange was more radical on the side of music with the explosion of graphic notation. That graphic notation has remained outside the purview of postwar art history is only due, then, to disciplinary and methodological limitations of the field. Only recently with the growing acceptance and institutionalization of interdisciplinary practice have we seen a revival of interest in graphic notation. This imbalance has begun to be rectified only within the past ten years, although it has continued to center mainly on the figure of John Cage. See Julia Robinson, ed., *John Cage*, October Files 12 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011); Robinson, et. al., *The Anarchy of Silence*; as well as Theresa Sauer, *Notations 21* (New York: Mark Batty Publisher, 2009) and Alex Waterman, et. al., *Between Thought and Sound: Graphic Notation in Contemporary Music* (New York: The Kitchen, 2008).

drawing.⁵⁹ The score would not be written; it would be drawn, like a picture. This transformation incurred a radical decoupling of the score's iconic appearance and its significative function such that text and image were separated into elaborate graphic constellations on the one hand and lengthy performance instructions on the other.

With a return of scoring to its affiliation with drawing the score was returned, as in its earliest appearances, to its role as a way-station for a musical work whose identity in performance would never be selfsame. The innovation of graphic notation lay not merely in the invention of new composition tools for describing sound. It coincided with a conceptual shift in which the transmission of the musical work was no longer invested in the secure capturing of a complete work in a universally understood notation. Instead, there was a daring acceptance on the part of composers and performers of almost any graphic materials whatsoever as a score that could be read and performed.

The drawn score or score-drawing was backed by the belief that it offered a more concrete relationship to sound. Feldman linked his embrace of graphic notation to the milieu of gesture painting: "The new painting made me desirous of a sound world more direct, more immediate, more physical than anything that had existed heretofore."⁶⁰ His graph scores were drawn out of the desire "not to 'compose,' but to project sounds into time, free from a compositional rhetoric that had no place here."⁶¹ Freed as they were from the symbolic alphabet of metrical notation, the scores "are really not 'compositions' at all. One might call them time

⁵⁹ For a musicological perspective on the graphic score as drawing see Sylvia Smith and Stuart Smith, "Visual Music," *Perspectives of New Music* 20, no. 1/2 (1981): 75-93.

⁶⁰ Feldman, *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, 5.

⁶¹ Feldman, *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, 5-6.

canvases in which I more or less prime the canvas with an overall hue of the music.”⁶² Brown, speaking on his work leading up to the pure graphism of *December 1952*, recalled, “I wrote in a graphic, line-drawing style, very rapidly....This was an attempt at correlating my own conception with an extremely rapid way of ‘composing,’ which was, I have said, almost like improvising myself—in other words, realizing a graphic drawing in my own way.”⁶³ To draw a score as opposed to writing it out using an inherited notational language was felt to counteract its mediating role, in turn leading to a more “direct” performance experience in which the interpreter would have more control over the final outcome of the work. Feldman continued to compose graph works until 1953 when he abandoned this method due to its tendency to lapse into improvisation. Still, he considered the continued notational experiments of Cage to be of utmost significance: “I would characterize Cage’s Contribution, in capital C, as being in notation.”⁶⁴

Graphic notation was immediately controversial, even in advanced music circles. In spring of 1950, Feldman sent some of his graph pieces to Pierre Boulez, suggesting a comparison to the abstract compositions of Piet Mondrian.⁶⁵ Boulez’s reaction was overwhelmingly negative. Unable to countenance imprecise designations of pitch, he saw the notations as a simplistic, dangerous regression to obsolete scoring methods. He complained to Cage, “They [Feldman’s *Intersections*] let themselves go dangerously to the *seduction of graphism alone*. Now, we are

⁶² Feldman, *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, 88.

⁶³ Brown, “On *December 1952*,” 2. The alignment of musical composition with the practice of drawing was not limited to the New York School. Karlheinz Stockhausen has referred to his *Klavierstücke*, although not overtly graphic in nature, as “my drawings.” Karlheinz Stockhausen, liner notes to Aloys Konstarsky (piano), *Stockhausen: Klavierstücke I–XI*, recorded July 1965, CBS, 77209.

⁶⁴ Feldman and Young, “A Conversation on Composition and Improvisation,” 155.

⁶⁵ Nattiez, *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence*, 114-117.

musicians and not painters, and pictures are not made to be performed.”⁶⁶

Debates on graphic notation became especially heated at the 1959 IFNM. The most vociferous critic was Luigi Nono, who blasted graphic notation along with indeterminacy as effectuating a “spiritual suicide” on the part of the composer, resulting in failed musical works passed off as successful by virtuoso performers (Nono likely had David Tudor in mind).⁶⁷ Stockhausen’s response was more measured. In his illustrated lecture, “Musik und Grafik,” which addressed among other graphic works Cage’s *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1957-58, discussed below) and Sylvano Bussotti’s *Piano Piece for David Tudor* (1959), Stockhausen acknowledged certain dangers of fetishization and obscurantism presented by graphic notations: they are purchased by “musical dilettantes” to be hung on the walls of art galleries and musicians and composers cannot agree on what they mean.⁶⁸ Still, perhaps out of loyalty to Cage, he defended the value of graphic notation as one of the latest developments in experimental compositional practice.

The group to most enthusiastically embrace graphic notation was the young generation of

⁶⁶ Nattiez, *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence*, 116.

⁶⁷ Peter Gradenwitz, who reported from that year’s IFNM, gave this précis of Nono’s critique: “Indecision, escapism and false naïveté all characterise such composers that for lack of courage and direction leave the final act of composition to the virtuoso who will make their work successful even where they have failed themselves, was his [Nono’s] verdict.” Gradenwitz, “The Performer’s Role in the Newest Music,” 63. Nono’s lecture was published in the 1960 *Darmstädter Beiträge* under the title “Geschichte und Gegenwart in der Musik von heute” (Past and Present in the Music of Today). Other important published contributions to the debate include Cornelius Cardew, “Notation—Interpretation, etc.,” *Tempo* 58 (Summer 1961): 21-33; and Roman Haubenstock-Ramati and Katharine M. Freeman, “Notation—Material and Form,” *Perspectives of New Music* 4, no. 1 (Autumn-Winter 1965): 39–44.

⁶⁸ “Es ist nicht nur Snobismus, daß seit einigen Jahren musikalische Dilettanten sich Partituren kaufen, um sie als Graphik an die Wand zu hängen; daß viele Musiker, ja Komponisten, von bestimmten Partituren sagen (oder zu sagen wagen): ich verstehe zwar nicht, was es bedeutet, aber es sieht sehr schön aus; oder daß John Cage in New York eine Ausstellung von Partituren arrangierte und sie als Graphiken verkaufte.” Karlheinz Stockhausen, “Musik und Graphik” (July 1959), in Stockhausen, *Texte zur elektronischen und instrumentalen Musik* (Köln: DuMont, 1963), 177; originally published in the *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik* 3 (1960). Gradenwitz’s account of Stockhausen’s lecture describes Bussotti’s composition as “a line-drawing made up of straight and curved lines, arrows, vertical and diagonal signs of directions, ornaments, and so forth.” Gradenwitz, “The Performer’s Role in the Newest Music,” 62. More recently, Bussotti’s score, taken as an emblematic rhizome structure, has appeared at the opening of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

artists studying with and influenced by Cage, a number of whom were not trained in the reading or performing of music. Concurrently with Cage's 25th anniversary concert of May 15, 1958 at Town Hall, New York, organized by Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and filmmaker Emile de Antonio, pages from Cage's *Water Music* (1952), *Seven Haiku* (1952), and *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* were displayed on the second floor of the Stable Gallery above an exhibition of abstract expressionist paintings by the young artist Mario Garcia.⁶⁹ Cage's concert and exhibition were attended by current and future students including Kaprow, who had already been attending Cage's course, and Brecht, who was about to enroll that summer.⁷⁰

The *Solo for Piano* component of *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* was alone a monumental feat of graphic invention (Figs. 1.7, 1.8). Eighty-four different forms of invented notation are presented over sixty-three pages, with the instruction that any amount of the score, from none to all, may be performed in any order and the pages may be read horizontally or vertically.⁷¹ Cage subjects the basic vocabulary of recognizable musical graphemes—stemmed notes, staff lines, accidentals, clefs, and dynamics—to distortion, dismantling, reorganization, repurposing. The five lines of the staff are mapped over with organic strata, loose strings, encircling boundaries and perspectival schematizations. Notes lose their finials and stems; they float in space, measurelessly. Cage provides instructions on how to interpret the various

⁶⁹ The exhibition was held May 5-15, 1958. Rebecca Y. Kim writes of reports that Cage's scores were shown above an exhibition of Robert Rauschenberg, but New York Times critic Dore Ashton's review (discussed below) suggests otherwise. See Kim, "In No Uncertain Musical Terms," 140. The reception of graphic notations as a genre of drawing has since been reinforced by the inclusion of pages of Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* in the Museum of Modern Art's 1976 exhibition "Drawing Now: 1955-1975" alongside works by Johns, Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Sol LeWitt, and others.

⁷⁰ Cage's *Water Music* includes the instruction, "Pour water from one receptacle to another"; Brecht's *Drip Music (Drip Event)* would come in 1959.

⁷¹ John Cage, prefatory note, *Concert for Piano and Orchestra, Solo For Piano* (1957-1958) (New York: Henmar Press, 1960).

notational segments by way of a prefatory catalog of indexed performance notes from the minutely detailed to the extremely vague. The instruction, “AR: Play in any way that is suggested by the drawing,” accompanies a segment in which a treble and bass clef are the armature for a concatenation of perspectively rendered hexahedrons devoid of any individually articulated points whatsoever (Fig. 1.9). *Solo for Piano* marked Cage’s understanding of graphic notation as a process of drawing that, in tandem with chance processes, provided a further means of severing the composer’s control over final musical form.

Critic Dore Ashton reviewed the exhibition in the *New York Times*, noting that the composer “works in India ink with fine pens” and comparing his scoring practice to a kind of calligraphy: “They [the scores] are set down in a complex system of numbers, notes, letters, and geometrical formations, and each page has a calligraphic beauty quite apart from its function as a musical composition...In all of the manuscripts, there is a delicate sense of design at work that transcends the purely technical matter of setting down music.”⁷² Ashton continues with the very same language to describe the painted abstractions of Garcia.

If to interpret these scores as visually compelling drawings constitutes a methodological and disciplinary transgression, it was precisely Cage’s transformation of musical notation from a highly coded symbolic language to an iconic, pictorial one (supplemented by text) that prepared his work to be accepted more readily by visual artists. Ashton’s approach to the work was in fact not far off; Cage and Feldman were known to discuss in detail what kinds of pens they used to draw their scores.⁷³ And according to Cage, “Bob [Rauschenberg] said at the time that he hoped I

⁷² Dore Ashton, “Art Review: Cage, Composer, Shows Calligraphy of Note,” *New York Times*, May 6, 1958.

⁷³ Alvin Lucier, “Performer as Subject,” (panel discussion, University of California, San Diego, CA, November 19, 2011).

wouldn't become an artist, because I could be a threat."⁷⁴ By early 1961, Brecht would sketch out a score for inclusion in a gallery exhibition, taking care to note that the score should be written in India ink and framed.⁷⁵

At this early moment, Cage's score-drawings demonstrated that the drastic reduction of sound to its most basic, inherent qualities, freed from the armature of tonal structure and the teleology of musical narrative, would have to be notated with the most basic elements of drawing. The graphic equivalent of an individual sound would be a point; extended through time, point became line. The correspondence between sound and the graphic mark had already been theorized for the visual arts in Wassily Kandinsky's 1926 treatise, *Point and Line to Plane*, a text Cage may have come to know through Galka Scheyer, a patron and dealer of Kandinsky whom he came to know in his early years in Los Angeles.⁷⁶ An English translation was published in 1947 by Hilla Von Rebay on behalf of the Guggenheim Foundation's early Museum of Non-Objective Painting, and its intended audience was the abstract painters of Pollock's generation.

Kandinsky's study of pictorial elements begins with an examination of the point, described throughout the text as a "beat" or "sound." The point finds its origin in the act of

⁷⁴ Cited in Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 303. By now there have been numerous exhibition catalogues focused on visual art aspects of Cage's practice including: John Cage, *Rolywholyover: A Circus* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1993); Kathan Brown, *John Cage: Visual Art: To Sober and Quiet the Mind* (San Francisco: Crown Point Press, 2001); John Cage, *Every Day is a Good Day: The Visual Art of John Cage* (London: Hayward Publishing, 2010); and Robinson, et. al., *The Anarchy of Silence*.

⁷⁵ The work would eventually become *Three Chair Events* in the exhibition *Environments, Situations, Spaces* at Martha Jackson Gallery in April. Robinson, "From Abstraction to Model: George Brecht's Events and the Conceptual Turn in Art of the 1960s," *October*, 93.

⁷⁶ Maria Müller, "'It Is a Long, Long Road': John Cage and Galka Scheyer," in *The Blue Four: Feininger, Jawlensky, Kandinsky, and Klee in the New World*, ed. Vivian Endicott Barnett and Josef Helfenstein (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998). Of note here, I first arrived at the Kandinsky connection after discussion with Fluxus artist Daniel Spoerri, who pointed to Kandinsky's text as the inspiration for his own extraordinary collection of three-dimensional "lines": walking sticks from a multitude of geographic origins. The projective quality of the concept of a line as a point vectored through space corresponds to the durational qualities of many of Spoerri's chosen organic materials, given as they are to perceptible deterioration.

writing, notably as a signifier of inaudibility or silence: “In the flow of speech, the point symbolizes interruption, non-existence.”⁷⁷ But then, “torn out of its customary state”—released, that is, from the symbolic regime of language—the point “prepares to leap out of one world into another.”⁷⁸ Given room, the point becomes an “independent being,” ushering forth onto the space of the page a realm of pictorial communication and mark-making. “This,” declares Kandinsky, “is the world of painting,” with the point as its “proto-element.”⁷⁹ The point for Kandinsky is the basic element not only of painting but all art forms including dance, architecture, and music. He provides diagrammatic translations from each genre—bodies, buildings, and metrical notations are transformed into smatterings of points. The tips of a dancer’s fingers and toes become points; the ornamental peaks of Gothic architecture and a Chinese pagoda become points (Fig. 1.10).⁸⁰ In several pictorialized versions of passages from Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, variously sized points accompanied by linear arabesques indicate rhythmic and dynamic emphases (Fig. 1.11).

Later scores by Cage including *Water Walk* (1959) and *Aria* (1959) verged fully into drawing through remarkably similar ideogrammatic notations (Figs. 1.12, 1.13). *Water Walk* was a theatricalized adaptation for Italian television of Cage’s earlier work *Water Music* (1952), whose score was designed to be displayed as a poster during performance. The later version incorporated drawn renderings of the piano and some of the props to be used. In the vocal piece *Aria* (1959), fragments of lyric text are accompanied by drawn lines approximating pitch progressions, recalling neume, the shorthand-like graphemes introduced in the 8th century to

⁷⁷ Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, trans. Howard Dearstyne and Hilla Rebay (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1947), 25.

⁷⁸ Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, 28.

⁷⁹ Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, 28, 32.

⁸⁰ Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, 40.

record relative pitch patterns as they were chanted by liturgical choirs of the Roman Catholic church.

Given all this, we can begin to read Cage's famous three movements of silence in a new light. Of the three score formats in which *4'33"* appeared—staff notation, proportional notation, and text (“tacet, tacet, tacet”)—it was in fact the proportionally notated version that was for Cage the work's primary representation rather than the text version most widely known today (Figs. 1.14-1.16). This was the version Cage gifted to its dedicatee Irwin Kremen, and it was the version Cage chose to reproduce in the avant-garde music journal *Source* in 1967 (although, problematically, it did not appear to scale). A graphic notation of the most reduced sort, each second of time is represented by 1/8 inch of blank page-space. Four minutes and thirty-three seconds become approximately six blank pages divided into movements by the imposition of drawn vertical lines. With this version we can see most clearly how *4'33"* responded to the *White Paintings* of his friend Robert Rauschenberg. Cage had been contemplating the possibility of a “silent piece” as early as 1947, but it wasn't until 1951 when he saw Rauschenberg's series of abutting panels painted entirely white that he summoned the courage to go forth with the idea (Fig. 1.17). As is often recounted, Cage recalled seeing the paintings' surfaces not as empty blanks (“*a canvas is never empty*,” he said) but as “airports for shadows and for dust,” “mirrors of the air.”⁸¹ The graphic version of *4'33"* indicates Cage's understanding that the paintings' effect of an expansive, inclusive visibility was reliant upon the painterly mark being displaced from the canvas surface to the negative space just beyond its edge where the minute gaps between the canvases could be read visually as a series of vertical articulations framing the

⁸¹ Cage, “On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work” (1961), *Silence*, 99; John Cage, *I-VI*, 26.

phenomenally charged spaces in-between.⁸² Even with no notes present in Cage's graphic iteration, the musical work is effectively *drawn* into existence by means of the framing line.

The New York School's shift from the writing of scores to their drawing coincided with an alteration in the way the score functioned in relation to the musical work. The score was transformed from an inscription, a mechanism of transcription or recording, into a kind of engine for inventing the very new, a tool no longer of registration but one of *projection*, as the title of Feldman's first graph piece acknowledged. Pieces of music composed in this sketch-like fashion were increasingly prospective and less descriptive, less singular and authoritative Works and more akin to multifaceted structures, different features of which would be revealed with every performance. The free delineation of graphic notation was meant to subvert the traditional calibration of tones to staff and meter, the notational equivalent of linear perspective or horizon line—a second-order, symbolically coded, illusionistic mode of representation. Graphic notation, it turned out, was the most appropriate form of notation for the indeterminate, experimental music Cage and his cohort sought, this music redefined as “an act the outcome of which is unknown” to both performer and composer.⁸³

Catherine de Zegher has written on the relation of drawing to the articulation of form, explaining that the drawn line is not necessarily in the first instance a registration of cognition, communication, or even draughtsmanly craft as art history would have us believe. “The arrangement of lines to determine form—*delineation*—is much older than its companion, *perspective*. While perspective deals with the placement of objects in space, delineation deals

⁸² The connection between the graphic version of *4'33''* and Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* has been discussed lucidly by Branden Joseph in his book *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

⁸³ Cage, “Experimental Music: Doctrine” (1955), *Silence*, 13.

primarily with analogy: the representation of objects as such, not as they appear in space.”⁸⁴

Delineation’s signification by means of analogy to the depicted object is precisely how graphic notation is mobilized as a new kind of transitive musical form. Delineation produces form in its most basic sense: a point is a sound, a wavering line is a melody. Proportional, graphic notations such as Feldman’s *Projections*, Brown’s *December 1952*, and Cage’s *Music for Carillon* marked a limit of simplicity in experimental notation. The conflation of space and time—the “so much space equals so much time” with which Cage’s course began—coupled with a push toward concretism brought the score back to its most basic function of demarcating a set of sounds in relation to one another in pitch- and time-space.

The Score as Diagram

It could be said that graphic notation simply realized, in the most literal of ways, what the score-form had long been understood to be: a laying out of relations between notes. For Cage it was in fact the score’s fixed relations that defined it as a musical “time-object.”⁸⁵ For Theodor W. Adorno, who lectured at the 1961 IFNM, relations were the very definition of music: “For [the bare note] to become music, it must have recourse to those configurations which it cannot discover within itself...Music consists not just of notes, but of the relations between them and... the one cannot exist without the other...There are no notes without relations, no relations without notes.”⁸⁶ It is precisely due to the musical work’s basis in a set of fixed relations that its identity

⁸⁴ Catherine de Zegher, “A Century Under the Sign of Line: Drawing and its Extension (1910-2010),” in *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*, ed. Cornelia H. Butler and Catherine de Zegher (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 23.

⁸⁵ Cage, “Composition as Process: II. Indeterminacy,” 38.

⁸⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, “Vers une musique informelle,” *Quasi una fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Verso, 1992), 298-299, 301.

is maintained through an infinite number of potential realizations. Yet if notation under the Beethoven paradigm had been defined by ever-greater precision and control in regard to structures and materials, in works like Feldman's *Projections* and Brown's *December 1952* structure had become radically flexible, manipulable and multifaceted, its material possibilities more capacious. The new musical work was imagined, as Stockhausen described, as "an individual, self-contained world like a crystal, which, when one turns it, is always different, but always the same. It should not matter whether the music is played from the beginning, middle, or end, so long as it goes full circle."⁸⁷ To sketch the work as a diagrammatic set of relations made this understanding of music absolutely emphatic. Graphic notation announced that the work, like the score, is an abstract, mobile, scalable structure that may take any number of sonic material forms. The score exfoliates into infinite realizations that are analogically, isomorphically connected in their allegiance to a shared structure—a structure, moreover, through which an astonishing variety of sonic materials can be brought into relation.

It would seem, then, that graphic notation's transformation of the score into a schematic constellation of relations places it under the semiotic category of the diagram and diagrammatic depiction—what philosopher Sybille Krämer has referred to as a "cultural technique" of visualization that brings together the communicative functions of image and text on a shared plane through the "graphism of the line."⁸⁸ Diagrams encompass graphic notation, flow charts, maps, architectural plans, and other representational forms that rely upon schematic drawing in order to visualize complex spatial configurations or time-based and vectored processes of

⁸⁷ Karlheinz Stockhausen cited in Francis Burt, "An Antithesis: The Aesthetic Aspect," *The Score* 19 (March 1957): 69.

⁸⁸ Sybille Krämer, "'Epistemology of the Line': Reflections on the Diagrammatical Mind," in *Studies in Diagrammatology and Diagram Praxis*, ed. Olga Pombo and Alexander Gerner (London: College Publications, 2010), 13-39.

movement or transformation. Such structures, while abstract, maintain an intimate connection to reality as the registration of an existing object or the projection of a future one. In recent years, art history has begun to unearth a variant trajectory of modernist abstraction based in diagrammatic or diagram-based forms and practices, marking the outlines of an emergent theoretical model encompassing both utopian/projective and dystopian/legislative aspects of the diagram.⁸⁹ Such practices belong to a vein of modernist abstraction that, as I will argue, came to fruition in the postmodernism moment as an alternative means of organizing artistic form apart from visually consistent morphologies. We might even credit such practices with enabling the transition to postmodernism at all.

To understand better how the diagram functions, we can turn to Danish cultural theorist and semiotician Frederik Stjernfelt's rigorous theorization of the diagram's ontology, function, and reception, which has defined the contours of an entire field of diagrammatology.⁹⁰ Like many theorists of the diagram, Stjernfelt locates the origins of diagram theory in the work of Charles Saunders Peirce, who categorized the diagram as an iconic sign in that it is

⁸⁹ See the following: David Joselit, "Dada's Diagrams," in *The Dada Seminars*, ed. Leah Dickerman and Matthew S. Witkovsky (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005); George Baker, "The Cinema Model," in *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty*, ed. Lynne Cook and Karen Kelly (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005); Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Hesse's Endgame: Facing the Diagram," in *Eva Hesse Drawing*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Painting as Diagram: Five Notes on Frank Stella's Early Paintings, 1958–1959," *October* 143 (Winter 2013): 126–144; and my "The Diagram Dematerialized: Duchamp, Cage, and the Fluxus Event Scores of George Brecht," (MA thesis, University of California Los Angeles, 2007), published in abridged form as "The Diagram Dematerialized, from Marcel Duchamp to John Cage to George Brecht," *Athanor* 26 (2008): 99–105.

⁹⁰ Frederik Stjernfelt, *Diagrammatology: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Phenomenology, Ontology, and Semiotics* (New York: Springer, 2011), especially the chapters "How to Learn More: An Apology for a Strong Concept of Iconicity" and "Moving Pictures of Thought: Diagrams as Centerpiece of a Peircean Epistemology." Notably, Stjernfelt acknowledges W. J. T. Mitchell's early yet under-theorized use of the term diagrammatology: "The art historian W. J. T. Mitchell has, on a couple of occasions, used the word 'diagrammatology' in a sense not wholly unlike my own, based on the plausible idea that our access to literary (and other) form takes place by means of "'sensible" and "spatial" constructs.' Mitchell first used it in a small debate article ["Diagrammatology," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Spring, 1981): 622–633]....Here, he poses the question: 'If we cannot get at form except through the mediation of things like diagrams, do we not then need something like a diagrammatology, a systematic study of the way that relationships among elements are represented and interpreted by graphic constructions[?]'” Stjernfelt, *Diagrammatology*, 425, fn 3.

representational by means of similarity to its depicted object. However, the diagram is an exceptional kind of icon in that it represents its object as a *purely schematic set of relations*. Peirce writes, “The pure Diagram is designed to represent and to render intelligible, the Form of Relation merely.”⁹¹ Stjernfeldt explains that the diagram is thus an “operational icon” in that it participates in a logic of deduction that allows for the icon to be operated on, employed as a tool or technique of thought. In Peirce’s words, “Deduction consists in constructing an icon or diagram the relations of whose parts shall present a complete analogy with those of the parts of the object of reasoning, of experimenting upon this image in the imagination, and of observing the result so as to discover unnoticed and hidden relations among the parts.”⁹² As an operational icon, the diagram allows for the conceptual manipulation of form. It is, as Stjernfeldt describes, “a formal machine for *Gedankenexperimente* [thought experiments].”⁹³ To this end, the diagram “may refer to existent, future, past, imaginary, fantasy, or any other objects.”⁹⁴ It can be descriptive or projective, a map or a plan. Thus it entails a process of abstraction that unfixes form’s relation to space and time.

The musical work represented by graphic notation is precisely this kind of diagram, one that is topological in its openness to transformation and distortion through space and time but which nevertheless maintains a consistent basic structure. The common identity of two performances of an individual score is based not on a similarity of visual or aural appearance but on a formal correspondence of operation, of a common diagram, performed. In fact, it is only by

⁹¹ Peirce, cited in Stjernfeldt, *Diagrammatology*, 96. Stjernfeldt engages mainly Peirce’s 1906 paper “PAP (Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmatism),” reproduced in Charles Saunders Peirce, *New Elements of Mathematics* 4, ed. C. Eisele (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1976).

⁹² Peirce, cited in Stjernfeldt, *Diagrammatology*, 90.

⁹³ Stjernfeldt, *Diagrammatology*, 99.

⁹⁴ Stjernfeldt, *Diagrammatology*, 98.

re-imagining form as diagrammatic and topological that the musical work in the wake of graphic notation be said to be a work or “time-object” at all. This is the basis of the score model that will be taken up by the Fluxus event score.

Dada’s Diagrams

As it turned out, the more that notation tended toward visual abstraction, the more verbal explanation it seemed to require, recalling the confrontation of text and image that had been central to the historical avant-gardes of the early 20th century. David Joselit has shown how the diagrammatic was for Dada artists a key visual tactic on par with montage and the readymade, observable first in the mecanomorphs of Francis Picabia and Marius de Zayas published in the pages of the avant-garde journal *291* in 1915.⁹⁵ Printed across from one another in the double spread of the November issue, the parallel layouts of De Zayas’ poem *Femme!* and Picabia’s drawing *Voilà Elle* demonstrated the clash of text and image most forcefully (Fig. 1.18). On the left, De Zayas’ visual poem recalls the calligrams of Apollinaire yet departs fully from the latter’s quasi-representational language and design. An explosion of evocative phrase-fragments —“*pas de forme,*” “*atrophie cérébrale causée par matérialité pure*”—correspond in language and arrangement to the frivolous mechanizations depicted in Picabia’s drawing opposite, a female machine of equally nonsensical yet erotic functionality.

The mecanomorphs Picabia published in his own journal *391* soon after would fully integrate the textual and visual. In *Donner des puces à son chien (To Give Fleas to One’s Dog)* (no. 8, February 1919), language as much as line does the job of articulating the machine’s parts;

⁹⁵ David Joselit, “Dada’s Diagrams.”

at the same time, language is spun, churned, and ground down, the subject of the contraption's machinations (Fig. 1.19). For that issue's cover, Picabia's *Construction moléculaire (Molecular Construction)* tells us much about what kind of thought the diagram implies (Fig. 1.20). For one, it is the grid that is the primordial ground from which the diagram emerges. Second, while the diagram emerges in Dada as a critical form of individual portraiture, it would become in this image a means of mapping social relations within the loose collectivity of the group itself. With *Construction moléculaire* we are witness to the scattered affiliations of subjects and projects, each individual and yet conjoined within a common plane. Here is a demonstration that, against the "implosive" obfuscations of Cubist form, Dada's diagrams provided a promiscuous and expansive "model of polymorphous connectivity between discrete elements" that emphasized the "pure relationality *between* things" over and against modern industrial applications of the diagram to the regulation and administration of thought.⁹⁶

Picabia's sharpest critique of the diagram's legislative functions came in the form of two mecanomorphs that appeared in Tristan Tzara's special issue of *Dada* in May 1919, the "Anthologie Dada." In *Mouvement Dada*, Picabia again defers to a diagram to map the relations of Dada, yet this time he emphasizes movement over structure: the grid is shunted aside and the names are in spiraling free-fall (Fig. 1.21). The other, *Réveil Matin*, was Picabia's strongest protest against the diagram as the two-dimensional ground from which all manner of machines devised to regulate subjectivity are born: littered across the page are inked traces of the innards of an alarm clock, smashed (Fig. 1.22).

The diagram's ability to specify *how* elements relate to one other over designating their

⁹⁶ Joselit, "Dada's Diagrams," 232, 234.

material constitution is how the diagram, as Joselit describes, “encompasses objects without itself signifying any particular object in the world,” thus able to “circumvent the object altogether.”⁹⁷ In addition to their positing a virtual object, the diagrams’ rhizomatic, ramose forms encourage a highly performative and liberatory mode of viewership in which the beholder scans or glances across the page following numerous, unpredetermined paths. As Roger Shattuck describes, “[O]ne must scan it [the calligram] in search of vectors and relations leading to a possible order of events.”⁹⁸ For this very reason, Apollinaire referred to his calligrams as *poème-événements*, or event-poems, connecting the notion of the event at an early moment to the framing and organizing capacities of vision and cognition that would be harnessed in Brecht’s event scores of the 1960s.

The most elaborate and well-known of Dada’s diagrams would be, of course, Duchamp’s *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* or the *Large Glass* (1915-1923), a schematized narrative of machinic-erotic relations rendered at monumental scale (Fig. 1.23).⁹⁹ Like the proliferation of explanatory notes necessitated by graphic notation, it was attended by *The Green Box* (1934), an addenda of Duchamp’s copious notes related to the work. What was truly remarkable about the *Large Glass*, however, was its transparent support, which shifted the ground of the diagram from the page to the world. Matter and form were separated, the latter mobilized as a set of abstract relations that could be mapped onto other materials, objects, and

⁹⁷ Joselit, “Dada’s Diagrams,” 235, 238.

⁹⁸ Roger Shattuck, “Apollinaire’s Great Wheel,” in *The Innocent Eye: On Modern Literature and the Arts* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984), 260.

⁹⁹ Of the Dada artists, Duchamp was the one with whom Cage would be in closest intellectual dialogue. In 1944, Cage produced the painting *Chess Pieces* for an exhibition on chess in art organized Duchamp and Max Ernst at Julien Levy Gallery. In 1947, Cage wrote the prepared piano piece *Music for Marcel Duchamp* as an accompaniment to Duchamp’s sequence included in Hans Richter’s film *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. The two artists came into closest dialogue in the 1960s, a decade which included their famous staged chess-match performance in 1968 at Ryerson Polytechnic, Toronto. See Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, 25-26, 145.

mediums. The diagram's ability to project form in varied modalities was literalized through recourse to a literal transparency of ground, a recognition of the diagram's capacity for projecting realities-to-come.

Earlier works by Picabia and Duchamp had experimented with the analogical and framing capacities of the diagrammatic line freed from the page. Picabia's *Tabac-Rat* (1920/48) was a gilded frame, empty save for some lengths of string forming parallel lines and an X upon which were hung the artist's name and the work's two titles (it was previously known as *Danse de Saint-Guy*) (Fig. 1.24). Here, as in the lines of Cage's graphic notation for *4'33"*, form is given by the frame's function of isolating art from the world around it. As Picabia explained, "The strings accompany the movement of anything that passes beyond the frame and constitutes a painting."¹⁰⁰ This painting of Picabia's that "divides space into volumes" also had a sculptural pair: Duchamp's portable, modifiable bathing-cap *Sculpture for Traveling* (1918), which worked similarly on volumes of three-dimensional space. As George Baker has argued, these examples of Dada transparency were a mocking critique of modernist structural transparency in which sculptural rationalism was thought to be achieved by rendering form penetrable to vision.¹⁰¹ Dada, in contrast, mobilized transparency as "an embrace of the ephemeral in art—a work that would not last, that would incorporate chance and the temporal—that would, in fact, constantly change or even disappear."¹⁰² It was also a gesture toward the capacious ensnarement of reality

¹⁰⁰ Francis Picabia interviewed by Georges Charbonnier in Charbonnier, *Le monologue du peintre* (Paris: Julliard, 1959), 136, translated and cited by George Baker in *The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 52.

¹⁰¹ Baker, *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 50-55. See also Rosalind Krauss's discussion of the sculpture of Naum Gabo in "Analytic Space: Futurism and Constructivism," in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 39-67.

¹⁰² Baker, *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 5.

into the category of art, which would become central to the neo-dada project of Fluxus (to be materialized in later works also involving string, as we shall see in Chapter 4). Indeed, both Duchamp and Picabia were photographed from behind their transparent works, subjecting their own bodies to the works' schemata in demonstration of diagrammatic visuality's provocation of an empathic perception of relations between all things (Figs. 1.25, 1.26). For if, as Baker argues, one can isolate in these Dada photographs "a modality of visual exchange based on contiguity and similitude, one that is *groundless* in its operation and infinite in its capacity for affirmation," a kind of affective transfer in which subjects and forms empathetically, joyously, promiscuously associate one thing with the next, this was also the case with Dada's diagrams—yet with the addition that, when combined with transparency, the invocation of groundlessness was made literal.¹⁰³ The culmination of such experiments came with Duchamp's 1942 *Sixteen Miles of String*, in which he enlaced the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition in New York with a webbing of white string. This work has been typically understood as a prohibitive barrier, yet in constellation with Dada's many diagrammatic lines and strings it would seem more properly to be a reverberative marking of connections between one artwork and the next and a materialization of potential circuits of vision.

Indeterminacy versus Ambiguity

In contrast to the performative implications of Dada diagrams, the graphic notations of the New York School were designed explicitly to be performed. In this, a crucial transformation takes place. No longer a purely visual motif, the diagram is brought to bear on reality. It is

¹⁰³ Baker, *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 195 (italics mine).

operative, enacted, performed. Yet this activation of the diagram's projective implications introduces a problem related to one last characteristic of the diagram we have not addressed, and it is where the diagram model begins to break down in the face of the art in question. Stjernfelt explains that the diagram does in fact retain a relationship to symbolic thought in that it must bear a consistent and rational correspondence to its object. This rule is the diagram's law, the insistence of the semiotician that the diagram's relations be consistent and rational despite the danger it courts in its need to be interpreted (as Krämer reminds us, "diagrams do not interpret themselves"¹⁰⁴), resulting in what Joselit describes as the diagram's potentially problematic "semiotic mobility or agency."¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, while the graphic notations of Feldman, Brown, and Cage were initiated out of the desire for a more direct relationship to the material of sound by attempting to show their music pictorially rather than narrate it with an inherited symbolic language, they in fact *amplified* notation's inherent ambiguity, which had been conventionally repressed under the Beethoven paradigm as a negative risk. Writing in 1952 just before the explosion of musical graphism, music critic Virgil Thomson ventured an explanation as to why abstraction had come so late to the practice of writing music: "The collage, the splatter, the blot, the accidental texture have been exploited by painters for forty years. From Duchamp and Picasso to the latest American abstractionists the history is continuous. Music itself accepts a high part of hazard in execution; and perhaps it is from this fact that composers have not exploited its possibilities much in actual scoring."¹⁰⁶

In indeterminate or ambiguous compositions the identity of the work in relation to its

¹⁰⁴ Krämer, "'Epistemology of the Line,'" 20.

¹⁰⁵ Joselit, "Dada's Diagrams," 236.

¹⁰⁶ Thomson, "The Abstract Composers," 74.

diagram is stretched to its limit. The “rule” of these works, as Stockhausen described through the metaphor of the crystal, is paradoxical. They become better understood the more diverse realizations that exist, and yet their complete revelation can only be approached asymptotically, as no number of performances will ever exhaust the possibilities of a topological form initiated as an unforfeitable, potential object. If, as Goehr has described, “The dependence between work and performance is *virtual* in the sense that...it remains a continuing practical possibility,” the indeterminate or ambiguous work embraces this quality as constitutive of the very form of a work that can never be consolidated, a form that, through its varied realizations, actually disaggregates over time.¹⁰⁷

Musicologist Daniel Charles has explained the twofold manner in which the new notation achieved its chance outcomes: “We have the blossoming of an ‘action’ notation specifying the gesture to be made rather than the result to be obtained, and an ‘experimental’ technique of sign indeterminacy, where the score did not specify how the polyphony was to be generated but simply described its appearance.”¹⁰⁸ In the first case, as in Cage’s works made in consultation with the *I-Ching*, a performative action or compositional process may be clearly delineated but its result is indeterminate. Form is determined by the description of an action rather than its result, departing from conventional notation in which an action is presumed to have a tonal causality common to all instruments. The latter capitalizes rather on the ambiguity of notation, what Charles refers to as the “enigma of the sign.”

These two methods, the former aligned with Cage’s concept of indeterminacy, and the

¹⁰⁷ Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 15 n. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel Charles, “Figuration and Prefiguration: Notes on Some New Graphic Notations” (1991), trans. Susan Park, in *Writings about John Cage*, ed. Kostelanetz, 250.

latter related to an embrace of the hazards of semiotic ambiguity, marked a fissure within the New York School's experiments with chance composition methods. Earle Brown, affiliated with the latter position, embraced ambiguity (both conceptual and material) as a valid means toward a new kind of mobile or open form work such as his "physically mobile" *Twenty-Five Pages* (1953), whose material pages can be played in varying orders, or *December 1952*, in which the ambiguous or "conceptually mobile" notation can be interpreted in infinite, unforeseen ways.¹⁰⁹ An unrealized aspect of *December 1952* would in fact have the work employ both, for Brown notes that his abstract graphic represented only a moment of a much more complex score that was to be set in constant motion (Fig. 1.27). He envisioned a transparent box sitting atop of the piano, inside of which a system of gears would set horizontal and vertical elements in motion in front of the performer's eyes, to be read spontaneously as they passed through his or her field of vision. Brown explains, "I had a real idea that there would be a possibility of the performer playing very spontaneously, but still very closely connected to the physical movement of these objects in this three-dimensional motorized box."¹¹⁰

Brown's vision of a physically mobile score led him to imagine what was in fact no longer a score in the traditional definition of that term, but rather an object—what might be better described by the art historian as a performative or kinetic sculpture—that would be *read* as a score.¹¹¹ Notation in this case would simply become a hermeneutic operation defined by the

¹⁰⁹ Brown, "Prefatory Note," n.p.

¹¹⁰ Brown, "On *December 1952*," 3.

¹¹¹ Brown admits of "not being able to get motors and not really being all that interested in constructing it," although notably some of these sketches were later realized by Brown's former student the Fluxus artist Joe Jones, who became known for his mechanized musical contraptions that could perform. For a related work inspired by Buckminster Fuller, also never realized, Brown had imagined a geodesic sphere afloat on water, bearing a notation on each of its faces. As the performer played, he or she would blow on the sphere to reveal different sections of the music. Brown, "On *December 1952*," 3-4.

adoption of any material whatsoever as a potential score to be interpreted. *December 1952* pointed toward a score model in which form could be appropriated from anywhere as an alternative to the composer's own organization of content, marking the beginning of an important reconceptualization of the score away from any predetermined format, text or graphic.¹¹² The score turns from a text or object into an activity in which the performative act of interpretation envelops the entire artistic process. For an example of the implications of this, we might think back to George Brecht's narrative of discovering as opposed to composing his *Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)*. A score model was hereby initiated, a mode of musical practice that would appropriate *potentially any object* as a notation to be performed. Freed from the musical establishment's strict ideology of score compliance, this model would form the basis of a culture of notation that characterized much neo-avant-garde practice of the early '60s.

This was not, however, a letting go of all limits, for Brown was adamant that the musical work must retain its integrity as a formal object: "Ambiguity in the service of *expanding* the conceptual and real potential of the work must not lead to the loss of the work as a recognizable, and to a certain extent, 'objective' entity. The 'object' must reappear transformed by the process imposed upon it as a 'subject.'"¹¹³ In this expanded notion of the work of art, unexpectedly allied with emergent forms of kinetic art informed by cybernetics, the artwork becomes a "quasi-organism" that evolves through "multiple formal identities."¹¹⁴ In contrast, although Cage's

¹¹² Cornelius Cardew's Scratch Orchestra adopted this principle in the late 1960s as the fundament of a performance practice in which any graphic material could be adopted as a form of found notation. However, by 1976 Cardew rejected graphic notation altogether as a false avant-garde serving the fancies of the musical bourgeoisie. Cardew, "Wiggly Lines and Wobbly Music," *Studio International* 192, no. 984 (November/December 1976): 249-255. See also Michael Parsons, "The Scratch Orchestra and Visual Arts," *Leonardo Music Journal* 11, Not Necessarily "English Music": Britain's Second Golden Age (2001): 5-11.

¹¹³ Earle Brown, "The Notation and Performance of New Music," 193.

¹¹⁴ Brown, "Form in New Music," 29.

Concert for Piano and Orchestra, among other works, had relied heavily upon ambiguity as a means of indeterminacy, Cage would notoriously come to reject ambiguous notation, which he saw as allowing a space for the performer's ego and habits to direct the work toward clichéd forms of self-expression. If one were not following the "dictates" of the ego, he thought, one was still liable to fall into line with the "dictates" of the subconscious.¹¹⁵

Cage viewed graphic works like *December 1952* as negative corollaries to his own practice, which pushed ever further toward anti-subjective rules of composition and performance that would ostensibly free both composer and performer from influencing the formal outcome of the work. Earle Brown recalls:

The reaction of John Cage to these scores in particular was highly dubious, to say the least. Cage, at this time in 1952, was composing things by chance, by literally flipping coins, and putting things into continuities using this technique which was completely apart from his choice or taste or from anyone's choice or taste, apart from the taste of the performer. In these scores of Cage, once the coins were flipped, the resulting continuity was played that way always, even according to a stopwatch, which is a high degree of control and eliminates almost totally the possibility of a performer being flexible, or of multiple interpretations of the performance itself.¹¹⁶

While Cage was mostly pleased with the results of his early experiments with the grid in that they produced outcomes he could not predict, he continued to be dissatisfied that his chance methods had no effect on performers' relationship to the finished composition. In the final instance, his chart technique continued to produce conventional musical scores written in staff notation that the performer would read and perform in a typically linear fashion. Cage saw the relationship between composer and performer posited by the score as a dehumanizing one in

¹¹⁵ "Dictates" is Cage's term. See Cage, "Composition as Process: II. Indeterminacy," 35.

¹¹⁶ Brown, "On *December 1952*," 7.

which performer and instrument were made to conform to the dictates of an ideal work wholly indifferent to the complexities of individual performance situations.¹¹⁷

And so Cage's version of experimental music would ultimately come to reject form altogether. Beginning with the composition of *Variations I* in January 1958, he began to dismantle musical form by breaking down the graphic elements of notation further than previous compositions like *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* had dared. To ensure the work's variability from performance to performance and that it would escape the determining ideations of the composer, lines and dots were freed from their fixed relation on the page. Moreover, *Variations I* is for "any number of performers; any kind and number of instruments." Dedicated to David Tudor, the score consists of six transparent squares, one printed with points of various sizes indicating multiplicities of sound and the others variously criss-crossed with lines representing five qualities of sound: frequency, overtone structure, amplitude, duration, and "earliest occurrence [sic] within a decided upon time" (Fig. 1.28).¹¹⁸ After arranging the transparencies, the interpreter draws perpendicular lines between points and nearby lines to provide quantifiable distances "to be measured or simply observed." *Variations I* was a further dismantling and remobilization of the point-and-line graphic elements of notation first seen in the segments marked BB and BV in the *Solo for Piano* segment of Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1957-58), in which the five lines of the staff have been dismantled from their parallel orientation

¹¹⁷ The ideological implications of Cage's turn to indeterminacy have been theorized in various ways by Rebecca Y. Kim, Julia Robinson and Branden Joseph. See Kim, "The Formalization of Indeterminacy in 1958: John Cage and Experimental Composition at the New School" and Robinson, "John Cage and Investiture: Unmanning the System," in *John Cage*, ed. Robinson; as well as Branden Joseph, "Chance, Indeterminacy, Multiplicity," in *The Anarchy of Silence*, ed. Robinson.

¹¹⁸ John Cage, *Variations I* (January 1958) (New York: Henmar Press, 1960).

and randomly overlap (Fig. 1.29).¹¹⁹

Cage would go even further than this, enacting a veritable shattering of form. In the second and most radical of the *Variations* series (there would eventually be eight), *Variations II* (February-March 1961) works similarly to *Variations I* except that each point and line is assigned to an individual transparency sheet. Cage presents as a score the basic graphemes of notation radically *unformed*, freed from any fixed relation whatsoever, in an homage to Erik Satie's observation that "music notation is nothing but points and lines."¹²⁰ To Cage, this drastic method could no longer even be called a score. Writing to music critic Peter Yates in May 1959, Cage explained, "I no longer write scores, but only parts which can be performed in any combination....For a year now there are no conventional musical notations in the materials I provide, simply points on transparent sheets, lines on others, free superimpositions of these, and suggestions as to their interpretations."¹²¹

No relations, no form, no object, no music, no work. And yet as every art historian has known since Heinrich Wölfflin, "Every work of art has form, is an organism. Its most essential feature is the character of inevitability—that nothing could be changed or moved from its place, but that all must be as it is."¹²² It has been no different in the realm of music. For both, the tools of the artist have always been set to the task of defining form, understood as the set of relations that constitute the artwork's unique and consistent identity, and so critics have been faced with

¹¹⁹ Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, 135-136.

¹²⁰ John Cage, *John Cage, Writer: Selected Texts*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 105.

¹²¹ John Cage letter to Peter Yates, May 19, 1959, Peter Yates Papers, Mandeville Library, University of California, San Diego.

¹²² These are the words of Heinrich Wölfflin in the first lines of his chapter "Closed and Open Form" in *The Principles of Art History* (New York: Dover, 1950), 124.

two options in the face of Cage's most extreme gestures toward indeterminacy: either to reject them (thus protecting existing aesthetic categories), or to labor over the redefinition of music/art so as to legitimate it and bring it back into the fold (a taming of indeterminacy's most radical implications).

Aesthetic philosopher Nelson Goodman's 1968 text, *Languages of Art*, raised the example of an early point-line notation by Cage as a negative example that does not even constitute a score for its unaccountability to score compliance, which assumes that a score's main function is to be "the authoritative identification of a work from performance to performance."¹²³ The problematic segment in question, drawn from *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*, "furnishes no means of identifying a work from performance to performance or even of a character from mark to mark."¹²⁴ As noted earlier, Goodman's language imagines the relationship of artist to work as a relationship of possession or ownership, in which compliant performances "belong to" a musical work.¹²⁵ Daniel Charles has described well what is at stake here: "It is [for Goodman] a matter of using the score to protect the work against the risk of loss of identity—or increased entropy—that lurks in acquiescence to the ephemeral, denounced as conveying an absolutely fatal fragility."¹²⁶

It may be easy enough to reject Goodman's hardline definition of scores and his

¹²³ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 128.

¹²⁴ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 189.

¹²⁵ The root of this notion in analytic philosophy and the philosophy of music is owed to Peirce's definitions of *type* and *token*, in which a type is defined as a class of which the corresponding token is a member, here applied to describe the relationship between a scored work and its iterations. While Goodman relegates the language of type and token to a footnote (*Languages of Art*, 131 n. 3), it is taken up by Richard Wollheim in *Art and Its Objects* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968). For a critical overview of the major philosophical positions regarding the ontology and identity of the musical work, see Goehr, "Being True to the Work." For Peirce on type and token, see *Collected Papers of Charles Saunders Peirce* 4, ed. C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 423.

¹²⁶ Charles, "Figuration and Prefiguration," 256.

disavowal of Cage's indeterminate works in light of the expanded field opened up by the New York School, but he has nevertheless provided some helpful terms. Elsewhere in *Languages of Art*, he describes how painting and sculpture are understood to be "autographic" arts (meaning, literally, written with one's own hand) in that the work bears a direct, physical relation to the artist. In contrast, the "allographic" arts (meaning written differently, or otherwise) are those distributed or realized by means of score, script or text, those which necessarily exist in multiple copies or manifestations.¹²⁷ Cage's allographism would seem to take the multiple aspect of the score to the letter. The *Variations* series demonstrates the fullest flowering of Cage's strivings toward a seemingly chaotic multiplicity akin to nature, based in a score-performance relation of difference rather than identity which *ensures* that the work will be different every time it is performed. In relation to the discourse of music and art at this moment, Cage devised a work that critically enacts and reenacts the dispossession of the very possibility of form—if we understand form to be the abiding characteristics that uniquely identify a work as itself. As we have seen with the example of George Brecht's *Drip Music*, the challenge of Fluxus similarly owed to the application of an allographic model of production and dissemination to a market and value system based in an autographic model while also exacerbating the ways in which allographic production throws the identify of the artwork into question.

Ultimately, it was Cage alone who would push to the furthest extremes of the abolishment of form. In the final instance, his peers backed away from the precarious edge of the work's loss. Indeterminacy, mobile form, and graphic notation would disappear from the work of most of its innovators by 1962, marking a return to musical order. From the vantage-point of

¹²⁷ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 113-114.

1965, Morton Feldman explained:

Up to now the various elements of music (rhythm, pitch, dynamics, etc.) were only recognizable in terms of their formal relationship to each other. As controls are given up, one finds that these elements lose their initial, inherent identity. But it is just because of this identity that these elements can be unified within the composition. Without this identity there can be no unification. It follows then, that an indeterminate music can lead only to catastrophe. This catastrophe we allowed to take place.¹²⁸

Neither would Fluxus artists revel in the anarchic, anti-formal effects of indeterminacy as Cage did. On August 7, 1958, Brecht prepared for the last meeting of Cage's summer course the outlines of a comparative analysis of Brown's *Four Systems* (1954) and Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI*, two works that Cage would analyze in his infamous "Indeterminacy" lecture given at the IFNM on September 8th. Brecht's notes show that Cage's classroom was not the site of conventional pedagogical transmission but the scene of a two-way exchange that should make us consider the ways in which Cage's practice transformed in the wake of his encounter with his students, many of whom were only a decade younger.¹²⁹ Here is Brecht's analysis of the structure and operation of Brown's *Four Systems*, a graphic score of rectilinear elements much like *December 1952* (Fig. 30):

Since the structure being interpreted...retains its relationships...the situation is concerned with relativity as well as with probability. That is, the same structure retaining the relationships between its parts is viewed in different frames of reference.¹³⁰

Brecht describes *Four Systems* in the same manner by which we have come to understand the

¹²⁸ Feldman, "Predeterminate/Indeterminate" (1965), in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, 35. This essay originally appeared in *Composer* 19 (Spring 1966): 3-4.

¹²⁹ Regarding the similarity of Brecht's notes to Cage's "Indeterminacy" lecture, Rebecca Y. Kim has proposed that either Cage borrowed ideas from Brecht or already knew about the Darmstadt invitation and requested Brecht's assistance. Given the evidence on hand, the former seems the more plausible. See Kim, "In No Uncertain Musical Terms," 153-154; and Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 1, 11, 17, 63.

¹³⁰ Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 1, 63.

diagram. He reiterates the idea later on in the passage:

Though the reference frame is rotated the fragments or sound-events remain in somewhat fixed relationship to each other, so that the macrostructure (the piece as a whole) maintains certain relationships through each performer viewing the same score-structure from a different vantage point.¹³¹

Brecht locates the phenomenon in Cage's work, too. "This is analogous somewhat to your page no. 59 (Stable exhibition)," he writes, pointing to a segment from *Solo for Piano* that is a jumbled lattice of overlapping staff lines peppered with notes, a momentary diagrammatic spatial deformation of staff notation before its explosion into the severed points and lines of *Variations I* and *II* (Fig. 1.31).

The next part of Brecht's analysis concerns the level of each work's "situation participation," or the extent to which either piece "partakes of the situation in which it occurs, as opposed to arising from some pre-existent structure."¹³² Stockhausen's work, he observes, would seem to be more situation-specific given that the order of individual sound fragments is not pre-ordained, and yet "the *ambiguity* in interpretation of each fragment in the B[rown] piece compensates for the relative rigidity of structure within each system."¹³³ "Dictionaries call indeterminate and ambiguous synonyms," Brecht ponders, "I wonder if they really are."¹³⁴ And so he goes to their roots, noting the following:

ambiguity - ambigire, to waver, be taken in more than one way.
indeterminate - determinire, to limit.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 1, 65.

¹³² Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 1, 67.

¹³³ Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 1, 67, italics mine.

¹³⁴ Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 1, 69.

¹³⁵ Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 1, 65.

With this series of close observations, Brecht isolates a crucial difference between the two approaches to chance approximated by Brown's open-ended abstractions on the one hand and Stockhausen's—as well as Cage's—rule-bound, algorithmic processes of indeterminacy on the other. Indeterminacy is based in a relationship of negative dependency to limits, particularly in cases where rationally derived systems of chance are employed, such as random number tables, coins, dice, cards, etc., in which the experimental work emerges by way of a rigorous upholding of a rule system. These systems may be layered at every level of the composition process in order to intensify the quality of indeterminacy but at the cost of restricting the freedoms of the performer.¹³⁶ As Cage laid it out to his Darmstadt audience:

To ensure indeterminacy with respect to its performance, a composition must be determinate of itself. If this indeterminacy is to have a non-dualistic nature, each element of the notation must have a single interpretation rather than a plurality of interpretations which, coming from a single source, fall into relation.¹³⁷

As we have said before about Cage, and this was his goal: no relations, no form, no object, no music, no work. Ambiguity, in contrast, appealed to no limits whatsoever. It pointed to a radical dispossession of the work by the artist so that it could be taken up by the performer or beholder in ways to be discovered beyond the dictates of the score. Here is Earle Brown reflecting on *November 1952* and *December 1952*:

I mean the results of those pieces do not belong to me. They never can be my property. The only thing I did, was to create the environment, the conditions under which people can get together and make music. You know, I am not an anti-ego, or the kind of ego which prides itself by being non-egoistic. I think there's a whole sophistry going on about ego [undoubtedly Brown is thinking of Cage here] but these pieces interest me, because they seem to be some of the first pieces which allow that situation of non-owning, and just because it says *December*

¹³⁶ Cardew would put it this way: “[Cage’s] word ‘indeterminacy’ is like a conviction: the relation between musical score and performance *cannot* be determined.” Cardew, “Notation—Interpretation, Etc.,” 21-23.

¹³⁷ Cage, “Composition as Process: II. Indeterminacy,” 38.

1952, Earle Brown. In the program notes, graphic score by Earle Brown: what you will hear, is the results of the collaboration between all of the people that do it.¹³⁸

Brecht had made a similar observation in his 1957 essay “Chance-Imagery,” a text that he had sent to Cage, thereby launching their relationship. It provides a remarkable historicization and theorization of chance processes that also includes a methodological section outlining possible uses for coins, dice, numbered wheels, cards, bowl drawing, random numbers, automatism, and what Brecht refers to as “the irrelevant process”—the determination of form by means of a system unrelated to the work at hand, such as Cage’s practice of marking notes along the imperfections of the composition paper.¹³⁹ Brecht is most deeply interested in the latter two categories, which, in contrast to systems that derive from “mechanical processes” such as casting dice, are seen as poetically expansive, forming an art historical “vector” through Dada practices and Duchamp’s sense of irony, Surrealist automatism and André Breton’s notion of the marvelous, to Pollock and the “present-day chance-imagists.”

In the most extreme examples of chance-imagery, Brecht explains, “significant images occur as the result of processes over which we exercise *no selection at all*.”¹⁴⁰ For example, “The most moving collage I ever experienced was the 4 x 4 x 24 foot side of a truck carrying boilers, a piece of canvas patched irregularly with other pieces of canvas of various shades of gray.”¹⁴¹

This was to be a great freedom for the artist. “The receptacle of forms available to the artist thus

¹³⁸ Morton Feldman, et. al., “Morton Feldman, Earle Brown and Heinz-Klaus Metzger in Discussion,” *Music Before Revolution* (EMI Electrola, 1C 16528954/957, 1972).

¹³⁹ “Chance-imagery” refers to the “formation of images resulting from chance, wherever these occur in nature. (The word ‘imagery’ is intentionally ambiguous enough, I think, to apply either to the physical act of creating an image out of real materials, or to the formation of an image in the mind, say by abstraction from a more complex system.)” Brecht, “Chance-Imagery,” *A Great Bear Pamphlet* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966).

¹⁴⁰ Brecht, “Chance-Imagery” (1966) (ubuclassics, 2004), 23.

¹⁴¹ Brecht, “Chance-Imagery” (1966) (ubuclassics, 2004), 23.

becomes open-ended, and eventually embraces all of nature, for the recognition of significant form becomes limited only by the observer's self."¹⁴² In other words, Brecht saw "the ability of humans to structure anything" as an inevitability from which there was no point in trying to engineer an escape.¹⁴³

And so form would remain. On October 10, 1958, after the conclusion of Cage's summer course and his departure to Europe, Brecht began to outline an essay (never published) called "Sources of Structure in Contemporary Music," which would chart the "necessity of internal relationships" of musical forms.¹⁴⁴ Beginning with classical, "pre-Schönberg" modal and tonal forms like the fugue and sonata, his notes outline the historical development of structure in music through Wagner, Stravinsky, neo-classicism, the serial music of Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, Stockhausen, and Boulez up to the contemporary, as-yet-unclassified work by Cage, Feldman, Wolff, and Brown. Even chance and random methods are here regarded as upholding a kind of structural relation—that of non-relation.

At stake is Brecht's turning away in the final instance from Cagean indeterminacy in the

¹⁴² Brecht's use of the term "significant form" is owed to the early 20th century formalism of Clive Bell. Clearly, however, it is an anachronistic, even obsolete term for the kind of form that Brecht is trying to describe, indicating that the operative language in art discourse of the time had not yet caught up with developments in artistic practice. Brecht, "Chance-Imagery" (1966) (ubuclassics, 2004), 24, italics mine; Clive Bell, "The Aesthetic Hypothesis," *Art* (New York: Stokes, 1913). Duchamp's essay "The Creative Act," which makes similar claims to Brecht's, was presented publicly in 1957 and published in 1959 in Robert Lebel's widely read *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 77-78.

¹⁴³ George Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, ed. Dieter Daniels and Hermann Braun, vol. 2 (Cologne: Walther König, 1991), 101. Cage had once expressed a similar view before committing himself to indeterminacy. In 1937, he wrote, "The present methods of writing music, principally those which employ harmony and its reference to particular steps in the field of sound, will be inadequate for the composer, who will be faced with the entire field of sound... The principle of form will be our only constant connection with the past. Although the great form of the future will not be as it was in the past, at one time the fugue and at another the sonata, it will be related to these as they are to each other: through the principle of organization or man's common ability to think." "The Future of Music: Credo," 1937, *Silence*, p. 4-6. This text was reprinted in the program for Cage's 25-year retrospective concert in 1958. Brecht records in his notebook this thought by Henri Bergson: Disorder is merely "an order we had not been looking for." Branden Joseph has written about the relation of Cage's work and ideas about multiplicity and indeterminacy to his reception of the philosophy of Henri Bergson.

¹⁴⁴ Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 2, 23.

recognition that structure and form cannot be evaded. If form could not be abolished, Brecht thought, it ought to be opened up to alternative modes of organization. And so we find in his notebook the following text, dated October 24, 1958 (Fig. 1.32):

A. The Problem: To construct situation in which it is made possible for light and sound events of any desired characteristics (frequency/wave-length, amplitude/brightness, duration/spectral distribution, morphology) to occur at any points in space and time.

B. Requirements for the System

1. Maximum Generality (as above)
2. Maximum Flexibility (possibility for changing the nature of the universe of possibilities from which the elements of A. are chosen, and for changing the nature of the situation in which the elements of A find themselves.)
3. Maximum economy.¹⁴⁵

With Cage away in Europe for the time being, this was a kind of assignment Brecht administered to himself, and it seemed to guide the development of his scores thereafter. The importance of these notes is their indication that the solution to the “problem” Brecht faced was not to be found in an object but an alternative articulation of form. His compositions pursued the possibility of a form that played at the boundary of form and formlessness, objecthood and objectlessness by way of these three “requirements” of generality, flexibility, and economy. Having faced early on in Cage’s course the practicable limits of complexly regimented systems of indeterminacy, he would now work toward simplification. His next pieces would adopt simple organization systems such as decks of playing cards or cards inscribed with plainly written instructions. These latter pieces, his event scores, would become in the ensuing years a foundational model for Fluxus production, providing the diagram for a new manner of artwork in flux.

¹⁴⁵ This entry is dated 26 October 1958. Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 2, 35.

In effect, the event scores of Fluxus were engaged rather with subjecting form to the ambiguities, nuances, and evocative capacities of language and performance channeled through the experience of different subjects. They took advantage of the dangerous semiotic mobility attributed to varied interpretive encounters with a given diagram. This practice owed as much to the example of Brown as it did to Cage. While Cage ultimately rejected ambiguous notation in favor of more precise, mechanical forms of indeterminacy such as tossing coins and consulting the *I Ching*, ambiguity would be embraced by Fluxus artists for the creation of a kind of artwork that, as Brecht described, would be “left as open as it could be and still have the same shape.”¹⁴⁶

The Fluxus Diagram

The best known Fluxus scores employed vernacular language to schematically map out spatio-temporal arrangements of objects and actions, as if to enfold diagrammatic structure into language itself. This characterization of the event score as a primarily language-based format has flattened out what was actually an incredible diversity of approaches, many of them highly graphic. If, as Robinson has suggested, “Accounts of Fluxus frequently exclude detailed analyses of language functions and prove how the performance context has overridden the range of textual strategies in Fluxus,” this is equally if not more true in regard to the overall range of graphic experimentation seen across Fluxus scores, by which both text and image were brought into meaningful counterplay.¹⁴⁷ For even when their primary mode of communication is textual,

¹⁴⁶ Michael Nyman, “An Interview with George Brecht” (1976), in *An Introduction to George Brecht’s Book of the Tumbler on Fire*, by Martin, 110. Allan Kaprow put the widespread turn to vernacular language among the neo-avant-garde this way: “The easiest way to notate an action: describe it simply.” Statement by Kaprow published in *Notations*, ed. John Cage and Alison Knowles (New York: Something Else Press, 1970), n.p.

¹⁴⁷ Robinson, “From Abstraction to Model: In the Event of George Brecht & The Conceptual Turn in the Art of the 1960s,” PhD diss., 262.

visual traces of the diagram remained. In Brecht's scores we find so many bullet points, some of which appear like Kandinsky's liberated point, independent of any text (Figs. 1.33-1.38). Add to this the numbered lists, parentheses, curiously deliberate negative spaces and even occasional images—punctuation and graphic elements that, as Liz Kotz has described, “function almost algebraically—as if to reduce language to a set of spatial relations.”¹⁴⁸

Maciunas's scores resurrected the form of the grid in the most quotidian sense: the administrative table. In an oft-repeated format, a list of actions occupy the grid's lefthand side while a timescale appears across the top, and the performer is to choose and mark certain gestures to be performed in time. In *Solo for Violin* (1962), a performer might play a sentimental tune, pluck and break strings, blow into the instrument's cavity, fill it with rocks, or, most violently, rip it apart and throw the pieces into the audience (Fig. 1.39). The grid format was used by Maciunas for scores ever more material and physical, taking as their sound content bodily noises and gestures. The actions listed in *Solo for Sick Man* (1962) include cough, spit, sniff, snore, gargle, swallow pill, and blow wet nose. The tables could also be printed on transparent paper and populated by markings observed from an underlaid page of conventional notation.

We could also look to *Graphis 82* by Dick Higgins, part of a series of works begun at the time of his participation in Cage's class in 1958-59 and performed in 1962 at the Living Theatre and the Fluxus festivals in Wiesbaden and Paris (Fig. 1.40). Looping lines knit together a

¹⁴⁸ Brecht use of parentheses was meant, as the artist explains, to “refer to events in one's experience. (Egg), for example, refers to the actual occurrence of egg in some form in one's experience.” George Brecht notebook, December 1962-May 1963, Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, Museum of Modern Art, New York. We also know that Brecht was keen to control the look of his scores on the page. In a letter to Michael Horowitz, editor of the poetry and music journal *New Departures*, Brecht wrote: “La Monte has told me that you would like to publish some events and pieces in the *Musical Times*, and of course you may. I would only like to ask that there be enough empty space, and that the format be respected as far as practical. The ‘Time-Table Music’ and the ‘Candle-Piece for Radios’ has just been published in *KULCHUR 3* with changes in format and reduction in white space that (for me) has made the scores seem somewhat cramped” (September 10, 1961). Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, ed. Dieter Daniels and Hermann Braun, vol. 7 (Cologne: Walter König, 2005), 104-105.

scattering of words, the whole of which was to be transcribed onto the floor of the performance space as a complex labyrinth for performers to follow as they vocalized the various words. Theater critic David Cole writes of the work, “At the time of the *Graphis* experiments, Dick Higgins was, by his own description, ‘a musician in rebellion against my medium,’ fascinated by the ‘extraordinary notations’ of modern music.”¹⁴⁹ An importation of the graphic score to the context of experimental theater and happenings, Higgins’s *Graphis* scores suggested a new kind of “visual script” befitting the highly visual theatrical tradition of Futurist and Bauhaus performance.¹⁵⁰

These visions—of a violinist ravaging his instrument or a gaggle of performers weaving circuitously around a stage—point to the ways in which the experimental notations of Fluxus artists incorporated diagrammatic forms associated with rationality, bureaucracy, and administration as a form of sardonically deflating cultural critique. In Maciunas’s scores, the body’s limitations and frailties are highlighted, not mitigated, by rigorous structures, and Higgins’s *Graphis* mocks Taylorist workflow schemata.¹⁵¹ In Robert Watts’s anthology of scores, *Events*, vintage graphic collages depict male and female bodies subject to forms of torture and experimentation that in turns appear both violent and erotic (Figs. 1.41-1.43). Benjamin Patterson’s book of scores, *Methods and Processes* (1962), pairs texts with photographic cutouts

¹⁴⁹ David Cole, “The Visual Script: Theory and Techniques,” *The Drama Review: TDR* 20, no. 4, Theatrical Theory Issue (December 1976), 28.

¹⁵⁰ Cole’s article demonstrates that the interest in graphic notation migrated quickly from music to theater. From his viewpoint in 1976, he wrote, “In it [the visual script] we might well have found a means of realizing two of the most persistent dreams of modern theatre: (1) *the freeing of performance from all dependence on texts*, and (2) *the totally integrated theatre production (gesamtkunstwerk)*.” The second goal was irrelevant to Fluxus artists’ modest productions, but the first stands. Cole, “The Visual Script,” 48.

¹⁵¹ For an overview of this phenomenon and its relation at an earlier moment in history to Duchamp’s readymades, see Helen Molesworth, “Work Avoidance: The Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp’s Readymades,” *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 53-55.

of figures marked up with analytical measurements and activated by vectorial arrows (Fig. 1.44). The total disciplining of mind and body dramatized in these works was a tactic counterpoised to the loosening of form and relation we find in scores like Brecht's.

Notations in myriad experimental, highly graphic forms continued to be a significant basis of Fluxus practice such that in 1969, Alison Knowles assisted Cage in the editing for publication by Something Else Press of *Notations*, an anthology drawn from Cage's archive of musical graphics accompanied by quotations from over one hundred artists and composers. In many ways, *Notations* can be seen as a document of the aftermath of the rich terrain opened out by *An Anthology*, the implications of the earlier publication having been followed through by musicians and visual artists beyond the Cagean circle. *Notations* includes conventional notations, visual notations, text instructions, and even object-like documents to be treated as notations.¹⁵²

As we have seen, the debates around indeterminacy, improvisation, and ambiguity that emerged between 1950 and 1962 were a response to technological advances but they were also part of a search for alternatives to musical form wholesale and a testing of the limits of musical identity. Cage's *4'33"* had been an important, early effort to open up the field of music to all sounds, but by the late 1950s it had been replaced by efforts to let fall all boundaries whatsoever, even that of preconceived duration. While the field of music would see a return to order, on the fringes of the visual art world an intermedia, notational neo-avant-garde was launched.

Although Cage and Fluxus would take divergent paths, in October 1962 Cage composed *0'00"*, a kind of homage to the genre of score that he had seen emerge in his classroom and

¹⁵² Toshi Ichianagi's *The Field* (1966), for instance, is one of very few photographs in the volume. It depicts a surface that has been impressed or embossed with objects that have left abstract, geometric, and in some cases mechanical traces from which the performer derives rules of time, space and density. Cage and Knowles, *Notations*, n.p.

which had made its public debut in various Fluxus concerts that summer and fall. Cage's other compositions of this moment were continuations of his graphic experiments with points and lines combined with chance processes and appropriated organizational forms. In contrast, *0'00*" was a "solo to be performed in any way by anyone," dedicated to the Japanese Fluxus affiliates Yoko Ono and Toshi Ichiyanagi. Known also as *4'33*" (*No. 2*), the piece was a bookend and fitful counterpart to his original silent piece coming ten years later. Not only is *0'00*" a mere paragraph of text, it bears an uncommonly intersubjective charge in its requirement that it be fulfilled as "an obligation to others." It was, in effect, Cage's attempt at writing a Fluxus score:

In a situation provided with maximum amplification (no feedback),
perform a disciplined action.
With any interruptions.
Fulfilling in whole or part an obligation to others.
No two performances to be of the same action, nor may that action be the
performance of a 'musical' composition.
No attention to be given the situation (electronic, musical, theatrical).
The first performance was the writing of this manuscript (first margination
only).

The Fluxus Event Score: George Brecht and the Notational Object

The event score, the first common format for the Fluxus group, was from the beginning imbricated in perceptual encounters with the material world and its objects. Brecht's first explicitly named "event" arose from the artist's elevated consciousness of a quite banal situation: standing behind his Ford station wagon, its engine idling and turn signal blinking. Such piqued, quasi-surreal encounters with the objects and events of everyday experience were so basic to the very definition of Brecht's event that by 1965, after his active period of writing scores had already ceased, he sent to Maciunas a score entitled *Event Score*. It was an emblematic summarization of the entire genre:

Arrange or discover an event score and then realize it.

- If the score is arrived at while awake, then make a dream realization, that is, note all dreams until a realization of the score has been discovered in a dream.
- If the score is dreamed, then make a waking realization, that is, search in your waking life for whatever dream or part of a dream constitutes the score.

Brecht, suspicious of the nostalgic and melancholic affect of Surrealism, was typically not one to fixate on dreams. And yet here he mobilizes the dream state to stand in for the transformational and world-making interchange of subject and object, self and other, (sub)consciousness and world that characterizes an event. *Event Score* also emphasizes that the event score format is not

a purely conceptual medium. It is based in the arrangement or discovery of event-like phenomena within the flow of everyday experience as it unfolds in a highly material time-space. The interchange narrated by Brecht's story of *Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)*—in which phenomena are discovered, arranged, encapsulated into a text piece, and then re-realized in performance—was common in Brecht's practice. Objects begat events and vice versa.

The event score could be seen to take shape even earlier with the evolution of Brecht's *Time-Table Music* (July 1959), which instructs performers to go to a train station and appropriate posted arrival and departure times as indications for when and how long sounds should be made (Fig. 2.1).¹ This was the first score Brecht signed and dated in his notebooks, and it was the first to be typewritten on a card, soon to become the artist's preferred format. It was also one of the first to circulate in print, appearing in a 1961 issue of the American poetry magazine *Kulchur*. *Time-Table Music* translates the vectors of travel—the comings and goings of trains, arranged in tabular form—as a “found notation” for making music.² Brecht returned to the idea in April 1961 to create *Time-Table Event*, in which a time-table determines the length of the piece but not precisely when the sounds are to occur within it (Fig. 2.2). Together, the “music” and “event” versions of this piece illustrate a shift from the reading of tabulated information to an open timeframe approaching Cage's 4'33” in which any number of events may occur depending upon the circumstances of its context of appearance. These two scores approximately bookend the progression of Brecht's scores in this period toward extremely minimal language, a progression wholly reflected within the singular work *Drip Music (Drip Event)* and its built-in “second

¹ Julia Robinson discusses the development of this work in detail in “From Abstraction to Model: In the Event of George Brecht & The Conceptual Turn in the Art of the 1960s,” PhD diss., 145-46.

² George Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebook*, ed. Dieter Daniels and Hermann Braun, vol. 3 (Cologne: Walther König, 1991), 133. Brecht describes both *Card-Piece for Voice* and *Time-Table Music* as examples of “found notation.”

version” that reads, simply, “dripping.” By 1962, the year of Fluxus’s founding, the specificity and length of Brecht’s earlier scores had been given over to generality, ambiguity, and openness.

Brecht reached “maximum economy” in April 1961 with *Word Event*, a score consisting of a single, bulleted word: “EXIT” (Fig. 2.3). The score became a favored means of closing out Fluxus concerts, to be scrawled on a chalkboard or handheld sign. For Brecht simply noticing a preexisting exit sign, perhaps above a concert hall door, constituted a fitful realization. With its maximum flexibility, generality, and economy, *Word Event* was a remarkable encapsulation of the event score format’s dialectical operation of shuttling form between the registers of the abstract (of language and ideas) with its propensity for mobility, and the concrete (of real objects, situations, time, and space). Brecht’s turn to more and more capacious language would be, in other words, all the more to allow the concrete, actual, material circumstances of each individual realization to shape the final outcome of the piece. On this transformation, Brecht remarked, “What we have here is a research in music, turned into a research in objects. What that gives is something that everyone has to decide for himself.”³

This is what art historical accounts of the event score emphasizing the format’s proto-conceptualist nature have thus repressed: that the event score was only one part of a two-pronged strategy which aimed for the radical reconceptualization of form into a dialectical twinning of the abstract and concrete. Paradoxically, it was by means of the mobile format of the score that Fluxus could develop a practice that was at once deeply material and virtually authorless, as we shall see. And so, after dwelling on the origins of Fluxus scoring practices, we will now attend to

³ Martin, “An Interview with George Brecht,” 81-82.

the material side of things, to see how from the start, Fluxus practice was deeply intertwined with an engagement with objects—objects of a certain kind, seen as avatars of “the concrete.”

The Fluxus Concrete

I always talk about the cards in Water Yam as event-scores, like a musical score is a plan for realizing a piece of music, right? The event-scores, the cards in Water Yam are plans, or suggestions for realizing something concrete.
—George Brecht⁴

On June 9, 1962, George Maciunas and Benjamin Patterson hosted a summer concert at Rolf Jährling’s Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, one of several pre-Fluxus events to take place that summer. It marked a symbolic turning point, deliberately positioned “Après John Cage” (the concert’s title) and before the first Fluxus concerts Maciunas was arranging for the coming fall. With this concert, Maciunas intended to clear a path for a new artistic tendency that had been coalescing in New York since 1958 and introduce it to a European audience for the first time. The evening began with a reading of Maciunas’s manifesto-like text, “Neo-Dada in New York,” in German alongside the display of an illustrative chart that diagrammed the relations between the wide spectrum of artists and practices with which Maciunas had been associated back home (Fig. 2.4). Mapping the territory between the two poles of “time art” and “space art” were the categories of literature, graphics, music, theater, happenings, and environments. Under these umbrellas appeared a staggering diversity of names: Jackson Mac Low, Emmett Williams, Henry Flynt, Larry Poons, Benjamin Patterson, Al Hansen, Claes Oldenburg, George Brecht, Dick Higgins, La Monte Young, Robert Morris, Walter De Maria, Allan Kaprow, Ray Johnson, and

⁴ *Octobre des arts, Lyon, 1986* (Lyon: Musée Saint-Pierre art contemporain, 1986), 49.

Stan VanDerBeek. According to Maciunas's logic, the motley group was unified by a common turn to the concrete:

Almost each category and each artist...is bound with the concept of Concretism ranging in intensity from pseudo concretism, surface concretism, structural concretism, method concretism (indeterminacy systems), to the extreme of concretism which is beyond the limits of art, and therefore sometimes referred to as anti-art, or art-nihilism.⁵

The "anti-art" forms are directed primarily against art as a profession, against the artificial separation of a performer from audience, or creator and spectator, or life and art; it is against the artificial forms or patterns or methods of art itself; it is against the purposefulness, formfulness and meaningfulness of art; Anti-art is life, is nature, is true reality—it is one and all.⁶

Dick Higgins would later offer his own account:

"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.⁷

This notion of what we might call "the Fluxus concrete" was not a revival of the concretism so named by De Stijl leader Theo van Doesburg in the earlier part of the century to refer to strictly non-referential, abstract painting and sculpture (although such work had come back into consciousness in the early 1960s through the efforts of new geometricists such as Max Bill).⁸ Rather, in its most extreme versions, Maciunas's theory of concrete art pursued the logic of the readymade (hence his reliance on the neo-dada appellation) to attack the illusionism and artificiality of art in general. More than any other artistic tendency to disentangle itself from the

⁵ Maciunas, "Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art," 156.

⁶ Maciunas, "Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art," 157.

⁷ Dick Higgins, *Jefferson's Birthday / Postface* (New York: Something Else Press, 1964), 83-4.

⁸ In 1960, Bill organized a large-scale, international, retrospective exhibition of concrete art in Zürich. See Max Bill, *Konkrete Kunst: 50 Jahre Entwicklung* (Zürich: Helmhaus Zürich, 1960).

knotty constellation of practices elaborated in Maciunas's chart, the idea of the concrete was to become a fundamental—if not *the* fundamental—precept of Fluxus, the primary means by which the art-life divide, which had preoccupied generations of avant-garde artists, would finally be breached.

Maciunas and his cohort's turn to the concrete was part of an early backlash in the American context against a mass culture of the image that was seen to be negatively usurping and falsifying reality. In 1961, six years before the appearance of Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* and following the watershed television debates between Kennedy and Nixon, the conservative American historian Daniel J. Boorstin published *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*.⁹ Boorstin's account was one of the earliest critical analyses of postmodern image culture in the United States. His concept of the "pseudo-event" referred to happenings designed expressly for circulation in the media, which found their corollary in the rise of celebrities, those carefully scripted pseudo-subjects similarly designed for media circulation. For artists, the corollary and primary signifier in artistic practice of such artificiality, deception, and fantasy was illusionistic representation, against which the turn to everyday objects and materials was deemed an effective counter-tactic. Dick Higgins made explicit reference to the mass media's negative effects in his widely circulated text of 1966, "Intermedia," a manifesto in support of an expanded media landscape in which artists could begin to explore the terrain between mediums. "Intermedia" has often been misrecognized as an unqualified celebration of new media although it was in fact a resolute statement *against* the fetishization of the

⁹ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

technological in light of its impact on human culture. Higgins writes:¹⁰

Due to the spread of mass literacy, to television and the transistor radio, our sensitivities have changed. The very complexity of this impact gives us a taste for simplicity....The art which most directly does this is the one which allows this immediacy, with a minimum of distractions....If we assume, unlike McLuhan and others who have shed some light on the problem up until now, that there are dangerous forces at work in our world, isn't it appropriate to ally ourselves against these?¹¹

Higgins's concerns about the "dangerous forces" of media culture were echoed in a number of exhibitions in the early 1960s that featured work positioned in explicit opposition to painting and sculpture. These works were identified simply as "objects" for their three-dimensionality and their anti-transcendent address. The exhibition *Art 1963—A New Vocabulary*, staged at the YM/WHA of Philadelphia in October-November 1962 while the first Fluxus concert tour was unfolding overseas and in-between the inauguration of New Realism and the codification of Pop art, brought together and attempted provisionally to define a number of these new terms and tendencies. Organized by Audrey Sabol and Billy Klüver, the exhibition included works by Brecht, Robert Breer, Jim Dine, Johns, Kaprow, Klüver, Lichtenstein, Marisol, Oldenburg, Rauschenberg, Rosenquist, Segal, Tinguely, and Watts. The catalogue took the form of an incomplete and draft-like dictionary of new aesthetic terms. "Object" was a crucial one, defined thus:

ob-ject n. 1. something which may be perceived by the senses; a distinct bounded thing having specific density. 2. in this art movement a word signifying concern for "things" as opposed to the action-continuum of abstract expressionism. 3. the

¹⁰ Here the term media refers to the technologies and apparatuses of artistic production whereas medium refers to the conventional categories of painting, sculpture, etc.

¹¹ Dick Higgins, "Statement on Intermedia" (1966), reprinted *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, by Armstrong and Rothfuss, 172-173.

object is a fact. 4. no object is purely functional.¹²

Here the term “object” was multiply resonant. It referred to the materiality or resolute thinginess of the work as much as it situated the work in opposition to Abstract Expressionism’s embrace of both abstraction and expressionism. It was a definition minima for the legibility of the art object that foreshadowed the “non-compact,” “diffuse,” and “nearly imperceptible” forms of the expanded and dematerialized post-minimalist and process artworks to come later that decade.¹³

By the following year the artists identified with Pop had been separated out of this milieu, and the problem of how to define the work of these so-called object artists remained. In December 1963, Nicolas and Elena Calas organized the exhibition *Hard Center* at Thibaut Gallery, New York, including a Johns flashlight, boxes by De Maria, Morris’s *Three Rulers (Yardstick)* (1963), and a chair piece by Brecht. The exhibition was accompanied by an essay which began: “*It is not art, It is not painting, It is not sculpture. IT IS. It is an object, yet not the product of the imagination, nor the outcome of an act of grace.*”¹⁴ The text continues:

A new generation of artists is shifting the emphasis from the subject to the object: what is it? We do not escape from reality when facing the new object for it is neither fantastic or symbolic, nor intended as an expression of individual or collective unconscious, nor is it the sign of a secret code. With this object, we are far removed from the lower depths of man and society and stay firmly in the center of the *now*.

In line with Higgins’s call for simplicity and a minimum of distractions, these objects newly defined were credited with diminishing the significance of the artist-ego and situating the

¹² Billy Klüver, Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldengurg, and Jean Tinguely, *Art 1963—A New Vocabulary* (Philadelphia: Fine Arts Committee of the Arts Council of the YM/YWHA, 1962).

¹³ Lawrence Alloway, “The Expanding and Disappearing Work of Art” (1969) in *Topics in American Art Since 1965* (New York: Norton & Company, 1975), 207. See also Marcia Tucker and James Monte, *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1969).

¹⁴ Nicolas and Elena Calas, *Hard Center*, exhibition brochure (New York: Thibaut Gallery, 1963), Jean Brown papers.

viewing subject emphatically in the present. And they would do so primarily through the material vocabulary of the readymade. But what would ultimately separate Fluxus tactics from the parade of neo-Dada, Pop, and New Realist objects that attempted in their various ways to gain purchase on the real was the way in which the Fluxus engagement with objects was always paired with a score-based practice. For along with objects, the score was a complementary means for accessing concrete objects and experiences. This idea was already present in Maciunas's Wuppertal statement, in which he called for an art form that would be:

an “automatic machine” within which or by which, nature (either in the form of an independent performer or indeterminate-chance compositional methods) can complete the art-form, effectively and independently of the artist-composer. Thus the primary contribution of a truly concrete artist consists in creating a *concept* or a *method* by which form can be created independently of him.¹⁵

By 1962, Maciunas had understood through the example of Brecht's work that the event score—abstract, proto-conceptual, and language-based—had proven to be an effectual version of such an automatic machine, one that enabled the outlining of a form that could adopt as its content the material conditions of any given reality and recognized in the readymade an always-already potentially activated material or “notational object.” As George Brecht would describe, “Event-scores prepare one for an event to happen in one's own ‘now.’”¹⁶ We should return, then, to Brecht's activities around John Cage's experimental composition courses in the summers of 1958 and 1959 to witness the early co-evolution of events and objects.

¹⁵ Maciunas, “Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art,” 157.

¹⁶ George Brecht, “EVENTS. (assembled notes.)” (1961), reprinted in *George Brecht: Events: A Heterospective*, by Robinson, 226.

The Event-like Nature of Objects

Brecht's earliest compositions for Cage's class relied upon everyday objects with event-like qualities chosen not for their appearance but for what they could do or what they sounded like. In July 1958, Brecht began a list of "things that light will go through," including glass, plastic sheeting, a screen, cellophane, cloth, nylon, foil poked through with pin-holes, gauze, and string glued on a frame (recalling the works of Duchamp and Picabia discussed in Chapter 1). These items were also chosen for their easy availability and common use. Remarkably, the pieces Brecht wrote for the piano, or any musical instrument for that matter, were few. He preferred compositions that utilized rather a myriad of handy quotidian thingamajigs: milk bottles with pebbles inside, colored lights, confetti, sandpaper, ping-pong balls, toothpicks, matches, sand, water, birthday candles, burettes, playing cards, toy ukelele, comb, brush, whistle, toothpicks, and a night light. As Michael Nyman has explained, "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 class."¹⁷

Brecht's compositions also tended to occupy space in ways that mapped across the entire performance space, enveloping the audience. In *Burette Music* (1959), burettes were positioned around the darkened classroom in relation to the pattern of the floor tiles and set to drip "very slowly."¹⁸ *Candle-Piece for Radios* (1959) similarly entailed scattering about the room the work's primary sound-source, radios, here paired with birthday candles, which provided illumination for performers to take direction from stacks of instruction cards and concomitantly set the time-length for the piece. It was a common feature of Brecht's pieces to conclude at the

¹⁷ Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music : Cage and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), 63.

¹⁸ Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 3, 45.

extinguishing of a candle or, more often, the completion of the final task indicated by a limited set of cue-cards. “There was a general feeling,” Brecht explained, “that clock time was not the way to do it. But the problem that I’d posed for myself with the *Candle Piece for Radios*, for example, was that the duration of the piece shouldn’t be set beforehand but that it should come from within the piece itself.”¹⁹

The immanent duration of Brecht’s compositions capitalized upon the same quality of percussion instruments that had initially attracted Cage: that the time-length of a percussive tone is contingent upon the resonant materiality of the instrument. In the years leading up to his prepared pianos, Cage had had an influential encounter with the abstract filmmaker Oskar Fischinger in which, as the composer remembers, “He spoke to me about what he called the spirit inherent in materials and he claimed that a sound made from wood had a different spirit than one made from glass. The next day I began writing music which was to be played on percussion instruments.”²⁰ The encounter led to Cage’s *The Quartet* (1937) for unspecified percussion instruments. In preparation for its first presentation, Cage and his co-performers adopted tables, books, chairs, pots, and pans, as well as finds from local junkyards and lumberyards including automobile brake-drums, pipe, steel rings, and wooden blocks.²¹

If Cage at that point had not yet arrived at indeterminacy, his giving over the form of the work to its constitutive materials was an early gesture towards the idea, especially given that his materials were apt to change with every performance. These ideas were further developed in a 1948 lecture, “Defense of Satie,” delivered at Black Mountain College, in which Cage defined

¹⁹ Nyman, “An Interview with George Brecht,” 115.

²⁰ Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, 12.

²¹ Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, 12.

the components of music beyond the fundamental dualism of structure and form to include also method and materials, the interplay of which gave rise to musical form.²² Form, he argued, should not be conceived as a preexisting quality of the work but should emerge through the application of a given method on a given set of materials. This was a way of proceeding more “naturally.” As Cage explained:

I recognized that expression of two kinds, that arising from the personality of the composer and that arising from the nature and context of the materials, was inevitable, but I felt its emanation was stronger and more sensible when not consciously striven for, but simply allowed to arise naturally.²³

The years following *Quartet* were those in which Cage was also occupied with perfecting the prepared piano, which he had arrived at in 1938 for practical reasons of space, having been asked to compose a piece of dance music to be performed in a space with room only for a piano. His masterwork for prepared piano, *Sonatas and Interludes*, was premiered at Black Mountain College in the same year as his Satie lecture. Cage inserted into the strings of the piano a battery of objects, including weather stripping, rubber, screws, bolts, metal washers and nuts, pennies, wood, bamboo, and pencil erasers in order to alter and expand the piano’s sound. Cage’s prepared piano was a logical extension of the “string piano” techniques employed by Henry Cowell beginning in the 1920s, in which Cowell moved beyond the keyboard and began to pluck, flick, scrape, and sweep his hands over the strings. By the time of *Sonatas and Interludes*, Cage’s prepared piano technique was exacting enough that it entailed a remarkable Fluxbox-like kit containing the prescribed nuts, bolts, and material scraps along with exacting instructions as to where they should be placed (Fig. 2.5).

²² Cage, “Defense of Satie,” in *John Cage*, ed. Kostelanetz.

²³ John Cage, “A Composer’s Confessions” (1948), cited in Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, 17.

More than a novel means of expanding the possibilities for sound, Cage's prepared piano marked the reconceptualization of the instrument as a whole object to be manipulated on any available surface rather than being metonymically identified with the keyboard. Attention was paid not only to the strings; other works instructed performers to slam shut the keyboard lid or strike the underside of the body. Cage's reconceptualization of the piano as a fully manipulable object opened the way for increasingly theatrical compositions incorporating everyday items. *Water Music* (1952), the score for which we have already discussed due to its graphic qualities, incorporated a radio, whistles, water containers, wooden stick, and deck of cards, the last of which are dealt directly into the body of the piano.

At stake in these works was a shift in attitude toward the conventional use-value of the objects involved, whether they belonged to the traditional repertoire of musical performance or not. Both avenues of this dual approach—the musical instrument as object and the object as musical instrument—were brought together in exaggerated form at the first Fluxus concert in Wiesbaden in 1962. For his *Variations for Double Bass* (1961-62), Benjamin Patterson sounded his instrument with cereal, clothespins, gauze, a duster, and an air pump (Fig. 2.6). Other pieces by Emmett Williams, Dick Higgins, and George Maciunas utilized no traditional instruments at all but rather simple objects like hats, whistles, scissors, rocks, and wooden blocks. The score for Philip Corner's *Piano Activities* (1962) catalogues all conceivable manners of engaging the piano from the orthodox to the most experimental, playful, and destructive (Fig. 2.7). Performers are to pluck, scratch, rub, and drop objects on the strings and to drag over and strike all parts of the piano with foreign objects. For the Wiesbaden performers these included a tea kettle, brick, hammer, and shoes. Although Corner was not present (or perhaps precisely because he was

absent) the piece ended in the piano's destruction, becoming the most provocative event of the festival (Fig. 2.8).²⁴ *Piano Activities* might not have been much of an innovation on the tactics that Cage had already brought to his prepared piano pieces if not for a crucial difference: Corner's piece is written for any number of pianists and stresses the collaborative and evolving nature of the interrelations between the performers, piano, and their props. *Piano Activities* instructs performers to alternate between restraint and extremity, action and inaction, ignoring and relating to each other as, following the score, they "enhance, and destroy, or transform their actions."²⁵ In this way, *Piano Activities* effectively recast music wholesale as an exercise in collective and intersubjective subject-object relations, forecasting the ways in which Fluxus objects would operate.

Object Arrangements

The incorporation of everyday objects into the earliest Fluxus performances reflected the concurrent development of experimental music with a neo-dada, post-abstract expressionist visual art practice in New York. Brecht's work in the years 1959-1962 was exemplary of this. Following his expanded compositional experiments in Cage's classroom, he was invited for his first solo exhibition in New York. The Reuben Gallery opened its doors in October 1959 with Brecht's exhibition *toward events: an arrangement*, followed immediately by Allan Kaprow's famous *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*. The two events inaugurated a program that would include

²⁴ Many commentators have remarked that the gesture was particularly offensive given the symbolic function of the piano within the longstanding German culture of *Hausmusik*. Pianos were treasured pieces of furniture in bourgeois households where amateurs learned and shared music for private entertainment. In light of the critiques of *Piano Activities*, Maciunas defended the action by insisting that the piano had been acquired second-hand in irreparable condition and that it would have been impossible to remove from the concert hall in one piece.

²⁵ Philip Corner, "Piano Activities" (1962), reprinted in *Fluxus Scores and Instructions: The Transformative Years*, ed. Hendricks, 72.

exhibitions and performances by Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, Red Grooms, George Segal, Lucas Samaras, Al Hansen, Ray Johnson, Robert Whitman, Simone Forti, James Waring, and Richard Maxfield.²⁶

Before the end of Cage's summer 1959 course, Brecht was already sketching ideas for his exhibition that fall. A miniature retrospective of sorts, it would catalogue the transition from the artist's early chance paintings of 1956-1957 to his current engagement with events and objects. Brecht's greatest efforts were spent developing four new pieces for the show, which, although decidedly objects, were conceived of by Brecht as "events" due to the loosely directed, participatory manner in which viewers were to engage with them: *The Case*, *The Dome*, *The Cabinet*, and a card game called *Solitaire*. Created in advance of the proliferation of event scores that Brecht would write between 1959 and 1963, these works nevertheless operated remarkably like scores and in so doing established an important precedent for the proliferation of game-like objects that would come to characterize Fluxus. In Brecht's language, the exhibition was not to be an exhibition but "an arrangement," and rather than identifying himself as the artist Brecht indicated that the works were "arranged by" him. The gesture was a borrowing and adaptation of musical language to the world of objects, giving rise to a unique genre of what we might think of as *notational objects*, objects whose form and appearance implied, without explicitly instructing, the beholder's performative engagement. Between readymade and score, they were Fluxus's first intermedia objects. They seemed aligned, at least superficially, with the objects of Pop and New Realism but were distinguished in that Brecht's selection of their components prioritized functionality over aesthetic appeal. According to Brecht, "At the beginning it was because I

²⁶ The short-lived gallery was open only until May 1961. See Lawrence Alloway, "The Reuben Gallery: A Chronology," *Topics in American Art Since 1945* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), 151-154.

didn't like it that everything was so closed. At the end of the 50s, to enter a gallery and put your thumb on a painting was sacrilege. So it was done in a spirit of liberation: to let the spectators take part in what was happening."²⁷ It was to be a gentle act of awakening and empowerment.²⁸

In Brecht's view, the most significant work on display was *The Case*, a found picnic case lined in black-and-white checkered print with leather organizing straps on the underside of its lid, a partitioned interior, and removable top tray. Brecht filled the case with a panoply of everyday objects that activate all the senses and are affiliated with leisure activities: rubber balls, twine, a paddle ball game, jumprope, Chinese noisemaker, wooden juggling clubs, dominos, golf tees, puzzle pieces, flash cards, newspaper and magazine clippings, photographs, ticket stubs, thread, a recipe card, musical score, seashell, candle, and leather glove (Fig. 2.9). It came into being much like *Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)*, with Brecht's flea market encounter with a suitcase that struck him as "an object waiting to be realized."²⁹ As a recombinant found object born from an event-like encounter, *The Case* recalled aspects of the Surrealist object, in particular the work of Joseph Cornell, an artist in whom Brecht professed a deep interest.³⁰ However, Brecht rejected precious, fetishistic, and psychically charged objects in his pursuit of highlighting and revaluing banal rather than extraordinary aspects of everyday experience. Brecht seemed to have been drawn to objects that were widely available, simple, durable, and familiar to the broadest

²⁷ Irmeline Lebeer, "An Interview with George Brecht," in *An Introduction to George Brecht's Book of the Tumbler on Fire*, by Martin, 88.

²⁸ In John Cage's words, "We must arrange our music, we must arrange our Art, we must arrange everything, I believe, so that people realize that they themselves are doing it, and not that something is being done to them." Cited in Joseph Byrd, "Abdication of the Performing Arts," *Los Angeles Free Press*, August 26, 1966.

²⁹ George Brecht, et. al., "A Kind of Introduction," in *George Brecht—Notebooks*, ed. Daniels and Braun, vol. 1, n.p.

³⁰ The red wooden heart appearing in Brecht's *Repository* of 1961 was reputedly given to the artist by Cornell. On the relationship of Brecht's work to Surrealism see Anna Dezeuze, "Unpacking Cornell: Consumption and Play in the Work of Rauschenberg, Warhol and George Brecht," *Papers of Surrealism* 2 (2004): 1-24.

possible audience.

Instructions on how to use *The Case* appeared on a brochure which Brecht printed on a brown paper bag as yet another functional object to be activated (Fig. 2.10):³¹

THE CASE is found on a table. It is approached by one to several people and opened. The contents are removed and used in ways appropriate to their nature. The case is repacked and closed. The event (which lasts possibly 10-30 minutes) comprises all sensible occurrences between approach and abandonment of the case.

Although the many items contained in *The Case* were divorced from the packs and sets and bindings which would typically indicate their proper use, they retained a sense of use-value by way of their quotidian familiarity and kit-like arrangement. The work's score-like imperative relied not upon Brecht's dramatically open-ended instructions, which did not always accompany it, but by the call to the viewer made by the objects themselves.

Brecht's instructions for *The Dome* were simply that "necessary actions" be taken, relying ever more upon viewers' quotidian familiarity with the functionality of the materials at hand. *The Dome* featured a bell jar enclosing a petite wooden cabinet containing yet more enclosures: a tin canister labeled "for redemption" with two more canisters nested inside, the smallest containing a metal token embossed with the words "to be redeemed" (Fig. 2.11). Brecht envisioned the token would be "redeemable for something evolving out of the nature of the whole dome," although we do not know for what.³² Meanwhile, the wall-mounted *The Cabinet* came with no instructions at all. Its objects—a clock, hourglass, thermometer, radiometer, magnifying glass, seeds, yo-yo, bell, and juice for drinking—registered the passage of time and other changes of state (Fig. 2.12).

³¹ Brecht considered printing the invitation on a number of other functional items, including a shirt, hat, carton, and calendar. Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 4, 39.

³² Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 4, 27.

The object model Brecht's works proposed was hard for viewers to place. These arrangements looked like readymades and yet, unlike Duchamp's nominalist operation of converting everyday items into artworks, the many yo-yos, bells, and clocks were not divorced from their original use-value. Certainly they resonated with the neo-dada assemblages of Robert Rauschenberg and sculpted flashlights and lightbulbs of Jasper Johns, but Brecht's event-like objects were given minimal aesthetic treatment. They were not formal compositions but arrangements composed in the musical sense, and their appearance was always contingent upon how the last viewer had left them. Their call for participation also had little in common with the whimsical, mechanical techno-gadgetry of Jean Tinguely's *Méta-matics* or the kineticism that characterized Daniel Spoerri's Éditions MAT (*Multiplication d'Art Transformable*). Henry Martin has described the nature of Brecht's objects well:

Brecht's work is made of all the tiny little odd things that come and go and find their ways into pockets or live in the extra ash-tray on the corner of a desk....His favorite objects...are objects without any common collocation though one might be able to maintain that the things he deals with are all the little human things that become visible by virtue of their having escaped the attention of modern design and the systems for the computer control of the images of our environments.³³

Even if displaced from their conventional contexts, Brecht's objects were also not brought together, in the Surrealist manner, into marvelously strange combinations. His interest in those early avant-garde works seems to be more in how they recognized in everyday, utilitarian items a model for the transgressing of conventional distinctions. What Brecht saw in his many tiny little odd things that come and go was a model for an object that could be more than just an object, an object that could be something else: an instruction, a call to activity, *a notation*. Responding to an invitation from curator Jan van der Marck to be included in an exhibition on the topic of such

³³ Martin, *An Introduction to George Brecht's Book of the Tumbler on Fire*, 39.

medium transpositions, *Pictures to be Read/Poetry to be Seen*, Brecht struggled to explain his views:

We don't know...at the moment, where music ends and theater begins (and vice versa, no matter what is on stage)...What I am centering on is that the point is not so much an interrelationship (between existing categories) as it is a (here it is difficult to find the expression—non-category has a negative over-tone, and multi-category is not only too abstract but repulsively categorical.) The only way I think to explain it is to tell you, very personally, that there is a state of mind humanly possible now to which these divisions of thought are no longer relevant.³⁴

Between 1959 and 1962, Brecht's object-arrangements were exhibited in the U.S. and Europe alongside examples of all the aforementioned models. Audiences alternately ignored the works or were shocked by their utter ordinariness and the slightness of the artist's intervention in their presentation. Following Cage's desire to allow form to arise out of the "nature and context of the materials," Brecht had attempted to remove himself from the role of director-composer and let the objects, typically associated with quotidian rituals of self-care and leisure, communicate the necessary requirements for an event to take place. The success of these works thus relied deeply upon the commonplace virtuosity brought to the encounter by the beholder's everyday experience.³⁵ The radically new proposition of Brecht's event-like objects—that it was sufficient for a work of art to be arranged by the viewer or simply noticed by him or her—was hardly legible at the time, as evidenced by an exchange recorded in a notebook included in *The Case* in which visitors were invited to write. Among the other mostly inane comments and doodles, a curious viewer named Sue writes on December 5, 1959:

³⁴ In this letter Brecht points explicitly to the examples of André Breton's *Objet-poème* (1941) and Joan Miró's *Object poétique* (1936), which he likely saw in Seitz's *The Art of Assemblage* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1961. Letter from George Brecht to Jan van der Marck, May 21, 1967, Hanns Sohm Archive.

³⁵ From Brecht's notebook of 1959: "In performing this new music (with much compositional indeterminacy), the performer confirms his own nature, in exactly the way the composer, in composition, confirmed his. The 'virtu' of virtuosity must now mean behavior out of one's life-experience; it cannot be delimited toward physical skill." Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 3, 123.

Mr. Brecht, Isn't art a means of expression? If so, have you purposely expressed something through the use of your case? Have you inspected and played with the contents of the case as you have instructed your audience to do? Have you tried to find out or have you thought about what you've expressed in assembling this case (even though you may have assembled its contents at random, with no purpose in mind)?

Brecht's seemingly expressionless work was even at odds with the work for which the Reuben Gallery would become known, the kind of proto-Pop expressionism—"unceremonious, anti-formal, untidy and highly physical"—of George Segal, Jim Dine, Lucas Samaras, Claes Oldenburg, and Red Grooms, whose objects, environments, and happenings were staged as dramatic installational extensions into the environment, the city, and the street.³⁶ In comparison, Brecht's work seemed radically subtle and anti-theatrical, domestic even.

The final new work of Brecht's *toward events* exhibition, *Solitaire*, was a custom game deck of twenty-seven cards with bits of paper, leaves, and seeds laminated onto their surface in abstract formations (Fig. 2.13). The combinations of elements indicated three variables each of number, size, and color. Players were to deal the cards and match them according to these three categories, making explicit the underlying exercise of Brecht's work of this time to be one of arrangement, both in the handling of objects or in the organizing of reality by perception. Earlier that year, Brecht had followed a course at the New School in which he studied symbolic logic and the philosophy of symbolic forms with particular attention to the work of Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer. During this time he fixated upon the idea that perception is organized according to the symbolic rubrics of science, art, and religion (the latter synonymous for Brecht with Zen Buddhism). His notes include the observations that, "The mind perceives by means of specific

³⁶ Alloway, "The Reuben Gallery: A Chronology," 152. See also Joshua Shannon, *The Disappearance of Objects: New York Art and the Rise of the Postmodern City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

basic acts of symbolic transformation,” and “Objects arise from a constitutive act and perception.”³⁷

Arrangement was not only a means of eliciting participation, but it was also a means of form-giving that transferred power into the hands, eyes, and consciousness of the viewer. In this schema, objects became props in games of correlation and exchange. The germ of Brecht’s idea that, in the case of a striking phenomenon *Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)*, “a wholly ‘event’ piece could be drawn from the situation,” was just such an example of a constitutive, form-giving act of perception, of which objects were the main instigators. Brecht’s friend of many years, Hermann Braun, once remarked on how, for Brecht, the world was a continual game of such subject-object relations and re-arrangements:

How often we have sat together in the pub, when suddenly he took the salt shaker and a beer coaster or anything else that was lying around, brought them together in a certain experimental arrangement and said to me, “That is all I want to say.” Correlations as event....For him, the correlations were significant.³⁸

This aspect was carried over wholesale into Fluxus practice. From the event scores with their insistently object-like packaging to the hundreds of Fluxboxes that required unpacking and dismantling, arrangement was to become the basic mode of interaction with Fluxus objects. It was also the crux of how an object could appear to behave like a notation and a notation could adopt the material qualities of an object. Brecht’s stocked cabinets and cases were a model for the many Fluxus editions Maciunas would go on to produce in the first years of the sixties. Their

³⁷ Brecht, notes from February 27, 1959, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, ed. Dieter Daniels and Hermann Braun, vol. 2 (Cologne: Walther König, 1991), 132.

³⁸ “Wie oft haben wir in der Kneipe zusammengesessen, dann hat er ploetzlich den Salzstreuer genommen und einen Bierdeckel oder irgend etwas, was da so herumlag, hat sie in einem bestimmten Versuch zusammengebracht und zu mir gesagt, das ist alles, was ich sagen will. Zusammenhaenge als Ereignis.[...] Fuer ihn waren die Zusammenhaenge wichtig. Es haben ihn immer mehr Dinge interessiert, die in Bewegung bleiben, als die fertigen Sachen.” Hermann Braun in conversation with Bogomir Ecker in *Übergangsbogen und Überhöhungsrampe: Naturwissenschaftliche und künstlerische Verfahren* (Hamburg: Material, 1996), 70.

utter ordinariness and invitation to tactile engagement achieved the kind of non-elitist engagement that Fluxus sought to promote. For Brecht, the meaning of these objects was that they were on their way to becoming something other, through being moved, played with, exchanged with their neighbor, or exchanged with something completely new to the piece.

Arrangement would certainly pertain to the object qualities of Brecht's *Water Yam* anthology, designed by Maciunas, in which dozens of individual score cards are encountered not as individual text pieces but as a handy collection of cards to shuffle through. They beg arrangement in combinations, progressions, complements, and hierarchies, such that one score is a fulfillment of the next. Recalling the "pages in liberty" of Duchamp's *Green Box* and counterpoised to Cage's superimposed transparencies, Brecht's scores followed from work which relied upon the handiness of decks of playing cards and stacks of instructions to be passed among performers.³⁹ Brecht took great interest in the layout of his texts and the card stock on which they were printed, specifying frequently to publishers that there be included a generous amount of empty white space surrounding the text. Brecht also experimented with the idea that a blank card could constitute an event in and of itself. The idea for an event and its manifestation; the event and its objective existence; or, simply, event and object—become one and the same.

The scores of *Water Yam* ask to be splayed out and rearranged as porous meta-diagrams of relations mapping across numerous scores. Even the most reduced pieces become clearly related when encountered en suite:⁴⁰

³⁹ Joeslit, "Dada's Diagrams," 223-227.

⁴⁰ Hermann Braun dates the table scores to May 1962 and the suitcase ones to July 1962. Braun, "George Brecht Event Scores in Three Waves," in *George Brecht: Events: A Heterospective*, 301.

SUITCASE

- black suitcase
- white objects

SUITCASE

- from a suitcase

TABLE

- on a white table

SUITCASE

- suitcase

TABLE

- table

The multiple versions of *Suitcase* and *Table* lead one onto the next in a process of progressive simplification or, conversely, amplification. The grouping narrates Brecht's experimentation with extremes of reduction, namely the removal of all prepositions, that would seem to foreclose relationality and the diagrammatic, akin to the way in which his notational objects merely imply activation. And yet the most reduced versions of *Suitcase* and *Table* are better understood as advanced realizations meant for performers already familiar with Brecht's practice. (The artist once referred to his scores as "little enlightenments I wanted to communicate to my friends who would know what to do with them."⁴¹) The relations formerly signified by prepositions and phrasal statements are merely implied, or, the score's relational logic is extended to what is ostensibly exterior to it. Within the context of *Water Yam*, the *Suitcase* and *Table* works find in *Two Exercises* (Fall 1961) a meta-diagram of relations, which in turn could be a fulfillment of yet another score, *Exercise* (April 1963) (Figs. 2.14, 2.15). In their progression toward either reduction or plenitude, the *Suitcase* and *Table* series enact on the one hand *Exercise*'s call for the

⁴¹ Brecht, "The Origin of Events," n.p.

“othering” of objects and on the other the obliteration of the “other” toward an exercise of the exploration of limits.⁴²

Exercise dramatizes form not as a given but as a perceptual encounter, a process. This score was a distillation of Brecht’s interest in the liminal, in what he referred to as a “‘borderline’ art” which his events were at pains to make visible. It was a score that performed the same kind of questions Brecht was posing to himself in his notebook: “If art were not in form, it could be (life) instead of art...Can art not be in form and still be art?”⁴³ Brecht has said of *Exercise*, “I don’t think it would be correct to say that there are no objects or that Fluxus wanted to destroy them. The *Exercise* only shows how one can change one’s attitude to the concept of the object.”⁴⁴ This score in fact dwells upon the fundamental preoccupation of the avant-garde: whether and how the boundary between art and life might be crossed or eliminated, and whether or not one could de-link the definition of art from the reification of objects and their isolation from the chaotic stream of the everyday. They test whether one might be able to recognize the urinal as art, so to speak, but also to leave it in the shop window rather than bring it into the museum.

Two Object Models: The Assemblage and The Prop

By the time of Brecht’s participation in *The Art of Assemblage* in 1961, the interactive nature of his objects was still anomalous among the neo-dada tendencies highlighted in that

⁴² These scores might also have been Brecht’s answer to Walter De Maria’s *Boxes for Meaningless Work* (March 1960), described by De Maria in his contribution to *An Anthology*: “I will have built two small boxes. I put small things in the boxes, A sign explains the boxes to anyone who should approach them. It says ‘Meaningless work boxes.’ Throw all of the the things into the other. Back and forth, back and forth. Do this for as long as you like.” This work was likely realized at the January 8, 1962 concert fundraiser for *An Anthology*, whose program credits De Maria as contributing “some objects in the lobby.”

⁴³ George Brecht, “EVENTS. (assembled notes.),” 226.

⁴⁴ Gisliind Nabakowski, “An Interview with George Brecht” (1974), in *An Introduction to George Brecht’s Book of the Tumbler on Fire*, by Martin, 95.

exhibition. Curated by William Seitz, the show was an encyclopedic catalogue of assemblage work, mainly American examples from the late 1950s complemented and legitimated by early 20th-century Dada and Surrealist works. Brecht designed for the show the work *Repository*, a multi-level cabinet with various openings and drawers containing and organizing myriad common objects including keys, balls, toothbrushes, and dice, many represented in multiple (Fig. 2.16). The multi-form container incorporated vertical gridded shelving, hooks, miniature cupboards with doors, and partitioned drawers that could be pulled out—all variants on the general theme of containment just as the work’s inventory consisted of variations on a series of thematic objects. In search of items to fill the piece, Brecht listed in his notebooks all manner of “balls” (rubber, baseball, golf, ping-pong, lottery, candy, glass, seeds, rosary, glass eye, etc.) and “rods” (brass, steel, aluminum, copper, glass, lucite, dowels, ceramic, knitting needles, rolled-up documents, springs, etc.) that he could think of.⁴⁵ While for most works in the show, appropriated everyday objects were incorporated into two- and three-dimensional collage-like compositions that continued to treat the items as formal elements in a picture, Brecht’s objects were quite literal indices for states of change, pointing to motions, gestures, and other transformational processes: a pocket watch, thermometer, puzzle, toothbrushes, pencils, preserved worm, pocket mirror, lightbulbs, keys, coins, balls, and playing cards. In addition, Brecht decided to remove all textual supplements from his work in acknowledgment of the objects’ incipient use value. The work seemed to claim that displacing dice, for example, from their typical context in a game and incorporating them into a work of art in a museum should not proscribe their usefulness. As with *The Dome* and *The Case*, the artist intended for visitors to

⁴⁵ Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 4, 92.

interact with *Repository*—to take out the objects, change them around, and to exchange them with things they had on hand, as if the vertical gridded structure was a kind of game board or classification device for which visitors were to invent their own rules. Brecht took care to write to Seitz, insisting it was inappropriate to characterize his work as an assemblage; it was rather an “arrangement” in the musical sense, one that should continue to be rearranged across the duration of the show.⁴⁶

Brecht’s object-arrangements were developed with an interested awareness in the assemblage work of Rauschenberg and Johns, however, and it was in relation to this very work that they were first exhibited. In the years just preceding *The Art of Assemblage*, the three artists had appeared together in two iterations of an assemblage show staged at Martha Jackson Gallery in the spring and fall of 1960: *New Media — New Forms* and *New Forms —New Media II*. Before this, works by Rauschenberg and Brecht had appeared together in two group shows in the winter of 1959-1960, *Group 3* at Douglass College and *Below Zero* at the Reuben Gallery. Johns and Rauschenberg’s work from the mid-1950s consisted of canvasses incorporating features similar to what had appeared in Brecht’s Reuben show: found objects that indexed change—clocks, thermometers, and compasses; hinged doors that could open and close. Rauschenberg’s motivation with such work, as he explained, was the belief that “a picture is more like the real world when it’s made out of the real world.”⁴⁷

In the exhibition *Below Zero*, Brecht’s *The Case 2* (now disappeared), which included a transistor radio and telescope, appeared alongside Rauschenberg’s combine *Coca-Cola Plan*

⁴⁶ Letter from George Brecht to William C. Seitz, 1961, William C. Seitz Papers, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

⁴⁷ Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 193-194.

(1958) (Fig. 2.17). The latter was a vertical, three-tiered, box-like wooden frame similar to what Brecht would construct for *Repository*. On its bottom level was a distressed wooden newel cap; at center, three Coca-Cola bottles smeared with paint and two cast metal wings jutting out from the sides of the frame; on the top, a diagram and the words “PLAN / Lay out stretcher on floor / Watch markings and join.” The diagram and textual instructions brought into relation within a sculptural object bears similarities to Brecht’s object-arrangements, seemingly another version of the event score married to the object with which it would be performed. However, as Julia Robinson has noted, the instructions on the face of *Coca-Cola Plan* likely refer to a different work and are not meant as a provocation to action.⁴⁸ Rauschenberg’s object elements, following from the lessons of Pollock and Cage, were designed to heighten the viewer’s awareness of the indexical and performative qualities of painting. And yet these objects, ostensibly registering change, were often only activated or set in motion *in potentia*. The indexicality of Johns’s “device” works, which incorporated the scraping gesture of a wooden dowel along with the actual dowel used, referred to an action that had already taken place.⁴⁹ The hinged doors of Rauschenberg’s *Short Circuit* and *Interview* or of Johns’s targets and plaster casts were typically untouched by visitors, their mechanical objects frozen in time. At the very least, they were inextricably contained and pictorialized within the picture plane’s compositional space, dramatically excised from the everyday experience they are meant to index. While the inclusion of such varied elements in this assemblage work was an argument for, as Yve-Alain Bois has noted, the “entropic equalization of all things,” this equalization took place purely in the space

⁴⁸ Robinson, “From Abstraction to Model: In the Event of George Brecht & The Conceptual Turn in the Art of the 1960s,” PhD diss., 203.

⁴⁹ The same would go for Jim Dine’s *The Hammer Acts* and *Flesh Chisel* (both 1962), which similarly incorporated the very objects that had acted upon the painting.

within the painting with the effect that “there is no fundamental difference between a collage element and a painted one.”⁵⁰ In other words, these pictures were more like the real world, but in the final instance they were still pictures. This forestalled potential of the painted instruction would soon be recognized and hypostatized in Andy Warhol’s *Dance Diagrams* and *Do It Yourself* paintings (1962), which parodied such empty gestures of participation and connected the utopian ideal of participation, as Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has argued, to a highly choreographed mass culture of false modes of inclusion and sociality—“those *real rituals of participation* within which mass culture contains and controls its audiences.”⁵¹

In a few instances, however, Rauschenberg’s objects exceeded the frame or leapt out of it altogether. The most famous example was *Black Market* (1961), seemingly a response to Brecht’s interactive suitcase and chest shown at Reuben two years prior (Fig. 2.18). In this work the canvas is accompanied by a suitcase laying below it on the floor in which four objects are to be continuously exchanged with offerings from visitors who are requested to mark the transactions on four metal clipboards attached to the canvas. Notably, both Rauschenberg and Brecht faced disappointment with how the public engaged with their respective works, in both cases taking objects without replacing them. It was a turning point for Brecht, who has recounted:

At that time I was still very optimistic and I hoped that people would enter the game with a certain gentleness, that perhaps they’d exchange one object for another, that they’d open the drawers to move the objects and so forth. Unfortunately I had to come to the realization that that didn’t work, that people would take the things I loved most and leave nothing in exchange and so forth.

⁵⁰ Yve-Alain Bois, “Robert Rauschenberg’s Combines,” *Artforum* (March 2006). Such formal containment also characterized, to a certain but lesser extent, the work of Joseph Cornell, another important influence on Brecht. See Dezeuze, “Unpacking Cornell: Consumption and Play in the Work of Rauschenberg, Warhol and George Brecht.”

⁵¹ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Andy Warhol’s One-Dimensional Art,” in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 485.

That was a huge disappointment for me and I had to decide to limit the exchange to my friends.⁵²

Black Market faced a similar fate when it went on display in Amsterdam as part of the exhibition *Art in Motion*. Curator Pontus Hultén wrote to co-curator Billy Klüver, “All the objects in *Black Market* have disappeared. Nothing is left....People have taken them without replacing anything themselves.”⁵³ At the show’s next venue, the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, interaction with the work was prohibited and the call to participation rendered merely symbolic. The work became, like so many others of the period, a painting with an appendage held in tow by means of a leash-like rope, umbilically connected to the picture plane, a painting with a prosthesis. By 1963, Brecht’s opinion of the artist he had previously so admired had fallen; he now saw Rauschenberg as “an old master” whose work seemed solidified and restricted.⁵⁴

The departure and division of Brecht’s work from the concerns of Rauschenberg and Johns and what accounted for its strangeness in the face of so much neo-dada assemblage can be explained vis-à-vis his attitude about a singular everyday object, the chair. In spring 1960, Brecht’s *The Cabinet* from the Reuben exhibition appeared in *New Media — New Forms* along with Rauschenberg’s *Pilgrim* (1960) (Fig. 2.19). *Pilgrim* is a highly painterly combine, in part a canvas covered over in manic patches of blue, white, red, black, and yellow that obscure bits of paper and fabric. The quotidian intruder here is a wooden chair that stands on the floor in front of the painting, its top edge secured to the canvas by a hinge (Fig. 2.20). According to Rauschenberg, “the chair found its way into *Pilgrim* because, on a visit to a collector’s

⁵² Lebeer, “An Interview with George Brecht,” 88.

⁵³ Cited in Hiroko Ikegami, *The Great Migrator: Robert Rauschenberg and the Global Rise of American Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 109.

⁵⁴ George Brecht notebook no. 12, c. 1963, Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, Museum of Modern Art, New York, n.p.

apartment, chairs had to be moved in order to see the pictures.”⁵⁵ The chair also recalled a lesson absorbed by Rauschenberg from Josef Albers at Black Mountain College in which Albers would set an ordinary wooden chair at the front of the room, running it over with his hands and sitting in it to demonstrate its particular qualities for the class’s observation—to show, as Martin Duberman has described, “that no chair is an abstraction, and so should never be treated as one.”⁵⁶ And yet if the chair was meant to be a paradigmatic enunciation of the object’s concrete actuality, Brecht’s personal encounter with *Pilgrim* proved otherwise: “Just as I was about to sit in it [the chair], I was told, ‘No, no! It’s attached and you can’t sit in it.’”⁵⁷ The experience demonstrated that Rauschenberg’s opening up of his canvases to everyday objects was only a partial opening and that the transformation these objects underwent was, as in Duchamp’s readymades, one which decidedly blocked what was most interesting to Brecht about them: that they could act as a bridge to typically non-aesthetic experience.

Meanwhile, Brecht struggled to find ways of isolating found objects for contemplation as aesthetic phenomena without overdetermining their reception as artworks. Following the first wave of Fluxus concerts in Europe in late 1962, witnesses reported back to Brecht that his works often disappeared in the context of the programs, particularly his score for *Piano Piece, 1962*,

⁵⁵ Andrew Forge, *Rauschenberg* (New York: Abrams, 1972), 32.

⁵⁶ Martin B. Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 55. This was likely a lesson inspired by the teachings of Edmund Husserl, who, as Annette Michelson has noted, had been influential to the Cubists and their turn to the everyday object. (A whole history could be written of the significance of the chair in modern and postmodern art.) Michelson writes, “Cubism corresponded, then, as representation, to that relatively early ‘objectivist’ stage of phenomenological method which produced the obsessive encircling of the object—the object of common use as Object of Knowledge. The analytic articulation of Table, the Bottle, the Guitar, has, when seen in this particular light, the aspect of those class-room exercises which are said to have absorbed Husserl’s students. They constitute an overture to a more radically conceived investigation of the nature of consciousness.” Michelson, “Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression,” in *Robert Morris* (Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969), 63.

⁵⁷ Nyman, “An Interview with George Brecht,” 80.

which indicated simply “a vase of flowers on(to) a piano.”⁵⁸ And so in January 1962 he began a list of “ways to treat objects in order to see them,” which included surrounding them with empty space, lighting them, altering them subtly, inviting people to interact with them, and placing other objects nearby with which they may form relationships of continuity or difference.⁵⁹ Still, Brecht continued to seek the minima tactics of legibility for his scores and objects without formalizing them by means of plinth or frame. This he would achieve by means of “emptiness or formality” in time or space, whether in a performance context or through the careful graphic spacing of a printed score.⁶⁰

Brecht seemed perversely to enjoy the fact that his works, whether performative or object-based, were sometimes lost. In 1961, Brecht’s *Three Chair Events* was included in both event score and object form in the group exhibition *Environments, Situations, Spaces* at Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, in the company of Allan Kaprow’s tire-filled *Yard* and a version of Oldenberg’s *Store*. Of Brecht’s three chairs—a spot-lit white one in the gallery, a yellow one on the sidewalk out front, and a black one in the bathroom—the yellow and black chairs went mostly unnoticed. Brecht had achieved an eerie simplicity in which the banality of his chosen objects is precisely what is highlighted as interesting about them, with the effect of activating all other like objects for similar aesthetic contemplation. Reflecting on this practice, Robert Morris wrote:

Sitting on Brecht’s white chairs one can forget about them.... Was the glass of water I drank at Brecht’s Brecht’s Glass of Water? Was the moment of quiet there Brecht’s

⁵⁸ Letter from Brecht to Maciunas, n.d. (c. early 1963), Hanns Sohm Archive; Letter from Maciunas to Brecht, January 6, 1963, Jean Brown papers.

⁵⁹ George Brecht notebook no. 8, June 1961-September 1962, Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 54.

⁶⁰ Letter from Brecht to Maciunas, n.d. (c. early 1963), Hanns Sohm Archive.

Silence? When I creaked moving the chair was that Brecht's sound? Closing the door to leave did I make a Brecht Action? Brecht casts a spell; a witch doctor whitening things up, painting out the names, giving back that vast white place where all the delicate multiplicities are admitted and can come to life.⁶¹

Similarly, Brecht's *Table and Chairs*, corresponding to the score *Three Table and Chair Events* (both 1962), was overlooked when displayed as part of *Art 1963—A New Vocabulary* in Philadelphia (Figs. 2.21, 2.22). A tableau of two white chairs and a table was set in three variations with props including a plate and silverware, glass, playing cards, and a newspaper that changed daily. Brecht wrote excitedly to Maciunas, "Many people used the furniture to put their coats on, to rest on, etc., and the piece was effectively lost in ordinary life! Nothing special!...I am very happy about that."⁶² Maciunas replied that he considered the artists's works to be neither material nor conceptual but "mind-perceptual" inasmuch as his transformation of readymade objects and phenomena into works of art was owed to the form-giving capacity of consciousness. Maciunas attempted to distill Brecht's method into an homage score titled *4 Excercises* [sic]:

- note object
- observe object
- discern object
- become object.⁶³

If Brecht, like Rauschenberg, had backed away from explicitly inviting tactile participation after his negative experience with *Repository*, the subtle presentations of *Three Chair Events* and *Table and Chairs* were an alternative means of continuing to make open and interactive works.

⁶¹ Robert Morris, untitled statement on George Brecht, reprinted *George Brecht: Events: A Heterospective*, by Robinson, 254.

⁶² Letter from Brecht to Maciunas, n.d. (c. early 1963), Hanns Sohm Archive.

⁶³ Letter from Maciunas to Brecht, January 6, 1963, Jean Brown papers. Eventually, Brecht would begin to tire of art audiences' inability to detect his subtle arrangements long after the lessons of Duchamp should have been well absorbed. In the early 1970s, he complained that during a studio visit a pair of "specialists in looking at things" did not notice the broom and yellow dustpan that Brecht had carefully arranged in a corner. George Brecht notebook no. 28, December 8, 1973-July 19, 1975, Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 111.

Brecht's relationship to the objects comprising his works was remarkably casual or, at the very least, ambivalent. For the Philadelphia show, not only did the work constantly change its appearance, but Brecht stipulated that the catalogue include a photograph of an entirely different piece. Writing to Sabol, he explained, "It seems to be a further characteristic of my work that individual works have no definite form....So it pleases me that there is no work in the show that exactly corresponds to the catalog photograph. This should lead to a healthy questioning of what's what."⁶⁴ This was explicitly to avoid giving "definite photographic form" to *Table and Chairs* in acknowledgment that the piece was composed of an arrangement of certain classes of objects without designating any specific object as being a permanent feature of the work. For later exhibitions, Brecht's position in regard to the material specificity of his works would become more extreme—which is to say more and more loose. For a 1969 solo exhibition of chair-and-object arrangements at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, in lieu of traveling to Los Angeles Brecht merely sent basic descriptions for each work, listing the chair's color and the object(s) that should be placed on or against it.⁶⁵

As we have established, Brecht's model of integrating objects and events was developed in opposition to the model of neo-dada assemblage in which the object was integrated into a formal, painterly, compositional practice, brought into and transformed by the space of the picture plane. A second model with which his work was more properly aligned was to be found in the experimental music and performance community in New York, in which objects were integrated as instruments, tools, and props. The series of concerts organized by La Monte Young at Yoko

⁶⁴ Letter from Brecht to Audrey Sabol, July 18, 1962. Interleaved in George Brecht notebook no. 8.

⁶⁵ George Brecht, *George Brecht: The Book of the Tumbler on Fire: Selected Works from Volume I* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1969).

Ono's Chambers Street loft in 1960-1961 was a well-known meeting point for like-minded experimentalists and a hugely influential context for the first stirrings of Fluxus. It is where Maciunas met Brecht and Dick Higgins for the first time.⁶⁶ The series advertised a ranging program of music, poetry, plays, "machinery," and events by Young, Henry Flynt, Joseph Byrd, John Cage, Walter De Maria, George Brecht, Richard Maxfield, Terry Riley, Christian Wolff, David Tudor, Jackson Mac Low, Robert Morris, and Simone Forti (then Simone Morris). Influenced by the work and teachings of John Cage, these artists also composed works in opposition to the expressionistic, poetic work that followed in the wake of Abstract Expressionism. Many of these artists would be published in *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, the compendium of scores, performance instructions, and essays edited by Young and constituting Maciunas's first neo-avant-garde design project, and they would perform together in concerts to fundraise for the publication.

In the performance works of this milieu, objects were utilized either to register or to control movement with the effect of guiding and focusing perception. The "object" here stood for two things. First, a set of materials: banal, everyday items of no particular visual interest and/or proto-minimalist, geometric sculptural forms. Second, the object in a more notional sense stood for an approach to perceptual experience that privileged the intensity and singularity of immediate, concrete phenomena. Often, the two were brought together in ways that we have already seen in Brecht's work for Cage's class: parameters for an action are given and performed in an objective, task-like manner and typically involve interacting with a given set of simple objects. This certainly pertained to La Monte Young's own concert evening, in which he and

⁶⁶ Owen F. Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* (San Diego, CA: San Diego State University Press), 31.

Robert Dunn performed *Composition 1960 #10 (to Bob Morris)* (Young's famous "Draw a straight line and follow it") thirty times in succession with the simple aid of a plumb bob and a yardstick, the length of the concert depending upon the length of the drawn line.⁶⁷ After the first concert, which the artists felt had been too long, the line was shortened for the second; still, it lasted more than three hours. Young's interest in monomorphic sounds and activities and experiences of sustained attention first explored in his *Composition* series of 1960 would lead to his drone music practice and the founding of The Theatre of Eternal Music in 1965. Of Young's music, Cage reflected that "Listening reverts to placing a particular object under a microscope so that the object becomes an entire universe, simply because it is enlarged to that extent. It ceases to be an object."⁶⁸

Not only did objects play a formative role in enabling performers to focus their activities and attention and retain a non-expressionistic, task-like demeanor, performance works were understood as object-like despite their extension through time. Following works involving a seesaw and boxes on wheels presented at Reuben Gallery in December 1960, Simone Forti premiered at Ono's loft a group of *Dance Constructions* executed with the participation of Robert Morris, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer. With titles like *Slant Board*, *Huddle*, *Hangers*, and *Platforms*, Forti's constructions were dependent upon a given set of props as much as they were imagined as a new form of hybrid performative-sculptural object. In *Slant Board*, performers relied upon knotted ropes to climb up, down, and across an eight-foot square board positioned at a forty-five degree angle to the wall. In *Hangers*, performers wound paths between

⁶⁷ Letter from La Monte Young to David Tudor, c. 1961, David Tudor papers, 1884-1998 (bulk 1940-1996), The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 980039.

⁶⁸ John Cage, *For the Birds*, 150. For the departure in ideology between Young's transcendentalism and Cage's multiplicity see Branden Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage* (New York: Zone, 2011), 109-117.

bodies standing suspended on hanging loops of rope. The two performers of *Platform* hid beneath wooden boxes constructed by Morris and called back and forth to one another by whistling. The props devised for *Slant Board*, *Hangers*, and *Platforms* remain the only physicalized constant for works whose choreographic parameters are otherwise very open, as if designed to test the various ways in which a subject might interact with them. Meanwhile, no foreign objects were involved in the dance construction *Huddle*, only a churning hillock of bodies out from and over which one performer after another would climb. The tightly gathered group of performers collectively *became* an object (according to Forti's instructions, "the huddle" or "the mass.") They became a unitary thing, singular. She writes, "The duration should be adequate for the viewers to observe *it* [the huddle], walk around *it*, get a feel of *it* in its behavior."⁶⁹ Of the constructions she has recalled, "I thought of a lot of those pieces more as sculpture that the audience could walk around."⁷⁰ Indeed, the language Forti uses in her instructions vacillates ambiguously between the verbal and nominative, treating the performers as objective entities. They are no longer dancers but "hangers" metonymically identified with their props. In another of Forti's works performed at Ono's loft, *Accompaniment for La Monte's 2 Sounds*, a performer stands in a hanging loop of rope that is tightly wound above the top of his or her head. It is the rope that performs while the body remains passive: "The rope unwinds, then rewinds on its own momentum, unwinds and rewinds on and on until, finally, it becomes still."⁷¹ No mention of a performing body at all.

⁶⁹ Simone Forti, *Handbook in Motion* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design), 59, italics mine.

⁷⁰ Ginger Spivey, manuscript of an unpublished interview with Simone Forti, 2000. My thanks to Liz Kotz for sharing this source with me.

⁷¹ Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, 64.

Brecht's name appeared on several announcements for the loft series, although no performances of his would materialize there. He was, however, designing sets, props, and sounds for collaborative works with dancer and choreographer James Waring to be performed elsewhere. In the course of their "chamber event" piece *Gossoon* presented at the Reuben Gallery on June 11 and at the Living Theatre on August 8, 1960, paper balls and stars, balloons, toy animals, confetti, folding fans, flash cards, and flashlights were handled by the performers, and some were distributed to the audience. In his early notes for the piece, Brecht imagined requesting audience members to bring with them objects that would be spontaneously incorporated into the performance.⁷²

In this performance culture, objects would also be displayed apart from the performing body. De Maria and Morris both presented performative objects at fundraisers for *An Anthology* at The Living Theatre in early 1962. At the January 8 fundraiser, De Maria contributed to the program "objects in the lobby" drawn from his series of "object/situations" shown at Maciunas's AG Gallery in July 1961. The instructions for *Boxes for Meaningless Work* (1960-61), which appeared in *An Anthology*, references two boxes containing "small things" which the beholder is called upon to shuttle from one box to another (Fig. 2.23).⁷³ At the February 5 fundraiser, Morris presented *Column*, a two foot square by eight feet high gray rectangular column which stood erect onstage for three and a half minutes before being toppled by Morris with the tug of a string and then left to lay for another three and a half minutes. This was not the first time Morris would present sculptural objects in a performance context; on the invitation of Henry Flynt, Morris's *Box With the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961), a walnut box containing an audio recording of its

⁷² Brecht, *George Brecht—Notebooks*, vol. 4, 172.

⁷³ Walter De Maria, "Boxes for Meaningless Work," in *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, ed. Young.

own construction, was (dis)played in a concert of new music at Harvard University in March 1961.⁷⁴

The proto-minimalist sound and object experiments of Young, Morris, and De Maria relied upon a given structure that in its pared-down, obdurate perpetuity called attention to phenomenological experience. Morris's earliest articulation of this key minimalist idea can be found in his 1961 statement, "Blank Form," which was to be included in *An Anthology* but was pulled out last-minute by the artist while the printed materials for the publication were being stored at his loft, awaiting collation (Fig. 2.24). It was for Morris a symbolic withdrawal from the carnevalesque proto-Fluxus milieu from which he was beginning to feel increasingly distanced. Morris's statement clarifies the motivation behind works like *Column* and why he felt they initially deserved a theatrical presentation. "So long as it [the form] perpetuates and upholds itself as being object in the subject's field of perception," Morris writes, "the subject reacts to it in many particular ways when I call it art."⁷⁵ The text includes descriptions of three paradigmatic examples of Blank Form: a gray rectangular column measuring two feet by two feet by eight feet (an exact description of *Column*), a smooth gray wall measuring two feet by eight feet by eight feet, and a gray cabinet measuring one foot by two feet by six feet, just large enough to enter (a rough description of his work *Pine Portal* (1961). With the first minimalist exhibition *Black, White and Gray* opened at the Wadsworth Atheneum in 1964 (Brecht participated with a table and chairs arrangement), the presentation of examples of Morris's Blank Forms in a conventional exhibition setting was enough to reclassify them as static sculptures, the overt performative implications of the columns and beams reduced to fleeting auratic remembrances of the attendees

⁷⁴ Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*, 117.

⁷⁵ Robert Morris, "Blank Form," in *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, ed. Young.

of those few early concerts. Any implication of duration and temporality would be held up mainly by the embattled discourse of the time (namely Donald Judd's essay "Specific Objects" [1965], famously rebutted by Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood" [1967]).⁷⁶

As the practice of Young in the ensuing years pursued the transcendental unity of the drone, the sculptural practices of Morris and De Maria departed from the overtly theatrical and participatory and shifted toward the presentation of all manner of unitary, gestalt forms that would come to characterize Minimalism.⁷⁷ Even if the projects of Minimalism and Fluxus initially shared the same goal of heightening perceptual awareness on the part of the viewer, the means by which objects would function *and* the means by which the artwork itself would function as an object in each practice were diametrically opposed. The Fluxus model engaged a dialectical meeting of object and score determined to evade 1) the fetishization of the artwork as a unique, single-authored entity and 2) the dissipation of the work into a completely abstract, conceptual procedure ostensibly divorced from concrete experience and tangible materiality. As we have seen in Brecht's work, there exists no ideal conceptual form against which an individual realization may be tested. Brecht's forms with "no definite form," his objects without a fixed object-status, established the conditions for the work of art to change its form continuously. In effect, the material conditions of his works were made to mirror, rather than to contrast with and provide a foil to, the viewer's ever-shifting perspective (as minimalist works did). They opted for

⁷⁶ Yvonne Rainer has remarked that art history has repressed the humorous affect of the *L-Beams*' when they first appeared, presumably because they carried with them the suspicion of bodies hidden inside. Rainer, "Out of a Corner of the '60s," (lecture, University of California, Irvine, April 2, 2008).

⁷⁷ One late exception and a notable failure was Morris's 1971 retrospective at the Tate Gallery, London, which was fashioned as a kind of minimalist playground of wooden structures for visitors to navigate. The exhibition was temporarily closed after five days due to some "minor accidents" involving visitors and then revised to a more conventional format before being reopened. Jon Bird, "Minding the Body: Robert Morris's 1971 Tate Gallery Retrospective," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion, 1999).

the object's dispersal on *both* material and conceptual registers over its formal consolidation.

The Fluxus model, a dialectical twinning of the abstract and concrete, would be fully realized with the production of Fluxus multiples spearheaded by George Maciunas, as the next chapter will show. However, Brecht was not the only artist from which Maciunas took his cues. In July 1961 at his AG Gallery, Maciunas hosted an exhibition of Yoko Ono's *Instruction Paintings* (all 1961), in which a series of altered canvases were displayed alongside the text scores describing the actions taken upon them (Figs. 2.25-2.28). These included *Painting in Three Stanzas*, in which a growing vine snaked out from a hole cut into the canvas, and *Smoke Painting*, which had been burnt through with cigarette holes. On the floor was *Waterdrop Painting*, a circular piece of canvas onto which the artist had directed drops of liquid to fall, and *Painting to Be Stepped On*, a forlorn, beaten-up scrap of canvas left over from the preparation of the other works, to be further worn down by the treading of gallery visitors.⁷⁸ That these works were called paintings was somewhat misleading, for the only features they held in common with conventional paintings were their material support and their display, hung for the most part vertically along the gallery's raw brick walls. Otherwise, these unframed, raw-edged canvases suspended from the ceiling with wire and tacks were certainly not pictures *of* anything. Rather, they were indices of a set of actions taken upon a set of objects, or, as the artist has described, works which separated painting into two different functions: instruction and realization, displayed in tandem.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ The exhibition also included realizations of *A + B Painting*, *Painting to Let the Evening Light Go Through*, and *Painting for the Wind*. Yoko Ono, *Instruction Paintings* (New York: Weatherhill, 1995).

⁷⁹ Yoko Ono, *Yoko at Indica* (London: Indica Gallery, 1966).

Allographic Form

The form that Fluxus was trying to promote was first of all a form of openness: openness, you might say, practically to the point of dissolution.
—Joseph Beuys⁸⁰

What the example of Brecht and Ono's work proposes is a dialectic relationship between score and object in which each completes the other. The conceptual abstraction of the instruction or score was a means of referring the work, again and again, to concrete realizations. While the event score points to objects in real time-space, the objects indexed to a given realization are interchangeable place-holders for any number of other, equally adequate objects. What we have, then, is the paradoxical centrality of objects to a model of artistic practice that intends to do away with them, aligned with a radical reconceptualization of form as fully allographic, divorced not only from the hand of the artist-maker but from his or her taste and powers of authentication.

It would seem, then, that from the very start the Fluxus project gathered around a series of losses and lettings-go: of form, medium, and the object, of disciplinary boundaries, conventional measures of value, hierarchies of production, and mainstream market and community networks. And yet this quality of loss was constitutive of works that, while evading established categories of materiality, ultimately upheld their status as art, and which have shown an impressive flexibility, longevity, and strength due to their basis in the score. This was very different from the rigorous specifications that accompanied much minimalist sculpture and would be carried over into conceptualist practices of the late 1960s. The Fluxus score was by no means an authoritative, contract-like set of specifications as we have seen in the works of artists

⁸⁰ Joseph Beuys, Anna Guglielmi, Pierre Restany, and Sarenco, "12 questions for the man in the felt hat," in *Lotta Poetica* 2, no. 5-6 (Verona, 1982), cited in Emmett Williams, "St. George and the Fluxus Dragons," in *Upheavals—Manifestos, Manifestations: Conceptions in the Arts at the Beginning of the Sixties, Berlin, Düsseldorf, Munich*, ed. Klaus Schrenk (Cologne: DuMont, 1984), 29.

like Donald Judd, Carl Andre, or Dan Flavin.⁸¹

And yet if Brecht, for one, was interested in loosening form, form was not let go. As we recall, the artist had declared in 1962 that, “It seems to be a further characteristic of my work that individual works have no definite form.”⁸² By 1966, this thought had clarified into the idea that, “It is rather only explicitness that has been lacking: a form which without being a FORM, traitorous to immediate experience, permits us to experience directly.”⁸³ In other words, the shuttling between event score and object was part of the search for a model of form *without* form, a novel manner of form rendered by the event score into an armature of relations that accommodates and indeed relies for its very existence and legibility upon such varied content that it may—indeed *must*—continue to have a life in the present, quite apart from its original author.

In many of Brecht’s works, the liminal transmission from score to object and from object to score was thematized by a focus on border situations and in-between states, or the boundaries between individual forms and between form and formlessness. Brecht’s engagement with liminality was emblematic of post-war artistic responses to the tense meeting of the textual and visual, a preoccupation of the avant-garde throughout a century in which images came to dominate the cultural landscape. By the 1960s, however, “the object” had emerged as a crucial third term to images and language. “Object” corresponded both to a category of material thing and to a perceptual procedure whereby objects are formed by consciousness; the first was

⁸¹ See Miwon Kwon, “Unhinging of Site Specificity,” in *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); and Martha Buskirk, “Authorship and Authority,” in *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

⁸² Letter from Brecht to Audrey Sabol, July 18, 1962.

⁸³ George Brecht notebook no. 15, c. May 1966-June 1966, Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 41.

affiliated with the readymade and the second with the event score. As we have seen, works like *Exercise*, *Two Exercises*, and *Drip Music* explored the space between objects, while the most minimal of scores tested the diagrammatic limits of language itself. The scores' emphatic and "unapologetic *in-betweenness*," as Robinson has put it, enacts a self-referential meditation on the score's form-giving capacities.⁸⁴ As we saw in the previous chapter, this is owed to the scores' affinity with diagrams, which likewise occupy an interstitial domain, trafficking between the ideal and material, symbolic and literal, abstract and concrete.⁸⁵ We ought to recall here Brecht's *Event Score*, emblematic of the format's aspiration to evade the limitations and reductions of rationality on the part of the subject on the one hand, and, on the other to evade material determinism on the part of the object. *Event Score* tells us that these works operate not by means of mechanical, Cagean processes of indeterminacy but via the slippages and elasticities of conscious and unconscious thought as it plays with equally flexible formal structures, resulting in the interpretational vagaries of form conceived after the model of the diagram. For diagrams, in their affiliation with materialist practices, are indeed abstract structures intimately linked to our experience of physical objects and environments, paradoxical signifiers of what Joselit has called the diagram's "embodied utopianism."⁸⁶

Brecht was not the only Fluxus person to attempt to theorize this very particular approach to composition. If Brecht imagined a form without form and Maciunas had earlier posited the work as an automatic machine, Dick Higgins, after nearly a decade of Fluxus practice upon

⁸⁴ Robinson, "In the Event of George Brecht," in *George Brecht: Events: A Heterospective*, 34.

⁸⁵ Liz Kotz has described this quality in terms of the general versus specific. My reading forces this duality into confrontation with the material conditions under which the event scores were made to function. Kotz, "Language Between Performance and Photography," *Words to Be Looked At*.

⁸⁶ Joselit, "Dada's Diagrams," 237.

which he could now reflect, would propose the notion of “Blank Images” (1970) as if in direct opposition to Morris’s obdurate Blank Forms:

One would take the “idea” for the work, and figure out its essence. Then try to make it into a “Blank structure,” whose structure might imply a whole ideology....The structure would then be filled in with meaningful content, the individual performances being determined by whatever was meaningful by (and to) the individual performers.⁸⁷

Higgins furthermore describes the blank image’s ability to incorporate varied content as a quality of “transparency” that should be seen as carrying forth aspects we have earlier seen in the work of Duchamp, Picabia, and Cage.⁸⁸ Certainly the event score was just this kind of blank image or structure, an abstract form accommodating to the shifting content a performer or beholder might justify giving it and fully reliant upon that content to manifest its existence.

The near lawlessness of Fluxus realizations did not so much obey the score—we can recall, again, that old language of score compliance and ownership—as test how the relations described therein might be realized or discovered otherwise, in an unforeseen way. Higgins gave to this quality of the Fluxus work the name “exemplativism,” explained in his late

“Exemplativist Manifesto” (1976):

Any realization...will necessarily be to some extent arbitrary, and is therefore an example rather than a fixity. For this reason, such art can be called exemplative. The emphasis rests on precisely what the work is an example of, and not on the precise structure or realization of the work... This process stressed not the single realization as the work, but the dialectic between any single realization and its alternates, for many exemplative works the

⁸⁷ Dick Higgins, “Blank Images” (1970), *A Dialectic of Centuries: Notes Towards a Theory of the New Arts* (New York: Printed Editions, 1978), 78.

⁸⁸ The significance of transparency to this lineage of artists does not end here. For Cage, at least, the interest in transparency was integral to a lifestyle of constant observation and mediation through transparent, framing windows of all sorts, from the plate-glass windows of his east village apartment and home in Stony Point, New York, to the architecture of Mies van der Rohe, to the hanging wire sculptures of his erstwhile neighbor Richard Lippold, to the view out of a restaurant window. See also Branden Joseph, “John Cage and the Architecture of Silence,” in *John Cage*, ed. Robinson.

method and format of the notation are far more crucial than in the works of the cognitive past. The look of the written text, the graphic element of the musical notation, the prescription for the dramatic presentation—in exemplative works, much of the meaning interface here with the work as the final audience will see it. *In fact in such a system all form is a process of notation, among other things.* The audience sees or senses the bare bones of the work along with the flesh, so the clarity with which these bare bones are assembled becomes a criterion of the value of the work.”⁸⁹

For each new exemplification of a work, then, the constellation of existing realizations would have to make room. Event scores were not regarded as master scripts but simply one of many possible realizations of a given work.⁹⁰ This would account for the flexibility in Brecht’s practice as to whether a score or an object would come first as well as for the practice of Fluxus artists interpreting and re-interpreting the work of their peers.

In his account of early 20th century avant-garde diagrams, David Joselit proposes that, “What has been called the postwar ‘dematerialization’ of art...is founded in a diagrammatic visuality that...is purely semiotic.”⁹¹ The emergence of the Fluxus event score would be among the very first signs of the diagram’s post-war reemergence, contributing significantly to the

⁸⁹ Higgins, “Exemplativist Manifesto” (1976), *A Dialectic of Centuries*, 156, 159, italics mine.

⁹⁰ Higgins’s exemplativism, as well as the resolutely non-hierarchical logic infusing all of Fluxus practice from the event score to the multiple, corresponds to an Aristotelian understanding of exemplification, or the relationship between a type and tokens or examples of it. The type-token relation has occupied philosophies of art and music as a means of describing the relationship between an allographic work and its varied instantiations. In contrast to the Platonic understanding of the type-token relation, which imagines the type as existing abstractly above and apart from its tokens, here the type is immanently and *only* manifest in its tokens. Brecht played knowingly with this relation in acknowledgement that his works too were modeled on a rather ambiguous form-type that would reveal itself through a mutating succession of token realizations. His score *Two Definitions* (1963) compiles six definitions of the word “token,” from “A medium of exchange issued at a nominal or face value in excess of its commodity value” to “a cup and saucer” (a token of hospitality). In the planning of *Water Yam* via correspondence with Maciunas, Brecht had suggested the inclusion of coupons, “which the subscriber could return to me, and for which I would send him an actual object or event.” And the unpack-able *The Dome* included at its core a metal canister labeled “for redemption” enclosing a tin coin “to be redeemed.” Following the lead of early 1960s practices which began increasingly to register process and to decouple idea from object, British philosopher Richard Wollheim published *Art and Its Objects: An Introduction to Aesthetics* in 1968 (New York: Harper and Row), which relies upon the type-token dualism. See Goehr, “Being True to the Work,” 66 n. 26 and my Chapter 1, note 171.

⁹¹ Joselit, “Dada’s Diagrams,” 238. This is perhaps nowhere more clear than in a photograph from 1968 taken in Richard Hamilton’s London studio, which shows Brecht playing the harmonica as an accompaniment to Jim Dine’s “playing” of Duchamp’s assisted readymade *Bicycle Wheel*—that is, activating the transparent diagram of its spokes. Reproduced in Robinson, *George Brecht: Events: A Heterospective*, 253.

diagram's transformation from a visual morphology to a score-based, operational model of form affiliated with creative activity itself, the nature of which Brecht was committed to investigating in all dimensions of his practice. The operational, analogical mode of thought proposed by the score form and rendered visually explicit by graphic notation would pass into the Fluxus milieu as a foundational principle of composition and interpretation. The basis of innovation in the field of music in the years leading up to the decade of the 1960s, it laid the ground for the artwork-in-flux to emerge as a protest against the regulation of form by any means. Form would now be iterative, performative, and transitive but also ambiguous and thus morphologically flexible or topological.⁹²

But the Fluxus engagement with diagrammatic form would also be, in contrast to the proto-conceptualist, “dematerialized” practices of the later 1960s, resolutely material and embodied, reliant upon a semiotic exchange not only of signs but of objects, made to perform according to and beyond their conventional use-value. We shall see more of this with the example of Fluxboxes in the following chapter. This abstract-concrete operation, assuming the exchangeability of things and driving always back toward what is concrete, material, and immanent, explains how in the universe of Fluxus an artwork could be derived from the observation of an everyday phenomenon. And how this phenomenon could be rendered as a string of words, and this string of words could become a man on a ladder dripping water from a pitcher, and this dripping water from a pitcher could become a sopping rag, and this sopping rag could become a leaky faucet—and on and on and on, unceasingly, as Brecht's *Drip Music* had

⁹² *Iterative*, *performative*, and *transitive* are terms that have been deployed by Kotz, Robinson and Joselit, respectively, in their characterizations of the postwar, (proto-)postmodernist artwork. Arguably, these qualities all belong to a broader model of notational or score-based practices, which become the dominant model of artistic production after 1960.

demonstrated.

The Fluxbox Multiple: George Maciunas and the Transitional Commodity

The first recorded public mention of Fluxus occurred in New York in 1961, uttered from the dais of the symposium accompanying the Museum of Modern Art exhibition *The Art of Assemblage*. George Maciunas's defense of "neo-dada music and theater" was read aloud by curator and moderator William Seitz during the question-and-answer period following the presenters' remarks. Maciunas's name was mispronounced, and he was introduced as the editor of a *Fluxus* magazine which did not yet exist. This scenario, of a Fluxus artist speaking second-hand from the audience of an event celebrating more well known representatives of the most advanced art of the moment, is emblematic of the Fluxus group's marginal position vis-à-vis the neo-avant-garde. It should come as no surprise, then, that the first so-named Fluxus exhibition took place in March 1963 in a basement kitchen, the province of the scullery maid (Fig. 3.1). The display occupied the bowels of Nam June Paik's first solo exhibition staged at the Galerie Parnass, home of architect Rolf Jährling in Wuppertal, Germany. With only a day's notice, Maciunas stocked the small quarters, already cluttered with furniture and storage boxes, with scores and small objects he had on hand.

Whereas media attention was lavished on Paik's work displayed throughout the villa's stories above, one sole photograph records Fluxus's "gallery" debut. Walls and countertops were appropriated as exhibition surfaces for the Fluxus wares. Brecht scores were scattered about as curious labels for the room's features (table, keyhole, exit, light switch). Postcard trails of

manicules snaked around the room, directing visitors' attention from one object to the next. Set atop the stove and countertops were Tomas Schmit's *Poems* (1963): plastic letters, dictionary pages, and plastic dolls suspended in liquid in peanut butter jars to be shaken like a poor man's snow globe. There were Robert Watt's *Hospital Events* (1963), girlie pictures marked with numbered dots that viewers were to strike successively with a hammer. They did so with such enthusiasm that the tables were dented and the pictures quickly destroyed; Maciunas had to write to Watts asking for more.¹ There were also untold things from Ben Vautier.

Fluxus objects would almost never see a legitimate gallery space. An even earlier model and precedent for the display and distribution of Fluxus objects was Robert Filliou's *Galerie Légitime*, presented in July 1962 alongside a "sneak preview" Fluxus concert held at Galerie Girardon on the Boulevard Pasteur in Paris. The *Galerie Légitime* was a miniature gallery in Filliou's flat cap featuring a solo exhibition of Benjamin Patterson's also quite miniature *Poems in Boxes*, montages of poems and found images cut up into jagged puzzle pieces and housed in discarded matchboxes and yogurt and cheese containers retrieved from the garbage bins of Paris (Figs. 3.2, 3.3). Like a wayward magician or black-market merchant, Filliou would doff and sales-pitch his gallery's wares to passersby. His favorite clients were the female cashiers installed in the ticket booths of the Paris Métro, a truly captive audience. Beginning at four o'clock the morning of July 3rd, Filliou and Patterson escorted the gallery through the streets of Paris. Their parcours included visits to the tomb of Gertrude Stein, the statue of Balzac on Boulevard Raspail, the galleries Iris Clert, Rive Droite, and J, café Les Deux Magots, and the *Mona Lisa* at the Louvre (Fig. 3.4). In name and format, *Galerie Légitime* was a call for art to come down "de

¹ The work was so named because Watts sent it to Maciunas as an activity to occupy him while hospitalized in Wiesbaden for one of his many ailments.

ses hauteurs” into the street as well as a demonstrative provocation that, in a society that could drive one to misery or prostitution, anything an artist might do to earn money was legitimate.²

By the mid-1960s, the various returns to the object—by Rauschenberg and Johns, the new realists, Pop, and Minimalism—had established a new category, even a new medium for art. As clarified in the writings of invested artist-critics Robert Morris and Donald Judd, the “object” was an artwork that was three-dimensional, not painting and not sculpture, smaller than the human body, tactile, and intimate.³ The earliest Fluxus displays described above established the basic characteristics of a Fluxus object closely allied with that definition: it would be small and portable (Maciunas was traveling across Europe from concert to concert by automobile), anti-spectacular, and intimately and physically interactive, affiliated and even at times attached to the body. Additionally, the Fluxus object would be an amalgam of the readymade, book, and score, existing in multiple copies. Seeing Brecht’s scores as paradigmatic for Fluxus, Maciunas applied the iterative quality of the score to the invention of a format that imagined the artwork as an interactive, miniature collection. Departing from the typical treatment of musical notation, they were objects to be manipulated in the manner of Brecht’s card decks or the Maciunas-designed experimental publication *An Anthology of Chance Operations*. The latter had pointed toward the tactile nature of the book as object with such contributions as Dieter Roth’s *Poem Machine*, a

² Robert Filliou, “De La Galerie Légitime,” *Happening & Fluxus*, n.p. *Galerie Légitime* was an idea born one evening during Filliou’s time in Copenhagen in 1960-61 while in the company of Jean Tinguely, Niki de St.-Phalle, and Addi Koepcke, who laughed at their friend’s idea to launch a gallery in an internationally itinerant wheelbarrow or pushcart. Serious about his plan yet unable to get the proper license from the city of Paris, Filliou took the gallery underground, making it indeed illegitimate. According to Spoerri, Filliou’s final choice of a hat was in reference to the Jewish quarter in which he lived, where there was an active black market of goods sold out of solicitors’ coats and hats. Daniel Spoerri, *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance (Re-Anecdoted Version)* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), 146-148; author’s interview with Daniel Spoerri, May 22, 2011.

³ The theorization of the new category of art as “object” would soon be clarified in the writings of Robert Morris and Donald Judd. Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture I-III” (1966-7) and “Notes on Sculpture IV: Beyond Objects” (1969), in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993); Donald Judd “Specific Objects” (1965), in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975).

page with die-cut holes meant to organize readymade texts into poetry, or the pasted-in envelope containing La Monte Young's graphic score *Composition 1960 #9*, a card printed with a singular horizontal line (Figs. 3.5, 3.6).⁴ Fluxus objects prioritized the material qualities of event scores and other printed matter over their existence as language and image, treating them as objects to be perceived in confrontation with a multidimensional environment and staging encounters inspired by the performance context from which they emerged.

New York School experiments in graphic notation had already pushed the score in this direction. Although Earle Brown's *December 1952* was never realized as the mechanical score-in-motion as the composer had initially intended, the ability to read that score in multiple orientations had triggered a revised understanding of its utility and heightened awareness of its existence as a paper object. Manipulation of the paper support was made part of the process of interpretation and performance. Cage's *Variations* series (begun in 1958) printed on transparencies required shuffling, sorting, and stacking, and his "Indeterminacy" lectures at Darmstadt praised Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI* mainly for its unconventionally large, scroll-large format, which required it to be transported in a cardboard tube.⁵ Cage's prepared piano piece *Sonatas and Interludes* of 1948, with its accompanying box containing all the required hardware filed into individual, carefully annotated envelopes, had already exploded the score format into three dimensions.

The earliest publications began as anthologies of the event scores and performance instructions presented at the concerts, recognizing in the book a companion allographic format to

⁴ Liz Kotz details the fraught development of Maciunas's design for *An Anthology* in her essay "Poetry Machines," in *± 1961: Founding the Expanded Arts*, by Julia Robinson and Christian Xatrec (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2013).

⁵ Cage, "Composition as Process: II. Indeterminacy," 36.

the score. Liz Kotz has observed that neo-avant-garde practices of the sixties were defined by the two trajectories of the object/edition/store and performance/instruction/score. In Fluxus these formats were not discrete but always deeply interlinked, even mapped onto one another.⁶ Brecht's rearticulation of the readymade as a notational object had already provided one such example; the interactive "hand-held book-boxes" and multiples of Fluxus designed by Maciunas would be another.⁷ The modest success of the first Fluxus display encouraged Maciunas to integrate more elaborate object exhibits into the ongoing Fluxus performance festivals. He excitedly set about writing to his colleagues: "Please send objects for exhibits,"⁸ "Please thing [sic] up something of your own for such exhibits."⁹ In particular, he called for "small items for everyday use."¹⁰ Fluxus exhibits soon appeared alongside a 1963 "little festival of new music" at Goldsmith's College and at a 1965 program at Carnegie Recital Hall (Fig. 3.7).¹¹ Objects were typically set out on open tables in lobbies and reception areas adjacent to the concert spaces where the main performance events took place, a kind of bizarre form of merchandise for audiences to peruse and purchase between acts. With this context in mind, Brecht characterized his early Fluxus boxes as "objects for lobby, foyer, aisles, washrooms of theatre."¹²

⁶ Liz Kotz, "Object, Action and Ephemera," in *Concept Action Language*, ed. Achim Hochdörfer, Wilfried Kuehn, and Susanne Neuburger (Vienna: MUMOK, 2010).

⁷ Estera Milman, "Road Shows, Street Events, and Fluxus People; A Conversation with Alison Knowles," *Visible Language* 26, no. 1/2 (1992), 99.

⁸ Letter from George Maciunas to Robert Watts, n.d., Jean Brown papers.

⁹ I take Maciunas's spelling here to be deliberate. Letter from George Maciunas to Emmett Williams, n.d., Jean Brown papers.

¹⁰ Letter from Maciunas to Williams, n.d., Jean Brown papers.

¹¹ Smith, *Fluxus: The History of An Attitude*, 122, 177.

¹² George Brecht, "Summary," c. 1962, Lawrence Alloway papers.

The correlation of the allographic forms of score and book was already written into Maciunas's biography. All the formats in which he was trained involved collaborative, multi-step processes of planning and implementation. As Julia Robinson describes, "Trained as an architect and a designer, Maciunas was in a sense shaped by the logic of the multiple. In defining Fluxus production it seems that he fused, conceptually and actually, the blueprint-to-production model of his professional experience and the score-to-performance model of Cage/Fluxus."¹³ Maciunas studied art, graphic design, and architecture at the Cooper Union in 1949, followed by studies in architecture and musicology at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. Throughout the '50s and '60s he supported himself, his mother, and Fluxus with freelance graphic design jobs, and in the early '60s he worked in the products and planning unit of the modern furniture company Knoll Associates. Maciunas's liberal interpretations of other artists' designs complicated the division between author and publisher. Acting at times as artist, editor, commissioner, designer, publisher, and dealer, his activities collapsed several categories of identity that in the mainstream art world were typically held separate.¹⁴ Most problematically, he incorporated into the production process of the product designer the indeterminacy and ambiguity that had already troubled the field of music.

The first major Fluxus publication, *Fluxus I*, was comprised of leftover material from *An Anthology* that Maciunas took with him to Wiesbaden when he fled the U.S. and his debts in November 1961 to take a job as a graphic designer with the U.S. military (Fig. 3.8). The first publication to take Fluxus as its title, *Fluxus I* was imagined by Maciunas as the inaugural

¹³ Julia Robinson, "Multiple Manifestations: Nouveau Réalisme & Fluxus," in *The Small Utopia: Ars Multiplicata*, ed. Germano Celant (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2012), 146.

¹⁴ Drawing upon the theories of Judith Butler, Julia Robinson has read Maciunas's Fluxus publishing output in terms of a revolutionary "performative design: a model of design that subverts its conventional function to political ends." Robinson, "Maciunas as Producer: Performative Design in the Art of the 1960s," *Grey Room* 33 (October 2008): 75.

volume of seven anthologies that would chart a historical chronology and global itinerary of the neo-avant-garde from Western Europe to Japan. *An Anthology* had utilized an array of paper colors and stocks that Maciunas acquired as remainders (due more to economics than aesthetics). Still, *Fluxus I* surpassed *An Anthology* with its innovative design, a three-dimensional “book-box” designed in coevolution with the new Fluxus object displays. In a call he sent out in spring 1962 to the mailing list of artists, musicians, dancers, and poets who had formed his community in New York, he explained that he had decided “to utilize instead of covers a flat box to contain the contents so as to permit inclusion of many loose items...Any composition or work that cannot be reproduced in standard sheet form or cannot be reproduced at all.”¹⁵ *Fluxus I*'s basis on the remnants of a prior publication was embraced by Maciunas as a fitting thematic for the entire collection. He invited contributions of essays, scores, graphics, films, flip-books or “poor man’s films,” and original objects in the form of all manner of refuse: “wood objects, scraps of paper, clippings, junk, raggs [sic]”; “scraps, collages, smears, junk, garbage, rags, ready-makes [sic], found objects etc.”

To accommodate such an array of materials Maciunas designed an unconventional book format in which manila envelopes and various kinds of papers are bound together with nuts and bolts. *Fluxus I* can be handled like a book with the added feature of the reader being able to open the envelopes and explore their content, as well as to unbind and rearrange the unnumbered

¹⁵ George Maciunas, *Fluxus Newsletter No. 1*, 1962, reprinted in *Fluxus Etc. Addenda I*, 140.

pages.¹⁶ Event scores comprise much of the book's content as printed leaves or loose cards gathered in the envelope-pages. But there are also other, curious instances of event scores in other guises wherein the proximity of score and object closes the gap between instruction and performance so that the viewer is provided with the means to enact the score in situ as a kind of literalization of action poetry. Vautier contributed a page printed with the phrase "Turn this page," the other side of which says, "This was a gesture piece by Ben." Later on is his *Mystery Envelope*, bound with its open end oriented toward the binding so that in order to open it the viewer must disassemble the entire book, efforts which disappointingly and mockingly turn up a small card with the artist's name on it.¹⁷ Other works venture further into three-dimensions, such as Ay-O's *Finger Hole*, a miniature manila envelope with a slit cut into the surface, allowing the packet's bulging contents to force open the incision just enough for the reader to "put finger in hole" as the printed label instructs (Fig. 3.9). Risking a paper-cut, one may proffer a vulnerable digit to feel the enclosed soft, black tulle. One can also pull out from an envelope-page Alison Knowles's plastic glove "to be worn while examining" (Fig. 3.10). Fluxus publications to follow would expand upon the direction taken by Ay-O and Knowles's works in their integration of instruction and object—the notational object conjoined with the format of the book.

If books, as handheld compendia of printed pages, engage both two- and three-dimensional experience, *Fluxus I* emphasized its appeal to the latter and was referred to often as

¹⁶ Barbara Moore has identified precedents for *Fluxus I* in Japanese neo-dada artist Gempei Akasegawa's 1963 bolted stack of counterfeit yen bills and Dieter Roth's rivet-bound design for *Material 2* (1959), a magazine edited and published by Daniel Spoerri. While Fortunato Depero's 1927 bolted volume *Depero Futurista* could be another reference and it is often mentioned by scholars in reference to *Fluxus I*, it is unlikely Maciunas knew of it. Moore, *Fluxus I: A History of the Edition*, self-published pamphlet, 1985, n.p. To this collection of references I would add a crucial missing figure: Duchamp and his ring-bound "books-in-the-round" (*Some French Moderns Says McBride*, 1922) and unbound "pages in liberty" (*The Green Box*, 1934) as described by David Joselit in "Dada's Diagrams," 223-227.

¹⁷ The card was designed by Maciunas who, trained in graphic design, created typographically inventive, black-and-white name logos for most artists whose work he published.

a hybrid book-object or book-box. For Maciunas's promotional photograph of *Fluxus I* he stood the book upright and observed it from above, splayed out fanlike (Fig. 3.11). The accordion brochure of artists's name logos attached to the back cover cascades open. This aerial viewpoint, borrowed from the Constructivist-inspired photography of László Moholy-Nagy, signaled Maciunas's belief in the published book-object (always a hyphenated, in-between entity) as a tool for reorienting understandings of the form and use of objects. His vision for the Fluxus object would become increasingly radicalized. By 1964 he was writing to his assistant Tomas Schmit of Fluxus's relationship to the Soviet LEF group of the 1920s, proclaiming that the group's goals were not aesthetic but social, aimed at the elimination of the work of art altogether. Calling up the productivist vision of the "collective social object" triumphing over the "private fetish," the Fluxus object would have only a "a temporary pedagogical function" until it could prove the superfluity of art.¹⁸

The Asshole of New York

By the autumn of 1963, Maciunas was back in New York. His job with the US military had ended because his employer was no longer willing to pay the medical bills for the chronically ill artist (or so Maciunas claimed). Thus the materials for *Fluxus I* traveled from New York to Germany and back again, and yet the first Fluxus anthology would still not be finished until the following year. Maciunas moved into a second-story loft at 359 Canal Street in Soho

¹⁸ Letter from George Maciunas to Tomas Schmit, Jan 1964, cited in Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1988), 37. Maria Gough, "The Art of Production," in *The Small Utopia: Ars Multiplicata*, ed. Celant; Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 253.

and divided the space in two, establishing both a Fluxhall performance space and Fluxshop for the publication and distribution of Fluxus objects.

The establishment of the Fluxshop marked a shift in emphasis of Maciunas's efforts toward the production of objects following a series of events in 1963-64 that threatened the group's cohesion. Maciunas's increasingly aggressive efforts included the demand that artists give exclusive rights for all past, present, and future works to Fluxus in order to present a "common front" as well as proposing aggressive agitprop interventions and disruptions of public transportation, postal, and radio communications systems and of events at galleries, museums, and theaters.¹⁹ Most artists balked at both propositions. Maciunas thus began to see the advantages of publishing over organizing concerts and from 1964-68 focused his efforts there, as publishing was an area over which he could retain organizational and design control. The audience for published works was potentially much greater, did not involve expensive and time-consuming travel, and allowed Maciunas to maintain a regular work schedule in order to finance them. Thus the consolidation of Fluxus object production coincided with the beginning of the group's dispersal. With this shift, as we shall see, Fluxus practice would more pointedly address prevailing object models in the aesthetic and social field and, being neither commodity nor sculpture nor tool, enter into critical dialogue with multiple categories of objects at once.

The Fluxshop was located conveniently opposite a post office on a street littered with job-lot and dime stores carrying the cheap cast-offs that Maciunas would collect for future use. It was also directly above Canal Plastics, provider of the compartmentalized boxes that gave the Fluxboxes their standard dimensions. The majority of Fluxus objects would borrow their form

¹⁹ Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 71-82. The Fluxus "news-policy" letters in which these plans are outlined appear in Jon Hendricks, ed., *Fluxus Etc.: Addenda I: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection* (New York: Ink &, 1983).

from these mass-produced boxes, a format indebted to the participatory cabinet and suitcase sculptures of Brecht, such as *The Case* and *Repository*, which had debuted in New York exhibitions in 1959 and 1961.²⁰ Thus when Maciunas acquired his first bulk of plastic boxes and invited artists to propose contents for them, naturally Brecht “was the first one to respond and he came up with lots of little boxes, with games and puzzles and things like that.”²¹ As self-appointed commissioning publisher of Fluxus, Maciunas approached artists directly, asking them what they might do with his supply of papers, plastic boxes, and trinkets. “I just handed them [the boxes] to everybody and I said, how about doing something with them?”²² The labels Maciunas designed, typeset, and printed himself. In later years, he would send around photo inventories of the items in his storehouse from which artists could choose the contents for their soon-to-be reduplicated works.

Maciunas called the New York Fluxshop a mail-order warehouse, giving the impression of a massive operation with stockpiles of goods waiting to be shipped out, but in fact art history’s conception of Fluxus’s “infinite overproduction” is something of a myth.²³ Fluxus objects often existed only *in potentia* as so many parts lying in wait in the jars and boxes of Maciunas’s studio to be assembled one by one over extended periods of time. The “warehouse” inventory consisted of a few pre-assembled samples dwarfed by a gigantic closet stocked with boxes of all the necessary labels and supplies for each kit. Orders were responded to one at a time, instigating a

²⁰ These exhibitions were his first New York solo exhibition at the Reuben Gallery and *The Art of Assemblage* at the Museum of Modern Art.

²¹ The Fluxboxes were fashioned out of wood (or cardboard) after Brecht’s example until June 1964 when Maciunas fully transitioned to the cheaper readymade plastic kind. Larry Miller, “Transcript of the Videotaped Interview with George Maciunas” (1978), in *Fluxus Etc.: Addenda I*, ed. Hendricks, 18.

²² Miller, “Transcript of the Videotaped Interview with George Maciunas,” 18.

²³ Yve-Alain Bois, “The Use Value of ‘Formless,’” in *Formless: A User’s Guide*, by Bois and Rosalind Krauss (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 24.

process in which Maciunas would go fossicking through his wares, plucking out all the labels, cards, and objects necessary to compile an individual work. Editions were completed in small batches with whatever was on hand. Maciunas would later brag of the Fluxshop's failure, saying "[W]e had it open I think almost all year. We didn't make one sale in that whole year."²⁴

By 1967, when Maciunas had relocated to 349 West Broadway nearby, the object archive occupying Maciunas's studio storeroom was in itself an enormous Fluxbox stacked high with cardboard boxes labeled and organized according to a highly personal categorical system: wood, hardware, graphic samples, rubber, utensils, vessels, dishes, optics, acoustics, linen, medicine, and eggshells (Fig 3.12). Inside these were the countless gewgaws and thingamajigs Maciunas salvaged from the bins of C&K Surplus, Columbia Surplus, and Canal Hardware: eye droppers, pill jars, rubber bands, paper clips, old toys, pieces of plastic, dried mushrooms, mahjong tablets, shards of mirror, feathers, rivets, golf tees, thread, test tubes, grinders, corks, pill capsules, lenses, pebbles, keys, beads, nuts, bolts, shells, and belt buckles. Maciunas lovingly collected, preserved, and catalogued these castoffs from the job lot and dime stores lining Canal Street where the excess of 1960s mass-production and the material waste of late capitalist society accumulated before realizing some latent use-value and sneaking back into the consumer economy or heading, finally, to the garbage dump. No wonder artist Lee Lozano, one of the

²⁴ Miller, "Transcript of the Videotaped Interview with George Maciunas," 20.

area's loft-dwellers, referred to Canal as the "asshole" of New York.²⁵ Instead of looking for the marvelous among cast-offs, the objects Maciunas selected for inclusion in future Fluxboxes overwhelmingly sympathized with the low. Fluxus celebrated the old, outmoded, and arcane and pledged its troth to the tacky and utterly worthless dross of everyday life, the result of which its products were always already obsolete and degraded. As Alison Knowles has reflected, "Anything can, after all, become art, particularly (George might say) if it's worthless or separated from its practical context (like half a pair of scissors)."²⁶ Maciunas purchased items in bulk, the plastic boxes a gross at a time. In the gleefully acquisitive eyes of Maciunas, "These small objects in barrels were multiples in themselves."²⁷

Maciunas's rhetoric suggested the desire for sophisticated modes of production and distribution, but his reliance on mail-order circulation and the aesthetics of his editions corresponded rather to the low-culture, low-value sphere of Canal Street. The Fluxboxes sold cheaply, for the most part between \$1 and \$10, and were advertised via gimmicky broadsheets. Their low-brow tackiness deliberately tread the line of good taste in contradistinction to the

²⁵ Matt Keegan, "Public Image Limited," *Artforum* (January 2010): 158. Although now part of gentrified Soho, Canal Street has maintained this identity. The cheap wares hawked by discount retailers have been capitalized by yet another generation of artists including John Miller with his gilded and dung-colored encrustations of Canal's "abject excess" of "useless shit." (See Keegan, "Public Image Limited," 158.) As part of a series of public performances and site-specific installations on and about Canal Street hosted by Art in General in 2001-2002, Matthew Buckingham published a postcard edition recalling the early history of the area. Up until the 19th century a stream used to run along the Canal Street, draining water into the "shocking hole" of the massive Collect Pond a few blocks south. When the stream was widened at the turn of the century to facilitate the pond's draining it effectively became an "open sewer" that, even after being covered over in 1819, "kept Canal Street smelling foul for years." Buckingham, *Canal Street Canal*, unlimited postcard edition (New York: Art in General, 2002).

²⁶ Milman, "Road Shows, Street Events, and Fluxus People; A Conversation with Alison Knowles," 99. Fluxus's low-end objects should be distinguished from the "hygienic," "antiseptic" vision of a New Realist like Martial Raysse, whose *Supermarket*, 1961 was a partitioned white box containing brightly colored commercial objects with a mirror fitted to the underside of its lid, optically multiplying and dematerializing its contents. See Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen, "La Vitrine/L'éponge: the École de Nice and the 'Hygiene of Vision,'" in *New Realisms: 1957-1962: Object Strategies Between Readymade and Spectacle*, ed. Julia Robinson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).

²⁷ Milman, "Road Shows, Street Events, and Fluxus People; A Conversation with Alison Knowles," 99.

“cool” art of the day: Minimalism, Pop, and hard-edge painting. Fluxus objects were keyed to an economic and cultural context of mass-production, consumption, and planned obsolescence in comparison to which its output was deliberately retrograde. Rather than the Fordist, high-tech factory churning out goods of universal design, Fluxus production corresponded more to the model of the medieval artisanal guild in which handcrafted items were produced one at a time by skilled makers in control of all stages of the production process. Maciunas’s “factory” consisted, at various times, of Tomas Schmit, Willem de Ridder, Takako Saito, and Sara Seagull, whose craft skills were appropriated to Maciunas’s plans. At a time when artists like Donald Judd, Robert Morris, and Walter De Maria were turning to industrial fabricators, Fluxus never made that transition.

Fluxus I finally appeared in late 1964 and would be limited to between 100 and 200 copies because they were all handmade and it took several hours to compile just one.²⁸ Miniature crates fashioned from scrap wood were made to house the book-objects, signaling their aspiration to the status of fine art while at the same time making a joke of that very ambition. Maciunas continued to produce copies of *Fluxus I* piecemeal over the course of 14 years, and as a result their contents were not always consistent. In January 1965, he wrote in desperation to Ben Vautier: “We ran out of your ‘bag over the head’ then ran out of small booklets you sent, then ran out of record labels, so we have NOTHING FROM YOU TO PUT IN FLUXUS I !!! So please send a quantity of your contribution. Send anything you like.”²⁹ As Barbara Moore explains, “Maciunas effected changes right up to the last copies he made, a few months before his death.... These modifications might be due to any number of reasons: a new artist discovered and his or her

²⁸ Moore, *Fluxus I: A History of the Edition*, n.p.

²⁹ Letter from George Maciunas to Ben Vautier, January 23, 1965, cited in Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, 109.

piece added; an artistic squabble which ended with Maciunas making an excision; certain entries getting lost or becoming out-of-print.”³⁰

For the most part, the Fluxboxes were the collaborative output of individual artists and Maciunas. There was often a remarkable disparity between prototype and finished Fluxproduct, which led many collaborators to see Maciunas as “a plagiarist and ‘arranger’ of the ideas of others.”³¹ Works were produced after others’ ideas without explicit permission, and artists would discover their concepts had been realized as editions only many years later. Maciunas’s cavalier attitude about the consistency of Fluxus editions frustrated some artists, who complained that “the contents did not really matter to him so long as he had the opportunity to produce a box.”³² The hand-crafted, one-off boxed kits submitted to Maciunas reemerged as cheap, mass-produced counterparts. Vautier’s *Trou Portatif (Flux Holes)* (1964), a black wooden suitcase cut through with a hole, became plastic boxes filled with photo cards, straws, and plastic and metal rings from the hardware store (Fig. 3.12). His *Dirty Water* (1963), a mason jar of sewagey liquid, became medicine bottles fitted with eye droppers and filled with an inky fluid (Fig. 3.13). Brecht’s *Closed on Mondays* (1966), a wooden box bearing an industrially produced sign and held shut by an interior rubber band, became the familiar plastic Fluxus model glued shut and adorned with an elaborately crafted montage of school children idling in a street, surrounded by Fluxgraffiti (Figs. 3.14, 3.15).

Procedurally Maciunas’s process may have mirrored the composer-performer relations of

³⁰ Moore, *Fluxus I: A History of the Edition*, n.p.

³¹ Benjamin Patterson, “Ich bin froh, daß Sie mir diese Frage gestellt haben,” *Kunstforum* 115 (September-October 1991): 174, translation mine.

³² Per Kirkeby, “Fluxus,” in *Wiesbaden Fluxus 1962-1982: Eine Kleine Geschichte Von Fluxus in Drei Teilen*, ed. René Block and Anne Marie Freybourg (Berlin: Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD, 1983), 145-146, translation mine.

score-based performance, and yet the prototypes were treated not as a master plan or form but only the first of a never-ending succession of differing versions whose non-hierarchical relation to one another formed an ever-expanding constellation in which each manifestation would inform and encourage the next. In this sense, Fluxus's alarmingly *unspecific* objects were already more radical than the strict, serial implementation of Conceptualist ideas yet to come.³³

Maciunas's loose design and production model was a fitting adaptation into object production of a score-based practice and performance culture in which artists would freely interpret one another's pieces. If Pollock's modality of chance procedures had been to invite gravity to shape his mark and Cage's indeterminacy was achieved by means of randomizing rule systems, the Fluxus means of accessing chance was to pass the work through the interpretations of multiple subjects.

The concept behind each Fluxbox defines a semiotic economy—of time, light, food, medicine, etc.—that (re)orients the meaning and function of objects placed within it, unhinging or disidentifying them from their given purpose. In turn, Maciunas's capacious approach to the value of a given object pressed the concept behind each box to its limits. Across the varying editions of Robert Watts's *Flux Timekit* (1966) we find dice, matchsticks, seeds, beans, measuring tape, watch gears, postmarked stamps, balloons, chalk, bullets, shells, and an hourglass (Fig. 3.16). The more generic and ubiquitous the item, it seems, the more frequently it appears across Fluxus editions. Nuts, bolts, washers, matchsticks, and dice have the most flexible identities. This exercise of exchange and conversion is encouraged by the boxes' horizontality, which allows beholders to shuttle the items about within the compartmentalized interior—the

³³ "For Conceptual art wishes to transform the work of art into a simple token of a master idea, the way various printing of a poem are tokens of what we would call the poem itself." Rosalind Krauss, "Stella's New Work and the Problem of Series," *Artforum* (December 1971): 41-42.

Fluxus version of the 1960s transformation of the picture plane into a “flatbed” surface of operations and procedures.³⁴ Their combination of the features of transparency and the grid encourages a metonymic exercise of exchange and transposition of individual parts that acknowledges similarity and difference simultaneously and recalls the highly physical interactions with scores and cards of the earliest Fluxus publications. As Kotz has described, “these moves reflect and respond to a destabilization and dispersal of the object immanent to advanced forms of industrial production. Mass produced, repeatable, and thus eminently replaceable, the object becomes empty, a placeholder or position in a larger system of recombination and transformation.”³⁵ It is an exercise that throws the identity, meaning, and value of each object into question, reverting it to a mere thing confronting the viewer with its brute materiality as if to cultivate an alternative competency in relation to the materials of everyday life. The objects are transformed from ultimate commodities—highly useful goods available in mass quantity—into anti-commodities that don’t identify with their intended purpose. The Fluxboxes hereby fix a compromise between the sculptural moves of the mimetic appropriation of commercial display techniques and the endless gathering of objects as if in a pathological system of classification. If, as Adorno and Horkheimer describe, “the general designation ‘culture’ already contains, virtually, the process of identifying, cataloging, and classifying which imports culture into the realm of administration,” then the Fluxboxes encourage malfunctions in the processes of categorization that define culture itself.³⁶ Through

³⁴ Leo Steinberg, “Other Criteria,” in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 82.

³⁵ Kotz, “Object, Action and Ephemera,” 47.

³⁶ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 104.

such endless physical and significative reconfiguration they endeavor to evade both material and semiotic fixity.

Multiple Modes of Touch

The artisanal, on-demand production of Fluxus objects can be seen in critical relation to the industrial methods and materials utilized in the production of Pop art multiples by ventures such as Multiples, Inc. with which Maciunas felt he was in competition (although later he would consign works to Multiples, Inc.). Among other enterprises established during the multiples boom of 1965-67, Multiples, Inc. specialized in the production and sale of multiples and other artist-designed items that catered to the expanding market for Pop art by further exploiting the commercial appeal and logic of that work. With their handy scale, portability, and incorporation of packaging into their overall design, multiples were meant to intervene in object relations configured by consumer goods more directly and effectively than neo-dada sculptural incorporations of the readymade.

In 1965, Marian Goodman, in partnership with Barbara Kulicke, Robert Graham, Sonny Sloan, and Ursula Kalish, opened Multiples, Inc. on Madison Avenue two doors down from where Maciunas's AG Gallery had been. They offered "prints, portfolios, posters, jewelry, sculptures, objects, boxes, banners" "by well-known artists in carefully supervised, signed, and numbered editions."³⁷ Multiples, Inc. produced cloisonné jewelry designed by Roy Lichtenstein and sculptural reliefs in vacuum-formed vinyl by Claes Oldenburg. Works were consigned from the Betsy Ross Flag and Banner Co., Daniel Spoerri's Édition MAT, Rosa Esman's Tanglewood

³⁷ Grace Glueck, "Art Notes: M-M-Multiples," *New York Times*, October 31, 1965.

Press/Original Editions, and the Kulicke Cloisonné Workshop. Also in these years gallerist Richard Feigen launched a temporary multiples outlet at Bonwit-Teller department store, and curator Joan Kron appeared on the Johnny Carson show with multiples from her 1967 exhibition *Museum of Merchandise*, organized in Philadelphia with Audrey Sabol.³⁸ The proponents of multiples, including the more radicalized German publishers René Block and Wolfgang Feelisch, felt the new medium provided a revolutionary model of accessibility and affordability until, as Goodman herself admitted, “It turned out that the people who buy prints are the same people who buy everything else.”³⁹ Within the decade, Lichtenstein’s pins were being resold at an 800% markup. It appeared that despite their promise, multiples had amounted to nothing more than a quirky fad, so many curious bibelots to decorate the coffee tables and mantels of collectors whose walls were already overhung with splashy Pop canvases.

The willingness of the art world to embrace multiples and prints depended upon the implementation of strict standards of production and attribution that required the artist to maintain physical and conceptual control over the work at all times.⁴⁰ If the multiple’s characteristic non-uniqueness threatened to compromise its value or legitimacy as art, other features were amplified to compensate for this potential defect. Value was guaranteed and fortified by size (graphic banners on the scale of paintings), material (cloisonné enamel), function (jewelry) or technical complexity and novelty of production (vacuum-formed plastics

³⁸ Constance Glenn, *The Great American Pop Art Store: Multiples of the Sixties* (Santa Monica, CA: Smart Art Press, 1997), 52, 64. Cheryl Harper, *A Happening Place: How the Arts Council Revolutionized the Philadelphia Art Scene in the Sixties* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Community Centers of Greater Philadelphia, 2003).

³⁹ Peter Schjeldahl, “Onward and Upward with the Arts: Dealership,” *The New Yorker*, February 2, 2004, 38.

⁴⁰ Joshua Binion Cahn, ed., “What is an Original Print? Principles recommended by the Print Council of America,” (New York: Print Council of America, Inc., 1961). See critiques of multiples by Virginia Allen of Tamarind Lithography workshop, “The Problem of the ‘Original Print’” *Artforum* (April 1963): 53, and Max Kozloff, “Three-Dimensional Prints and the Retreat from Originality” *Artforum* (December 1965): 25-27.

and motorized kinetic sculptures). Even Spoerri's *Édition MAT*, perhaps the closest model to the Fluxus multiple, strictly limited its editions, insisted upon interactive and changeable forms as a means of artificially charging the work with uniqueness, and solicited works from members of the historical avant-garde to legitimate the value of those by younger artists.⁴¹ Although the Fluxboxes were produced in edition, being neither strictly limited nor comprised of exact copies they barely adhered to that standard. They were unnumbered, unlimited, internally varied, collectively produced, and, in some cases even anonymous, introducing an allographic model of production and dissemination to a market and value system based (even for the mainstream multiple) in an autographic model.⁴² The Fluxus multiple was thus problematically and ambiguously situated between the models of unique art object and the multiple, adhering to the standards of neither one. When we open Vautier's *Flux Holes*, for instance, we do not know if we will find metal washers, straws, a sink strainer, or a photograph showing the cavernous bell of a tuba. Another work, *Fresh Goods from the East* (1964), contained whatever latest items had come across Maciunas's desk, thus incorporating variability as the foundation for its material and conceptual design (Fig. 3.17). It was a work whose authorship Maciunas would disavow, further undermining its commercial value.

We can see in a photograph taken by Maciunas of his Fluxus wares the chairman's celebration of the aberrant editions and their chaotic organization. A jumble of Fluxboxes is strewn out across the floor; their contents spill out over and into one another, intermingling,

⁴¹ Katerina Vatsella, *Édition MAT: Die Entstehung Einer Kunstform* (Bremen: Hauschild H.M. GmbH, 1998).

⁴² Where the artist's signature does appear it is often as a self-conscious joke, as in Vautier's gesture of signing "everything" and Watt's signatures of Ingres, Duchamp, and Picasso in neon and on baseballs. An important precedent was the subversive economics of the artist's signature in Dada. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Cryptic Watts," (New York: Leo Castelli Gallery, 1990), 7-8; Ina Blom, "Ben Vautier's Signature Acts and the Historiography of the Avant-Garde," *Visible Language* 39, no. 3 (2005): 278-307; and George Baker, "Dada Painting," in *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 95-156.

making it unclear where one work ends and another begins (Fig. 3.18). As with the image of *Fluxus I*, the works are observed from above, occupying a space of tactile engagement, handiwork, and exploration. This cluttered display was keyed to the low-end retail environments of Canal Street and a working class consumer audience that, as Cécile Whiting has described, “selected goods through the sensory mode of touch rather than relying on vision.”⁴³ In contrast, the pristine shelving units lining the walls of Multiples, Inc.’s Madison Avenue location segregated one work from the next, with many of its modules functioning as vertical surfaces for the exhibition of miniature wall-based or upright works with a primarily optical address (Fig. 3.19). (Fluxus is represented here by the 1964 *Fluxkit*, unsurprisingly a bottom-shelf item.)

What’s more, the invitation to touch became provisional when confronted with the preservationist demands of the collector and the exhibition’s conventional codes of behavior. An emblematic episode occurred at the Bianchini Gallery exhibition *The American Supermarket*, a cheeky installation of Pop multiples that borrowed the bright and orderly merchandizing of the supermarket with its pristine towers and rows of canned goods, fruit, and veg. Jasper Johns’s *Ale Cans* were shown alongside Robert Watts’s chromed and flocked eggs and Andy Warhol’s signed Campbell’s soup cans until they were removed by owner Robert Scull who complained, “I just don’t want people touching them... When the gallery makes a protective covering for them, I’ll bring them back.”⁴⁴ Fluxboxes demanded to be touched, calling forth haptic engagement by their form and content in ways that exceeded the casual fondling and admiring of the everyday shopper. To properly engage the work is to intervene in its material arrangement. One means of

⁴³ Cécile Whiting, *A Taste for Pop: Pop Art, Gender, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 26.

⁴⁴ Grace Glueck, “Gallery Market Hawks Art On Rye,” *New York Times*, October 8, 1964.

achieving this effect was the absorption of the container as an integral structuring element of the work such that the encounter would necessarily begin with procedures of opening, unpacking, and (re)arranging.

Fluxkit, an elaborate compendium of Fluxboxes, of boxes within a box, took the form of a leather briefcase lined in faux red velvet and fitted with custom wooden partitions that organized its contents tightly (Fig. 3.20). It contains ten small plastic Fluxboxes, including Ben Vautier's *Flux Holes*. Among the photo cards picturing a drain, keyhole, the bell of brass instrument, and a recessed brick wall there is a nearly abstract image that edges the collection into a darker register. It is inscrutable, calling up a variety of obscene suggestions—a clogged nostril, a ball-gag in a mouth, a plugged-up toilet (Fig. 3.21). A version of *Fresh Goods From the East* contains six tiny purses, like mini patent-leather holsters, each containing a single earphone. These are the plugs to Vautier's holes, and there are four more of them than the ears can accommodate, suggesting other uses for other orifices. A three-dimensional version of Ay-O's *Finger Box*, which had earlier appeared in *Fluxus I* in envelope form, tempts a vulnerable digit to feel its hidden contents (in this case, soft foam). There is also Vautier's *Dirty Water*, reeking of ink and earth, equipped with a glass dropper so that we may drip, lick, suck, administer, insert, etc. Benjamin Patterson's *Instruction No. 2*, containing a small soap and a disposable washcloth printed with the phrase "Please wash your face," seems a joke on his Fluxpeers' invited transgressions.

The sexual, violent, infantile, and scatological tenor of engagement is underscored by the Fluxbox labels' vintage graphics, culled by Maciunas from the image collections of the New York Public Library. In Robert Watts's *Events*, an event score depicts a diagram of a laboratory

setup that positions a dripping burette over a man's open eyes; another shows a naked woman seemingly in mid-orgasm, about to be cut up on an operating table. Issues of the Fluxus newspaper *cc VTRE* are strapped with a little leather belt to the underside of the case's lid, their plays in graphic grotesquerie indicating an obsession with the perverse as a larger concern of Fluxus extending beyond the collection of objects at hand. The January 1964 issue's front-page includes a graphic of an obsolete apparatus for performing a bedside enema. We see it being demonstrated by a happy customer alongside a display of the tool, laid out as if on a mail-order catalogue page (Figs. 3.22, 3.23). The back page of the February 1964 issue is dominated by Dieter Roth's *Poem Machine*, instructing handlers to cut along the dotted line to produce a void in the crown of Roth's bald head (Fig. 3.24). "Cut hole in head along dotted line to produce Diter Rot's 'Poem Machine,'" it says, an aggressive gesture toward the artist, one that would produce another hole for the handler of the kit—another hole through which to let loose, another hole to re-plug.

For the next collection, *Flux Year Box 2*, first assembled in 1967, Maciunas made a call to artists to send him object-works that, in the manner of Brecht's notational objects, would be realized "automatically" as the handler inspected the collection.⁴⁵ There were meant to be many more kits and yearboxes, but this would be Maciunas's last major edition of collected Fluxus works before illness and debt began to catch up with him.⁴⁶ Much like the *Fluxkit* it was a partitioned box, but this time made entirely of wood and containing only a small assortment of Fluxboxes and several dozen scores (Fig. 3.25). Vautier's *Flux Holes* are present as a set of white

⁴⁵ "We are also planning a second yearbox—Fluxus 2—which will be limited to book events only, i.e. events that are enacted by the reader automatically as he inspects the book or box." George Maciunas, "Fluxus Newsletter," c. March 1965; cited in Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, 122.

⁴⁶ See Thomas Kellein, *The Dream of Fluxus: George Maciunas: An Artist's Biography*, trans. Fiona Elliott (London: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 2007).

rubber bands. There is also Shigeko Kubota's *Flux Medicine*, a supply of empty, transparent pill capsules; Ken Friedman's *Flux Corsage*, a handful of seeds; and Vautier's *Total Art Matchbox*, a tiny but insidious object calling for the destruction of all museums, art libraries, readymades, and Pop art. There is the same intermingling of gag humor, scatology, eroticism, and violence. What is new in *Fluxus Year Box 2* is the introduction of cinema, rendered strangely tactile and sculptural through the inclusion of a hand-held film viewer and loops by Watts, Yoko Ono, Wolf Vostell, Paul Sharits, and John Cale. Here cinema is broken apart, rendered into the experience of watching a slow succession of images as they click awkwardly past a tiny viewfinder cupped awkwardly to the viewer's eye. Cinema within the *Year Box* is about touch as much as image—there is the unraveling of the loops, holding them up to the light, thumbing them up, loading the plastic device, slowly turning the crank, tugging the ribbon along (hoping it does not rip), exchanging the loop for another and another, and finally regathering the loops, thumbing them up some more, and stuffing them back into an ill-fitting narrow slot.

Surfaces and Holes

There are almost no precedents for this kind of tactile sculptural object in the history of modern art. Whatever models existed had, by the time of Fluxus's emergence, been violently repressed despite the three-dimensional nature of the medium.⁴⁷ Even the most avant-garde interventions had only intimated the kind of touching actually invited by the Fluxboxes.

Duchamp's readymades and his miniature retrospective *Boite-en-Valise* (1935-41) had been the first gestures of a practice that would move from sculpture to the object in their portability,

⁴⁷ David J. Getsy, "Tactility or Opticality, Henry Moore or David Smith: Herbert Read and Clement Greenberg on The Art of Sculpture, 1956," in *Anglo-American Exchange in Postwar Sculpture, 1945-1975*, ed. Rebecca Peabody (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011), 105-121.

incorporation of readymade materials, and invitation of tactile engagement. Yet the readymades seem to do more to *sever* everyday objects from their everydayness, and the *Valise*, even as one must delicately unpack its contents, still prioritizes vision, being after all, a miniature museum. Duchamp's more successful experiment with tactile engagement was *Prière de Toucher (Please Touch)*, a foam breast attached to the cover of a 1947 Surrealist exhibition catalogue, a work that was not a sculpture at all but, tellingly, married to the form of the book.⁴⁸

In a historical reversal, it was in fact the emergence of the multiple that made possible the republication and multiplication of many of Duchamp's works in the 1960s. Duchamp had earlier remade several of his readymades as they were lost or destroyed, but they were not replicated *en masse* until the neo-dada moment of the 1950s and '60s brought renewed interest in his work. The gallerist Arturo Schwartz alone was responsible for the reproduction in number of fourteen of Duchamp's readymades between 1964 and 1965.⁴⁹ Reconstructions after photographs, plans, drawings, and instructions were overseen by the artist, who abandoned his earlier position of indifference in recognition that the "custom-made editioned replicas" of his readymades had already been recuperated as sculpture.⁵⁰ As he explained, "The readymades were a way of getting out of the exchangeability, the monetarization of the work of art, which was just beginning about

⁴⁸ André Breton and Marcel Duchamp, *Le Surréalisme en 1947: Exposition internationale du surréalisme* (Paris: Maeght, 1947).

⁴⁹ Schwartz showed Fluxus works at his Milan gallery and was particularly close with Brecht, with whom he shared drafts of his catalogue raisonné text on Duchamp. On October 9, 1967, Schwartz wrote to Brecht in Villefranche, "I can't tell you how *grateful* I am for your willingness to go through my text on Duchamp. Your remarks and corrections are most pertinent and useful. Thank you ever so much. I am sending you the 3 following chapters and when I receive them here, will send you the last 3. Take it at leisure, if you can send them back to me say in ten days time that would be fine. Duchamp who has read the book likes it very much. But his opinion is of course prejudiced: the book is about him! So I really need the opinion of somebody like you." Letter from Arturo Schwartz to George Brecht, Hanns Sohm Archive. The publication referred to is Schwartz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1969).

⁵⁰ Adina Kamien-Kazhdan, "Duchamp, Man Ray, and Replication," in *The Small Utopia: Ars Multiplicata*, ed. Celant, 105. See also Martha Buskirk, "Thoroughly Modern Marcel," *October* 70 (Fall, 1994): 113-125.

then. In art, and only in art, the original work is sold, and it acquires a sort of aura that way. But with my readymades a replica will do just as well.”⁵¹ With the readymade, as well as his numerous works that referenced books and scores, Duchamp had wanted “to wipe out the idea of the original, which exists neither in music nor in poetry: plenty of manuscripts are sold, but they are unimportant.”⁵² In other words, in order to escape the construct of the unique, autographic object, artists would have to appeal to the allographic. Yet Duchamp’s complicity in the meticulous reproduction of his readymades served only to reinstate and solidify their status as single-authored works of art.

The neo-dada revival of the readymade has been criticized, most famously by Peter Bürger, as a futile repetition of a strategy that could no longer function as a radical avant-garde.⁵³ (The commercial success and celebration of object-based work by the likes of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg in *The Art of Assemblage* was proof enough of that.) The way Fluxus objects engaged the readymade, however, was in the form of a reversal of which such a critique takes no account. This reversal entailed *not* severing the readymade from its intended use value, and *not* dislocating it from its typical space of use. The Fluxus multiples thus realized aspects of the readymade that Duchamp had not explored, from their manner of replication which welcomed difference to their overtly tactile address. These are objects that the viewer is invited to handle and open up, whose contents we are invited to shift around. They are functioning objects that function with no clear purpose. And in that sense, they are not only objects without a definitive object-status, they are *objects without object* in a second sense: objects without a singularly

⁵¹ Quoted in Calvin Tomkins, “Marcel Duchamp,” *The Bride and the Bachelors*, 40.

⁵² Quoted in Otto Hahn, “Passport No. G255300,” *Art and Artists* 1, no. 4 (July 1966): 7.

⁵³ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*.

definable point or purpose, positioned against the “art-object as non-functional commodity.”⁵⁴ Indeed they will function, but not as commodities. They facilitate in object form what the influential composer John Cage ventured in the writing of music: “a purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play.”⁵⁵ And yet they do not adhere to the exceptional uselessness of the work of art. To evade being circumscribed as “art,” the functions and meanings of the readymade object in Fluxus are drastically *multiplied* as it is set into relation with seemingly *unlike* objects and functions, able to be transported from place to place, moving happily from the bookshelf to the coffee table to your rucksack.⁵⁶

Art history has typically identified the radical reorientation of the art object with the dispersal in time and space of the modern sculptural object in the 1960s and ‘70s while overlooking Fluxus production almost entirely. In Rosalind Krauss’s *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, minimalist, post-minimalist, and earth works including Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1969-70) and Richard Serra’s *Shift* (1970-72) are seen as newly emphasizing bodily experience through expanded relations of space, scale, and time while simultaneously destabilizing the viewer’s sense of bodily centeredness and control.⁵⁷ It is this heightened address to the perceiving subject’s body that seems to cause the dissipation of sculpture, as her subsequent

⁵⁴ Letter from George Maciunas to Tomas Schmit, January 1964, reprinted in *What’s Fluxus? What’s Not! Why*, ed. John Hendricks (Rio de Janeiro: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 2002), p. 163.

⁵⁵ Cage, “Experimental Music,” 12. In this regard it is important to note that when Maciunas teamed with Robert Watts and Lee Heflin in 1966 to produce commercially mass-produced, functional gag items—stick-on jewelry, paper aprons, sweatshirts, disposable dinnerware, postcards and stamps, low-cost furniture, playing cards and games—he did so under the name Implosions, Inc., maintaining the integrity and critical uselessness of Fluxus items.

⁵⁶ Recognizing this, later producers of multiples such as Wolfgang Feelisch of Vice Versand highlighted the pedagogical function of his editions, donating them to schools for students’ use. See also Hannah Higgins, “Teaching and Learning as Art Forms: Toward a Fluxus-Inspired Pedagogy,” in Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*.

⁵⁷ Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*.

essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” suggests.⁵⁸ Yet Krauss’s theorization of the phenomenological address of these artworks is only partially embodied in the sense that the viewer’s awareness of self in the face of minimalist sculpture is perceptual primarily on a visual and cognitive level. It is crucial that vision is embodied, Krauss reminds us, but it is still to vision that sculpture is addressed. Never is the viewing experience described in terms of a haptic encounter; where touch enters her narrative, it is either to emphasize “the contingencies of real time,” as in the case of a rearrange-able Jean Arp sculpture (*Head with Annoying Objects*, 1930), or merely to thematize touch, as exemplified by Henry Moore’s sensuous, undulating, biomorphic curves, which serve only to remind us that touch is, of course, at the service of our “capacity to conceptualize.”⁵⁹ On the other hand, the account given by Jack Burnham’s *Beyond Modern Sculpture* describes a transformation of sculpture in which the art object disassociates from the ontological status of the object altogether.⁶⁰ A sculptural tradition of the object defined by durability, presence, situatedness, and formalism is taken over by a new model of sculpture as a system—kinetic, optic (charged by light and motion), environmental, cybernetic—formed by field-structuring relations organized by technology and/or vision. In both models of history, touch is implicitly denied as the expanded field opened by the new sculpture (or anti-sculpture, as the case may be) creates a vertiginous, uncertain, anti-mnemonic space into which the viewer is thrust.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, 276-290.

⁵⁹ Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, 144.

⁶⁰ Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of This Century* (New York: G. Braziller, 1968).

⁶¹ This is not to elide the differences between Krauss and Burnham’s accounts, which diverge dramatically on the role of sculpture vis à vis technocratic society. Burnham sees the relation as mimetic, whereas Krauss insists on art’s potential for critical resistance.

In addition to the phenomenological and systems models offered by Krauss and Burnham, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has described a semiotic model in which the materiality and three-dimensionality of the sculptural object are overcome by the image of sign exchange value. His account offers a refined definition of the sculpturally induced vertigo described by Krauss by proposing a two-part model between which recent sculpture may be situated: the commodity fetish and the logic of the spectacle. Duchamp's readymades prefigured this situation, having brought sculpture, to the destruction of its monumentality and commemorative capacity, near to both the sign and the fetish in one and the same gesture. "Sculpture," Buchloh writes, "is thus constituted in an uneasy balanced double reference, operating simultaneously in a discursive/semiotic space and in a social political space."⁶² Any critical engagement with the two enforced terms of object experience—sign and fetish—must invent a means of "critical interpellation" by which demythologized historical consciousness may re-emerge to combat the amnesia and indifference induced by today's cultural conditions of late capitalism.⁶³

We must begin to wonder where the Fluxboxes might fit into these narratives, what kind of model they present in the face of the fetish and the sign. By their humble materiality they clearly do not participate in sculpture's monumentalizing drive. They speak more to the commodity fetish, given their exchangeable and collectable form. But they also demand the viewer's touch, which would be linked to use-value, temporality, and intimacy—all antithetical

⁶² Benjamin Buchloh, "Sculpture: Publicity and the Poverty of Experience," in *White Cube/Black Box* ed. Sabine Breitwieser (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 1996), 164.

⁶³ Buchloh, "Sculpture: Publicity and the Poverty of Experience," 171.

to the fetish and the preservationist impulses of the collector.⁶⁴ The Fluxboxes hold a persistent balance between these two extremes of sculptural possibility—the phenomenological and the semiotic—in that they arise out of a meeting of language (the event score) and objects that implicate the body (book pages, boxes, and toys).

In one of the few theory-driven accounts of Fluxus that we have, Buchloh has read the group's project and its mimetic engagement with commodity culture through the work of Robert Watts.⁶⁵ He argues that Fluxus artists, having recognized the impossibility of rejecting or critiquing market forces from an outside position, turn to a strategy of ludic affirmation in which those forces are transformed into a running gag. If the subject's experience of capitalism is inescapably alienating and exploitative, then Fluxus would exploit itself by hawking its items in the manner of a circus sideshow or low-brow mail-order catalogue. At the same time, public systems of communication and exchange such as the postal system were mined for whatever social utopian potential they yet contained. The Fluxus strategy was therefore both mimetic and polemical, but its slapstick methods achieved minimal critical success. Fluxus jokes ultimately fell flat, unable to dislodge the commodity fetish from the center of object-relations. And thus their import for art history is reduced merely to registering the beginning of the totalizing regime of sign exchange value.

Buchloh's argument is focused around the chrome-plated works of Watts: casts of small African art objects and trays of eggs one would typically find in the grocery store refrigerator

⁶⁴ Buchloh articulates this point in terms of sculpture history: "It is precisely this shift from the collection to the mere 'accumulation' of more or less identical objects in the work of Arman and Oldenburg at the beginning of the Sixties that makes the universalized conditions of fetishization apparent and with them the rapid disappearance of those forms of experience that had been tied to the knowledge of use value and the temporality and intimacy of the object." "Sculpture: Publicity and the Poverty of Experience," 169-70.

⁶⁵ Benjamin Buchloh, "Robert Watts: Animate Objects, Inanimate Subjects," *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry*, 531-553.

(Figs. 3.26, 3.27). Their highly reflective surfaces speak directly to the alienating condition of the fetish as theorized by both Freud and Marx. From Freud we recall the infamous “shine on the nose” as one patient’s focus of sexual excitation, holding in abeyance but signifying nonetheless the confrontation with sexual difference. From Marx we remember that the fetish is the rendering of the value of commodities in terms of pure exchangeability with the effect of suppressing the relations of production they actually embody. Buchloh reads Watts’s work in terms of a lineage of sculpture concerned more and more with surface, ultimately building toward the diagnosis of a Fluxus strategy of utter submission to the logic of the fetish and its alienating effects, albeit with a few moments of “sudden rupture” within the system’s “mesmerizing totality and numbing continuity.”⁶⁶ He writes:

Transparency, translucence, sheen, shine and reflection are clearly some of the perceptual conditions that Watt’s work is engaging (or of which he makes his spectators aware as the inescapable structures within which vision in commodity culture is contained). If these are the criteria of an aesthetic of surface, rather than an aesthetic of substance, structure, or form that had dominated sculptural thought throughout most of the twentieth century, it should be evident that they are of course also the perceptual conditions of the experience of the fetish.⁶⁷

The accounts offered by Krauss, Burnham, and Buchloh regard the history of sculpture in terms of a succession of surfaces that reorient the viewer’s relationship to the artwork. We are pointed to one example after another of the opacification of materials and meaning: Rodin’s unreadable bodies, Brancusi’s immaculately reflective abstract forms, Picabia’s blinding light backdrop for the ballet *Relâche*. To these we could add Judd’s aluminum boxes, Morris’s

⁶⁶ Buchloh, “Robert Watts,” 551.

⁶⁷ Buchloh, “Robert Watts,” 543-544. Of the Fluxus artists Watts was the most closely allied with Pop, having in 1964 undertaken a project to trademark the name. This is perhaps why his work has a rather un-Fluxus-like obsession with surfaces akin to Warhol’s images’ affiliation with screens. Hal Foster, “Andy Warhol, or the Distressed Image,” *The First Pop Age: Painting and Subjectivity in the Art of Hamilton, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Richter, and Ruscha* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

mirrored cubes, and even the sun glinting off Great Salt Lake between the coils of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*. At the same time that their seductive veneers provoke desire these surfaces deny narrative coherence, recognizing only the movement of the perceiving body through time and space in front of the work. In a world governed by the commodity, objects (of which the art object is a preeminent example) are faithful mirrors that reflect the subject's desires. As Buchloh writes, "The art object traditionally registers projections of identity (individual, cultural, national, ethnic, or class-based). Paradoxically, the experience of identity is mediated by an act of reification, an act in which parts of the self are invested in the object's receiving the projected image of that identity like a mirror."⁶⁸

We have seen many examples of how this dynamic of projection and reflection is literalized materially. Such a focus on surfaces makes sense in relation to the singular example of Watts' chrome-plated objects. But collectively, the Fluxboxes seem to require a different narrative, one that can account for the various evocations of penetration, passing through, and taking in.⁶⁹ Might a focus on surfaces cover over, literally and figuratively, a critical history of absorption and bodily incorporation? What happens when the art object re-presents the subject not by means of an aesthetics of surface but through the figure of the hole?

For we see in the Fluxboxes so many holes, open mouths, and anuses in addition to plugs, pills, droppers, and tubes. The box itself is a kind of hole, an enclosed, portable void. Ay-O's

⁶⁸ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Knight's Moves: Situating the Art/Object" (1986), in *Neo-avantgarde and Culture Industry*, 292. On the object as mirror see also Jean Baudrillard, "Subjective Discourse or The Non-Functional System of Objects," *Revenge of the Crystal: Selected Writings on the Modern Object and its Destiny, 1968-1983*, ed. and trans. Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis. (London: Pluto, 1990), 46.

⁶⁹ Annette Michelson, writing on Robert Morris's mirrored cubes of 1964, has considered how the two conditions of reflection and absorption might in fact be deeply related: "[T]he reflective process is grounded in, inseparable from, the radically engaging physicality of the work, a structure which in this instance visibly (virtually) *absorbs* the spectator." Michelson, "Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression," 35, italics mine.

Finger Boxes are holes with built-in holes, Mieko Shiomi's *Endless Box* a terrifying and delirious hole-en-abyme (Figs. 3.28, 3.29). Vautier's *Flux Holes* could seemingly encompass everything and yet they contain, in fact, nothing. These holes are certainly not sculptures. Perhaps they are not even objects. For Maciunas, the hole was anti-illusionistic, anti-significatory, brutally concrete. Ay-O's holes were a form of concrete painting.⁷⁰ Dieter Roth's *Poem Machine*, which would magically conjure readymade poetry out of negative space, was the very definition of concrete poetry. If the figure of the mirror is associated with projection, identification and mimesis, the hole signifies passage and exchange. Being not decidedly of one object/body or another, the hole marks the site of a *transition*, a pathway to difference.

The Transitional Commodity

The subject-object relations posited by these works produces a dynamic akin to children's play, for the simplicity of gestures drawn "automatically" from the handler mimics the way toys are designed to rehearse and encourage the infant's basic motor skills on her way to gaining more and more control over the world and its objects. For this reason the Fluxboxes should be thought in relation to D. W. Winnicott's theorization of the transitional object, an item elected instinctually by the infant as a symbolic substitute for the breast in the period before he begins to accept relations with "not-me" objects.⁷¹ In Winnicott's formulation, indebted to the work of Melanie Klein, the child's relationship to the feeding breast is predicated upon the initial illusion

⁷⁰ Miller, "Transcript of the Videotaped Interview with George Maciunas," 21.

⁷¹ D. W. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," *Playing and Reality* (New York: Basic Books, 1971). Winnicott's theory was first introduced in a 1953 paper presented to the British Psycho-Analytical Society entitled "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena—A Study of the First Not-Me Possession." Anna Dezeuze has also turned to Winnicott in order to theorize a broad range of newly interactive artworks of this period. Dezeuze, "Play, Ritual and Politics: Transitional Artworks in the 1960s, in *The 'Do-it-yourself' Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media*, ed. Dezeuze (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2010).

that the breast is an inseparable part of the child. The child's awakening to the falsity of this belief begins with the frustration of the breast not appearing "on command." The transitional object, typically a blanket or stuffed toy, aids the child in dealing with the anxieties of being confronted with this new idea of the not-me, which marks the beginning of his coming to terms with the idea that there exist things that are separate from the self. The transitional object is transitional because it is symbolic of the intimate connection between the child and the breast but also because it behaves as a bridge for the child between the stages of 1) the infant's illusion of omnipotence, which is really his dependence on the mother, and 2) the infant's recognition of the world of objects and beings outside of the self and his control. Winnicott writes, "The object represents the infant's transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate."⁷² As with the breast, the infant cycles through various attitudes toward the transitional object, and so the transitional object must be able to survive the infant's obsessive love, hate, and aggression. It is alternately cuddled and mutilated, adored, and deplored. Winnicott notes that the transitional object is a possession with close ties to Freud's notion of the fetish and may even stand in for feces, given the child's concurrent passage to the anal stage.⁷³ It is perhaps not coincidental, then, that once the bizarre taxonomic practice of the Fluxboxes was established, Maciunas commented self-reflexively upon the anality of its logic by producing several versions of *Excreta Fluxorum* (1973), a Fluxbox containing specimens of animal and insect excrement, labeled and organized according to species (Fig. 3.30).

⁷² Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 14.

⁷³ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 9.

In the vision of Maciunas, Fluxus was to be an outpouring of low-cost art goods that luxuriated in base humor, and it was not insignificant to him that the word *flux* can describe bodily excretion. Thus we have Ben Vautier's *Dirty Water* and *Flux Holes* (1964) labelled with the image of a prodded asshole; Robert Filliou's *Fluxhair* and *Fluxdust* (c. 1967-1968) (Figs. 3.31, 3.32); and Alison Knowles's work with the cheap and lowly bean, including *Bean Rolls* (1964) (Fig. 3.33) and a cooked bean dish that Maciunas delighted in referring to as *Shit Porridge* (1969). There is also Maciunas's aforementioned Wunderkammer of poop, a product of a continuing obsession with bodily excreta that would culminate in the inclusion of elephant dung in the largest Fluxbox ever constructed, a human-sized *Fluxlabyrinth* constructed in 1976. Such works were a crucial component of Fluxus's sardonic "rear-guard" attack on bourgeois modern art and the by-then institutionalized postwar avant-gardes.⁷⁴

In contrast to the developmental logic of the transitional object—for healthy infants, the object decathects over time and interest is re-distributed over a range of objects and people—the quality of Fluxus play is clearly regressive, resolutely anti-developmental in its concentration on the bodily, especially the anal and scatological. The bodily model suggested by many of the Fluxboxes is utterly, excessively low, allied with the grotesque in its emphasis on moments of transition and opening up, of expelling and taking in. They are designed according to the riotous logic of the Rabelaisian grotesque body, as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin:

Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts

⁷⁴ In a 1964 statement on Fluxus as a revolutionary form of art-amusement, Maciunas proclaimed: "Art amusement must be simple, amusing, unpretentious, concerned with insignificances, require no skill or countless rehearsals, have no commodity or institutional value. The value of art-amusement must be lowered by making it unlimited, massproduced, obtainable by all and eventually produced by all. Fluxus art-amusement is the rear-guard without any pretention or urge to participate in the competition of one-upmanship with the avant-garde. It strives for monostructural and nontheatrical qualities of simple natural event, a game or a gag." *Happening & Fluxus*, n.p.

of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation. This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body, the link in the chain of genetic development, or more correctly speaking, two links shown at the point where they enter into each other.⁷⁵

The grotesque body revels in opening to the outside world. It revels in the zones where self meets other, subject meets object, and in this way it occupies a space similar to the transitional object. Likewise, the transitional object maintains an intimate relation to the body, first to the mother and the breast, but also to the infant. Bodily traces—finger prints and body odors—reinforce the infant’s possessive relationship with it. One of the first things Winnicott notes about the transitional object is that “The mother lets it get dirty and even smelly, knowing that by washing it she introduces a break in continuity in the infant’s experience, a break that may destroy the meaning and value of the object to the infant.”⁷⁶ Given this intimate bodily relation, it is the preeminent fetish, constituting the infant’s first encounter with the dynamics of fetishistic relations. There is the same pre-genital fixation, the alternation between obsessive love and castrating hatred, and the irrepressible attraction to what is “dirty” and “evil-smelling.”⁷⁷

The Fluxbox stages object relations as an archetypical experience of fetishization in which the fetish-object seems to have emerged from the subject’s own body. As William Pietz

⁷⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 26.

⁷⁶ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 4.

⁷⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 21 n. 2.

explains, “The fetish is...first of all, something intensely personal, whose truth is experienced as a substantial movement from ‘inside’ the self...into the self-limited morphology of a material object situated in space ‘outside.’ Works of art are true fetishes only if they are material objects at least as intensely personal as the water of tears.”⁷⁸ The most basic and thorough thematization of this idea was realized in Larry Miller’s *Orifice Flux Plugs* (1974), a treasury of earphones, enema syringes, nose-droppers, cotton balls, pacifiers, whistles, glass eyes, bullets, tampons, bottle nipples, and condoms (Fig. 3.34).⁷⁹ But of course it would be Maciunas, with his flat-footed and sardonic humor, who would test the extremities of the idea by gathering the body’s leavings—human hair, fingernails, and the shavings from calluses and bunions—as the materials for Robert Filliou’s *Fluxhair* and Ken Friedman’s *Flux Clippings* (1966) (Fig. 3.35).⁸⁰ The Fluxboxes are riddled with the bodily grotesqueries of incision, ingestions, penetration, and being penetrated. We ingest the Fluxmedicine. We drink the dirty water. We put our finger in the hole. We slip on the glove. We soil the washcloth. Recognition of difference is short-circuited through an obsessive fixation on the bodily grotesque. One need only register the way in which Maciunas photographed the boxes opened, undone, strewn out, and mixed up, as compared to the Multiples, Inc. image, or any exhibition catalogue image of the Pop multiple in fact, which shows items artfully and precisely arranged so that we can imagine how everything fits back together neatly in its proper place.

If the transitional object represents the intermediary period of the child’s separation from the mother and his beginning to comprehend what is not-me, then it is responsible for guiding

⁷⁸ William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, I,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (Spring 1985): 11-12.

⁷⁹ The tampon was a product for which George Brecht, in his work as a research chemist for Johnson & Johnson, held several patents.

⁸⁰ Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, 253.

the child into the world of objects, other potential fetishes, and thus of commodities. That is the reason Fluxboxes borrow the form of the store-bought toy, typically the child's first commodity. In their challenge for us to use them, to submit to their transgressive and associative logic, the Fluxboxes challenge the aesthetic history of the sculptural object but also our social relationship to objects, as the boxes and the objects they contain give themselves over to the body—disappearing into it, being destroyed by it—at the same time that the body is forced to reckon with its all-consuming, expansive relationship to objects.⁸¹ Here is Herbert Marcuse describing this dynamic from the historical viewpoint of the 1960s:

The so-called consumer economy and the politics of corporate capitalism have created a second nature of man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form. The need for possessing, consuming, handling, and constantly renewing gadgets, devices, instruments, engines, offered to and imposed upon people, for using these wares even at the danger of one's own destruction, has become a biological need.⁸²

The cultural situation of the subject-as-consumer described by Marcuse inspired in Fluxus an aggressively physicalized aesthetic response in which the now-biological need for the commodity was thematized as a bodily incorporation. In other words, as the object is engulfed by

⁸¹ The Brazilian artist Lygia Clark, also working in the '60s, is a productive figure to bring into a counter-history of haptic sculpture given her historical proximity to Fluxus. Beginning with her series of hinged metal objects called "Beasts" and evolving into a series of masks, gloves, suits and other apparatuses, Clark described her works as "living organisms" in the face of which the subject becomes highly conscious of subtle sensorial shifts and distinctions between inside and outside are erased. While both Clark and Fluxus are invested in the transformative potential of object relations (Yve-Alain Bois even describes Clark's works as "objects designed to be transitional"), Clark's mystico-organicist-spiritualist rhetoric and claims for the newfound freedom of the "spectator-author" in the face of her objects is far from the slapstick, dumb materiality of the Fluxboxes, which can be at times confrontational toward the participant. Lygia Clark and Yve-Alain Bois, "Nostalgia of the Body," *October* 69 (Summer 1994): 85-109.

⁸² Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 11.

the body, subjectivity is mapped onto the object and formed by it in turn.⁸³ If the transitional object marks the irreversible threshold from which we leave the safety of the self to confront the world of objects, the Fluxboxes' address to the world of objects-as-commodities produces a critical object for both the social and aesthetic fields, one we can call the *transitional commodity*. They engender an interrelation between subjects and objects that is constantly in flux, exposing the beholder to danger and newfound freedom with the knowledge that we are beholden to, enchanted by, and formed by our objects just as much as they provide us with a logic that exceeds them.

Returning to Vautier and his emblematic collection of *Flux Holes*, whose title implies a lack or void the handler is called upon to fill, we cannot fail to notice that the remaining empty space of the box might be filled by other holes of our choosing. An errant taxonomic structure is unleashed, encouraging promiscuous identification beyond the box's own logical bounds. In this way, the Fluxbox manifests the event score's diagrammatic principles of connectivity and transmutability by promoting the endless exercise of matching increasingly dissimilar objects like-to-like, as if difference could eventually be made to disappear. Fluxboxes encourage engagement and identification with objects that are *excessively* not-me. They demonstrate a boundless, promiscuously taxonomic model of thought that encourages us to locate ever more holes in our surroundings and defies the very principle of containability that the boxes seemingly

⁸³ The connection made in Fluxus works between the readymade and the body and between consumption and bodily incorporation capitalized upon associations present already in Duchamp's work, as elaborated by Helen Molesworth in her essay, "Bathrooms and Kitchens: Cleaning House with Duchamp," in *Plumbing: Sounding Modern Architecture*, ed. Nadir Lahiji and D. S. Friedman (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997). Additionally, the Fluxus object touched upon the Surrealist understanding of the object as a prop, a logic that George Baker has described as one "that contemplates the fusion of subject and object: every object presented as an extension of the subject, and the subject attached to all of its objects." George Baker, "Man Ray's Culture Industry," in *Alias Man Ray: The Art of Reinvention* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Baker first articulated the idea of sculpture as a prop in relation to the work of Rachel Harrison. Baker, "Mind the Gap," *Parkett* 82 (2008): 143-148.

propose.

The intensity of such engagement was new in the history of aesthetic theory and art history. Whereas distance had been fundamental to Kant's judgement, Marx's fetish, and Walter Benjamin's aura, in Fluxus's objects without object there would be no separation between objects and subjects. Infantile interaction was encouraged as a means of loosening the stranglehold of the symbolic in order to access a prelinguistic, presymbolic engagement with brute material things.⁸⁴ Such exercises had the potential to release commodities from their workaday purpose, giving them new life and, indeed, new purpose after all. To borrow the words of the Retort collective, the political potential of such objects is this: "Commodities can embody human purposes, and are capable of inflecting and developing such purposes, only if they are constantly subject to reorientation—change of function, change of valuation, *recall to their mere instrumentality*—in a world of meanings vastly exceeding those that any *things* can conjure up."⁸⁵

The Fluxboxes offer holes to look through, holes to penetrate, holes through which things may enter or fall out. This should not be surprising, for one definition of Fluxus appropriated by Maciunas for his 1963 manifesto reads: "A flowing or fluid discharge from the bowels or other part; esp., an excessive and morbid discharge; as, the bloody *flux*, or dysentery." As a corollary to the Fluxboxes' logic of endless connectivity and indiscriminate taxonomies, these many Fluxus holes point to the threat of entropy, absence, and loss. They call attention to the absolute material presence of the thing-at-hand, reminding us that the artwork, like the body, will eventually

⁸⁴ Jack J. Spector, "The Avant-Garde Object: Form and Fetish Between World War I and World War II," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 12 (Autumn 1986): 132.

⁸⁵ Retort, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (New York: Verso, 2005), 179.

deteriorate and disappear. Thus, if the Fluxus artwork seeks to evade a finite materiality by its dispersal through a network of forms, it also provides a powerful model of the Fluxus subject: intersubjective and mortal, it gains meaning and value through its participation in systems of exchange.

This is the kind of Flux that was imagined by Maciunas when he originally chose the title for his magazine. Almost anything can enter Vautier's *Flux Holes* to become a valid extension of the box's rather straight-forward, propositional title. Whatever enters is automatically organized by and understood according to the loosely structuring physical and conceptual frame of the box.⁸⁶ This reference to the exchangeability of commodities is equated with what goes in and out of the body, but commodities are not supposed to be exchanged quite like this. The accumulation of physical traces on the objects—fingerprints, creases, tears, stains—amounts to a historical catalogue of each body that has handled them. As art objects, their preservation is always frustrated by the body's trace. There is always too much of the body; the body always has more to give than it can take. Fluxus objects are destroyed a little, then returned to their boxes and put away, held in reserve until re-engaged. Thus they pose an attack on the commodity that magnetizes use-value and exchange-value and suggests a radical model for an associative, connective subjectivity that gives over to its objects as much as it takes from them. Moreover, their rehearsal of the experience of failed object relations and acceleration of planned

⁸⁶ Judith Rodenbeck has associated the shift from formalism to process in 1960s art to the figure of the "black box" whose mute exteriority masks dramatic internal complexity. Fluxus is among many neo-avant-garde and intermedia practices that have "fallen outside the mainstream of critical discourse largely because, given their explicit or implicit engagement with temporality itself, they could not be recuperated in formal terms. Despite the unyielding external formalism of the (happener/black box) structure itself, this new discursive system and its operations would yield results that would challenge and eventually displace the very terminology of the formalism that produced them." Rodenbeck, "The Black Box," in *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 78.

obsolescence deflates our fantasies about what commodities, in particular the artwork, might provide.

Fluxus objects collapse the categories of commodity and capital in their aggressive literalization of the Marxian notion that a thing may only realize its value when it is kept in circulation. However, unlike capitalist exchange, this is one in which value does not accumulate. It is rather an anti-accumulatory exchange that deliberately perpetuates loss. The rear-guard strategy of the Fluxbox was to be bad art (trashy and/or tasteless), bad sculpture (fingered up), and a bad commodity (useless and always-already obsolete). In this last tactic of its multi-fronted arsenal, the Fluxbox rehearsed a dynamic of disappointment and frustration. The irrational relationship between label and contents is what produces their gag effect, but it is typically a pathetic and dissatisfying one.⁸⁷ To open a Fluxbox is to rehearse the anticipation of acquiring a highly desired consumer product object from the store and opening it for the first time. The thrill of novelty and surprise is depleted almost instantaneously; instead of bringing satisfaction the object fuels desire for more, different, newer things. This play of calculated disillusion was self-reflexively thematized in the origami boxes-within-boxes of Mieko Shiomi's *Endless Box* and the abundance of boxes and envelopes contained in the anthologies *Fluxus I*, *Fluxkit* and *Flux Year Box 2*. The frame of the box guides the viewer through a staged experience of the delirium of fantasmatic consumption only to frustrate that experience with disappointed expectations and loss, just as the transitional object decathects for the infant. Flipping between delight and disappointment, Fluxboxes rehearse the drama of failed object relations. Fetishistic relations are

⁸⁷ The disappointment engendered by Fluxboxes coincides with the critical reaction to Fluxus performances, which in light of the “wild and joyous and semi-accidental” Happenings that took place around the same time in New York were seen as “studied, painstaking, almost frozen—at unendurable length.” “A Theater Whatzit,” *Village Voice*, March 30, 1960, 11; cited in Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 113.

harnessed toward an experience of defetishization. Buchloh has described how the box format achieves this effect:

The box is, of course, the quintessential transitional object, mediating between use value, exchange value, and exhibition value. Performing all tasks simultaneously, it has by now acquired a greater epistemological importance than the object itself. In the same way that the container signals the simultaneity of all object values, it also pronounces the simultaneity of the object's temporalities. While closed, the container promises the object's future epiphanous appearance, the literal unfolding of its mythical use value, yet after the object's departure, having delivered its services to produce exchange value, the container contains nothing but obsolescence and signifies object loss in its purest form.⁸⁸

The Fluxus Subject

Indeed Fluxus objects, made as they are from scraps, junk, rags, smears, garbage, etc. amount to a grimly ironic celebration of all manner of loss captured in physical form. For the Fluxus artist understood that in order to dissolve art into life—to make one's artistic practice into a kind of life practice—one would have to embrace trauma, loss, and death along with joy, humor, and sociality. Maciunas would have his share of them all. Having spent his New York years living in a series of grimy, low-rent, mice-infested apartments with his mother, by the end of his life it seemed he felt allied to the mouse, scurrying about, collecting the chaff of commerce and playing a cat-and-mouse game of evasion from the authorities who wished to shutter his Soho loft cooperatives, from a contractor's henchmen who in 1975 beat him nearly to death, and from the pancreatic cancer by which he was slowly dying.

But loss here does not end with the Fluxbox and its utopian function as a transitional object towards the devaluation and obsolescence of art. In Maciunas's efforts to promote

⁸⁸ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Gabriel Orozco: Sculpture as Recollection," in *Gabriel Orozco* (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes : Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, 2006), 177.

collectivism, anonymity, and anti-individualism the identity of the artist was under assault too; the destabilization of subjectivity, particularly of the artist-subject, was yet another valence of the word *flux*.⁸⁹ (In the words of Allan Kaprow, “Fluxus has always been for me a clarifier, or should I saw, a *flusher*?, of inessentials—inessentials like individualism, important subject matter, lofty formalisms, career, market.”⁹⁰) Countering expectations that artworks be unique, precious, and the creation of a singular author, the Fluxboxes dramatize the decentering and dispersal of both object and subject. Fundamentally allographic, they participate in a set of encoded or scored relation between artists, between artist and audience, between objects, and between different versions of the “same” object. They exist only in relation to other possible versions they might take and other authors or participants that might realize or interact with them. As Julia Robinson has written, “Rejecting works of ‘art’ as finalized, static objects, the primary function of the Fluxus score”—which I have argued provided the blueprint for Fluxus objects—“was to compose relationships between subjects.”⁹¹ But the kinds of relationships composed by Fluxus scores implied more than a collective performance practice and the dedication of works to one’s artist-friends. The supposed loss of the Fluxus object without object was seen positively by Fluxus artists as promoting a dramatic form of subjective expansion. George Brecht viewed “the ‘person’ [as] such an approximate, one might say ‘inaccurate,’ and overworked construction” given that “it’s always impossible to decide where the work of an artist or a creator finishes and

⁸⁹ Letter from George Maciunas to Tomas Schmit, January 1964, cited in *Fluxus Codex*, 37.

⁹⁰ Allan Kaprow, “Maestro Maciunas” (1996), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 243.

⁹¹ Robinson, “Maciunas as Producer: Performative Design in the Art of the 1960s,” 67.

where the work of somebody else begins.”⁹² Fluxus authorship was trans-subjective as well as schismatic in regard to the practice of individual artists. “For each artist,” explained Dick Higgins, “the Fluxus work which he did was a part of a *different body* which had its own integrity: there was not even one artist who did only Fluxus work among the original Fluxus people.”⁹³

To figure the “different body” of the Fluxus subject, the hole returns. Alongside the many Fluxus holes we have examined thus far, Maciunas produced an astonishing series of photographic portraits of his artist-compatriots that stage encounters of the artist’s body with the liminal space of the hole (Figs. 3.36-3.38). Yoko Ono’s determined visage appears through a tear in a monumentally sized concert poster, while Ay-O peeks mischievously through a portal that mimes those of his *Tactile Boxes*. In both images it remains unclear as to what constitutes inside and outside; what is important is rather the status of the hole as passageway. There is also a portrait of Milan Knížák in which multiple holes call for our attention: a gaping eye and mouth as well as two flared nostrils and a second, half-opened eye. These projective and incorporative sphincters welcome proliferating connotations of the body’s desires, states, and drives: hunger, sexual pleasure, illness, violence, and so on. Next to these we should consider a polaroid of Maciunas taken by his friend Robert Watts in 1977, the year before Maciunas’s passing (Fig. 3.39). Above the toothy smile he bares for the camera, two twinkling blue eyes stare out. There is one of his castoffs, a rescued doll’s eyeball with an oversize iris and false lashes that stands in for the eye he had lost in the beating two years before. Another prosthetic, a plaster finger, plugs his

⁹² Letter from George Brecht to George Maciunas, January 11, 1963, Hanns Sohm Archive; Ben Vautier and Marcel Alocco, “A Conversation about Something Else: an Interview with George Brecht” (1965) in *An Introduction to George Brecht’s Book of the Tumbler on Fire*, by Martin, 68.

⁹³ Dick Higgins, “Something Else About Fluxus,” *Art and Artists* 7 no. 7 (October 1972), 17-18, italics mine.

left ear. The body full of holes is revealed as the grotesque body, a body that opens itself up and gives itself over to other objects and other subjects. It is through holes such as these—optical, nasal, aural, oral, anal, urethral, glandular, vaginal, umbilical, cervical—that we physically join with one another and with the world. It is through holes such as these that we are born. (*Of course* it was the “asshole” of New York where Fluxus artists gathered and called home.)

Corresponding to the Fluxus object is a model of trans-subjective, self-othering subjectivity that identifies with others, with what is different despite that difference, that sees likeness where we are otherwise trained to see difference.⁹⁴ In contrast to the Freudian understanding of love as essentially heteropathic or excorporative and thus impoverishing to the ego, the Fluxus model of subjectivity posits that the self-dissolution and self-abnegation required by collective production leads to an expanded notion of self.⁹⁵ This is why Fluxus has been historicized not as a movement but rather as a “spirit” or “attitude” that is seen by younger generations of artists and critics as living on.⁹⁶ In a longer reflection on the meaning of Fluxus, Higgins had this to say:

And so again I am a Fluxus person....[I believe in] an art which by its very nature denies its perpetrators their daily bread, which must therefore come from somewhere else. Such an art must be given, in the sense that experience is shared: it cannot be placed in the market place. And in this way it differs profoundly from the

⁹⁴ Leo Bersani’s notion of “impersonal narcissism” and Kaja Silverman’s theorization of “active idealization” have been helpful to my formulation of this model of subjectivity-in-flux, as has Miwon Kwon’s writing on the experience of “intimacy-in-distance and distance-in-intimacy” in the more recent work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. See Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Tim Dean, Hal Foster, Kaja Silverman and Leo Bersani, “A Conversation with Leo Bersani,” *October* 82 (Autumn 1997): 3-16; and Kwon, “The Becoming of a Work of Art: FGT and a Possibility of Renewal, a Chance to Share, a Fragile Truce,” in *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, ed. Julia Ault (Göttingen: Steidl, 2006). Julia Kristeva also offers a helpful theory of self-othering in which she argues that “the difference within us...[is] the ultimate condition of our being *with* others.” Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Rudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 192.

⁹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 18 (London: Hogarth Press), 105-16.

⁹⁶ Rothfuss and Armstrong, *In the Spirit of Fluxus*; Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*.

Fluxus-derived “movements” of earth-works or media-hype forms of concept art. Much of that work I enjoy—I even love: especially Acconci, Smithson, Beuys. But finally I must reject it, not because it isn’t officially Fluxus, but because it isn’t free. It’s just so many hat racks for careers to be hung onto. When the name of the artist determines the market value of a work and not its meaning in our lives—beware! And there again we come to Fluxus. In the early sixties, when the first generation of Fluxus artists were doing and giving away their experiences, it mattered little which of us had done which piece. The spirit was: you’ve seen it, now—very well, it’s yours. Now you are free to make your own variation on it if you like, and the piece and the world will be a little richer for all that.⁹⁷

Higgins’s words suggests that in a final sense, the hole can be seen as an invitation, a proposition, a gift. We should thus call upon one more figuration of the hole—a 1964 work by Takako Saito, yet another box (Fig. 3.40). Inside is a wooden frame covered on both sides with delicate paper, its edges stamped with the following words: *Make 300 holes with any implement. This is my gift.*

⁹⁷ Letter from Dick Higgins to George Maciunas, November 19, 1974, Jean Brown papers.

Objects Without Object: Robert Filliou and the Unworking of Fluxus*The Mystery Game III*

A Contribution to the Art of Music.

Since Music has to do with _____ (anything) _____

then if you take a(n) _____ (anything) _____

and a(n) _____ (anything) _____

and put them together

you will get music.

Repeat four more times.

—George Brecht and Robert Filliou
Games at the Cedilla, or The Cedilla Takes Off

Fluxus Abandonments

The proliferation of Fluxus's objects without object and artworks in flux overseen by Chairman Maciunas was part of an effort to realize what had been set forth in his 1963 manifesto with all its talk of boundless purging, flowing, flooding, and change for the sake of creating a "non art reality" understandable and available to all. In contrast to its objects, however, Maciunas maintained that the group should be *fused* into an anonymous, united front that would complement the transitional pedagogical function of its work by producing the almost impossible construction of the artwork without artist. Fluxus editions were often compilations of works by various artists whose identities were difficult to disentangle. Maciunas invented alphabetical codes to stand in for artists' proper names, and some works were attributed simply to the Fluxus

name as if it were a brand.¹ The works' participatory nature called authorship yet further into question.

But problems arose when Maciunas tried to formalize collective anonymity by incorporating Fluxus in a quasi-legal sense. In a January 1963 newsletter he announced a policy that would require affiliated artists to grant Fluxus exclusive publication rights for all past and future works. Furthermore, Maciunas intended to pursue international copyrights "to protect authors from unauthorized copy and performance...Such monopolistic scheme," he explained, "is proposed for the purpose of obtaining wider copyright coverage, greater protection of authors and greater centralization of new art and anti-art activities."² This communiqué drew numerous negative responses, including from George Brecht and Nam June Paik, who argued that requiring permission to perform Fluxus works was inappropriate to their nature and that such centralization and control would destroy the "harmonious cooperation" necessary for producing successful Fluxus events.³ As Brecht later explained, "Copyright entails the idea of possession. And I don't at all have the feeling of possessing what I do. For example, when I say or write 'listen to the telephone,' anyone could do that."⁴

Maciunas's efforts to incorporate the wide-ranging output of dozens of artists under the banner of Fluxus were fanatically earnest, but his day-to-day dealings as "plagiarist and 'arranger' of the ideas of others" were perceived by some as disingenuous, even totalitarian,

¹ On the design and branding aspects of Maciunas's publishing efforts, see Robinson, "Maciunas as Producer: Performative Design in the Art of the 1960s).

² George Maciunas, *Fluxus News Leter* [sic] *No. 5*, January 1, 1963, reprinted in *Fluxus Etc., Addenda I*, ed. Hendricks, 155.

³ Letters to George Maciunas from George Brecht, n.d., and from Nam June Paik, January 15, 1963, Hanns Sohm Archive.

⁴ Vautier and Alocco, "A Conversation about Something Else: an Interview with George Brecht," 73.

leading to accusations of his stealing others' ideas and wishing to control other artists in the manner of a corrupt gallerist.⁵ Maciunas's "dream of Fluxus," it must be admitted, was in some ways outright dysfunctional.⁶ Following the arrival in New York of Takako Saito, Shigeo Kubota, and Mieko Shiomi from Japan, who had traveled there to commit themselves to Fluxus activities, Maciunas instituted a "Fluxus dinner commune." According to Saito, what was intended to be a self-sustaining, egalitarian operation seemed always to end with the women doing all the cooking and cleaning after having already put in a full day's work elsewhere.⁷ A most damning critique came in the form of a letter from Dick Higgins three years after his establishment of the Something Else Press had caused Maciunas, who saw the gesture as traitorous and competitive, to expel Higgins dramatically from the group.

While you invented the term "Fluxus" (and nobody will deny you that) you have consistently destroyed its utility, antagonized your real friends, and mis-used the whole situation for your personal cultism and aggrandizement, if not as an artist, then as a critic...But Fluxus means too much (and I insist on that) to allow any individual person to reduce it to a means of confinement of people's work on the basis of your own personal taste, what Breton has done with Surrealism for example. I made a grievous error in 1963 not to perform the Stockholm Fluxus without you, and in so doing, for the first time, established a precedent on the basis of which you have been able systematically to reduce the most important artistic tendency of the last half century (with Dada, of the last century) to a personal fief.⁸

The mounting controversies that initiated the downfall of Fluxus's rather brief moment of

⁵ Patterson, "Ich bin froh, daß Sie mir diese Frage gestellt haben," 174.

⁶ Thomas Kellein narrates the evolution of Maciunas's Fluxus plans in *The Dream of Fluxus: George Maciunas: An Artist's Biography*.

⁷ Maciunas's insistence on anonymous, collective production could be seen as cowardly, disingenuous and rather too conveniently aligned with his desire to control final design and production decisions. Saito for one has argued that it is the ethical responsibility of the artist to claim authorship of the work he or she has created. Correspondence from Takako Saito to the author, June 16 and November 30, 2010. Saito's commentary opens onto the problematic and under-examined role of women within the Fluxus group. For an entry into this conversation, see Alison Knowles, Carolee Schneemann, Sara Seagull, Barbara Moore, Brynn Wein Shiovitz, Midori Yoshimoto, and Alex Pittman, "An Evening with Fluxus Women: a Roundtable Discussion," *Women & Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory* 19, no. 3 (2009): 369–389.

⁸ Letter from Dick Higgins to George Maciunas, August 23, 1966, Hanns Sohm Archive.

cohesion led, paradoxically, to a third wave of activities lasting from 1966 until Maciunas's death in 1978 in which he devoted himself to the planning and implementation (to whatever extent possible) of collective projects that would re-imagine all facets of life under the umbrella of Fluxus. There were to be Fluxhouse loft cooperatives in Soho, Fluxparades, Fluxorchestra concerts, Flux street events, Fluxolympiads, Fluxtours, Fluxfeasts, a Flux-Mass, a Fluxcolony in the British Virgin Islands, and a Fluxus-derived art school in western Massachusetts imagined in the tradition of the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College. The endeavors of this late phase of Fluxus moved beyond the earlier, mostly symbolic efforts to transgress the art-life divide (making quotidian activities the subject of performances and objects) to the crafting of a holistic Fluxus practice based on "non-hierarchical experiences, processes of change, a lack of boundaries, and a creative life praxis modeled not on art but on experiences."⁹ However, as Andreas Huyssen as rightly observed, "the almost obsessive and fetishistic Fluxus emphasis on redoing everything under the sun in its own name seems...like an anticipation of the apolitical life-style obsessions of later decades (the difference being that life according to Fluxus was not supposed to be commercialized at all)."¹⁰ Yet while it may seem that Maciunas's grandiose proposals were an accommodation of the Fluxus project to the culture of spectacle, the reality was more of a series of intimate experiments undertaken by interconnected circles of Fluxfriends.

In a complementary strategy, Maciunas would seek to establish an international network of Fluxshops in order to distribute the mountains of editions, publications, and ephemera that were

⁹ Owen Smith, "Avant-gardism and the Fluxus Project: A Failed Utopia or the Success of Invisibility?," *Performance Research* 7, no. 3, On Fluxus (September 2002): 3-12.

¹⁰ Huyssen, "Back to the Future: Fluxus in Context," 145.

beginning to crowd his studio. In the summer of 1964 he wrote to Emmett Williams, “I am so piled up with newspapers, cards, boxes of all kinds, I can hardly turn around or scratch myself. That’s why I thought it wise to follow Crushchev’s [Nikita Krushchev] advice and Decentralize Fluxus—at least to 3 centers Tokyo-New York-Amsterdam. De Ridder is very energetic and even got an assistant to help out on fluxwork.”¹¹ Maciunas’s newsletters and serial publishing plans had already reprised some of the bureaucratic strategies to which Tristan Tzara had turned in the 1920s—the circulation of an officious “Mouvement Dada” letterhead, for example—in order to forge a “proto-globalized identity” for Dada.¹² Maciunas’s fluctuating list of Fluxcenters included Willem De Ridder’s European Mail-Order Warehouse in Amsterdam, Ben Vautier’s Magasin record shop in Nice, and George Brecht and Robert Filliou’s La Cédille qui Sourit in Villefrance-sur-Mer. It is unclear whether the Tokyo outlet, likely affiliated with the Hi Red Center, ever materialized. In this last phase, the Fluxus project was no longer concerned with the question of production; rather, in the words of Nam June Paik, the revolutionary artist-collective of the 1960s would have to “seize the distribution-medium.”¹³

The project of Fluxus would only be able to continue through its organizational dissolution and dispersal even if such an expansion meant that Maciunas would lose control over its identity. After all, artists’ allegiance to Fluxus had only ever been partial from the start. To see the project of Fluxus as circumscribed by Maciunas’s activities is limiting and an inaccurate representation of what most associates of the group imagined it to be. In these later years, as Owen Smith

¹¹ Letter from George Maciunas to Emmett Williams, c. July 1964, Jean Brown papers.

¹² Leah Dickerman, “Introduction,” in *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 1.

¹³ Statement by Nam June Paik, *Fluxus Etc.*, ed. Jon Hendricks, (Bloomfield Hills, MI: Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, 1981), 44.

describes, “Fluxus became more of an organization through which a changing cast of participants took part in various activities.”¹⁴ In any case, as we have seen in our discussions of the Fluxus object—a work that literally and figuratively gave itself away—the nature of Fluxus practice did not allow for a tight group model. The group’s activities tended toward the disavowal of the coherence of Fluxus itself, a construction that most artists adopted as a convenient but easily abandoned outlet—that “different body” described by Dick Higgins—for projects that did not comport with the rest of their oeuvre.¹⁵

And so there were other models of objects without object and artworks without artists that emerged outside of Maciunas’s assembly-line production, and the most important of these would come from the French artist Robert Filliou. While Brecht and Maciunas have figured centrally in existing studies of Fluxus, the contributions of Filliou have been woefully overlooked. Filliou’s aesthetic theories were elaborated through writings and artworks that speak to what would sustain Fluxus after its dynamic New York years and after Maciunas’s decline. Trained as an economist, Filliou abandoned the profession to devote himself to poetry and by 1960 was ushered into a visual arts practice by his friend in Paris, the artist Daniel Spoerri. Filliou never lived in New York (although he visited several times), and he did not participate in the first Fluxus concert in Wiesbaden. But he did participate in lesser-known events that were important to what Fluxus would become, including a “Fluxus Preview” mounted with Benjamin Patterson in Paris in July 1962 and the Festival of Misfits in London in October the same year.

There could not have been a figure more opposite to Maciunas’s American pseudo-

¹⁴ Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*, 179.

¹⁵ “For each artist, the Fluxus work which he did was a part of a different body which had its own integrity: there was not even one artist who did only Fluxus work among the original Fluxus people and no major one among the later arrivals.” Higgins, “Something Else about Fluxus,” 18.

entrepreneurial industriousness. Maciunas was an ambitious, diligent, indefatigable bureaucrat with a taste for toilet humor. Filliou the Frenchman was a lazy poet, a misfit, a wastrel, a mooch, a bum, a *clochard*. His output did not follow the byways laid by Maciunas, but it was nevertheless an exemplary efflorescence of the challenge to art first posed by Maciunas's Fluxus and a crucial component in the collective's project to refashion the art object and its means of distribution in the postwar period. Taken together, the two artists' antipodal yet complementary strategies characterize the multivalent efforts of the Fluxus collective to redefine, amidst a period of great artistic upheaval, two dimensions crucial to our understanding of the figure of the artist: authorship and labor.

By the late sixties it was evident that the gesture of multiplying the artwork to undermine its value had been recuperated by the market, and so Fluxus would need to look beyond the art object to its modes of distribution. Maciunas's Fluxbox production engaged the art market on its margins, whereas Filliou's undertakings (alone and with George Brecht) amounted to a radical gesture of dropping out, a seemingly un-Fluxus-like moment of *non*-participation that led to alternative forms of connectivity that could not register in advanced artistic circles of New York. This chapter will look at a number of these Fluxus abandonments. If Maciunas's Fluxboxes can be seen as models of the Fluxus subject, Filliou's objects without object modeled a precariously disjointed yet robust network of Fluxus artists and practices in its entirety, a capacious community without community that has against all odds continued to reproduce itself into the present.

Robert Filliou, *seigneur des toits*

The departure of Fluxus artists from art-world centers literalized the metaphor of the underground or outsider artist, taking seriously Duchamp's 1961 pronouncement that "The great artist of tomorrow will go underground."¹⁶ (Warhol's factory, in contrast, operated as an outside that maintained a highly seductive insider status.¹⁷) There had been Maciunas's basement apartment shared with his mother in the AG Gallery days and the first exhibition of Fluxus objects in the Galerie Parnass's underground kitchen. De Ridder's Amsterdam Fluxshop was initially located in the cellar of a bookstore specializing in war memorabilia; when he lost that space it became a purely mail-order operation—a shop with no inside at all.¹⁸ More significant was Fluxus artists' occupation of renovated lofts in Soho led by Maciunas's founding of the redevelopment agency Fluxhouse Cooperatives, Inc. in 1966. Artists had to make constant efforts to deceive building and city authorities about their working and living status as they skirted the law. In the reminiscences of Alison Knowles, "it was an underworld and I think maybe that contributed to the effervescence of the ideas that we weren't really above board...we had nobody really looking at our work except for, really, one another."¹⁹

The Fluxus culture and geography of the underground was matched by an allegiance to the outside. Like poor buskers, Knowles and Ben Vautier gave free performances in the neighborhood's streets and sidewalks. They chose pieces that incorporated urban architecture,

¹⁶ Marcel Duchamp, "Where Do We Go From Here?" (1961), *Studio International* 189, no. 973 (January-February 1975): 28.

¹⁷ The fashionable outsider-as-insider status of Warhol has only been further reinforced in historicizations of his work and personality. Emblematic of this phenomenon was artist Rob Pruitt's *The Andy Monument* (2011-12), a brilliant, silver-chromed sculpture of Warhol carrying a Bloomingdale's bag erected near the former site of the Factory—the artist appropriated as a mascot of the neighborhood's gentrification into a high-end shopping district.

¹⁸ Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, 236.

¹⁹ Knowles, et. al., "An Evening with Fluxus Women: a Roundtable Discussion," 379.

traffic and street life as unwitting collaborators, drawing connections quite literally between art and city life. In one piece, Vautier's body was wound round with string, cast in a web laced between his body and an adjacent building; in another, the two artists unfurled a ribbon across the street, temporarily blocking a line of cars (Figs. 4.1, 4.2). Even the inside of the Fluxhall was cast as a location ostensibly outside, with its whitewashed mural advertising Fluxus street events against which Maciunas photographed a rag-tag group of his comrades in warm overcoats and hats (Fig. 4.3, 4.4). This image reappeared in vestigial form as the label for George Brecht's Fluxbox *Closed on Mondays* (c. 1969) in which a bunch of street urchins loiter and play in front of a set of closed doors graffitied with the names of the box's title and author. The Flux game ends when the beholder realizes that she too is an outsider; the box is glued shut.²⁰ Tomas Schmit imagined Fluxus occupations of the outside as yet another form of the group's affinity with in-between spaces, holes, and gaps, writing that Fluxus "didn't fill a gap in the art scene...it created its own gap outside the scene. It gapped around it."²¹

The underground, the outside, the periphery, the street—these would be appropriate sites for the Fluxus artist fashioned as the non-professional, outsider, misfit, and amateur as indeed so many of them were, trained not as visual artists but in the fields of literature, music, and science. Filliou, recognizing in himself the identity of the outsider, became a nomadic site of experimental institutional formats. His roving *Galerie Légitime*, a “*couvre-chef d'oeuvres*” (discussed in the previous chapter) was launched during a time when he was also

²⁰ An adjacent node of the Soho avant-garde network deserves mention here: Ornette Coleman's storefront performance space at 131 Prince Street, four blocks north of Canal Street and one of Maciunas's loft redevelopment sites. Known as Artists House, it served as the location for the recording of Coleman's 1970 album *Friends and Neighbors: Live at Prince Street* whose cover image of two children loitering outside the studio's scrawled-upon doors mimics Maciunas's design for Brecht's Fluxbox *Closed on Mondays* (c. 1969).

²¹ Letter from Tomas Schmit to Gilbert Silverman, February 3, 1981, reprinted in *What's Fluxus? What's Not! Why*, ed. Hendricks, 123-124.

engaged in a form of darkly humorous and invisible street theater. In *Performance Piece for a Lonely Person in a Public Place* (1960), Filliou would sit in a public place and observe the actions of a chosen individual whom he imagined he might look like in twenty, thirty, or forty years' time. This private performance, an intimate act of visual and psychic identification involving no actual interpersonal contact, was a commentary on the experience of city life in which subjects are rent by strong feelings of desire and alienation. His series of three conceptual *No-Plays* (1962) were automatically self-nullifying: "if the spectators come, there is no play. And if no spectators come, there is no play either...I mean, one way or the other there is a play, but it is a No-Play."²² (*No-Play #3* was evidently never written down.) (Fig. 4.5)

Filliou's version of the outside had a uniquely French valence. His first exhibition was not underground but upstairs on the rooftop above the attic apartment at 36 Rue des Rosiers that he shared with his wife Marianne and their daughter Marcelline in the Jewish quarter of Paris. It was here that Filliou staged his first exhibition of visual art in 1961 for no one save the lens of Vera Spoorri's camera (Figs. 4.6-4.9). In her images we see him crouched down, assembling across the rooftop's horizontal surface objects made from torn cardboard fragments, blocks of wood, wire, string, rope, egg cartons, empty cans, clothes hangers, and hardware. The materials in Filliou's works were always particularly poor.²³ If the poet is a bricoleur of the readymade material of language, in his incarnation as visual artist Filliou fitfully became an assemblagist of

²² Robert Filliou, "No-Play #1," in *A Filliou Sampler* (1967) (<http://www.ubu.com>: ubuclassics, 2004), 17. Originally published in 1967 as a Great Bear Pamphlet by Something Else Press.

²³ At this time the artist's family was so poor in fact that his wife Marianne had to sell her breast milk and steal boxes of sardines from the supermarket in order for them to survive. Conversation with Marianne Filliou, May 9, 2011.

readymade, close-at-hand materials.²⁴ We see him linking together by means of hook and rope individual object-units into series, spelling out a language of objects. These works are not yet hanging like his suspense poems will (as we will soon discuss), but they are here on the rooftop, like the artist, hanging out. With this staged exhibition Filliou self-critically postured himself as the idle artist, one already idling and sputtering out, a failure before he has even really begun. For what kind of debut exhibition takes place on the rooftop of one's own home? Here is Filliou's recognition that he has already been hung out to dry.

More specifically Filliou seems to patrol the rooftop like a cat, those "*seigneurs du toits*" (lords of the rooftops) in the imagination of Mallarmé, or a chimney sweep (*fumiste*), both symbolic anti-heros of the Parisian avant-garde.²⁵ His makeshift exhibition, as much a conceptual as material gesture, aligned Filliou with the legacy of the *Fumistes*, a circle of fin-de-siècle Parisian avant-garde poets and artists gathered around Émile Goudeau, Eugène Bataille (a.k.a. Sapeck) and Alphonse Allais and affiliated with the Chat Noir (black cat) cabaret. According to the manifesto of *fumisme* penned by composer Georges Fragerolle, the *fumiste* plays the imbecile but is in truth a "brilliant" and "complicated" figure who "beneath a naive, quasi-prudhommesque envelope conceals this core of skepticism." In short he is "a lion in the

²⁴ Anna Dezeuze situates Filliou's working methods within the moment's emergent model of assemblage or bricolage in her essay "Assemblage, Bricolage, and the Practice of Everyday Life," *Art Journal* 67, no. 1 (2008): 31-37.

²⁵ Stéphane Mallarmé, "Pauvre enfant pâle," *Stéphane Mallarmé: Collected Poems*, trans. Henry Weinfield (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 95.

skin of an ass.”²⁶ The *Fumistes* produced texts in the manner of “intertextual bricolage”²⁷ and deployed ambiguous, black humor as a critical weapon of “disdain expressed through the aggression of the hoax.”²⁸ As a well known precedent of Dada and Surrealism, Filliou’s invocation of *Fumisme* was moreover a veiled critique of the French New Realists’ neo-dada revival of avant-garde strategies on purely aesthetic terms, denuded of their political meaning (although Filliou considered many of those artists his friends). In one last image we can see Filliou gazing proudly over the scene of his handiwork (Fig. 4.10). But it is in fact an artist portrait-turned self-deflating, emasculating gesture, for between his spread-open legs we can see that in the place of a phallus a glove hangs down like a flaccid udder, spilling a number of dice, a sight both hilarious and pathetic. It is no surprise that the industrious *garagiste* Jean Tinguely wanted nothing to do with Filliou the neo-*fumiste* and would refer to him simply as “*Le Clochard*.”²⁹

La Cédille qui Sourit, the Asshole of Villefranche

Filliou’s greatest project of abandonment was one that, paradoxically, would bring him fully into the Fluxus orbit even as he became geographically isolated from most other members.

²⁶ Georges Fragerolle, “Le Fumisme,” *L’Hydropathe* (May 5, 1880), trans. Jeffrey S. Weiss and cited in Weiss, “‘Marcel Duchamp Qui est Inquiétant’: Avant-gardism and the culture of mystification and *blague*,” *The Popular Culture of Modern Art: Picasso, Duchamp, and Avant-gardism, C. 1909-17* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 143. On *fumisme* see also Mary Gluck, “The Decadent and the Culture of Hysteria,” in *Popular Bohemia: Modernism and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Daniel Grojnowski and Bernard Sarrazin, eds., *L’Esprit fumiste et les rires fin de siècle* (Paris: José Corti, 1990).

²⁷ Catherine Dousteysier-Khoze, “Fumisme: le rire jaune du Chat Noir,” in *(Ab)normalities*, ed. Dousteysier-Khoze and Paul Scott (Durham, UK: University of Durham, 2001), 157.

²⁸ Weiss, “‘Marcel Duchamp Qui est Inquiétant’: Avant-gardism and the culture of mystification and *blague*,” 143.

²⁹ Hans-Werner Schmidt, “Filliou ist mein großer Bruder, aber ich bin seine Mutter,” an interview with Daniel Spoerri, in *Robert Filliou 1926-1987 Zum Gedächtnis*, ed. Schmidt (Düsseldorf: Städtisches Kunsthalle, 1988), 11. Confirmed in author’s interview with Daniel Spoerri, May 22, 2011.

In September 1965 he opened a shop in collaboration with George Brecht in Villefranche-sur-Mer, a seaside village of 4,000 inhabitants just east of Nice, France. The 36-square-meter shop, with its yellow awning and chalkboard sign in the window, in former times a candy store and television repair shop, was called La Cédille qui Sourit, or “The cedilla that smiles” (Figs. 4.11, 4.12). It was located across from an antique shop at 12, rue de May, a narrow, stepped passageway leading down to the Bay of Villefranche. The restaurants whose kitchen doors belched out fish guts and sudsy water onto the rue gave it the feel of a back alley, reinforced by its culmination at harbor’s end in a cramped stone archway—the architectural equivalent of an asshole (Figs. 4.13, 4.14). The modest and intimate choice of site, typical for a pair of Fluxus artists, should be counterpoised to the highly spectacular stagings of an art-world outside of that moment: 1) critic Gene Swenson’s picketing of the Museum of Modern Art’s 1968 exhibition *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* to protest the bourgeois subsumption of the revolutionary avant-gardes and 2) the monumental, picturesque, and “seemingly undetermined and unbound spaces of negation (the deserts, the Arctic, the moors, the non-sites of industrial wasteland)” chosen by the post-minimal generation for their “heroic dislocation[s].”³⁰

Imagined first as an English bookshop conceived “under the sign of humor,” the Cédille was actually, as Filliou has recounted, “a sort of workshop and of shop, of nonshop [sic] would we say now, for we were never commercially registered, and the Cédille was always shut,

³⁰ Grace Glueck, “300 Hippies Protest at Opening of Modern Museum Dada Show,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1968; Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “The Posters of Lawrence Weiner,” *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry*, 567-568.

opening only upon request of visitors to our homes.”³¹ There were few unannounced visitors to the Cédille, or at least ones who were successful in visiting, since the shop did not have a telephone and Brecht and Filliou seemed not to spend much time there. The artists presided more often at one of the nearby cafés, devising more and more of the visual gags they called “One-Minute Scenarios,” “dis-inventing” objects, adding tales to their “Anthology of Misunderstandings,” or talking with Alfred the bricklayer, Antoine the fisherman, Fernand the plumber, or anyone else who happened to drop by.³² The artists called their shop a “Center of Permanent Creation,” for they were continually producing research, letters, jokes, puzzles, games, recipes, poems, sketches, events, and all manner of procedural concepts and materials typically cast aside along the way to the finished artwork. “The center itself is a work of art,” Brecht offered, “not in the banal sense that ‘everything is a work of art,’ but in the sense that it calls into action all the resources of the one who creates anything at all.”³³

The Cédille carried materials from a variety of artists associated with Fluxus. On offer were Spoerri’s Éditions MAT, books from Something Else Press, and the Fluxus multiples produced by Maciunas in New York. None of Brecht and Filliou’s own works initiated there seemed able to be finished, however; or, as we shall see, their material structure emphasized the

³¹ Robert Filliou and George Brecht, *Games at the Cedilla, or The Cedilla Takes Off* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), n.p.; Robert Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*, ed. Kasper König (Cologne: Walter König, 1970), 198. The English bookstore model was likely a nod to the Centre Américain des Artistes in Paris, a resource center for many avant-garde poets and the site of a three-day Domaine Poétique event in 1963 in which Filliou participated. Barry Miles, *Beat Hotel: Ginsberg, Burroughs and Corso in Paris, 1957-1963* (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 233.

³² These varied ludic formats are documented in the compendium *Games at the Cedilla*. Alfred the bricklayer, Antoine the fisherman, and Fernand the plumber are Villefranche friends named by Filliou in *Teaching and Learning*, 202. The crucial role of the artists’ partners Marianne Filliou and Donna Jo Brewer should be noted here, for they were often the ones to carry-through and administer the artists’ ideas while they were off being “café geniuses.”

³³ George Brecht notebook no. 17, July-October 1966, Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, Museum of Modern Art, New York, n.p.

possibility of endless reconfiguration. In the Cédille's haphazard, almost anti-retail display, works are nearly indistinguishable from their neighbors or from the surrounding works in progress.³⁴ It was an appropriate setup for the distribution of editions whose openness to alteration belonged to a nonconventional trajectory of objecthood indebted to the readymades of Duchamp and the indeterminate compositions of Cage. In this way, the Cédille was more akin to an artist's studio than a white cube gallery; it was an expansion of the model of Fluxus's artworks-in-flux into an artist-run economy of production, distribution, and exchange.

The Cédille was a shop that kept no regular hours and had no tidy, reliable stock of merchandise. Still, it subsisted until March 1968 when Brecht and Filliou realized that they could not afford to pay rent on the space much longer, and by October they had defaulted on a contract that should have carried the project into 1974. And thus we must admit that the Cédille, if indeed it was meant to function as a store, failed as a commercial venture.³⁵ Yet each of the ways in which Brecht and Filliou's project "failed" was deliberate. The Cédille playfully critiqued the expanded commodification and capitalization of art in the 1960s, which coincided with the economic boom of the immediate postwar decades. The demands of a growing collector base had instigated the invention and promotion by artists and galleries alike of multiples, a new art product that adopted forms and techniques of mass production and distribution. In the brief period from 1964-1967 in New York, multiples were promoted through exhibitions like *The American Supermarket* at Bianchini Gallery and newly founded ventures like Mass Art, Inc. and

³⁴ The word retail comes from the French *retaille*, meaning "a piece cut off." As an anti-retail gesture, the Cédille's wares were not cut off from one another or from their own process of creation.

³⁵ Anthony Huberman has seen resonances of the Cédille's productive failure in the current movement toward adhocracy in contemporary art. Huberman, "Talent is Overrated," *Artforum* 48, no. 3 (2009): 109-10. See also Martin Patrick's wide-ranging account of Filliou's work, "Unfinished Filliou: On the Fluxus Ethos and the Origins of Relational Aesthetics," *Art Journal* 69, no. 1-2 (2010): 44-61.

Marian Goodman's Multiples, Inc.³⁶ Meanwhile, Brecht and Filliou, disillusioned by their experiences working with commercial galleries in New York and Paris, willfully abandoned the creative and economic centers of the art world for provincial Villefranche. There they continued to develop formats of a tenuous and transmutable materiality and object status, a strategy being advanced across the scene of Fluxus. The group's activity had become concentrated in New York around Maciunas but retained, in idea if not in reality, shifting international outposts such as Brecht and Filliou's shop. Like the founding of Higgins's Something Else Press, the Cédille was a tangential splintering off from Fluxus that furthered its aims independent of Maciunas's oversight.³⁷ By no means antipodal to Fluxus, it advanced the collective's project in ways that exceeded Maciunas's initial conceptual and productive frameworks.

If Fluxus artists endeavored to propose an alternative to the high-market art commodity along with its attendant notions of uniqueness, material integrity, and cultural and monetary value, then the Cédille represents a key moment within this project given its array of activities designed for this very task. Brecht and Filliou's venture was not simply a flippant dropping-out from an art system with which they had become disillusioned; it was a concerted effort to construct other models for the art object and its distribution, a move with important ramifications for artistic labor. Brecht and Filliou, already dropouts from the fields of chemistry and economics, pursued anti-instrumental nonwork leading to nonobjects, which were sometimes

³⁶ For a critique of the multiple around the time of its growing popularity, see Kozloff, "Three-Dimensional Prints and the Retreat from Originality." For historical appraisals of this moment, see Liz Kotz, "Object, Action, and Ephemera," and Shannon, *The Disappearance of Objects: New York Art and the Rise of the Postmodern City*.

³⁷ "So, what was Something Else Press? At the time it seems to be it was an outgrowth from Fluxus because I wanted to break out of the charmed circle of New York Avant-Garde activity—which I was never very comfortable with. I was international, but I was also interregional. I was not interested in the New York power structure... I was never happy with the New York mentality and I wanted to bypass New York and deal with other countries, other cultures." Hugh Fox, "Interview with Dick Higgins," *Stony Hills: The New England Alternative Press Review* 1, no. 2 (June 23, 1977): 6.

available and sometimes not through their nonshop. It was the artwork's—or in the operative sense, art *work*'s—allegiance to process that Brecht and Filliou pursued through their activities at the Cédille. Their activities productively mined the relation between formation and deformation, threatening the visibility of their production for the sake of its visibility as something like a play with the political or a play that *is* political.

A cedilla, a smile, a hook, and a question

The Cédille's founding principles were perhaps best emblemized by its curious name. In the French language, a *cédille* (cedilla) is the hooklike orthographic sign that attaches to the bottom of a *c* in order to transform its phonetic value to that of an *s*, like so: ç. The cedilla is thus a transformational grapheme, emerging onto the scene of language to cause a subtle but meaningful alteration. This curlicue form figures inconspicuously but centrally in perhaps the only lucrative object-centric activity that Brecht and Filliou undertook at the Cédille: the suspense poems, a format first developed by Filliou in Paris in 1961.³⁸ Filliou initiated the series under the title *Étude d'acheminement de poèmes en petite vitesse* (Study in dispatching poems at low speed), and potential subscribers were identified with the aid of Spoerri's address book (Fig. 4.15).³⁹ The works were referred to also as “object-poems” in reference to Surrealist works that played with material and symbolic relations between language and objects brought into a

³⁸ In a similar vein, Brecht and Robert Watts developed a series of *Delivery Events* in 1962 as part of their Yam Festival. See Michelle Kuo, “Research and Development: George Brecht and Robert Watts's *Yam Lecture*,” in *Concept Action Language*, ed. Hochdörfer, Kuehn and Neuburger, 74.

³⁹ Pierre Tilman, *Robert Filliou, nationalité poète* (Dijon, France: Presses du réel, 2007), 58. All citations from this text are my translation.

common plane.⁴⁰ As with much of Filliou's practice, his means of innovating upon the object-poem format concerned its form of distribution. Notions of suspense were evoked in the poems' materiality and mode of circulation, for the works were in fact assemblages that subscribers would receive slowly, one piece/verse at a time by post. Each verse-object was typically a wooden support bearing a text and a small image or object, its top and bottom equipped with metal hooks and eyes allowing successive verses to be suspended below.

If the suspense poems were the most popular of the goods created by Brecht and Filliou that the Cédille had to offer, their mode of distribution did everything to upset consumer culture and the instant gratification of the purchase. Production and acquisition were drawn out over an extended period of time and made to overlap, as if they would never end. This caused confusion for at least one devoted Fluxus collector, Jean Brown in Massachusetts, who wrote to the artists to say she was missing the first installment of her poem.⁴¹ Though it is doubtful that Brecht and Filliou would err in one of their only profitable schemes at a time when they struggled to pay rent, Brown's misapprehension was appropriate. Take, for instance, a model object-poem created by Filliou, whose components successively read: "the mussel is alone / the egg is alone / the snail is alone / the dog is alone / the cactus is alone / end of poem: the man is alone."⁴² In other extant examples of the poems (alas most have been lost or remain private), eggshells and the shells of mussels and snails appear and reappear, natural objects that double as armor and a self-

⁴⁰ Breton defined the Surrealist object-poem thus: "J'ai défini le poème-object comme une composition qui tend à combiner les ressources de la poésie et de la plastique en spéculant sur leur pouvoir d'exaltation réciproque." André Breton, *Entretiens 1913-1952* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), 162.

⁴¹ Brown's letter is reprinted in *Games at the Cedilla*; Robert and Marianne's replies can be found in the Filliou files of the Jean Brown Papers.

⁴² Notably similar is the material treatment of language by Filliou's friend and fellow poet-turned-visual-artist Marcel Broodthaers, who would employ mussel shells as a kind of antisignifier for mutability and inscrutability. Rachel Haidu, *The Absence of Work: Marcel Broodthaers, 1964-1976* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 9-45.

contained, portable home (Fig. 4.16, 4.17). The phrases are labels for a series of found objects concluded always by the image of a man's face, which serves to emphasize the ambivalence between the melancholic solitariness of the individual parts and their anticipation of a connection to come. As with Filliou's earlier urban wanderings, desire and alienation are here dialectically intertwined. Besides containing the phrase "*fin du poème*," the endings of the poems were marked formally by the last piece's lack of connecting apparatus. Yet since the poems were designed to hang from an uppermost catch, there was always the suggestion that they could be added onto, a sense compounded by the seemingly random accumulation of objects to which any number of others might be added. The suspense poems' drawn-out fabrication destabilizes meaning, with each new component altering the resonances of the entire composition. They are units in a signifying chain through which meaning oscillates, unwilling to settle—suspended, we should say—a phenomenon further emphasized by the viewers' ability to rearrange the poem's parts. The sense of conclusion that the end of the poem might bring is contradicted by the top element's extending appendage, ever available for connection. The additive logic of the suspense poem seems to suggest that the surface from which it hangs is part of the work too and, therefore, that the poem itself is merely the conclusion to a visual poetry that extends to the space around it and beyond. Meaning continues to unravel. If the Surrealist object-poem's equivalent treatment of language and objects indicated an expansive, associative model of thought, Brecht and Filliou enlarged this purview to the spatiotemporal field of reception, encouraging connections between ever more disparate things. Ultimately, where once it seemed that the suspense poems might be the one product of the Cédille marked by finitude or completion, turned on their head they become once again open-ended. Filliou's engagement with the idea of connection through the

form of the hook was taken to its logical conclusion in a 1969 work, *The Permanent Creation Toolbox*, a metal toolbox containing dozens of plain, rough-hewn wooden blocks with hooks and eyes at their ends that viewers are invited to assemble in any fashion (Figs. 4.18, 4.19). By that point, nodes of connection had come to the fore as the work's main visual interest.

The one-page subscription announcement sent from the Cédille referred to the format as a suspense-poem, object-poem, verse-object, and suspense-poem-object (Fig. 4.20). Along with Maciunas's book-objects and book-boxes, here was yet another hyphenated entity by which Fluxus artists would trouble the object. Like the hyphen, the cedilla was seen as a linking device. Pierre Tilman has recognized the cedilla's morphological similarity to the small hooks so crucial to the construction of the suspense poems, beautifully explaining the hook's dual nature as functional and symbolic device: "Easy to use, [the hooks] are practical and allow the combination of elements...that connect to one another, suspend, follow, develop like sequences, phrases, chapters. If this is a history of poetry, then the hooks enter into this history. They resemble question marks, and question marks upside down resemble cedillas."⁴³ Tilman hereby imagines another poignant resonance for the cedilla other than the curl that for the artists looked so much like a smile: it is an inverted question mark. The interrogative, common to the artists' favored discursive forms of jokes, puzzles, and misunderstandings and visually resembling a hook or an extended hand, creates an opportunity—a demand, even—for connection.⁴⁴ This idea was signified on the small address stamp designed by Brecht that served as the Cédille's logo (Fig. 4.21). Below the shop's address, instead of the typical dadaist manicule favored by

⁴³ Tilman, *Robert Filliou*, 125.

⁴⁴ Not coincidentally, Dick Higgins had chosen a question mark for the logo of Something Else Press. Coincidentally, but striking in its timing and design, there exists a poster created during the May 1968 student uprisings in Paris that is dominated by a bold, cedilla-like question mark and reads, "*Quoi de changé?*" Atelier populaire ex-Ecole des Beaux-Arts, *Quoi de changé?*, May 1968, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

Maciunas, is a graphic of two clasped hands, symbolic of the Cédille's founding as a "Partnership Piece" co-authored by Brecht and Filliou and reiterated in Brecht's favored closing salutation in correspondence at the time: "Handshakes, George."⁴⁵

Experiments with the cedilla as a morphological trope, especially by Filliou, revealed additional resonances. Filliou's *Poème invalide* (Disabled poem), published in the Belgian journal *Phantomas* in the months leading up to the Cédille's opening, includes an image of a body composed of three numbered blocks with cedilla-like appendages (Figs. 4.22, 4.23). The image might not read as a body at all if not complemented by a text in the form of a list of things which, as the French *manquer* richly evokes, the writer both lacks and feels a longing for: a hope, an idea, a meal, a shoe, a love, a home, etc. Punctuating this list is the melancholic refrain, "it's YOU that I miss."

Two altered photographs accompany the poem. The first is a bicycle-riding man whose arms and left leg have been severed from his body. On the facing page the missing limbs appear in their proper place with respect to the previous image, but with the man's body missing they appear suspended ridiculously in midair. *This* man who lacks gets fulfilled, if only in a delayed fashion. A turn of the page, however, confronts the reader with the aforementioned geometricized figure, under which the poem arrives at its conclusion:

I'm missing a beginning

I'm missing a middle

I'm missing an end

An end?

⁴⁵ Marianne and Robert Filliou's touching manuscript *Partnership Piece (for George and Dana [sic] Brecht (1965)* lays out a plan for establishing and sustaining the store in the manner of an extended event score in thirteen movements. Hanns Sohm Archive.

End of the poem:

I THINK ONLY OF YOU WHO IS WHAT I MISS

The cedillas of the abstract figure now clearly transform into legs and arms, connectors or receptors that reach for the *toi* called for in the poem. The cedilla-body of the cedilla-man has no beginning, middle, or end. It is defined by what it lacks, what it misses, and that for which it waits: a hope, an idea, a meal, a shoe, a love, a home, you.

In a preliminary sketch of the cedilla-man published in *cc Valise e TRanglE* (Fluxus Newspaper #3, 1964)—a sketch that may have been Filliou’s first articulation of the idea for *Poème invalide*—we witness the body’s limbs transform from hermetic protuberances into cedillas, one by one (Fig. 4.24). If the body pictured here is indeed disabled it is because its expectant gestures are not met, for it is surely a body made for connection. Filliou’s text suggests a fully relational model of subjectivity that, while individual, is also undoubtedly broken (in it we see the body of the beggar, the amputee, the cripple) and so desires to be fulfilled or made able once again able by connecting to others. It was a model lived by the artist himself, who depended for his survival upon the kindness and generosity of friends who simply reflected the kindness and generosity of their friend Robert back to him. Well aware that this had become his habitual approach to working and living, he once remarked: “The real talent I have is for friendship. Ninety-nine percent of my work is not visible.”⁴⁶ And so connectivity, generosity, and friendship became the operative ethic for the Cédille too. In July 1967 Brecht and Filliou cobbled together what extra money they had in order to purchase a ticket for the artist Joe Jones to travel from New York to Villefranche, where he would join Brecht and Filliou; their partners, Donna

⁴⁶ Tilman, *Robert Filliou*, 174.

and Marianne; and Takako Saito for the rest of the summer. Jones responded with a touching dadaesque diagram of his transit, imagined as a series of vectors linked and energized by a “love connector” that would facilitate the passage of a wilted flower into the company of five companions among whom it could blossom again (Fig. 4.25). Here, finally, was a Fluxus graphic score figured explicitly as a diagram of relations between subjects.

Rejuvenating the Arts of Giving and of Failure

That gift was not all. There were other aspects of the Cédille that, like the unfinished quality of the *Suspense Poems*, undermined the possibility of the shop’s commercial success. For Christmas 1966, Brecht and Filliou invited artists to contribute to the shop’s inventory of “objects that could be given to friends as gifts, not in the form of small versions of their personal works, but rather things that would be more difficult to present by conventional means.”⁴⁷ (Maciunas’s Fluxbox editions, always sent to distributors and regional Fluxshops on consignment, retained their own quality of the gift.) The roster of artists was titled *Tentative de rajeunissement de l’art d’offrir* (Attempt at the Rejuvenation of the Art of Giving) and participants were listed alongside the gift-games they had to offer (Fig. 4.26). These included “demi-livres de demi-livre” (half-books weighing 250 grams) from Arman, beads and pendants from Brecht’s partner Donna Brewer, linen bags from Marianne, neckties from Alison Knowles, Vautier’s portable holes, and hieroglyphs by Emmett Williams. Mieko Shiomi, Daniel Spoerri, Andre Tomkins, Serge Oldenbourg, Joachim Pfeufer, Jean-Jacques Lebel, François Dufrêne,

⁴⁷ See documents reproduced in *Happening & Fluxus*, ed. Sohm, n.p., my translation.

Mimmo Rotella, and Jacques Mahé de La Villeglé also participated.⁴⁸ Knowles wrote of the installation, “At first glance it seemed like a display of mechanics and plumbers tools available at special bargain rates. I loved it.”⁴⁹ Brecht and Filliou saw the gift as an object category capable of evading not only capitalist speculation but also the conventional modes of display that facilitate the translation of cultural value into pure exchange value. Moreover, to create an artwork-as-gift would set off a chain of giving that is potentially endless, like the connective hooks of the suspense poems or the cedilla-body, whose cupped hands signify a gesture not only of entreaty but of offering as well.⁵⁰ Accordingly, the poster advertising the exhibition of “unexpected offerings” multiplied the totemic grapheme into a dazzling field of seventy-nine golden cedillas, one for each of the exhibition’s artist-givers, each one a unique typographical iteration of a common graphic unit (Fig. 4.27).

Such schemes were ultimately not enough to keep the Cédille afloat financially, but for a time Brecht and Filliou seemed successful in establishing a provisional, noninstrumental “poetic economy” to counter what Filliou considered the art market’s “economy of prostitution” in which artists, like prostitutes, are forced into the business of selling their youth, a sign of their

⁴⁸ It is clear that some of the Décollagistes did not understand the intention behind Brecht and Filliou’s invitation despite the nature of their unlimited, anonymous, and infinitely repetitious work ostensibly “aimed at the (symbolic) annihilation of the individual producer.” Rotella’s initial response to the Cédille’s call was the proud announcement that he would submit “un objet très spirituel”: “le petit monument à Rotella” priced at the outrageous amount of 25.000 F (the works were to be priced between 30 and 300 F). Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Formalism and Historicity,” in *New Realisms: 1957-1962: Object Strategies Between Readymade and Spectacle*, ed. Robinson, 96 n. 27; Letter from Rotella to Filliou, November 12, 1965, Hanns Sohm Archive.

⁴⁹ Letter from Alison Knowles to George Brecht, c. January 1967, Hanns Sohm Archive.

⁵⁰ Like Maciunas’s turn to artisanal, almost Medieval modes of production for the Fluxus editions, Filliou and Brecht’s gift project seemed to revive an outmoded, even ancient form of exchange. It would be productive to consider the artists’ interest in gifts in relation to Marcel Mauss’s theorization of the relational dynamics of gifting or even Georges Bataille’s notion of expenditure. Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2002); Bataille, *The Accursed Share* vol. 1, *Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1991).

creative potential.⁵¹ The real failure of the artists' project, however, was that their alternative necessitated working in near obscurity. When a childhood friend of Filliou's once attempted to visit, he stopped multiple times to ask for directions but no one had heard of the place. Unable to locate the Cédille he gave up his search, thinking it was a clever joke true to Filliou's nature as he remembered him from their youth.⁵² Despite Brecht and Filliou's vision of an anti-elitist art practice that would reach broadly beyond the socioeconomic boundaries of the art world, the Cédille's notoriety was in fact quite limited. Two intersecting communities with whom the artists *did* communicate deeply were the decentralized network of their artist-friends and supporters, some of whom made pilgrimages to visit the Cédille, and the handful of Villefranche citizens who came to know Brecht and Filliou as neighbors. The former included Higgins, Knowles, Saito, Ay-O, Jones, Dieter Roth, Dorothy Iannone, Vautier, Arman, Takis, Pierre Restany, Oyvind Fahlström, and Cornelius Cardew; the latter Alfred the bricklayer, Antoine the fisherman, Fernand the plumber, and others whose identities will never be known.

Brecht and Filliou meditated openly on failure and its relationship to creativity and artistic production. They enthusiastically revived the tradition of the "café genius," the artist-character who sits about all day in the public forum of the café inventing countless ideas but realizing few or none of them. The figure of the café genius drew upon a French subcultural tradition of the revolutionary potential of laziness extending from the *Fumistes* to Paul LaFargue's revolutionary tract "The Right to Be Lazy" (1883) to Marcel Duchamp, the 20th century's preeminent figure of the lazy artist, who produced *The Large Glass* over a period of

⁵¹ Filliou, *Teaching and Learning*, 81, and "The Principles of Poetic Economy," in *Robert Filliou* (Hannover: Sprengel-Museum, 1984), 131-132.

⁵² Tilman, *Robert Filliou*, 127-128.

eight years after which he claimed to have quit making artwork entirely.⁵³ It drew also upon a specifically poetic tradition, going back to Arthur Rimbaud, of the artist as a vagabond or vagrant who wanders from place to place, refusing to settle down and take up work. The threat posed by the vagabond is that he is without *métier*; he refuses to expropriate his own body as a tool to the tasks of the manual laborer. As Kristin Ross has explained:

To have a *métier*, a trade, a specialty—even an antisocial *métier* like beggar or criminal (both professions who “live by their hands”; in French, *tendre la main* means “to beg”)—is to lose one’s hand as an integral part of one’s body: to experience it as extraneous, detachable, in service to the rest of the body as synecdoche for the social body, executing the wishes of another.⁵⁴

The vagabond rejects the position of both the beggar and the criminal (or pirate, or bandit), both figures we can now see represented in Filliou’s *Poème invalide* via the image of the limb as hook as hand. Following early 20th-century artistic imaginations of the “double logic of the prosthesis”⁵⁵ by which the subject in the face of modern technology is alternately extended and constricted, Filliou pictures the postwar subject as one rent by a distinctly postmodern experience of “dis/connection.” The postmodern subject is “made and unmade,” alternately burdened and supported by the economic technology of late capitalism in a disabling experience of dependence and giving without compensatory return.⁵⁶

Filliou thus glorified the revolutionary laziness of the café genius in the first proposition of a manifesto titled “Poetical Economy: Towards a New Standard of Value”:

⁵³ Paul LaFargue, *The Right to Be Lazy: Essays by Paul LaFargue*, ed. Bernard Marszalek (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2011); Kristin Ross, “The Right to Laziness,” in *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Molesworth, “Work Avoidance: The Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp’s Readymades.”

⁵⁴ Ross, “The Right to Laziness,” 51.

⁵⁵ Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 109.

⁵⁶ Hal Foster, “Whatever Happened to Postmodernism?” in *The Return of the Real*, 221, 222.

People used to make fun of wild, picturesque, tortured artists sounding off in drinking places, and leaving their work unattended. Some still do. They don't know yet that all of us now are sorts of café-geniuses. Not only do we have more ideas than possibilities of realizing them...But many of us don't even try any more. Better, they think, to make my life consistent with my ideals, than to trade them up for some money and illusory fame. So it is high time to rehabilitate the Génies de Café.⁵⁷

Filliou's manifesto was a call to a form of idleness that, like other Fluxus practices we have discussed, approached a radical form of desubjectification. When we are not working, Roland Barthes has explained, we are simply procrastinating or "marinating" before getting to the work by which we establish our identity and worth. True idleness does not exist in the modern West. To really do nothing would amount to a repudiation or disavowal of the self and the desire for self-actualization, for "in a situation of idleness the subject is almost dispossessed of his consistency as a subject. He is decentered, unable even to say 'I.'"⁵⁸

Brecht and Filliou's prescient embrace of "idea art" through the figure of the café genius already recognized the impossibility of an artistic creation that could evade the fetish economy of the art market. So, better not to create anything at all. Better to sit in the café and chat with Alfred, Antoine, Fernand, or whoever else happened to drop by. The embrace of art-world failure manifested in the anti-fame attitude and dysfunctional working methods of the café genius, who rejected not only the enduring ideal of the artist's solitary studio practice but also the emergent production models of Pop, Minimalism, and kinetic art, in which the artist would be either a socialite/promoter/producer or an industrial/technological worker.⁵⁹ Filliou became intimately

⁵⁷ Filliou, *Teaching and Learning*, 73.

⁵⁸ Roland Barthes, "Dare to Be Lazy," *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980*, trans. Linda Coverdale (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 342.

⁵⁹ Caroline A. Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

familiar with the latter model in his work during the Cédille years as fabrication manager of the magnetic/kinetic multiples of Takis. The artist-economist could thus recognize that these innovations in artistic production were not liberating paradigm shifts but merely a next step in the late capitalist economy's commodification and capitalization of creative labor. For Fluxus artists in New York, these developments were harder to ignore. In one of many dispatches to the Cédille, Robert Watts writes, "The thing now is 'primary structures' a show of sculpture at the Jewish Museum—Morris, Judd....It all sort of looks like bad playground sculpture of the housing projects (not quite) but you should read the words and manifestos, just another hard sell. Maybe Kaprow is right—just go out in the woods and forget it."⁶⁰

The second passage of Filliou's manifesto of Poetical Economy was an "Homage to Failures": "No one admires them. They influence no one. This is great. This is success, for we must get rid of the idea of admiration and of the deadweight of leadership."⁶¹ Failure was the means to an alternative notion of success, not only because the artwork resisted incorporation into the capitalist flow of accumulative exchange but also because the artist as an economic subject refused to participate in the hierarchical structure of power and fame that drives the art market and throws its participants into endless bouts of status anxiety. This was a difficult position to accept even for some fellow Fluxus artists, namely Vautier, who in a 1965 interview with Brecht in Villefranche became noticeably flummoxed by Brecht's anti-egoistic refusal to judge the importance of his or others' work. "I generally avoid comparisons," Brecht says. "I avoid comparing myself to other artists." We can imagine Vautier throwing up his hands in

⁶⁰ Letter from Robert Watts to George Brecht, May 7, 1966, Hanns Sohm Archive.

⁶¹ Filliou, *Teaching and Learning*, 74.

exasperation as he exclaims, “How is it possible to think like that?! That point of view is entirely alien to me.”⁶²

Brecht and Filliou’s provocations for material and interpersonal connection were part of a larger effort to escape the instrumental circuit of commodity production. The model of the cedilla-body was one not of instantaneous, one-off exchange but of the desire for constant connection. The suspense poems were not fit for immediate sale and gave the impression of being unfinished. The gifting project, the work of the café genius, as well as the artists’ “Non-École de Villefranche” (which existed only in the form of an official-looking letterhead), left nominal material trace.⁶³ In all the activities of their Center of Permanent Creation, the artists seemed systematically to refuse to advance beyond the phase of ideas and processes. To remain in the to-and-fro of process was to perpetuate the exhilaration of possibility as much as it was an allegiance to productive dysfunction, a courting of failure.

To understand an art that does not prioritize consummate objecthood and its attendant values, Hannah Arendt’s theory of the relation between labor, work, and action is helpful. Mapped against the additive and incomplete nature of the Cédille’s activities it makes sense of the shop’s larger *raison d’être*—to provide a countermodel to capitalist forms of artistic labor and exchange—and allows us to see the project’s ethical and political nature. In her 1958 text *The Human Condition*, Arendt discerns a tripartite hierarchy of human activity characterized by

⁶² Vautier and Alocco, “A Conversation about Something Else: an Interview with George Brecht,” 67.

⁶³ The motto of the school was “Carefree exchange of information and experience / No student, no teacher / Perfect license, at times to talk, at times to listen.” Dematerialized, noninstrumentalized productivity was the school’s aim, its primary activity being free and open discourse between equal participants. The Non-École prefigured Filliou’s participation in the Université Populaire d’Eté of Nice, born of the May 1968 events in Paris, a group that organized meetings, films, discussions, and “free creation” on the Riviera’s beaches. Letter from Robert Filliou to Emmett Williams, c. summer 1968, Jean Brown papers.

labor, work, and action.⁶⁴ Labor, whose time is cyclical and eternal, is structured by the need to maintain the necessities of existence. Tied to production and consumption, it operates solely in terms of means-ends rationality, and for this reason she likens it to slavery. A second category, work, is also associated with instrumental thinking. Ruled by the principle of “for the sake of,” work has among its goals the fabrication of objects (namely tools) and our entire inorganic environment, and thus it has a definitive end. The last and most valued form of activity for Arendt is action, which occurs immaterially in the speech and actions of multiplicities of communicating individuals. As a counterpart to work, action is world-creating in a nonmaterial, cultural sense, and it is integral to her understanding of the true experience of politics. Special attention is paid to artworks, whose conventionally material nature (Arendt is writing in the late 1950s at the cusp of the art object’s radical transformation and dispersal) would tie them to the category of work; yet more than any other kind of object they withstand the vicissitudes of use and time, and so they maintain “a closer relationship to politics than other objects, and their mode of production has a closer relationship to acting than to any other type of occupation.”⁶⁵ It is in this sense that artworks can be thought to engender a world outlasting the life span of any individual, communicating across great expanses of time and space.

Brecht and Filliou’s objects, which were almost not objects, and their artistic work, which was almost not work, threatened to collapse the distinction between object and process. So many of their activities at the Cédille displayed a humble, precarious materiality. The suspense poems

⁶⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

⁶⁵ Hannah Arendt, “Culture and Politics,” in *Reflections on Literature and Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 190. Criticisms of the idealist, even antimaterialist nature of Arendt’s articulation of politics has not invalidated its relevance for aesthetics; rather, this quality has made it particularly useful for understanding ephemeral art forms. See for example Richard Halpern, “Theater and Democratic Thought: Arendt to Rancière,” *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (2011): 545-72.

were made of wood, found objects, and bits from the hardware store. The gifts were things like holes, hieroglyphs, puddings, and neckties, hardly objects for aesthetic glorification—at times hardly even objects. All that remains of the gifting project is an inventory list, and of the Non-École a piece of stationery, the lessons shared by its nonmasters having vanished like spoken words dissipate into air and silence. What remain are only anecdotes, letters, poems, misunderstandings, and jokes—so many scraps that offer only the slightest vision of what actually happened at 12, rue de May. At the price of losing their tangible worldliness, the activities in the brief life of the Cédille moved ever closer to the domain of true politics as envisioned by Arendt without, however, departing from the immanent here and now of the shop’s highly localized day-to-day existence.

Object Without Object and The Eternal Network

Following the Cédille’s bankruptcy, Brecht moved to London and began to mount conceptual projects with the artist Anna Lowell, while the Fillious relocated to Düsseldorf, where Robert worked at Dieter Roth’s studio and occasionally taught at the Kunstakademie. Yet even when the Cédille closed, it did not quite end; it rather was transformed and dispersed into yet another theoretical invention of Filliou’s called *La Fête Permanente*, rendered into English by Filliou as the “Eternal Network.” To announced the Cédille’s closure, the artists mailed out a poster that read (Fig. 4.28):

There is always someone making a fortune
someone going...
BANKRUPT
(us in particular)
La Cédille qui Sourit turns the page again, and so...
La Fête est Permanente

announces the next realization of
THE ETERNAL NETWORK
manifestations, meanderings,
meditations, microcosms, macrocosms,
mixtures, meanings...

Ellipses seem to be the predominant punctuation here, signaling that the end of the Cédille was in fact not an end but rather the continuation of the artists' energies in other projects. The announcement linked the Cédille to the next realization of the Eternal Network, a conceptual framework devised to connect the collective production of like-minded artists internationally. Like the nodes of an ellipsis, which signify the possibility of continuation rather than the finitude signaled by the singular period at the end of a sentence, the Eternal Network operated according to a principle of addition that contained within it also the idea of separation. Despite the fact that Brecht and Filliou's poster was the first announcement of the Eternal Network, the rhetoric of its language seemed to suggest not only that the Cédille was part of a larger structure that would proceed indefinitely into the future but also that the shop was part of something that had always been. It was merely one instantiation, one point, of a poetic project onto which a proliferating, infinite network of activities could be added. This (in)conclusion of the Cédille project was akin to Arendt's idea that, whereas the meaning of a material thing is fundamentally contained within that thing, "the meaning of an activity can exist only as long as the activity continues." The world of action is "a world that never comes to an end and that—although spun of the most ephemeral stuff, of fleeting words and quickly forgotten deeds—is of such incredible enduring tenacity that under certain circumstances...it can outlive by centuries the loss of a palpable manufactured world."⁶⁶ The inauguration of the Eternal Network was Brecht and Filliou's final

⁶⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics* (New York: Schocken, 2005), 193, 161. It should be noted that Arendt writes these words with the example of Jewish culture in mind.

effort to extend the life of the Cédille despite the very real limits in the face of which, it must be admitted, the shop failed in its initial goals.

And yet the concept of the Eternal Network is so capacious as to be almost meaningless. In being everything it arrives at nothing, a fitful demonstration of the (non)logic characteristic of Filliou's practice and symptomatic of the project of Fluxus at large in its attack on the bases of aesthetic meaning and value.⁶⁷ There is one more object or rather non-object that we should discuss in this regard, and that is a work fashioned by Filliou upon his arrival in Düsseldorf following the shuttering of the Cédille. Titled *Object Without Object*, it is a wooden post, about as tall as a person, dotted with metal hooks, one off of which hangs a wooden block inscribed with the work's title (Figs. 4.29, 4.30). It, too, bears a hook-like appendage (a nail, actually) allowing one to travel the wooden block up and down the various positions marked on the vertical support. It is an emblematic Fluxus object without object in that it is seemingly without purpose, point or function. It is a poor, dumb, objectless object that is hardly recognizable as an artwork. The titular inscription's separation into two parts—object / without object—is a declaration that immediately negates itself. If *Object Without Object* is an object that is indeed an object, a thing, it is one that seemingly does not want to be, one that wants to suggest materiality or thingness or objectivity without committing fully to it. The work was Filliou's answer to the "no-object" generation of his artist-contemporaries. As Spoerri has explained, "We all had a concept. César compressed, Arman accumulated, Yves Klein immaterialized, Tinguely

⁶⁷ Dieter Roth: "You want to get rid of the general idea that value is something to value?" Filliou: "Right, right." Robert Filliou, interview with Dieter Roth, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*, 152.

motorized, Fontana destroyed....Christo wrapped, I showed a square meter of the world.” But Filliou, as far as Spoerri could tell, did not have such a concept.⁶⁸ Filliou was without-concept.

But *Object Without Object* was in many ways a perfect object-correlate to the Eternal Network. Its hooks imply connections with other objects and other artworks (the *Suspense Poems* are only a start), to be connected with ever more objects, and so on and so on, invoking the paradoxical operation at the heart of Fluxus: the stability of the individual artwork is undermined by its excessive relationality.⁶⁹ As connections multiply and one thing is rendered equivalent to or exchangeable with another, the artwork dissipates, disperses, devalues, almost disappears. Filliou’s *Object Without Object* is an emblem of the event score, which diagrammed the contours of an object without giving it final shape, and of the Fluxbox multiple with its shifting contents and pointless exercises. It is an emblem of Fluxus’s many objects without object: non-objects, objects that evade a definitive object status, and objects that no longer exist for us. It is an emblem of all of Fluxus’s imagined, gifted, stolen, and lost objects, the collective output of a collective of cafe-geniuses.⁷⁰ (Brecht once remarked that the most important aspect of the Fluxhall/Fluxshop was the bar next door where artists could gather). Works were made only to be held in perpetual transformation, subjected to purposeless or objectless play, progressively unmade and unworked through time. *In extremis*, Fluxus artworks are objects without object, artworks in flux.

⁶⁸ Daniel Spoerri, “Filliou is mein großer Bruder, aber ich bin seine Mutter,” 16, translation mine.

⁶⁹ Moreover, the relationality of such an object extends beyond Fluxus, calling forth a whole lineage of avant-garde artworks with outreaching hooks suggesting connectivity and expansion, including Duchamp’s readymade hat rack and coatrack (1917) and Man Ray’s mobile of interlinked coat hangers, *Obstruction* (1920).

⁷⁰ Alison Knowles’s *Street Piece* (1962) is the instruction, “Make something in the street and give it away.” Knowles, Brecht, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins and Takako Saito made preliminary plans for a “stolen art time-space event” in which a series of works would be designed to be stolen and the artists would attempt to track and document their whereabouts. Letter from Knowles to Brecht, c. 1966, Hanns Sohm Archive.

Following the Cédille's closure, Filliou would continue to develop a series of interlocking theories of alternative economics, while Brecht would continue to devise arrangements of objects that called attention to subtle perceptual shifts in everyday life. For all this, the Eternal Network functioned as a conceptual underpinning, automatically uniting these diverse activities without, however, neutralizing their differences. The Eternal Network was to replace the notion of the avant-garde in function and relevance at a moment when the category "art" had become capacious enough to include seemingly anything. In this moment, now recognized as the dawn of postmodernism, the model of the avant-garde understood historically as comprised of artist collectives engaged in socially, politically, and aesthetically revolutionary practices was superseded on multiple levels by a widely dispersed, nearly invisible network formation.⁷¹ First, as Filliou reasoned, there was no longer the need for artists to consolidate in recognized art centers since anything an artist is doing wherever he or she happens to be can be considered art. Second, the Eternal Network considers art itself as a network in and through which individuals engage with one another. And third, all human activities are automatically a part of this network, which interlinks with the activities of all other beings and reaches out, as Filliou mystically describes, into the "cosmos."⁷² Brecht had already communicated this attitude in a letter to Maciunas wherein he ascribed the same vision to Fluxus as a whole: "GLOBAL ASPECT: Fluxus seems to me a situational...phenomenon, a network of active points all equidistant from the center. These points can proliferate, new points arise, at any place on the earth where there is

⁷¹ In this sense I support both sides of Andreas Huyssen's diagnosis: "Fluxus is either the master-code of postmodernism or it is the ultimately unrepresentable art movement—postmodernism's sublime, as it were." Huyssen, "Back to the Future: Fluxus in Context," 142.

⁷² Robert Filliou, "Entretien Avec Georg Jappe" (Hamburg, 1984), *Inter: art actuel* 87 (2004): 59.

life.”⁷³ Brecht seems to suggest that Fluxus could be a code name for the Eternal Network, or vice versa—that the logic of Fluxus was that of a network, the whole of which could be activated by anyone from anywhere.

As with earlier Fluxus plays with hyphens and cedillas, the Eternal Network was a theoretical structure signified by a punctuational grapheme, the ellipsis, a succession of points on their way to becoming a line, a vector, a connector. Kandinsky had long ago theorized the significance of the singular point or node and its double implication of separateness and connectedness:

[W]e look upon the geometric point as the ultimate and most singular *union of silence and speech*. The geometric point has, therefore, been given its material form, in the first instance, in writing. It belongs to language and signifies silence. In the flow of speech, the point symbolizes interruption, non-existence (negative element), and at the same time it forms a bridge from one existence to another (positive element).⁷⁴

In the ellipsis the point returns but instead of signifying interruption and non-existence it is doubled, tripled, continuous, tending toward a positive, relational resonance as “a bridge from one existence to another.”⁷⁵ The ideas of relations maintained despite separation and of silence bridging acts of sound and speech returns us to the realm of music. We are returned to the realm of graphic notation and its uniting of writing, picturing, and action. We are returned to the realm

⁷³ Letter from Brecht to Maciunas, January 11, 1963, Hanns Sohm Archive. Brecht’s description of the “global aspect” of Fluxus notably resembles the structure of late capitalist empire as described by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). If Hardt and Negri propose that an anti-imperial political project can be launched only in the same network form as Empire, then the Eternal Network might be considered a formulation of counter-Empire in artistic terms. As a counterpart to the drama of futility performed by Fluxus editions, the Cédille offered perhaps a more viable artistic-political model.

⁷⁴ Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, 25. See also Christopher Short, “Between Text and Image in Kandinsky’s Oeuvre: A Consideration of the Album *Sounds*,” *Tate Papers* 6 (Autumn 2006).

⁷⁵ Benjamin Buchloh has broached a similar explanation for the role of ellipses in the text pieces of Lawrence Weiner: “The ellipsis functions like the strategy of the removal itself: it functions simultaneously as a fragmentation prohibiting closure and perfection, and invites as well the participatory and collaborative responses from the perceiving subject.” Buchloh, “The Posters of Lawrence Weiner,” 564.

of the score and its function of dismantling stable notions of object and authorship.

But we are talking about the Eternal Network and there is of course no score here. We have arrived at the radical outcome of artists in pursuit of the experimental logic of John Cage, according to which, as Robert Ashley has described, “the entire metaphor of music could change to such an extent that—time being uppermost as a definition of music—the ultimate result would be a music that wouldn’t necessarily involve anything but the presence of people. That is...the most radical redefinition of music...would be one that defines ‘music’ without reference to sound.”⁷⁶ We have at last arrived at a score model fully unhinged from anything representing notation taken as the organizing force for the international, artistic (non)community of Fluxus, the “non-group” to which Filliou felt closest.⁷⁷ We have arrived at a score model whose primary function, as Julia Robinson has described, “was to compose relationships between *subjects*.”⁷⁸

In an effort to understand human relationships outside the frame of the individual subject, Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy have theorized friendship and the formation of community not through a dynamic of amiable conviviality but rather through separation, discontinuity, and absence in recognition that the connection between two people is also the demarcation of an unbreachable distance—what Blanchot has called a “double dissymmetry.”⁷⁹ Our companions, Blanchot writes, “reserve, even on the most familiar terms, an infinite distance, the fundamental separation on the basis of which what separates becomes relation.” This

⁷⁶ John Cage, “Interview with Roger Reynolds [and Robert Ashley]” (1962), in *Contemporary Composers On Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz, Barney Childs, and Jim Fox (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2009), 346.

⁷⁷ Letter from Robert Filliou to George Maciunas, May 27, 1970, Hanns Sohm Archive.

⁷⁸ Robinson, “Maciunas as Producer: Performative Design in the Art of the 1960s,” 67.

⁷⁹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 70-71.

separation is “the interruption of being that never authorizes me to use him [the other], or my knowledge of him..., and that, far from preventing all communication, brings us together in the difference and sometimes the silence of speech.”⁸⁰

A community founded on such relations is in Nancy’s formulation a *community without community* “made of the interruption of singularities, or of the suspension that singular beings are.”⁸¹ That is, communities form under the threat of their own impossibility, deferral, or undoing, and so the work of the community without community becomes precisely work’s opposite: an unworking or *désœuvrement* defined by Blanchot as the space of madness, laziness, idle chitchat, or silence. Encompassing unworking, worklessness, inoperativity, idleness, being unoccupied or at loose ends, Blanchot’s *désœuvrement* is the principle of (non)production that is the motor of the community without community.⁸² To return again to Nancy:

Community cannot arise from the domain of *work*. One does not produce it, one experiences or one is constituted by it as the experience of finitude. Community understood as a work or through its works would presuppose that the common being, as such, be objectifiable and producible (in sites, persons, buildings, discourses, institutions, symbols: in short, in subjects)...Community necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called ‘unworking,’ referring to that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension.⁸³

⁸⁰ Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 291.

⁸¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community (La Communauté désœuvrée)*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 31.

⁸² Fittingly, there is not a singular text through which once can understand the interconnected notions of friendship, community without community, and *désœuvrement* articulated by Blanchot and Nancy in the wake of the work of Bataille. The terms thread through their writings as coarticulations of a group of interlocutors who were, at least in the case of Blanchot and Bataille, close friends. Blanchot, *L’Amitié (Friendship)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); Nancy, *La Communauté désœuvrée (The Inoperative Community)*, (orig. pub. *Alea* 4, February 1983) (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1986); Blanchot, *La Communauté inavouable (The Unavowable Community)* (Paris: Minuit, 1983). See also Eleanor Kaufman, *The Delirium of Praise: Bataille, Blanchot, Deleuze, Foucault, Klossowski* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Leslie Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Leslie Hill, *Bataille, Klossowski, Blanchot: Writing at the Limit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁸³ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 31.

Nancy's language calls up all the various disavowals of object and subject in the realm of Fluxus we have examined thus far and the group's deliberate positioning on the outsides and undergrounds of various worlds. His invocation of interruption, fragmentation, and suspension speaks directly to the activities of the Cédille, which marked the beginning of the end of Fluxus as Maciunas had imagined it and exemplified the social solution more realistically adopted by Fluxus artists by the late 1960s despite Maciunas's attempts to build vast artist communes to house his cohort.⁸⁴

The political potential of unproductivity at the heart of *désœuvrement* can be seen as an involution of Arendt's notion of political action in a negative, melancholic mood, in recognition that the most radical encounter with absence and separation around which communities gather is death.⁸⁵ Indeed, one of the last times the first-generation Fluxus community gathered was around the death of their chairman in 1978, an event which marked the culmination of Maciunas's Fluxus labors, his final work of art/life. If this idea seems preposterous and/or perverse, we need only consider the mock newspaper produced by Maciunas's friends to announce his passing, which bore the headline for a wildly exaggerated story—"MACIUNAS DIES: Hart [sic] attack kills him at summer palace"—alongside a photomontage of the artist in papal regalia (Fig. 4.31). In light of this, the Fluxboxes might now appear to us as grids of grave plots for objects made obsolete by commodities bright and shiny and new, a succession of poignant little coffins for

⁸⁴ With this constellation of terms the example of Dada again influences my account of the project of Fluxus. George Baker has identified procedures of *désœuvrement* in the context of Dada in his book *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 85-91. Blanchot's theories of literature and non-work or failure also thread through Rachel Haidu's study of Filliou's artist-poet contemporary Broodthaers, although the book does not engage *désœuvrement* explicitly. Haidu, *The Absence of Work: Marcel Broodthaers, 1964-1976*.

⁸⁵ For community without community, *désœuvrement* ("the inoperative operation of the work"), objects without object, artworks without artists—"all the 'X without X,'" Derrida writes, "belong without belonging to the untimely time of Nietzsche." Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (New York: Verso, 2005), 47 n. 15.

what commercial culture left for dead but which Fluxus artists, like postmodern rag-pickers, sought to give new life.

In its latest hours, Fluxus approached a model of an artistic project as quasi-communitarian biopolitic that, in relinquishing any separation between art and life, concomitantly embraced all forms of life—including its antithesis, death. At Maciunas’s funeral, his mother, who never quite understood the passion with which George undertook his Fluxus activities, was finally able to imagine the preservation of her son’s body as a most profound kind of Fluxbox as he himself likely would have—one assembled with the utmost affection, love, and care. She wrote, “When looking at his last ‘box (drawer/chest)’ in which his emaciated body lay, and at the lid where a huge bouquet of Nature’s gifts—springtime flowers—shone perfectly, his ‘children’ gathered again, his friends, and his spirit saw them and rejoiced.”⁸⁶

Maciunas’s desperate attempts to control an anarchic group of non-joiners was both distressing and comical, for Fluxus was in fact a collective without a permanent cast of members or works, an organizational model based in contingency and flexibility that brought with it an unexpected longevity and durability. Brecht sensed this already in 1972. “Each of us had his own ideas about what Fluxus was and so much the better. That way it will take longer to bury us.”⁸⁷

Scholars have struggled to find ways of neatly describing the nature of this alternative community, calling it at times an attitude, a spirit, and a laboratory.⁸⁸ However, if we admit to its

⁸⁶ Leokadija Maciunas, “My Son,” n.p.

⁸⁷ George Brecht, “An Interview with Robin Page for Carla Liss (who Fell Asleep),” *Art and Artists* 7, no. 7 (October 1972), 29.

⁸⁸ Armstrong and Rothfuss, *In the Spirit of Fluxus*; Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*; Owen Smith, “Fluxus; Experiments in Community, Collaboration and Connectivity,” in *At A Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*, ed. Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); and Craig Saper, “Fluxus as a Laboratory,” *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman (New York: Academy Editions, 1998);

precariousness, if we accept that its relationships were riven by disagreement and geographical distance, we can begin to understand the Fluxus object without object as an appropriate counterpart to the group's formation. From a community always on the verge of dissolution, of unworking itself, becoming *désœuvrée*, came artworks subjected to a similar unworking, artworks which, for their part, threatened the notion of the artwork and of artistic work.⁸⁹ In light of this, Fluxus seems no less than a multi-sited effort to redraw the lines of relation structuring the art community, offering reconfigurations of authorship, the artwork's material status, and its production and distribution, and proposing an alternative model of artistic labor and community-formation for the postwar period. To do this meant operating under the constant stress of the paradox that, as Filliou articulated, "As a group, what binds us is greater than what divides us. Individually, what divides us is greater than what binds us."⁹⁰

⁸⁹ My articulation of Fluxus as a community without community having produced scored-based objects without object (as against accounts of Fluxus as a humorous spirit or attitude) parallels the antagonistic counter-model of relational aesthetics articulated by Claire Bishop (as against accounts of that later work which emphasize utopian conviviality). In her arguments Bishop has also turned to Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*. She writes, "Since the mid-1990s, Nancy's text has become an increasingly important reference point for writers on contemporary art, as seen in Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions*; chapter 4 of Pamela M. Lee's *Object to Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000); George Baker, "Relations and Counter-Relations: An Open Letter to Nicolas Bourriaud," in *Zusammenhänge herstellen/Contextualise*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior (Cologne: Dumont, 2002); and Jessica Morgan, *Common Wealth* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003)." Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Autumn 2004): 68 n. 47. Further theorizations of communities unworked can be found in *Community at Loose Ends*, ed. Miami Theory Collective (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and Alphonso Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). For attempts to write Fluxus into art history via its resonance with contemporary practices see Huberman, "Talent is Overrated"; Patrick, "Unfinished Filliou: On the Fluxus Ethos and the Origins of Relational Aesthetics"; and Bertrand Clavez, "Fluxus: Reference or Paradigm for Contemporary Art?" *Visible Language* 39, no. 3 (2005).

⁹⁰ Emmett Williams file, Jean Brown papers.

Coda

I want to begin my ending with a little story: About three years ago, on a springtime visit to the New York studio of Alison Knowles, I brought with me a bouquet of yellow tulips, some of the first of the season, which the artist set in a vase on the middle of the low-slung living room table around which we sat and talked. Deep into our conversation, Alison stopped abruptly and exclaimed, “Look! Those tulips are opening.” Indeed the yellow buds, having taken to the water, had relaxed and opened their blossoms but a hair. It occurred to me in that moment, more powerfully than ever before, that Alison, like many Fluxus artists, was a first-class noticer of things, everyday things most people would find trivial or mundane.

To this, I want to juxtapose another story. In 2008, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art mounted the exhibition *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*, an historical survey of interactive art accompanied by a catalogue with essays by curator Rudolf Frieling and media theorists Boris Groys and Lev Manovich. The show began with John Cage’s silent piece *4’33”* and continued with works like Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece* (1964), Nam June Paik’s *Participation TV* (1963), Lygia Clark’s *Dialogue: Goggles* (1968), and examples of Fluxus event scores and multiples. There was also Tom Marioni’s *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends Is the Highest Form of Art* (1979), a stack of Felix Gonzalez-Torres posters (1992-1993), and props for visitors to enact Erwin Wurm’s *One Minute Sculptures* (2007-2008). These works, which provided a range of experientially diverse possibilities for interaction, led finally to a quiet gallery sparsely equipped with computer monitors where viewers could sit and browse digital and Internet-based

works by Lynn Hershman Leeson, Warren Sack, and others.

The computer-room conclusion to Cage and Fluxus was written into the exhibition from its very start. Originally titled *MyMuseum* in a nod to the language of social media, the exhibition could be read as a project of historical legitimation for certain contemporary digital and new media practices, which, as viewers were told, are emblematic of a new “Internet mindset” of browsing, sharing, collecting, and production in the age of Web 2.0.¹ The implications were twofold: first, that the likes of Cage and Fluxus have necessarily led us to this museum computer room and, second, that our current-day Internet mindset can be mapped retrospectively onto those earlier practices.

Fluxus activities of the 1960s are increasingly called upon to legitimate countless forms of contemporary practice from mail art, video art, and relational aesthetics to the kinds of Internet, digital, and new media practices included in Frieling’s exhibition. Historians and critics stress the dispersed, network-like qualities of Fluxus, claiming that it demonstrated an incipient “network mentality” in postwar art. In a recent scholarly anthology focused on precursors to Internet art, Owen Smith writes, “Even though much of Fluxus existed prior to the age of the computer, the Internet, the World Wide Web, hypermedia, and hypertext, Fluxus’s activities and attitudes present many of the most important realizations of network culture, many of which we

¹ Rudolf Frieling, “Introduction,” in *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*, ed. Frieling (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008). According to the press release, the exhibition was to be “an overview of the rich and varied history of participatory art practice during the past six decades, exploring strategies and situations in which the public has taken a collaborative role in the artmaking process....From early performance-based and conceptual art to online works rooted in the multiuser dynamics of Web 2.0 platforms, *The Art of Participation* reflects on the confluence of audience interaction, utopian politics, and mass media, and reclaims the museum as a space for two-way exchange between artists and viewers.” “SFMOMA Presents Major Overview of Participation-Based Art,” press release, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, June 15, 2008.

are now only rediscovering.”² A most extreme version of this position argues that the ostensible failure or breakdown of Fluxus by the late ‘70s has been finally redeemed by new media practices that are only now able to fully realize the group’s goals. Thus we witness the recasting of the Fluxus viewer as a “user” and the application to Fluxus work of terms like “open-source” and “hypermedia” until the entire project of Fluxus is circumscribed by its virtual existence as an incipient world wide web.³ “[I]t becomes clear,” Smith writes, “that Fluxus is more of a virtual space than it is a particular art historical group with a finite set of geographic and chronological parameters.”⁴ “This is not to say that there are no boundaries, materials, or objects in Fluxus, but that they are less important and ultimately inconsequential in the processes of change and creation of possibilities.”⁵

Fluxus artists were indeed radical for turning to alternative means of distributing their works, but it was not the singular defining characteristic of them. At the same time that their score-based practice emphasized the work’s fundamental translatability, they also defended the importance of the uniqueness of each material instantiation. The network is not where the Fluxus artwork or the meaning of its critique ends, for every one of the innumerable tentacles of the

² Owen Smith, “Fluxus Praxis: An Exploration of Connections, Creativity, and Community,” in *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*, ed. Chandler and Neumark, 136. The examples are almost too numerous to cite. In her book *Digital Art*, Christiane Paul writes that Fluxus works “based on the execution of precise instructions whose fusion of audience participation and event as the smallest unit of a situation in many ways anticipated the interactive, event-based nature of some computer artworks.” Paul, *Digital Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 13. See also Craig J. Saper, *Networked Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), XV, 43; Charlie Gere, “The Digital Avant-garde,” *Digital Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2008); *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*, ed. Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark (MIT Press, 2005); and *MediaArtHistories*, ed. Oliver Grau (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007). In tandem, there is an active community of Internet artists who are explicit in their identification with Fluxus.

³ “Hypermedia is based on three concepts: a prioritization of interaction, an interest in multivariant readings or experiences, and the use of a form that has built-in demands for responses by the participants.” Smith, “Fluxus Praxis: An Exploration of Connections, Creativity, and Community,” 130.

⁴ Smith, “Fluxus Praxis: An Exploration of Connections, Creativity, and Community,” 132.

⁵ Smith, “Fluxus Praxis: An Exploration of Connections, Creativity, and Community,” 128.

Fluxus nexus culminated in an intimate encounter between beholder and artwork, an experience utterly singular and material. If Fluxus practice was buoyed by the utopian ideal of an international network, its works did not operate in a virtual space. Rather, they were directed at the transformation of the experience of everyday life.

The new media recordings of Fluxus that I have described bear similarities to accounts that see Fluxus as a dematerialized proto-conceptual art of unfettered communication whose neo-Dada, “anti-art” stance was equally anti-object. However, the Fluxus turn to language—an admittedly abstract, symbolic material—was only a means for the artwork to fully partake of the specific material conditions of each situation in which it would appear, to achieve what I have named the Fluxus concrete. Fluxus works were in many ways opposed to mediation. They were deliberately anti-spectacular, anti-technological, and anti-digital—radically analog. Fluxus strategies were developed precisely to critically *resist* the dematerialization and virtualization of the artwork and the sign at the earliest moment of the cultural shift we now understand as postmodernism.

In Maciunas’s proto-Fluxus manifesto of summer 1962, “Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art,” readymade and indeterminate methods and materials were advocated as means of resisting the artificiality of illusionism and abstraction. “Anti-art is life, is nature, is true reality,” Maciunas declared. “Rainfall is anti-art, a babble of a crowd is anti-art, a sneeze is anti-art, a flight of a butterfly, or movements of microbes are anti-art. . . . If man could experience the world, the concrete world surrounding him. . . in the same way he experiences art, there would be no need for art, artists and similar ‘nonproductive’ elements.”⁶ Certainly there is a fetishism in his

⁶ Maciunas, “Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art,” 156-157.

language, but it is not a fetishism of networks or of unfettered communication; it is a fetishism of the everyday valued as the essence of the real—a fetishism admitted to by the artists themselves. “[T]here was almost a cult among the Fluxus people” wrote Dick Higgins in 1972, “or, more properly, a fetish, carried far beyond any rational or explainable level—which idealized the most direct relationship with ‘reality,’ specifically objective reality. The lives of objects, their histories and events were considered somehow more realistic than any conceivable personal intrusion on them.”⁷

Fluxus artists were not alone in their allegiance to the concrete, although their methods remain singular. In the late 1950s and into the ‘60s, the turn to the everyday, common object—by artists from Rauschenberg and Johns to the Nouveau Réalistes in France—was a key tactic among neo-avant-garde efforts to challenge the alienating effects of both modernist aesthetics and mass culture. The return of the object was an assault on two linked phenomena of the time: first, the mass-production of waste incurred by the industrial strategy of planned obsolescence and, second, the establishment by mass media of a virtual reality of spectacle and simulation. Critical consciousness of these issues on the left and right was marked by the publication one after the other of Vance Packard’s *The Waste Makers* in 1960 and Daniel Boorstin’s *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* in 1961.⁸

Accounts such as Smith’s which see the virtual space of the network as performing a break with modernism fail to recognize that virtuality defined the ideal high modernist artwork and its concomitant viewing experience. For Greenberg, the successful modernist artwork was

⁷ Higgins, “Something Else About Fluxus,” 17-18.

⁸ Packard, *The Waste Makers* (New York: Pocket, 1960); Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1961).

one that presented the illusion “that matter is incorporeal, weightless, and exists only optically like a mirage.”⁹ The attendant subject of this modernist virtuality is disembodied and wholly, eternally present. As Rosalind Krauss has argued, the modernist artwork instated a transcendent “reciprocity of absence” between artwork and viewer. “What we have here,” she writes, “is...not exactly a situation of non-presence but one of abstract presence, the viewer floating in front of the work as pure optical ray.”¹⁰ This mirage-effect has been carried forth from the high modernist field through the image world of Pop art to contemporary forms of screen-based new media in which the subject becomes a function of the image, both dependent upon and alienated by it.¹¹ It was against this mirage-effect that neo-avant-garde practices of the 1960s such as Minimalism, New Realism, and the many “concrete” practices of Fluxus were positioned.

In the face of these developments, Maciunas had called for an art that would be like “an ‘automatic machine’ within which or by which, nature...can complete the art-form, effectively and independently of the artist-composer. Thus the primary contribution of a truly concrete artist consists in creating a *concept* or a *method* by which form can be created independently of him...”¹² As we have seen, the Fluxus event score was precisely this. The event score harnessed language in order to loosen form from a definitive material existence, rendering it transitive and ambiguous—qualities that belong as much to musical notation as they do to the written word. This turn to an abstract, symbolic medium was a necessary means for the Fluxus work, whether performance or object, to materialize more individually and concretely in varied contexts. As

⁹ Clement Greenberg, “The New Sculpture,” in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 145.

¹⁰ Rosalind Krauss, “Using Language to do Business as Usual,” in *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (New York: Polity Press, 1991), 89.

¹¹ Krauss, “Using Language to do Business as Usual,” 89.

¹² Maciunas, “Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art,” 157.

Higgins explained, “In its most extreme manifestations, Fluxian intermediality dispenses with media. For Fluxus, reality is the medium, experience the utensil, and language the means of distribution.”¹³

Perhaps more than any of Maciunas’s statements, Dick Higgins’s concept of intermedia, introduced in a manifesto-like text of 1966, has been taken as an early defense of new media due to its call for an untrammelled approach to artistic mediums.¹⁴ For in the contemporary digital realm, as Lev Manovich describes, new media works’ shared basis in numerical code allows for infinite possibilities of “transcoding” and “programming.”¹⁵ All forms of media are seen to converge through a unifying blanket of code that effectively erases their underlying distinctions. In a more recent account of contemporary art by David Joselit that is decidedly less technophilic yet informed by new media language and concepts, all artworks are understood as images that circulate through different formats. The wider and greater this virtual circulation, the greater power an artwork-image is seen to have.¹⁶ Higgins’s “Statement on Intermedia” in fact called for “simplicity” and return to “basic images” as a counter-experience or escape from mass media:

Due to the spread of mass literacy, to television and the transistor radio, our sensitivities have changed. The very complexity of this impact gives us a taste for *simplicity*, for an art which is based on the underlying images that an artist has always used to make his point. As with the cubists, we are asking for a new way of looking at things, but more totally, since we are more impatient and more anxious to go to the *basic images*. This explains the impact of Happenings, event pieces, mixed media films. We do not ask any more to speak magnificently of taking arms against a sea of troubles, we want to see it done. The art which *most*

¹³ Dick Higgins, *A Dialectic of the Centuries: Notes Toward a Theory of the New Arts* (New York: Printed Editions, 1978), 4.

¹⁴ Higgins, “Statement on Intermedia.” Higgins’s essay was reprinted with commentary by Hannah Higgins in the arts, sciences and technology journal *Leonardo* in 2001. See *Leonardo* 34, no. 1 (2001): 49-54.

¹⁵ Lev Manovich, “Principles of New Media,” *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 27-48.

¹⁶ Joselit, *After Art*.

directly does this is the one which allows this *immediacy*, with a *minimum of distractions*.¹⁷

The experience of viewing proposed here is not a position of omniscience and transcendence but rather of an actively engaged, highly physical, and material spectatorship called into being by the artwork itself. The Fluxus object was recalcitrant to an art market that demanded (and continues to demand) unique, precious, individually authored things and to an image culture that demanded (and continues to demand) continuous circulation of consistent, recognizable images. It could be a Fluxus mantra: A taste for simplicity, immediacy, basic images, most directly, with a minimum of distractions. We want to see it done.

The example of Nam June Paik and his work with video, television, and broadcast technologies, the earliest examples of which were coincident with his participation in Fluxus, has provided historians with one of the strongest links between Fluxus practices and contemporary new media. Yet Paik imagined his work with electronics from the beginning as a humanizing, critical “anti-technology technology.”¹⁸ Paik’s first significant body of work incorporating televisions was presented in 1963 in his *Exposition of Music. Electronic Television* at Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany.¹⁹ Following the example of John Cage’s prepared pianos, which critiqued the idea of music as an inherently abstract art by treating the piano as a whole, concrete object to be played on any of its surfaces, Paik approached the television as a three-dimensional object rather than identifying it metonymically with the screen. TVs were cast randomly about the space, including many on the floor, some screen-side down, their broadcasts disrupted by

¹⁷ Higgins, “Statement on Intermedia,” 172, italics mine.

¹⁸ See Nam June Paik, “TV Bra for Living Sculpture” (1969) and “Interview with Paik” (1975), in Wulf Herzogenrath, ed., *Nam June Paik Fluxus/Video* (Bremen: Kunsthalle Bremen, 1999), 132.

¹⁹ The exhibition was held March 11-20, 1963.

manipulations to their circuitry. Several were interactive by means of pedal switches, microphones, and external sound sources as a way of augmenting the typically sedentary encounter with television into a full-body experience.

Paik's pianos, TVs, and manipulated electronics called for a bodily incorporation of technology; listening necessitated touching, and aural experience crossed into orality.²⁰ Paik pursued a television art of the concrete that would render mass media spectatorship highly material and experientially rich.²¹ These works were poised against the reality of a scene he once recounted having witnessed at a New York dance club: "[I] was stunned...there were more than 1000 young people...mostly with their dates. 90% of them neither kissed, nor danced, nor...even touched...hands. They were just looking [at] a big TV projector, which ... [showed]... banal pictures, such as old movies or Rock Roll music or Elvis, which they have seen most of their lives in their home TV set or movie house."²²

Paik's apparatuses were to be interfered with, fondled, worn. He gave us wrapped TVs, burned-out TVs, organic materials fashioned into TVs, TVs eviscerated and overtaken by nature. By the late sixties, he was known among his peers particularly for working with outmoded and obsolete devices in ways that highlighted technology's material aspects. Allan Kaprow wrote in 1968: "His pianos...were old and irreparable, and his television consoles are cast-off derelicts

²⁰ Paik referred to such works as "physical music" and "time art." See letter from Nam June Paik to Rolf Jährling, December 22, 1962, cited in Susanne Neuberger, "Terrific Exhibit: 'Time Art' alias Music in the Exhibition Genre," in *Nam June Paik: Exposition of Music Electronic Television Revisited* (Cologne: Verlag König, 2009), 31; and Nam June Paik, "afterlude to the EXPOSITION of EXPERIMENTAL TELEVISION," *fLuxus cc fiVe ThReE* 4 (June 1964).

²¹ Regarding the Wuppertal show, Paik wrote of his interest in the "possibilities of combining many senses; touching, blowing, caressing, seeing, treading, walking, running, hearing, striking, etc." See "About the exposition of the music," *Décollage* 3 (1962). As David Joselit has noted, in Paik's work the "'dematerialized' mobility of the network was stabilized as an object of spectatorship." David Joselit, *Feedback: Television Against Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 13.

²² Nam June Paik, "Artificial Intelligence vs. Artificial Metabolism" (1982), in Wulf Herzogenrath, ed., *Nam June Paik Fluxus/Video* (Bremen: Kunsthalle Bremen, 1999), 252-253.

from Canal Street.”²³ Cage described Paik’s work as simply “Wires and more wires”; an “image of utter collapse.”²⁴

Paik conceived his work as complementary to that of his more Luddite Fluxus peers, writing in a 1966 manifesto, “Cyberated art is very important, but art for cyberated life is more important, and the latter [cyberated life] need not be cyberated. Maybe George Brecht’s *simplissimo* is the most adequate.”²⁵ Indeed, Brecht’s event scores were a kind of Fluxus anti-technology designed to produce *unmediated* experience, to recreate the artwork anew, over and over again, for each and every *now*. Liz Kotz has described that this logic of the event score as a two-part logic, “in which a ‘*general*’ *template or notational system...generates ‘specific’ realizations in different contexts.*”²⁶ Purposefully evading a definitive, fixed form, the work rematerializes again and again, with each appearance revealing yet another dimension of the work’s potential as if it were an infinitely faceted jewel.

And so there *is* a virtual operative in Fluxus, I would argue, although it is not the virtuality of networked space. It is rather the virtuality of the artwork forever in-becoming through *time*. The plain language of Fluxus scores, chosen for its affectlessness, keeps the work’s form radically uncircumscribed such that the general-specific dualism Kotz describes might better be named in terms of philosopher Henri Bergson’s dualism of the virtual-actual, which he

²³ Allan Kaprow, “Nam June Paik” (1968), in Herzogenrath, ed., *Nam June Paik Fluxus/Video*, 124-125

²⁴ John Cage, “Nam June Paik: A Diary” (1965), in Herzogenrath, ed., *Nam June Paik Fluxus/Video*, 102-103.

²⁵ Nam June Paik, “Manifesto,” in *Manifestoes*, a Great Bear Pamphlet (New York: Something Else Press, 1966).

²⁶ Further, in this logic of specification, “the template, schema, or score is usually not considered the locus of the work, but merely a tool to produce it.” Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At*, 194.

proposed in place of the possible-real.²⁷ For Bergson, the relationship of possible-to-real assumed a situation in which the real is simply one scenario that wins out over a set of pre-determined possibilities, whereas the idea of the virtual-actual entails the possibility for the actual to unexpectedly diverge from the known. The first is limited to relationships of identity; the second contains the possibilities of spontaneous difference. It is a subtle differentiation, but it has everything to do with the way we exist in, understand, and interact with the world. Gilles Deleuze, a champion of Bergson, emphasizes this point in his book *Difference and Repetition*:

It would be wrong to see only a verbal dispute here: it is a question of existence itself. Every time we pose the question in terms of possible and real, we are forced to conceive of existence as a brute eruption, a pure act or leap which always occurs behind our backs and is subject to a law of all or nothing. What difference can there be between the existent and non-existent if the non-existent is already possible, already included in the concept and having all the characteristics that the concept confers upon it as a possibility?²⁸

Rather than the making-real of a finite set of possibilities, this conception of the virtual helps us to see that quality of Fluxus works which maintains the potential for ushering forth the utterly new. Branden Joseph has appealed to the Bergsonian virtual to describe Cage's devotion to mechanical methods of indeterminacy, which, against the grain of the musical discipline, sought a kind of work whose performances would be defined by difference rather than identity to one

²⁷ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1911), 179, 181, 196-197, 257-258. Bergson's distinction between the virtual-actual and possible-real, somewhat obscured by the English translation, has been explicated and drawn out by Gilles Deleuze (see note 505). Interestingly, as Branden Joseph points out (see note 506), Cage and Deleuze were working through Bergson's ideas at roughly the same moment.

²⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 211. "The actualization of the virtual," Deleuze goes on to say, "always takes place by difference, divergence, or differentiation" (212). Note the difference Deleuze posits between differentiation and his neo-logism differentiation: "We call the determination of the virtual content of an Idea differentiation; we call the actualization of that virtuality into species and distinguished parts differentiation," 207. The alteration of the second term emphasizes the disjunctive temporal divide between the virtual and actual. Deleuze engaged Bergson throughout his career, but the two major texts that deal with the concept of divergent actualization are *Difference and Repetition* and *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Brooklyn, NY: Zone, 1988). See also Gilles Deleuze, "Bergson's Conception of Difference," in *The New Bergson*, ed. John Mullarkey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

another.²⁹ A similar effect was pursued by the Fluxus event score after the example of graphic notation. This projective, temporal virtuality of the Fluxus work—always in-becoming through its appearance as multifarious versions of the concrete—could not be further from the spatial and phenomenological virtuality of digital forms of communication and participation, in which, as Boris Groys writes, “the body of the person using the computer is of no consequence.”³⁰

* * *

In his catalogue essay for the 1993 major Fluxus retrospective *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, Andreas Huyssen made the provisional claim that Fluxus may be the “master-code of postmodernism,” pointing to the group’s relationship of critical mimesis to capitalist culture as well as its position as one of the first radical art movements of the postwar decades to recognize the futility of avant-garde strategies of the early 20th century.³¹ Rather than attempting an overt critique of the order of things in the manner of those earlier movements, such as the turn to violent anti-art tactics, manifestoes, exuberant public demonstrations, and propagandistic imagery, Fluxus responded to the rapid institutionalization and neutralization of such radical art practices by eagerly taking on the task of commoditizing and promoting itself. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has similarly noted that the Fluxus relationship to commodity culture was mimetic in

²⁹ Joseph, “Chance, Indeterminacy, Multiplicity.”

³⁰ Groys goes on: “The body of the person using the computer is of no consequence—apart, say, from the physical manifestations of fatigue that are inevitable after a few hours in front of the screen. The experience of bodily presence, for which modern art has continually striven, is absent in virtual communication. As a computer user, one is engrossed in solitary communication with the medium; one falls into a state of self-oblivion, of unawareness of one’s own body...” Boris Groys, “A Genealogy of Participatory Art,” in *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*, ed. Frieling, 29.

³¹ Huyssen, “Back to the Future: Fluxus in Context,” 142. My understanding of the term “master-code” entails Fluxus’ collective embodiment of all the major terms of postmodern culture at their earliest point of identification.

that its strategies of production, distribution, and circulation mirrored structures of the mail order catalogue, street vendor, and publishing house, but that it was also polemical in its moments of ludic rupture.³² Fluxus objects involved gags, bathroom humor, obsolete or broken objects, and the disappointment of viewers' expectations. Fluxus artists participated in commodity structures in order to make their works available to a wider audience beyond the art world, to maintain control over the distribution of their work, and to manipulate market structures in humorous and critical ways. Yet the moments of ludic rupture wherein a Fluxus commodity humorously fails to deliver anything but a punch-line—moments that Buchloh has argued contain the sole potential of a critical practice—ultimately have “minimally redeeming functions.”³³

For these critics the radical capacities of Fluxus gestures are minimal, the importance of Fluxus for art history being mainly to serve as a barometer of a changing cultural climate in which the avant-garde no longer holds promise. Following Huyssen's logic, Fluxus is not an avant-garde project at all but rather a postmodern one, since it recapitulates historical energies in a way that seems more traditionalist than radical as obsolete avant-garde models are clung to in a way that neglects the production of the radically new. Indeed, Maciunas spent much of his energies defining Fluxus in terms of “neo-dada” and self-canonizing Fluxus work in collections and anthologies at the moment of its production as if the movement was already dead. As much as Fluxus proclaimed an ethos of renewal and revolution, as a self-described “rear-guard” it looked back to vintage graphics, obsolete mass-cultural forms, and employed extremely low-tech ways of doing things.

³² Buchloh, “Robert Watts: Animate Objects—Inanimate Subjects,” 531-553.

³³ Buchloh, “Robert Watts: Animate Objects—Inanimate Subjects,” 551.

The arrival of postmodernism heralded a dynamic efflorescence of developments in technology and culture that has democratized those spheres, leading paradoxically to an utter flattening of culture into a state of what Hal Foster has called “a paradigm-of-no-paradigm.”³⁴ Fluxus confronted the postmodern condition primarily through the matrix of the commodity. Buchloh has written that for Fluxus, the commodity’s “sole dimension of promise (if any) would remain its intrinsically egalitarian element and its potential to establish a competence of object relations.”³⁵ The Fluxus engagement with the commodity took place on a number of fronts. In New York, Maciunas maintained something of a central distribution center, putting himself in charge of production and distribution of hundreds of Fluxus goods, which were sent away to be sold at artist-run outposts elsewhere. Despite his attempts to retain control over the Fluxus “brand” it proliferated anarchically, hijacked by Fluxus-identifying artists who employed the name without Maciunas’s collaboration or approval.³⁶ Fluxus works played on the formal similarity between the logic of the readily exchangeable, transmittable postmodern image and the “egalitarian” quality of the commodity (itself informed by the egalitarianism of capital’s frictionless, universal fungibility), positing in the face of both an alternative model of exchange that borrowed something of the commodity fetish while undermining it through the invitation to touch and rendering it promiscuously expansive (their objects would never cohere as discrete things).

³⁴ Hal Foster, “This Funeral is for the Wrong Corpse,” *Design and Crime (and other diatribes)* (London: Verso, 2002), 128.

³⁵ Buchloh, “Robert Watts: Animate Objects-Inanimate Subjects,” 548.

³⁶ Over several years Maciunas would decry Dick Higgins, Wolf Vostell, Charlotte Moorman and others for co-opting Fluxus without consulting him. Ironically his accusations were often framed in terms of the perpetrator’s egoistic claim to Fluxus, without Maciunas’s self-reflecting upon his own possessive relationship to the name.

I take seriously Huysen's claim that Fluxus is postmodernism's master-code, but I would argue as well that this did not negate its significance as a postwar avant-garde if we understand the avant-garde to be invested in the bringing together of art and life for the sake of imagining and bringing forth symbolic (if not real) political transformation. Given its mirroring relationship to consumer culture and the ways it thereby reorients our expectations of that culture to critical effect, we can see Fluxus as adhering to both a postmodern and avant-garde project. Fluxus was an avant-garde refigured for the moment of postmodernism. It was, in other words, the foundational "postmodern avant-garde."

Figures

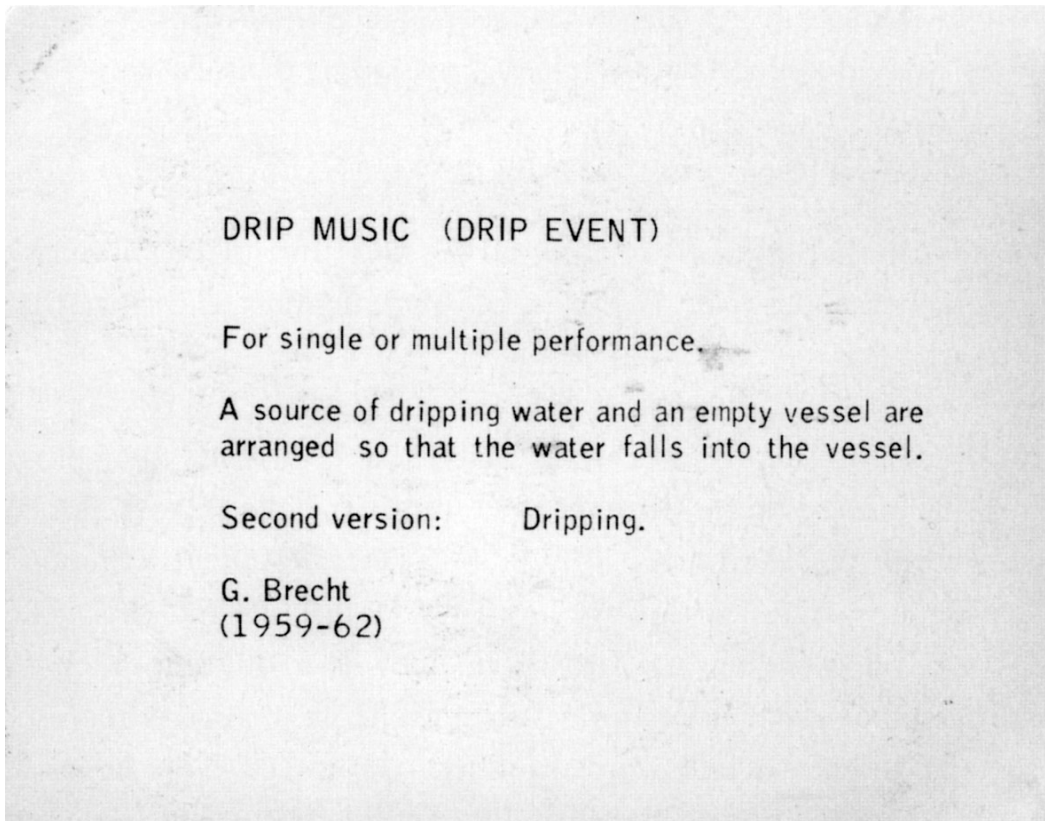


Figure I.1. George Brecht, *Drip Music*, 1959-1962.



Figure I.2. Dick Higgins performing *Drip Music*, Copenhagen, 1962.



Figure I.3. George Maciunas performing *Drip Music*, Düsseldorf, 1963.



Figure I.4. Fluxus members performing *Drip Music*, conducted by Maciunas, Düsseldorf, 1963.

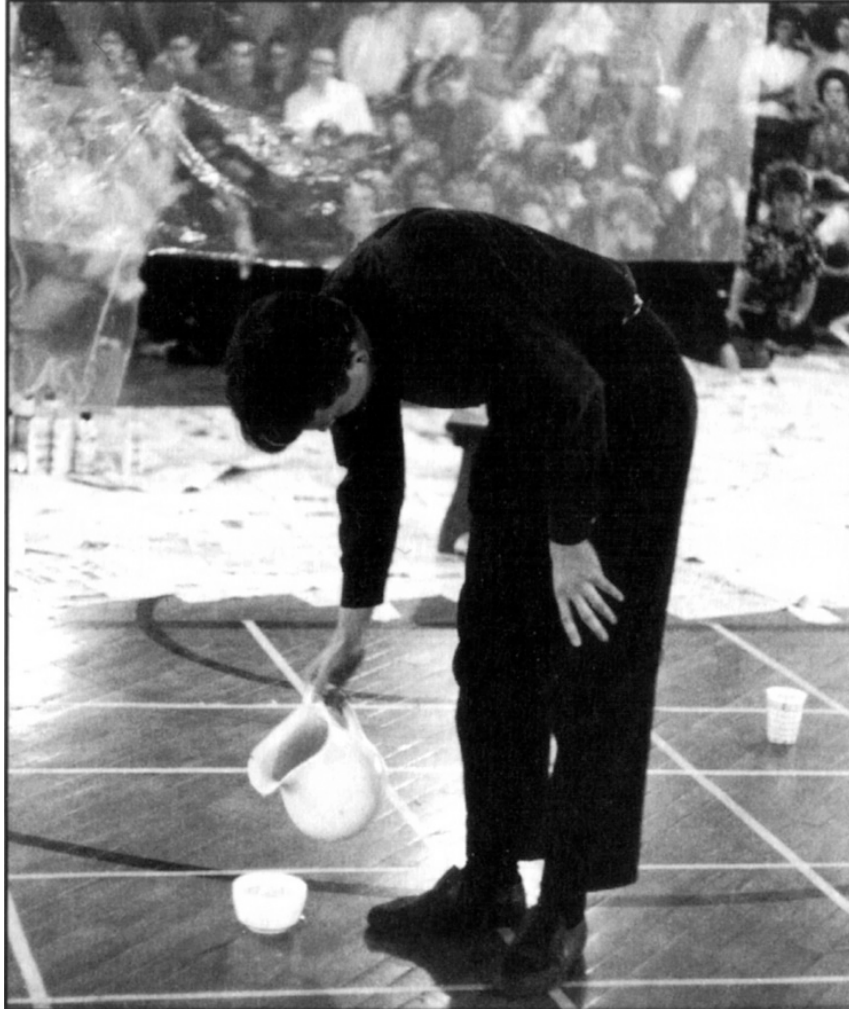


Figure I.5. Brecht performing *Drip Music*, Rutgers University, 1963.



Figure I.6. Maciunas performing *Drip Music*, Amsterdam, 1963.



Figure I.7. Nam June Paik, *Zen for Head*, performance of La Monte Young, *Composition 1960 #10 to Bob Morris*, Wiesbaden, 1962.

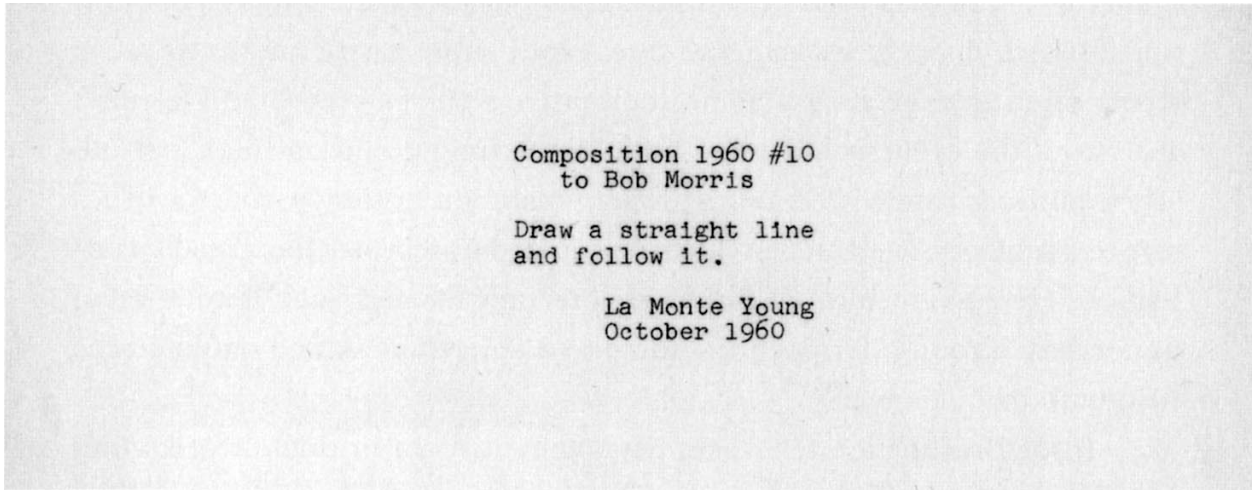


Figure I.8. La Monte Young, *Composition 1960 #10 to Bob Morris*, 1960.

Manifesto:

2. To affect, or bring to a certain state, by subjecting to, or treating with, a flux. "Fluxed into another world." South.
3. Med. To cause a discharge from, as in purging.

flux (flŭks), *n.* [OF. fr. L. *fluxus*, fr. *fluere*, *fluxum*, to flow. See FLUENT; cf. FLUSH, *n.* (of cards).] 1. Med. a A flowing or fluid discharge from the bowels or other part; esp. an excessive and morbid discharge: as, the bloody flux, or dysentery. b The matter thus discharged.

Purge the world of bourgeois sickness, "intellectual", professional & commercialized culture, PURGE the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art, — PURGE THE WORLD OF "EUROPANISM"!

2. Act of flowing: a continuous moving on or passing by, as of a flowing stream; a continuing succession of changes.
3. A stream; copious flow; flood; outflow.
4. The setting in of the tide toward the shore. Cf. REFLUX.
5. State of being liquid through heat; fusion. Rare.

PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD AND TIDE IN ART,
Promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART REALITY to be fully grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals.

7. Chem. & Metal. a Any substance or mixture used to promote fusion, esp. the fusion of metals or minerals. Common metallurgical fluxes are silica and silicates (acidic), lime and limestone (basic), and fluorite (neutral). b Any substance applied to surfaces to be joined by soldering or welding, just prior to or during the operation, to clean and free them from oxide, thus promoting their union, as rosin.

FUSE the cadres of cultural, social & political revolutionaries into united front & action.

Figure I.9. George Maciunas, *Manifesto*, 1963.



Figure I.10. George Brecht, *Water Yam* (produced by George Maciunas), 1963.

THREE AQUEOUS EVENTS

- ice
- water
- steam

Summer, 1961

Figure I.11. George Brecht, *Three Aqueous Events*, 1961.

THREE DANCES

1.
Saliva

2.
Pause.
Urination.
Pause.

3.
Perspiration.

Summer, 1961
G. Brecht

Figure I.12. George Brecht, *Three Dances*, 1961.

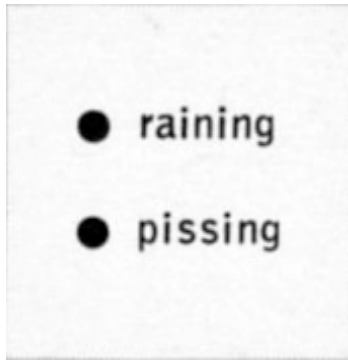


Figure I.13. George Brecht, Untitled [raining, pissing], 1962.

CANDLE-PIECE FOR RADIOS

1. There are about one and one-half times as many radios as performers. The radios are placed about the room and turned on at lowest volume. A stack of instruction cards from a shuffled master-deck is dealt, face-up, at each radio.

2. The room lights are turned out. (Birthday) Candles are lighted and given to the performers, each of whom places one candle by each of the instruction card stacks. After doing this, each performer finds himself at a radio. He performs the instructions given on the top card, places the card at the bottom of the deck, and proceeds to another, unoccupied, radio.

3. Each performer, then, finds himself performing a card instruction and going to another radio. He does this until he finds either that a card is unreadable, or that the candle at a radio is out completely. In either event, he turns off that radio, and, when no more radios are available, returns to his seat.

4. Instruction card notation is as follows:

Pause 3 means pause for a slow count of 3.

Volume up means raise volume to audibility.

Volume down means lower volume as far as possible without turning the radio off.

R and L apply to tuning changes, R-3 meaning right about 3 cm. on the dial, L-5 meaning left on the dial about 5 cm.

If the direction brings the dial indicator as far as it can go to the end of the dial, then the distance remaining is to be made up in the opposite direction.

1/2sec(ond), applied to volume or tuning changes, is a convention denoting the shortest practical duration.

5. The instruction card universe is constructed as follows:

a. An equal number of cards of type I and II are made up.

b. Type I follows the form:

"Pause (0-9), vol up 1/2sec, (L or R) (1-9), vol down, pause (0-9)."

Type II follows the form:

"(L or R) (1-9), pause (0-9), vol up 1/2sec, vol down, pause (0-9)."

There are an equal number of L and R cards of each type.

Numerical values in parentheses are chosen from the indicated range, using a table of random numbers.

George Brecht
Summer, 1959

Figure I.14. George Brecht, *Candle-Piece for Radios*, 1959.

CARD-PIECE FOR VOICE

1. There are from 1 to 54 performers. Performers are seated side by side, except for the "chairman", a performer who sits facing the others. They rehearse before the performance to develop common vocables of the four types described below.
2. The chairman holds a deck of ordinary playing cards (four complete suits plus Joker and Extra Joker). He tosses each card into the air so that it is free to fall face up or face down, then re-forms the deck and shuffles it, keeping each card in its face-up or face-down direction.
3. He then deals one card at a time to each performer in turn, including himself, until all cards have been dealt.
4. There is a second stack of "phoneme cards", blank cards on each of which a single phoneme from one or more languages familiar to all performers has been written. These are shuffled and dealt, face up, one at a time, to each performer in turn, who keeps them in a stack separate from the playing cards.
5. At a nod from the chairman, each performer takes a playing card from the top of his sub-deck, performs a sound or not, according to the system of cues given below, and discards the card. Unless there is a signal from the chairman to repeat, or stop, the performance, each performer stops at the end of his sub-deck.

6. The Cue System:

Suits: indicate the "vocal" organ primarily responsible for the sound production.

Hearts: Lips

Diamonds: Vocal cords and throat

Clubs: Cheeks

Spades: Tongue

Sounds may be produced in any way, that is, with the breath, by slapping (of the cheeks), etc.

Number Cards: indicate duration of sound, approximately in seconds.

Face Cards (disregarding suit): indicate the speaking of a phoneme, with free duration, pronunciation, and dynamics, roughly as it might be heard in ordinary conversation. Specification and order of the phonemes is as indicated by the phoneme cards, read consecutively.

Card Backs: indicate approximately five seconds of silence.
Joker and Extra Joker: are cues only for the chairman, other performers ignoring them.

Joker: Chairman crosses his arms at the end of his deck, signaling one repeat, and each performer, having reached the end of his own deck, runs through his cards once more, in the order in which they now occur (last card first). Then each performer stops, including the chairman (who ignores the joker during the repeat).

Extra Joker: Chairman raises his arms, signaling an immediate stop to the performance.

George Brecht
Summer, 1959

Figure I.15. George Brecht, *Card-Piece for Voice*, 1959.

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)

Figure I.16. George Brecht, *Comb Music (Comb Event)*, 1959-1962.

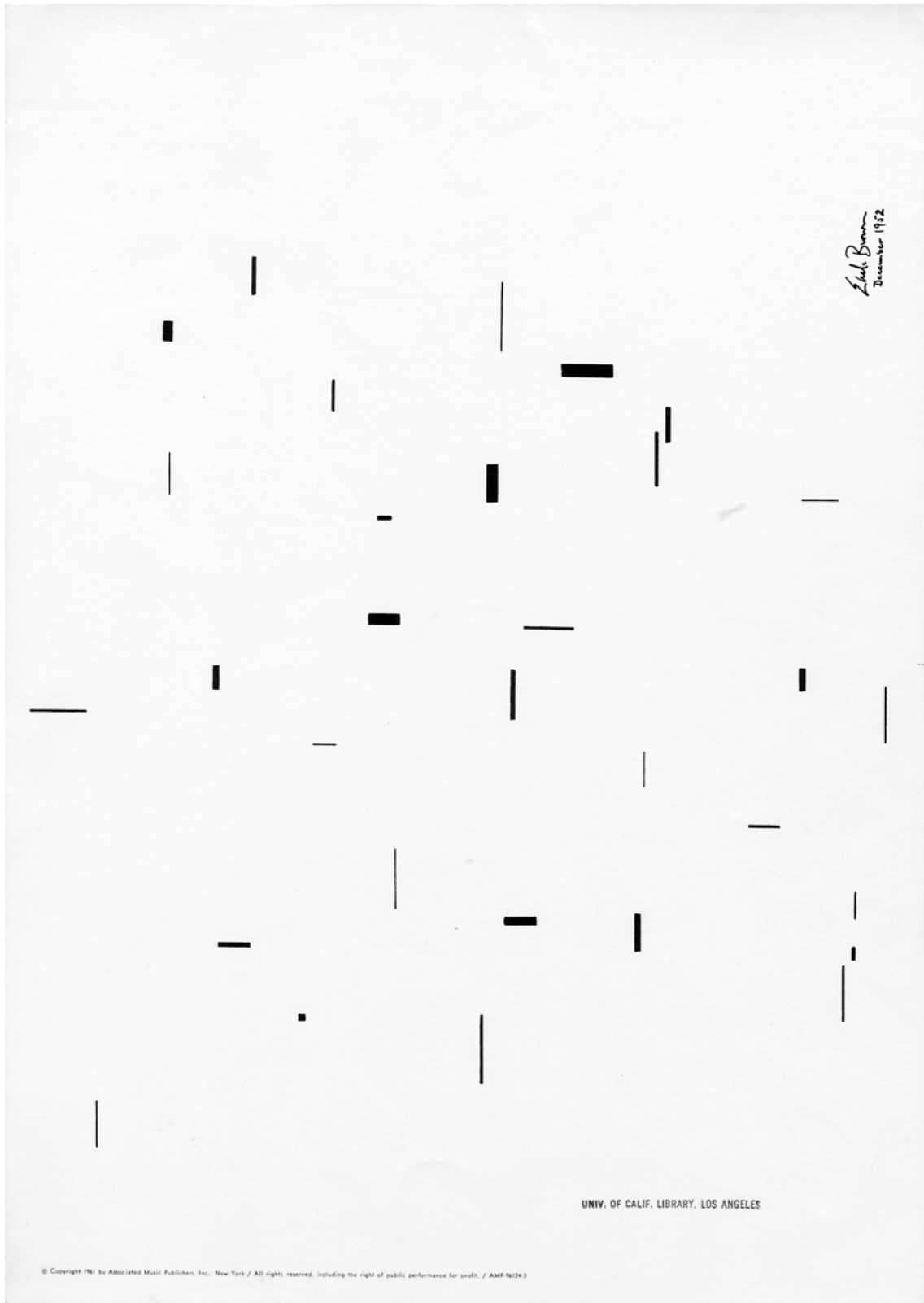


Figure I.17. Earle Brown, *December 1952*, 1952.

INCIDENTAL MUSIC

Five Piano Pieces,
any number playable successively or simultaneously, in any
order and combination, with one another and with other pieces.

1.
The piano seat is tilted on its base and brought to rest against
a part of the piano.
2.
Wooden blocks.
A single block is placed inside the piano. A block is placed
upon this block, then a third upon the second, and so forth,
singly, until at least one block falls from the column.
3.
Photographing the piano situation.
4.
Three dried peas or beans are dropped, one after another, onto
the keyboard. Each such seed remaining on the keyboard is
attached to the key or keys nearest it with a single piece of
pressure-sensitive tape.
5.
The piano seat is suitable arranged, and the performer seats
himself.

Summer, 1961. G. Brecht

Figure I.18. George Brecht, *Incidental Music*, 1961.

Einladung für

zum **Kleinen Sommerfest**

zur Eröffnung der Ausstellung

MAGI - Kaspary

„Après John Cage“ George Maciunas (U.S.A.)
Benjamin Patterson (U.S.A. - Paris)

1. Einführung: Neo-dada in New York Maciunas
Chefredakteur der neuen Kunst-Zeitschrift FLUXUS

3. Variation für Kontrabaß Patterson

2. Duo *Rauscher* Patterson

4. Lippen-Musik *Homage to Adriano Olivetti* Maciunas

Tribut an Grösste der Kunst u. d. Zeit
Sonnabend, den 9. Juni 1962
Jed' Gurt ab 20.30 Uhr

194?
Zürich-USA
Ear Music - Terry Riley
Constellation no.2 - Dick Higgins

Um Anmeldung wird höflich gebeten
Tel. 35241

Galerie Parnass · Wuppertal · E · Moltkestrasse 67

Gerdur Paris
Edel
Rauer-Sirrenberg Wuppertal
Boehm
Schmitz
Grzimek Berlin
Englert
Le Blanc Antwerpen
Schlieker Bochum
Hanebeck Remscheid
Hulbeck New York
v. Rothkirch Lohr / M.
Bartels Düsseldorf
Rothe
Fausto Go Neapel

*einige von Zufall
507. kann werden auch die John Cage'sche*

*Kaspary
Jed' Gurt's USA kündigt
abkommen. n.
Hörst du
Namen zum Paris*

Figure I.19. Program for “Kleinen Sommerfest – Après John Cage,”
Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, Germany, 1962.



Figure I.20. Arthur Caspari reading George Maciunas's text in German, "Neo-Dada in den Vereinigten Staaten" (Neo-Dada in the USA), 1962.

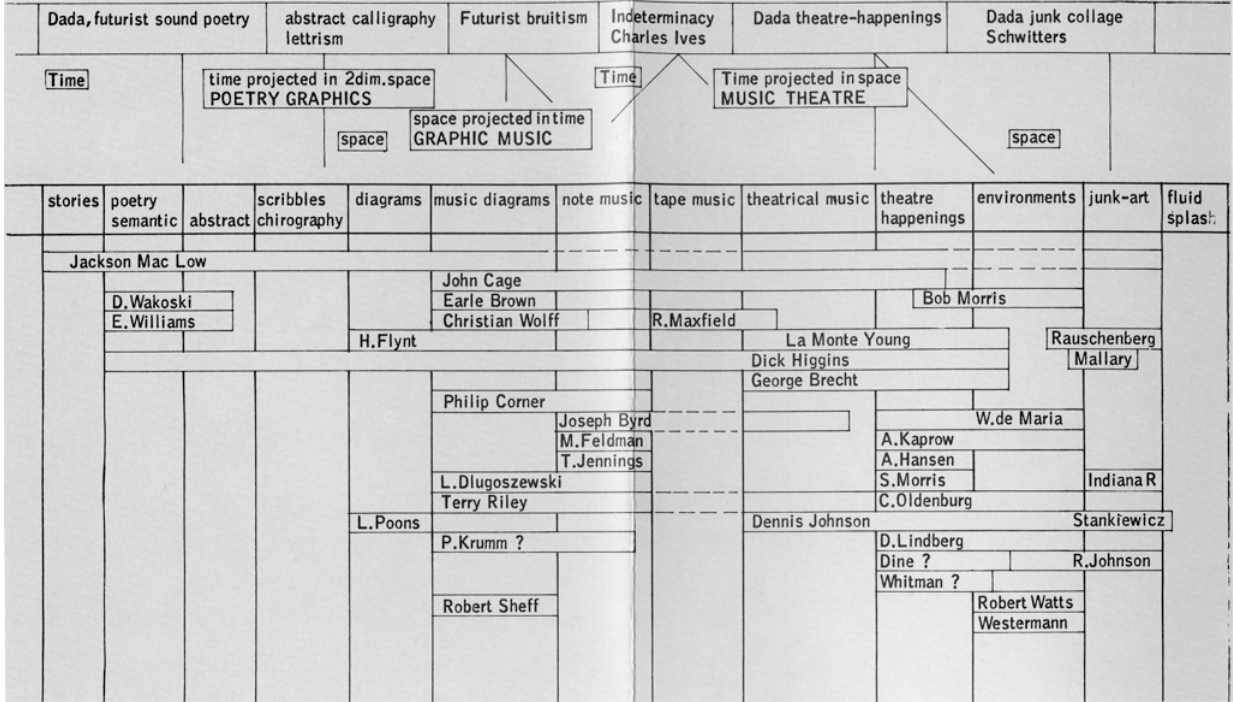


Figure I.21. George Maciunas, *Time/time projected in 2 dim. space POETRY GRAPHICS/space/ space projected in time GRAPHIC MUSIC/Time/Time projected in space MUSIC THEATRE/ space*, 1962.

4.28 **Burette Music**

from burette

crumpled soil

drinking glass

Rate

.05 cc/drop

fast dropping → 300/min.

slow dropping → ²⁴⁻³⁶ 120/min.

200 p.c.

@ .05 cc./drop, fast rate → 15 cc./min.

slow rate → ^{1/2} 7.5 cc./min.

30.0	10.5	24	36	15/30.0	33
.05	.05	.05	.05	50	1.5/50.0
15.00	6.00	1.20	1.80		7.5

50 cc. at the fast rate, lasts 3 1/3 min.

" " " slow " " 33 1/3 min.

some paper (no sound)

some foil (sound)

cloths saturated then drips (but wet cloths before piece)

smaller cloth

wooden embroidery hoop

paper and foil strips

one plate

Figure I.22. George Brecht, notebook, April 1959.

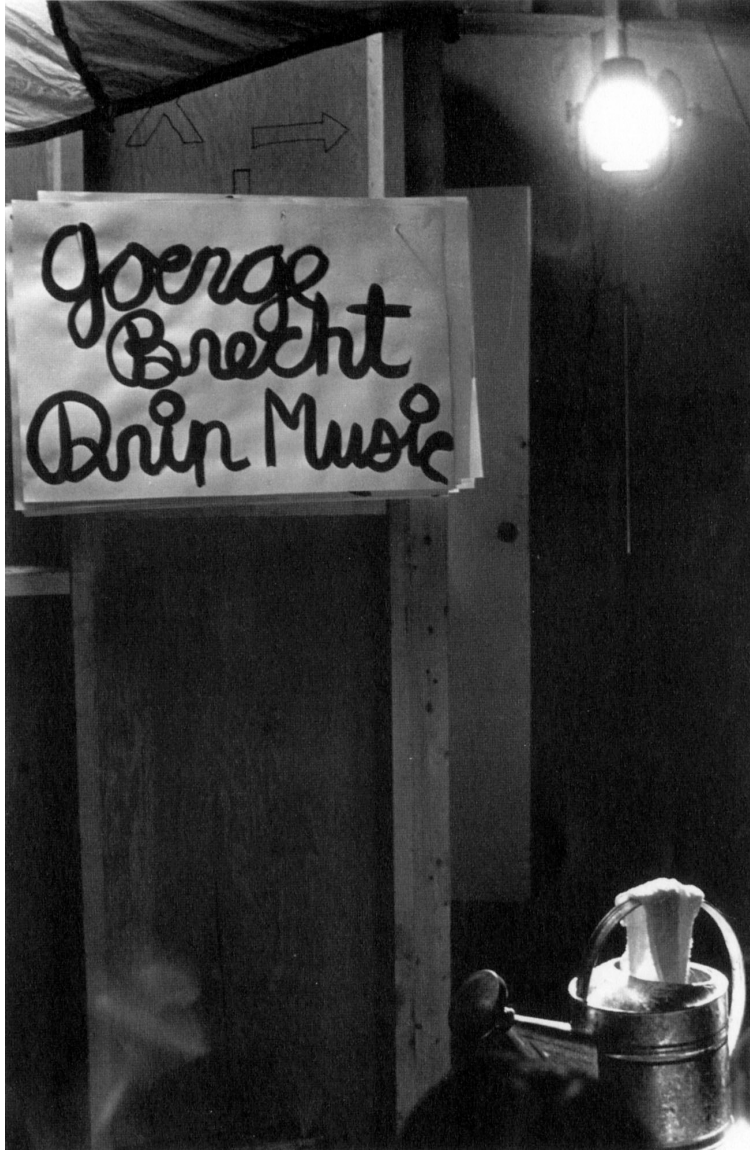


Figure I.23. Anonymous realization of *Drip Music*, Fluxhall, New York, 1964.

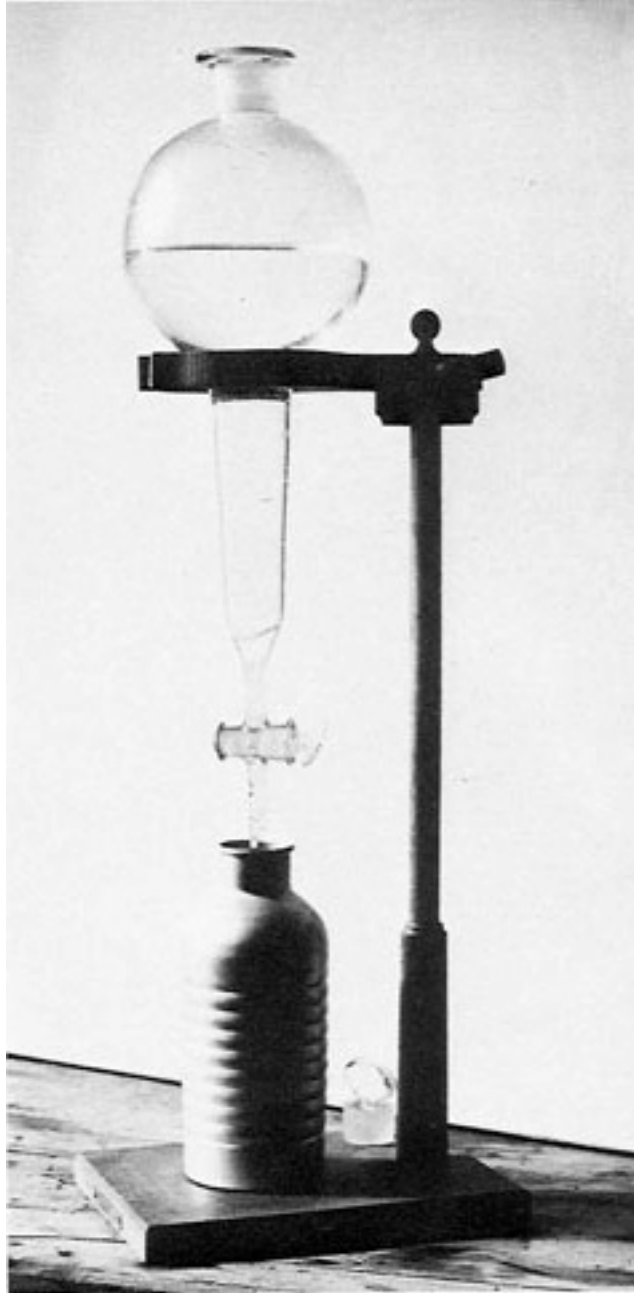


Figure I.24. George Brecht, *Drip Music*, 1966.

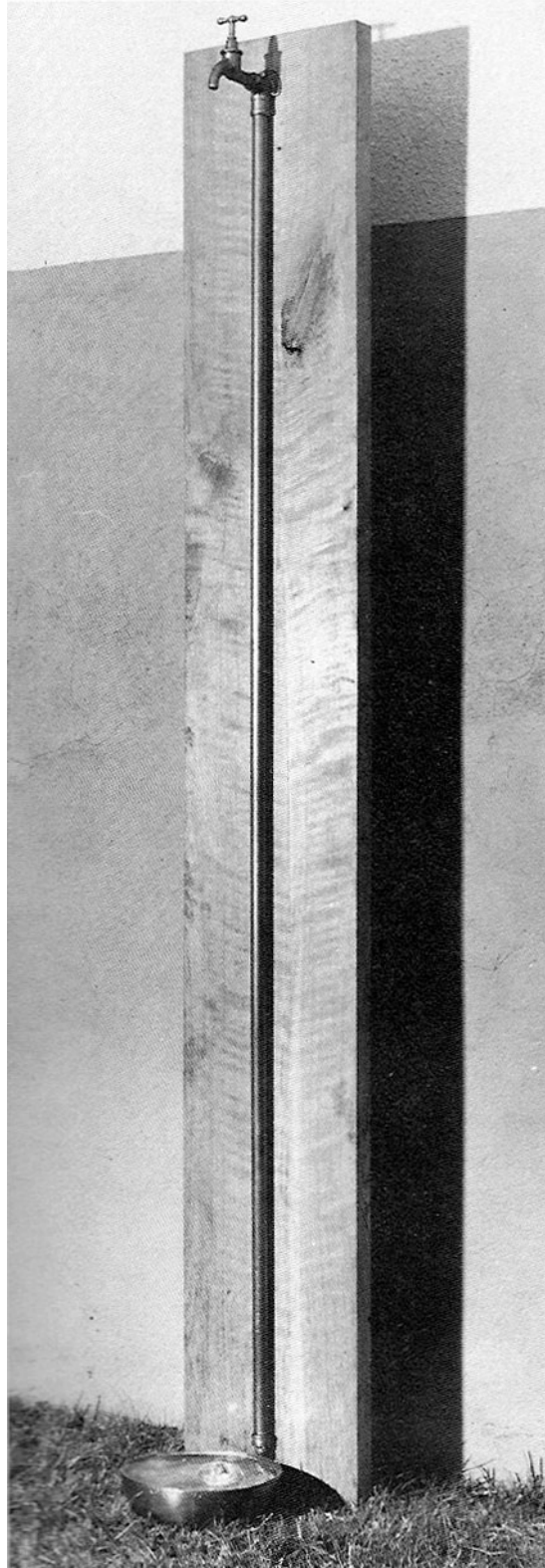


Figure I.25. George Brecht, *Drip Music*, c. 1970.

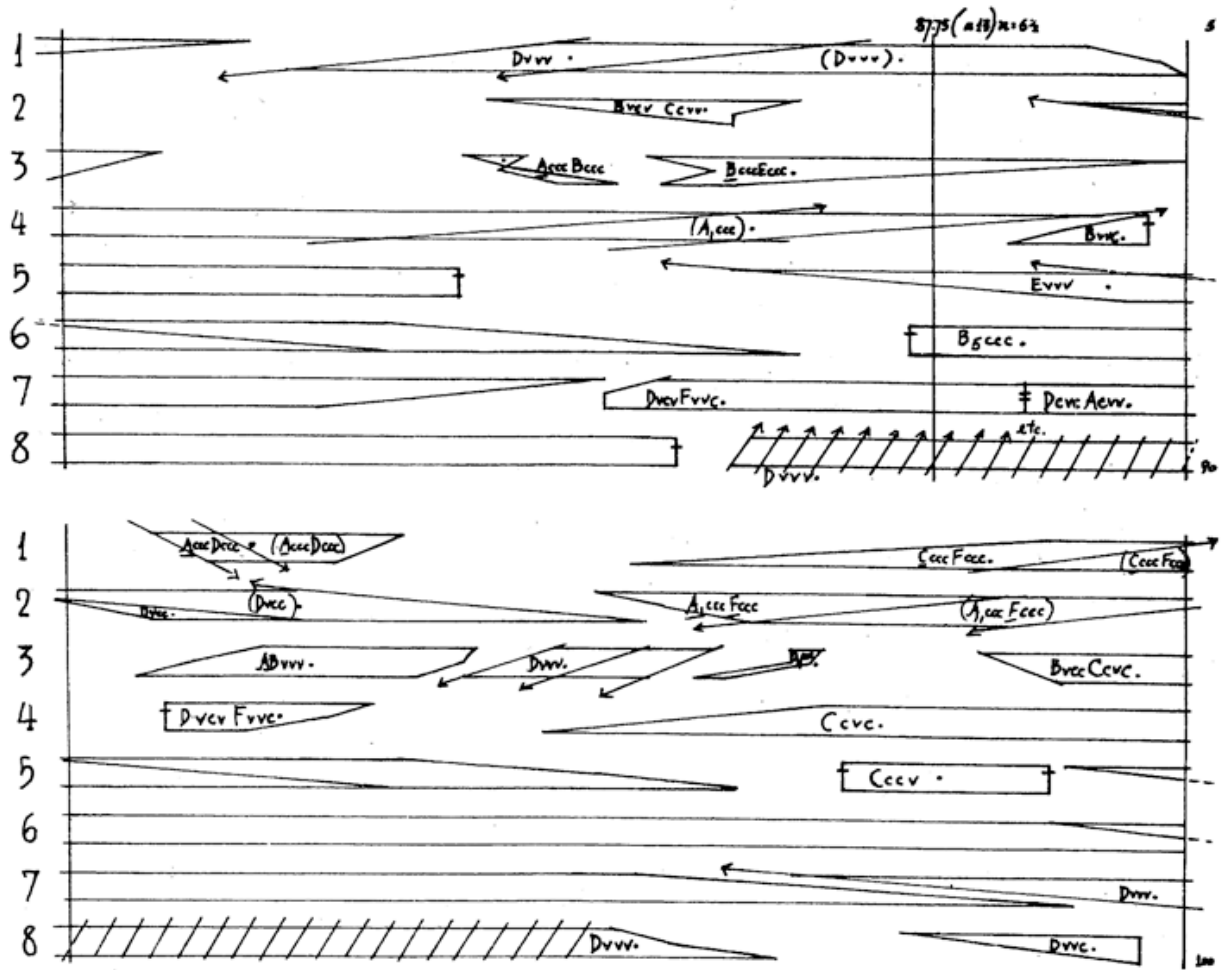


Figure 1.1. John Cage, *Williams Mix*, 1952.

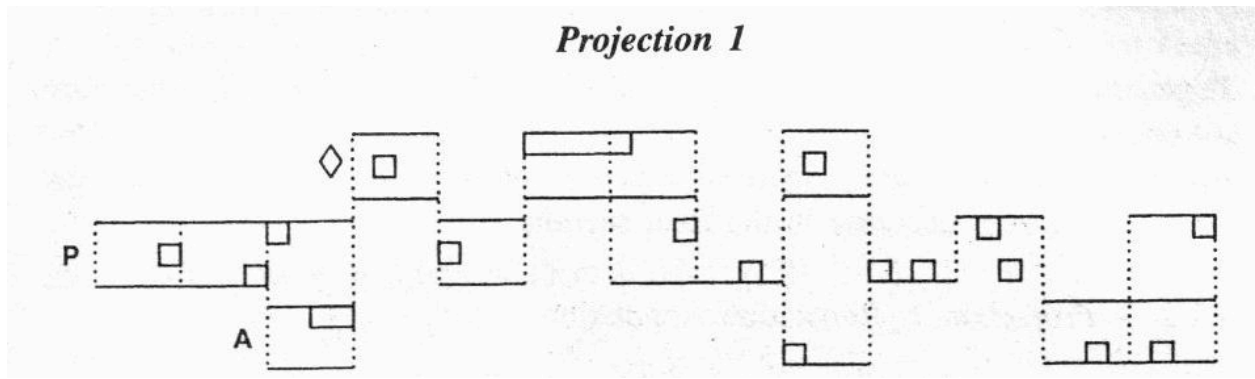


Figure 1.2. Morton Feldman, *Projection I*, 1950.

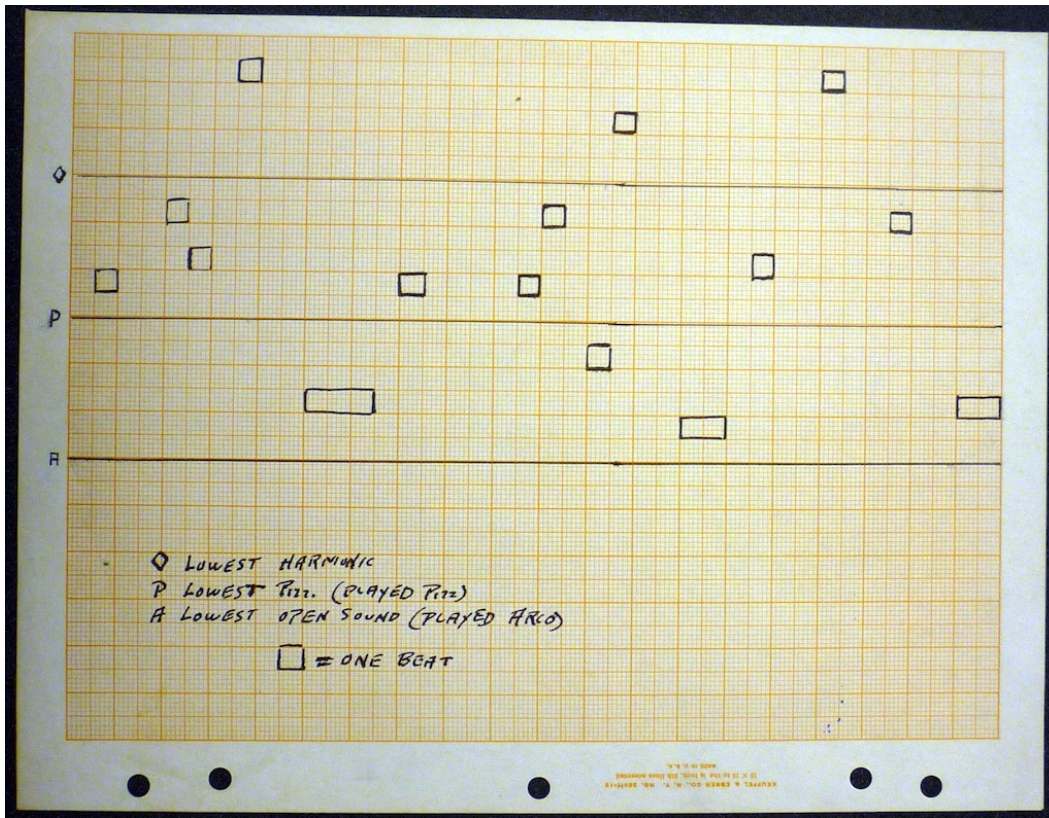


Figure 1.3. Morton Feldman, Untitled graph piece, n.d. (c. 1950), David Tudor Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

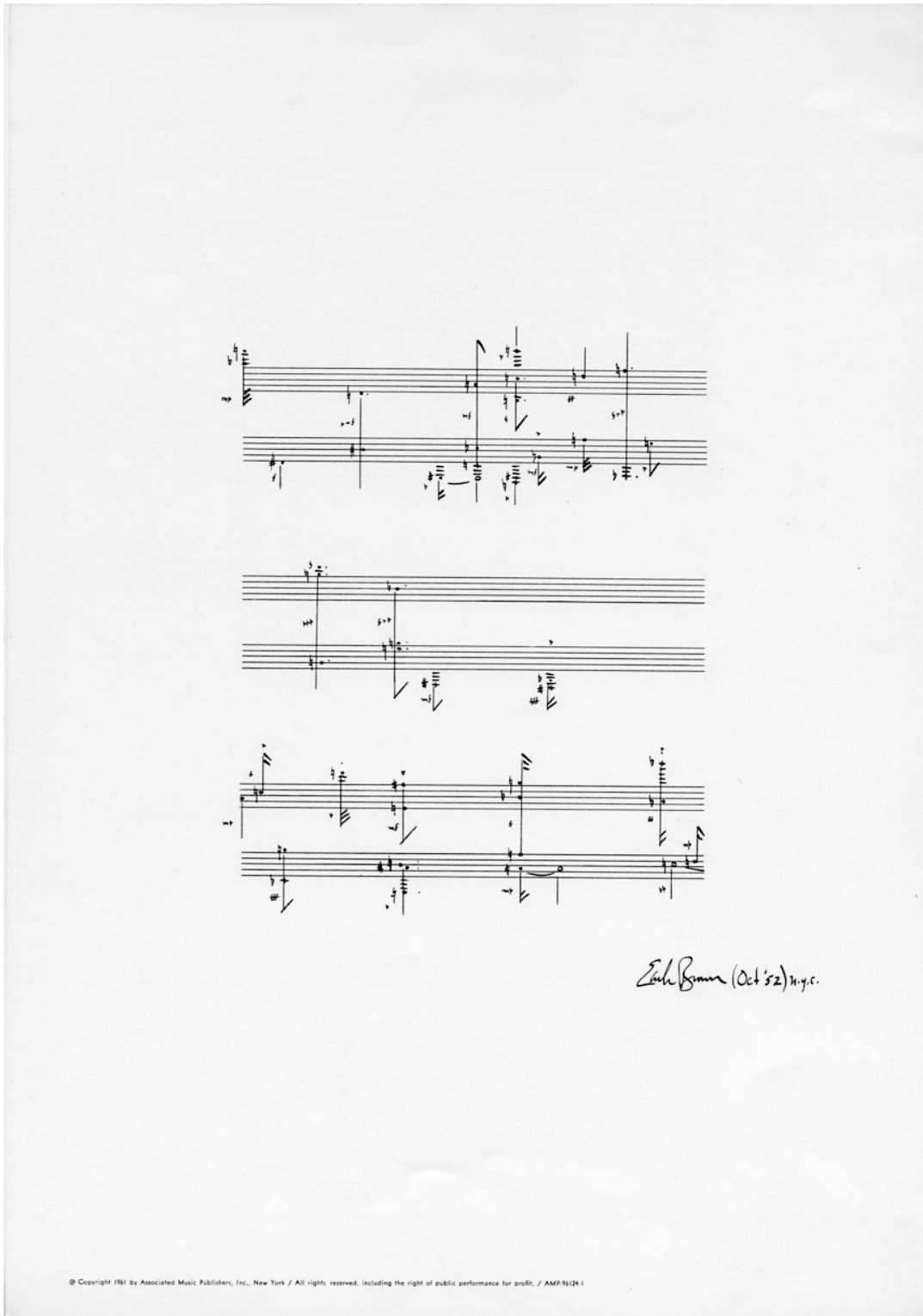


Figure 1.4. Earle Brown, *October 1952*, 1952.

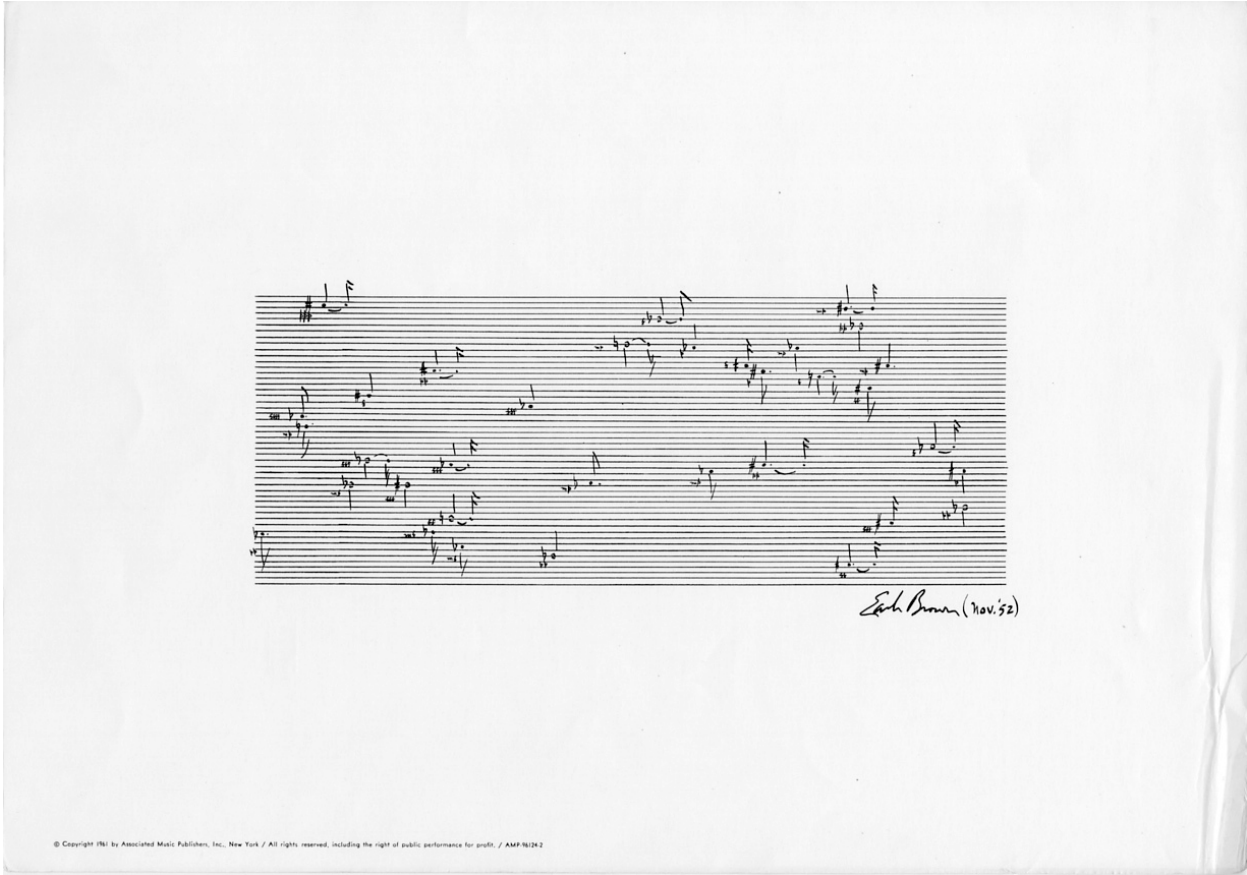


Figure 1.5. Earle Brown, *November 1952* (“Synergy”), 1952.

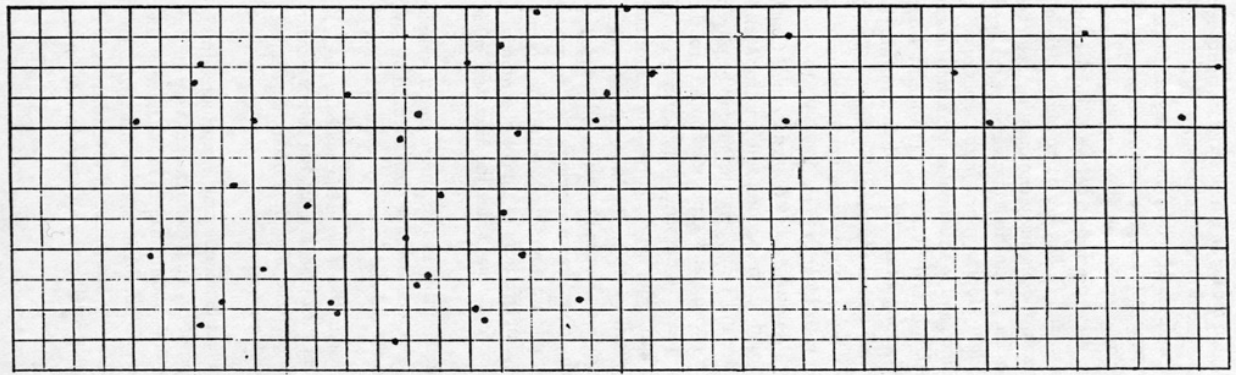
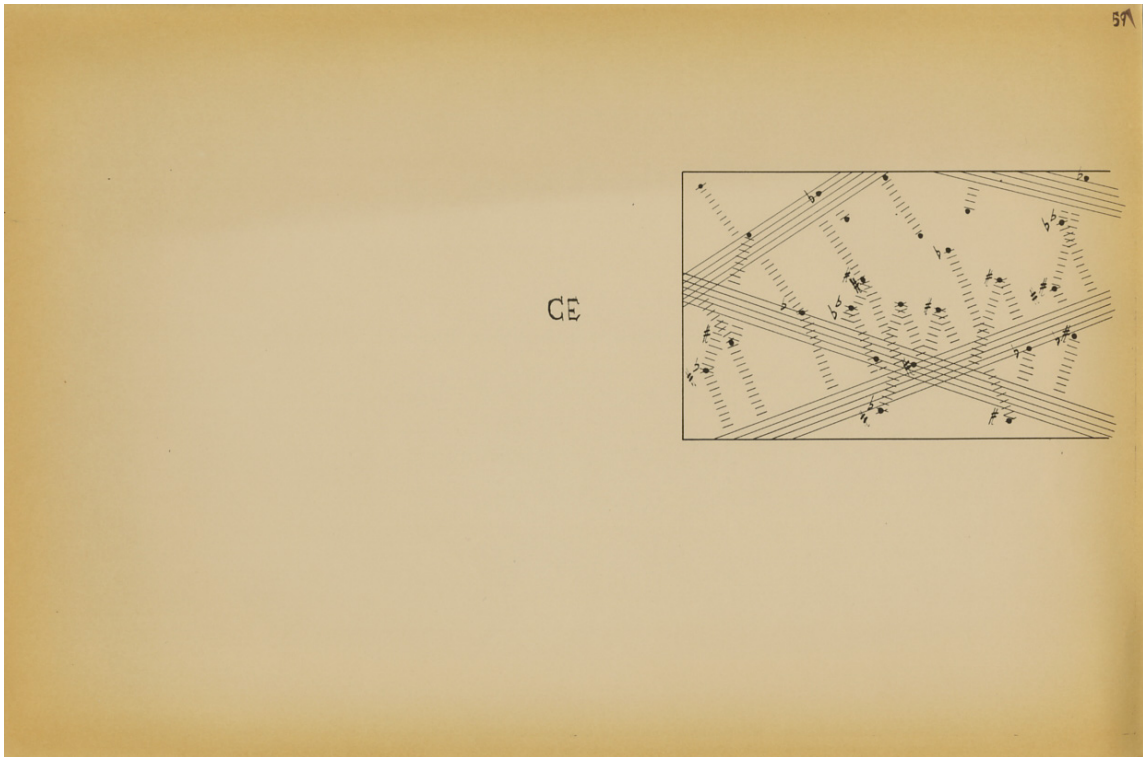
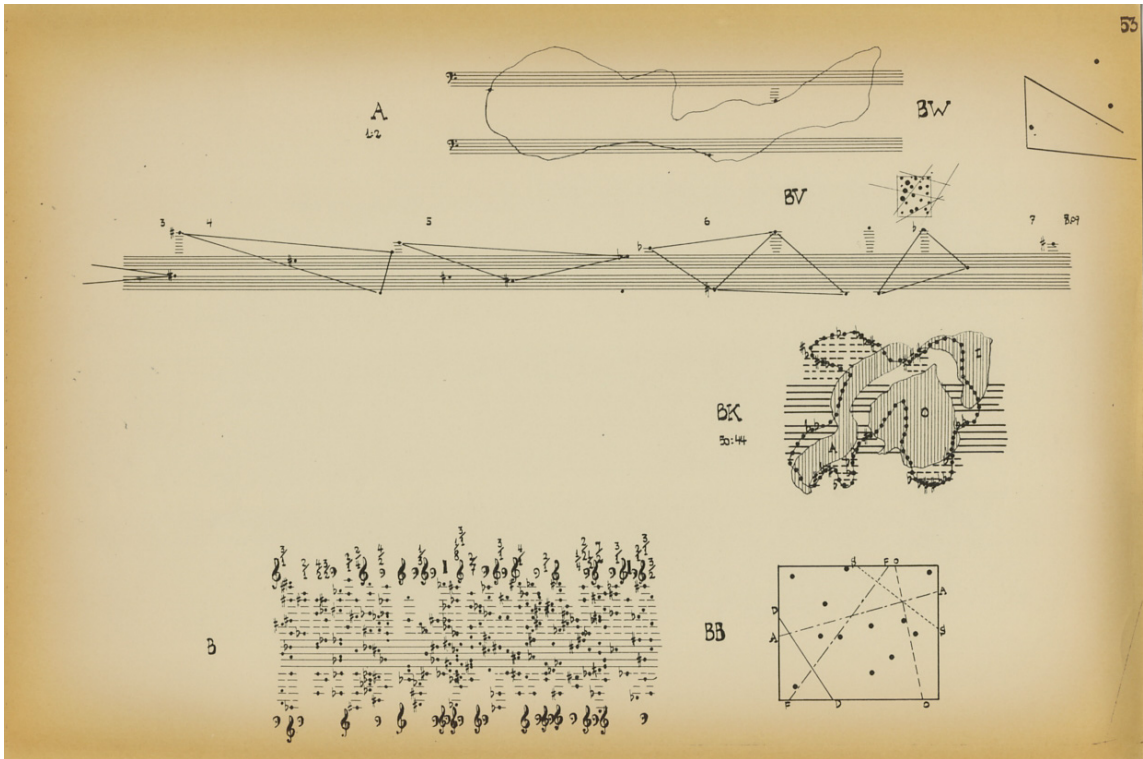


Figure 1.6. John Cage, *Music for Carillon No. 1* (excerpt), 1952.



Figures 1.7, 1.8. John Cage, *Concert for Piano and Orchestra, Solo for Piano* (excerpt), 1957-58.

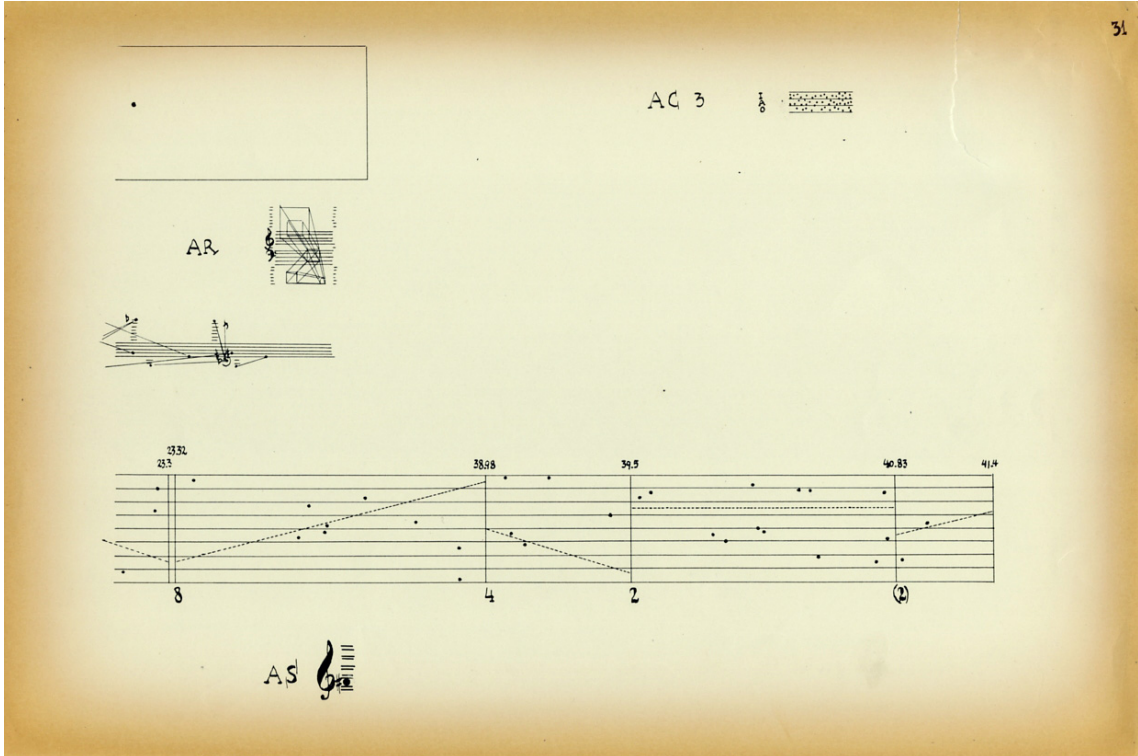


Figure 1.9. John Cage, *Concert for Piano and Orchestra, Solo for Piano* (excerpt), 1957-58.

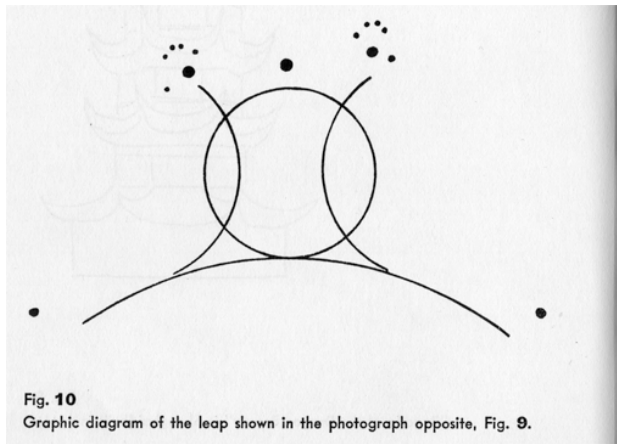


Figure 1.10. Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane* (excerpt), 1947.

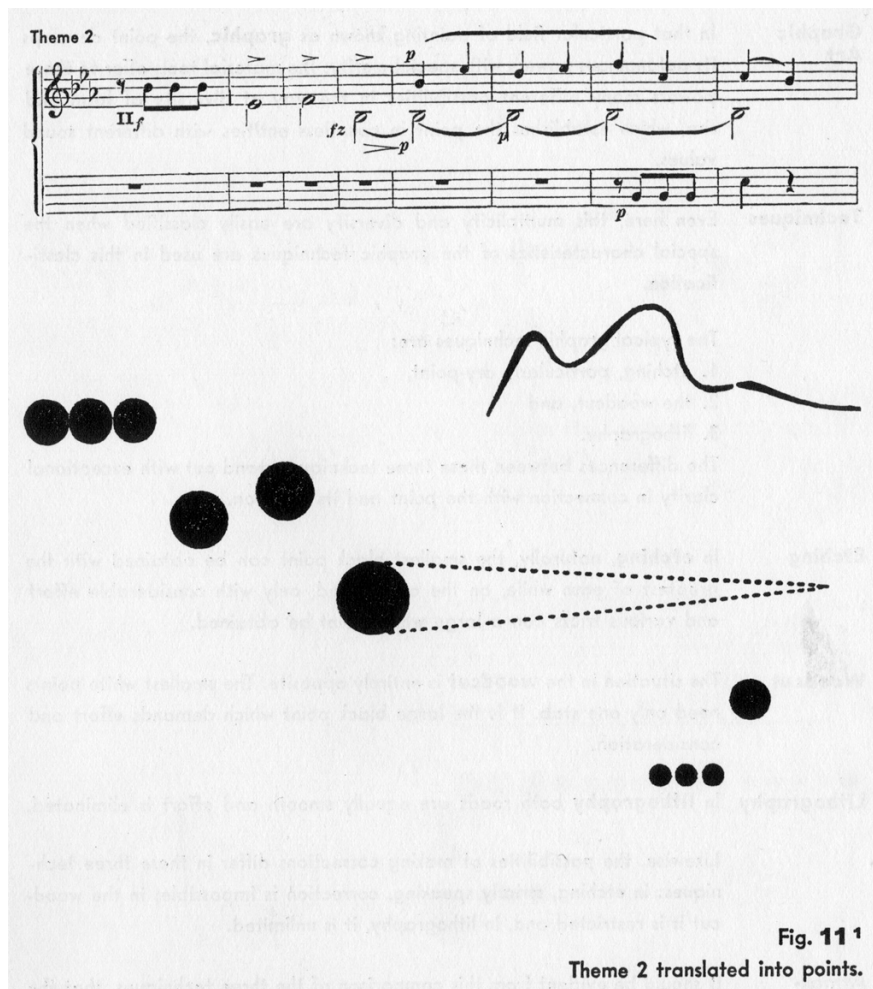


Figure 1.11. Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane* (excerpt), 1947.

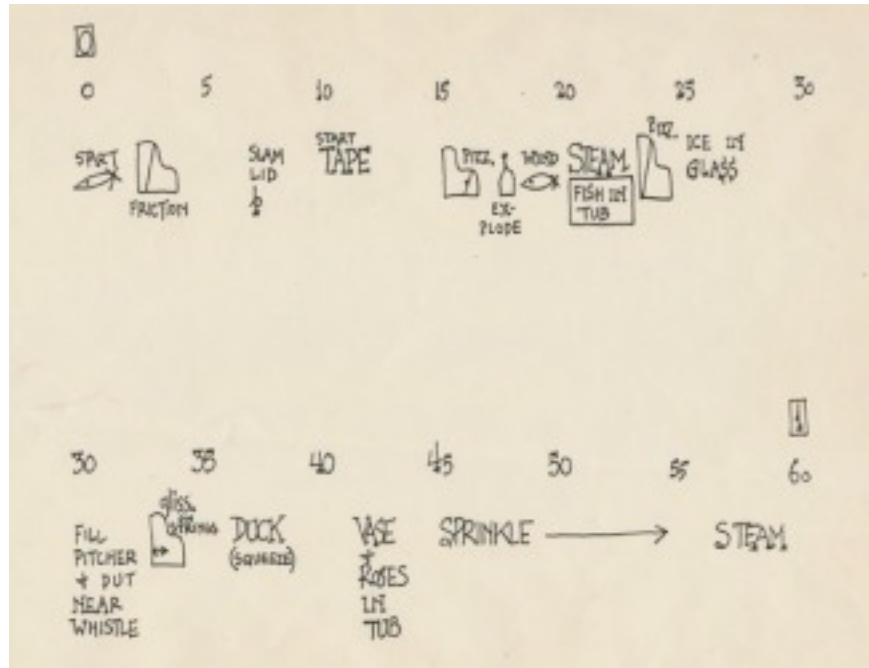


Figure 1.12. John Cage, *Water Walk* (excerpt), 1959.

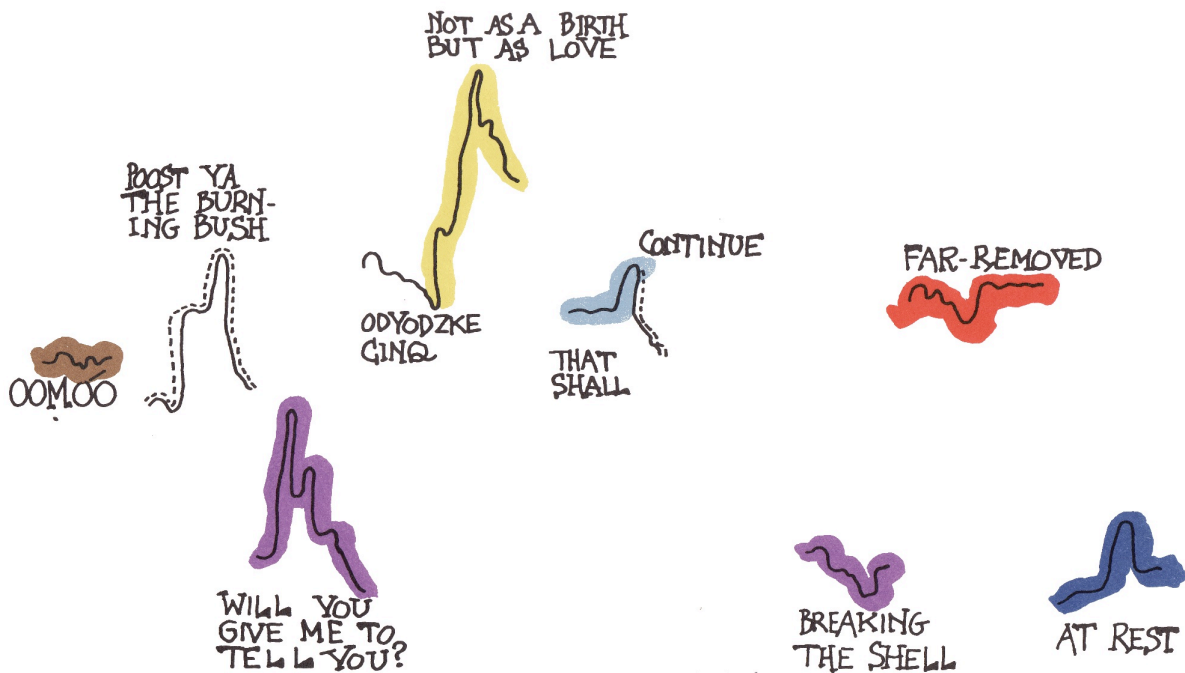
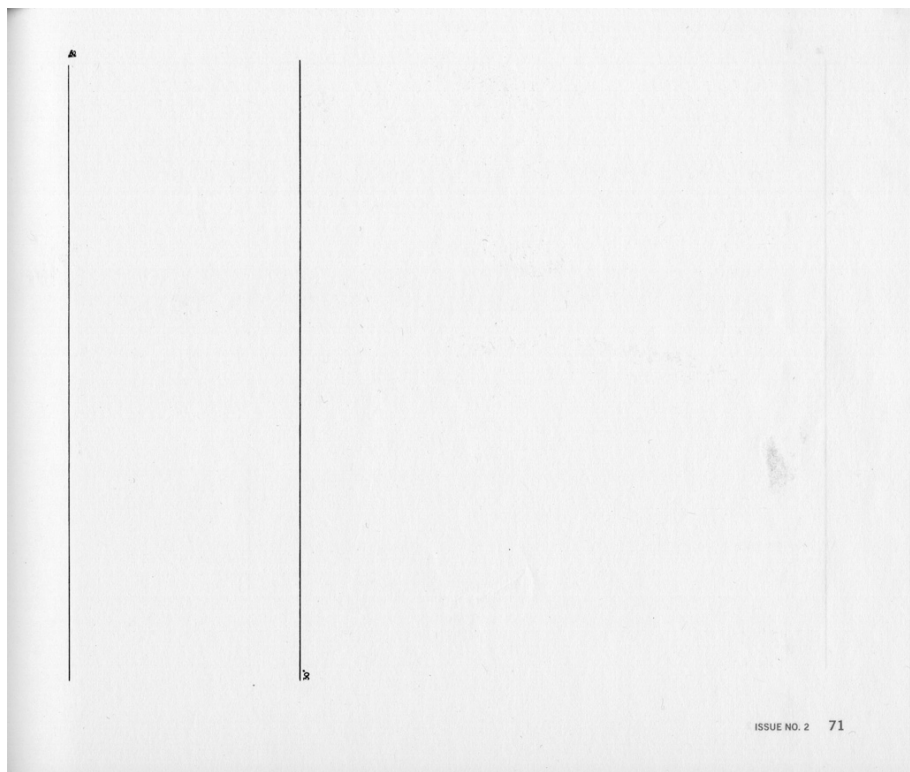


Figure 1.13. John Cage, *Aria* (excerpt), 1959.



Figures 1.14, 1.15. John Cage, *4'33''* (excerpt), 1952, reprinted in *Source: Music of the Avant-garde, 1966-1973*, 2011.

I
TACET
II
TACET
III
TACET

NOTE: The title of this work is the total length in minutes and seconds of its performance. At Woodstock, N.Y., August 29, 1952, the title was 4' 33" and the three parts were 33", 2' 40", and 1' 20". It was performed by David Tudor, pianist, who indicated the beginnings of parts by closing, the endings by opening, the keyboard lid. However, the work may be performed by any instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time.

FOR IRWIN KREMER

JOHN CAGE

COMPOSERS FACSIMILE EDITION Copyright 1953 John Cage
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Figure 1.16. John Cage, 4'33", composition 1952/notation 1953.

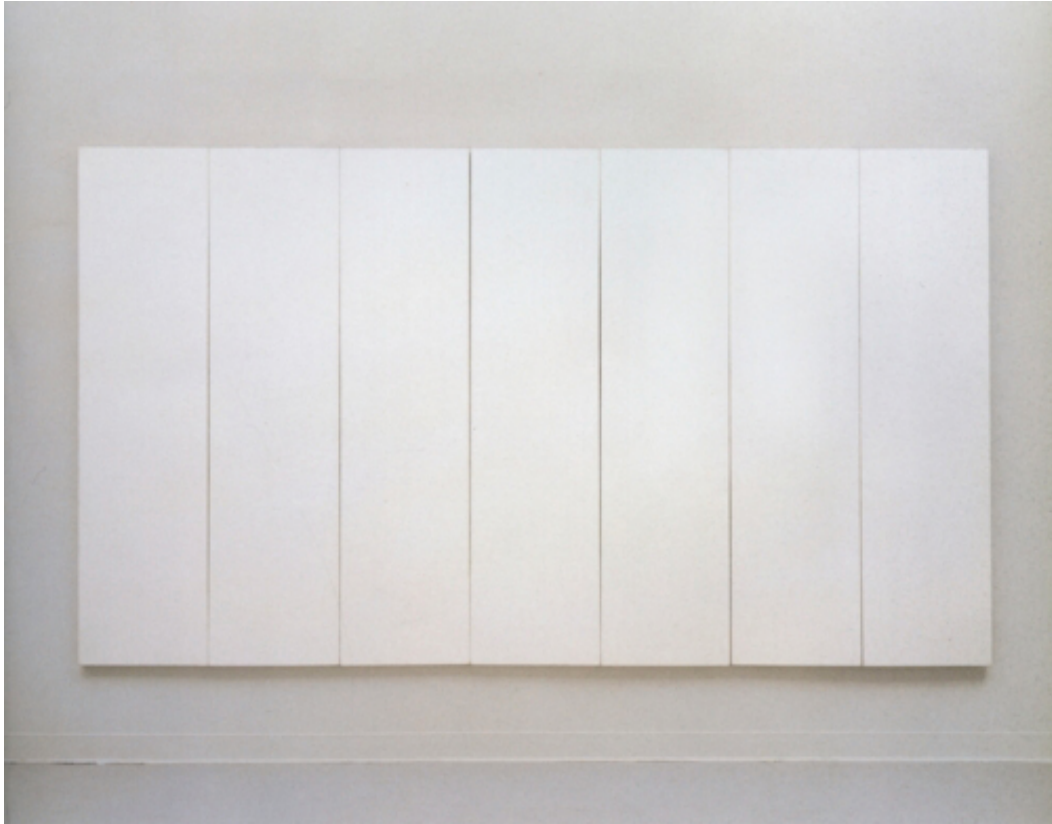


Figure 1.17. Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting (Seven Panel)*, 1951.

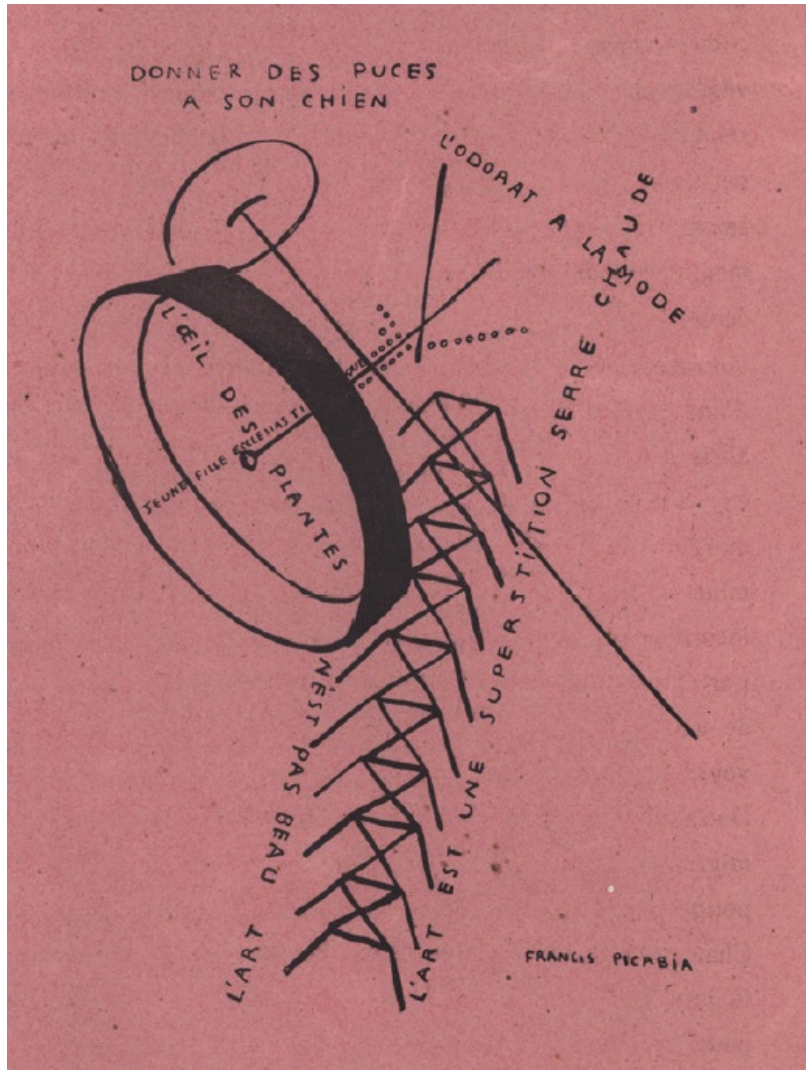


Figure 1.19. Francis Picabia, *Donner des puces à son chien* (*To Give Fleas to One's Dog*), 391 no. 8, February 1919.

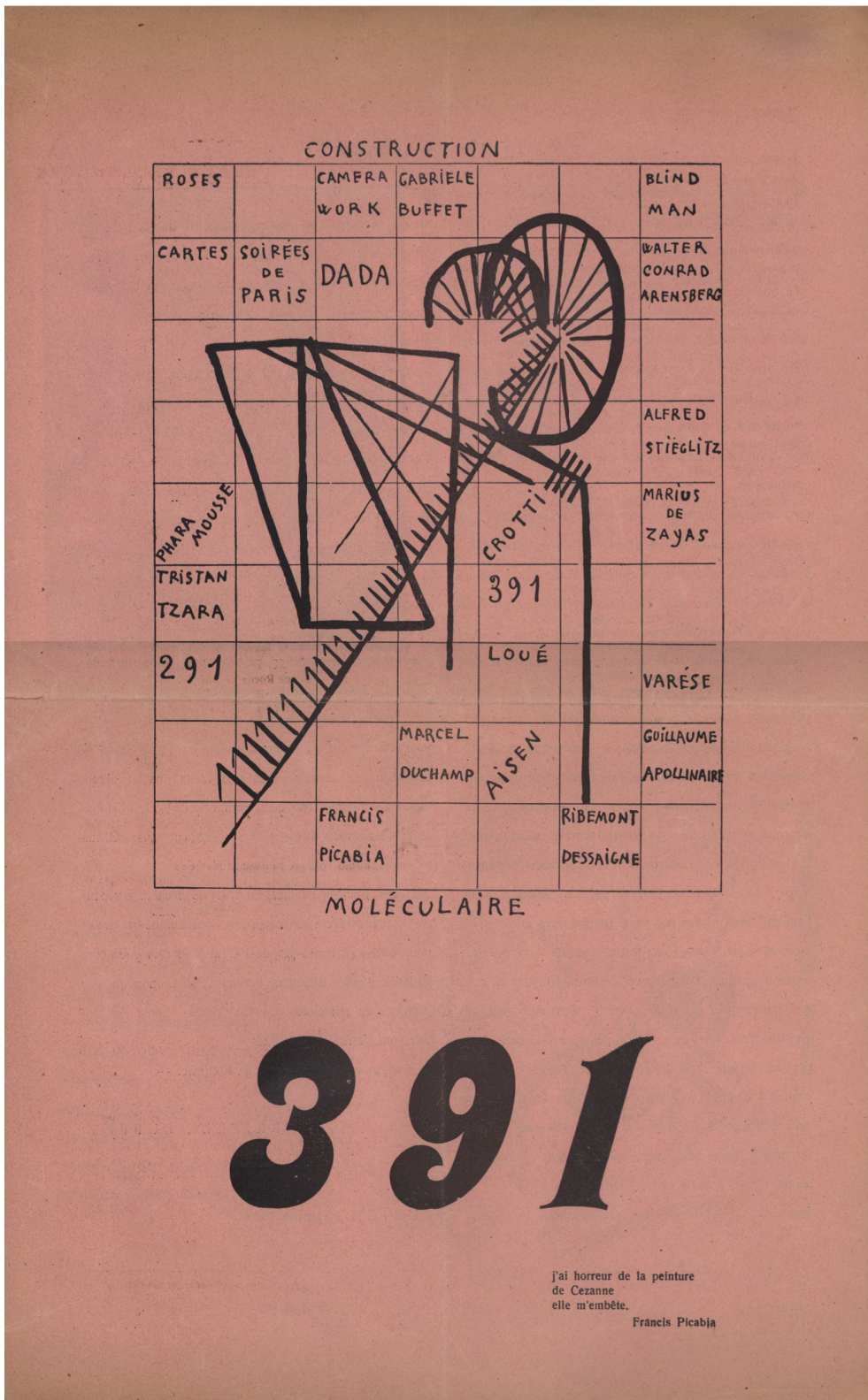


Figure 1.20. Francis Picabia, *Construction moléculaire*, 391 no. 8, February 1919.

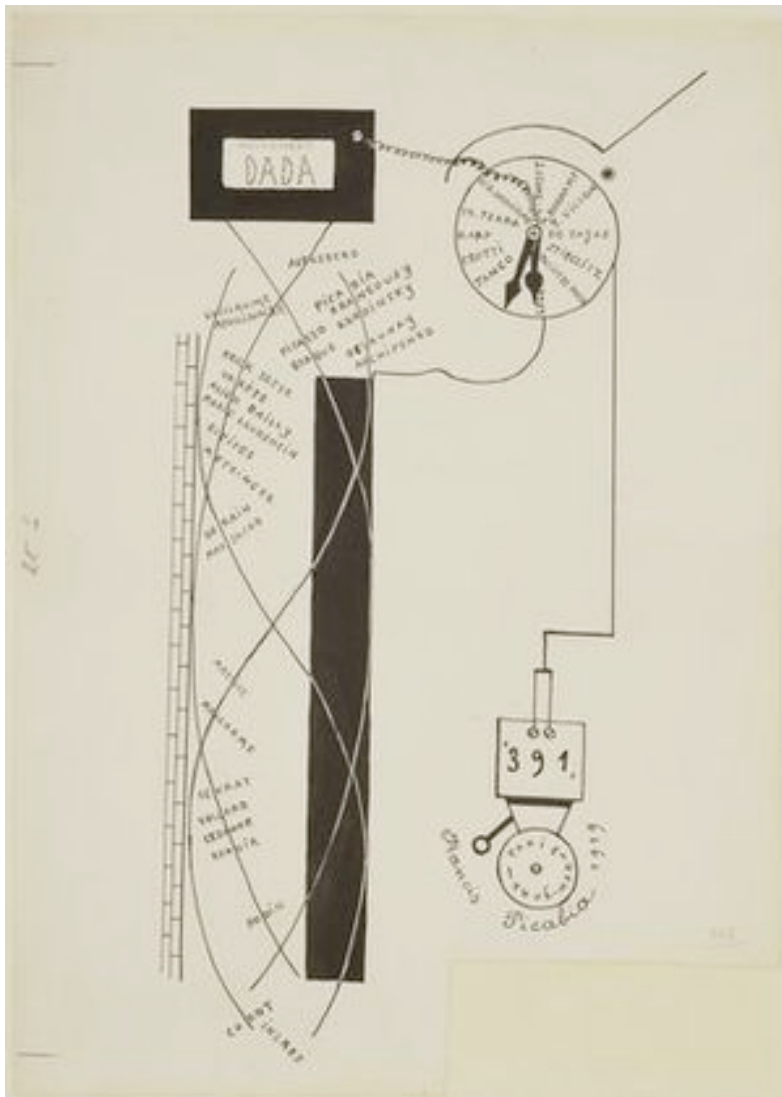


Figure 1.21. Francis Picabia, *Mouvement Dada*, *Dada* nos. 4-5, May 1919.

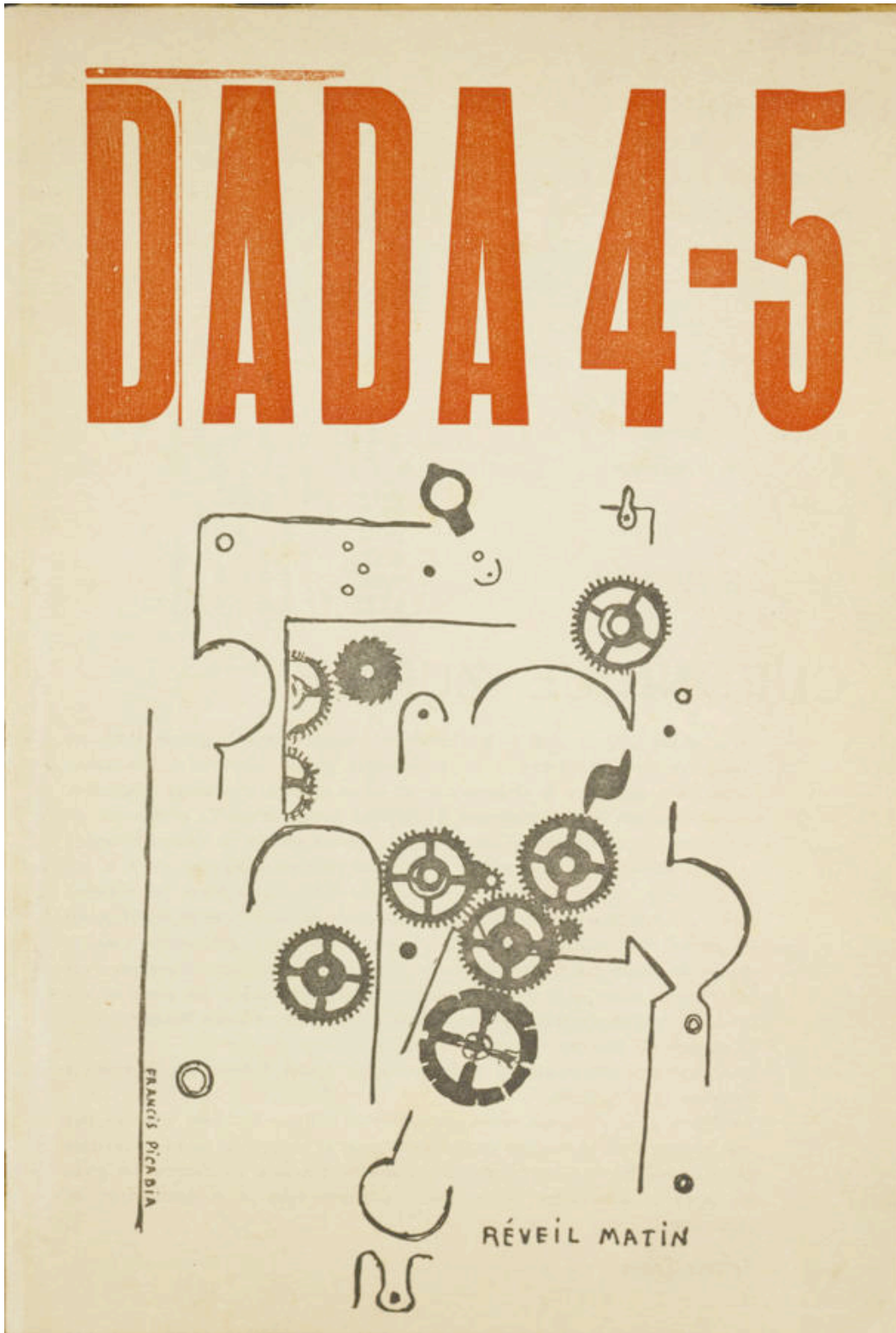


Figure 1.22. Francis Picabia, *Réveil Matin*, cover of *Dada* nos. 4-5, May 1919.

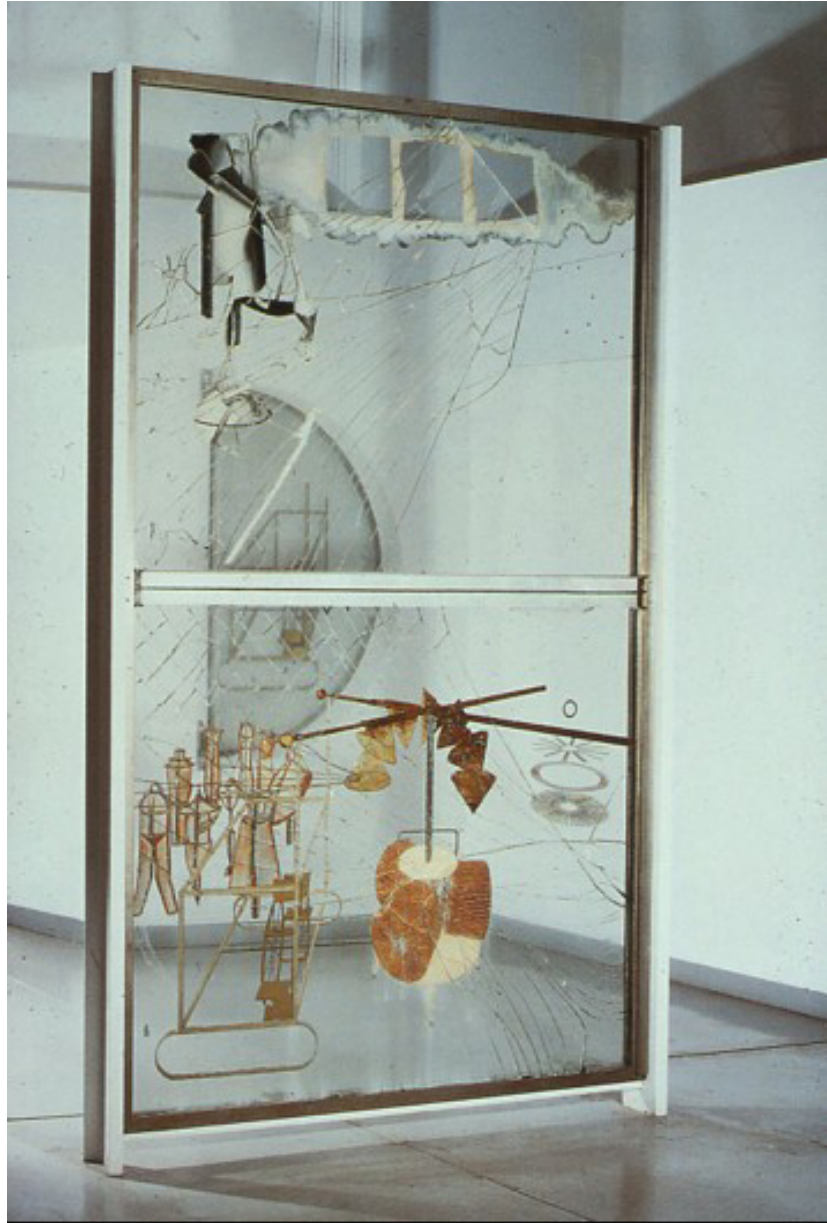


Figure 1.23. Marcel Duchamp, *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, 1915-1923.

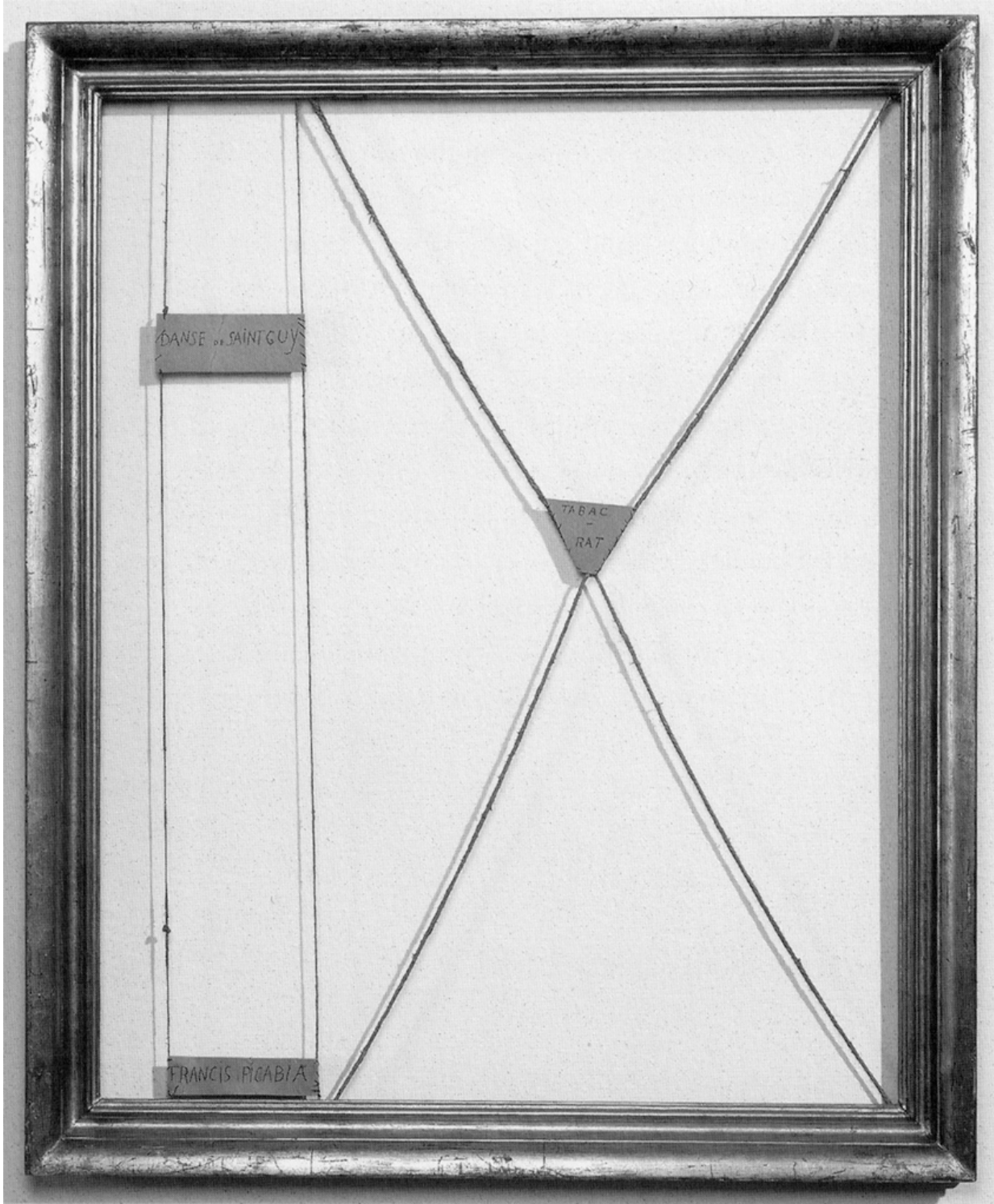
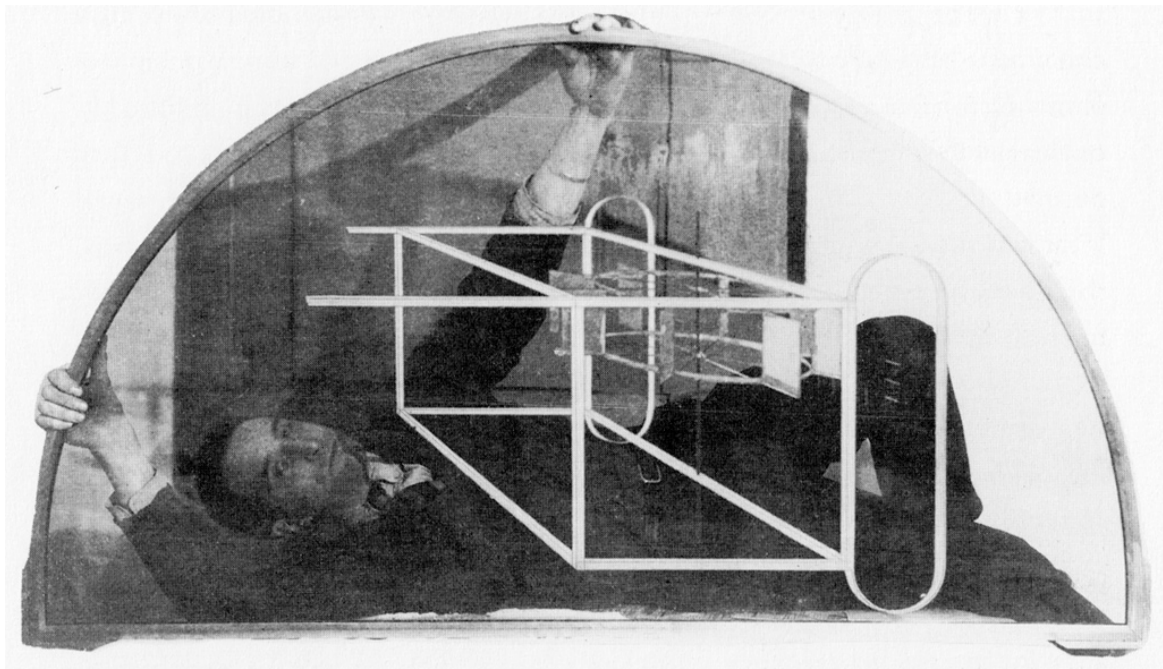
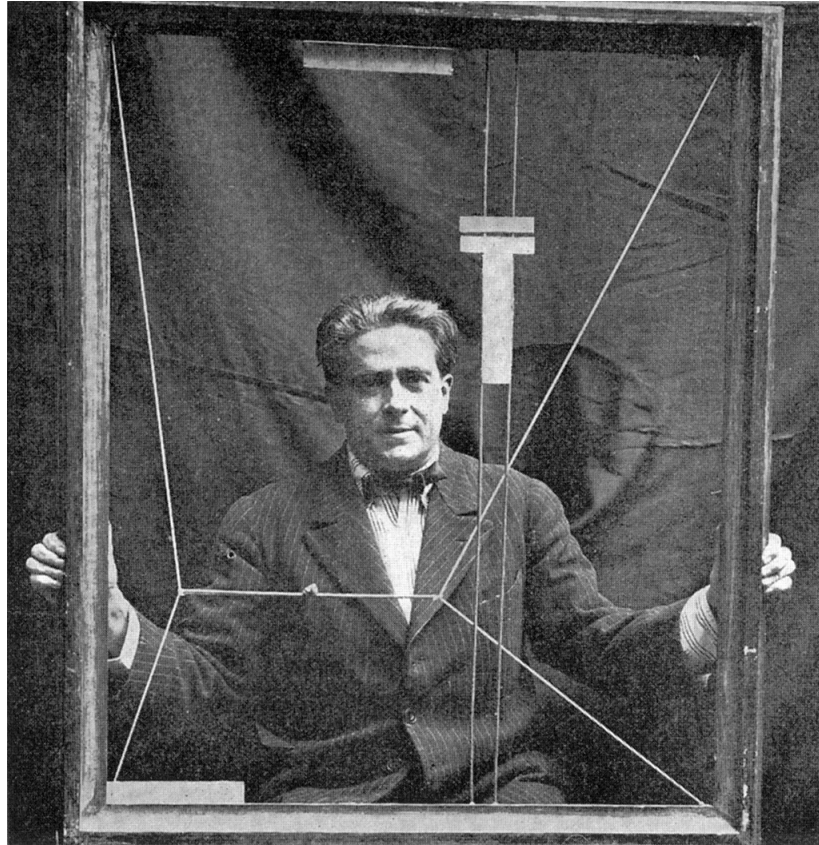


Figure 1.24. Francis Picabia, *Tabac-Rat*, 1920/1948.

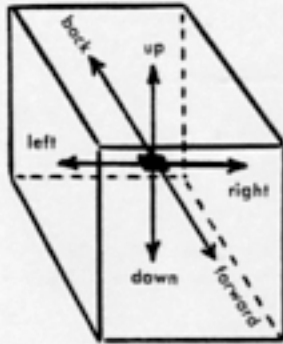


Figures 1.25, 1.26. Top: Anonymous [Man Ray?], *Francis Picabia with Danse de Saint-Guy (St. Vitus' Dance)*, from *The Little Review* 8, no. 2, Spring 1922.
Bottom: Man Ray, *Marcel Duchamp with Glider*, 1917.

DECEMBER 1952

for one or more instruments and/or sound-producing media

The following note and sketch appear on a notebook page dated Oct. & Nov. '52, but they are the basis of the composition "December 1952" as well as being particularly relevant to "Four Systems".



space relative to conceptual mobility and transformation of events in arbitrary, unstable time

"... to have elements exist in space . . . space as an infinitude of directions from an infinitude of points in space . . . to work (compositionally and in performance) to right, left, back, forward, up, down, and all points between . . . the score [being] a picture of this space at one instant, which must always be considered as unreal and/or transitory . . . a performer must set this all in motion (time), which is to say, realize that it is in motion and step into it . . . either sit and let it move or move through it at all speeds."

"[coefficient of] intensity and duration [is] space forward and back."

Figure 1.27. Earle Brown, "Prefatory Note" (detail), *Folio and Four Systems*, 1961.

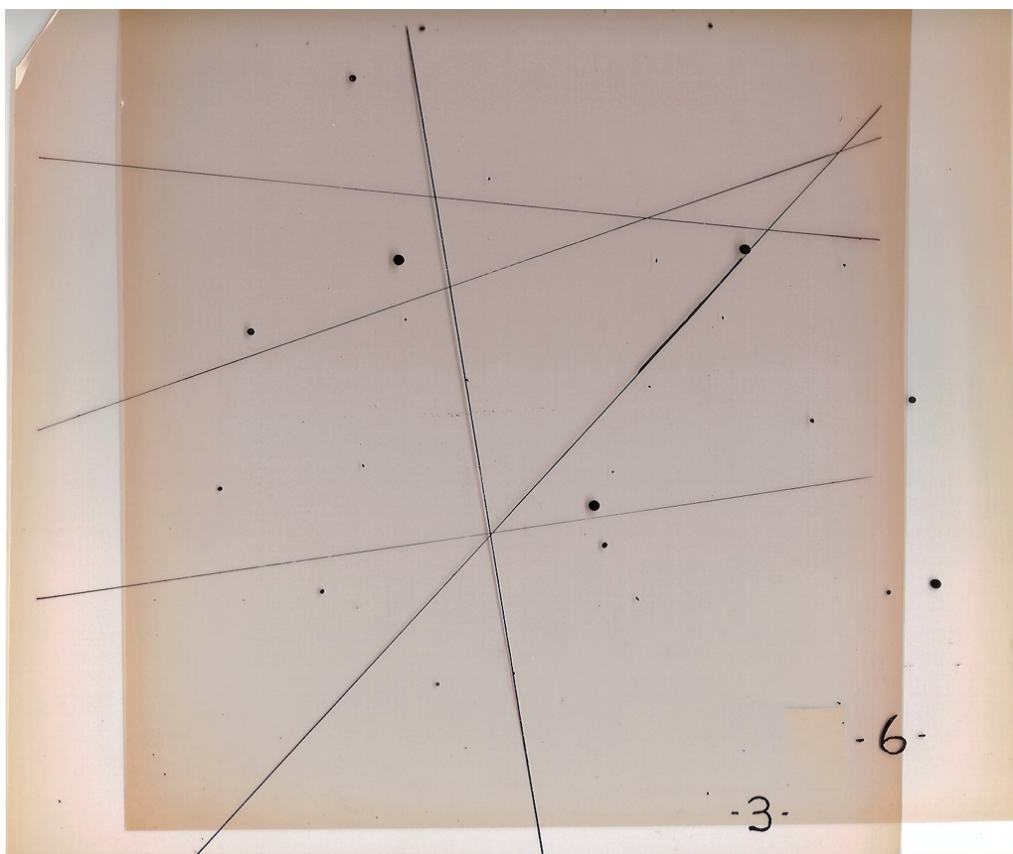
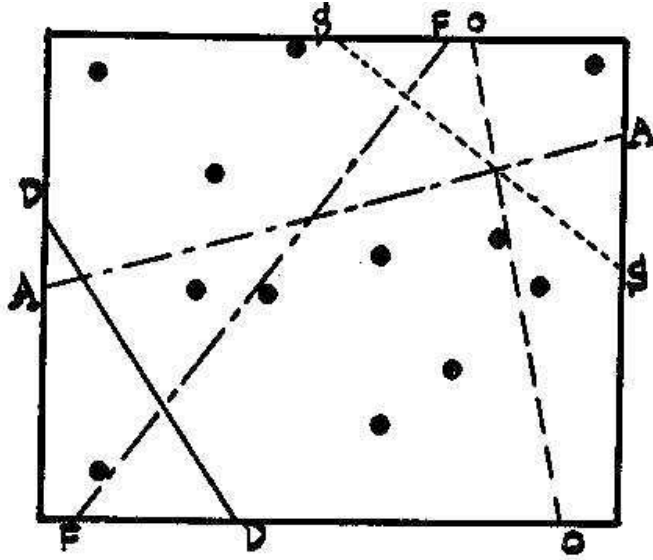


Figure 1.28. John Cage, *Variations I* (detail of two pages), 1958.

BB



BV

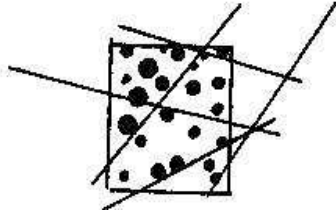
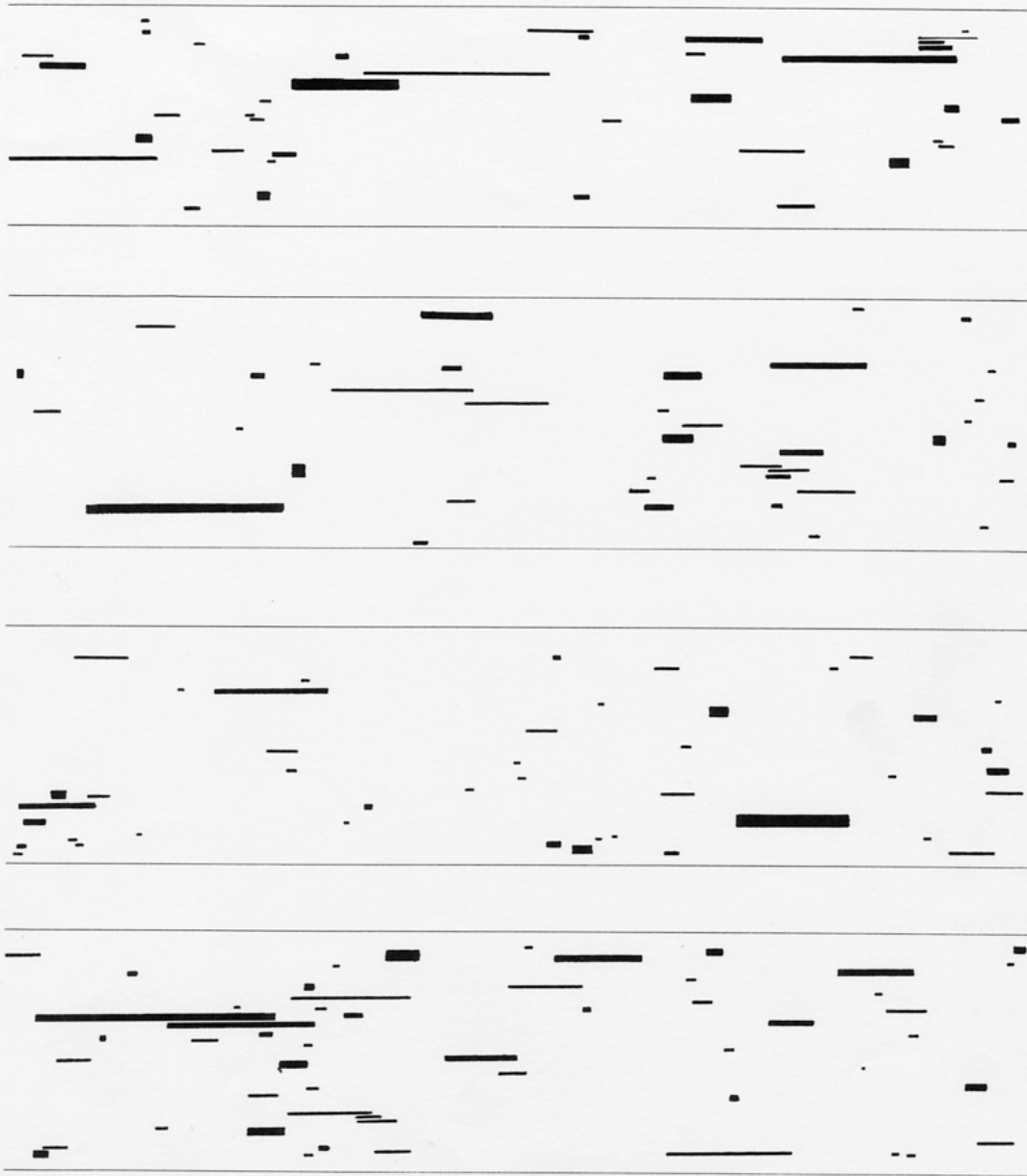


Figure 1.29. John Cage, *Concert for Piano and Orchestra, Solo for Piano* (excerpt), 1957-58 (reproduced from James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, Cambridge University Press, 1993).

4 SYSTEMS

for David Tudor on a birthday
Jan. 20, 1954

Earle Brown



May be played in any sequence, either side up, at any tempo(i). The continuous lines from far left to far right define the outer limits of the keyboard. Thickness may indicate dynamics or clusters.

Jan. 20, 1954
Earle Brown

Figure 1.30. Earle Brown, *Four Systems*, 1954.

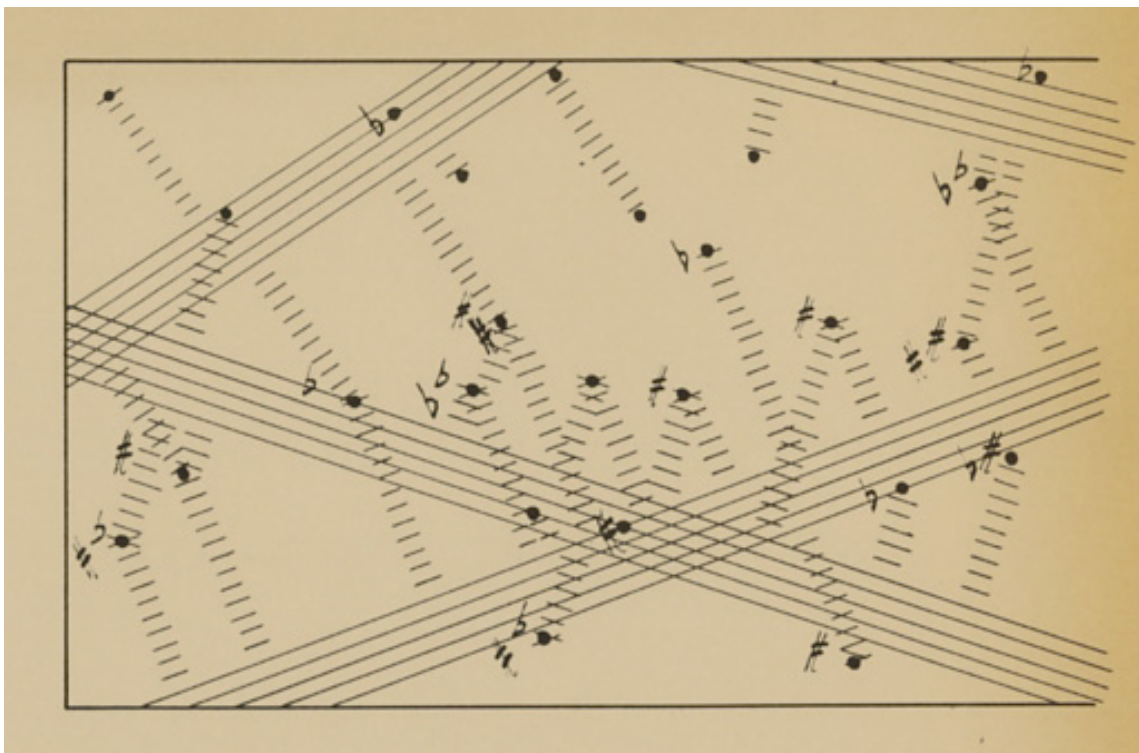


Figure 1.31. John Cage, *Concert for Piano and Orchestra, Solo for Piano*, page 59 (detail), 1957-58.

10/26

A. The Problem: To construct situations in which, ^{it is made possible for} light and sound events of any desired characteristics (frequency, wave-length, amplitude/brightness, duration, timbre/spectral distribution, morphology) to occur at any points in space and time.

B. Requirements for the System

① Maximum Generality (as above)

② Maximum flexibility (possibility for changing the nature of the universe of possibilities from which the elements of A. are chosen, ~~and~~ and for changing the nature of the situation in which the elements of A. find themselves.)

③ Maximum economy.

What is the nature of the unity of space and time which occurs in such situations?

macro-events. { The events are strung together in time. At any point in time one event, simple or complex (silence, one sound, 2 lights + 3 sounds, etc.) takes place. Each event has a character.

The situation is described by a set of space-figures giving the distribution of micro-events in space. Each figure is for one time period, and the complete set of figures gives the total space-time structure of the ^{entire} event. (Event = Σ space-time structures)

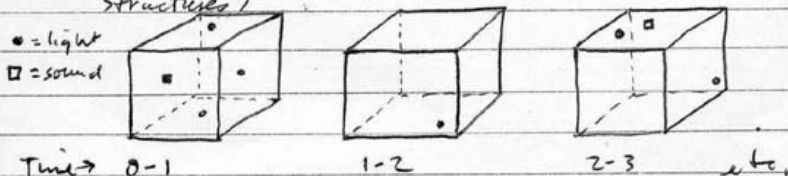


Figure 1.32. George Brecht, notebook (detail), October 1958.

INTERMISSION

1. hair growing arrangement
(haircut)
- 2.

PIANO PIECE


Center

THREE VEHICLE EVENTS


- roller - coaster
- spring. summer. autumn. winter.
-

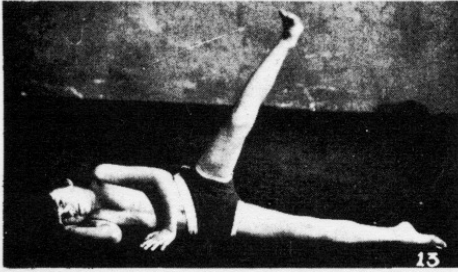
SIX DOORS

- EXIT
- ENTRANCE
- EXIT
- ENTRANCE
-



3. A small object on the clock face.





15

2. A fingertip on black bulb.

1. A fingertip on child's right foot.

TWO APPROXIMATIONS

(

obituary

)

Figures 1.33-1.38 (clockwise from top left).
George Brecht, various scores from *Water Yam*, 1963.

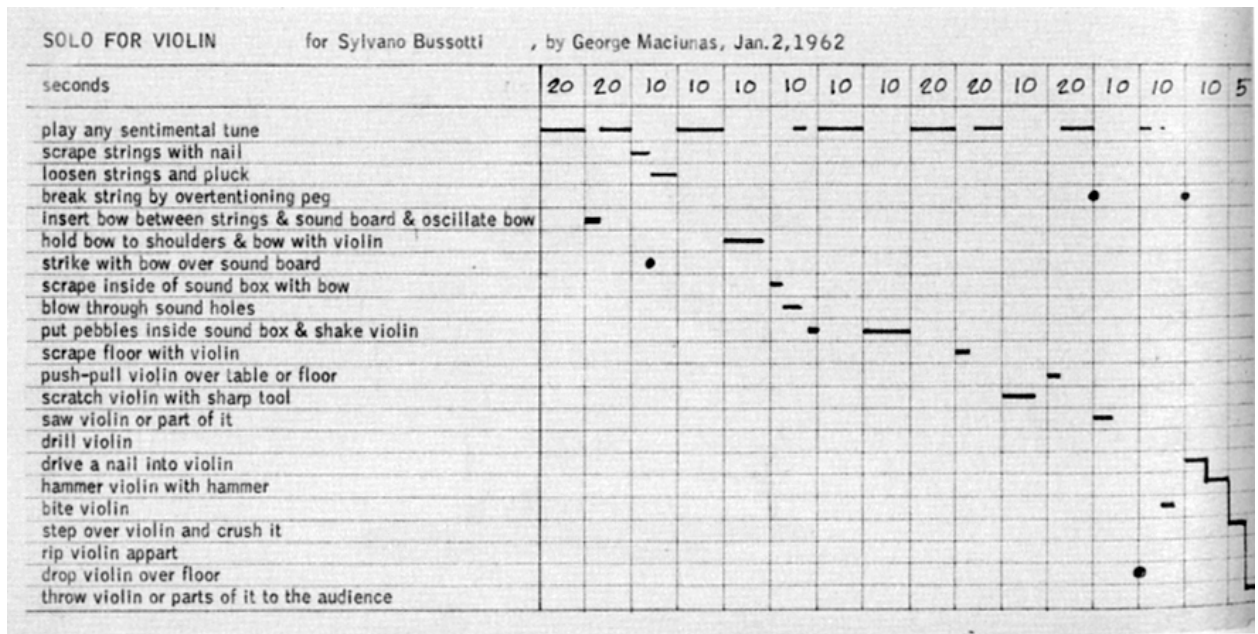


Figure 1.39. George Maciunas, *Solo for Violin*, 1962.

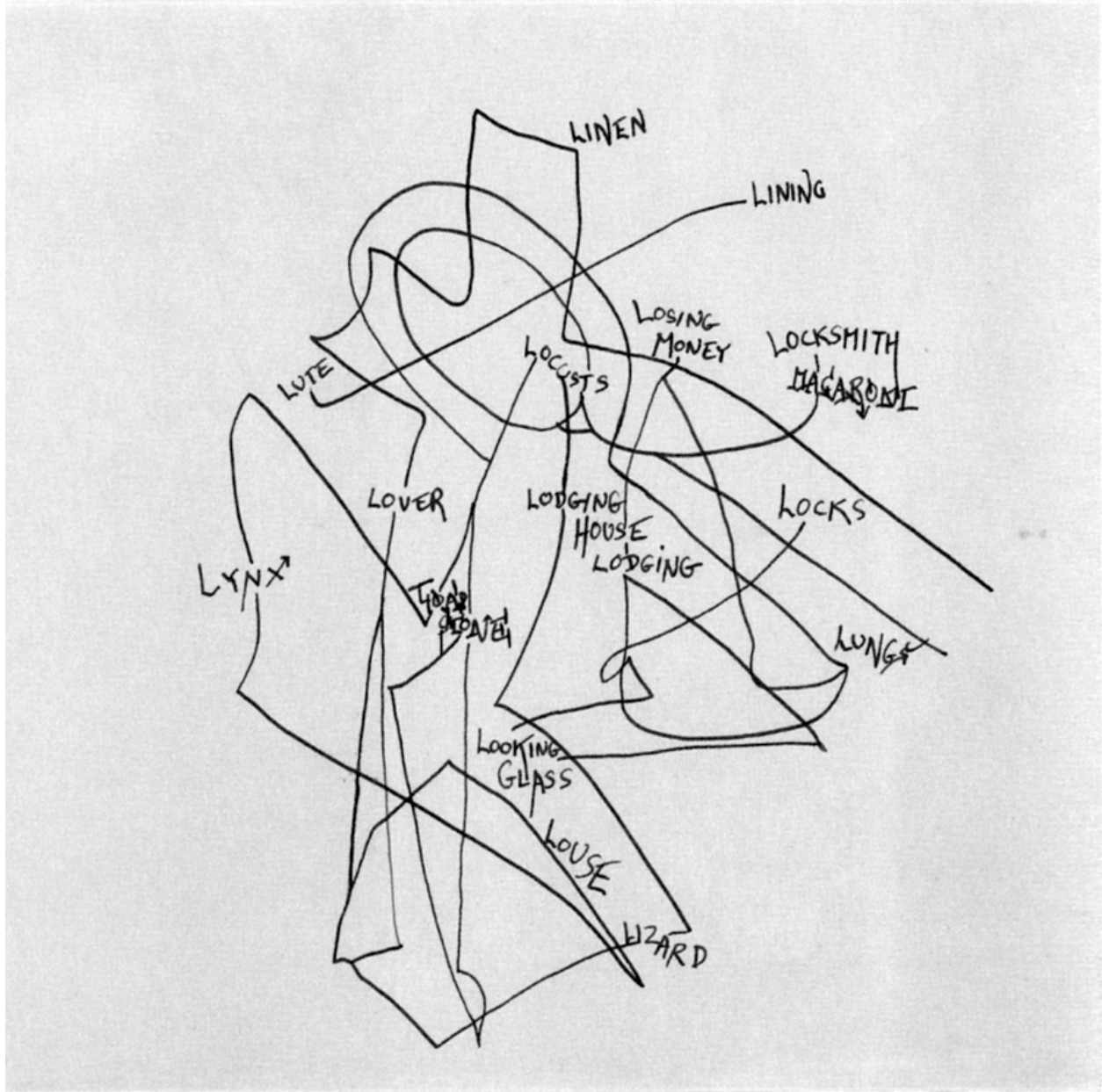
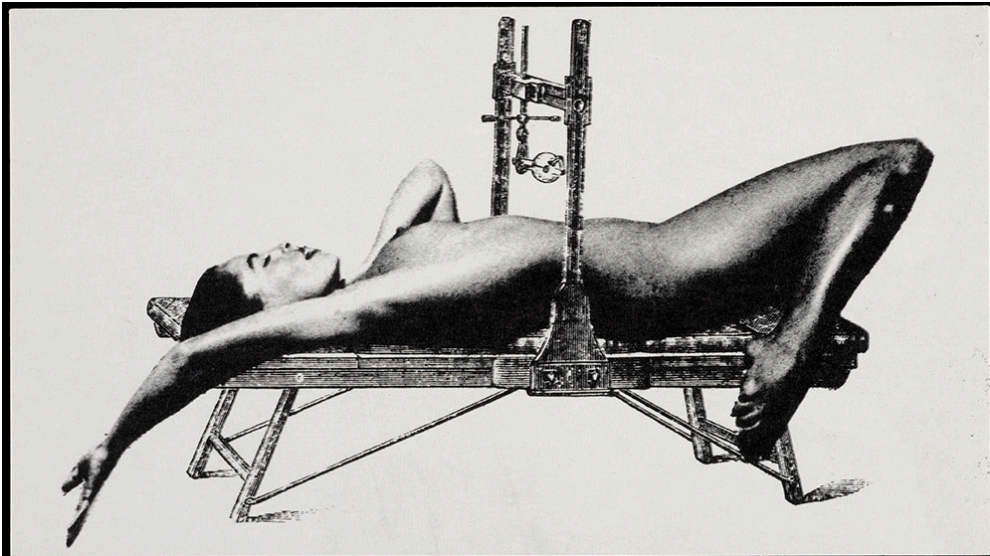
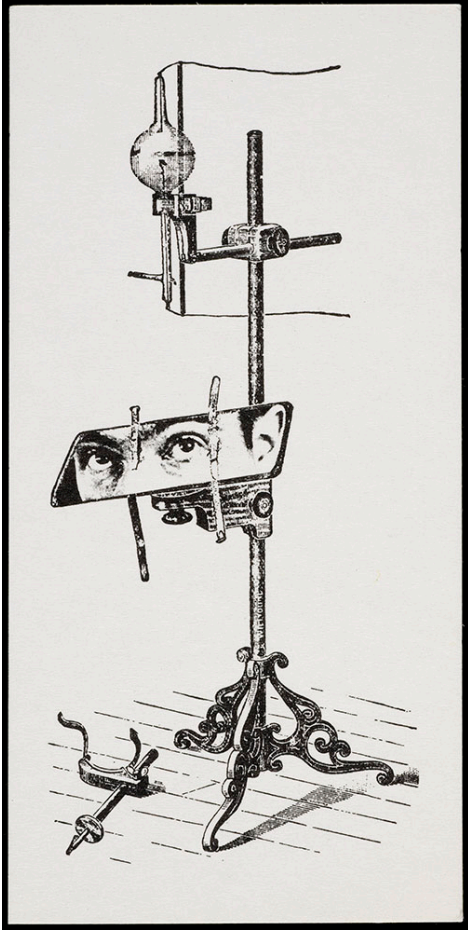


Figure 1.40. Dick Higgins, *Graphis 82*, 1960.



Figures 1.41-1.43 (clockwise from top left). Robert Watts, *Events*, and score card examples, 1964.

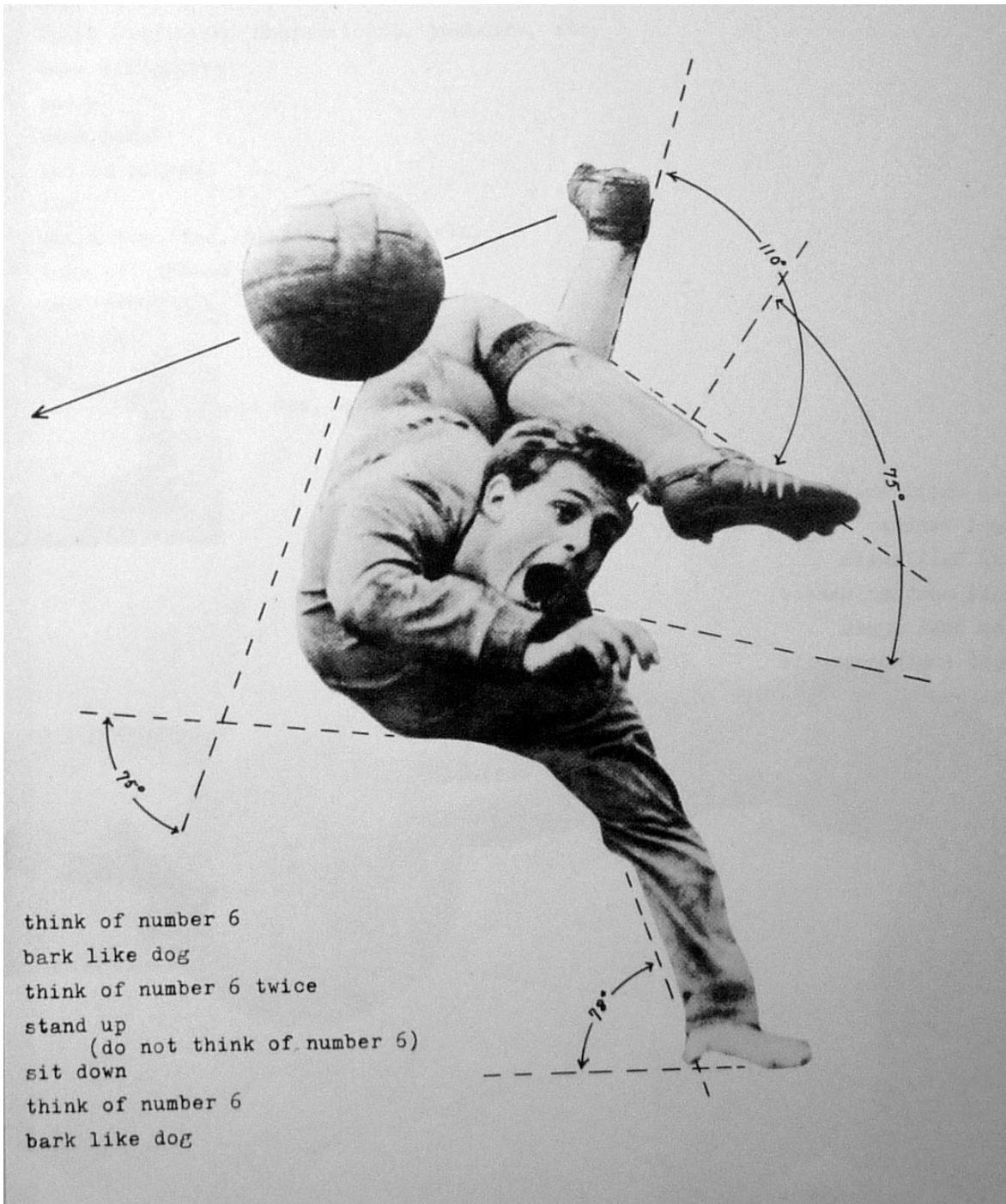


Figure 1.44. Benjamin Patterson, *Methods and Processes* (detail), 1962.

TIME-TABLE MUSIC

For performance in a railway station.

The performers enter a railway station and obtain time-tables.

They stand or seat themselves so as to be visible to each other, and, when ready, start their stopwatches simultaneously.

Each performer interprets the tabled time indications in terms of minutes and seconds (e.g. 7:16 = 7 minutes and 16 seconds). He selects one time by chance to determine the total duration of his performing. This done, he selects one row or column, and makes a sound at all points where tabled times within that row or column fall within the total duration of his performance.

George Brecht
Summer, 1959

TIME-TABLE EVENT

to occur in a railway station

A time-table is obtained.

A tabled time indication is interpreted in minutes and seconds (7:16 equalling, for example, 7 minutes and 16 seconds). This determines the duration of the event.

Spring, 1961
G. Brecht

Figures 2.1, 2.2. Top (2.1): George Brecht, *Time-Table Music*, 1959.
Bottom (2.2): George Brecht, *Time-Table Event*, 1961.

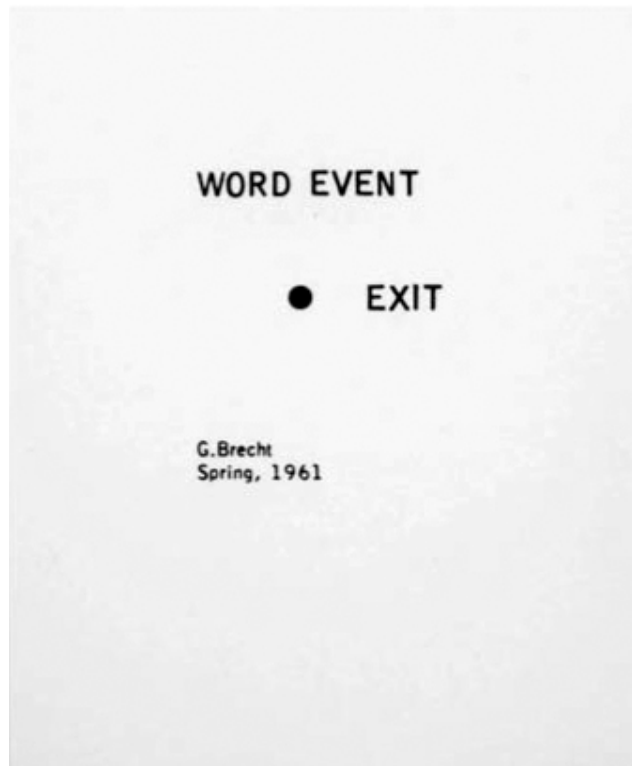


Figure 2.3. George Brecht, *Word Event*, 1961.



Figure 2.4. Arthur C. Caspari reads George Maciunas's text "Neo-Dada in New York" in front of Maciunas's diagram, Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, Germany, June 9, 1962.



Figure 2.5. John Cage, kit for *Sonatas and Interludes*, 1946-48. Includes screws, bolts, nuts, pieces of rubber and plastic, and one eraser.



Figure 2.6. Benjamin Patterson performing *Variations for Double Bass*, Galerie Parnass, 1962.

PIANO ACTIVITIES
(piece for many pianists)

Each of the players is to assume one of the following roles.
There may be changing of roles in the course of the piece.
Not all roles need at all times be occupied (at times, some should not)

Keyboard _____ play in orthodox manner, or in other appropriate ways.

Pedal _____ crouch underneath, control all the pedals.

Other parts of piano -

1. Mute strings, with fingers and hand
Strike, and damp, with fingers and hand.
2. Pluck, with fingernails, flesh, knuckles, or tap or using plectrum.
3. Scratch or rub - with fingers
or cloth
sand paper
sticks
glass
metal
rubber
4. Drop objects on strings or other parts of piano or draw chains or bells across.
5. Act on strings, with external objects
such as hammers
drum sticks
wires or ropes
6. Strike or drag over parts of the piano other than the strings, with metal or wood rod, or other objects.
7. Introduce preparations into the strings, lay material on them, move such objects to different places, remove them
8. Bring objects producing their own noise in contact with parts of the piano.
9. Act in any way on underside of piano.

To Performers:

Show restraint and extremity in both inactive and active aspects of your participation.
constancies, limitations with exaggeration
diversity of changes, continuing surprises at their limit;
moderate as well
ignore and relate to other players
enhance, and destroy, or transform their actions.

Figure 2.7. Philip Corner, *Piano Activities* score (detail of three-page score), 1962.



Figure 2.8. Fluxus artists performing Philip Corner's *Piano Activities* at the Fluxus Festspiele Neuester Musik, Museum Wiesbaden, Germany, September 1962. From left: George Maciunas, Dick Higgins, Wolf Vostell, Benjamin Patterson, Emmett Williams.

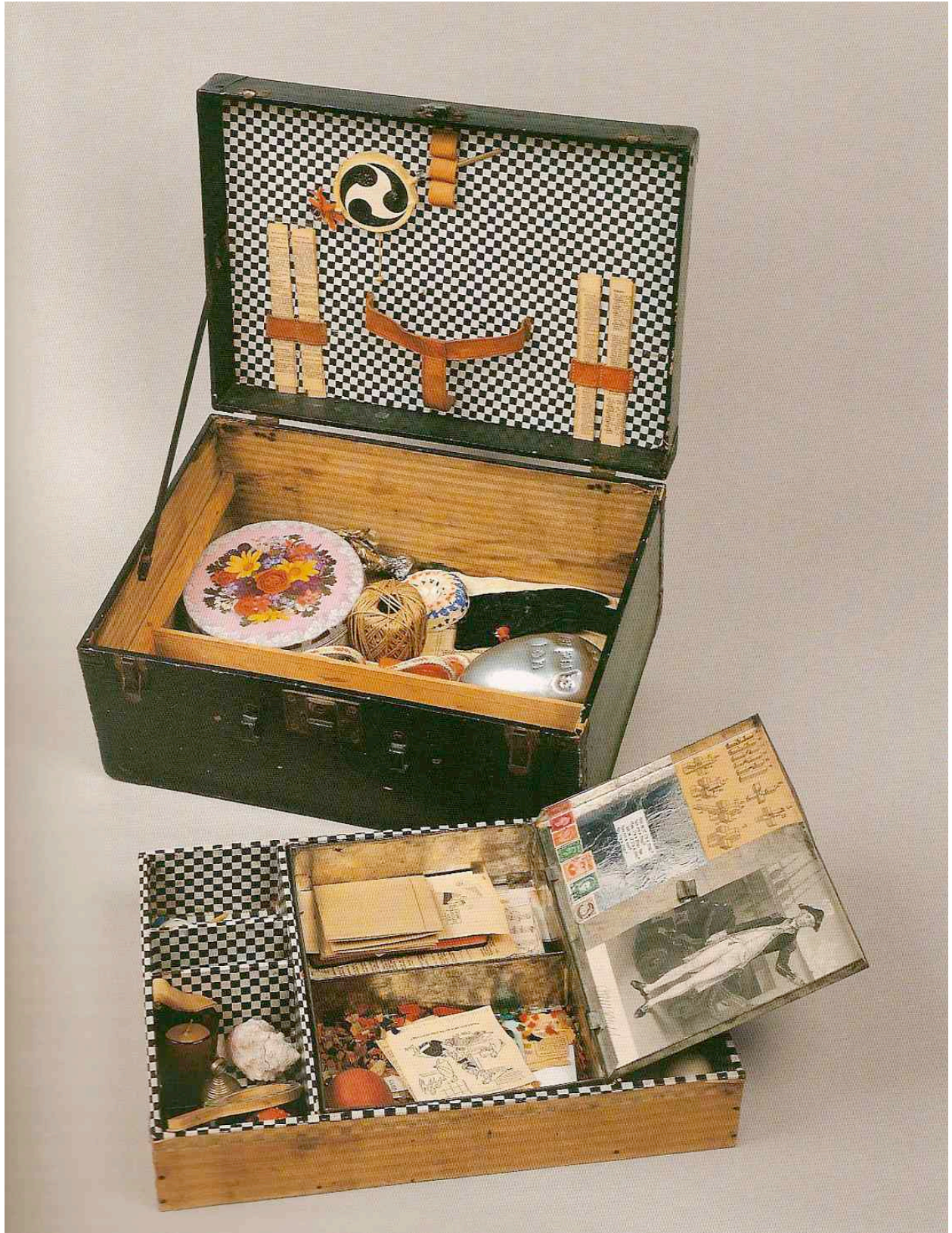


Figure 2.9. George Brecht, *The Case*, 1959.

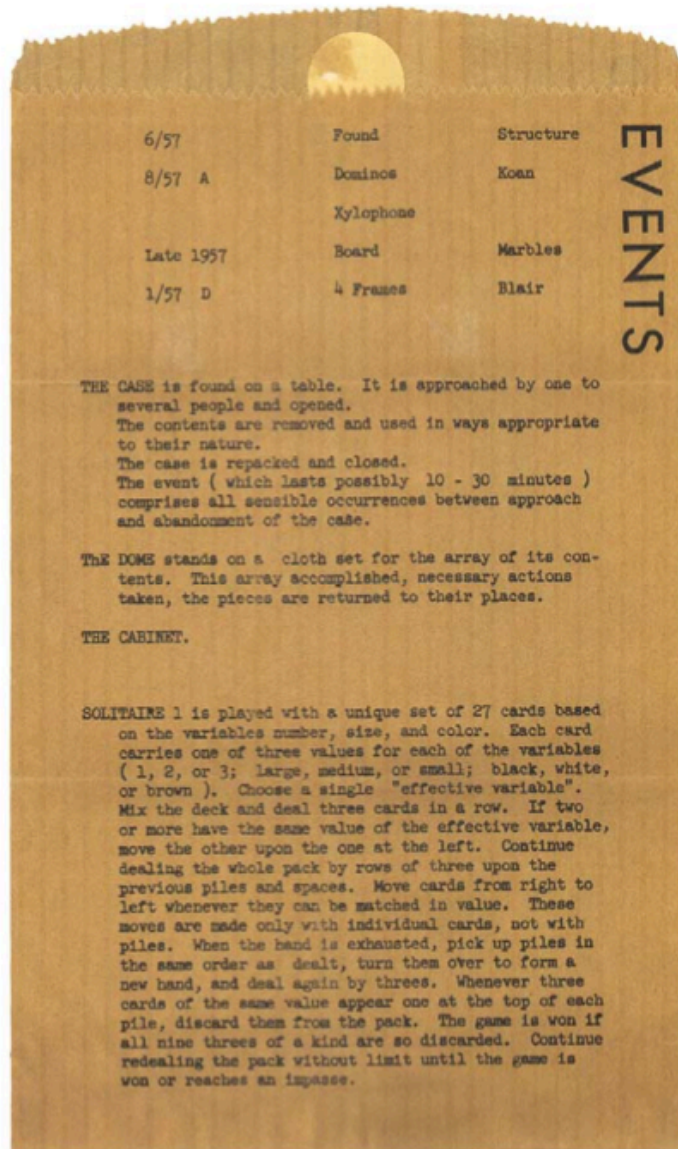


Figure 2.10. George Brecht, brochure for *toward events* exhibition at Reuben Gallery, 1959.



Figure 2.11. George Brecht, *The Dome*, 1959.



Figure 2.12. George Brecht, *The Cabinet*, 1959.

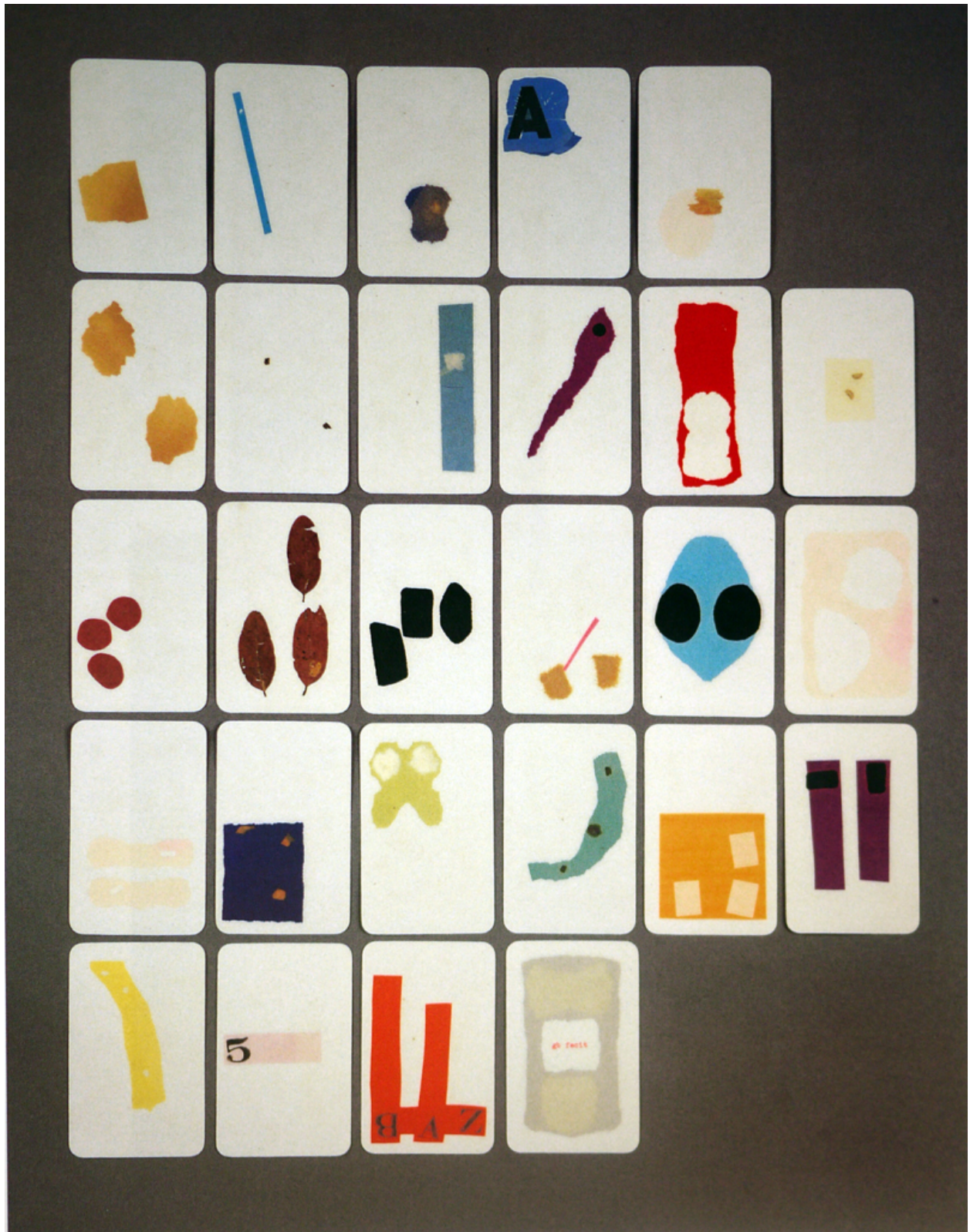


Figure 2.13. George Brecht, *Solitaire*, 1959.

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.**

Fall, 1961

Figure 2.14. George Brecht, *Two Exercises*, 1961.

EXERCISE

Determine the limits of an object or event.

Determine the limits more precisely.

Repeat, until further precision is Impossible.

Figure 2.15. George Brecht, *Exercise*, 1963.

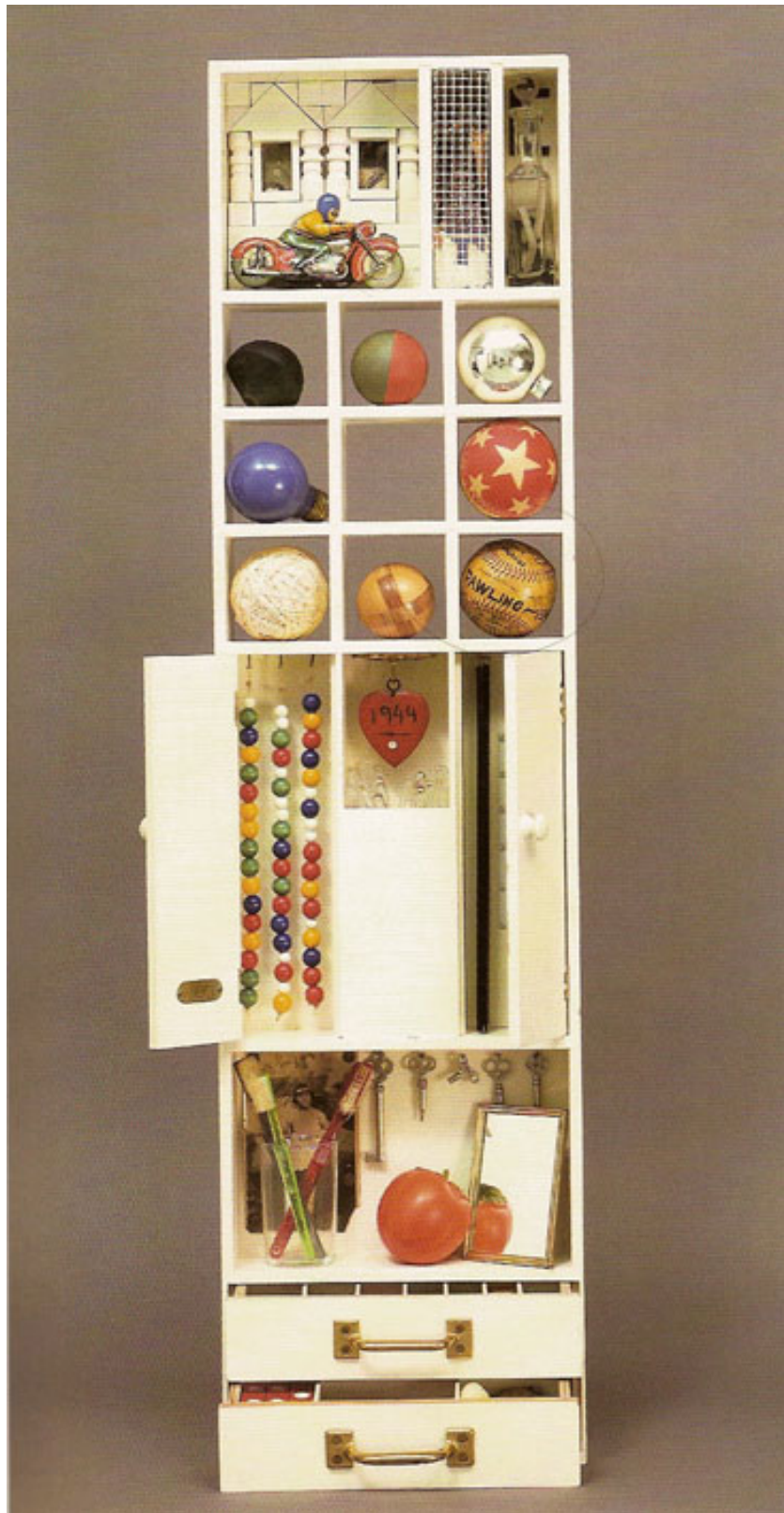


Figure 2.16. George Brecht, *Repository*, 1961.



Figure 2.17. Robert Rauschenberg, *Coca-Cola Plan*, 1958.



Figure 2.18. Robert Rauschenberg, *Black Market*, 1961.



Figure 2.19. Robert Rauschenberg, *Pilgrim*, 1960.



Figure 2.20. Robert Rauschenberg, *Pilgrim*, 1960 (detail).



Figure 2.21. George Brecht, *Table and Chairs*, 1962.

3 TABLE AND CHAIR EVENTS

● newspaper

● game

plate
knife

● fork
spoon
glass

Figure 2.22. George Brecht, *Three Table and Chair Events*, 1962.

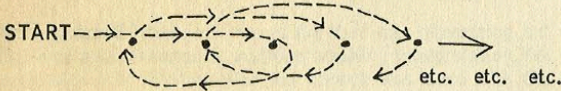
BEACH CRAWL

Go to sea shore (Beach)
 Take three stones. large or small
 Place yourself on your hands and knees
 Put one stone down.
 Crawl forward a few feet, and place second stone down.
 Crawl forward a few feet more, place third stone down.
 Then crawl back to the first stone, pick it up.
 Then turn around and crawl back past second and third stones,
 and place first stone a few feet in front of the third stone.
 Then turn around and crawl back to the second stone,
 (which has now become the last stone) pick it up, turn around
 go back up the line of stones, and place that stone a bit in front
 of the lead stone.
 In this manner you can travel down the beach. . .
 a) until you get tired
 b) until you have gone through the cycle 100 times
 c) until you run into the Ocean

At that time you gather the three stones and place them into
 a little triangle pattern.
 Then shout as loud as you can "Well that's new isn't it?"
 Then throw the three stones into the Ocean. end
 As is plain from the description of the event, it must be done with
 solemnity.
 no stopping to bark at dogs
 no altering of straight ahead course for horses or fishermen.

DIAGRAM

July, 1960



PIECE FOR TERRY RILEY

PROLOGUE

Terry Riley has played semi-professional baseball.
 At that time he did not realize how great he was.

PIECE

Come on the performance area dressed in a baseball catcher's
 uniform. Stand there for a minute to let the people see what they
 will hear. Smile, and say pleasantly - "I'd like you to see and
 hear my catcher's equipment." Then explain the functions of all of
 the parts of the equipment and make sounds with them. Show everything.
 Mask, glove, chest protector, shin guards, straps etc. Hum babe.

5/60

PROJECT FOR BOXES

BOXES for MEANINGLESS WORK

I will have built two small boxes.
 I put small things in the boxes,
 A sign explains the boxes to any-
 one who should approach them.
 It says "Meaningless work boxes."
 Throw all of the things into one
 box, then throw all of the things
 into the other. Back and forth,
 back and forth. Do this for as long
 as you like. What do you feel?
 Yourself? The Box? The Things?
 Remember this doesn't mean any-
 thing.

March, 1960

COLUMN with a BALL on TOP

I have built a box eight feet
 high. On top place a small gold
 ball. Of course no one will
 be able to see the ball sit-
 ting way up there on the box.
 I will just know it is there.

Feb. 1961

SURPRISE BOX

The surprise box has a top with a
 hole in it large enough to put your
 hand through it. One person puts
 something into the box. anything.
 A second person comes when the
 box has been left alone, and reaches
 into the box to find what has been
 left inside. He may feel around fast
 or slow, depending on how much
 suspense he wants to feel. Pretty
 soon he will find what's in the box.
 He can then do whatever he likes
 with what he found. He then can
 put something else in the box for
 the next person to find.

June, 1960

Figure 2.23. Walter De Maria, excerpt from his contribution to
An Anthology of Chance Operations, 1960-63.

BLANK FORM

From the subjective point of view there is no such thing as nothing - Blank Form shows this, as well as might any other situation of deprivation.

So long as the form (in the broadest possible sense: situation) is not reduced beyond perception, so long as it perpetuates and upholds itself as being object in the subject's field of perception, the subject reacts to it in many particular ways when I call it art. He reacts in other ways when I do not call it art. Art is primarily a situation in which one assumes an attitude of reacting to some of one's awareness as art.

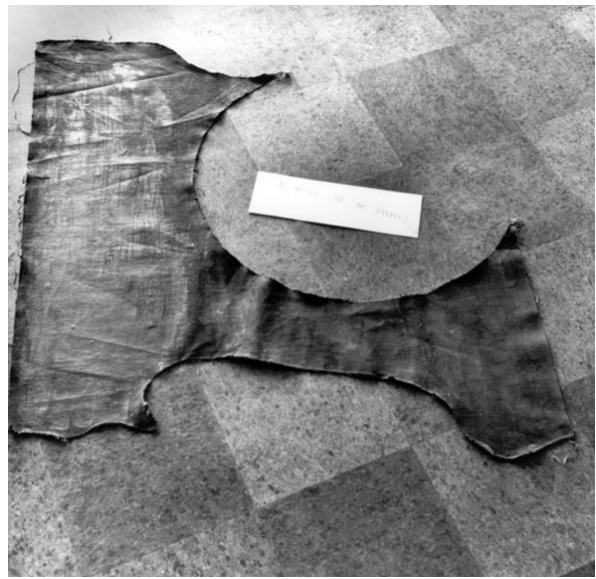
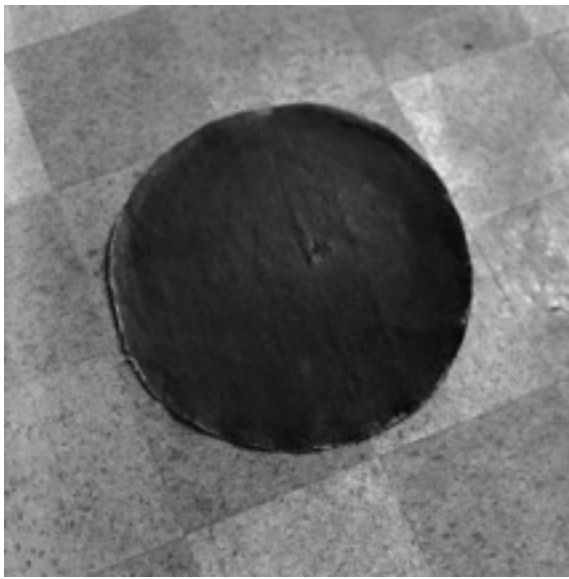
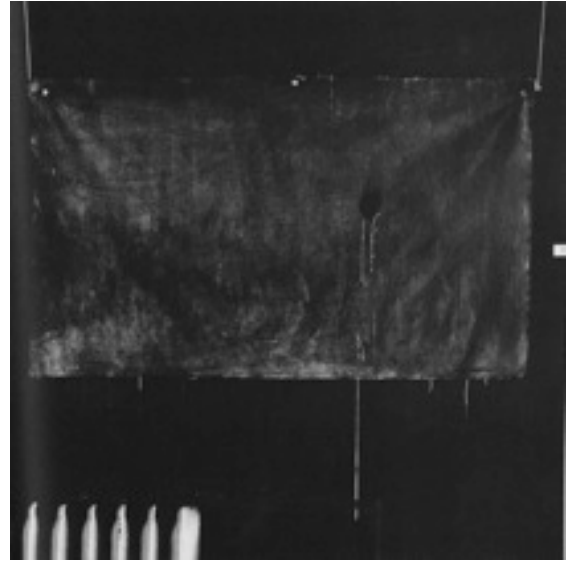
Blank Form is still in the great tradition of artistic weakness-taste. That is to say I prefer it - especially the content (as opposed to "anti-form" for the attempt to contradict one's taste). Blank form is like life, essentially empty, allowing plenty of room for disquisitions on its nature and mocking each in its turn.

Blank Form slowly waves a large gray flag and laughs about how close it got to the second law of thermodynamics.

Some examples of Blank Form sculpture:

1. A column with perfectly smooth, rectangular surfaces, 2 feet by 2 feet by 8 feet, painted gray.
2. A wall, perfectly smooth and painted gray, measuring 2 feet by 8 feet by 8 feet.
3. A cabinet with simple construction, painted gray and measuring 1 foot by 2 feet by 6 feet - that is, a cabinet just large enough to enter.

Figure 2.24. Robert Morris, "Blank Form" (1961), *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, 1963, Jean Brown Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.



Figures 2.25-2.28 (clockwise from top left). Yoko Ono, *Painting in Three Stanzas*, *Smoke Painting*, *Waterdrop Painting*, and *Painting to Be Stepped On*, 1961.
Installed at AG Gallery, New York, July 1961.



Figure 3.1. First Fluxus exhibit in the basement kitchen of Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, Germany, March 1963.



Figure 3.2. Robert Filliou, *Galerie Légitime*, 1961-1963.



Figure 3.3. Benjamin Patterson, *Poems in Boxes*, c. 1962.

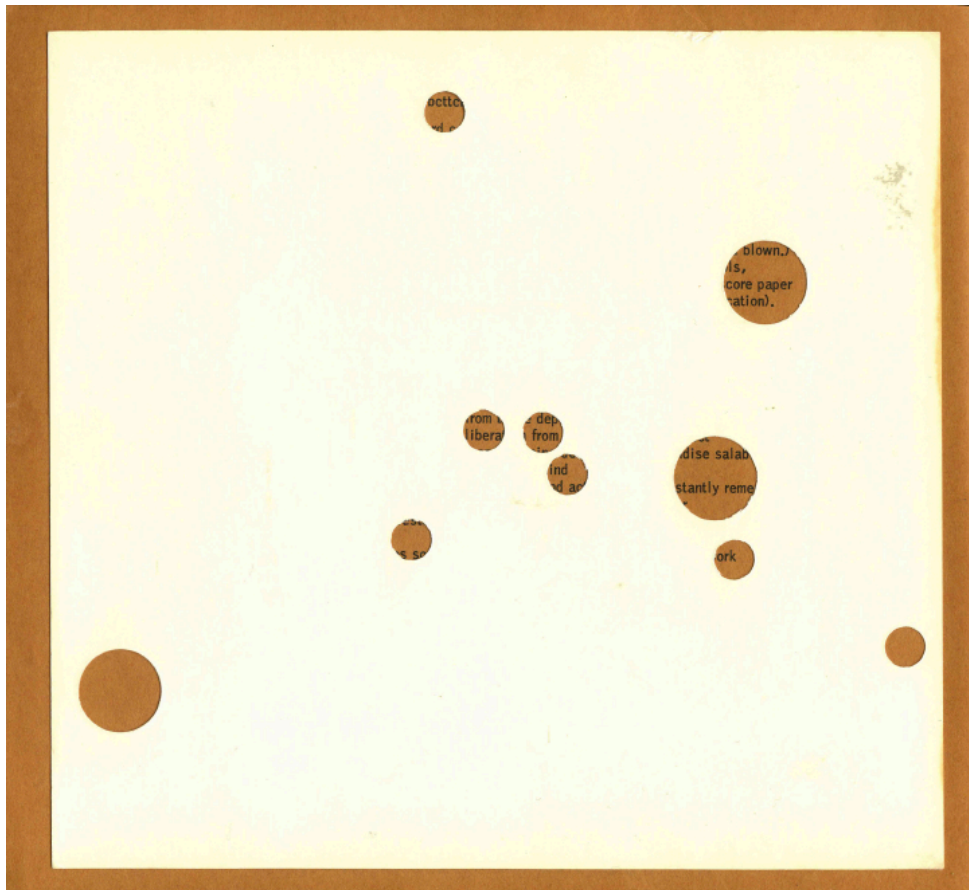


Figure 3.5. Dieter Roth, *Poem Machine*, 1961/1963.

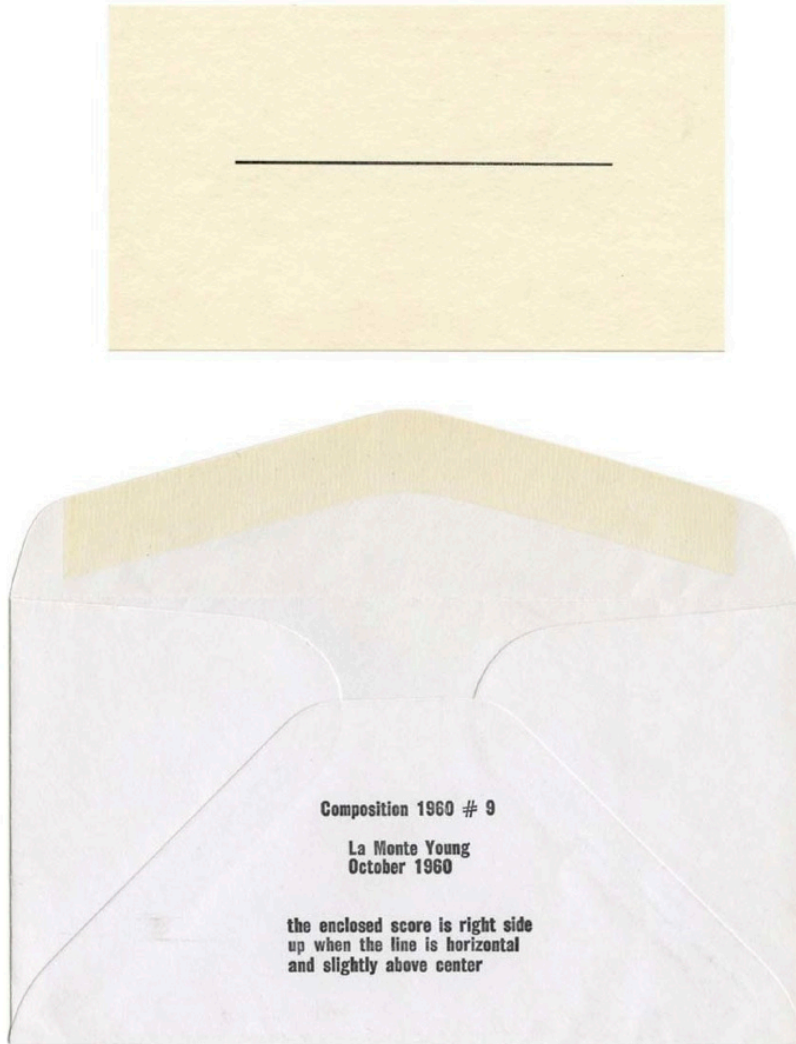


Figure 3.6. La Monte Young, *Composition 1960 #9*, 1960.



Figure 3.7. Fluxus display at Carnegie Hall, 1965.



Figure 3.8. Various copies of *Fluxus I*, 1964.



Figure 3.9. Ay-O, *Finger Hole*, c. 1964.

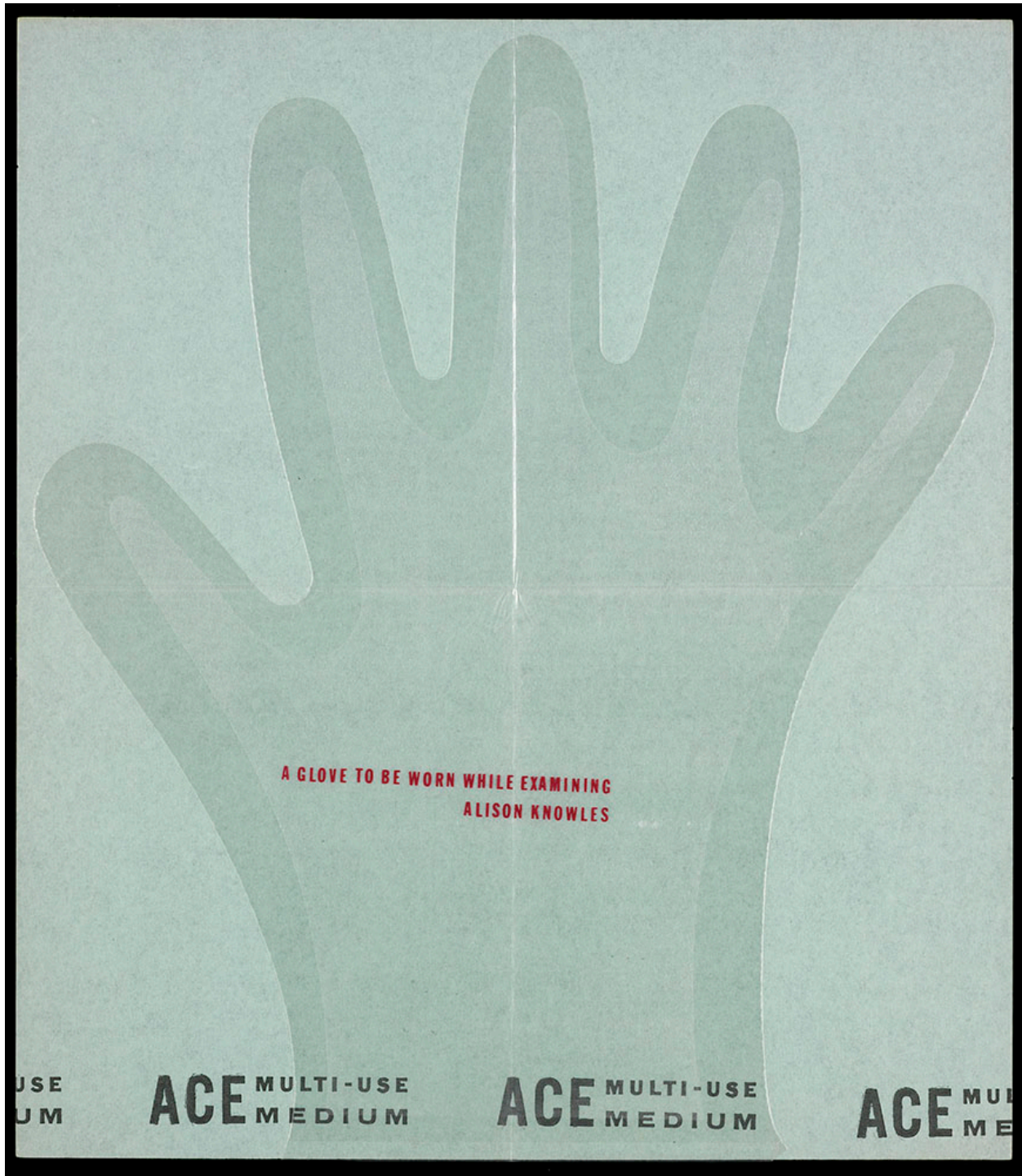


Figure 3.10. Alison Knowles, *Glove to Be Worn While Examining*, c. 1964.



Figure 3.11. George Maciunas, photograph of *Fluxus I*, c. 1965.



Figure 3.12. Hanns Sohm, photograph of George Maciunas's storeroom at 349 West Broadway, c. 1967.



Figure 3.13. Prototype and various versions of Ben Vautier, *Trou Portatif (Flux Holes)*, 1964.



Figure 3.14. Prototype and various versions of Ben Vautier, *Dirty Water*, 1963.



Figure 3.15. George Brecht, prototype, *Closed on Monday*, c. 1966.



Figure 3.16. George Brecht, *Closed on Mondays*, 1969.

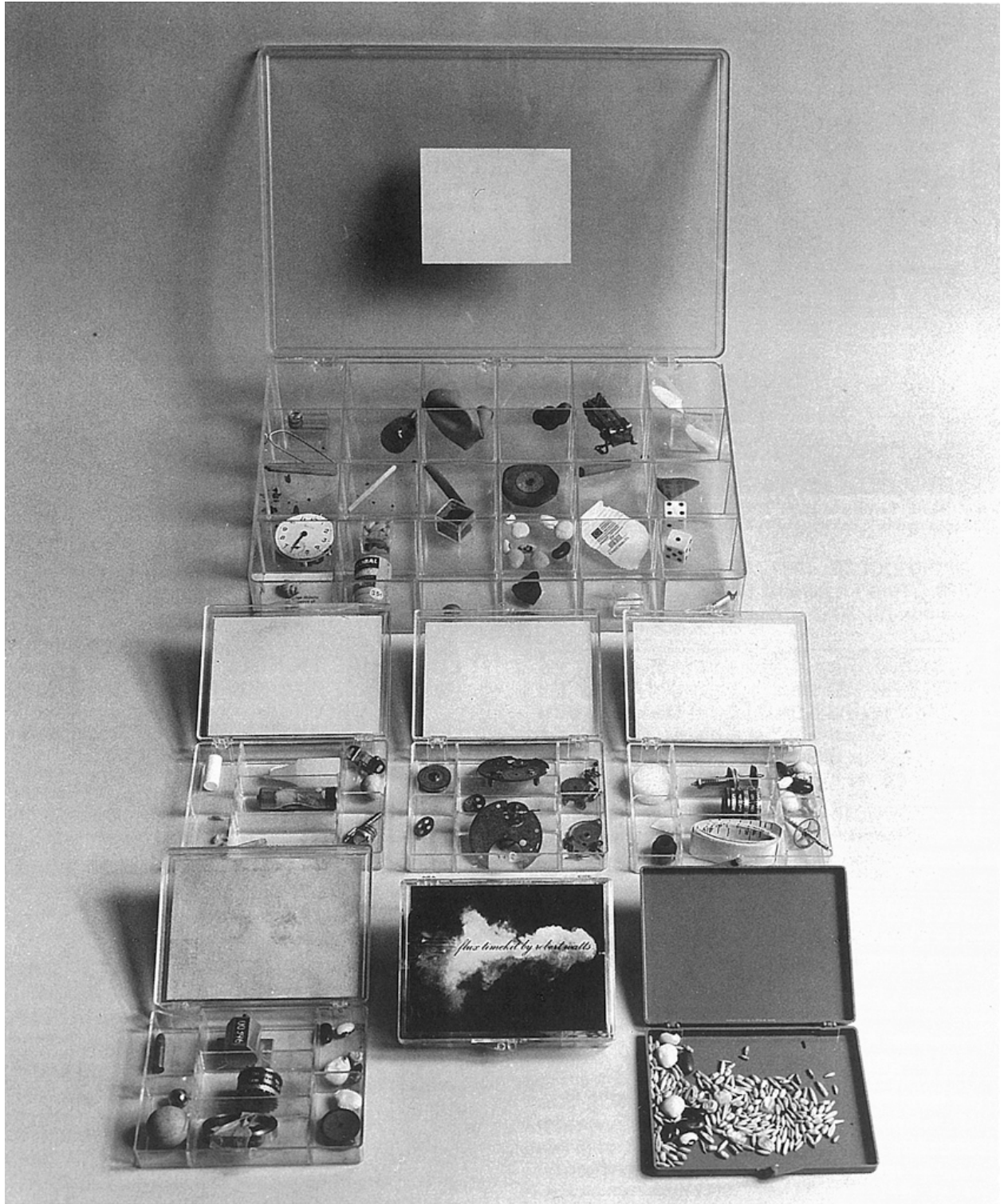


Figure 3.17. Various versions of Robert Watts, *Flux Timekit*, c. 1966.



Figure 3.18. Anonymous (George Maciunas), *Fresh Goods from the East*, c. 1964.



Figure 3.19. George Maciunas, photograph of Fluxbox editions, 1964.



Figure 3.20. Multiples Inc., New York, 1966.



Figure 3.21. Various, *Fluxkit*, 1964.

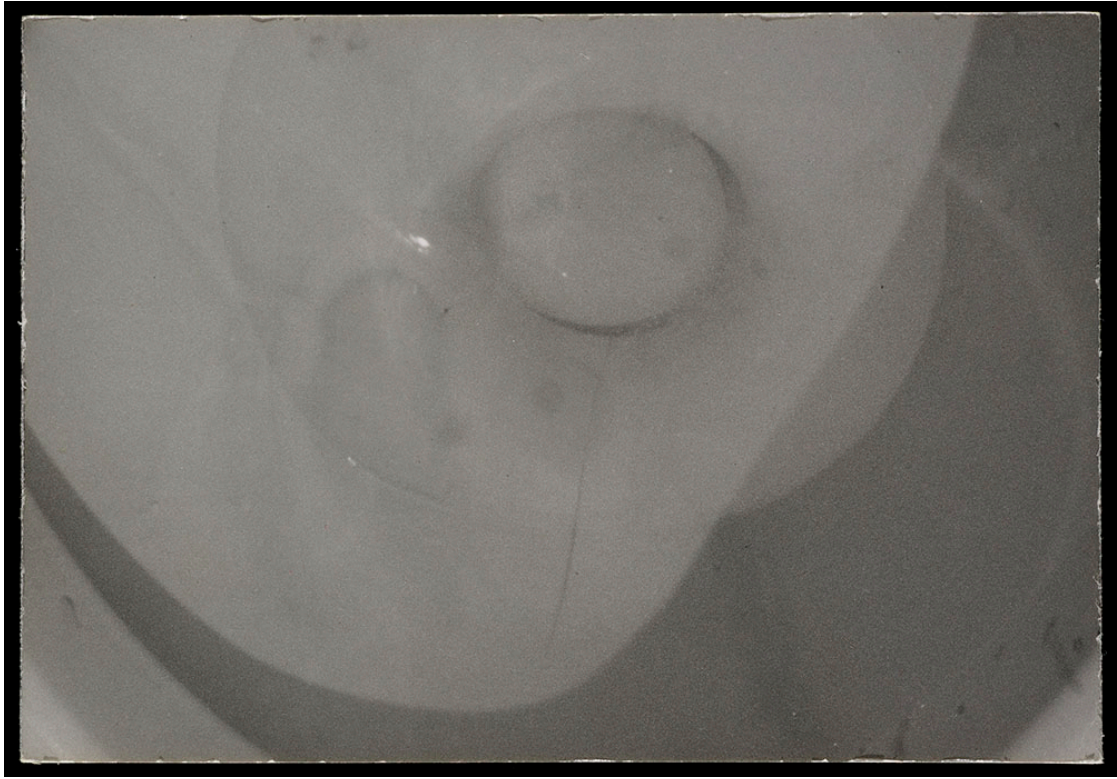


Figure 3.22. Detail, Ben Vautier, *Flux Holes*, 1964.

DIRECTION

Arrange to observe a sign indicating direction of travel.

- travel in the indicated direction
- travel in another direction



One Hundred

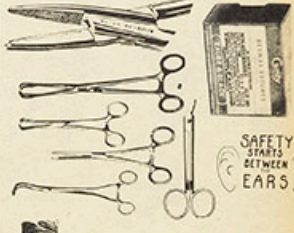
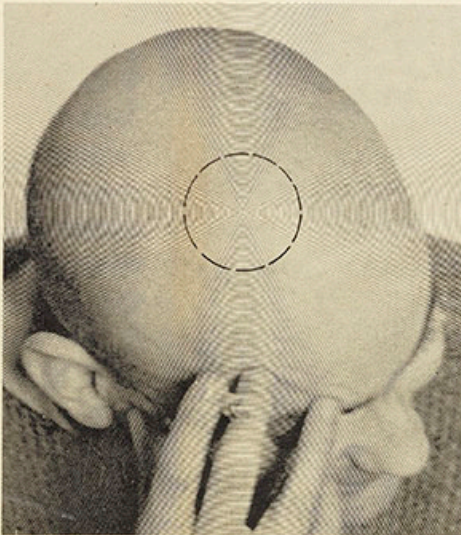
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 one one one one one one one one

WOOD
 World famous founder
 of reading dynamics
WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO READ and comprehend 3 TO 10

Pick the "fun" number

Jackson Mac Low
 15 December 1961
 945 Hoe Avenue
 New York 59 NY

LINCOLN CENTER
For the Performing Arts
PHILHARMONIC TAKES ON THE AVANT-GARDE



SAFETY STARTS BETWEEN EARS

from a richard maxfield concert :
 elektrisirk nachtmusick

I (for j. mac l.)
 thiqu thas toss bambu jungel
 rodlagu doors open ope pian o
 whips whisparati whispokeak
 flah flashhappen whispowont
 grasshapper hoppersin wirt

Ilillog moyllit grossweak
 no noiw leanda meanda meout
 molloi symph sypath seasymp
 tymph tatyph latame ti ti
 meta metaph musiat a lirslog

Jim htmawed jimawed jinjoymt
 joyjoynt joboy jobi jajaw jajo
 jaju kennabekken bak bak
 gainin gan Indragon dragonoso

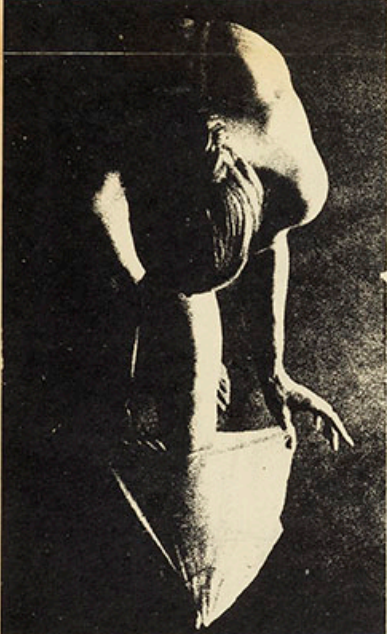
o dragonlligh courts down o
 trem thik bambu juppi o cilie
 thirread owt spewspok a yew

II (for r. e. b.)
 o lrv telus be kine to l.
 anzth ml crier pine wheel o
 disetabl rive und than nie
 zi gliori un lito undice arrs
 nubli skit lightn in cri
 orak has hairs der un woodwatch
 skti skat ut opit ut remsu
 kurg dovid mof un majestum
 thot u shud be l hoo urderst
 thot war approche thot armj
 muve down o'ida mudder rode
 alnsaqua ls own foetus shoe
 muven in shellalorn w/ alla
 shells fallin aroun sich
 and marrow twarg et sprachen
 sprung out filamenta massa ze
 zaidur cumen seed meln ovarj
 okapi disguys sthll burt fr
 yest ope kall katzen katsumi
 unden orientar skimme schliml
 aber ober ajack abjeck i kameen
 ths awry u a weat wadin wid
 luk lak masse ml qui veut yu

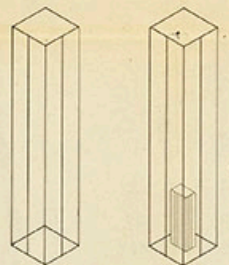
III (for r. k.)
 nacht au sich eine cleensmel
 hamcricket dikkn ewnin cocoon
 neetwon ya yup up owen jorge
 ye mucfox joice fuwracholy em
 teven un nicht nacht blossun
 fratzwend movin eyah in er eye
 ah seez ye hrtbeest makkim a
 maxum stima to tremu chees
 breadrats tumum out each cam
 camboly ovah rest lita robot
 summa robot frossbottland cole
 impernial letre lakme blad en
 spel vykewishe vosc voibis bosk

IV (for d. w.)
 winda sonun awakenin on rry
 grayv gravitie ti moonshamey
 la monstque tumov brid beerd
 gl rabel gl semin ol vuiner ol
 shi cooson apulian wast zim
 watta bufalch fa la outa fr to
 nowland thatzain hunz atque
 thistren go groumstist oa pine
 down hollow up mts tis ov
 thei haku ml coosrio no wind sv
 wlv shtiant weve upin nachtwind

carel berqf
 new york city
 april 1961



"ONE OF THE BEST!" —DAILY NEWS
"IMPRESSIVE!" —JOURNAL-BROADCAST
"MEMORABLE!" —WORLD TELEGRAM
"A GIGANTIC DRAMA!" —DAILY MAGAZINE
"AN EPIC!" —EVENING MAGAZINE
"BRILLIANT!" —HERALD TRIBUNE
"A TRIUMPH!" —NEWSDAY



Portrait of John Cage
 Portrait of the School of Cage, Caged (De Maria 6Z)



V. Feldman by permission from PUNCH

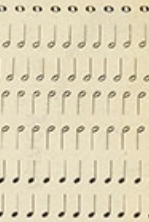


Figure 3.25. Back page, cc VTRE, February 1964.



Figure 3.26. Various, *Flux Year Box 2*, 1967.



Figure 3.27. Robert Watts, assorted figures from the series *New Light on West Africa*, 1976.

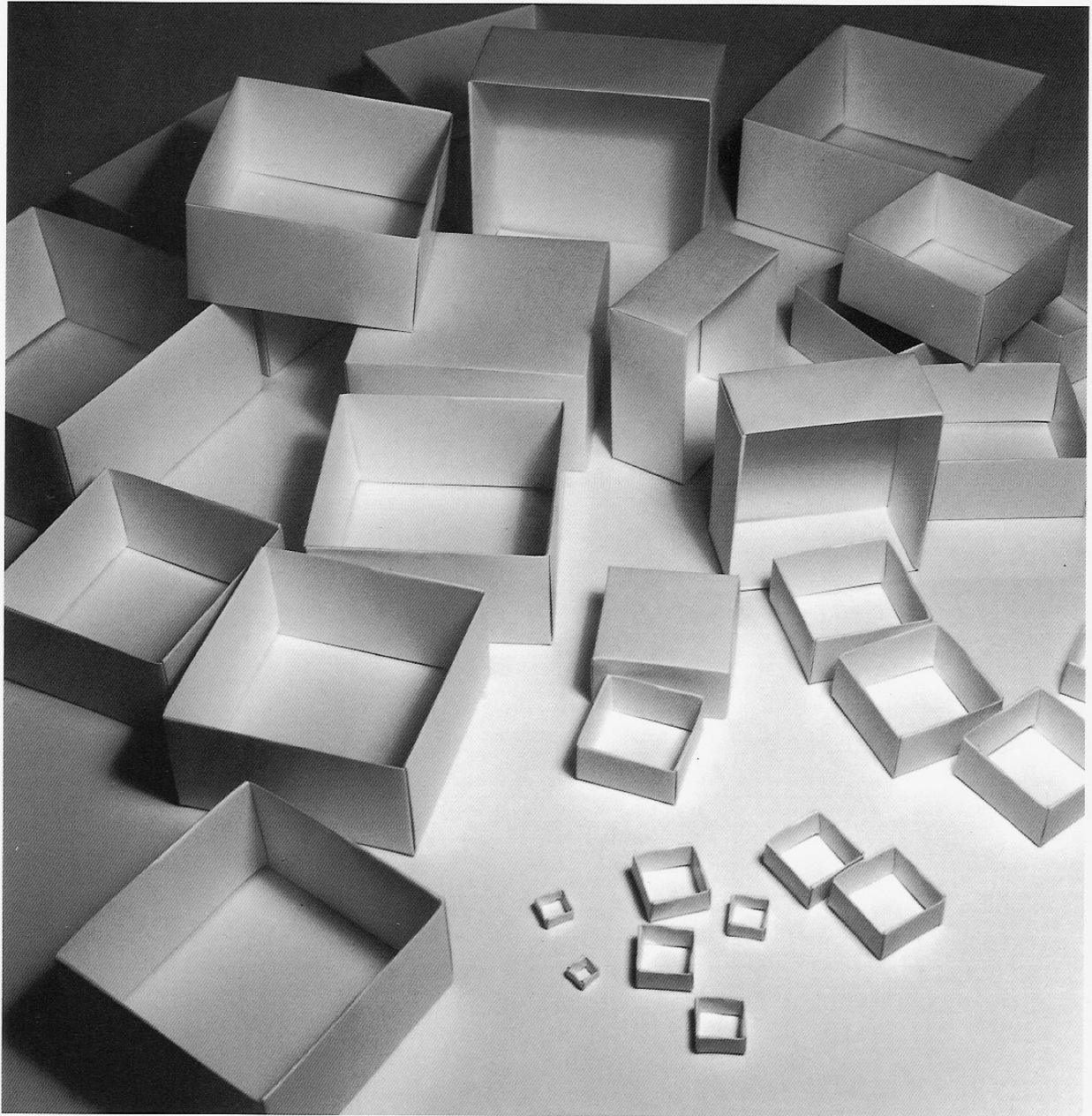


Figure 3.28. Robert Watts, *Untitled (Assorted Eggs from The American Supermarket)*, 1964.



Ay-O. FINGER BOX. A selection of Fluxus Editions, and a prototype made by the artist

Figure 3.29. Ay-O, prototype and various versions of *Finger Box*, c. 1964.



Maciunas' photograph of Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi's *Endless Box*, Fluxus Editions 1964

Figure 3.30. Mieko Shiomi, *Endless Box*, 1964 (photographed by George Maciunas).



Figure 3.31. George Maciunas, *Excreta Fluxorum*, 1973.



Figure 3.32. Robert Filliou, *Fluxhair*, c. 1968.



Figure 3.33. Robert Filliou, *Fluxdust*, c. 1967.



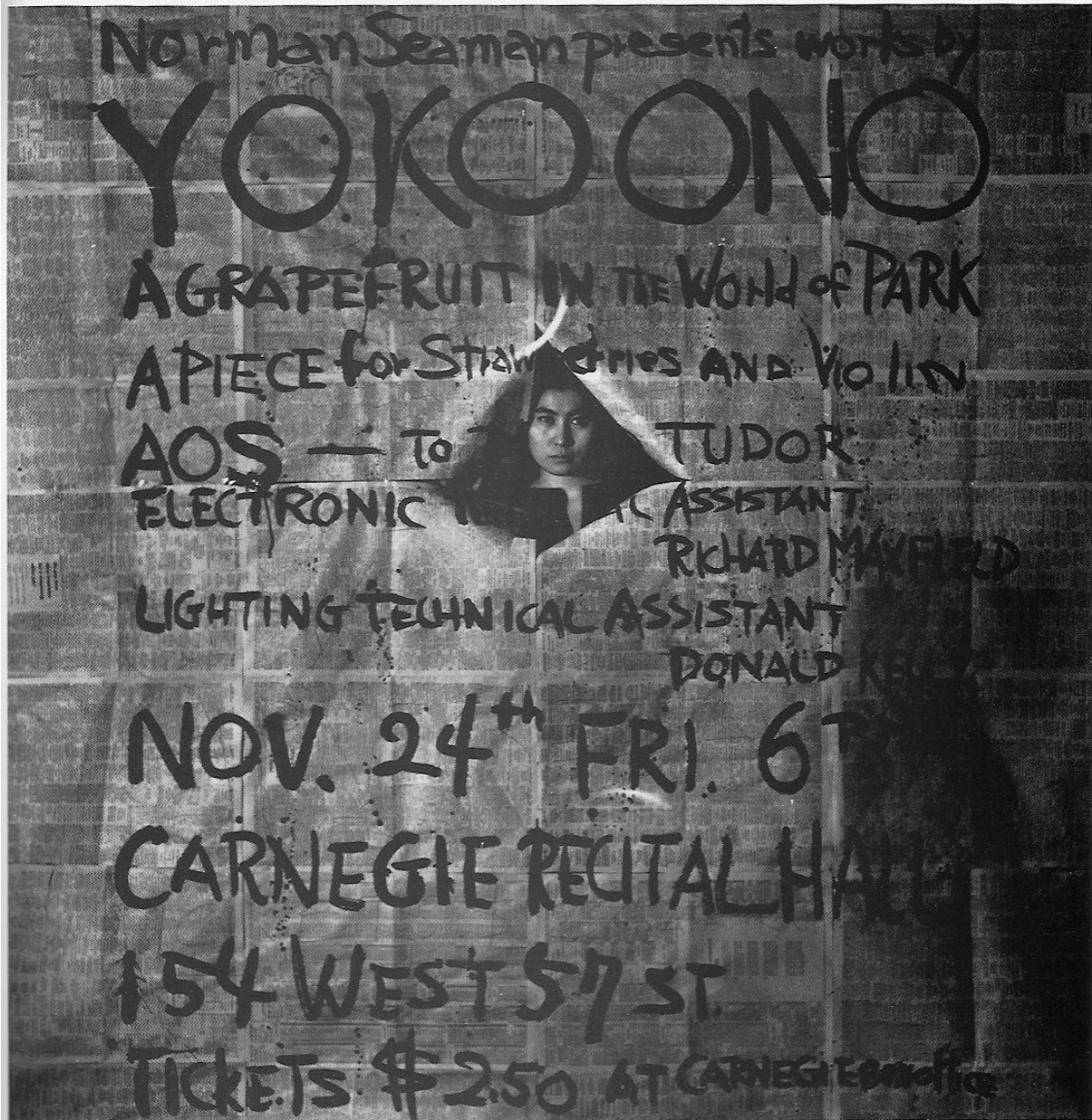
Figure 3.34. Alison Knowles, *Bean Rolls*, c. 1963.



Figure 3.35. Larry Miller, *Orifice Flux Plugs*, 1974.



Figure 3.36. Ken Friedman, *Flux Clippings*, 1969.



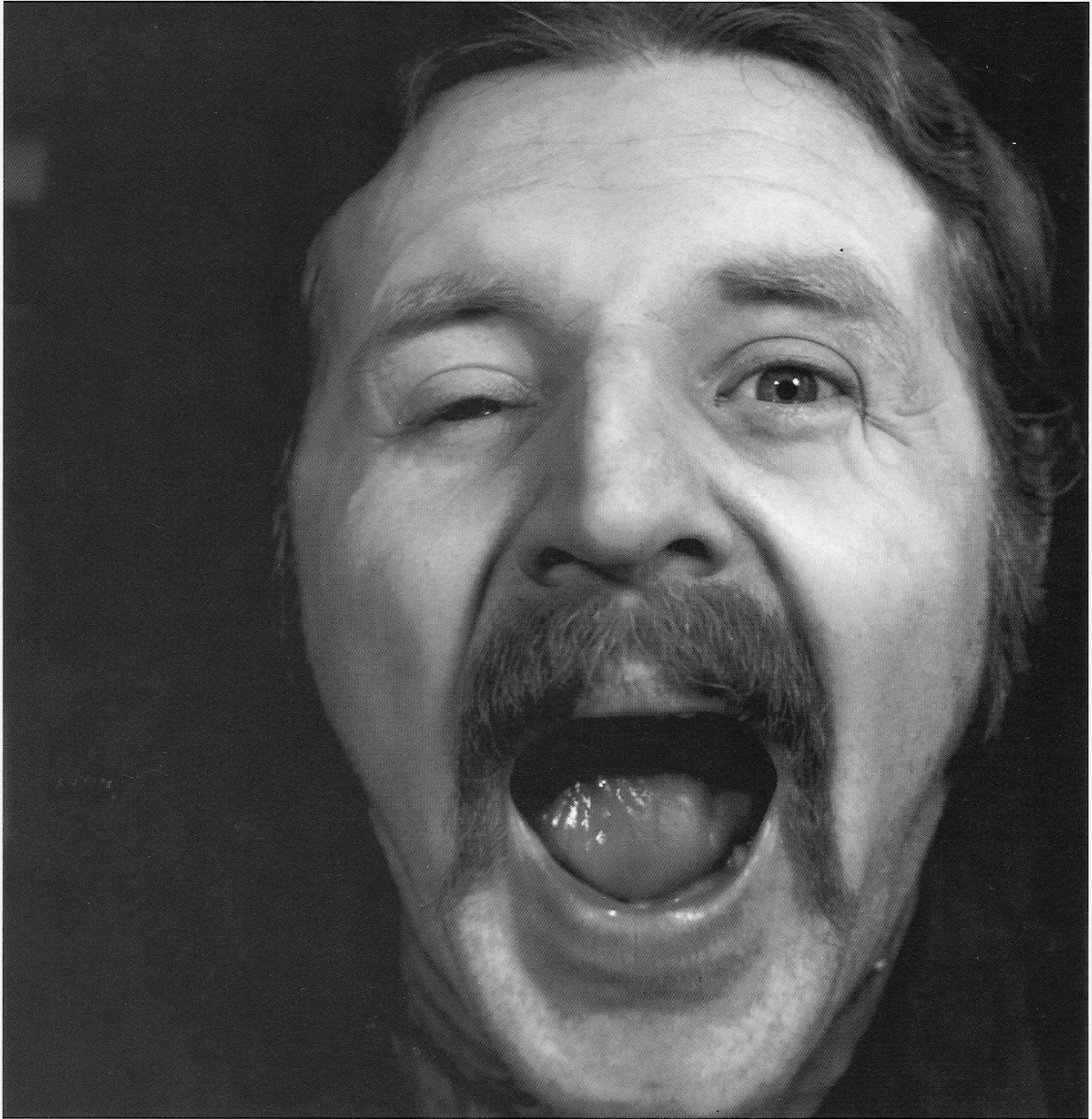
Maciunas' portrait of Yoko Ono behind her concert poster for *A Grapefruit in the World of Park*, Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, 24 November 1961

Figure 3.37. George Maciunas, portrait of Yoko Ono, 1961.



Maciunas' portrait of Ay-O, c. 1964

Figure 3.38. George Maciunas, portrait of Ay-O, c. 1964.



Maciunas' portrait of Milan Knížák, c. 1967

Figure 3.39. George Maciunas, portrait of Milan Knížák, c. 1967.



Figure 3.40. Robert Watts, portrait of George Maciunas, 1977.



Figure 3.41. Takako Saito, *Make 300 holes with any implement. This is my gift*, 1964.



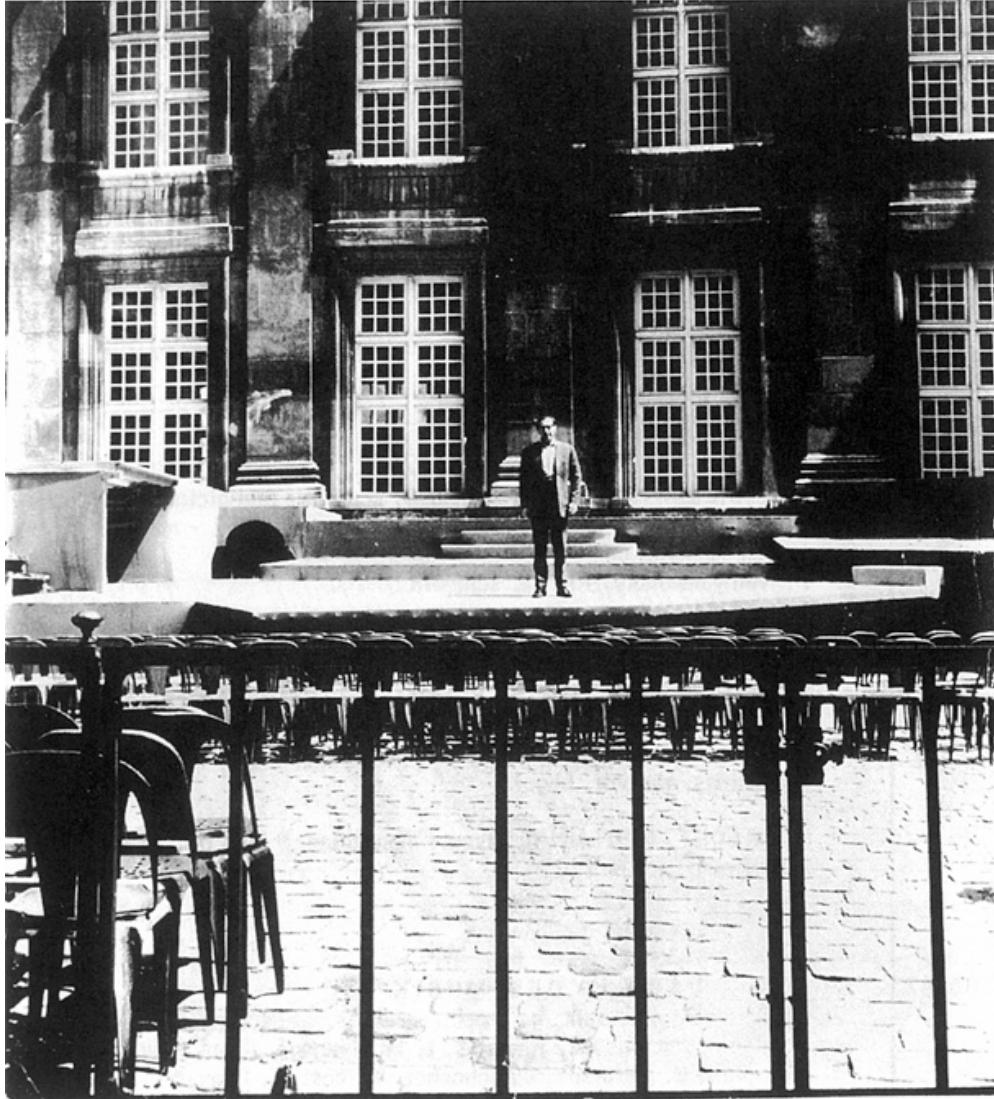
Figures 4.1 (top), 4.2 (bottom). Ben Vautier and Alison Knowles, Fluxus Street Theater, New York, 1964.



Figure 4.3. George Maciunas, Fluxus Street Events promotional photograph, 1964. From left: Dick Higgins, Letty Lou Eisenhauer, Daniel Spoerri, Alison Knowles, Ay-O.



Figure 4.4. Fluxhall interior view, c. 1964.



3 No-Plays

No-Play #1

This is a play nobody must come and see. That is, the not-coming of anyone makes the play. Together with the very extensive advertising of the spectacle through newspapers, radio, T.V., private invitations, etc. . . .

No one must be told not to come.

No one should be told that he really shouldn't come.

No one must be prevented from coming in any way whatsoever!!!

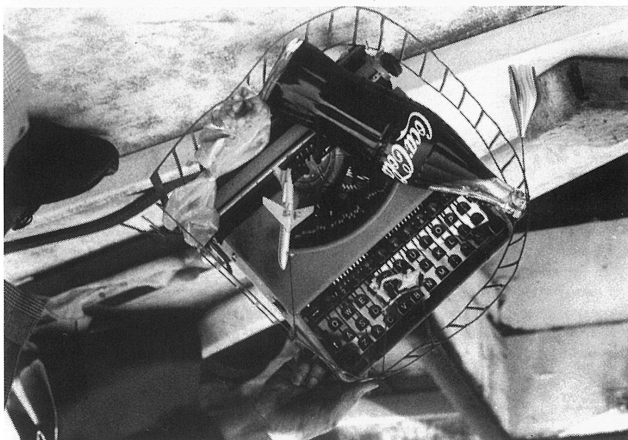
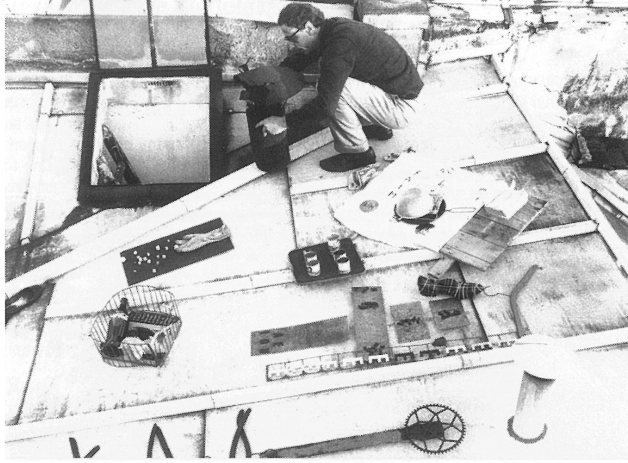
But nobody must come, or there is no play.

That is, if the spectators come, there is no play. And if no spectators come, there is no play either . . . I mean, one way or the other there is a play, but it is a No-Play.

No-Play #2

In this No-Play, time/space is of the essence. It consists of a performance during which no spectator becomes older. If the spectators become older from the time they come to the performance to the time they leave it, then there is no play. That is to say, there is a play, but it is a No-Play.

Figure 4.5. Robert Filliou, *3 No-Plays*, c. 1962.



Figures 4.6-4.9. Robert Filliou installing temporary rooftop exhibition, 36 rue des Rosiers, Paris, 1961. Photographs by Vera Spierri.

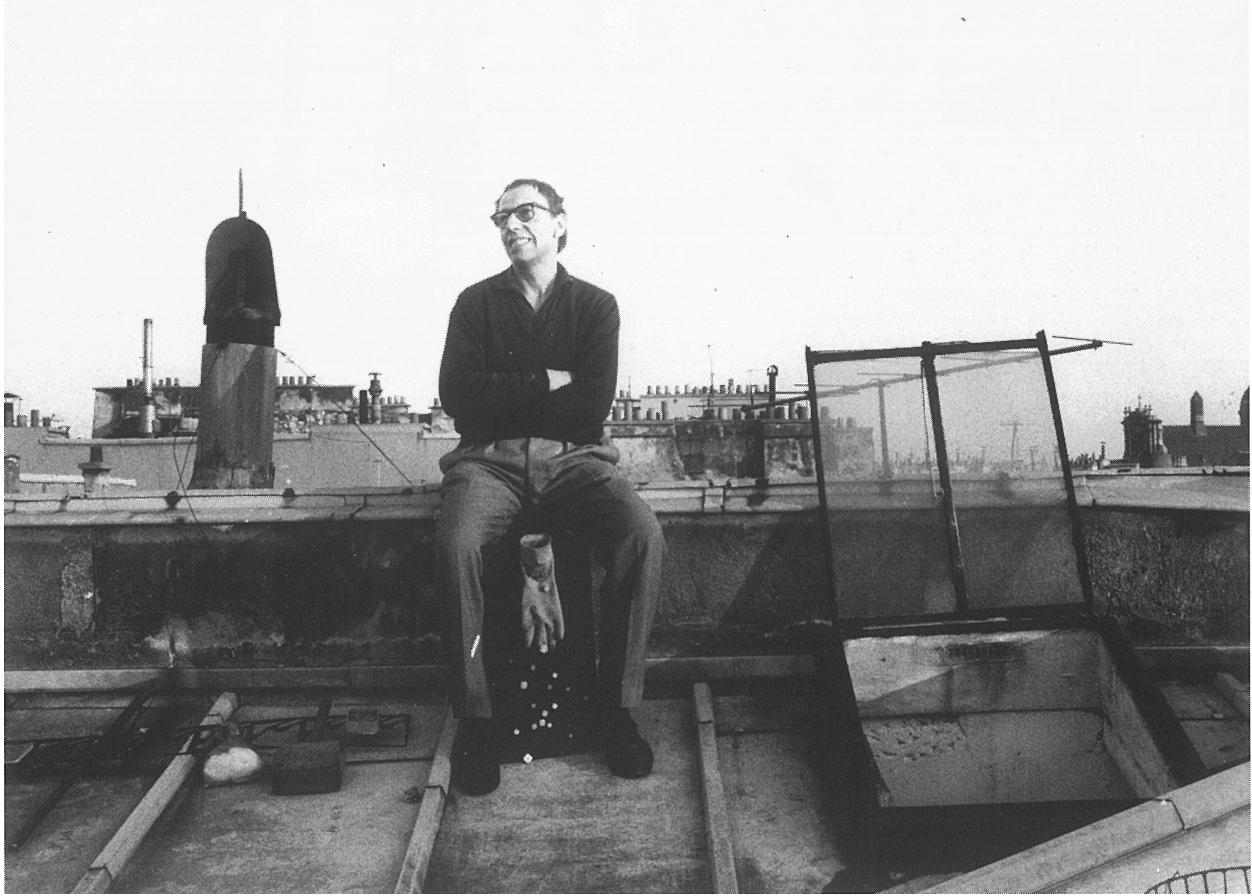


Figure 4.10. Robert Filliou attending his temporary rooftop exhibition, 36 rue des Rosiers, Paris, 1961.



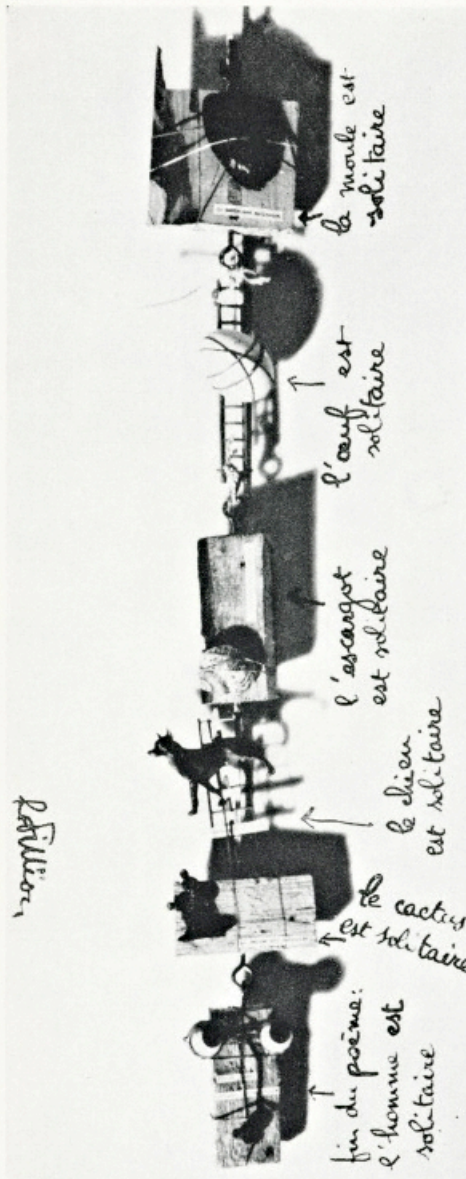
Figures 4.11 (top), 4.12 (bottom). Jacques Strauch and Michou Strauch-Barelli, interior views of La Cédille qui Sourit, c. 1968.



Figure 4.13. Rue de May, Villefranche-sur-Mer.



Figure 4.14. The harbor end of Rue de May, Villefranche-sur-Mer.



ETUDE
D'ACHEMINEMENT
DE POEMES
EN PETITE VITESSE

•
Cher Théodore,

Vous êtes-vous jamais abonné à un poème ? Vous pouvez le faire pour la somme de 2.000 anciens francs ou 20 N.F. ou leur équivalent en monnaies étrangères.

Pour cette somme, vous recevez chaque deux ou trois semaines, franco de port et d'emballage, un vers-objet, jusqu'à ce que le poème soit terminé (environ cinq envois). Le tout accroché par vos soins dans l'ordre d'arrivée formera un objet-poème de

Robert Filliou

P. S. — La teneur du poème dépendant des objets envoyés, chaque abonné possèdera un objet-poème unique. De plus, à chaque personne qui m'apportera trois abonnés, un nouveau poème sera offert gratuitement.

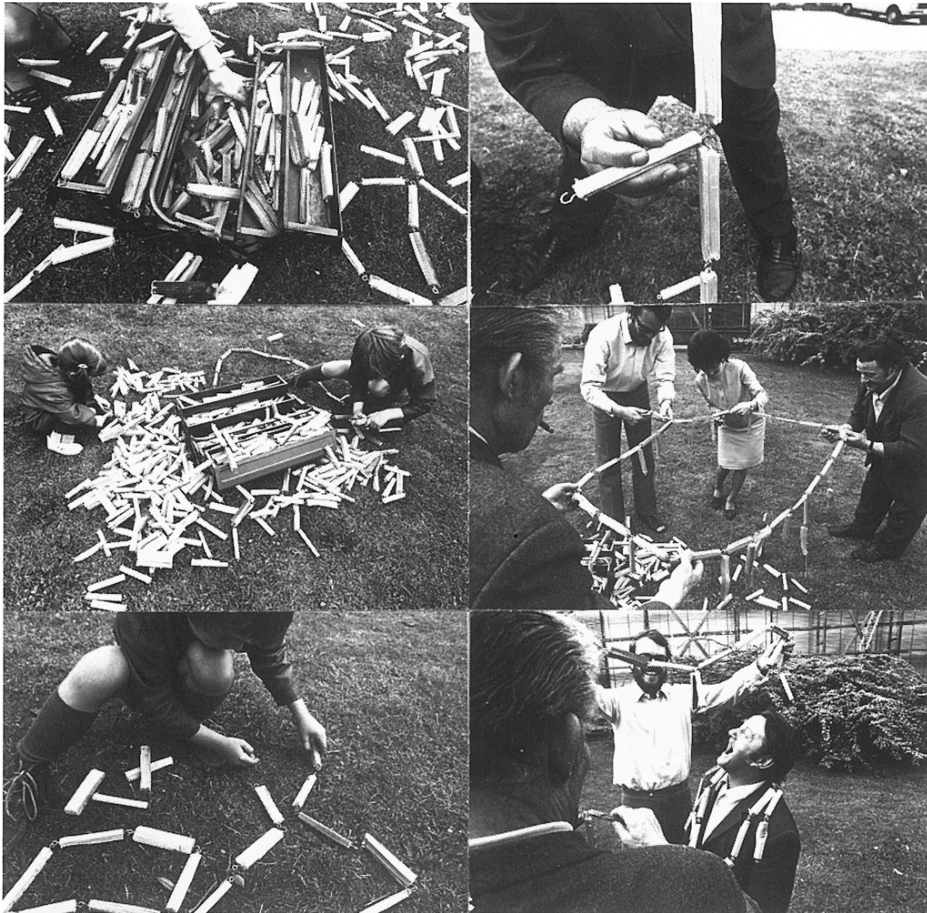
Prière de m'envoyer l'argent sous enveloppe, ou par mandat.

Votre adresse m'a été indiquée par : toi-même.

Figure 4.15. Robert Filliou, Illustration accompanying subscription announcement for *Étude d'acheminement d'poèmes en petite vitesse*, 1961. Printed in *Phantomas*, no. 50 (1965): 19.



Figures 4.16 (left), 4.17 (right). Robert Filliou, *L'homme est solitaire*, 1961-62; and *La chèvre est solitaire*, 1963.



Figures 4.18 (top), 4.19 (bottom). Robert Filliou, *Permanent Creation Toolbox no. 2*, 1969.

LA CEDILLE QUI SOURIT
Jonna, George Brecht, Marianne, Robert Filliou
12 rue de May, Villefranche-sur-Mer, A.M.

SUSPENSE-POEMS BY SUBSCRIPTION

Dear

Have you ever subscribed to a suspense-poem? Now you can - for the sum of 30 dollars or its equivalent in foreign currency.

In return you will receive a verse-object two or three times a week, without charge for postage or handling, until the poem is complete (about five mailings).

The whole, put together through your efforts in the order of arrival, will form a suspense-poem-object by GEORGE BRECHT or ROBERT FILLIOU.

Marianne Staffeldt
Handler of Affairs

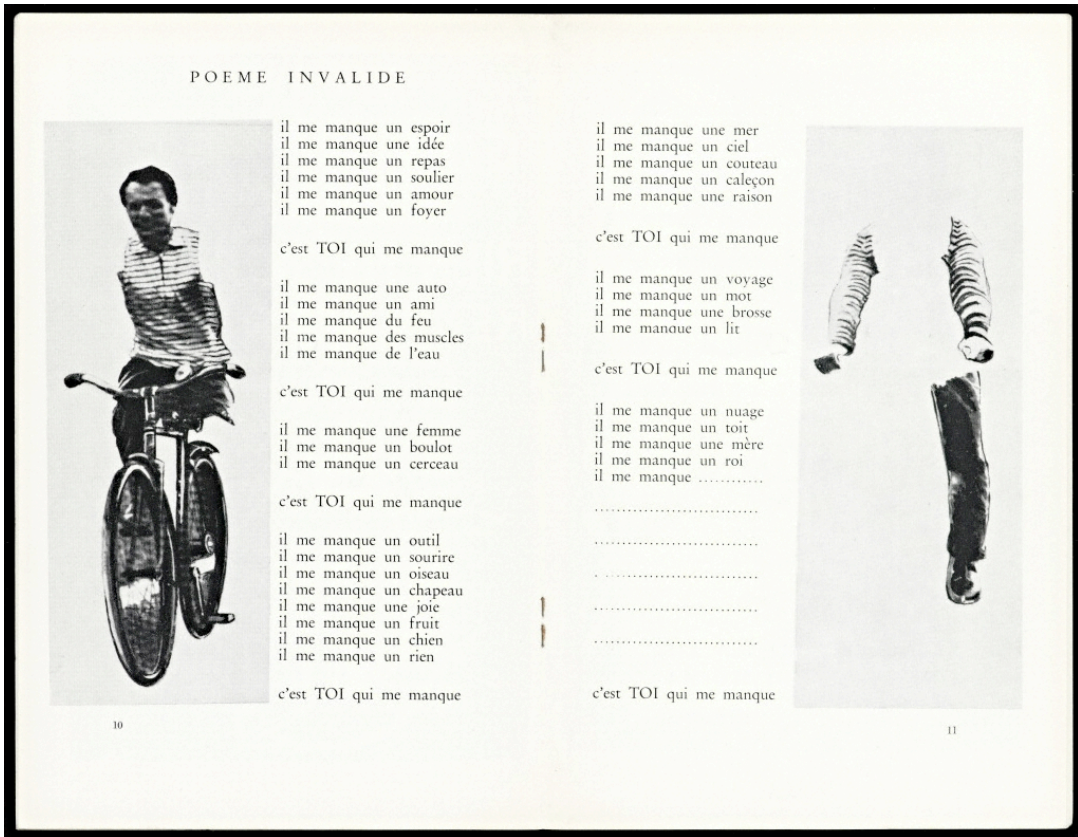
P.S. Each poem is limited to fifty numbered and signed copies. Orders will be filled on a first-come-first-served basis. Orders received after one poem is sold will be applied to the following suspense-poem.
Please pay by check or money order made out to MARIANNE STAFFELDT.
Your address was given to me by:

LA CEDILLE QUI SOURIT HANDLES EVERYTHING WHICH HAS OR DOES NOT HAVE A CEDILLA.
Continuing creation of presents and unusual games, with the collaboration of numerous artists.
Distribution of original works. Objects-poems.
Supplying publications of Edition MAT, MAT-MOT, Fluxus, Something Else Press.

Figure 4.20. La Cédille qui Sourit, Suspense Poem subscription announcement, c. 1965.



Figure 4.21. George Brecht, La Cédille qui Sourit address stamp, c. 1965.



Figures 4.22 (above), 4.23 (left). Robert Filliou, *Poème invalide*, 1965. From *Phantomas*, no. 50 (1965): 10-12.

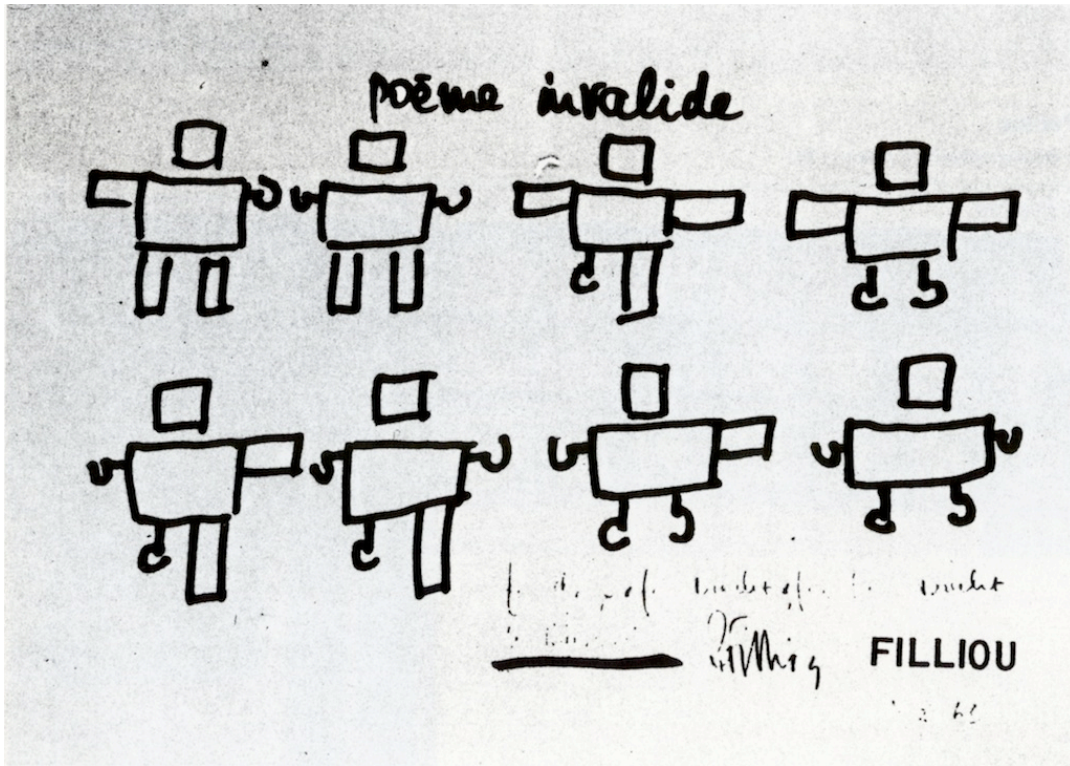


Figure 4.24. Robert Filliou, *Poème invalide* sketch, 1964.

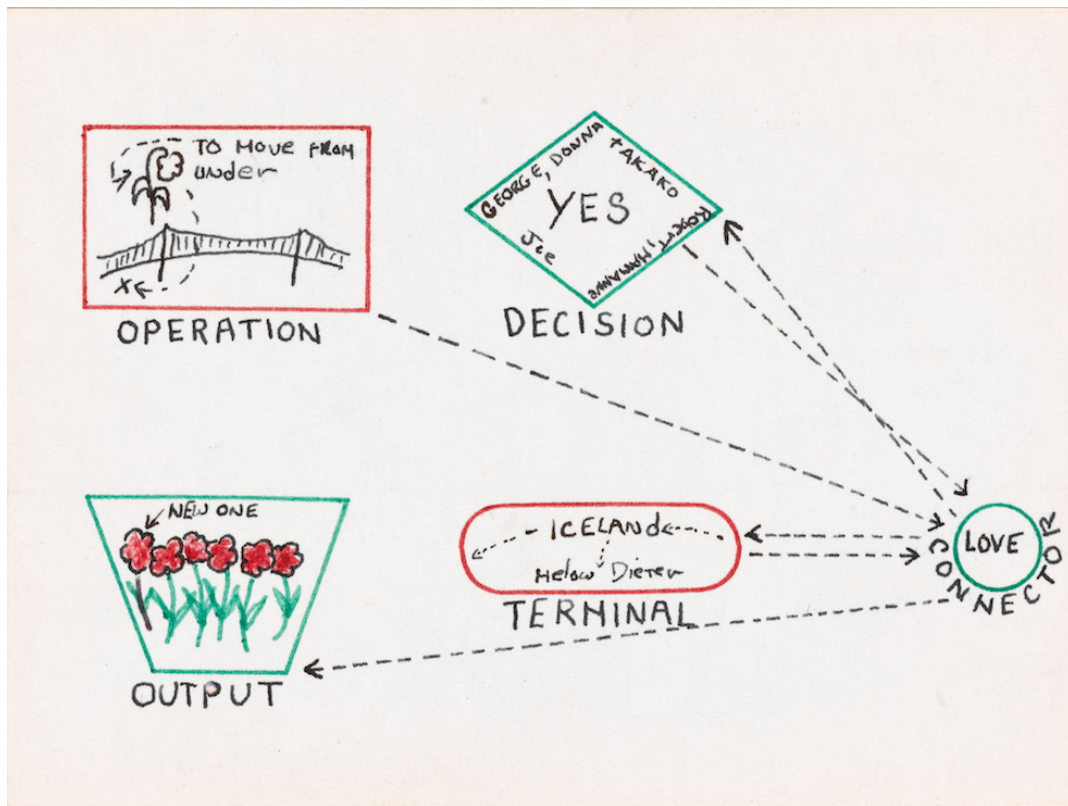


Figure 4.25. Joe Jones, *Untitled*, 1967, Hanns Sohm Archive, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

LA CEDILLE QUI SOURIT
Donna, George Brecht, Marianne, Robert Filliou
12, rue de May, Villefranche-sur-Mer, A.M.

TENTATIVE DE RAJEUNISSEMENT DE L'ART D'OFFRIR

Cadeaux conçus et créés par:

ARMAN: demi-livres de demi-livre
BRAU
FRANCOIS DUFRENE: poésie physique, disques, édition spéciale
GIL WOLMAN
GEORGE BRECHT: montres Cédille
DONNA BREWER: beads, pendants
LOURDES CASTRO: cartes néo-touristiques
FERRO: chircollages
ROBERT FILLIOU: boîtes optimistes
GILLI: pinçeaux
GROS: boîtes à cédille à lumière
ALISON KNOWLES: cravates
J.J. LEBEL
MALAVAL: gravures
SERGE OLDENBOURG: contenus
JOACHIM PFEUFER et ROBERT FILLIOU: kaléidoscopes out of the polpoïdrome
ROTELLA: petits monuments
SAIKO SHIOMI: fenêtres
DANIEL SPOERRI: lunettes de fakir
MARIANNE STAFFELDT: sacs à linge
A. THOREAU: 60 fois Victor Hugo
ANDRE TOMKINS: tampons-palindromes
TOPOR: journées de TOPOR
BEN VAUTIER: trous portatifs
BERNARD VENET: découpages
VILLEGLE: affichettes
EMMETT WILLIAMS: hiéroglyphes
TOM WASMUTH: carbonnes
CHRIS WOODS: puddings - chats siamois (selon la saison)

cadeaux acheminés sur demande

LA CEDILLE QUI SOURIT ACHEMINE TOUT CE QUI S'ECRIT AVEC OU SANS CEDILLE
Poèmes-suspense
Diffusion d'oeuvres originales, Objet-poèmes
Dépositaires Edition MAT, MAT-MOT, FLUXUS, SOMETHING ELSE PRESS, MOUNA
FRERES

Responsable: Marianne Staffeldt.

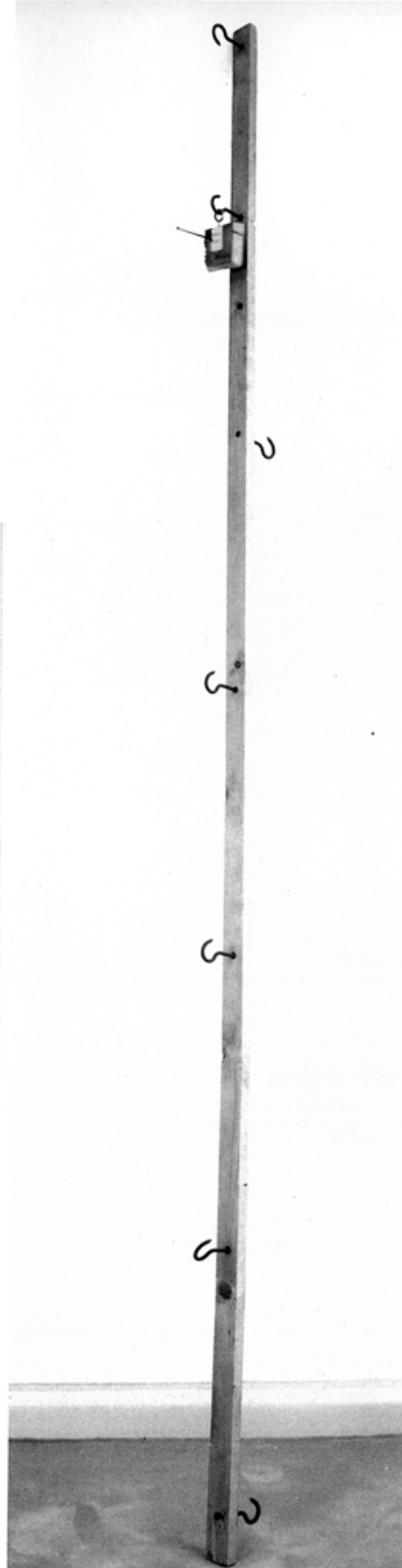
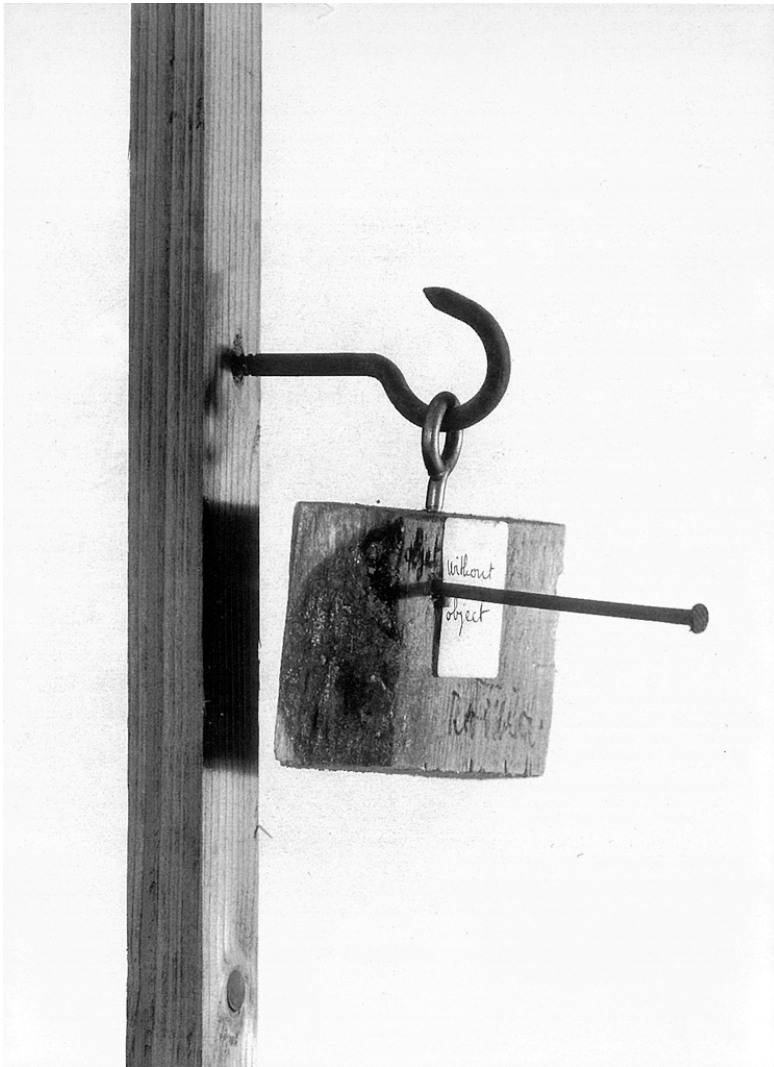
Figure 4.26. La Cédille qui Sourit, *Tentative de rajeunissement de l'art d'offrir*
invitation/announcement, 1965.



Figure 4.27. Poster announcing La Cédille qui Sourit exhibition “Offerings inattendus” at Galerie Ranson, Paris, 1966, Hanns Sohm Archive, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.



Figure 4.28. George Brecht and Robert Filliou, Untitled (*Banqueroute*), 1968, Hanns Sohm Archive, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.



Figures 4.29 (left), 4.30 (right). Robert Filliou, *Object Without Object*, 1969, Collection Wolfgang and Ute Feelisch.

a VTRE EXTRA

No. 11

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Unsettled

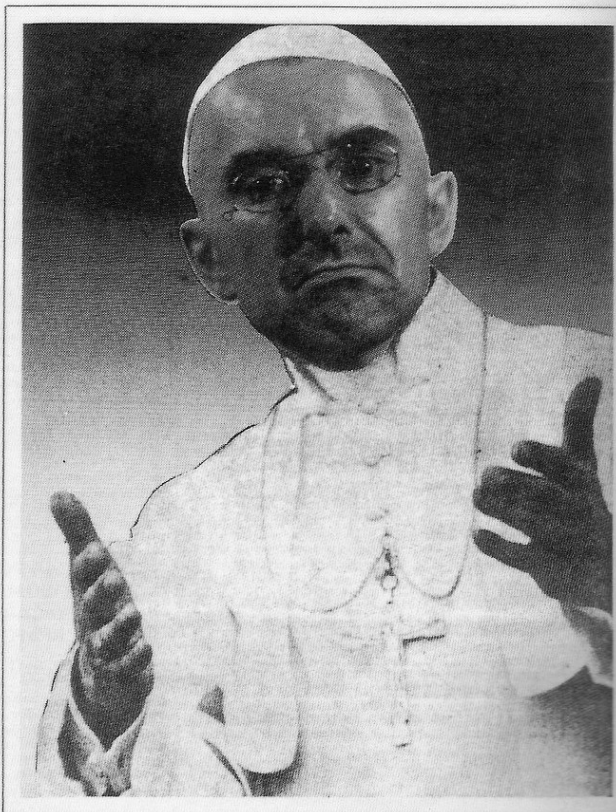
Saturday, March 24, 1979

TV Page 18

\$2.00

Hart attack kills him at summer palace

MACI UNAS DIES



George Maciunas in one of his many disguises to elude the Attorney General.

Flux Pope George Maciunas died last year after collapsing with a heart attack at his summer palace in New Marlborough. Earlier doctors fought to save the 92 years old spinster after being beaten and gang raped. He was given the last rites and the Flux Council appealed for world-wide prayers for his life.

'With deep anguish' Sobbing aide breaks news to the world

"She suffered horribly," said a Scotland Yard man. "The people who did this were animals."

A sobbing spokesman announced the news "with profound anguish and emotion." Crowds wept in the main square outside the palace.

Bruises

Three youths were involved—Afterwards one of them went to sleep on the battered spinster's bed. The parish church bell tolled a death knell. The papal Flux guards, dressed in their evening uniform of dark blue, closed the heavy gates of the palace.

The Pope was administered a Holy Flux Oil, a rite known as "extreme unction."

The old lady was raped three times. Her jaw and six ribs were

broken. Her body was a mass of bruises—battered with her own aluminum tea kettle. At the time the frail leader of 700 million pranksters was listening to jokes recited at his bedside by his private secretary.

Tragedy

"This was the most horrific attack on a woman I have ever experienced and one I hope I'll never experience again," added Detective Inspector Robert Hayday, who is leading the investigation.

The Pope's two personal physicians, the Fluxus Secretary of State, George Brecht, and several others were at the Pope's bedside when he died. Yesterday the spinster underwent two emergency operations in Bart's Hospital, London. Only six days ago the Pope visited a cardinal's tomb and told a congregation, "I hope to meet him after death, which cannot be far away."

The attack was on Saturday night. A police spokesman said: "He made full use of his jet age papacy and in his 15 years of office has travelled further and wider than

any of his predecessors." "An apostle on the move," he was the first reigning pontiff to travel by air, the first to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and the first to receive Communist leaders. He survived a knife attack in the Philippines in 1978. Two youths shinned up a drainpipe into the neighboring flat of a 34 year old man who was out playing bingo. They ransacked the man's flat. They disturbed the old lady who came up to investigate. They beat her up and then they all raped her.

Blood

One of the most difficult moments was in 1971 when he issued his encyclical letter on so called "Avant Garde" Festivals, which upheld the ban on verbal communication. When the neighbor came home, he found this youth asleep on the bed and the woman in a pool of blood on the floor.

Fluxus officials were said to be inspecting the grottos of St. Peter's Basilica, where Popes are buried, and the sewers of Rome. It was during this that he was stricken by

the fatal attack. Last night a youth was helping police inquiries.

Strollers along the waterfront of Buenos Aires are often surprised to see the crews of Japanese merchant ships playing stickball or catch, which the soccer-loving Argentine longshoremen consider "quaint Oriental games."

The Eskimos have been forbidden by Danish authorities to hunt within several square miles of the crash site. The Eskimos have also been told not to boil their meat with melted sea ice, as they have done for centuries in order to obtain salt, but to buy salt at the Danish Government trading post and to use melted glacier ice from the island for water instead.

450 SPERRY WORKERS FACE THE AX

A funeral atmosphere gripped the Sperry Gyroscope plant at Lake Success, L.I., today as its 6,350 employees reported for work.

Figure 4.31. Fluxus Editorial Council, *a VTRE EXTRA*, 1979.

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