The New Theatre
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The New Theatre

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Since the turn of the century, most art forms have vastly expanded their materials and scope. Totally abstract or non-objective painting and sculpture, unheard of in 1900, is practiced by many major artists today. Composers tend to discard traditional Western scales and harmonies, and atonal music is relatively common. Poetry has abandoned rhyme, meter, and syntax. Almost alone among the arts, theatre has lagged. But during the last few years there have been a number of performances that begin to bring theatre into some relation with the other arts. These works, as well as productions in other performance-oriented fields, force us to examine theatre in a new light and raise questions about the meaning of the word "theatre" itself.

In discussing this new theatre, new terms are needed. A few have already been provided by public usage, although they need clarification and standardization. Others will have to be created. Accurate nomenclature is important—not for the sake of limitation but to facilitate easy, accurate, and creative exchange among those concerned with the work and its concepts. If my own approach seems too serious, it may be justified as a reaction against those who take the new theatre very lightly and thus dismiss, without seeing them, theatrical developments of real importance.

It is clear, however, that perfect definitions are almost impossible to derive from actual recent theatrical productions. Just as no *formal* distinctions between poetry and prose can be made in some cases, and passages of "prose" are published in anthologies of "poetry," and as traditional categories of "painting" and "sculpture" grow less and less applicable to much modern work, so theatre exists not as an entity but as a continuum blending into other arts. Each name and term refers only to a significant point on this continuum. Definitions apply to *central tendency,* but cannot set precise limits.

For example, we find that theatre blends at one extreme into painting and sculpture. Traditionally these arts did not structure the time dimension as theatre does, but in recent years paintings and sculptures have begun to move and give off sound. They have become "performers." Some of the works of Rauschenberg and Tinguely are obvious examples, and pieces of kinetic sculpture by Len Lye have been exhibited to an audience from the stage in New York's Museum of Modern Art. Art displays, such as the large Surrealist exhibitions and the recent "labyrinths" of the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel de Paris, are turned into environmental mazes through which the spectator wanders, creating a loose time structure. The Environment which completely surrounds the viewer has become an accepted art form.

Although almost all Environments have made use of light, sound, and movement, *Eat* by Allan Kaprow (see p. 44) went one step further by employing human beings as the "mechanized" elements. The people involved functioned within narrow and well-defined limits of behavior. Their tasks, which had no development or progression, were repeated without variation. They responded only to particular actions on the part of the spectators—only when their "switch was turned on." It may be easy to keep "performing" paintings and sculptures within the categories of those arts, but does Kaprow's use of the human performer make his *Eat* "theatre"? Certainly *Eat* is at the dividing line between forms. My own opinion is that the very strong emphasis upon static environmental elements outweighs the performance elements. *Eat* is not quite theatre. It is just this kind of weighing, this evaluation guided by dominant characteristics and central tendency, which must be used in assigning works of the new theatre to a category.

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The most convenient beginning for a discussion of the new theatre is John Cage. Cage's thought, in his teaching, writing, lectures, and works, is the backbone of the new theatre. In the first place, Cage refuses as a composer to accept any limits for music. Traditional sound-producers did not satisfy him, and he created his own instruments: the prepared piano, in which various materials were placed on the strings of a piano to change the qualities of the sounds; the water gong, which was lowered into water while vibrating to produce a change in tone;

etc. Not only did he equate sound and silence so that long passages of silence were integral parts of his compositions, but he pointed out that absolute silence does not exist. (He is fond of describing his experience in a theoretically sound-proof research room in which he heard two sounds: the circulation of his blood and the functioning of his nervous system.) If sound is ever-present, so are the other senses, and Cage has gone so far as to deny the existence of music itself, if music is considered as hearing isolated from sight, touch, smell, etc.

These considerations led to a shift of emphasis in Cage's concerts toward non-auditory elements. Of course the performance of music for an audience is never entirely auditory. Rituals of tuning up, the appearance of the conductor, and the attitudes, behavior, and dress of the musicians are important parts of the experience. Although we enjoy watching performances on traditional instruments (at a piano recital, for example, seats on the keyboard side are preferred), the visual aspects are relatively easy to take for granted (and those who cannot see the keyboard do not feel cheated). A new instrument, such as a water gong, or a new way of playing, such as reaching inside the piano to pluck the strings, calls attention to itself: *how* the sound is produced becomes as significant a part of the experience as the *quality* of the sound itself. This theatricalization of a musical performance exists on an entirely different level from the emotional dramatizations of a Bernstein.

If any kind of sound-producer may be used to make music, and if silence is also music (because true silence does not exist), it follows that any activity or event may be presented as part of a music concert. La Monte Young may use a butterfly as his sound source; the ONCE group can refer to the performance of a piece which includes the broadcast narration of a horse race (the only primarily auditory element), the projected image of rolling marbles, and a series of people moving in various ways (on roller skates, etc.) as "music."

This emphasis upon performance, which is one result of a refusal to place limits upon music, draws attention to the performer himself. But the musician is not acting. Acting might be defined as the creation of character and/or place: details of "who" and "where" the performer is are necessary to the performance. The actor functions within subjective or objective person-place matrices. The musician, on the other hand, is *non-matrixed.* He attempts to be no one other than himself, nor does he

function in a place other than that which physically contains him and the audience.

Non-matrixed performances are not uncommon. Although the audience-performer relationship which is the basis of theatre exists in sporting events, for example, the athlete does not create character or place. Nor is such imaginary information a part of the half-time spectacle of a football game, religious or secular rituals, political conventions, or many other activities in "real life." The tendency, however, is to deny the performers in these situations serious consideration either because, like the musician, they are not a "legitimate" and accepted part of the formal experience, or because the works in which they appear are not art. My point is not to change our view of these "common" events but to suggest the profound possibilities and potentialities of non-matrixed performing for the theatre.

Since acting is, by definition, matrixed performing, why not simply use the terms "acting" and "non-acting" rather than suggesting new and fairly awkward terms? The fact is that "non-acting" would be equally awkward and less meaningful. Matrix is a larger and more inclusive concept than the activity of the performer, and a person may be matrixed without acting. Acting is something that a performer does; matrix can be externally imposed upon his behavior. The context of place, for example, as determined by the physical setting and the information provided verbally and visually by the production, is frequently so strong that it makes an "actor" out of any person, such as an extra, who walks upon the stage. In many cases nothing needs to be done in order to "act." The priest in church performing part of the service, the football player warming-up and playing the game, the sign painter being raised on a scaffold while passers-by watch, are not matrixed by character or place. Even their specific, identifying clothing does not make them "characters." Yet the same people might do exactly the same things in a play involving a scene of worship, a football game, or the creation of a large sign, and become "actors" because of the context.[1]

[1] Of course the behavior in "real life" and on stage might not be exactly the same. A particular emotional reaction to facing an audience in the theatre situation could be expected. But while *created* or acted emotions are part of character matrix, *real* emotions are not. The question of emotion will be touched on again below.

This does not mean that there is always a clear line between matrixed and non-matrixed performing. The terms refer to polar conceptions which are quite obvious in their pure forms, but a continuum exists between them, and it is possible that this or that performance might be difficult to categorize. In other words, the strength of character-place matrices may be described as "strong" or "weak" and the exact point at which a weak matrix becomes non-matrix is not easy to perceive. But even in the extreme case in which both the work of the performer and the information provided by his context are so vague and non-specific that we could not explain "who" he was or "where" he was supposed to be, we often feel that he is someone other than himself or in some place other than the actual place of performance. We know when we are suspending disbelief or being asked to suspend it.

Non-matrixed performances which are complete in themselves are referred to as Events. A piano is destroyed. The orchestra conductor walks on stage, bows to the audience, raises his baton, and the curtain falls. A formally dressed man appears with a french horn under his arm; when he bows, ball bearings pour from the bell of the horn in a noisy cascade. A person asks if La Monte Young is in the audience; when there is no answer, he leaves. A man sets a balloon on stage, carefully estimates the distance as he walks away from it, then does a backward flip, landing on the balloon and breaking it. Since Events are usually short, they are frequently performed as parts of longer programs. The Fluxus group, a fairly loose organization which includes most of the people working in the form in New York, has presented many "concerts" composed entirely of Events. The form demonstrates a type of performing that is widely used in the new theatre and which is one of its most important contributions.

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In his music Cage abandoned harmony, the traditional means of structuring a composition, and replaced it with duration. This was logically consistent, since duration was the only dimension of music which applied to silence as well as to sounds. Duration could also be used to structure spoken material, and Cage built lectures with these same techniques. Indeed, duration is the one dimension which exists in *all* performance, and in the summer of 1952, stimulated no doubt by

his awareness of the performance aspects of music and by his programmatic refusal to place limits upon the sounds used or the manner in which they were produced, Cage presented a work at Black Mountain College which combined dance, motion pictures, poetry and prose readings, and recorded music. These materials were handled exactly as if they had been sounds. The musical and non-musical elements were all precisely scored for points of entry into the piece and duration—a wide variety of performance materials was "orchestrated."

Theatre as we have generally known it is based primarily upon *information structure.* Not only do the individual elements of a presentation generate meaning, but each conveys meaning to and receives it from the other elements. This was not true of the piece which Cage presented at Black Mountain College. Although some of the elements contained information, the performance units did not pass information back and forth or "explain" each other. The film, for example, which was of the cook at the school and later of a sunset, did not help the spectator to "understand" the dance any more clearly than if the dance had been presented by itself. The ideas expressed in the poetry had no intentional relationship to the ideas contained in the prose. The elements remained intellectually discrete. Each was a separate compartment. The structure was *alogical.*

The information structure of traditional theatre is not alogical but either logical or illogical. Information is built and interrelated in both the logical well-made play and the "illogical" dream, surreal, or absurd play. Illogic depends upon an awareness of what is logical. Alogical structure stands completely outside of these relationships.

Of course the structure of all music (overlooking the "waterfalls" and "twittering birds" of program music and the written program itself, which adds its own information structure to the composition) and of abstract or non-objective painting and sculpture is alogical. It depends upon sensory rather than intellectual relationships. Literature, on the other hand, depends primarily upon information structure. It is this fact rather than a reliance upon written script material or the use of words which makes it so easy and so correct to call traditional theatre "*literary* theatre." As Cage's piece demonstrated, "verbal" should not be confused with "literary." Nor is the non-verbal necessarily alogical. Information is conveyed by movement, setting, and lighting as well as by words, and a mime play, although more limited in its

technical means, constructs the same web of information that a dialogue play does. Both are literary. The spectator "reads" the performance.[2]

A performance using a variety of materials (films, dance, readings, music, etc.) in a compartmented structure, and making use of essentially non-matrixed performance, is a Happening. Thus the distinction between Happenings and Events can be made on the basis of compartments or logically discrete elements. The Event is limited to one compartment, while the Happening contains several, most often sequential, compartments, and a variety of primary materials.

The name "Happening" was taken by the public from *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* by Allan Kaprow (who had studied with Cage), which was presented in 1959. Since then it has been applied indiscriminately to many performances ranging from plays to parlor games. It has been a fad word, although the small attendance at presentations prevents Happenings themselves from being called a fad. Nobody seems to like the word except the public. Since the name was first applied to a piece by Kaprow, it tends to be his word, and some other artists, not caring for the slightest implication that their work is not at least 100% original, do not publicly apply the name "Happening" to their productions. (I am reminded of the person who said he did not want to go to a particular Happening because he had seen a Happening already. It was as if he were saying that he did not want to read a particular novel because he had read a novel once.) Names are beginning to proliferate: Theatre Piece (Robert Whitman), Action Theatre (Ken Dewey), Ray Gun Theatre (Claes Oldenburg), Kinetic Theatre (Carolee Schneemann), etc. The ONCE group and Ann Halprin perform works which I would call Happenings, but they refer to them as "music," "dance," or by no generic name. Because nothing better has been coined to replace it, I will use the term "Happening."

[2] Thus it is not essentially the degree of correlation between the written script and the performance which makes a theatre piece "literary." Whether or not it began from written material, any production, no matter how alogical, may be described in words, and the description could then be used as the literary basis for another production. On the other hand, there is the additional question of the latitude of interpretation allowed by a printed script—e.g., George Brecht's *Exit,* the "score" of which consists in its entirety of the single word with no directions or suggestions for interpretation and realization. *Any* written material, and even non-verbal material, may serve as the "script" for a performance.

A dominant aspect of Cage's thought has been his concern with the environmental or directional aspects of performance. In addition to the frequent use of extremely loud sounds which have a high density and fill the space, he often distributes the sound sources or loudspeakers around the spectators so that the music comes to them from various angles and distances. In his presentation at Black Mountain College, the audience sat in the center of the space while some performers stood up among them to read, other readings were done from ladders at either end, Merce Cunningham danced around the outer space, and a film was projected on the ceiling and walls.

This manipulation and creative use of the relationship between the presented performance material and the spectator has been developed extensively in Happenings. Spectators are frequently placed in unconventional seating arrangements so that a performance element which is close to some is far from others and stimuli reach the observer from many different directions. In some arrangements the spectators are free to move and, in selecting their own vantage points, control the spatial relationship themselves. At other times they are led through or past spatially separated performance units much as medieval audiences passed from one station to another.

A major aspect of directional and environmental manipulations is not merely that different spectators experience stimuli at different intensities but that they may not experience some of the material at all. This is intentional, and unavoidable in a situation that is much like a three-ring circus.

If a circus were a work of art, it would be an excellent example of a Happening. Except for the clowns (and perhaps the man with the lions who pretends that they are vicious), the performances are non-matrixed. The acrobats, jugglers, and animal trainers are "merely" carrying out their activities. The grips or stagehands become performers, too, as they dismantle and rig the equipment—demonstrating that non-matrixed performing exists at all levels of difficulty. The structure of a three-ring circus makes use of simultaneous as well as sequential compartments. There is no information structure: the acts do not add meaning to one another, and one can be fully "understood" without any of the others. At the same time the circus is a total performance and not just the sum of its parts. The flow of processions alternates with focused activity in the rings. Animal acts or acrobatic acts are presented at the same time. Sometimes all but one of the simultaneous acts

end at the same moment, concentrating the spectators' previously scattered attention on a single image. Perhaps tumblers and riders are presented early in the program, and a spatial progression is achieved by ending the program with the high wire and trapeze artists. And the circus, even without its traditional tent, has strong environmental aspects. The exhibits of the side show, the menagerie, and the uniformed vendors in the aisles are all part of the show. Sometimes small flashlights with cords attached are hawked to the children: whenever the lights are dimmed, the whole space is filled with hundreds of tiny lights being swung in circles.

But although the acrobat may be seen as an archetypal example of non-matrixed performing, he can be something else. In Vsevolod Meyerhold's biomechanics, actors were trained as acrobats and gymnasts. The actor functioned as a machine, and the constructivist set was merely an arrangement of platforms, ramps, swings, ladders, and other non-representational elements that the performer could use. But the performers were still matrixed by place and character. Although the set did not indicate a particular place, the dialogue and situations made it clear. Biomechanics was used merely as a way of projecting the characters of the story. An actor turned a somersault to express rage or performed a salto-mortale to show exhaltation. Calm and unrest could both be signified on the high wire rather than in the usual ways. Determination could be projected from a trapeze. Although biomechanics used movements which, out of context, were non-matrixed acrobatics, it used them within place and character matrices created by an information structure.

The non-matrixed performing in Happenings is of several types. Occasionally people are used somewhat as inanimate objects. In *Washes* by Claes Oldenburg, for example, a motionless girl covered with balloons floated on her back in the swimming pool where the piece was being presented while a man bit the balloons and exploded them. At other times the simple operation of theatrical machinery becomes part of the performance: in *Washes* a record player and a motion picture projector were turned on and off in plain view of the audience; the "lifeguard" merely walked around the pool and helped with certain props. Most non-matrixed performing is more complicated, however. It might be thought of as combining the image quality of the first type with the purposeful functioning of the second. At one point in *Washes,* for ex-

ample, four men dove into the pool and pushed sections of silver flue pipe back and forth along a red clothes line. There was no practical purpose in shoving and twisting the pipes, but it was real activity. Manufactured character or situation had nothing to do with it. The men did not pretend to be anyone other than themselves, nor did they pretend—unlike the swimmers in *Dead End* or *Wish You Were Here* —that the water they were in was anything other than what it actually was: in this case a health club pool with spectators standing around the edge.

When acting is called for in a Happening, it almost always exists in a rudimentary form. Because of the absence of an information structure, the job of acting tends to fall into its basic elements. Perhaps an emotion is created and projected as it was by the exaggerated frenzy with which the man in *Washes* bit the balloons attached to the floating girl. Although the rate or tempo of this action had no necessary connection with character, and the activity could have been carried out in a non-matrixed manner, it could not be denied that the agitated and mock-ferocious quality that was dominant was acting. The acted qualities stood out and remained isolated because they did not fit into a character matrix or into a larger situation. Other facets of acting—"playing an attitude," place, details of characterization, etc.—are also found in Happenings, but they are usually isolated and function as a very weak matrix.

This is not to say that emotion of any sort during a performance is necessarily acted. Although much non-matrixed performance is comparatively expressionless, it would be erroneous to think that this type of performing is without emotion. Certainly feelings are expressed in the "non-matrixed performing" of everyday life: in the runner's face as he breaks the tape, in the professor's intonation and stress during his lecture, in the owner's attitude as he handles his dog in a dog show. The important point is that emotions apparent during a non-matrixed performance are those of the performer himself. They are not intentionally created, and they are the natural result of the individual's attitude toward the piece, of the particular task being performed, or of the particular situation of being in front of an audience. Without acted emotions to mask his own feelings, the performer's own attitudes are more apt to become manifest than they are in traditional theatre.

Of course acting and non-matrixed performing have certain elements

in common. When the production of various kinds of information is eliminated from the actor's task, certain requirements still remain. They are the same requirements which exist for performers of any kind. Concentration, for example, is as important to athletes and Happeners as it is to actors, and stage-presence—the degree to which a person can mask or control feelings of nervousness, shyness, uncertainty, etc.—is equally useful to actors, public speakers, and musicians.[3]

One final point about performance in the new theatre concerns the question of improvisation and indeterminacy. Indeterminacy means that limits within which the performers are free to make choices are provided by the creator of the piece: a range of alternatives is made available from which the performer may select. Thus in a musical composition the number of notes to be played within a given time period may be given but not the notes themselves; the pitch ranges may be indicated for given durations but specific notes not required. Indeterminacy is used in the new theatre when, for example, the number of steps a performer should take is limited but the direction is optional; when the type of action is designated but no specific action is given; etc. The choices involved in indeterminacy may be made before the actual performance, but they are most frequently left until the moment of presentation in an attempt to insure spontaneity.

Indeterminacy is not the same as improvisation. Although spontaneity may be a goal of both, it is also the goal of much precisely detailed acting. The primary difference between indeterminacy and improvisation is the amount of momentary, on-the-spot creativity which is involved. Not only is the detail—the apt comment, the *bon mot,* the unexpected or unusual reaction—central to improvisation, but the form and structure of a scene may also be changed. Even when, as was common in *Commedia dell'Arte,* the general outline of the scene is set, the performer is responding to unfamiliar material and providing in return his inventions, which require a response. As evidenced by the so-called "improvisational theatres" such as Second City, an improvisation loses these values once it has been repeated a few times. It no longer is an improvisation, and most of these groups make no pretense among themselves that it is. In indeterminacy the alternatives are

[3] The *use* of stage presence is an aesthetic question. Some performances place a high degree of emphasis upon it, while in others it is intentionally excluded or performers are employed *because* they are somewhat ill at ease.

quite clear, although the exact choice may not be made until performance. And the alternatives *do not matter*: one is as good as another. Since the performers usually function independently and do not respond to the choices made by the other performers, no give-and-take is involved. The situation is not "open-ended" as it is in improvisation.

Thus the four men who manipulated the sections of pipe in *Washes,* for example, did no creative work although the details of their actions and procedure were different during each performance. They merely embodied the image of man-and-pipe which Oldenburg had created. They were not, in the true sense, improvising. Only the type of behavior mattered and not the details. Whether they swam for a while rather than "working," whether they twisted this length of pipe rather than that one, whether they worked together or individually, did not matter provided they kept within the directed limits. The image was the same each night.

A somewhat related attitude is the acceptance of incidental aspects of audience reaction and environmental occurrences as *part* of the production. One of Cage's most notorious musical compositions is *4′ 33″*—four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence by the musician or musicians performing it. The non-playing (in addition to focusing the "performer" aspects of the piece) allows any "incidental" sounds—perhaps traffic noises or crickets outside the auditorium, the creak of seats, coughing and whispering in the audience—to become "music." This exploitation and integration of happenstance occurrences unique to each performance into the performance itself is another common, but not universal, trait of the new theatre.

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One method of assuring completely alogical structure in a work is to use chance methods. Beginning in about 1951 Cage used chance operations such as a system of coin tossing derived from *I Ching,* the Chinese *Book of Changes.* In a method close to pure chance, he determined the placement of notes in certain compositions by marking the imperfections in the score paper. In the Happening which he presented during the summer of 1952 at Black Mountain College the point of entry and the duration of the various performance elements were fixed by chance techniques. Cage's *Theatre Piece* of 1960 can be performed

by one to eight musicians, singers, actors, dancers, and is unusual in that it provides an elaborate *method* (including the use of plastic overlays) of determining individual "scores," but it does not designate the actions, sounds, phrases, etc.—several groups of which are selected to be the raw material for the chance operations.

The use of chance and indeterminacy in composition are aspects of a wide concern with methods and procedure in the new theatre. Another approach to the question of method is illustrated by a *Graphis* by Dick Higgins (who also studied with Cage) in which a linear pattern is marked out on the floor of the performance space with words written at various points. Performers may move only along the lines, and they perform pre-selected actions corresponding to each word when they arrive at that word. Thus the repeated actions and limited lines of movement create visual and rhythmic patterns which freely structure the work in an alogical way.

Jackson Mac Low, another of Cage's students, applied chance methods to the materials of the traditional drama. For *The Marrying Maiden,* for example, he selected characters and speeches from the *I Ching.* The order and duration of speeches and the directions for rate, volume, inflection, and manner of speaking were all independently ascribed to the material by chance techniques. Five different tempos ranging from "Very Slow" to "Very Fast" and five different amplitudes ranging from "Very Soft" to "Very Loud" were used. The attitudes to be acted were selected and placed into the script by the application of random number methods to a list of 500 adverbs or adverbial phrases ("smugly," "religiously," "apingly," etc.) compiled by Mac Low. Although the delivery of the lines in *The Marrying Maiden* is more closely controlled than in a traditional script, no movements, business, or actions are given. Staging is left to the director or actors. When the play was presented by The Living Theatre in 1960 and 1961, the physical activity worked out by Judith Malina, the director, was fixed. Other actions were inserted at random intervals by the use of an "action pack" of about 1,200 cards containing stage directions ("scratch yourself," "kiss the nearest woman," "use any three objects in an action,") which were given to the performers by a visible stage manager who rolled dice to determine his own behavior.

In many of the works by Dick Higgins the operations of chance shift emphatically onto the performance. In *The Tart,* for example, selection

by chance or taste is made from among the given characters, speeches, and cues by the performer or director, who then decides on actions to supplement the chosen material. Since at least some of the behavior or effects which cue the speeches and actions are provided by one or more "special performers," a complicated cueing situation exists, creating a performance *pattern* which is different each time, although the performance *materials* remain constant.

Since the chance performances of MacLow and Higgins make basic use of acting, the fundamental material of traditional theatre, there is some justification for retaining them in the "play" or "drama" category. They can be called *chance plays* or *alogical drama.* They are not Happenings. As with other definitions in the new theatre, however, these terms can only be applied by measuring central tendency. Plays obviously use materials other than acting; Happenings may use acting as part of the performance. It then becomes a question of whether acting is the *primary* element, as in a play, or whether the emphasis is on non-matrixed performing, physical effect, or a balance between several components, as in a Happening.

The recent production of *The Tart* is an example of the difficulty that can result when one tries to categorize a particular performance without making up pointless terms. Reading the script, there seems to be no question that the basic performance element is supposed to be acting and that it is a chance play. In the actual production at the Sunnyside Garden boxing arena in Queens, however, acting was used much less than it could have been, and physical effects were added. Because of this, the emphasis was shifted past the borderline between Happenings and chance theatre. This, in itself, is not important, but the way in which it came about makes clearer how to apply the terms I have been using.

In order to understand the apparent shift away from acting in the performance of *The Tart,* two things must be remembered. In the first place, distinctions between matrixed and non-matrixed performing are not made on the basis of acting style or on the basis of good or bad acting. Both naturalistic acting, in which the performer disappears within the character, and formalized acting, which makes use of "artificial" gesture and speech, develop equally strong matrices. The acrobatic performers in *Le Cocu magnifique* were acting. And the poor actor—unless he gives up completely and drops out of character to ask

for a line—is, like the good actor, providing a supply of character-place data. The work may be more obvious in one case and the matrices demonstrated or indicated rather than implied, but this is basically an aesthetic question rather than a formal one.

In the second place, neither costumes nor dialogue have any necessary relationship to acting. A costume or a line of dialogue is—like a prop, a particular kind of light, or the setting—merely another piece of information. It may be related to character material which is acted or to other information and thus help to form a strong matrix, but a non-matrixed performer may also wear a costume or speak.

The Tart makes great demands upon actors. The performers do not speak to each other and "play scenes" in the way possible, for example, with the alogical verbal material of Jackson Mac Low's *Verdurous Sanguinaria.* The dialogue of *The Tart* usually consists of speeches attributed to some other character, and something of that character is supposed to be superimposed upon the base character when the line is given. Obviously, in order to keep "in character," highly skilled actors are needed, and when the performers cannot sustain the base character, as happened in this case, acting disintegrates into disparate lines and actions. Although the performers are required to select their own actions, which can strengthen the character matrix and ease the complicated and difficult acting task, many of them in this production chose to use arbitrary or meaningless movement, which only destroyed any character matrix they might have established. One or two of the performers, experienced in Happenings, made no attempt to act. Thus the final effect was one in which acting was subordinate to effect and to non-matrixed performing. In performance *The Tart* turned from a chance play into a Happening.

Just as the words "play" and "drama" have a historical usage which should not be replaced with "Happening" or "Event" unless the fundamental elements are different, the word "dance" has an accepted meaning which takes precedence over any new terminology. And certain contemporary developments in dance are a very important part of the new theatre. Although these developments are the result of progressive aesthetic changes within the field, the form has been brought to that point where many formal and stylistic similarities exist between contemporary dance works and pieces presented by non-dancers which are not referred to as "dance." Significant creative exchange has become

possible between disciplines which have been thought of as isolated. One pronounced and important characteristic of the new theatre is the tendency to reduce or eliminate the traditionally strong divisions of drama, dance, opera, etc.

The changes in dance which give it a place in the new theatre parallel those which are exemplified by Events, Happenings, and chance theatre, but did not necessarily derive from them. For example, Merce Cunningham created *16 Dances* by chance method in 1951—the year before Cage's presentation at Black Mountain College. The order of passages and even the order of movements within one passage were determined by tossing coins. (Cage, who has worked closely with Cunningham for many years and was working with chance techniques at that time, composed the music for the piece by setting a fixed procedure for moving on a chart containing the noises, tones, and aggregates of sound that would be used in the composition.) Since Cunningham's early work, much investigation into chance, game, and indeterminacy methods and various other alogical structures has been undertaken by dancers, especially by Ann Halprin's Dancers' Workshop and by Robert Dunn, whose classes at Cunningham's studio in 1960–62 eventually developed into the Judson Dance Theatre.

As structure in dance became alogical and made use of simultaneous performances that were not interrelated (except that they were concurrently presented to the spectator), the manner of performance has also changed. Of course certain types of dancing have always been non-matrixed. No character or place is created and projected in ballroom dancing (which, it might be pointed out, almost always has an audience, although that is not its orientation), and acrobatic dancing, tap dancing, soft shoe dancing, and the like are all non-matrixed—unless, of course, they appear as part of the action in a play. But, from the stories of ballet to the psychological projections of Modern Dance, the dance as an art form has generally made use of character and place matrices. In recent years, however, story, plot, character, situation, "ecstasy," personal expression, and self-dramatization have all dropped away, and dance has made use of non-matrixed performing.

The separation of dance from music is perhaps one of the factors responsible for the shift. Musical accompaniment functions in part

as an emotional matrix which "explains" dancers. Think, for example, of how much expression and character can be given to the film image of a blank face or even the back of a head by the music on the sound track. In John Cage's scores for many of Merce Cunningham's dances, music and movement merely fill the same time period without relationship. Some of Mary Wigman's dances just after the First World War and almost all of the dances in the new theatre entirely eliminated music; thus "interpretation" is no longer a factor, and the possibility of non-matrixed performing is increased.

As character, emotional continuity, and a sense of created locale have been eliminated from dance, walking, running, falling, doing calisthenics, and other simple activities from everyday life have become dance elements. No attempt is made to embellish these actions, and it does not take years of training to "dance" them. Merce Cunningham did a piece called *Collage* at Brandeis University in 1953 in which he used fifteen untrained "dancers" who performed simple, ordinary movements and activities such as running and hair combing. A number of "nondancers" are performing members of the Judson Dance Theatre[4] in New York City.

The concern for activity with its concomitant movement rather than for movement in itself—for *what* is done rather than *how* it is done—brings much new dance very close to Happenings and Events. And just as any performance may be called "music" with the justification that sound is involved, almost any performance may be referred to as "dance" when human movement is involved. Works which are not formally distinguishable from Happenings have been called dance pieces. Actually the most important differences among many of the performances in the new theatre—whether done by painters, sculptors, musicians, dancers, or professional theatre people—exist on stylistic rather than formal grounds. One wonders what difference it would

[4] Although traditional dance movements and techniques are not excluded, this emphasis on relatively simple kinds of movement has led to the style being labeled "anti-dance." In lieu of a more accurate term, the name has some usefulness, but the intent of the dancers is not to oppose or destroy dance but to eliminate what seems to be unnecessary conventions and restrictions, to approach movement in a fresh way, and to open new formal areas.

make if *Check* by Robert Morris, for example, were called a Happening, and Claes Oldenburg's *Washes* were referred to as a dance.

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Certain works have come out of the new theatre and out of the creative climate fostered by Cage which have pushed "performance" beyond the limits of theatre and offer new insights into the nature of performing and of theatre. Cage advocated the elimination of boundaries between art and life. The acceptance of chance is an acceptance of the laws of nature; and life, as illustrated in *4′ 33″*, always participates in the totality of the perceived work of art. (This way of thinking means, for example, that a painting or sculpture is not the same in the gallery as it is in the studio.)

Performance and audience are both necessary to have theatre. But it might be thought that it is this very separation of spectator and work which is responsible for an "artificiality" of the form, and many Happenings and related pieces have attempted to "break down" the "barrier" between presentation and spectator and to make the passive viewer a more active participator. At any rate, works have recently been conceived which, since they are to be performed without an audience—a totally original and unprecedented development in art—might be called Activities.

In some of George Brecht's pieces the question of an audience seems ambiguous. Brecht's work implies that any performance piece has an aesthetic value for its performer or creator which is distinct from its value for an audience: the performance of *any* piece without an audience is a certain kind of art. Some of his things, such as the untitled child-thermometer-clock piece, are so intimate that spectators are obviously not intended or required.

Activities make it possible to work with time and space dimensions that would be very difficult or impossible in theatre. In *Chair* by Robert Ashley, for example, a wooden chair is variously transformed on each of six successive days. The lines in Stanley Brouwn's *Phone-drawings* exist only in the mind of the performer, who is aware that if the locations he has called on the telephone were connected (in the same way the child connects numbered dots to make a picture appear) the image he has chosen would actually exist on a vast scale. These

works emphasize the private, proprioceptive, and cerebral aspects of Activities.

Allan Kaprow has performed pieces which also eliminate the audience but function on a much larger scale. Some of them, using many performers, resembled his Happenings except for the absence of spectators. The more recent pieces, although involving sizable numbers of performers, are more widely distributed through space and time so that the participants are frequently entirely separated from each other. Ken Dewey's recent works have mixed both Activity sections and units in which the assembled people functioned in the traditional passive manner of spectators.

Although these works, like Kaprow's *Eat* Environment, are outside the limits of theatre, they are related to the performance mentality, and they help to clarify some of the attitudes and concepts of the new theatre as well as providing fresh theoretical positions from which to evaluate theatre as a whole.

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John Cage is emphasized as the touchstone of the new theatre for at least two reasons. In the first place, the body of his work—writings and lectures as well as musical compositions and performance pieces—gives clear precedents for many later developments. Secondly, many of the younger artists in the new theatre actually studied with Cage, although each creates in his own manner.

But there are at least as many reasons why the formulation I have presented is not wholly true or valid. As a simplification, it glosses over the exceptions and degrees of shading that any complete account should have. Actually, the new theatre has been in existence long enough for widening aesthetic ripples to spread far from the source. Each artist changes it. It has moved in various directions, making use of established techniques as well as the most recent developments in other fields and disciplines. Many of the artists producing Happenings, for example, are not fundamentally in sympathy with Cage's views, and their work is stylistically very different.

The emphasis on Cage may have implied that he is a completely original artist. This of course is not true. Completely original artists—like Dylan Thomas' "eggs laid by tigers"—do not exist. Actually each

of the dimensions of Cage's work was prefigured in the work of the Futurists and the Dadaists, in Marinetti, Duchamp, and others. (Of course, much of this material had been available to everyone for a good number of years. It is to Cage's credit that he saw what was in it while others apparently did not.)

A sketch of the earlier history and origins of the new theatre would have to begin at least with the Italian Futurists, whose "*bruitisme*," the use of everyday sounds and noises rather than those produced by traditional musical instruments, can be traced through Dada, the compositions of Erik Satie and Edgar Varése, and, finally, electronic music, which has as its material a sound spectrum of unprecedented width and variety. Although the Futurists apparently did not add non-musical elements to their performances, their theoretical position provided the basis for the later expansion of music into performance.

In addition to their own "noise music" performed by "instruments" such as baby rattles and jangled keys and tin cans, the Dadaists in Zürich during the First World War and later in Paris read and recited simultaneous poems and manifestos which were an early form of compartmentalization. (These and the Dada distortion of the lecture into a work of art prefigure certain aspects of Cage's lectures.) Unrelated "acts" were often performed at the same time, and the Dadaists presented what would now be referred to as Events: Phillippe Saupault in his *Le célèbre illusioniste* (*The Famous Magician*) released balloons of various colors each bearing the name of a famous man; Walter Serner, instead of reading a poem, placed a bouquet of flowers at the feet of a dressmaker's dummy; in their *Noir Cacadou* Richard Huelsenbeck and Tristan Tzara waddled around in a sack with their heads in a piece of pipe; Jean Arp recited his poems from inside a huge hat, and Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes danced inside a giant funnel. The Dadaists even staged a mock trial in front of an audience with "witnesses" called for the prosecution and the defense.

The intentional use of chance so important to Cage and some of the new theatre was also used by the Dadaists. Tristan Tzara composed and recited poems by mixing cards with words on them in a hat and drawing out the cards one at a time. Arp and Duchamp used chance in making paintings and constructions.

Surrealism also had its impact on the new theatre. It proposed the irrational as the material of art and stressed the dream, the obsessive act, the psychic accident; it supported automatism and chance as

creative techniques and thus—after being driven from Europe to this country by the Second World War—provided the basis for Abstract Expressionism. (Although Cage accepted this concern with method, he differed sharply with later creators of Happenings such as Oldenburg and Whitman who stressed the unconscious affective aspects in their work.)

The Abstract Expressionist mentality which pervaded the New York art world in the late 1950's was one of the contributing factors in bringing painters into the performing arts. The *act* of painting rather than the completed composition had become the creative focus. At the same time painting and sculpture had a long tradition, in which Dada and Surrealism played their parts, of assemblage—the fabricating of a work from disparate objects and materials. Thus the artists found nothing strange about assembling a theatrical work from various types of alogically related performance material.

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The new theatre is not important merely because it is new. But if it is agreed that a work of art may be important if only it is new—an aesthetic position which cannot be elaborated or defended here—then these works deserve serious consideration. Not only should they suggest to any practicing theatre artist new directions in which his work may go, but they represent several of the most significant developments in the history of theatre art.

In this theatre "suspension of disbelief" is not operative, and the absence of character and situation precludes identification. Thus the traditional mode of experiencing theatre, which has dominated both players and spectators for thousands of years, is altered.

As I have tried to show, structure and, almost always, the manner of performing are radically different in the new theatre. These innovations place theatre—in a very limited way—in some equivalency with the other arts. If painting and sculpture, for example, have not yet exhausted the possibilities of their non-objective breakthrough (which occurred only three years after the start of this century), and if music has not yet begun to assimilate all the implications of its new-found electronic materials, there is every reason to feel that there will also be a fruitful aesthetic future for the new theatre.