

Many of us have departed from the old canons and obsolete conventions, to a new space articulation, to satisfy more adequately the specific need of our time for a vision in motion.
—Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision* (1938)

In one sense, a theatre that mixes its means is not new, for the fusing of the arts is as old as Art itself. Indeed, as primitive ceremonies integrated dance and drama, song and sculpture, the separation of these arts probably followed in the development of human consciousness from the recognition of Art as distinct from life; and once these several kinds of artistic expression were recognized as distinctly different, individuals could specialize in one or another field and, in the Renaissance, sign their names to personal work. "Civilization," writes Herbert Read, "insisted on a specialization of artistic functions." Only then, historically, could specialists in one art join with veterans of another to produce such modern theatrical combinations of song-drama-dance as operas or, more recently, musical comedies.

What differentiates the new Theatre of Mixed Means from both primitive ceremony and the musical stage are, first, the components the new mixtures use and, second, the radically different relationships that these elements have to each other. That is, whereas both opera and musical comedy emphasize poetic language to an accompaniment of song, setting, and dance, the new theatre generally eschews the

language of words and includes the means (or media) of music and dance, light and odor (both natural and chemical), sculpture and painting, as well as the new technologies of film, recorded tape, amplification systems, radio and closed-circuit television.

In the old theatre, even in Diaghilev's ballets, the elements complemented each other—the music clearly accompanied the singer or dancer, each coinciding with the other's beat—but in the new theatre, the components generally function nonsynchronously, or independently of each other, and each medium is used for its own possibilities. Moreover, some practitioners of mixed-means theatre, such as Allan Kaprow, intentionally exclude any signs of the conventional arts, particularly such traditional contexts as art galleries and performance halls. Instead, the new theatre defines its presence not by the environment in which it occurs but by the purposes of its participants; as Ken Dewey puts it, "People gather together to articulate something of mutual concern." These departures make the new theatre crucially different from traditional practice, and although its ancestry can be traced, its novelty remains unquestioned.

The new movement has generally been called "Happenings," which is hardly appropriate, for not only do all examples of the new theatre have some kind of script, but very few use chance procedures, either in composition or performance, and even fewer depend upon improvisation, or entice an audience to participate. As this is a new theatrical form, it deserves a new name; and I prefer "the Theatre of Mixed Means," because that phrase isolates the major characteristic and yet encompasses the entire movement. Within this new art, I discern four distinctly different genres of mixed-means events: pure happenings, kinetic environments, staged happenings, and staged performances. Although most pieces fit clearly into one particular category or another, sometimes a piece will shift from one style to another as well as overlap stylistic boundaries.

In pure happenings, the script is vague enough to allow unexpected events to occur in an unpredictable succession. The movements and identity of the official participants are only sketchily outlined, and a participant may improvise details of his activity, although its general purpose has usually been decreed in advance. The resulting actions are, as Michael Kirby notes, *indeterminate* rather than improvised. A pure happening insists upon an unfettered exploration of space and

time — both are open rather than closed. A pure happening provides neither a focus for one's attention nor a sense of duration; and the performance envelops the audience, who generally do not intend to be spectators, by allowing them to feel that they too are participants in a significant process. Although Kaprow (who originated the word "happening" and scrupulously pursues his ideal conception) first established himself as a painter, the shape his pieces take actually has less to do with how we see than how we hear:

Auditory space has no favored focus. It's a sphere without fixed boundaries, space made by the thing itself, not space containing the thing. It is not pictorial space, boxed-in, but dynamic, always in flux, creating its own dimensions moment by moment. It has no fixed boundaries; it is indifferent to background. The eye focuses, pinpoints, abstracts, locating each object in physical space, against a background; the ear, however, favors sound from any direction. [Edmund S. Carpenter, *Eskimo* (1959)]

The author of a pure happening is, as Kaprow notes, closer to a basketball coach than a theatre director or choreographer; for he gives his players only general instructions before the event. Thus, one of Kaprow's recent pieces, *Household* (1964), opens in "a lonesome dump out in the country" with the following activities:

11 A.M. Men build wooden tower on a trash mound.
Poles topped with tarpaper clusters are stuck around it.

Women build nest of saplings and strings on another mound.
Around the nest on a clothesline they hang old shirts.

The entire script for Dick Higgins' *Gångsång* is: "One foot forward. Transfer weight to this foot. Repeat as often as desired." In the summer of 1966, Ann and Lawrence Halprin, respectively a dancer and an architect, gathered a group of people on a driftwood beach and asked them to build shelters; the resulting process, which actually created a driftwood village, was a pure happening. So is a massive gathering of people, a "Be-In"—whose author is not individual but collective. Pure happenings are generally not performed in conventional theatrical situations which, by their nature, close off the space and impose focus on the activity. Some have exploited natural surroundings, such as a forest or a swimming pool or Grand Central Station or an entire city. Some can be performed anywhere, at any

time, before either an intentional audience, a random gathering of miscellaneous people, or even nobody at all.

Kinetic environments differ from pure happenings in that they are more closely planned, their space is more specifically defined and constricted, and the behavior of the participants (or components) is more precisely programed. However, they are, like happenings, structurally open in time and, as forms, capable of encouraging participational attention. USCO, or Us Company, an artists' collective, has created kinetic environments of music, taped noise (such as a constant heart-beat), paintings, sculpture; machines, electronic instruments (for example, a television or an oscilloscope), and projected images both on slides and film. A kinetic environment of fewer elements is La Monte Young's Theatre of Eternal Music, in which Young, along with three other musicians, creates within a closed space a precisely constructed chord of constant harmonic sound which is electronically amplified to the pitch of aural pain and projected through several speakers; usually the sound can entirely envelop both the room and the spectator's consciousness. A recording of Young's theatre piece, however, is not a kinetic environment but a piece of sound-music, unless, of course, the listener recreates the original performance situation — the environment — of a darkened room, several loudspeakers, slides of oriental calligraphy, and an odor of incense.

Staged happenings differ from pure happenings primarily in occurring within a defined space, mostly on a theatrical stage. Otherwise, the actions of the participants are variable or indeterminate from performance to performance; either chance operations or a flexible script ensure that events cannot be duplicated. Because the space is fixed, the audience is usually separated from the performers; thus, its role is more observational than participational. John Cage's concerts are generally staged happenings; so are most of Ann Halprin's and some of Merce Cunningham's pieces. "A Happening with only an empathic response on the part of a seated audience," Kaprow writes, "is not a Happening but stage theatre." For instance, a football game is a staged happening to a spectator; a pure one to a participant.

In the staged performance, which is as pre-planned in conception and as precisely executed as the kinetic environment, the major actions are defined in advance, the audience's role is observational, and the dimensions of space and time are usually predetermined. Indeed, in

all these respects, the staged performance is similar to traditional theatre; but where drama emphasizes speech, new theatre thoroughly mixes the media of communication and most pieces have no words at all. When language is employed, the words generally function as isolated, minimally syntactical fragments of "found" sound. For example, in Ken Dewey and Terry Riley's *Sames* (1965), short phrases — "I," "That's not me" — are repeated over and over again and one voice multiplies into a chorus of itself, while six stationary ladies in bridal dress grace the stage and film is projected upon the theatre's ceiling and walls. Staged performances offer a perceptual experience akin to a lively dance act or an engrossing mime.

The following chart * graphically represents the differences between one genre and another:

GENRE	SPACE	TIME	ACTION
Pure Happening	Open	Variable	Variable
Staged Happening	Closed	Variable	Variable
Staged performance	Closed	Fixed	Fixed
Kinetic environment	Closed	Variable	Fixed

What all the various forms of the Theatre of Mixed Means have in common, then, is a distinct distance from Renaissance theatre — a distance that includes a rejection not only of the theatre of explicit statement and objectified plot but also the visual clichés produced by unison movement, synchronous accompaniment, and complementary setting. Intrinsic in the mixed-means theatre is the most liberal definition possible of theatrical activity: any situation where some people

* As "open" is the equivalent of variable, and "closed" equals fixed, then three aspects—space, time, action—distributed two ways produce the possibility of 2³ or eight, and the following are, by implication, the four unborn genres of new theatre, which I shall refrain from christening with individual names:

- 1.) Open-Fixed-Variable would be, for example: Move anywhere, in any manner, for thirty minutes.
- 2.) Open-Fixed-Fixed would be, for instance: Move ten barrels from Spot X to Spot Y by any route that you wish in exactly five minutes.
- 3.) Closed-Fixed-Variable would be: Do anything you wish within a circumscribed area for one-half hour; an example might be a truly improvised jazz performance with an exact time set for its end.
- 4.) Open-Variable-Fixed would be: A cross-country race over a terrain that lacked a marked path.

perform for others, regardless of whether or not the spectators intend to be an audience.

In mixed-means theatre, the performers usually do not enact roles but carry out prescribed tasks. Since these gestures and movements are, to varying degrees, less precisely programed than actors' activities in theatrical drama, mixed-means performers, unlike actors, do not assume other personalities, but merely display their own. As synchronization is abandoned, so the relations between all activities, whether at any particular moment or over the duration of the piece, tend to be discontinuous in structure and devoid of an obvious focus. As the ways of presenting material are nearly as various as the number of mixed-means practitioners, each piece demands of the spectator an actively engaged and highly personal perception. These symptoms of apparent disorder, often leaving the eye unsure of where it should look and the ear unsure of what it should hear, challenge the audience to perceive order in chaos.

The process of understanding any unfamiliar form of communication appears to involve three separate recognitions, which Edward T. Hall in *The Silent Language* (1959) defines as "*sets, isolates, and patterns*. The sets (words) are what you perceive first, the isolates (sounds) are the components that make up the sets, while the patterns (syntax) are the way in which sets are strung together in order to give them meaning." However, in drawing upon several kinds of communication, a mixed-means piece speaks in several languages at once, insisting that its audience be as artistically polylingual as its creator. A realized event should exemplify Richard Southern's dictum: "All good theatre should be comprehensible to a deaf man." Furthermore, as each piece of new theatre tends to create an amorphous definition of space, an imprecise conception of time, an unconventional stage rhythms, the audience often has difficulty discerning when a particular piece has ended.

In the Theatre of Mixed Means, a piece usually opens by announcing a sound-image complex which is immediately communicated; and rather than employ the musical techniques of variation and development or the dramatic forms of linear development, mixed-means pieces generally pursue one of three patterns — an unmodulated development that sustains or fills in the opening outline; a thoroughly discontinuous collage of several sections; or an associational succes-

sion of sequences that relate to each other in several ways.* The first form is more often than not characteristic of environments, the second of both kinds of happenings, and the last of staged performances; but there exists no necessary correlation between genre and structure. Narrative, when it exists, functions more as a convention than a revelatory structure or primary component, for the themes of a piece are more likely to emerge from the repetition of certain actions or the coherence of imagery. The comprehension of a mixed-means piece, then, more closely resembles looking at a street or overhearing a strange conversation than deducing the theme of a drama: The longer and more deeply the spectator dissects and assimilates its sound-image complex and associates the diverse elements, the more familiar he becomes with the work.

Like many of the most important tendencies in contemporary art, the Theatre of Mixed Means emphasizes the processes of creation, rather than the final product, and this links it with primitive pre-verbal communal rituals. "Drama may be the *thing done*," writes Richard Southern, "but theatre is *doing*." More important, it employs various media of communication to create a field of activity that appeals to the total sensorium. Historically, the new theatre represents that radical departure from nineteenth-century forms that the modern theatrical medium, unlike the other arts, has yet to undergo. "The theatre is always twenty or thirty years behind poetry," Eugene Ionesco once wrote, "and even the cinema is in advance of the theatre." As the revolt in poetry was away from the Renaissance notions of perception and connection, so the new theatre embodies a rejection of linear form and explanatory truth. Like the new cinema of Jean-Luc Godard and Alain Resnais, it explores the representation of time; like the new architecture, the potential shapes of space.

* Flat form:
Discontinuous form:
Associational form:

**Obviously the causes of Happenings
have been "in the air"
for at least fifty years,
probably longer.
—Ken Dewey, "X-ings" (1965)**

The Theatre of Mixed Means did not spring out of ether; indeed, not only do its precedents exist in the four great avant-garde movements of early modern art — Futurism, Dada, the Bauhaus, and Surrealism — but the new theatre also extends from recognizably modern tendencies in all the arts it encompasses: painting, sculpture, music, dance, film, and theatre. Art ultimately comes out of art, because the artist is influenced more by the conceptual models he observes in art and retains in his head than by non-artistic experience; and what data he finds outside of art generally falls into patterns that were shaped by those prior conceptual models. "Every style aims at a faithful rendering of nature and nothing else, but each has its own conception of Nature," the German art historian Alois Riegl argued around the turn of the century, and his intellectual disciple, the contemporary art historian E. H. Gombrich, formulates this dictum: "We can never neatly separate what we see from what we know." Therefore, the confluence of these tendencies and the influence of the mixed-means precedents, along with the dialogues one art persistently holds with another, is probably the most immediately conclusive explanation of

why the Theatre of Mixed Means should have emerged at this time, as well as why, despite variations in individual background and purpose, the new theatre as a whole achieves a highly definite character.

Futurism, Dada, the Bauhaus, and Surrealism all represent the banding together of artists in various fields—writers, musicians, sculptors, painters, and architects—who first either produced manifestos announcing a collective purpose or, in one case, founded an institution and then created works of art both individually and corporately; and what these movements also have in common is a rejection of archaic conceptions of aesthetic form as well as the barriers that traditionally separated one art from another. "You may paint with whatever you please," wrote Guillaume Apollinaire in 1913, "with pipes, postage stamps, postcards or playing cards, candelabra, pieces of oil cloth, collars, printed paper, newspapers." From then on, all arts could emulate painting by extending into other arts, and traditional ideas of artistic propriety were consigned to the ashcan of art history.

Futurism was historically the first of these multi-media movements, originating in Italy with the poet-politician Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* of 1909. Once organized, the movement intended to create art representing qualities and activities as various as speed, simultaneity, kinetic continuity, interaction of visible and invisible forces, changes in the environment, leaps in point of view, etc. Futurist paintings, out of an admiration for the machine, seem on the verge of motion, initiating what Gyorgy Kepes defines as the "simultaneous representation of the numerous visible aspects composing an event," and Futurist poets recorded in print the abstract sounds of everyday life. Where Marinetti exploited various sizes of typography to create picture-poems that expressed, wrote Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, "movement, space, time, visual and audible sensations," so the composer-painter Luigi Russolo envisioned in 1913 that music would "break out of this narrow circle of pure musical sounds and conquer the infinite variety of noise-sounds," and he subsequently constructed *Intonarumori* (Noise-Organs) to produce sounds mechanically in a theatrical context. Soon after, Marinetti himself posited a mixed-means theatre (which he never built) that would simultaneously exploit "the new twentieth-century devices of electricity and the cinema" as well as poetry, scenery, and props.

Where Futurism discovered that the new technologies would be

come propitious instruments for mixed-media art, Dada exposed all subsequent modern artists to unfamiliar material, as well as introduced unfamiliar material to art. When a poet signed his name to a page in the telephone directory and Marcel Duchamp affixed the pseudonym of "R. Mutt" to a porcelain urinal, Dada proclaimed that ready-made "found objects" were as much the stuff of art as hand-made ones. Upon such an assertion of absolute aesthetic freedom, Dada artists constructed, in both space and time, mixed-media conglomerations which, writes William Seitz, "awakened the senses and sensibilities to the immense multiple collision of values, forms, and effects among which we live." The Cologne Dadaists transformed a 1920 exhibition into what we would now recognize as a mixed-means environment. "In order to enter the gallery," David Gascoyne writes, "one had to pass through a public lavatory. Inside the public was provided with hatchets with which, if they wanted to, they could attack the objects and paintings exhibited." Kurt Schwitters, perhaps the most versatile of the Dadaists, once transformed his own home into a multi-roomed environment; and he later performed an *Ursonata* (1924) which Moholy-Nagy in retrospect describes as "a poem of thirty-five minutes' duration containing four movements, a prelude, and a cadenza in the fourth movement. The words do not exist, rather they might exist in any language; they have no logical only an emotional context; they affect the ear with their phonetic vibrations like music."

Indeed, in the 1920 Schwitters conception of the "Merz composite work of art," we can recognize an extraordinary prophecy of the new theatre of the 1960's, even though his speculative image never grew beyond the printed page:

In contrast to the drama or the opera, all parts of the Merz stage-work are inseparably bound up together; it cannot be written, read or listened to, it can only be produced in the theatre. Up until now, a distinction was made between stage-set, text, and score in theatrical performances. Each factor was separately prepared and could also be separately enjoyed. The Merz stage knows only the fusing of all factors into a composite work. Materials for the stage-set are all solid, liquid and gaseous bodies, such as white wall, man, barbed wire entanglement, blue distance, light cone. . . . Materials for the score are all tones and noises capable of being produced by violin, drum, trombone, sewing machine, grandfather clock, stream of water, etc. Mate-

rials for the text are all experiences that provoke the intelligence and emotions. The materials are not to be used logically in their objective relationships, but only within the logic of the work of art. The more intensively the work of art destroys rational objective logic, the greater become the possibilities of artistic building. . . . Take in short everything from the hairnet of the high class lady to the propeller of the *S. S. Leviathan*, always bearing in mind the dimensions required by the work.

So precisely prophetic of contemporary work was this description that, indicatively, early pieces were regarded, by some historical critics, as a species of neo-Dada; but that classification, like certain other early rubrics, was too limited a description for the variousness of the Theatre of Mixed Means.

Unlike Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism, informal conglomerations of like-minded artists, the Bauhaus was an educational institution possessed of clearly articulated purposes, particularly the fusions of art with craft, the artist with technology, and artistic design with daily life. The architect Walter Gropius, its founder in 1919, drew the Bauhaus faculty from several arts—among its members were established architects, painters, sculptors, stage designers, photographers, typographers, industrial designers, and writers, and upon such diverse resources, the Bauhaus initiated what Herbert Read considers “the greatest experiment in aesthetic education yet undertaken.” While teaching its preliminary course in the middle twenties, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, a jack of nearly all artistic trades, conceived of an elaborately mechanized mixed-means theatre—a “Mechanized Eccentric,” which could project a “synthesis of form, motion, sound, light (color) and odor,” onto three simultaneously active stages; the result would be a “Theatre of Totality,” which, he wrote, “with its multifarious complexities of light, space, plane, form, motion, sound, man—and with all the possibilities for varying and combining these elements—must be an organism.” At the same time, Gropius himself devised a “Total Theatre,” unfortunately never built, in which the entire interior could be changed to suit the form of the theatrical event. A picture-frame proscenium stage could be transformed into a protruding platform surrounded on its forward sides by a semicircular orchestra, or the completely circular seating of a sports event or circus. “The contemporary theatre architect,” Gropius wrote, “should set himself the aim to create a great keyboard for light and space, so objective and adaptable

in character that it could respond to any imaginable vision of a stage director." Such a building would still be an ideal structure for contemporary mixed-means theatre, which generally insists upon creating a space suitable for a particular piece, or a piece appropriate for an existing space.

Surrealism, in its original purpose, is markedly different from Futurism and Dada; for where its predecessors wanted to incorporate the realities of modern life into art, Surrealists attempted to expose subterranean forces in the individual—to represent a personal reality beyond appearances—in order to create a new consciousness. To this purpose, Surrealists intended to suppress the desires of the individual ego, as well as break down the conventions of linear organization. Often several collaborated on poems and drawings, each doing his share independently of the others; the painter Max Ernst, a Dadaist before he became a Surrealist, developed "frottage" by putting a sheet of paper over randomly chosen material and rubbing a pencil across the sheet. "The drawings made in this way," writes Calvin Tomkins, "lost the character of the material employed and assumed a wholly new aspect." Certain strains of mixed-means theatre, like frottage, use similarly aleatoric techniques to discover an originality that the author's conscious intentions could not possibly create. Paradoxically, although Ernst's purposes were anti-intention and anti-art, his technique contributed to the storehouse of strategies from which subsequent artists could intentionally draw.

In its preference for alogical and nonsynchronous activity, the new theatre also draws upon the Surrealistic interest in collage. Although this compositional technique was actually invented by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque several years before Surrealism took shape, the Surrealist poets and painters became more thoroughly committed to exploring the possibilities of non-logical juxtapositions. The result was an aesthetic syntax distinctly new—what the critic Jill Johnston christens "the logic of simultaneous vision." Indeed, after exploring such a compositional "logic" within various media—whether poetry, prose, painting, or music—the Surrealists began, with the Paris exhibition of 1938, to create three-dimensional environments. Marcel Duchamp designed what Michael Kirby describes as "a great central hall with a pool surrounded by real grass. Four large comfortable beds stood among the greenery. Twelve hundred sacks of coal hung from

the ceiling. In order to illuminate the paintings which hung on the walls, Duchamp planned to use electric eyes that would switch on lights for the individual works when a beam was broken." At a later Surrealist exhibition, Duchamp wove twine all over the exhibition hall. Like the Dadaists before them, not only did the Surrealists announce themselves as "anti-art," but they also produced (and sold!) works we now admire as masterpieces; and the examples they set had a great influence upon subsequent art.

The mixed-means theatre also extends from another primary tendency in modern painting—the development, starting in the late nineteenth century with Paul Cézanne, away from fixed perspective to a simultaneously multiple point of view. Cézanne's great revolution consisted of integrating into a single two-dimensional field several objects as they could only be seen from different viewpoints—for example, a table is represented as seen from above, a bottle as seen from its side. This technique influenced more thorough Cubists such as Picasso and Braque and, later, Willem de Kooning, whose *Woman I* (1952) displays a figure seen simultaneously from many different angles, in numerous moods, from various lights, and in diverse dress. "Cubism," writes Sigfried Giedion, "breaks with Renaissance perspective. It views objects relatively; that is, from several points of view, no one of which has exclusive authority." In other words, a multiplicity of moments-in-time and perspectives are superimposed upon one still rectangle; and certain examples of mixed-means theatre attain a similarly Cubist fusion of temporal and perspective diversity within a single frame.

Nonetheless, in painting such a development implies a converse action, which is actually a movement out from the painting's frame into the third dimension of space and eventually the fourth of time, no longer suggesting depth and duration through illusory means but actually achieving them as physical qualities. In the history of painting, collage leads into assemblage, which extends the collage principle into space and various media. Picasso initiated this modern device by pasting a fragment of oil cloth onto a Cubist composition, *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1912), and then wrapping a piece of hemp around it in lieu of a frame. Such an act represents, writes William Seitz, "the absorption of assembling objects into the method, as well as the subject matter, of painting." Out of Picasso's artistic precedent,

write Harriet Janis and Rudi Blesh, came "the movement of the picture out into space and its eventual merging into action and/or forms in the space-time continuum." In the middle fifties, Allan Kaprow, originally a painter, extended the collage principle into time when he escalated an exhibition of his assemblages into an all-over environment with moving parts, *Penny Arcade* (1956). "Not satisfied with the *suggestion* through paint of our other senses," he wrote at that time, "we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movement, people, odors, touch. Objects of every sort are materials for the new art." Subsequently, he pushed the collage technique one step further to pure happenings which, he writes, "in structure and content are a logical extension of 'environments.'" Where space was once static and the spectator a passive observer, now it becomes kinetic and he a participant. If Jackson Pollock regarded the canvas as an area within which the painter acts and represents his actions, Kaprow in pure happenings removed the canvas, so to speak, and made the action itself into an artistic event. "Space is no longer pictorial," Kaprow wrote in 1960, "but actual (and sometimes both); and sound, odors, artificial light, movement and time are now utilized." Also in the middle fifties, Robert Rauschenberg incorporated a stuffed goat into his collage entitled *Monogram* (1955-59), thereby creating "a combine" or stand-up painting. In 1959, he initiated fourth-dimensional painting (a phrase which incidentally could also define certain strains of new theatre), by incorporating an actual radio into the field of *Broadcast*. To the curator-critic Henry Geldzahler, the historical significance of painters' mixed-means theatre lies in "an attempt on the part of painters to reintroduce recognizable human content into our artistic life."

From sculpture, two contemporary tendencies—one extrinsic, the other intrinsic—flow into the new theatre. The first aims to get sculpture off its heavy pedestal and out of the museum into an informal setting and, parallelly, brings informal materials, such as crushed car parts and other junk, into sculpture, all to make sculpture more intimate and accessible to the spectator. In his *Mobile* (1913), Marcel Duchamp put a bicycle wheel on a stand, initiating not only "readymades," but kinetic sculpture; and by the end of that decade, the Russian sculptor Vladimir Tatlin founded the modern practice of constructing an abstract object out of miscellaneous materials, as well

as designed a sculptural *Monument to the Third International* (1919–20) that would have been over one thousand feet high. The late David Smith, probably the greatest modern American sculptor, preferred to “house” his metallic pieces on his own front lawn; and Simon Rodia, whose intentions may not have been as classically artistic as Smith’s, actually constructed his masterful Watts Towers in his backyard, right in a Los Angeles slum. His works are so large that attempts to move and house them are likely to be thwarted. Similarly, Claes Oldenburg always transforms an exhibition of his sculpture into an integral environment, to create the illusion that the setting is not a gallery or a museum but an artistically articulated space, and he generally allows the art-viewer to *touch* his works. Moving sculpture outside is at once a physical reality and a metaphor for extending sculptural designs into theatrical settings; for as the life-size sculptures of George Segal, a close friend of Kaprow’s, create the impression, Lucy Lippard notes, of “quick-frozen happenings,” so Oldenburg’s theatrical pieces, particularly those in *The Store* (Spring, 1962), are designed to offer experience as tactual as his sculpture.

The second major evolution of contemporary sculpture has been away from a material concept of space to virtual and kinetic volume. That is, in contrast to a piece of classic sculpture which defines its presence by its mass, the Constructivist works present a skeletal frame which encloses the space (or body) of the work. “We deny volume as a spatial form of expression,” wrote the brothers Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner. “In sculpture we eliminate (physical) mass as a plastic element.” The “volume” of a Constructivist sculpture is virtual (enclosed and imposed) and yet constant, even though it becomes redefined as the spectator moves around the piece. “From each new viewpoint,” writes Carola Giedion-Weckler, “it seems to be a different composition.” Mobiles and other forms of kinetic sculpture, however, continually rearticulate both their virtual volume and definition, “by the [constant] motions of points (smallest bodies),” Moholy-Nagy writes, “or by the motion of linear elements or larger bodies.” In this respect, Alexander Calder’s mobiles exist in time as, Moholy-Nagy continues, “a weightless posing of volume relationships and interpenetrations” (which explains why film reproduces them more effectively than photographs). Indeed, Moholy-Nagy himself designed plastic and mechanical “light sculptures” which expressively

transform and reproject the illumination around them. "By the mere fact of devoting fresh attention to the problem of light," he wrote to Giedion-Weckler in 1937, "we enter into a new feeling . . . which can be summed up in one word—floating." Therefore, kinetic sculptures presage those strains of new theatre in which people and objects are less sculptural volumes in a fixed space, as in literary theatre, than kinetic forces in a continually rearticulated space.

If the new theatre grows out of the desire of painters and sculptors to stretch their art into time, so it also extends from the concern of certain composers with the space their pieces fill; and this tendency, in turn, complements the musical tendency to exploit in a theatrical context all possible materials, regardless of their medium, previous familiarity, or artistic status. Richard Wagner was probably the first important modern composer to favor an integrally mixed-means work; and certain recent happenings seem an ironic comment on his conception of "the artwork of the future." Years after him, the Russian composer Alexander Scriabin incorporated a light-projector into his *Prometheus—The Poem of Fire* (1910) and later envisaged a *Mysterium* which he wanted to perform, Faubion Bowers writes, from a mountain top in India before an audience that could also observe images on a screen and inhale various kinds of incense, as well as pursue certain activities to Scriabin's instruction.

Where Wagner and Scriabin wanted to assault the senses with a variety of stimuli, the American composer Charles Ives, like Gabrieli and Mozart before him, desired to make the performance space contribute to his compositional intention; and in his *The Unanswered Question*, written in 1908 but not performed until many years later, two groups of musicians are, by design, separated from each other, while a soloist is assigned to a third position in the hall. "There is complete contrast between the three elements," writes the composer Henry Brant, "in tone quality, tempo (which includes speedups, retards and rebato), meter, range; harmonic, melodic and contrapuntal material. No rhythmic co-ordination exists between the three constituents, except an approximate one at points of entrance." As the sound literally moves from one place to another, the piece attains choreographic qualities and its space becomes kinetic; and by granting his three sound-sources a relative degree of autonomy, Ives literally created what we would now define as a staged happening. More

recently, Brant himself has pursued the possibilities of sounds in space, distributing his musicians all over (and sometimes under) the performance situation; and most wholly electronic pieces exploit the technological capability of distributing a sound over one or several of many loudspeakers.

In America, among the greatest influences shaping the Theatre of Mixed Means are the ideas and examples of John Cage, who in the early fifties made the intellectual leap that connected all performed music with theatre. In *4'33"* (1952), perhaps the most crucially influential of Cage's artistic illustrations, the pianist David Tudor comes to the bench and sits—just sits still—for the prescribed duration. The "music" is composed of all the sounds that happen to arise in the performance during *4'33"* and the "theatre" consists of all the miscellaneous visual-aural activities that happen within that time span. Pursuing the implications of his example, Cage takes the radical step to say that any and all sounds, arranged in any way, whether intentional or accidental, are "music" and that all activities, both visible to the eye and audible to the ear, constitute "theatre." In a 1954 lecture entitled "45' for Speaker," he wrote, "Theatre takes place all the time, wherever one is. And art simply facilitates persuading one this is the case." While admiring the freedom implicit in his position, most creators of the new theatre take a slightly more conservative position, which holds that any and all sounds and images, as well as any juxtapositions of these elements, are viable components of a theatrical situation which the artist *designs* to a certain coherence and conception—what Schwitters meant when he described "the dimensions required by the work." Only practitioners of pure happenings take the final leap with Cage and regard unintentional elements as intrinsic to the piece.

"Cage is currently less concerned with musical structure than with theatre," as Milton Babbitt so concisely put it; and many a spectator has found Cage's comic demeanor and David Tudor's swift and expansive movements all over and under the piano as engaging as the sounds they produce. Indeed, Cage himself has stated that he often finds the orchestral performers' machinations more interesting than the music they play, particularly when their movements are not in unison; in *Theatre Piece* (1960), which like all his recent works is indeterminate in performance, he intentionally substituted directions

for visual activities (which, of course, inadvertently make sounds) for his usual prescription for aural experience. His most recent mixed-means performance pieces create a situation which offers, to quote him, "the autonomous behavior of simultaneous events," both visual and aural; and a thoroughly hybrid event, such as his spectacular *Variations V* (1965), in which his music joins Merce Cunningham's dance, Stan VanDerBeek's films and several sorts of complicated electronic technology, is probably the most original and interesting form of opera America has today.

The Theatre of Mixed Means also descends from tendencies in contemporary dance. Historically, the first great development in modern dance, as John Martin has observed, was away from an emphasis upon classic poses (the framing of pictures) and choreographic conventions (stylization) to a concentration upon more original patterns of movement and personalized expression. With this shift from stasis to kinesis and from the telling of stories (and the creation of consistent characters) to the making of suggestively indefinite activities, the new dance of Isadora Duncan and Mary Wigman initiated a more fluid and dynamic conception of space, which was both non-rectangular and continually rearticulated. The work of Ann Halprin and Merce Cunningham culminates the second revolution of modern dance. Developing her ideas in San Francisco quite independently of Cunningham, who has lived in New York, Halprin allows in her work only natural movement which arises in the course of accomplishing a particular task; therefore, although people move in her pieces, often quite beautifully, the beauty that is created is more "found" than intentional. Moreover, her pieces exhibit a clearly unfettered use of space and material—an attitude characteristic of the entire mixed-means movement; and several of her more recent activities pursue this predilection into pure happenings in which an event, out of its own processes, develops organizing principles that define the piece. An example is the creation, mentioned before, of the driftwood city.

In their long professional association with each other, Cage and Cunningham have evolved similar aesthetic principles; and if Cage suggests that all sounds can be considered music, so Cunningham believes that all kinds of movement, in any combination, whether intentionally choreographic or not, can be considered viable compo-

nents of "dance." To demonstrate this bias, in *Collage I* (1952) he instructed his company to perform onstage such everyday activities as combing their hair, brushing their teeth, and washing their hands. In addition to exposing dance to all available movements, Cunningham has achieved four great changes in dance structure. First, he separated dance from its enslavement to the rhythms of the accompanying music. Not only does Cunningham generally compose his dances without musical background, but when he does use music (which he usually chooses after he composes the dance), the dancers do not follow its sounds—it functions as an equally discontinuous aesthetic parallel to their movements. His definition of "music" is, of course, as liberal as Cage's, and in his *How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run* (1965) the "score" consists entirely of John Cage reading a series of funny stories. Jill Johnston writes that Cunningham's work was "the first example in dance of putting things together, or letting things go together that are not logically thought to have any business being together." Second, not only do Cunningham's dancers move independently of each other, but the parts of their bodies also function within a similarly discontinuous syntax. Third, he discards the traditional rule that a particular dance should have a single fixed order; sometimes he tosses coins to determine the sequence of its parts. Finally, his pieces depart from traditional dance by exploding the focus out from a particular dancer to the entire stage (as Pollock's all-over paintings animate an entire canvas), as well as by abandoning the traditional reliance upon climaxes and resolutions. In these principles, the authors of the new theatre have much in common with Cunningham; and like Cunningham and Cage, nearly all of them reject the notions that art should express the author's emotion or direct attention to a particular extrinsic reference. Their art affects us primarily, but not entirely, as arrangements of sensory forms.

Traditionally, film has been, in Marshall McLuhan's dichotomy, a hot medium. That is, primarily because it occupies so few degrees of man's entire viewing range, film fosters detachment in the audience. However, recent years have witnessed numerous attempts to make the film experience more intimate and involving—more primarily tactual than visual. Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1962), with its blurred outlines and undefined action, has a cooler, more involving quality than standard fare; and like the mixed-means

theatre, so much of the best cinema since 1960—in the age of Godard—is more elliptical from sequence to sequence, or less dependent upon telling a patently coherent story, as well as more demanding of the sensory faculties; and these formal changes make film a more involving medium, to those segments of the audience willing or prepared to become involved.

Moreover, the experiments in multiple projection, ranging from Cinerama to 3-D, attempt to encompass more of human attention than conventional screening—an effect similar to that produced by sitting very close to the screen. For instance, when the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein finished a seminar or lecture, his pupil Norman Malcolm remembers, he would immediately rush off to the cinema, where he would insist upon sitting in the front row. There the screen “would occupy his entire field of vision, and his mind would be turned away from the thoughts of the lecture and his feelings of revulsion.” Cinerama can achieve a similarly total absorption, as evidenced by a toboggan ride, in an early example, which invariably induced frantic screams, and in many of the 3-D films, a fad that passed too quickly, several events exploited the semblance of depth to shock the audience. A primary current ambition, expressed by artists as various as Milton J. Cohen and Stan VanDerBeek, consists of systems of movies and slides, as well as lenses and mirrors, that would project images onto all the available space above the floor, often in combination with live performers, music, and other sensory input; the aesthetic model is the classic planetarium. “The lesson,” Howard Junker writes, “is that creating perfect illusion entails encasing the audience with images.” Also, by surrounding the eyes with visual data, such experiments more accurately duplicate the quality of real life than “neo-realism” or the most factual documentary.

In most strains of mixed-means theatre, however, film becomes another means for filling the space. Sometimes filmed images are projected upon a wall or a screen, as well as a mobile prop and/or person. Film also functions as a commentary on the medium itself—a major theme of Robert Whitman’s *Prune. Flat.* (1965) is film’s illusionistic capacity; for not only is a certain action on film quite different from the same action repeated live on the stage, but projecting a filmed image upon a live performer produces strange effects upon both the film and the person. In that kind of situation, a mixed-means artist

is taking a fixed product—a print of film—and putting it in an un-fixed process-situation; and that produces not only singular patterns of integration but also a greater diversity of response.

In *The New Vision*, Moholy-Nagy offers a strikingly comprehensive insight into the unprecedented character of all contemporary culture, when he noted that as the emphasis in poetry has shifted "from syntax and grammar to relations of single words," so painting has changed "from colored pigment to light (display of colored light)," which is to say film; so modern sculpture has evolved "from mass to motion" and so architecture has developed "from restricted closed space to free fluctuation of forces." In the old architecture, as well as in the old styles of theatre and sculpture, space was a static volume which could be best observed from one place; Fontainebleau, near Versailles, for instance, asks to be viewed from the front. In the new architecture, as well as the new theatre, when we move around the building its space becomes kinetic, as our perception of it is continually changing. Contrasting Renaissance space with present conceived today is its many-sidedness, the infinite potentiality for awareness, Sigfried Giedion writes, "The essence of space as it is relations within it. The eye can not sum up this complex at one view; it is necessary to go around it on all sides, to see it from above as well as from below." The new theatre resembles the new architecture in denying the traditionally clear boundary between inside and out, between what belongs to the structure and what does not. Therefore, the revolution in space implicit in the tradition that runs from Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House (1906), with its indeterminate spatial flow between the living areas, through Walter Gropius' Fagus Factory (1911) with its glass walls, Le Corbusier's Chapel at Ronchamps (1955), and Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson's glass-walled Seagram Building (1958), demands of the spectator the same kind of perceptual readjustment as kinetic sculpture and mixed-means theatre. All these tendencies, writes Moholy-Nagy, "lead to the recognition of a space condition which is not the result of the position of static volumes, but consists of visible and invisible forces."

The dominant forces shaping the new theatre, particularly in America, come from outside theatrical circles; yet these recent developments still represent extensions of modern theatrical ideas regarding the materials available to the director, the space a performance creates, and

the performance's relationship to its audience. Ever since the debut of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896), which represented the overthrow of nineteenth-century conventions and the ideal of similitude as well, everything has become possible in the theatre, although, one hastens to add, certain propitious possibilities became more acceptable earlier than others. Intrinsic in this assertion of absolute freedom was the unfettered use of additional media. Where Sergei Eisenstein, a theatrical director before he turned to movies, incorporated film clips into his early twenties' stage productions of Jack London's *The Mexican* and Alexander Ostrovsky's *Enough Simplicity in Every Sage* (and in 1923 actually staged *Gas Masks* in a gas factory), his former teacher Vsevolod Meyerhold suggested in his 1930 lecture on "Reconstruction of the Theatre" that the director, "using every technical means at its [theatre's] disposal, will work with film, so that scenes played by the actor on the stage can alternate with scenes he has played on screen." Erwin Piscator, working in Berlin around the same time (with Moholy-Nagy as his stage designer) also adopted this innovation, which has since become so respectable that film clips are now frequently incorporated into Broadway productions.

Where the proscenium stage, which historically emerged in Italy in the seventeenth century, was tied to Renaissance ideas about visual perspective and the arched banquet halls of Italian palaces, many contemporary directors favor a more open stage, where at least three and sometimes four sides face the audience. Some productions today extend out into the auditorium itself, not only through the rampways we associate with burlesque but also by actually planting actors in the seats. As the audience becomes a part of the performance's active space, it feels more viscerally involved with what transpires. "This sense of physical participation, in conjunction with the pre-established atmosphere of intimacy between actor and audience, [extends the] immediate theatre reality over the whole of the auditorium," Earle Ernst writes of the Kabuki Theatre, "so that the focal center of the performance is created in the midst of the audience." Indicatively, as Western theatre moves out of the proscenium mold, the melodramatic forms that were once the common theatrical staple become more appropriate to the rectangular performance fields of conventional movies and television.

Greater audience involvement is a motive we nowadays associate

with Antonin Artaud, who argued in *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938) that as the Western tradition of literary theatre had reached a dead end, theatre should abandon the Word and return to more primitive or Eastern conceptions of a ritualistic spectacle and an intimate performer-audience relationship. Artaud's ideas have since filtered into the contemporary literary theatre. In Ionesco's *The Chairs*, for instance, the most significant scenes, as well as the climax, are entirely wordless (or filled by sounds that might be interpreted as ersatz), and the characters function, their author writes, as "the pivots of some mobile construction." The Artaud influence extends to Roger Blin's direction of Jean Genet's plays, Judith Malina's productions at New York's Living Theatre, and the extraordinary work of Jerzy Grotowski, who transforms his entire theatre in Wroclaw, Poland, into a functioning stage. In a prison play, for example, he places the audience in one cell while the action takes place in another; in Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, the audience sits among the actors at a long medieval dining table. Enticing the audience to become participants in a theatrical process is, as Artaud would have recognized, precisely the same strategy that informed primitive ritual theatre.

However, all these achievements differ from the Theatre of Mixed Means in several crucial respects. Blin, Malina, and Grotowski use professional actors who play roles; the new theatre usually draws performers trained in the other arts or even people of no particular competence, all of whom execute prescribed tasks. Also, where these three directors usually adapt the scripts of others, in the new theatre the director—the man who "fields" the performance—is usually also the scripter of the plan; having assumed responsibility for both creation and execution, he becomes the total author of the production. As a result, since each performance piece is so closely attached to its author, it is generally impossible for one man to duplicate another creator's piece as closely as, say, productions of *Hamlet* duplicate each other. True, he may adapt another man's format or even pilfer an image or a sequence, but then what is stolen probably becomes the crook's possession.

A first-rate mixed-means work generally represents a more integral fusion of various media than the blatant combination exemplified, for example, by most musical comedies. Sergei Eisenstein perceived the crucial difference when he contrasted the Japanese Kabuki en-

semble with the Moscow Art Theatre. In a "*monastic ensemble* [*italics his*]," he wrote, "sound-movement-space-voice here *do not accompany* (or even parallel) each other, but function as *elements of equal significance*." Perhaps the mixed-means theatre will someday evolve, as Kabuki has, a coherent, purely theatrical language composed of all the artistic languages that theatrical situations include, and Western audiences will understand everything they perceive as definitively as Japanese spectators comprehend Kabuki performances.

The new theatre extends Bertolt Brecht's idea of theatrical alienation, as the playwright and critic Lee Baxandall has noted, not only in making "words, music and setting . . . become more independent of one another" and rejecting the clichés of commercialized theatre, but also in espousing the objective creation of a spectacle which produces responses that are at once subjective and personal and yet detached and critical. "The A-effect," writes Brecht, "consists of turning the object . . . to which one's attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected. What is obvious is in a certain sense made incomprehensible, but this is only in order that it may then be made all the easier to comprehend." That second sentence inadvertently indicates a primary strategy of mixed-means theatre—to present common materials in arrangements so original that each member of the audience will be forced to a perception, if not a definition, wholly his own.

The new movement in American theatre connects with the great (but sometimes hidden) tradition of non-literary performance which, I would argue, has been the dominant and propitious tradition of the American stage. From pre-Revolutionary times to the present, the best American theatre has eschewed literary moorings for an emphasis upon performance values, where the performer himself was the author of whatever words he spoke—a tendency that artistically owed more to the European example of *commedia dell' Arte* than Elizabethan theatre. As Constance Rourke showed in *American Humor* (1931), much of the best American theatre in the nineteenth century existed in the minstrel shows; and had she lived into the 1960's, Miss Rourke undoubtedly would have rewritten her posthumously published *The Roots of American Culture* (1942) to identify the Boston Tea Party as an early semblance of pure happenings. "It may well be a ques-

tion," she wrote, "whether the participants enjoyed more dumping the tea in the harbor or masquerading in warpaint and feathers with brandished tomahawks."

Early in the current century, the most satisfying theatre was found in vaudeville—a hybrid, mixed-means format that could encompass nearly every known kind of entertainment. Like vaudeville, the Theatre of Mixed Means is not exclusive but inclusive, exploiting everything it can potentially encompass, rather than putting down some feasible possibilities as beneath its dignity; vaudeville and the new theatre are also distinctly similar in formal strategy. "Not the happy ending but the happy moment," writes Albert F. McLean. "Not the fulfillment at the end of some career rainbow but a sensory, psychically satisfying here-and-now were the results of a vaudeville show."

At the same time that Eugene O'Neill's plays became the masterworks of the American stage, the great performers entered the movies, creating a cinema where the Marx Brothers, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Orson Welles either dominated the director's efforts or became their own directors, if not scriptwriters and, in Chaplin's case, the composer too. Some observers have argued that the great performance tradition expired in the early thirties when the cinema and radio killed vaudeville, but I would reply that it continued in certain dramatic productions whose form and tradition often went unrecognized. In 1924, the stage designer Norman Bel Geddes transformed an entire Broadway theatre into the semblance of a cathedral (an environment) for Max Reinhardt's pantomime production of *The Miracle*. "The stage contained a facade of Gothic architecture pierced by windows of stained glass," writes Mordecai Gorelik. "Religious processions moved down the aisles of the theatre."

The greatest theatre of the thirties, I understand, came not from the script-oriented Group Theatre, whose history several memoirs have transformed into myth, but from Orson Welles's Mercury Theatre, which was more concerned with creating a spectacular performance than with scrupulously rendering the text. (He was, so to speak, more the disciple of Meyerhold than Stanislavsky.) In 1947, Stark Young wrote that the dancer Martha Graham was "the most important lesson for our own theatre that we now have," and two years later Eric Bentley judged José Limón's *The Moor's Pavanne*

the best theatre then current in New York. The performance tradition was sustained into the late fifties by Judith Malina's production of *The Connection* (1959), where the necessities of effective performance transcended Jack Gelber's script, and her extraordinary direction made Kenneth H. Brown's *The Brig* (1963) into a singularly spectacular production. Moreover, most live jazz concerts, which achieve a structure similar to that of the minstrel show, represent some of the best performance theatre around. In short, what theatrical genius we have had in America would seem to express itself primarily not in playwriting but performance—our writers excel, instead, at the arts privately created and privately consumed, such as fiction, poetry, and the essay. Perhaps by now we should recognize once and for all that the European tradition of a theatre of literature, like the European opera or the novel of manners, will not thrive as well on these shores.

The new theatre is characteristically American in its frequent references to sub-artistic or "popular" culture, if not in its use of the actual objects themselves—automobiles in Claes Oldenburg's *Autobodys* (1962), the most common of American historical myths in his *Injun* (1962), the radio and other mundane sources of sound in John Cage's pieces, bridal costumes in Ken Dewey and Terry Riley's *Sames* (1965), a corny travelogue in Robert Whitman's *Two Holes of Water* (1966). In practice, the pop reference is either the subject of the piece, an element within a larger frame, or a distortion that evokes ironic meanings; the popular element can even become the actual setting for the performance—as Oldenburg has exploited the seats of a moviehouse, so segments of Kaprow's *Gas* (1966) used such "found objects" as a summer beach on a Saturday afternoon and a garbage dump. What is important is that the new theatre, like pop art, views popular materials as a feasible subject for artistic purposes; and in this respect its artists connect with an American tradition that includes Charles Ives's *The Concord Sonata* (1915), which mixes snatches of hymn tunes with references to Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*; and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), which integrates common whaling lore with allusions to Shakespeare. (An implication of this tradition, I suggest, is that the American artist finds both high and popular culture equally immediate to his existence and perhaps

equally important, though in different ways. This attitude had wide currency here long before either pop art or mixed-means theatre was born.) Furthermore, not only does the new theatre display a rough surface texture and hybrid quality that is so unlike the smooth prettiness typical of European art, but formally it recreates all the visual diversity and discontinuity of our culture—a disordered order that invariably strikes the European organicist mentality as “chaos.”

Indicatively, as the Theatre of Mixed Means extends from all the arts it encompasses, so its creators trace their own artistic origins to a diversity of conventional arts. Ann Halprin worked in a Broadway troupe before she gave her first dance recital. Before he turned to dance, Merce Cunningham aspired to be an actor; in recent years, he has both conducted John Cage’s music and directed short plays. Robert Whitman, Robert Rauschenberg, Allan Kaprow, and Steve Durkee (of USCO) were all originally painters; Claes Oldenburg, Robert Morris, and Carolee Schneemann do sculpture; and Rauschenberg has designed costumes and decor for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. Ken Dewey, Michael Kirby, Meredith Monk, and Lawrence Kornfeld served apprenticeships in the theatre; Gerd Stern (of USCO) was once a poet and a journalist, and his associate Michael Callahan learned electrical work from his father and psychology in school. John Cage has written two books of essays, and the composer Dick Higgins also runs a publishing house. Stan VanDerBeek, once a painter, first became known for his films. All of these artists developed modernist ideas in their respective fields, and out of the convergence of these ideas comes the new kind of theatre we know.

Indeed, the prime movers of the new movement in America have had little experience with conventional theatre. Although Allan Kaprow is often credited as the originator of “happenings,” what was in fact probably the first such premeditated event in America stemmed from a cooperative performance at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, in the summer of 1952. As John Cage remembers it, in his foreword to *Silence* (1961), the evening “involved the paintings of Bob Rauschenberg, the dancing of Merce Cunningham, films, slides, phonograph records, radios, the poetries of Charles Olson and M. C. Richards recited from the tops of ladders, and the pianism of David Tudor, together with my Juilliard lecture, which ends: ‘A piece of

string, a sunset, each acts.' The audience was seated in the center of all this activity." Indicatively, none of these participants has had any connection with professional theatrical circles; and Kaprow's involvement ran no further than composing in 1960 an electronic score for an off-Broadway production of Eugene Ionesco's *The Killers*.

The Theatre of Mixed Means has developed outside the professional theatrical community, which has less opposed the new work than remained unaware of it. Kaprow's performances in the late fifties were held in art galleries or outdoors on private farms; now he uses spaces that know no limits, such as cities and counties. Some early events were performed in the gymnasium and gallery of Judson Memorial Church; Claes Oldenburg rented a narrow Lower East Side store to house his pieces. La Monte Young has performed in encased settings as various as a friend's loft, a small off-Broadway theatre, and a tent on Long Island. Some of the best recent performances used the New York Film-Makers' Cinematheque; and where Dick Higgins rented Sunnyside Gardens, a boxing ring, for Easter morning (1965), the Theatre and Engineering Festival (1966) used the same New York armory that had housed the notorious Armory Show more than fifty years before. Of the major practitioners of mixed-means theatre, only Robert Whitman and Carolee Schneemann have accepted formal contracts that require them to repeat a piece in the same theatre and at certain times.

The following list of American authors, several important pieces, places, and dates provides a more effective history than a padded narrative:

- John Cage, Untitled staged happening, Black Mountain College, N. C. (Summer, 1952)
- Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, Reuben Gallery, N. Y. (October, 1959)
- Ann Halprin, *Birds of America or Gardens Without Walls*, University of British Columbia (December, 1959)
- Red Grooms, *The Burning Building*, Delancey Street Museum, N. Y. (December, 1959)
- Claes Oldenburg, *Snapshots from the City*, Judson Gallery, N. Y. (March, 1960)
- Robert Whitman, *The American Moon*, Reuben Gallery, N. Y. (November, 1960)

- Claes Oldenburg, *Injun*, Museum for Contemporary Arts, Dallas, Texas (April, 1962)
- Allan Kaprow, *The Courtyard*, The Greenwich Hotel, N. Y. (November, 1962)
- Robert Rauschenberg, *Pelican*, Kalla/Rama, Washington, D. C. (May, 1963)
- Ken Dewey, *et al.*, *In Memory of Big Ed*, International Writers' Conference, Edinburgh, Scotland (September, 1963)
- Ann Halprin, *Parades and Changes*—Version I, San Francisco State College (February, 1964)
- La Monte Young, *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*, Pocket Theatre, N. Y. (October, 1964)
- Carolee Schneemann, *Meat Joy*, Judson Memorial Church, N. Y. (October, 1964)
- Robert Morris, *Waterman Switch*, Judson Memorial Church, N. Y. (January, 1965)
- Dick Higgins, *The Tart*, Sunnyside Gardens, N. Y. (April, 1965)
- John Cage, *Variations V*, Philharmonic Hall, N. Y. (July, 1965)
- Allan Kaprow, *Calling*, New York City and New Jersey woods (August, 1965)
- Ken Dewey and Terry Riley, *Sames*, Film-Makers' Cinematheque, N. Y. (November, 1965)
- Claes Oldenburg, *Moviehouse*; Robert Rauschenberg, *Map Room II*; and Robert Whitman, *Prune. Flat.*, Film-Makers' Cinematheque, N. Y. (December, 1965)
- Kenneth King, *Blow-Out*, Judson Memorial Church, N. Y. (April, 1966)
- Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Whitman, John Cage, *et al.*, *Theatre and Engineering Festival*, 69th Regiment Armory, N. Y. (October, 1966)
- Meredith Monk, *16 Millimeter Earrings*, Judson Memorial Church, N. Y. (December, 1966)

Although the impetus of the mixed-means theatrical movement seems to reside in America, the works here resemble parallel activities all over the world. The Gutai Group of Japanese painters were doing similar events in the middle fifties, although they have since abandoned the theatrical medium which has recently attracted a subsequent group of Japanese artists. There exist constellations of mixed-means practitioners in Germany, France, Holland, Scandinavia, and Czechoslovakia, all of whom interact with each other as well as learn about American phenomena. Nonetheless, discriminating observers who

travel more than I find that national boundaries separate distinctively different styles. As Edward T. Hall points out in *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), "No matter how hard man tries it is impossible for him to divest himself of his own culture, for it has penetrated to the roots of his nervous system and determines how he perceives the world."

Man takes cognizance of the emptiness which girds round him and gives it psychic form and expression. The effect of this transformation, which lifts space into the realm of the emotions, is space conception. It is the portrayal of man's inner relation to his environment: man's psychic record of the realities which confront him, which lie about him and become transformed.

—Sigfried Giedion,

The Eternal Present: The Beginnings of Art
(1962)

Just as the new theatre extends from so many distinctly modern tendencies in the arts, so has it much in common with certain impulses which we recognize to be truly contemporary in recent thought. In one respect, the new theatre contributes to the contemporary cultural revolt against the predominance of the Word; for it is definitely a theatre for a post-literate (which is not the same as illiterate) age, in which print will interact and compete with other media of communication. As twentieth-century art and music were liberated from the nineteenth century's dependence upon literary themes and concep-

tions, so has the new theatre emancipated itself from the need to make sense with words. The Word, it seems to say, separates man from an instinctive relationship with natural life; for as Marshall McLuhan notes, it was the ideographic alphabet, in contrast to the Eastern calligraphic, that initiated Western man's alienation from his environment. "By surpassing writing, we have regained our wholeness, not on a national or cultural, but cosmic, plane. We have evoked a super-civilized sub-primitive man." Paradoxically, the new theatre which is so deeply an extension of modern culture eschews the primary material that created that culture—expository prose.

By cultivating the total sensorium, the new mixed-means art seems designed to help man develop a more immediate relationship with his surroundings; for not only does the Theatre of Mixed Means return the performer-audience situation back to its original, primitive form as a ceremony encompassing various arts, but it also endeavors to speak internationally—to employ the universal media of sounds and movements, as contemporary painting speaks universally in shapes and colors, in an age when the old spoken languages contribute to archaic national boundaries. Similarly, the Theatre of Mixed Means denies the myth that formal education is necessary for the appreciation of art and, therefore, the tradition that theatrical arts are solely for the educated, even though many pieces demand an experienced perception for which the mixed-means theatre is often its own best teacher.

The new theatre also links with another contemporary notion which holds that art and life, instead of being wholly distinct realms, are continuous, if not identical; therefore, the old conservative cliché of "It's not art" is today more amusing for its archaism than valid for its relevance. Some recent artists have even espoused a naturalistic aesthetic whose primary tenet is that art must emulate the disorder of natural life—what the conservative critic Yvor Winters christens "the fallacy of imitative form." "I think daily life is excellent and that art introduces us to it and its excellence the more it begins to be like it," John Cage once said, using a syntax whose ambiguity must be intentional. The new theatre, however, is not an extension of literary naturalism; for although it employs natural materials and movements, its purposes are more formal than representational—it is more interested in the structural patterns life presents than in offering a literally detailed "slice of life." That is, lifelikeness as a positive value refers

more to form than detail or, as Cage might say, "As life is complex and lacks a steady beat, so I prefer complex theatrical pieces of irregular rhythm." This bias toward formal similitude also becomes a method. When Rauschenberg designed sets for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, he would often, just before a performance of a certain dance, *Story* (1963), draw upon scrap materials that happened to be lying about; and in the same piece, the performers at regular intervals would go offstage and pick additions to their costumes from a scrap-heap of diverse clothes.

The method they used resembles that of the Eskimo who instead of planning to carve a particular figure literally "finds" the figure in the slab at hand or the Indian sarodist Ali Akbar Khân who says of how he starts a piece, "I have to listen to the drone and check my instrument, and then I begin to see the full character of what I am going to play. It opens up like a book." The rationale of this method was expressed by a Balinese sculptor who said, "We don't create art. We just do as well as we can." The analogy with Eastern and primitive activity has two other dimensions of relevance. "Where European art naturally depicts a moment of time, an arrested action or an effect of light," writes Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Oriental art represents a continuous condition." Second, as Margaret Mead points out:

The art of primitive culture seen now as a whole ritual, the symbolic expression of the meaning of life, appeals to all the senses, through the eyes and ears, to the smell of incense, the kinaesthesia of genuflection and kneeling or swaying to the passing procession to the cool touch of holy water on the forehead. For Art to be Reality, the whole sensuous being must be caught up in the experience.

This attitude presumes that some of the best art stems from fortuitous accidents. Although Versailles is impressive, writes the architectural historian Jacqueline Thywhitt, "inwardly we find it rather boring. Main Street at night . . . is a chaotic mess, but inwardly we find it rather exhilarating."

Thus it is implied that ordinary life is filled with artistic movements and objects. The architectural professors Appleyard, Lynch, and Myer have, in *The View from the Road* (1964), written sensitively about the aesthetic experience of driving on the highway, and both the dance critic Edwin Denby and the anthropologist Edward T. Hall have

shown how much learned and developed "art" there is in such a normal activity as walking—how Americans, say, have assimilated and developed distinct forms of walking (and, thus, contrasting kinetic-space conceptions) different from Italians. Furthermore, because of the impact of contemporary design, most of us experience more consciously designed art per day than our historical predecessors. As I write this essay, for instance, I look at a streamlined typewriter keyboard that is considerably more artistic than keyboards of fifty years ago. Today, art is everywhere, impressing our sensibilities all the time.

It is indicative, therefore, that in mundane activities we find the aesthetic precedents and parallels for all genres of new theatre—as both battles and Easter egg hunts resemble pure happenings, so churches and discotheques are kinetic environments; as rodeos (and bullfights) and spectator sports are staged happenings, so circuses and burlesque routines are equivalents for staged performances. As our responses to these phenomena are not unlike our responses to the new theatre, our memories of these events tell us how each strain of new theatre offers us a different kind of perceptual experience. After all, as Herbert Read writes, "to give coherence and direction to play is to convert it into art," and recreation is a kind of re-creation.

Just as the radical aestheticians like Read, Gyorgy Kepes, George Kubler, and Marshall McLuhan would dismiss as insignificant the distinction between fine and applied art and elevate all modern life to the status of an aesthetic experience, so the new theatre, among its more radical implications, would remove art from its perch above experience—where it is held to be greater than experience—because it distinctly enhances it. This depreciation, in turn, implies a dethronement of the artist from his chair high above the mass. The new aestheticians define the artist as the man who makes things that his peers admire:

In primitive societies [writes Margaret Mead] the artist, instead, is a person who does best something that other people, many other people, do less well. His products, whether he be choreographer or dancer, flutist or pot-maker, or carver of the temple gate, are seen as differing in degree but not in kind from the achievements of the less gifted among his fellow citizens.

At most, the artist is a seer who perceives more of the actualities

and/or possibilities of the environment—particularly the ways its multiplicity and discontinuity impinge upon the sensibility—and then recreates his sensory experience to communicate it to others. That is, he creates works or activities that make us more conscious of our common existence.

This readjustment of the artist's status also relates to the new art's critique of the traditional hierarchies that related the choice of subject to artistic value. Whereas the female nude was once regarded as the highest or ideal form, it now has, as an image for art, a rank equal to miscellaneous junk; and where a heroic protagonist was once considered the pinnacle in the hierarchy of a play—he was indeed its *star*—so in the new theatre, in general, all performers have a status equal to each other and, sometimes, to nonhuman elements. Indicatively, those notorious nude or semi-nude figures that do appear in mixed-means theatre generally do not, in the context of a piece, function to elevate the text or focus the audience's interest.

Not only do mixed-means authors employ new electronic machinery to produce effects wholly impossible in the nineteenth century, but the new theatre joins the electronic media in contributing to the cultural revolution of the twentieth century: a revolt first against classical conceptions of mental concentration, second against traditional ways of organizing experience, and third against a predominantly visual existence. Just as the front page of a modern newspaper (itself a product of *wire* services) differs from a page of prose by offering a conglomeration of miscellaneous forms and data, so the new theatre insists that we concentrate not upon one place, as before, but everywhere at once. Some pieces are so rich in diverse and often distant activity that they effectively discourage the most recalcitrant habits of narrow focus. Second, the form of the mixed-means theatre corresponds to that of the new media; for whereas the old theatre, as well as the old music and the old film, imitated the formal character of print by offering a line of development, the new theatre presents a discontinuous succession of images and events, which must be pieced together in the observer's mind if the piece is to be fully understood. Finally, the Theatre of Mixed Means resembles the new media in appealing to more than one sense of human attention. The new theatre joins television in initiating, if not demanding, a revision of the sensibilities, inculcating in the young sensory ratios quite different from those of

their elders, as well as a decided preference for experiences which are more participational than observational. Indeed, this difference probably explains, first, why the young are able to do their homework while listening to the radio or watching television and, second, why they find the new theatre and the new multi-media discotheques more congenial than their parents do. In the discrepancy of response to the new theatre lies a symptom of the widening gap of generational difference.

Likewise, the new theatre has much in common with the formal revolutions implied by the new physics—Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity. According to the Quantum, energy flows not in a continuous stream, as Newtonian physics describes it, but in an uneven arrangement of discontinuous batches whose path of movement cannot be precisely predetermined. Not only is the form of mixed-means theatre more discontinuous than the theatre of Newtonian ages, but the activities in the new theatre are also less precisely programed than those of traditional performance. Moreover, "Space in modern physics," writes Giedion, "is conceived of as relative to a moving point of reference, not as the absolute and static unity of the baroque system of Newton." Similarly, in most strains of the new theatre, one seat is not necessarily more advantageous than another; indeed, if one sits at all, he should change his seat from time to time to observe the same activity from different angles, in the same way that he should move around the best examples of contemporary architecture. A purpose intrinsic in art, Herbert Read writes, is "mankind's effort to achieve integration with the basic forms of the physical universe and the organic rhythms of life;" and the Theatre of Mixed Means contributes to a contemporary effort to make the structures of art emulate the hidden forms of nature (micro-physics rather than macro-physics), not only to bring life and art into harmony but also to make, as art has always done, more of the invisible environment visible.

The new theatre also contributes to that contemporary impulse to obliterate traditional categories of artistic creation and apprehension. "The differences which were once so clear," Kaprow writes, "between graphic art and painting have been practically eliminated; similarly, the distinctions between painting and collage, between collage and construction, between construction and sculpture, and between some

large construction and quasi-architecture." As *Finnegans Wake* is at once poetry, fiction, and essay, so it implicitly challenges such traditional distinctions; and much that is relevant and influential in contemporary thought—the ideas, say, of Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, Kenneth Boulding—displace as irrelevant such traditional categories as criticism and social thought, science and humanities, precisely because they encompass all these dimensions. Likewise, contemporary science has undergone so much cross-fertilizing that those hybrid terms like bio-physics and physical chemistry seem to be excessively feeble attempts to draw jagged lines across overlapping territories. "A kind of interchange is occurring," Kaprow continues, "which, besides blurring traditional outlines, is producing a new set of forms that in turn are reconditioning our experience." Thus, a mixed-means theatrical performance can be at once music, dance, drama, and kinetic sculpture, as well as an entirely new form that eschews references to any of those arts. Just as all sciences are becoming Science, and all thinking is becoming Thought, so all the arts are becoming Art.

**Vision in motion
is a synonym
for simultaneity and
space-time; a means
to comprehend
the new dimension.**

—Laszlo Moholy-Nagy,
*Vision in
Motion* (1947)

**For audiences
developing today, a
sense of media forms
and leisure forms
is as important
as a sense of content.**

—Reuel Denney,
*The Astonished
Muse* (1957)

Many a literary mind has criticized the Theatre of Mixed Means as being "empty of meaning"; yet people trained in the arts know that it is chock full of artistic significances. Certain mixed-means events express a theme that can be defined in the same kind of denotative words we use for talking about literature. Carolee Schneemann's *Water Light/Water Needle* (1966), for example, portrays the high pleasure of physical movement and contact; indeed, it can be considered a realized image of the utopia Norman O. Brown posits in *Life Against Death* (1959). One of the major implications of Claes Oldenburg's *Moviehouse* is that the audience of a moviehouse can be more interesting than the film. Robert Whitman's *Prune. Flat.* expresses meanings of another kind—the differences between kinetic images and static ones, between filmed experience and live

activity. Still, the importance of the mixed-means theatre lies less in its themes and more in its contribution to forms. Not only has the new movement transcended theatrical formulas, whether commercial or anti-commercial, without yet sinking into its own ruts; but it has also reawakened our sense of the possibilities of theatrical situations.

Therefore, the ultimate "meaning" of an event can be nothing more than the forms it offers—the medium of multiple means can be the entire message—just as the complete effect of a piece may be the enhancement of the audience's sensory perception. "The lesson the theatre has to teach," Ionesco once wrote, "extends far beyond the giving of lessons." Without calling attention to its tutelage, the Theatre of Mixed Means teaches us, first of all, to be omni-attentive—to awaken and jostle the perceptive capacities of our eyes, ears, nose, and skin, both to fuse and separate this sensory information. It preaches at us to be fully aware as we, for example, cross the street, not only of the cars speeding from the right but also of the kinetic patterns and transforming images that natural activity continually shapes. In this respect, the Theatre of Mixed Means is an art for the age of informational overload, as well as the era of polymorphously libidinal leisure that is superseding the era of phallic concentration, whether at orgasmic pleasure or productive work.

Culturally, the Theatre of Mixed Means implies the abolition of archaic forms, whether artistic or social; the importance of truly individual responses in all kinds of situations; generalized perception (polyliteracy) in an age increasingly populated by specialized (monoliterate) machines; a profoundly liberal attitude toward the eccentric and unusual; the breaking-up of the mass audience into smaller communities; the creation of more intimate social experiences; and the importance of play, which is, Johan Huizinga writes, "that it is free, is in fact freedom." Significantly, producing mixed-means theatre involves a less complicated process than literary drama; and its equipment, if there is any, is generally more portable. Likewise, as a formal theatrical set-up is unnecessary, certain hazardous and time-consuming contractual negotiations are disposed of; because it has assimilated modern technology's virtue of cutting costs within the process of production, mixed-means theatre usually charges its audience less, if anything at all, than conventional fare; as a more accessible form of theatre, it therefore links with the contemporary desire to make na-

ture's abundance more accessible to everyone. Indeed, the new art's critique of the old parallels in several respects the new radical thought's critique (i.e., Kenneth Boulding's and Robert Theobald's) of both capitalism and socialism; for although we should honor the achievements of old ways, mankind must explore and exploit the radically new possibilities his environment creates if human life is fully to achieve its potential. "Tyranny and dictatorship, manifestoes and decrees will not recast the mentality of people. The unconscious but direct influence of art," Moholy-Nagy writes, "represents a better means of persuasion for conditioning people to a new society, either by its projective or its satiric-destructive means." Unlike orthodox Marxists, the new artists, as well as the new radical thinkers, presume that a change in consciousness *precedes* a change in social organization; and the new art is thoroughly implicated in this political purpose.

The spectator who most thoroughly (rather than "correctly") understands a mixed-means theatrical presentation becomes involved with the various dimensions of a piece, assimilating all the stimuli it has to offer (as well as integrating his own interpretative responses); for the new theatre demands a perceptual attitude closer to that instigated by the experience of paintings than of books. The most profound purpose of the new theatre, then, is initiating a multiply attentive perception that enables us better to perceive not isolated events in space and time, but the structure and order of events in space-time—to comprehend what Giedion defines as "a principle which is ultimately bound up with modern life—simultaneity," as posed by our multiply transforming, discontinuous environment. As art offers sensory delight as well as, in Kenneth Burke's phrase, "equipment for living," no medium I know is more effective in this education than the Theatre of Mixed Means; for through its pleasurable pedagogy, the new theatre enhances, at once, our perceptions of art and our enjoyment of life.