

urban occupation : ACTION

research : John Cage



Image: John Neff Performing 4'33" by John Cage Source: John Neff, 2002. From an exhibition at Suitable Gallery, Chicago video of a recent performance by James Tudor: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HypmW4Yd7SY>

authors / actors / participants:

4'33" was composed by John Cage, to be performed with any instrument, or combination of instruments; however- the premiere of the three-movement 4'33" was given by pianist David Tudor.

title: 4'33"

location: Woodstock, New York, USA

date: 29 August 1952

manifesto:

"I have spent many pleasant hours in the woods conducting performances of my silent piece... for an audience of myself, since they were much longer than the popular length which I have published. At one performance... the second movement was extremely dramatic, beginning with the sounds of a buck and a doe leaping up to within ten feet of my rocky podium." -John Cage: Silence: Lectures and Writings

In 1948, Cage visited Harvard University's anechoic chamber. (An anechoic chamber is a room designed in such a way that the walls, ceiling and floor will absorb all sounds made in the room, rather than bouncing them back as echoes.) Cage entered the chamber expecting to hear silence, but as he later noted, he "heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation." Cage had gone to a place where he expected there to be no sound, yet sound was nevertheless discernible. He stated "until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music." This realization of the impossibility of silence led to the composition of 4'33".

techniques / Not playing the instrument throughout the duration of the score.

tools: Maintaining speed/tempo/timing of the performance with a stopwatch.

action:

To mark the beginning of the piece, David Tudor closed the keyboard lid. Some time later he opened it briefly, to mark the end of the first movement, and repeated the process for the second and third movements. Tudor timed the three movements with a stopwatch while turning the pages of the score. The performer does not play a single note, nor does (s)he make any deliberate sounds throughout the duration of the piece.

outcome:

"They missed the point. There's no such thing as silence. What they thought was silence, because they didn't know how to listen, was full of accidental sounds. You could hear the wind stirring outside during the first movement. During the second, raindrops began patterning the roof, and during the third the people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out." -John Cage speaking about the premiere of 4'33".

urban occupation : ACTION - research : precedents

Motsi, Shaun, 0324268



diagram: Photograph of a plain white wall/ "Silence"
Source: Shaun Motsi, 2009



Image: Stills of John Cage performing "Water Walk" (A piece based largely on the idea of "chance" in music), 1960.
Source: <http://www.multimedialab.be/blog/?p=638> ; video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSulycqZH-U>

bibliography:

- <http://www.johncage.info/> ; 26/4/2009
- <http://www.mediaartnet.org/works/4-33/> ; 26/4/2009
- <http://www.multimedialab.be/blog/?p=638> ; 26/4/2009
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/4%E2%80%B233%E2%80%B3> ; 26/4/2009
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HypmW4Yd7SY> ; 26/4/2009