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Capturing Ephemerality: George Brecht's *For a Drummer* from the Perspective of a Performer

Abstract

The main purpose of the article is to present an individual approach of analysing and reperforming *For a Drummer* by George Brecht, a legendary composer and a member of Fluxus. The text is divided into several parts. The first half of the article is dedicated to the history and definition of performance art, the second one focuses on a performer persona and their artistic abilities. The latter leads to an actual analysis of a creative process, starting with a short biographical background of Brecht, followed by reading and understanding of the event score with a culmination found in the author's re-performance.

Keywords

performance, re-performance, performer, Fluxus, George Brecht

Introduction

The contemporary art is experiencing an extremely dynamic shift towards performance. The key events in the development of this type of practice took place in the 1960s, when the artists of the Fluxus movement made a turn in the history of art. This article is a tribute to them, focusing on a piece by one of their leading representatives, George Brecht.

This work is a record of the creative path leading to the re-performance of *For a Drummer*. It is divided into four parts. The first part deals with the notion of performance—an attempt to systematise the genesis of this practice, as well as to define its characteristic features.

The second part is a short discussion on the figure of a performer: an enigmatic artist who draws inspiration from their own environment, often exploiting their body to the extreme in the creative process. I present here a profile of Joseph Beuys, an artist who prides himself on his extraordinary contribution to the further creation of performative thought.

The third paragraph is a biographical memoir of George Brecht, the creator of *For a Drummer*. It ends the strictly historical-analytical part, leading directly to the practical part. The process leading to my re-performance of the piece became its essential research material. This part contains a description of the creative path and technical preparations that culminated in the performance of the piece.

Performance

While writing this text, I am going back to the events of 2017. There is no doubt that since then many new qualities have emerged in the field of performance art, similarly to the theoretical thought accompanying this art. Researchers have managed to grasp further fascinating imperatives aimed at facilitating the understanding of this practice that is difficult to define unambiguously. Meanwhile, artists are far more likely to leave the stereotypical studio space and base the material of their actions on real experiences and social choreography. Research on performance art is developing rapidly both abroad and in Poland, providing new sources on the subject, which in turn undoubtedly makes it easier to understand the idea of performance art. In the article below I only refer to some of a myriad of publications because my main aim is

to present a perspective of a performer. However, I believe that theoretical reflection cannot be omitted in this case, as it was also extremely important in the process of exploring, trying to understand and finally re-performing the piece.

I made *For a Drummer* for my bachelor thesis, as I was studying musicology at the University of Warsaw. At the time, I was combining my academic work with developing my skills in playing the drum set. I wanted to combine these two perspectives—theoretical and practical—in my thesis. I have extremely fond memories of my time as a student, so I wanted to write about a real-life event that I identify with and have an emotional connection to. An additional motivation for this method was my research interests, which included music aesthetics, learning about the profiles of artists, as well as analysing and interpreting their works. *For a Drummer* also initiated the creation of my individual practice, which resulted in the making my own performances.

The thesis based on my own experience was quite a challenge—apart from the fact that I had to draw the line between emotional reception of the piece and factual analysis, the very matter of performance art was extremely difficult for me to grasp. Then, a long process of self-reflection and phenomenological considerations began. I made global attempts to define performance and at the same time I was looking for caesuras and meaning locally, inside the re-performed piece. An important issue for me was where *For a Drummer* begins and where it ends—what it aims at, what ideas it carries.

Professor Tomasz Kubikowski, a theatre scholar and philosopher, was the first to use the term ‘performatyka’ as an equivalent of English ‘performance studies’ in Poland. Performance studies is not only about an artistic act—it studies human behaviour in specific situations, including those related to everyday life. Kubikowski claims that performance is a confrontation of instructions (and thus theory) with practice. It is a clash of concept and action, a selective treatment of a certain scenario, so that the resulting reality is attractive to us and allows us to adapt to a given situation.¹

Joanna Zielińska, the creator of the Performing Arts Department at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, refers to the monograph by Roselee Goldberg, an American art historian

¹ R. Schechner, *Performatyka: Wstęp*, tr. T. Kubikowski (Wrocław: Ośrodek Badań Twórczości Jerzego Grotowskiego i Poszukiwań Teatralno-Kulturowych, 2006), 44.

and curator of performance art. She refers to the publication from 1979, in which Goldber finds a genesis of performance in the activity of dadaists, surrealists and futurists. She also expands the definition of performative action—adding dance, choreography and quasi-theatrical activities.² Artists such as Georges Mathieu, Yves Klein and John Cage began the practice we know today as ‘happening’. The term was coined by Cage’s student Allan Kaprow.³

The year 1957: Kaprow, Cage and George Brecht (so crucial in this work) take a walk. Kaprow confesses that while creating his so-called ‘action collages’, he has problems with some of the sound elements of the installation (it is worth mentioning here that the artist was a great admirer of Jackson Pollock’s work, who used gesture painting, the so-called ‘action painting’; the expressive act of painting, which was supposed to emphasise that a painting is not a finished work but a record of the act of creation, was to be a great inspiration in the development of happening).⁴ Cage, who at that time was teaching composition at the New School for Social Research in New York, invited Kaprow to his lecture. The recording or looping techniques Kaprow learned had such an impact on the artist that he asked Cage to allow him to attend classes regularly.⁵

This is how a happening was born—something that, according to Kaprow, was supposed to happen spontaneously in the gallery space. More than creating a concrete, material work, he was interested in putting tools in the hands of the audience, who through their interaction with those tools created and redefined the artist’s idea. However, a constant element was the series of instructions that Kaprow issued along with the invitations to the exhibition. By doing so, he warned the viewers that they would at the same time become the creators of the work, taking an active part in its existence. The instructions were divided into particular situations (events), the end of which was signalled, for example, by the sound of a bell.

² J. Zielińska, ‘Czarna skrzynka. Rozmowa z Joanną Zielińską’, interviewed by M. Czyż, https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/8792-czarna-skrzynka.html?fbclid=IwAR2B5BJPTMJcUargwLT6cH_LKx9wtAgglEA3RzKR5PLhyJlh7BSLDyKnY6w, accessed 20 June 2020.

³ J.F. Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes. Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2011), 15.

⁴ K. Beaven, ‘Performance Art. The Happening’, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/h/happening/happening>, accessed 21 June 2020.

⁵ Beaven, *Performance Art*.

Kaprow realised his first happening in 1959 in New York (*18 Happenings in 6 Parts*) at the Reuben Gallery. The work had the so-called compartmental structure, which consisted of logically unconnected parts—events. For Kaprow, a happening was the so-called ‘collage of events’—realised live, fully improvised, performed by amateurs. He was most interested in the kind of happening that enables the active participation of the audience.⁶

A completely different concept of happening was presented by Wolf Vostell, also listed among the main creators of Fluxus. Vostell restrained the participants of his works, imposing on them specific actions to be performed, limiting their free exploration. He was interested in the process of destruction, according to him an inherent part of existence. For example, one of his actions is *Neun-Nein-de-collagen* from 1963—the use of a speeding locomotive to ram a car standing on the tracks. He passed on his ideas to the other members of Fluxus, who contributed significantly to the development of the happening.⁷

PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD AND TIDE IN ART.
Promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART REALITY to be
fully grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and profes-
sionals.⁸

The quotation provided above comes from the manifesto of George Maciunas, an American artist of Lithuanian origin, a spiritual leader and founder of Fluxus. In these phrases, he laid the foundations for a new artistic consciousness (strongly inspired by the work of John Cage) and a new perceptual consciousness based on ‘being in reality’ or ‘sensitivity’ to it.⁹ The work of the artists associated with the Fluxus movement balanced between art and anti-art, devaluing the artistic nature of intentional works while adding artistry to everyday activities and situations. Ben Vautier, an active participant in the movement, recalled years later the words of Maciunas, who gave the Fluxus ‘concerts’ the

⁶ Beaven, *Performance Art*.

⁷ K. Ruhrberg et al., *Art of the 20th Century* (Köln: Taschen, 2005), 75.

⁸ B. Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise. The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 220.

⁹ G. Dziamski, ‘Performance – tradycje, źródła, obce i rodzime przejawy. Rozpoznanie zjawiska’, in G. Dziamski, H. Gajewski, J.S. Wojciechowski, eds., *Performance. Praca zbiorowa* (Warszawa: Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1984), 30.

function of cheering up the contemporary music. He was to discover that it was boring in itself, because it was dependent on historically produced cultural needs. The works of Fluxus were shaped by the recognition in art of chance and amateurism as a constitutive factor for it.¹⁰ It should be emphasised that the artists of the Fluxus movement did not intend to claim a monopoly on defining art or the ability to transform the simplest situations and events into art. On the contrary, the effect of their actions was to mobilise everyone to undertake the artistic action and to provoke activity through a series of do-it-yourself instructions. The precursor of this type of art was John Cage. His concept was based on the belief that the act of musical creation is not an individual action of the artist, but spontaneously 'becomes' in a given situation with a given audience. Cage gave creativity a collective character, which is completely different from the romantic ideal of the alienated creator-genius.¹¹

Instead of being the product of one person, art is a process set in motion by a group of people. Art becomes socialised. It is not that someone says things, but that people do things, giving everyone (including those involved in art) the opportunity to have experiences they would not have had otherwise.¹²

The provocative nature of happening began to fade, giving way to an interest in the artist's body, treated shortly thereafter as a tool of artistic creation. The unquestionable leader in breaking physical barriers in her works is Marina Abramović, whose works such as *Rhythm 0* or *Rhythm 5* still arouse great controversy because of their radical course, dangerous to the artist's life and health. Another artist who was fascinated with crossing his barriers, both physical and mental, was Chris Burden. During the performance of his piece *Shoot*, he was intentionally shot in the arm by his friend.¹³

The work of relational artists clearly stood out in the art of the 1990s. In their view, the audience became a group of autonomous performers

¹⁰ Działowski, 'Performance', 31.

¹¹ Z. Skowron, *Nowa muzyka amerykańska* (Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 1995), 42.

¹² 'Sztuka, zamiast być wytworem jednej osoby, jest procesem uruchamianym przez grupę ludzi. Sztuka łączy się. Nie polega na tym, że ktoś mówi, lecz że ludzie czynią rzeczy, dając wszystkim (łącznie z zaangażowanymi w sztukę) możliwość zdobycia doświadczeń, których nie osiągnęliby innym sposobem'. Skowron, *Nowa muzyka amerykańska*, 42.

¹³ 'Chris Burden shot in the name of art in iconic performance', <https://publicdelivery.org/chris-burden-shoot/>, accessed 23 June 2020.

who, through their participation in the exhibition space, constitute its driving force, giving it an unpredictable rhythm.¹⁴

French-Canadian scholar Josette Féral, in her work *Theorie et Pratique du theatre. Au-dela des limites* tried to define the distinctive features of performance art. She pointed to three fundamental elements, independent of prevailing fashions or practices: manipulation of the artist's body as the most important and necessary feature of every performative act, manipulation of space, and the relation that is established between the artist and the audience, the audience and the work of art, the work of art and the artist.¹⁵

Professor Maria Szyszkowska (philosopher, politician) considers performance art to be philosophically rich—she appreciates it for bringing up topics that are often neglected in public discourse, such as ecology. She said that Jerzy Grotowski was an unquestionable precursor of ecological art. Szyszkowska also stresses that contemporary artists have taken over the role of the 19th century poet-poets, engaging additionally their own bodies in order to encourage people to abandon their stereotypical view of the world.¹⁶

Performer

Performance art appears as a free form of artistic inspiration flow, which is often based on observations of everyday life and the performer's individual vision. So the question arises: can everyone be an artist? 'Jeder Mensch ein Kunstler' (Everyone is an artist)—claimed Joseph Beuys, and in Poland he was echoed by Edward Stachura with his manifesto 'everything is poetry [...] everyone is a poet!'.¹⁷

¹⁴ Zielińska, *Czarna skrzyńka*.

¹⁵ J. Féral, *Theorie et Pratique du theatre. Au-dela des limites* (Montpellier: Editions L'Entretemps, 2011), cited in: J. Féral, 'Rzeczywistość wobec wyzwania teatru', tr. W. Prażuch, *Didaskalia*, 109/110 (2012), 19–25.

¹⁶ M. Szyszkowska, *Całe życie w opozycji. Rozmowy z Marią Szyszkowską* (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 1997), <http://biblioteka.kijowski.pl/szyszkowska%20maria/calezyciewopozy.pdf>, accessed 23 June 2020.

¹⁷ J. Wesołowski, 'Artysta jako człowiek i jako rzecz. Uwagi obserwatora uczestniczącego', in S. Wyśłouch, B. Kaniewska, eds, *Człowiek i rzecz. O problemach reifikacji w literaturze, filozofii i sztuce* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza, 1999), 45.

The photograph below shows Joseph Beuys, an artist, a political and social activist. It commemorates the 1982 performance during which Beuys planted (with the help of local people) seven thousand trees of various species in Kassel. Next to each of them he placed a basalt pedestal. The dualism of living, organic matter and processed, inanimate matter was meant to illustrate Beuys's key philosophy of the harmony and coexistence of these values in the life of every human being.¹⁸



Illus. 1: Joseph Bueys plants trees during the *7000 Oaks* action, Kassel 1982.¹⁹

7000 Oaks was an actual change of the city landscape, which affected not only its visual representation, but also the morale of the local people who took an active part in the project.

Central to the work below is the aspect of 're-creation'—that is, re-performance. Allan Kaprow, mentioned earlier, once said that re-performing his actions would contradict their specificity.²⁰ Artists

¹⁸ <https://www.walkerart.org/archive/E/A24315825E9BEAE26130.html>, accessed 7 June 2020.

¹⁹ Source: <https://somethingcurated.com/2019/10/30/sculpture-as-social-practice/>, accessed 17 July 2020.

²⁰ 'Reinterpreting Re-performance', <https://helenabarrett1987.wordpress.com/january-2011-study/>, accessed 7 June 2020.

and art curators at one point became concerned about the impossibility of commemorating works. The ephemeral nature of performance then became a subject of dispute and discussion. For it is an art that is extremely difficult to archive—the traditional ways of documenting art (photographs, descriptions) are not able to convey its essence, they may also be subject to manipulation and present an idea that is completely opposite to the artist's original concept. On the other hand, a performance by another artist will always bear the mark of their individual practice.

Although initially ambivalent about re-performance, artists—including Fluxus artists—were eager to draw on the works of their peers. For example, La Monte Young composed a series called *Compositions 1960*, part #10 of which ('to Bob Morris'), entitled *Draw a straight line and follow it*, was performed by Nam June Paik. The artist dipped his head in ink and, bent over, scribbled it on rolls of paper. He titled his performance *Zen for Head*.²¹ On the one hand, such a solution seems to be an extreme example of interference in the structure of a piece, but on the other hand it shows the evolution of thought about re-performance. The recording is treated as a script, which is in line with the current of reflections on performance theatre. As in theatre, different directors use the same scripts. In the case of performance, artists can draw from the works of other performers and create them according to their practice and emotions.

A Performer—with a capital letter (sic!)—is a man of action, not a man who plays another man. They are a dancer, a priest, a warrior; they are beyond the divisions of the genres. The ritual is a performance, a fulfilled action, an act. The degenerate ritual is a performance. I do not want to discover what is new, but what is forgotten. So old that divisions into art genres cannot be applied here. I am a teacher of the Performer (I use the singular: Performer). [...] A Performer is a state of being. A man of cognition. A man of cognition disposes of doing and not of thoughts and theories. What does a real teacher do for a practitioner? They say: *Do this*. The student struggles to understand, to bring the unknown to the known, to avoid doing. By the very fact that they want to understand, they resist. They will understand, but only after they do this. They will do this or not. Knowing is a matter of doing.²²

²¹ 'Reinterpreting Re-performance'.

²² 'Performer – z dużej litery (sic!) – jest człowiekiem czynu, a nie człowiekiem, który gra innego. Jest tancerzem, kapłanem, wojownikiem; jest poza podziałami na

This poetic quotation from a text by Jerzy Grotowski (a Polish theatre director, theoretician, educator and theatre reformer) is a contribution to reflection on who the performer is—what tools do they use? What is the aim of their creative creation?

Nigel Rolfe, an Irish representative of the life art movement, assigned the contemporary artist the following task: they have a chance to unite what culture has torn apart—life and art. Artistic performance seems to be a protest against this rupture and an impulse to create a new kind of artistic being, inseparably connected with human being and its existence.²³

Brecht

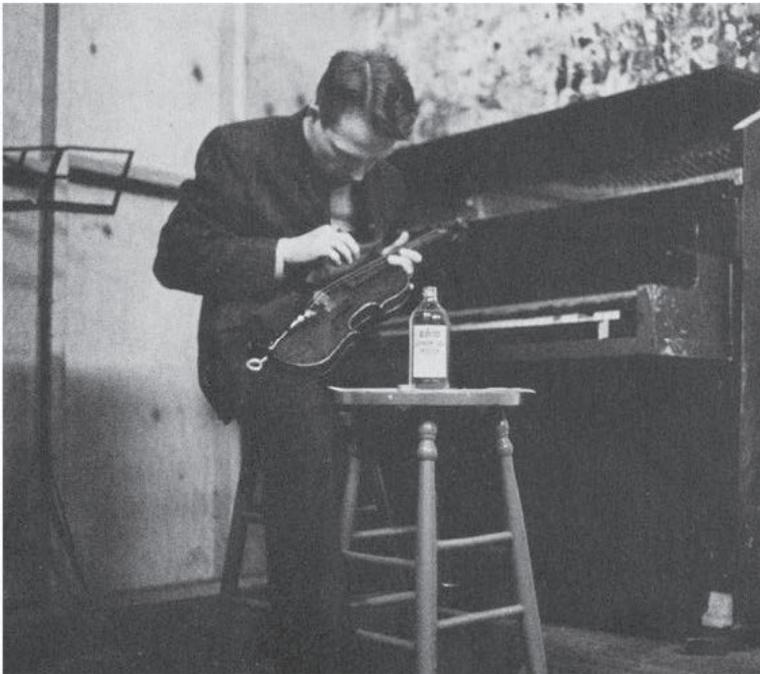
A key figure in the Fluxus movement is George Brecht, an avant-garde composer and conceptual artist who was a chemist by training. Brecht's artistic career began in the late 1950s. He was still working as a scientist at Charles Pfizer & Co. and Johnson & Johnson in New Jersey. He got the job after graduating from Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science (1946–1950). At that time he was keenly interested in art—at the beginning of his career he was inspired by the works of Jackson Pollock and Robert Rauschenberg. He transferred his fascinations onto sheets, which he covered with dark ink and titled *Chance Paintings*. Coincidence was thus the *modus operandi* of Brecht's early works. In 1956–1957, he formulated his theories on patterns of probability and the factor of chance in twentieth-century science and art, and published them in *Something Else Press*. The work entitled *Chance Imagery*

gatunki sztuki. Rytuał to performance, akcja spełniona, akt. Zwyródniały rytuał jest widowiskiem. Nie chcę odkrywać tego, co nowe, lecz co zapomniane. Tak stare, że podziałów na gatunki sztuki nie da się tutaj odnieść. Jestem nauczycielem Performera (używam liczby pojedynczej: Performera). [...] Performer to stan istnienia. Człowiek poznania. [...] Człowiek poznania rozporządza czynieniem – *doing* – a nie myślami i teoriami. Co czyni dla praktykanta prawdziwy nauczyciel? Mówi: *zrob to*. Praktykant walczy, by zrozumieć, by sprowadzić nieznanne do znanego, uniknąć uczynienia. Przez sam fakt, że chce zrozumieć, opiera się. Zrozumie, ale dopiero wtedy, kiedy zrobi. Zrobi lub nie. Poznanie to sprawa czynienia.' J. Grotowski, 'Performer', in J. Degler, Z. Osiński, eds, *Teksty z lat 1965–1969* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Wiedza o Kulturze, 1990), 214.

²³ A. Kawalec, 'Kilka uwag o pojęciu sztuki performans', in A. Kawalec, ed., *O pojęciu sztuki w kulturze współczesnej* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2010), 98.

revealed the author's fascination with dadaism and the figure of Marcel Duchamp, whom he regarded as the epitome of the 'searching artist'.²⁴

Brecht's career developed thanks to his collaboration with, among others, John Cage, with whom he studied between 1958 and 1959, during which time he developed the idea of the event score, which was to be, as the name suggests, a record of events. The idea turned into a symbol of the activities and functioning of Fluxus. In the mid-1960s, the composer decided to leave the United States. It is said that Cage spent an entire evening convincing Brecht not to do so. Unfortunately, the persuasions were to no avail, and Brecht, travelling through Rome, southern France, London, and Dusseldorf, settled in Cologne.²⁵



Illus. 2: George Brecht performs *Solo for Violin*, New York 1964.²⁶

²⁴ A. Dezeuze, 'Brecht for beginners', in A.M. Fischer, ed., *George Brecht. Events. A Heterospective* (Köln: Buchhandlung Walther König, 2005), 3.

²⁵ K. Johnson, 'George Brecht, 82, Fluxus Conceptual Artist, Is Dead', <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/15/arts/music/15brecht.html>, accessed 20 May 2020.

²⁶ Source: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/127320>, accessed 17 July 2020.

From event score to re-performance

For a Drummer operates with an unusual notation that requires a completely different perspective and research strategy. Below, the event score of Brecht's piece in its original version is presented.

Fluxversion 1: Performer drums with drum sticks or drum brushes over the surface of wet mud or thick glue until brushes or sticks get stucked and can't be lifted.

Fluxversion 2: Performer drums with sticks over a leaking feather pillow making the feathers escape the pillow.

Fluxversion 3: Performer drums over drum with 2 ends of slightly leaky water hose.

Fluxversion 4: Performer drums over drum with rolled newspapers until the rolls disintegrate.

Fluxversion 5: Performer dribbles a ping pong ball between a hand-held racket and drum skin.

Fluxversion 6: Performer drums with mallets or hammers on a helmet worn by another performer.

Fluxversion 7: Performer drums with brushes inside a vessel filled with cream until cream is thick.²⁷

George Brecht called the scores of his works collectively 'event scores'. The title provided above is also carried by one of the artist's performances, the content of which reads: 'Arrange or discover an event. Score and then realize it,²⁸ which is literally a suggestion to 'record' an event created by the artist. The term 'event' is thus an extremely broad concept, as we can see in *The Fluxus Performance Workbook*, a collection of works by artists associated with Fluxus. In the introduction to the book we read that the genesis of event scores goes back to John Cage's activity at The New School in New York. Together with his students, the composer tried to redefine a musical work, to bring it to life, depriving it of the rigid framework of performance markings. This is how the idea of events was born, the writing of which was to be a kind of encouragement, a proposal, an instruction. Therefore, events were concise descriptions of certain events, whose time, place and manner of performance depended on the individual concept of the performer.

²⁷ Source: K. Friedman, O. Smith, L. Sawchyn, eds., *The Fluxus Performance Workbook* (London, 2002), 28.

²⁸ K. Friedman, ed., *The Fluxus Performance*, 27.

Initially, they were to be printed on small pieces of paper and sent to the composer's friends.²⁹

From the contemporary point of view, these instructions are often compared to the works of minimalist poets (e.g. Emmett Williams).³⁰ In their works, the economy of words also provoked subjective evaluation and did not impose a concretized, paved interpretation on the viewer.

Brecht, as an abstract composer and collaborator of John Cage, was certainly fascinated by music, but entering into dialogue with it from the perspective of an avant-garde artist carries a considerable space of understatement. Performance allows for the presence and activity of people of all professions and passions. One of the forms of using event scores was their negation, which can be committed by anyone, not necessarily an antagonist of conceptual art. As a music researcher, I decided to treat *For a Drummer* as an abstract yet real musical activity, based on my knowledge and experience of playing the drum set.

Brecht himself used to say that there is no one right way to perform his works.³¹ The sphere of ephemerality of performance, as well as the connections between *For a Drummer* and the Fluxus movement, could contribute to conclude the analysis here. The aim of the performer is not a performance based on predictable and consistently planned gestures, but full surrender to the narrative of the piece which takes shape in the moment of contact with the viewer. However, since the above performance was also the subject of my research, I decided to go one step further and deepen the process.

Performing *For a Drummer* requires analysing the event score and making a number of decisions. Although in most of the etudes the guidelines are clearly defined by the composer, in a few situations there is an opportunity to choose what materials the artist can use on stage. In *For a Drummer*, the word 'or' gives the performer a choice

²⁹ Johnson, *George Brecht*.

³⁰ A. Michnik, 'Wejdz w świat Fluxusu (jeśli masz odwagę)', interviewed by A. Suprynowicz, <http://www.polskieradio.pl/8/3887/Artykul/1766720>Wejdz-wswiat-fluxusu-jesli-masz-odwage>, accessed 20 May 2020 (audition: *Bariera dźwięku. Przewodnik po muzyce współczesnej*, Channel Two of Polish Radio, 19 May 2017 at 10:30 p.m.).

³¹ K. Groh, 'Teoretyczna idea sztuki performance', in G. Dziamski, H. Gajewski, J.S. Wojciechowski, eds., *Performance. Praca zbiorowa* (Warszawa: Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1984), 63.

regarding the material or instrument used, which consequently significantly affects the audiovisual presentation. At this point there is a discrepancy between the aforementioned spontaneity of actions and the real preparation of the artist to perform the piece. In his publication *Training for Performance: A meta-disciplinary account*, John Matthews reflects on methods of preparing artists (actors, performers) for performances. He points out that performance is indeed a 'living art,' yet Marina Abramović had to prepare her body for the extreme stresses she put on it in her works to be able to fully convey the ideas behind them.³² The richness of meaning of the English word 'performance' poses considerable problems of interpretation, but Matthews clearly categorises the concepts of artistic acts, separating them from unrelated activities and achievements. He cites Alison Knowles, an American artist and Fluxus member, who believes that preparation and the creative process should be based on a thorough analysis of the materials used and adapting them to use as one intends.³³ Below is a description of this type of practice. I would like to stress that I use the words event and étude interchangeably, as in my opinion individual fragments of *For a Drummer* can be treated as performative particles in the shape of theatrical études—concrete situations, tasks to be performed on stage.

In the case of the first event of the piece I chose percussion brooms and glue as my tools. My choice was made after a 'sound test' of all possible combinations suggested by Brecht. I found that the drumsticks, upon contact with a sticky or dense surface, produce a quiet, muffled sound that is almost inaudible. Following this idea and relating it to my idea of musical performance I resigned from this option. The percussion brooms, due to their construction, produce a rustling, complex sound, which was audible with both mud and glue, so I opted for that tool. The choice of glue seemed more appropriate because of the intended location of the performance.

Event two required breaking up a feather pillow and deflating it with drumstick strokes. I used Vic Firth drumsticks (model 5A Black) with a classic head shape and a length of 40.64 cm. In order to allow the feathers to get out of the pillow, I made cuts on its edges.

³² J. Matthews, *Training for Performance: A meta-disciplinary account* (London: Bloomsbury, Methuen Drama, 2011), 53.

³³ Matthews, *Training for Performance*, 53.

The third étude was quite technically challenging. I used a prepared garden hose. The preparation of the hose consisted of making holes in it and closing its two ends with connectors. Since I decided to create a painting during this étude and leave a sort of memento of this expression, I placed a white cotton canvas under the snare drum I was playing. Before the performance began, the hose was filled with a red liquid (water tinted with fabric paint).

Étude four was not demanding. However, I decided that the newspapers would not be rolled into a uniform roll, and I would crumple the individual magazine pages into the shape of long strips. Holding them in handfuls of five and six allowed me to create more sounds when hitting the snare drum.

The preparation of étude five was tumultuous and constantly changing, which led to considerable modification of its content. First, for technical reasons, I did not use the ping pong table (it would not fit in the stage space). It turned out to be unnecessary, because this étude assumes the presence of two performers, and I performed solo. I first bounced the ball directly off the snare drum, holding it with my hands and balancing the bouncing ball, and then bounced it against the wall.

Étude six also involved the presence of two people. In my performance, I wore a helmet on my head (perhaps about a forty-year-old motorcycle helmet). It had been crafted and, in fact, repaired. The previous owner had written 'POLICE' on it in marker. In order not to significantly affect the texture of the helmet, I just painted it with silver paint. I hit it with a meat pestle and a small hammer.

Whipping cream during étude seven was very difficult for a simple reason. It is not easy to do it with percussion brooms, whose thin aluminium fibres bend. I added a few drops of pink paint to the whipping cream. Sitting on a chair, I stirred it until it thickened, all the while working on the sound and creating the rhythm.

Initially, my plan for working with the sound material of the performance was to explore the musicality of the objects provided in the event score. I was looking for parallels between the instruction presented and the percussion rudiments. The activity was to be based on interpreting the étude and looking for the best way to convey its ideological layer through movement. The goal of matching a specific rudiment to each étude was to best convey the meaning and message through simple, schematic movement. The percussion rudiments are

a series of ‘practices’, technical exercises that every instrumentalist should know and be able to play. They are divided into groups—some ‘strengthen’ the musician’s body, focusing on learning to play each limb simultaneously, while others present technical exercises based on the manipulation of the baton to produce a specific sound.

To illustrate my original point and to clarify a certain abstract approach that was born at the beginning of the work on the piece, I will give an example of the synthesis of rudiments with stage gesture. Projecting *étude six* in our imagination, we get the image of a person who, figuratively speaking, is ‘hammering’ something into the other person’s head. By directly hitting someone, and in addition with a hammer (or pestle), we show our superiority, power, strength. Above all, however, it has negative connotations. Firstly, using violence against someone (despite the helmet protecting your head) is immoral and wrong. Secondly, hitting someone over the head with a hammer brought to my mind all kinds of propaganda activities and ‘hammering’ someone else’s views and thoughts to gain support. If we follow this line of thought, and if we recall some selected events from history, we can come to the conclusion that such actions were based on a kind of pattern. In order to affect the collective psyche, actions must be uncomplicated, strong and blunt, and at the same time simple enough for everyone to compare them to their own situation and understand. Therefore, the most appropriate gesture seemed to be the seemingly simplest rudiment *Single Stroke Roll*, consisting of alternating playing equal rhythmic values with both hands. Its goal is to develop an even, almost mechanical playing of both hands, while maintaining a common rhythmic value and specific dynamics.

Ultimately, I gave up on this idea, guided mainly by the ideas of the Fluxus movement itself, which assumed, however, the creation of art in a way ‘everyday’, more of a social choreography than a finished artistic work. The percussion instruments used in *For a Drummer*, such as a meat pestle or a garden hose, are after all elements of almost every household. Moreover, in the case of any artistic activity there is a risk of a sudden ‘dazzle’ or simply a change in the concept or feeling of the piece being performed. By imposing a performance path on myself from the beginning, I not only deprived myself of the opportunity to emotionally search for the meaning of the performance and give it my individual characteristics, but I also somehow added a layer of

meaning that probably did not even cross Brecht's mind. Of course, this is a mistake, as reading a play and understanding it in all possible ways is the privilege of the viewer. However, assuming the duties of a performer who plays someone else's piece, it seemed right to me not to create, on the basis of *For a Drummer*, a new performance which would be my subjective manifesto.

Paradoxically, I limited my influence on the shape of the piece, deciding to carry out Brecht's instructions literally. However, taking the humble position of a performer was not less creative, because *For a Drummer* was my debut as a performer, it strongly influenced my further actions and still resonates in my emerging individual style. Besides, it was an attempt, an experiment of sorts, to bring performance into the musicological environment in a practical way.

The performance took place on 7 February 2017, and was attended by about fifty people. An important consideration was the venue for the performance of the piece. I chose Klubojadalnia Eufemia, located in the basement of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. The decision was conditioned mainly by the specificity of the place and the group of people visiting it—Eufemia is considered the centre of Warsaw's independent music and arts scene. The claustrophobia and intimacy of the basement club guaranteed more intimate contact with the audience, which is what I was aiming for.

The performance lasted approximately ten minutes. It was recorded on a DSLR camera not only for the documentation I needed to further my artistic studies, but also to analyse the performance and evaluate it. The illustration below shows a 'frame' from the recording. In it, I am performing étude six—hitting the helmet on my head with a hammer and meat pestle. It was an interesting experience, given the difference in the sound I heard and that of the audience.

Despite the abstractness of my actions and the unusual use of materials, only one person told me that they completely misunderstood the performance and did not find themselves in its narrative ('I didn't understand, I heard before that it was Fluxus and unusual, that's all'). Many audience members interpreted my actions very individually. There were interesting opinions connecting the études with the political situation, censorship—in this context the fragment in which I hit my head with a hammer made the biggest impression ('I felt that you react to what surrounds you, it was not as abstract as I thought')—or

sexuality, the theme of which came up while whipping cream and the sound it made ('the last bit was very intimate, exhibitionistic'). The audience members, who were previously familiar with Brecht's piece (there was even a person among them who had previously performed *For a drummer*), were very surprised by the études that provide for the presence of two performers, which I performed solo. In their view, this reinforced the message of the performance and resonated with my individual experience ('it was very yours, you made your presence very strongly felt in Brecht's piece').

Issues of the work

The question of aesthetic experience is an important element of research in the sociology of art. It is the component of reception that determines its qualification as an artistic product. Aesthetic experience causes that the work of art begins to evoke the desire for coexistence, individual reflection. This often results from the intensification of the viewer's existence—from striking those chords that will make him find common features with the work and identify with its narration.³⁴ In the case of avant-garde works within the Fluxus movement, which was the art of everyday life, it may be much more complicated. Then, the individual reception of the work seems to depend only on the viewer's sensitivity. It always requires cultural competence, knowledge of communication rules necessary to understand cultural products. This leads to interpretation, which is an intellectual operation that consists in the recipient's understanding of the perceived work and conscious grasping of its content, structure, and identity.³⁵

The main goal of the text was to present the path that a performer must take when working on event score and abstract performance material. The issue of performing this type of music is very individual and strongly dependent on the subjective feelings of the artist.

From the point of view of musicological research, the issue of performance seems to be a very interesting although demanding research field. A particularly promising perspective is created by combining

³⁴ M. Golka, *Socjologia sztuki* (Warszawa: Centrum Doradztwa i Informacji Difin, 2008), 175.

³⁵ Golka, *Socjologia sztuki*, 178.

theoretical concepts with practical skills. It is safe to say that such an approach introduces a completely new quality in music research.

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