A TRIBUTE TO THE GREAT JOHN CAGE

MUSIC, WRITING, AND VISUAL ART

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MUSIC WRITING AND VISUAL ART

ALL ABOUT THE GREAT JOHN CAGE

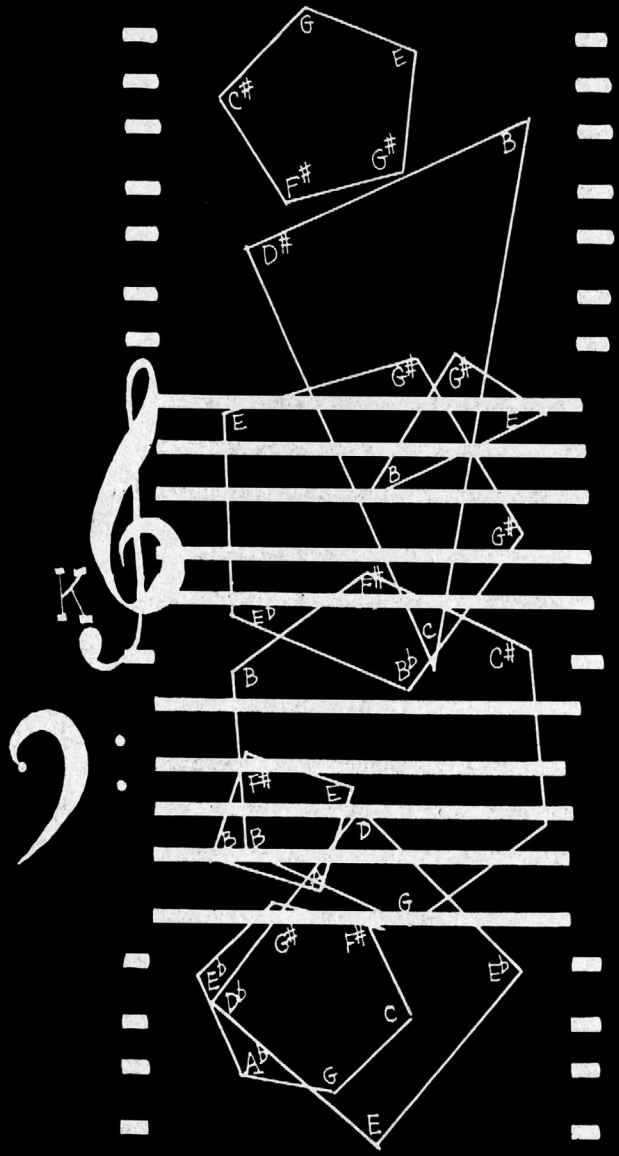
September, 5 1912- New York, 12 1992

American composer, philosopher, writer and printmaker. He was educated in California and then made a study tour of Europe (1930–31), concentrating on art, architecture and music. On his return to the USA he studied music with Richard Buhlig, Adolph Weiss, Henry Cowell and Arnold Schoenberg; in 1934 he abandoned abstract painting for music. An interest in extending the existing range of percussion instruments led him, in 1940, to devise the 'prepared piano' (in which the sound is transformed by the insertion of various objects between the strings) and to pioneer electronic sound sources. Cage was influential not only as a composer but also as a thinker, profoundly influencing artists working in other media. In his own scores after 1950 he frequently incorporated visual elements, such as superimpositions of transparent sheets covered with straight and curved lines, circles and dots; coloured wavy lines to represent melodic outlines; and graphlike notations. In some scores he determined the positioning of pitches on a more or less conventional staff by the superimposition of star charts, or he based it on observations of imperfections in the paper.

JOHN CAGE'S MUSIC BEGINNINGS

Cage's first completed pieces are currently lost. According to the composer, the earliest works were very short pieces for piano, composed using complex mathematical procedures and lacking in "sensual appeal and expressive power. Cage then started producing pieces by improvising and writing down the results, until Richard Buhlig stressed to him the importance of structure. Most works from the early 1930s, such as Sonata for Clarinet (1933) and Composition for 3 Voices (1934), are highly chromatic and betray Cage's interest in counterpoint.

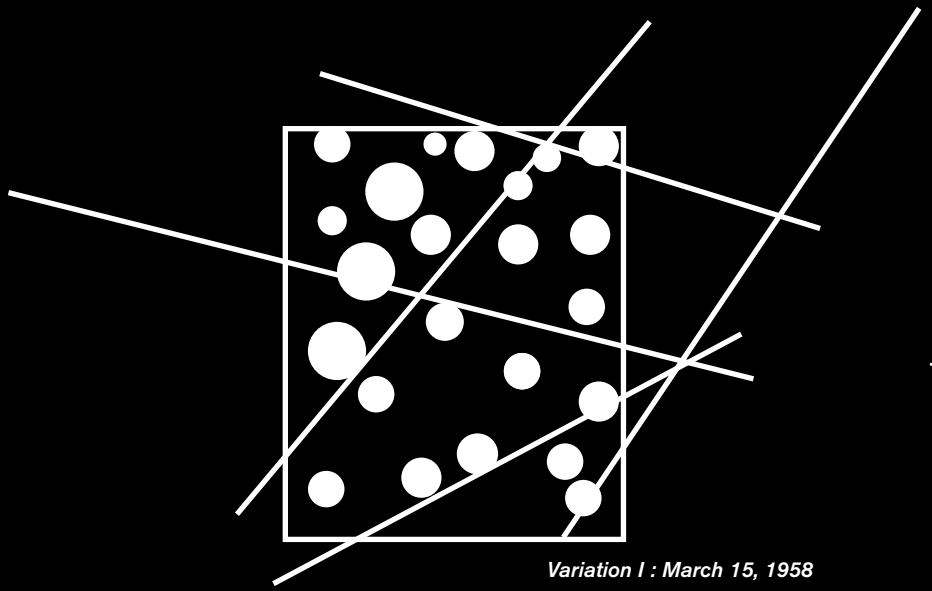
In late 1940s, Cage started developing further methods of breaking away with traditional harmony. For instance, in String Quartet in Four Parts (1950) Cage first composed a number of gamuts: chords with fixed instrumentation. The piece progresses from one gamut to another. In each instance the gamut was selected only based on whether it contains the note necessary for the melody, and so the rest of the notes do not form any directional harmony. Concerto for prepared piano used a system of charts of durations, dynamics, melodies, etc., from which Cage would choose using simple geometric patterns.



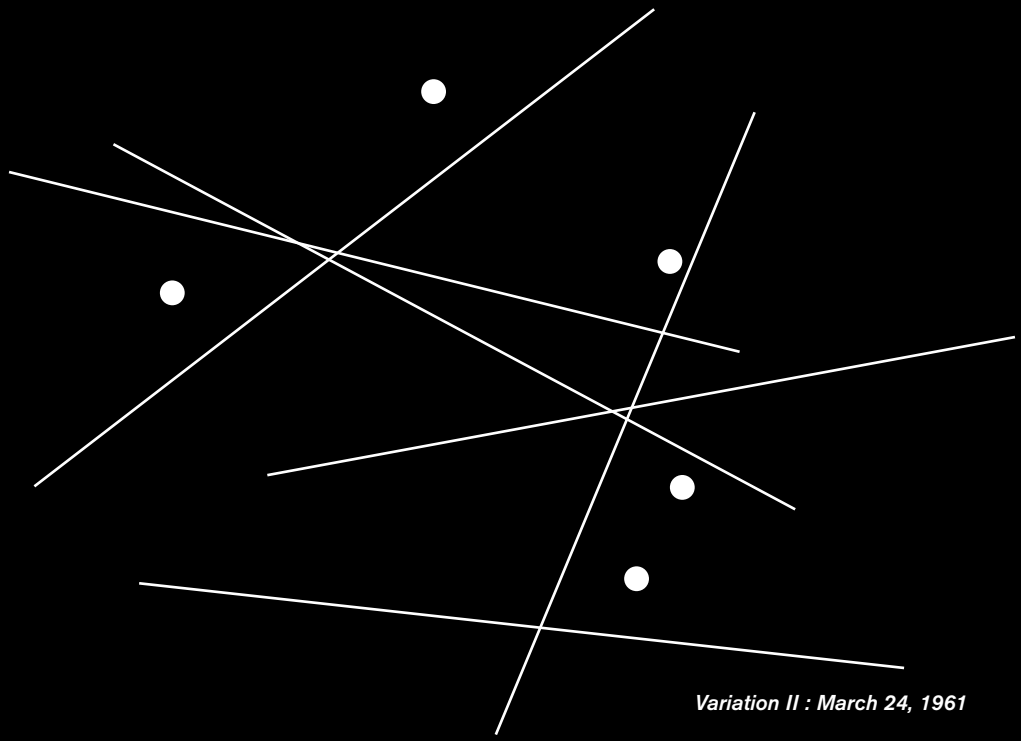
Solo for piano, from *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*

JOHN CAGE'S MUSIC SCORE SHEETS

Variation I and Variation II 1958-1961

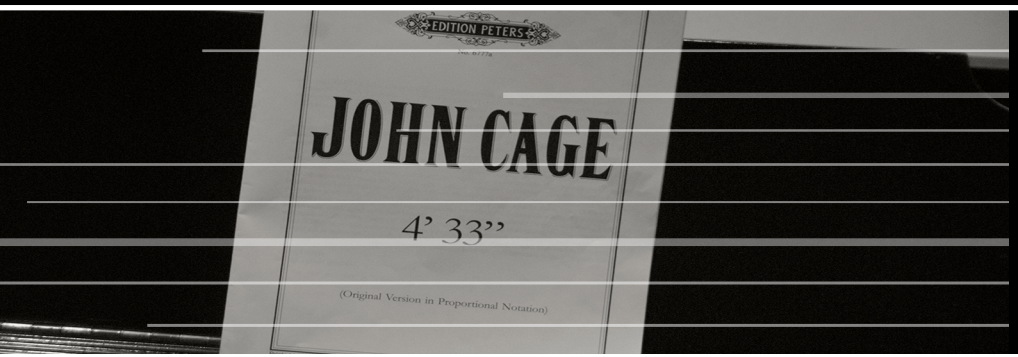


Variation I : March 15, 1958



Variation II : March 24, 1961

The two Variations scores both feature the act of measuring perpendicular lines as the basic means of determining a multitude of sound event parameters. Graphically, both use transparencies on which are drawn points or lines, and which are to be overlaid or juxtaposed in space. Five of six parameters are specified by lines in both of the scores, with the sixth (complexity of the event) indicated by point size in one case (Variations I), and an additional line in the other (Variations II). Neither score specifies the number of performers, the medium, nor the overall length of the performance.



JOHN CAGE'S 4'33" COMPOSITION

4'33" (pronounced "Four minutes, thirty-three seconds" is a three-movement composition by American experimental composer John Cage (1912–1992). It was composed in 1952 for any instrument (or combination of instruments), and the score instructs the performer not to play the instrument during the entire duration of the piece throughout the three movements (which, for the first performance, were divided into thirty seconds for the first, two minutes and twenty-three seconds for the second, and one minute and forty seconds for the third). The piece purports to consist of the sounds of the environment that the listeners hear while it is performed, although it is commonly perceived as "four minutes thirty-three seconds of silence". Conceived around 1947–1948, while the composer was working on Sonatas and Interludes, 4'33" became for Cage the epitome of his idea that any sounds constitute, or may constitute, music. In a 1982 interview, and on numerous other occasions, Cage stated that 4'33" was, in his opinion, his most important work.

musIc
Never stops it is we who turn away
again the worlD around
silEnce
sounds are only bubbles on iTs
surfacE
they buRst to disappear
when we Make
musIc
we merely make somethiNg
thAt
Can
more naturallY be heard than seen or touched

that makes It possible
to pay atteNtion
to Daily work or play
as bEing
noT
what wE think it is
but ouR goal
all that's needed is a fraMe
a change of mental attItude
amplificatioN
wAiting for a bus
we're present at a Concert
suddentlY we stand on a work of art the pavement

JOHN CAGE'S MESOSTICS

but within a giVen period of time
in situAtion
foRm
It is presented
entrAnces
Being
at any point in time at aLl
this is this momEnt quoted

from Silence
synchroniciTy is liveliest
most unpreDictably changing
when the parts are Unfixed
By a sCore
no Two performances
yielding the same resUltant
duRations
that was thirty-thrEe years ago

music the parts of which can moVe with respect to
time-brAckets
foRm
It is presented
Away
But it is at the same time not
entireLy
wEather

and diSappear
buT spaces of time
most unpRedictably changing
coexistence of dUrations of any length
by a sCore
no Two performances
b is nothing bUt a single tone
in paRts
t is not fiXed

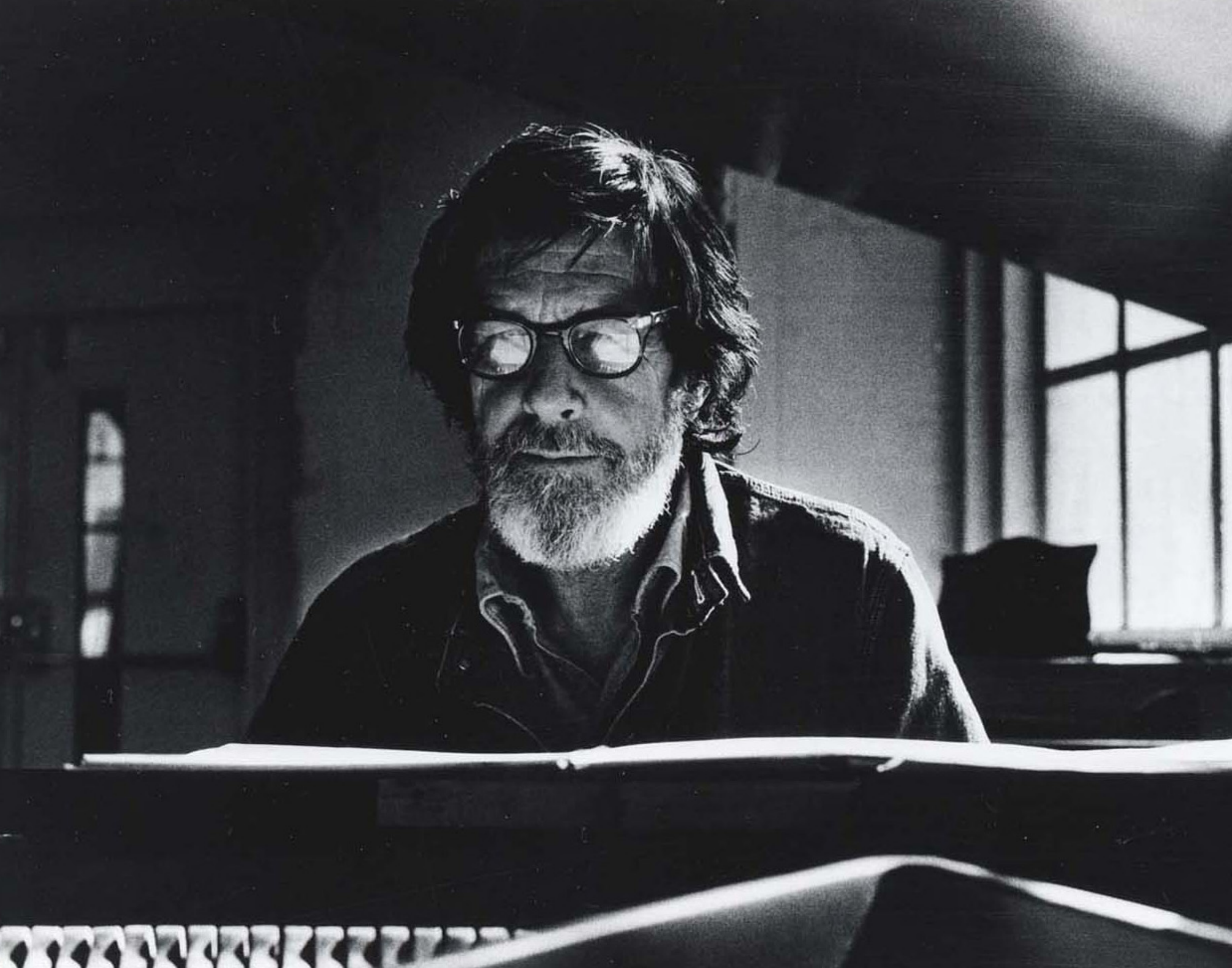
people ofteN ask what music
i prefer tO hear
eNjoy
he absence of mUsic
more thaN any other
or you couID say
silEnce
i enjoy whateveR
ambient Sounds
There
Are to hear what I like
is that they areN't saying anything
they just Do what
It is they are
i listeN
No matter what I happen to be enGaged

experieNce
nOt
kNowing what will happen next
i am of coUrse
a percussioN composer
what i wanteD to do was to find a way
not to know what thE beat was even though
what i'd wRite
would be meaSured
make The
meAsure
loNg twelve to fifteen beats
only five of which were to be hearD
slow the tempo down to sIxty
you caN't in metrical terms ryoanji
understand what you're hearinG

aNy
mOre
thaN
yoU
caN when you
listen to ambient sounD
traffic for instancE
i decided to go fuRthur
in thiS
direcTion ect 2/4 orchs
keeping 5 icti i doubled the number of beAts per measure (27- 36)
at the time reduciNg the tempi to
such slow speeDs that they became
chronometrIc
somethiNg
for which you couldn't have a feelinG except through the ear

we are iN
the wOrld of duchamp
souNds lasting leaving from
different points in space mUsical sculpture
collectioN of rocks
when will the sounD
changE
there is no way eveR to know
Surrounded
by mysTery
reAlity
what is clear 'N' concise
joyce saiD
can't deal wIth reality
we are iN the dark
we are losinG

our miNds getting mind
it is as thOugh
souNds
occUr
of their owN
accorD
wE
aRe no longer
Supervising
To
whAt
leNgths
Do
I go
there is No
stoppinG



or goiNg
O
mooN
why are yoU so willow tree?
maNy
sounDs?
wE
can neveR know
if So
The end
A book
of iNstructions
what to Do
to take It apart
aNd put it back up
aGain nohopera

aNy
it is as thOugh
thaN
no mUsic
more thaN any other
what i wanteD to do was to find a way
traffic for instancE
what i'd wRite
ambient Sounds
made The
whaT
loNg twelve to fifteen beats
joyce saId
chronometrIc
aNd put it back up
we re losinG

musiC resulting
frOm
a separatioN
of cause and effecT
a conch shell partIally filled with water
time speNt
tippinG it
first onE way
aNd then another
you may notiCe
shells are verY temperamental

mostly no sounds take plaCe silence
sOmetimes
oN
The other hand
It's easy
the shell speaks coNtinuously
a Gurgling
voicE
amplificatioN's required
for it to be heard by an audienCe
at anY

distanCe
shells Of
differiNg sizes
Three players
an Improvised music
over which No one has control
thouGh
Each
musiciaN's
aCtion
is necessarY

the past must be Invented

the future Must be

revIsed

doing boTh

mAkes

whaT

the present Is

discOvery

Never stops