

# John Cage and Investiture: Unmanning the System

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1. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1 – An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books, 1980, pp. 100–1.

2. John Cage, *Silence*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961.

3. The many volumes edited by Richard Kostelanetz are the first important example of this; starting with the interview with Cage in his *The Theater of Mixed Means*, New York: Limelight Editions, 1968, followed soon after by Richard Kostelanetz, (ed.), *John Cage: An Anthology*, New York: Praeger, 1970, and continuing into the 1990s and beyond. After *Silence* came the second volume by Cage, *A Year From Monday*, Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1967, and several other books of writings in the same format as the latter, which had of course followed the format of *Silence*. The collaboration *For the Birds: John Cage in conversation with Daniel Charles*, edited by Daniel Charles (Boston: Marion Boyars, 1981), is also a key part of this record. Another important, recent case is Cage's correspondence with Pierre Boulez. Though this is clearly less conscious discourse on Cage's side, or differently conscious (with an audience of one rather than with publication in mind). See Jean-Jacques Nattiez, (ed.), *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence* (1990), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. More recently: Peter Dickinson's *Cage Talk: Dialogues with and about John Cage*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006. This is very much a partial list of the dialogic structure of the Cagean record; many more examples could be cited.

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance, and a starting point for an opposing strategy.

—Michel Foucault.<sup>1</sup>

Discourse, as a means of channeling and altering power relations, is the crucial auxiliary of John Cage's compositional practice. Cage is one figure of the twentieth century who has been understood predominantly through his own words, specifically, through the dialogic representation of his life and work. His collected writings and lectures were published in 1961 as the book *Silence* at the start of his great renown, and they fueled it.<sup>2</sup> This was hardly Cage's first use of multiple discursive approaches to establish each step of his project, but it was the first time they were mapped. Arranged in not-quite-chronological order, his programmatic speech-acts, their unconventional (or rather, anti-conventional) modes of construction – demonstrated through formal, typographical differentiation – are revealed here in all their interdisciplinary dimensions. Indeed, *Silence* was the first consolidation of Cage's accumulated performances – the first glimpse of his systematic strategies of performativity – in print. And the initial wave of literature – the primary, as well as the hybrid, primary-secondary type – followed this lead.<sup>3</sup> Through the extensive collected interviews, the devoted presentation of meticulous mosaics of his statements, and the numerous quotation-heavy analyses accepting “his word” for how things went, Cage's voice remained distinctly present. To underscore this effect takes nothing away from the record of his significance. If anything, it adds to it. That, of course, was the intention.

A systematic study of the discursive acts Cage deployed to position his composition is all but absent from the existing Cage literature.

This essay explores what I am calling Cage’s strategic model of “investiture,” and how it contributed to his unique standing in the history of modern music and in twentieth-century art. The historian Eric Santner defines the concept of “investiture” in terms of founding moments, as well as “impasses and conflicts (that) pertain to shifts in the fundamental matrix of the individual’s relation to social and institutional authority, to the ways he or she responds to the calls of ‘official’ power and authority.” As Cage was well aware, these “calls” constitute crucial processes:

Rites and procedures of *symbolic investiture* whereby an individual is endowed with a new social status, is filled with a symbolic mandate that henceforth informs his or her identity in the community. The social and political stability of a society... would appear to be correlated to the efficacy of these symbolic operations – to what we might call their *performative magic* – whereby individuals “become who they are,” assume the social... [role] assigned to them by way of names, titles, degrees, honors, and the like.<sup>4</sup>

4. Eric Santner, *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber’s Secret History of Modernity*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996, pp. xi–xii.

Discussing the singular psychoanalytic case of Daniel Paul Schreber at the turn of the twentieth century as representative of a “crisis” of modernity, Santner argues that the symbolic order had become so weakened – “corrupt,” even “rotten” – that its symbols had turned simulacral, especially in the case of his paranoiac subject. At a later moment, Cage seizes such a fragile field of simulacra – such tokens of symbolic power – and appropriates it to set his project on its course. Cage’s relationship to the functions of symbolic power was particular. As we will discuss, he was intimately aware of those functions, and more radically distanced from them than most. At the cusp of modernity and postmodernity, such a complex relationship proved critical.

Cage’s grasp of “symbolic investiture” – his capacity for appreciating all that can make a gesture powerful and meaningful in the larger system into which it seeks to intervene – remains the substrate of his practice and its still-widening impact. This rare understanding allowed Cage to develop approaches to musical composition that would accomplish no less than the redefinition of the creative act and its implications in his time.<sup>5</sup> Not only did Cage’s strategies of “self-authorizing” allow him to rupture musical convention, they pointed beyond the limits of that discipline, opening his model of “Experimental Composition” to uses in art, film, and beyond. We can now recognize Cage’s implacable efforts to change musical composition as an intervention into “disciplines” in general, and ultimately, into the power networks of an ever-expanding, increasingly technology-driven arena of “communication.” What made the work function as such was the

5. The term “the creative act” invokes the title of Marcel Duchamp’s important foray into a similar performativity. The lecture, given in Houston (April, 1957) for the American Federation of the Arts, announced, among other things, that the spectator completes the work. It was reprinted in the important monograph *Sur Marcel Duchamp* by Robert Lebel, Paris: Trianon Press, 1959, translated into English the same year: Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, George Heard Hamilton (trans.), New York: Grove Press, 1959.

fact that his efforts as a composer – defining a matrix of mediation that consistently apprehended the dynamic field of its reception – were coupled with constant work at the level of *discourse*.

In his important book *The Music of John Cage* (1993), James Pritchett starts out by making a plea for the recognition of Cage as, fundamentally, a *composer*.<sup>6</sup> Given the reception of Cage as everything from philosopher to poet to artist at the time of its writing – the book was published the year after Cage’s death – the numerous “Cages” seemed to Pritchett to be getting in the way of this fundamental “Cage-the-composer. “What the book ultimately demonstrates through its extrapolation of the scores, and the scope of their development, over decades, however, is Cage’s exponential expansion of all that his discipline had known as “composition.”

Cage generated ever more sophisticated matrices for capturing relations, and suspending the unknown, if not the irreconcilable. Initially, the score structure allowed him to incorporate material for which there previously had been no allowance made in music: including the “new sounds” he added to percussion music, “noise,” chance, and, famously, a complex model of “silence.” Through continual refinement and clarification, Cage rendered the divisions, measures, and spatio-temporal registers of composition open to sound – all sound – such that the score accrued wider applications. The clean change Cage made from the use of tempo to clock time (e.g., the stopwatch used to signal the structure of his “silent” score *4’33”*) exemplifies this.<sup>7</sup> The micro-macro correlations, through which the individual units of his composition corresponded to the whole, ultimately led to a correspondence between score and world. New score models allowed Cage to reorganize and reweight the components of the work, and eventually, the relationships between performers, between performers and audiences, and even between different audience members. “Structure,” he said, “once accepted, accepts whatever.”<sup>8</sup> Cage opened the structure of the score to “accept” not only non-musical material but also new technologies, those both known and (at the time) unknowable. A template exclusive to music, in Cage’s hands the score became a device for mediating sensory stimuli beyond the aural. At a time of radically changing perceptual models, the score was a tool that placed Cage in a position no visual artist of the time could match.

One of Cage’s most striking moves as a musician/composer was to carve out a place, very early on, for the visual dimension of the

6. James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. I use Pritchett’s exceptional study extensively in what follows, as it remains one of the most useful and valuable sources in the literature on Cage. However, since I use it as a clear map of the oeuvre in order to go somewhere else, I would start with a disclaimer. To paraphrase what Cage once said about his use of Zen: what I do here I would not wish to be blamed on Pritchett.

7. Liz Kotz traces this singular condition of adaptability in Cage’s scores – identifying its origins in his earliest works and the significance of contemporaneous technologies – in her essay. See pp. 118–35 of this volume.

8. John Cage, “Lecture on Nothing” (1950), *Silence*, p. 111.

audience's experience. In a move comparable to Marcel Duchamp's efforts, as a visual artist, to excise the retinal – in order to absorb change; for Duchamp, the impact of industrialization on the work of art – Cage continually turned to music's so-called opposites, even to the outright antithetical. As if anticipating the effect of the entertainment industry on the contained field of music, and on his practice as a composer, Cage sought out the means that were changing audio-visual experience. Beginning with his visit to the sound-effect library at MGM Studios in Hollywood in 1939, he remained acutely conscious of contemporaneous technological advances, comprehending each decade's developments as they were happening. Radio ceded to film; both lost ground to television; and Cage asked, over and over, what it meant to compose in an age marked by each particular technology, thereby rendering his practice a responsive part of its changing mediatic context.

Cage's work with dancers, which spanned his entire career, presumably functioned as a kind of low-tech laboratory for this consciousness. The relationship of music to dance presented him with a hierarchy, which privileged what could be *seen* over what could be *heard*. Cage's many references to visual art and artists seemed to announce a vision beyond music, and his emerging interdisciplinary perspective. But it was the composer-performer-audience basis of his own discipline (a set of relations that he would later dismantle) that first allowed him to contemplate the *public register* of the creative act; a dimension much clearer in the real-time conditions of music than in painting, it revealed to Cage the means of elaborating performance as a performative act.<sup>9</sup> From the genre of "performance" came the political scope of performativity; that is to say, the strategic use of the public sphere – or the symbolic order, as we have described it – to make each composing move ultimately a social intervention as well. Indeed, what shored up Cage's project, clarifying the implications that he wanted read into his work, were his systematic efforts to recast his ideas performatively – most prominently, through lectures, which were timed with each radical change to make it register.

9. Here the distinction – central to this essay – between performance, the genre of the visual arts, and performativity as a social and potentially political act, is critical. "Performativity" as a type of linguistic act that changes a social reality was defined by J. L. Austin. See Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962. More recently, the concept has been theorized in the realm of gender by Judith Butler. See Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1999.

Of course, the dialogic, discursive format that dominates the record on Cage needs to be seen within the larger context of authorship and criticism at mid-century, not to mention the putative autonomy of the work of art under modernism. As he removed the specter of the subject (the author) from the act of composing, he *authorized* the composerly act externally, through lectures and texts. This speaking for himself is the measure of Cage's doubts about the functions of criticism and judgment, which he

10. The word “experimental” suggests an act that is not “later to be judged in terms of success and failure, but simply the outcome of which is unknown,” Cage wrote. See Cage, “Experimental Music: Doctrine,” *Silence*, p. 13.

11. Santner’s discussion of Schreber’s “investiture crisis” concerns symbolic power with an over-proximity to the subject. The reference, as we will discuss later, begins with Schreber’s nomination as presiding judge of the Saxon Supreme Court, and ends with the collapse of his sense of reality while he is a patient – subjected to the excesses and over-proximity of powerful doctors, experimenting to stake claims in their field. The Schreber case is a model of power in excess, its unhinging from the real – its becoming simulacral – when its enforcements no longer grasp the subject in his or her self-understanding, to paraphrase Santner.

12. A parallel to the above model of over-proximate power is, for instance, the close relationship of the critic Clement Greenberg to Pollock – as Greenberg proceeded to define Pollock’s project somehow, always, in excess of him. But this is beyond our present scope.

13. See Julia Robinson, “From Abstraction to Model: George Brecht’s Events and the Conceptual Turn in Art of the 1960s,” *October* No. 127, Winter 2009, pp. 77–108, and the chapter “The Shadow of Pollock: From Icon to Index,” in Julia Robinson, *From Abstraction to Model: In the Event of George Brecht and the Conceptual Turn in the Art of the 1960s*, PhD dissertation, Princeton University, Department of Art & Archaeology, 2008. I am taking the term “post-Cagean,” referring to artists of the 1960s who developed, or started out with and moved away from, his composition models, from Liz Kotz’s important text, “Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the ‘Event’ Score,” *October* No. 95, Winter 2001, pp. 55–89. The arguments there are developed in her recent book *Words to Be Looked At: Language in the 1960s*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007.

14. For a thorough compendium of this criticism see Pepe Karmel, (ed.), *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, Reviews*, New York: Museum of Modern Art/Abrams, 1999.

15. In his later “Preface to *Indeterminacy*” (1959), Cage makes a point of

rendered obsolete to “Experimental Music” as he was defining it through the 1950s.<sup>10</sup> More pervasively, his self-representation shows Cage to be a very astute player in the context of an overly-powerful state of criticism (the very criticism that presided over and enforced the autonomous field of modernism), which paved the way for Cage’s negations, or at least made them ring true.<sup>11</sup> That larger field of criticism, driven by concepts such as “style” and “medium specificity,” belongs primarily to art history, and the key figure in that story, in Cage’s moment, was Jackson Pollock.<sup>12</sup> As I have argued in detail elsewhere, Pollock’s radical approach to painting revealed cracks in the power structure of criticism, which may have moved Cage – and many “post-Cagean” artists who emerged in the 1960s – to take language into his own hands.<sup>13</sup> In Cage’s midst, Pollock introduced the “accidental,” the dimension of chance, and the sense of something improvised, in lieu of an appreciable technique. There was also, of course, the grand Pollockian paradox: radical “deskilling” (from painting to dripping), and, at one and the same time, an incontrovertibly original painterly product. As the flood of vacillating pronouncements by contemporary critics made clear, Pollock had somehow exposed the false ground of criticism – its rhetorical, performative projection of the symbolic as a feature of reality – opening a space for invention, which Cage systematically filled.<sup>14</sup>

At the height of Pollock’s fame, Cage was delivering his landmark lectures – “Forerunners in Modern Music” (1949), “Lecture on Nothing” (1950), and “Lecture on Something” (1951) – from the “headquarters” of Abstract Expressionism, the Artists’ Club in downtown Manhattan.<sup>15</sup> Though the composer almost never mentions Pollock by name – for good (Cagean) reasons, namely his own rejection of expression and his new work with chance – he was obviously fully aware of the artist, and the impact he was having. It is indeed arguable that aspects of Cage’s strategies in this critical period of his career (1949–52) – which, incidentally, were Pollock’s critical years as well – were partly a reaction to that landmark case in painting; a point to which I will return. In short, the state of criticism circa 1950, its inordinate power, which Pollock revealed, was the context Cage turned to his advantage at a key moment in the development of his project. By adopting the role of speaker on behalf of his work, Cage refused the power of criticism, and began to shape his own reception. At the outset of his career, however, Cage first had to “qualify” himself, in order to take up the position of an artist “invested” with the credibility to speak on behalf of *change*.

clarifying that the Artists' Club on 8<sup>th</sup> Street was "the artists club started by Robert Motherwell that predated the popular one associated with Philip Pavia, Bill de Kooning, et al." The mention of Motherwell is significant as he may have been a more likely host for Cage – than the other artists close to Pollock – particularly since, at the time, he was working with Duchamp to prepare his landmark book *The Dada Painters and Poets*, New York: Wittenborn Schultz, 1951. For Cage's statement see Richard Kostelanetz, (ed.), *John Cage: Writer*, New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000, p. 75.

16. Of course the organizing role of power is at the heart of the Foucauldian model of "discourse" with which we began. Indeed, the Schreber case – a first instance of a will to knowledge that allows human life to be understood as a "case," the background of which is ever-expanding regimes of knowledge, or "disciplines" – is legible through Foucault's key theoretical terms, as Santner points out. Santner, p. 84. Bearing on our account of Cage (establishing Experimental Music), Santner discusses Sigmund Freud's (symptomatic) misreading of the Schreber case as he is himself trying to establish psychoanalysis as a legitimate field in medicine. He quotes Adam Phillips: "Psychoanalysis began... as a kind of virtuoso improvisation within the science of medicine.... But Freud was determined to keep psychoanalysis officially in the realm of scientific rigor, partly... because improvisation is difficult to legitimate.... With the invention of psychoanalysis... Freud glimpsed the prospect of a profession of improvisers." Santner adds: "Freud demonstrates a keen awareness of the problems pertaining to historical transmission of legacies of social and existential legitimation." Santner, p. 60, and footnote 18, p. 156.

17. The attempted collaboration on *Atlas Eclipticalis* was catastrophic for Cage, who subsequently described the New York Philharmonic Orchestra members as vandals. See Benjamin Piekut, "When Orchestras Attack! John Cage Meets the New York Philharmonic," *Testing, Testing...: New York Experimentalism 1964*, PhD dissertation, Department of Music, Columbia University, 2008, pp. 45–110.

18. Micro-macro models pervaded Cage's thought and work. They are featured in Cage's "Lecture on Nothing." Pritchett gives a detailed analysis of the micro-macro rhythmic structures

## Los Angeles in the 1930s: Lectures, Schoenberg, and the Power of Investiture

So, how did Cage carve out this position in relation to his practice? From an early moment, he seems to have been well aware of the functioning of symbolic investiture. To reiterate, the effect of *investing* or *authorizing* a figure to take a key role in a field is performative. Whether a juridical act, a disciplinary determination, or an instance of social mores, acts of investiture change the dimensions of reality by modifying relationships, altering how a figure acts and is treated in society from then on. Such acts are symbolic because they join a system linked in and through the social fabric. The organizing matrix of power takes its shape through these relational processes and reinforces them.<sup>16</sup> Whoever can somehow occupy a position distinct enough to apprehend the functions of the system may recognize the extent to which it is, indeed, purely symbolic, and how effective that symbolic dimension is in creating real effects.

All aspects of Cage's thought and work contribute to his counter-model of symbolic investiture. Indeed, his career is clearly marked by critical negotiations of this kind from beginning to end: as a Californian coming to New York to study composition in the 1930s; as an American composer meeting his counterparts in France, Germany, and other European cities in the late 1940s and 1950s (first and perhaps most notably, Pierre Boulez), and using "Schoenberg" as a credential; as a spokesman for Experimental Composition and the "New York School" (which included Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff and Earle Brown) before often hostile audiences; as a "composer" who used chance operations; as the figurehead of an American Experimental Music defined increasingly against the contemporaneously emergent models of the European avantgarde, and clarifying the stakes of the difference (in a word, *Indeterminacy*) at the very center of New Music (Darmstadt); as an Experimental composer relying on a traditional orchestra in a traditional setting (e.g., the New York Philharmonic's presentation of Cage's *Atlas Eclipticalis* (1961) in 1964; and on and on, through his Norton Lectures at Harvard at the end of his life, written and delivered as a mesostic poem instead of a conventional lecture.<sup>17</sup> Cage repeatedly found himself confronting the limits that defined the discipline of composing. His constant work at this level was the *micro*-operation that foreshadowed work on the *macro* symbolic order of a larger social sphere, and became it.<sup>18</sup>

Cage's sustained emphasis on (self-) discipline was critical to the rupture of Disciplines: reversing relations, his work asserts the here and now, the *example* not the "principle."<sup>19</sup> His progress also

– unit groupings that relate to larger ones – in all his concert work from 1939–56 (i.e., up to *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1957–58). Pritchett, “For More New Sounds,” *The Music of John Cage*, pp. 10–22; see especially p. 13.

19. Santner explains that in the context of his own improvisational discipline, Freud asserts “a hermeneutic principle intrinsic to psychoanalytic modes of interpretation according to which the usual hierarchical relation of principle and example is reversed.” Describing Freud’s “investiture” of his newly invented field, and his simultaneous jockeying with his students who were becoming peers, Santner continues: “the example enjoys a paradoxical priority over the principle it would only seem to serve as illustration, and this reversal of priority extends to citations, glosses, and footnotes....” Santner, p. 22. In the close look at Cage’s texts that follows, this idea – this reversal and reorganization of conventional structure, including footnotes – will be increasingly relevant.

20. In its counter-patriarchal ramifications, the role of women as teachers, audiences, and models in Cage’s life is significant. This started with his first study of music with his Aunt Phoebe, and his early admiration of Gertrude Stein, using her linguistic structure in (against) high school examinations. For one account of this see Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant Garde* (1962), New York: Penguin Books, 1968, pp. 77–78. Cage also incorporated Stein’s work into his own scores (“Three Songs,” 1933 and “Living Room Music,” 1940); see David Nicholls, “Cage and America,” in David Nicholls, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 15. Stein stands as an extraordinary counter-figure to Arnold Schonberg in what we might call the signifying chain of Cage’s early practice. In the 1940s he “studied” Indian aesthetics with Gita Sarabhai. For two accounts of this see Pritchett, “To Sober the Quiet Mind,” *The Music of John Cage*, esp. pp. 36–47, and David W. Patterson, “Cage and Asia: History and Sources,” in Nicholls, (ed.), pp. 20–40.

21. The “performative magic” is Santner’s (quoted above). Santner, pp. xi–xii.

22. See Tomkins, p. 84.

rested on the fact that he was ambitious and acutely observant; he had an eye for those moves that would make his exhaustive work on composition signify. It is possible that Cage was shown something of the symbolic dimension of all performative investiture – the ways in which the framework of “authority” is pure projection – through his first “work” in Depression-era Los Angeles, giving an ambitious series of lectures on modern art and music to housewives.<sup>20</sup> He admitted outright to his audience that he was not an expert on the subjects he would be speaking on but promised to work hard every week to prepare. The popularity of the lectures must have revealed to Cage that “expertise” was not as valuable as the “performative magic” of what became the trademark Cagean humor, warmth, and earnestness.<sup>21</sup> What Cage once described as the “sunny disposition” with which he had been “blessed” was a key dimension of the signification system that underwrote his effect.

In 1933, on the advice of his early mentor Henry Cowell, Cage found himself in New York studying with Adolf Weiss – a former student of Arnold Schoenberg – with whom Cage was to train in order one day to meet the master. The widely repeated account of his work ethic at this time has had a great impact on our impression of the young Cage.<sup>22</sup> As the story goes, he returned to Los Angeles in 1935, prepared to study with Schoenberg. The *discourse* that has placed this early moment of Cage’s career on the record is now legendary, but it is worth quoting precisely for its *performative magic*:

I told him there wasn’t any question of affording it, because I couldn’t pay him anything at all. He then asked me whether I was willing to devote my life to music, and I said I was. “In that case,” he said, “I will teach you free of charge.”

And

Several times I tried to explain to Schoenberg that I had no feeling for harmony. He told me that without a feeling for harmony I would always encounter an obstacle, a wall through which I wouldn’t be able to pass. My reply was that in that case I would devote my life to beating my head against that wall....<sup>23</sup>

From Schoenberg’s side, as the legend has it, the master is supposed to have referred to his former student John Cage as, “Not a composer but an inventor – of genius.”<sup>24</sup>

In any case, this period of Cage’s life served him in manifold and unquantifiable ways. Schoenberg apparently taught Cage *how to live as a composer*; he imbued that life decision with unassailable legitimacy.<sup>25</sup> Another way of putting it may be that Schonberg taught Cage a lesson about symbolic investiture of the kind he needed – that is, in the discipline of music – and he only needed to learn

23. *Ibid.*, p. 85. The Schoenberg mystique around Cage lingers. David Revill questions the extent of Cage's studies with him, see Revill, *The Roaring Silence – John Cage: A Life*, New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992, pp. 47–49. Both Nichols and Pritchett explain that Cowell was a far more significant influence on Cage than Schoenberg; see Nicholls, "Cage and America," p. 16; Pritchett, pp. 7–10. As we will see, a similar phenomenon occurs with Cage's extensive reference to another key "investiture figure" in his life, Daisetz Taitaro Suzuki, see Patterson, "Cage and Asia," pp. 53–55.

24. This statement is cited from a 1940 interview between Schoenberg and Peter Yates; Tomkins, p. 85.

25. Pritchett, p. 9.

26. The *non-musical* master Cage will later enlist is, of course, D. T. Suzuki.

27. Interestingly, from 1949 onward Cage radically qualified his relationship to Schoenberg in regard to his own work, and the mandate of finding a new "structure" for composition. This begins markedly in Cage's lecture "Forerunners of Modern Music," *Silence*, pp. 62–66, as we will discuss. Despite this, he never annuls the symbolic function of Schoenberg in his self-representation.

28. Pritchett, p. 10.

29. Bonnie Byrd quoted in William Fetterman, "Early Compositions and Dance Accompaniments," *John Cage's Theater Pieces: Notations and Performances*, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996, p. 6.

30. As Pritchett explains clearly in his essay in this volume (see pp. 166–77), the conditions of percussion were crucial building blocks for Cage. See also his book chapter "For More New Sounds," pp. 10–22.

that lesson once. This is a rare moment, maybe the only one, where Cage defers utterly to another "musical" master.<sup>26</sup> In the course of its repetition throughout his career, Cage transformed the Schoenberg account from undeconstructed primal scene to polished origin story as grist for the Cagean discursive mill.<sup>27</sup> Pritchett notes that Schoenberg did not have a lasting impact on Cage's music, suggesting his function for Cage lay elsewhere: "Throughout his life, when asked why he composed music, Cage would speak of his vow to Schoenberg."<sup>28</sup>

### **Percussion and Prepared Piano: "The Future of Music: Credo" (1940)**

Cage learned another important lesson when he was offered his first professional appointment at the Cornish School in Seattle in 1938. While he had been given the title and role of "instructor" it was probably not lost on Cage that a major component of his job description was as "accompanist" to the dance. Merce Cunningham, whom Cage met at this time and with whom he lived and collaborated from the mid-1940s to the end of his life, was probably never in his own career confronted with the concept of being hired as "accompanist" to the music.

*Imaginary Landscape* (1939) was one of the earliest works Cage wrote for dance. Since it was composed for, amongst other things, two variable-speed turntables playing frequency records, the dancers – one of whom was Cunningham – were faced with a new challenge. Choreographer Bonnie Byrd recalled: "We had quite a hard time with the music... we were not used to working with music that we could not hold onto in some way."<sup>29</sup> At this time, Cage conceived of the utter necessity of separating the music and the dance even as they happened simultaneously, lest he spend his composing career being dictated to by choreography. Already that simple power relation – an index of the essential hierarchy that placed the visual over the auditory, which would ramify through the twentieth-century – prompted Cage towards his first clean break, his first independent move, away from the traditional functions of music.

Meanwhile, he was also shifting music's internal parameters. Percussion was the first field of music that allowed Cage to venture into the world of "more new sounds." This led him to privilege time, or rhythm, over harmonic progression, and the micro-macrocosmic model of organization whose structural emphasis would serve his later more radical acts of emptying out the traditional contents of musical composition.<sup>30</sup> This was also the moment of the first

“speech act” he put on the record (the first entry in *Silence*) a lecture called “The Future of Music: Credo,” which was given at the Cornish School (1940).<sup>31</sup> Astonishingly resolved in terms of Cage’s career as a whole, the lecture starts with the statement:

I believe that the use of noise to make music will continue to increase until we reach a music produced through the aid of electrical instruments which will make available for musical purposes any and all sounds that can be heard. Photo-electric, film, and mechanical mediums for the synthetic production of music will be explored. Whereas, in the past, the point of disagreement has been between dissonance and consonance, it will be, in the immediate future, between noise and so-called musical sounds.<sup>32</sup>

One of the most salient lines from this text, also one repeatedly quoted, defines a break with tradition in almost iconoclastic terms: “If this word ‘music’ is sacred... we can substitute a more meaningful term: organization of sound.”<sup>33</sup>

Interestingly, percussion seemed to have enough potential spaces for transgression of old limits that Cage saw it as a useful vehicle through which to begin to transform music and composing. It could be seen as his first development of the very work of *invention*. “Cage’s model of the Composer,” writes Pritchett, “was the inventor of new sounds and new instruments, and, along with that, the necessary invention of new forms and methods of composition.” He goes on to argue that, “above all else, Cage saw the advocacy of percussion music – the musical reclamation of noise – as his primary task as a composer,” a statement that we might now productively revisit with some skepticism.<sup>34</sup> This is arguably the start of Cage’s seeking out the cracks in the (flawed) coherence of traditional models of composition, his asserting the under-recognized “Other” to the established, celebrated (and *entertaining*) musical forms of the day.

It was amid his percussion phase and during his work as “dance accompanist” in Seattle that Cage came upon one of the best-known “inventions” of his career as a composer: the prepared piano.<sup>35</sup> One of the landmark stories in the Cage discourse discusses the circumstances surrounding the Syvilla Fort dance *Bacchanale* (1940). Clearing the stage of the cumbersome array of percussion instruments prompted his perhaps most transgressive act yet: opening the lid of the piano, dampening, halting, and altering the vibrations, and otherwise rupturing the taut expanse of tripartite string groupings. This intervention defamiliarized the effects of that hallowed centerpiece of bourgeois culture, the piano, scrambling its eternal “purity” with a new and unexpected spectrum of sounds. With the piano, open and exposed, as his tool for newness, Cage

31. Cage, “The Future of Music: Credo,” *Silence*, pp. 3–6. In the latter source Cage dates this as 1937, Pritchett gives the less certain dating of “1937 or 1938.” Pritchett, p. 10. It may be accidental (or symptomatic of the lecture’s crucial investiture role) that Cage asserts the earlier date; he adds that it is also printed in the brochure of his 25 Year Retrospective; *Silence*, p. 3. Pritchett differentiates “the published form (of) this ‘credo’” from the lecture, noting that there the original content “is interrupted at various points by expansions of the ideas set forth.” Pritchett, p. 10.

32. Cage, *ibid.*, pp. 3–4 (text in capitals, interspersed between lower case).

33. *Ibid.*, p. 3 (this appears in the lower-case text, interspersed between upper-case text).

34. Pritchett, p. 11.

35. The reason for the scare quotes around the term “invention” here is to qualify the oft-cited reference to Cage’s invention of the prepared piano. Cage’s teacher, Henry Cowell developed the “string piano” by opening the lid and sounding the strings directly. This remains the crucial precedent to Cage’s invention. Cage takes some years to mention this; see for example his subtle reference to Cowell’s “use of the piano strings” in Cage, “History of Experimental Music in the United States,” *Silence*, p. 71.

36. Tomkins, p. 90 (my emphasis).

had effectively shifted the symbolic power base of that instrument, taking the promises of a vast landscape of percussion music upon himself. As he announced: “The piano had become, in effect, a percussion orchestra under *the control* of a single player.”<sup>36</sup>

37. It was at this time that Cage met the composer Lou Harrison, with whom he collaborated on *Double Music* (1941), agreeing upon the measures and instrumentation in advance, and then composing their parts separately. See Pritchett, pp. 11, 21.

While the prepared piano was still in the place of discovery, percussion was the first vehicle through which Cage would express his musical ambitions. In Seattle he had organized an ensemble, requesting material from anyone producing new work for percussion, and he eventually traveled up and down the West Coast performing, gaining his first notoriety.<sup>37</sup> In this period, Cage also began making efforts toward starting up a school for “Experimental Music,” aiming at grounding his activities in an institutional framework of some kind. He hoped the school would help advance the effort to expand the field of music, where percussion musicians could work with engineers, and musical practice could be “refreshed with new technological instruments.”<sup>38</sup> Marking the early investiture of what he and others would develop as Experimental Music, spurred, in part, by the writing of his teacher, Henry Cowell on “New Musical Resources,” Cage penned an article (dispensing with the word “music”) entitled “For More New Sounds” (1941).<sup>39</sup>

38. Cage, quoted in Pritchett, p. 11.

39. Henry Cowell, *New Musical Resources*, New York-London: Knopf, 1930. See Pritchett, p. 11.

Since the prepared piano would end up being read as Cage’s most original move of the 1940s, it is perhaps surprising that this was not the instrument and work he chose to showcase for his debut performance in New York.<sup>40</sup> In February 1943 he arranged a percussion concert. This was not to be staged at a concert hall or a university auditorium but at an art institution, perhaps the grandest of its kind in the world, New York’s Museum of Modern Art. At many levels it was a gamble; and it paid off. Cage’s very first New York performance garnered him a spread in *Life* magazine.<sup>41</sup> The article featured a series of impressive photographs of the performance. A banner image running across the top edge of the first page above the title shows the entire stage. Its caption makes an odd and particular point: “At full strength, orchestra includes eleven players, *all of whom dress formally for concerts.*” Other captions were more flip-pant, exposing the author’s own difficulties or mixed feelings about *investing* this activity with musical importance. They included statements such as “Automobile Brake Drum gives out clear, bell-like sound. Best sounds come from brake drums of higher-priced autos”; and another: “Player is Xenia Cage, the conductor’s wife, who took up percussion shortly after marriage.”<sup>42</sup> Despite its somewhat odd humor, the article cannot but have been valuable. It depicted a confident young composer with all the requisite accoutrements – wife, tuxedo, impressive number of performers, and appearance

40. At this stage, the early 1940s, Cage had not yet written the works that would bring that instrument to its full potential. This happened in the second half of 1940s, culminating in his *Sonatas and Interludes*, to which we will return.

41. *Life*, March 1943, pp. 43–44. The concert was in February. Leta Miller has corrected the date of “The Future of Music: Credo” as (February) 1940. See Miller, “Cultural Intersections: John Cage in Seattle (1938–40)”, in David W. Patterson, (ed.), *John Cage: Music, Philosophy, and Intention, 1933–1950*, New York & London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 47–82.

42. “Percussion Concert: Band Bangs Things to Make Music,” *ibid.*, pp. 43–44. The reference to “after marriage” – the performative act *par excellence* – highlights the rather spectacular merger of performance and performativity we see in Cage’s career, even at this early stage.

at the Museum of Modern Art – underscoring Cage’s investiture moment as a *fait accompli*. Importantly, it also put on the record, at an early date, a succinct statement by Cage on his aims. Characterizing the “earnest, dressed-up musicians” sounding all manner of objects, including sheets of metal, brake-drums, and the jawbone of an ass, and a “very high-brow” audience listening intently, he turns to the hero of the hour:

The occasion was a percussion concert... conducted by a patient, humorous, 30-year-old Californian named John Cage, who is the most active percussion musician in the U.S. [...]

Cage believes that when people today get to understand and like his music... they will find new beauty in modern life....<sup>43</sup>

43. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Modern life, he adds, is “full of noises made by objects banging against each other.”<sup>44</sup>

44. *Ibid.*

Beyond the splashy coverage in *Life*, what we are left to ponder from this premiere performance is the fact that Cage was “launched” in New York at an art museum. Cage’s act of situating his most ambitious work in such a context is not anodyne. It would have been quite a different event if it had been scheduled at the Lincoln Center, for example.<sup>45</sup> Of course, this site introduces the “high-brow” audience, which, significantly, is open to the prospect that this might be more than an exclusively *musical* experience.

45. On hearing of the Museum of Modern Art date, Peggy Guggenheim, who had also offered Cage a concert, canceled. Perhaps it was her own competitiveness, but there is no doubt Guggenheim had a eye for the astute move Cage was making, appearing before an art audience. Cage reported to Tomkins that Guggenheim, Cage’s New York host, was “furious” when she learnt about his planned Museum of Modern Art concert. She not only canceled the concert she had offered him at her gallery but refused to pay for the transportation of his instruments across the country as she had promised, and asked him and Xenia to leave her house. Tomkins, pp. 94–95.

46. Pritchett mentions Cowell and Thomson’s support of Cage; see Pritchett, p. 36. Reviewing Cage’s work for the *Herald Tribune* in 1945 Virgil Thomson wrote: “Mr. Cage has carried Schoenberg’s twelve-tone harmonic maneuvers to their logical conclusion... Mr. Cage has been able to develop the rhythmic element of composition, which is the weakest element in the Schoenbergian style, to a point of sophistication unmatched in the technique of any living composer.” Tomkins, pp. 96–97.

### 1940s: From Incommunicable Emotions to Permanent Emotions

The decade of the 1940s in New York was a tumultuous one for Cage. It is a mixed period, in which he was not only consolidating his emerging reputation – benefiting somewhat from the support and positive reviews of Cowell and Virgil Thomson – but also coming to terms with his outsider position in an oppressively hetero-normative society, divorcing his wife, and eventually committing to a relationship with Cunningham.<sup>46</sup> Assuming a position outside the sanctioned symbolic order of patriarchal American society in the 1940s cannot but have affected his urgent ongoing efforts to “organize” his professional place in the world. While this issue rarely enters Cage studies except in a most cursory manner, taken as part of a larger symbolic whole (rather than literally, or merely biographically), it undoubtedly has serious significance regarding Cage’s rare place in his generation, and his consistent adeptness in thinking outside of conventions and limitations that had not previously been questioned.

Having launched himself professionally through percussion, Cage apparently discovered that the prepared piano was in fact the “invention” that would define him as an original/originating figure. From the early (as yet uncoded) Seattle moment, when he experimentally discovered the prepared piano – much as Pollock “discovered” his singular drip technique – Cage moved to consolidate that form as truly his. This can be tracked by his efforts to render this “experimental” find more rigorous. Pritchett explains:

In his earliest pieces, he gave only the most general indications of what kind of object to use; in later scores, he became increasingly precise, giving the size of screws and bolts. At the same time, he began specifying the precise position of the preparation on the string, giving measurements from the piano dampers accurate down to a sixteenth of an inch.... In the table of preparations for *The Perilous Night* [1944] he... indicated to which specific Steinway models the measurements are applicable.<sup>47</sup>

47. Pritchett, p. 24.

The increasingly meticulous instructions may have come from practical considerations but the process evokes Cage’s consistent and longstanding strategy of consolidating that which appears to be purely “experimental” with as many of the hallmarks of rigor, knowledge, and expertise – the outward signs of what I have been describing as “symbolic investiture” – as possible. Cage’s consolidation of the terms of the prepared piano hints at what would become a more programmatic process over the next two decades. In that moment, the prepared piano had become a complete system, one that was even associated with a brand: Steinway.

The compositions for prepared piano as they developed through the mid-late 1940s also upped the ante, becoming more and more resolved as they were refracted through the larger register of concert works. *The Perilous Night*, however, was a turning point. Written in the height of emotional turmoil, and conveying personal passions, it taught Cage a lesson about “expression.” It is repeatedly reported that audiences did not grasp this work; apparently there was a vast disparity between the composer’s aims and what was experienced. Cage put the problem this way:

I had poured a great deal of emotion into the piece, and obviously I wasn’t communicating this at all. Or else, I thought, if I were communicating, then all artists must be speaking a different language, and thus speaking only for themselves. The whole musical situation struck me more and more as a Tower of Babel.<sup>48</sup>

48. Tomkins, p. 97.

49. In a striking relationship to this concept of each artist at this moment in the history of modernism having their own language, Rosalind Krauss describes the transition from American painters of the 1940s drawing on Surrealism to their developing the terms of Abstract Expressionism as a move “from the automatic to the autographic.” See Krauss, “1947b,” *Art Since 1900*, New York and London: Thames & Hudson, 2004, pp. 349–50.

This allusion to non-communication, to artistic babbling – where each artist’s “signature” language is disciplined into a false coherence as the language of modernist discourse – seems ominous.<sup>49</sup> If this situation comes at too early a moment to call the end of an autonomous field of expression, it may have been one of its

harbingers. Pritchett states that audiences were not getting the “point” of Cage’s music. The problem Cage encountered with “communicating” in *The Perilous Night* made the case that there should not be a point. It was the first hint to Cage that music should be an operation – an intervention into a larger perceptual field that could shift its limits – rather than a finite construction delivering a finite model of subjectivity.

Cage’s personal turmoil, reflected in the impasse he encountered with *The Perilous Night*, cannot be dismissed from his development of the core strategies of his project. Advised by friends to seek out psychoanalysis, Cage tried, and quickly discovered philosophical points of reference that suited him better. Since psychoanalytic models are central to the modernist avant-gardes, and particularly to Cage’s immediate artistic context at this time – as Abstract Expressionist painters were processing the strategies of Surrealism – his rejection of this framework, *for personal reasons*, is not without larger implications. An oft-quoted statement by Cage in regard to this very period is that his discovery of an East Asian text, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, “took the place of psychoanalysis.”<sup>50</sup> At the time, he was studying the work of the Indian art historian Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, especially his books *Dance of Shiva* and *The Transformation of Nature in Art*.<sup>51</sup> From the latter, Cage gleaned a new mantra, which would become the banner statement for his aims from here onward: rather than self-expression, the purpose of art was “to imitate Nature in her manner of operation.”<sup>52</sup>

50. Pritchett, p. 36.

51. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934, and *The Dance of Shiva: Essays on Indian Art and Culture*, New York: Sunwise Turn Press, 1918 / Asia Publishing House, 1948.

52. It is noteworthy that Cage always retains the conventional feminine gendering of “nature.”

53. Theodor W. Adorno, “Vers une musique informelle,” *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, Rodney Livingstone transl., New York: Verso, 1992, p. 287. Branden W. Joseph has convincingly argued against the Adorno critique of Cage, introducing Henri Bergson as a theoretical counter-model. See for example: Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003, pp. 47–54.

Given the extensive references to this statement all through the Cage literature, a brief digression is required here. It is, arguably, only now that we can properly read its significance, actual and potential. Over the decades since it was first announced, Cage’s deployment of the highly loaded term “nature” has often seemed problematic in a variety of ways, from the “bad name” given to “nature” by those who embraced it – the hippy counter-culture of the 1960s and seventies for instance – to Theodor Adorno’s damning critique of Cage’s turn to “nature” and “Asia,” which held that Cage “appears to ascribe metaphysical powers to the note once it has been liberated from all supposed superstructural baggage [and] this destruction of the superstructure is conceived along botanical lines.”<sup>53</sup> From the perspective of the present, Cage’s rather fluid term “nature” reads as extraordinary shorthand for the idea of an incalculable but utterly structured system – familiar, omnipresent, and always potentially dangerous. Refunctioning its established meaning, the term nature comes to evoke unquantifiable “operations,” networks constantly creating new micro-macro systems and

ecologies. However we now view this statement, Cage was already working at the juncture of art and life, though he would only state as much in the later 1950s.<sup>54</sup>

Another perspective on Cage's use of "nature" – as a concept central to his work to change the conventional structure of composition – is suggested, again, in Foucault. Tracing the conversion of the definition of "nature," or what became designated as "natural," Foucault diagnoses the significance of this core term, where "the 'nature' on which [prohibitions] were based was... a kind of law."<sup>55</sup> Parallel to the redefinition of nature, for Foucault, is the force of "life's" entry into the political system:

For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence; the fact of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time...; part of it passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention.... If one can apply the term *bio-history* to the pressures through which the movements of life and the processes of history interfere with one another, one would have to speak of *bio-power* to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life.<sup>56</sup>

Of course as with the Foucauldian model of *discourse* with which we began, there is always a flaw in the system that renders it somehow vulnerable, or at least able to be turned to opposite ends. Foucault adds: "It is not that life has been totally integrated into techniques that govern and administer it; it constantly escapes them."<sup>57</sup> In this light, Cage's concept of creative practice echoing a systematized "nature," as an aspect of a changing technological "landscape," seems as apt as it does ambitious.<sup>58</sup> This will be clarified presently. It is simply important here to register the emergent framework Cage is able to signal with the term "nature" – neutral, without a singular source of power, self-governing, changing – as his initial *operation* to jettison expression from his music.

### **Nature / Asia: A New Landscape of Appropriation**

Cage's first formal reference to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy appears in a lecture called "The East and the West," which he delivered in 1946.<sup>59</sup> The lecture format, notably, is used to formulate a new direction. David Patterson notes that the reference is modest but "signals the new role of Asia in Cage's creative thought and anticipates what would become his extensive use of Asian concepts and terms in his own aesthetic rhetoric."<sup>60</sup> In describing Cage's rhetorical moves to consolidate his new approach, Patterson offers a rather striking choice of words, announcing that from this mate-

54. The so-called space between art and life has long since been trivialized by overuse of these terms. Cage clarified this in 1958 one year before Rauschenberg's famous statement: "Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.)"

55. Foucault is specifically discussing the modern relation of "law" to sexuality: "Doubtless acts 'contrary to nature' were stamped as especially abominable but they were perceived simply as an extreme form of acts 'against the law'...." Foucault, p. 39.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 142–43.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

58. It is noteworthy that all his *Imaginary Landscape* scores (1–5) from 1939 onward deal with technology.

59. Patterson notes that this early and modest reference is a rare case. Cage was "seldom direct in acknowledging Coomaraswamy's work...." Patterson, "Cage and Asia," p. 45.

60. *Ibid.*

61. Ibid. (my emphasis). If read in terms of the long line of moderns who have used a non-Western culture to “renovate” ailing form in Western culture it would seem late (from the German Expressionists to Picasso to the Dadaists; the list is long). But Cage’s model of “appropriation” – I will take this highly useful and suggestive term from Patterson – marks a difference. This is the first sense we get of the position Cage occupies at the cusp of the modern and the postmodern. In this light, Patterson’s paradoxical concept of “genuine appropriation” is a particularly productive one.

62. Patterson, p. 46.

63. Ibid., p. 47.

64. Ibid., p. 48.

65. The nine permanent emotions are: the heroic, the mirthful, the wondrous, the erotic; tranquility; sorrow, fear, anger, the odious. See Pritchett, p. 29.

rial: “Cage shaped his first *genuine* ‘collection’ of appropriations.”<sup>61</sup> There is indeed a striking aspect to Cage’s use of sources, exemplified by his emblematic deployment of the “nature in her manner of operation” concept. Patterson argues that Cage reduces Coomaraswamy, essentially, to that one idea.

Cage and Coomaraswamy also shared a conviction about “the need-less duality between art and life.” For Patterson, it is a point of convergence, where it is hard to say whether Cage was drawing from the critic or simply agreed with him on this fundamental point.<sup>62</sup> For all the suturing of Cage and Coomaraswamy in the Cage literature, according to Patterson, they could hardly be further apart philosophically. Coomaraswamy was fundamentally a traditionalist who had no interest in modern, that is to say, contemporary art. But of course, if “Coomaraswamy” was going to function in the emergent system of appropriation, Cage could not have him signify ambiguously. The differences between the thought of the two figures reveals Cage’s strategic use of Coomaraswamy, while the “divergences illuminate the nature of Cage’s appropriative subversions,” writes Patterson.<sup>63</sup> At this point, we see a mix between the force of the actual inspiration for Cage, and his skill in converting it to something like a symbol, using it to register his formal inventions as integral to the larger discourse of his project. As before, it seems that Cage reverses epistemological form, generating an example that becomes more significant than the principle. Hinting at the strategic appropriation I have begun to mark in relation to Cage’s strategies of investiture, Patterson concludes:

The manner in which Cage incorporated Coomaraswamy into his own aesthetic became typical of the way in which he approached later sources as well, appreciating their philosophic or aesthetic tenets on a highly selective basis, then recontextualizing, reconfiguring, and in some cases transgressing the intentions and ideals of their original authors.<sup>64</sup>

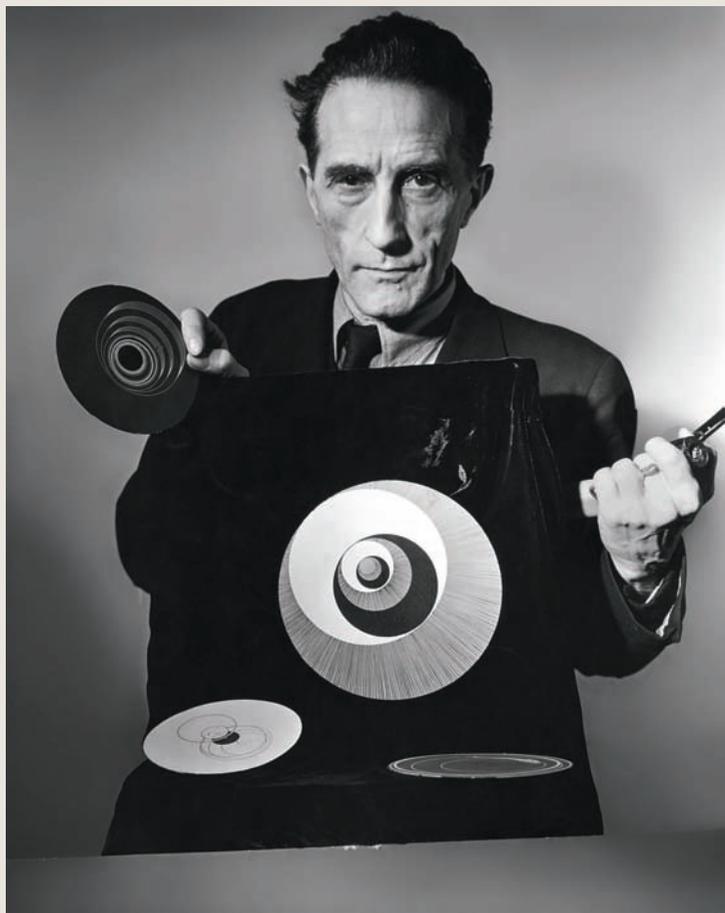
Sources for Cage ultimately become “texts” in circulation, severed from their contexts but this quality is one that develops gradually. From Coomaraswamy’s book *The Dance of Shiva*, mentioned above, Cage derived the model of the *rasa* (aesthetic quality) and its forms, manifested in the “nine permanent emotions,” which became the crucial means for setting the *personal* emotions on a more “universal” course.<sup>65</sup> His magnum opus for prepared piano, *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946–48) is focused through this model; it allowed him to retain the power of contrasting emotions in the music, just not his own. Written over a two-year period, *Sonatas and Interludes* is the record of Cage’s work toward a recalibration of his rationale for composing. An important figure for Cage in this period was Gita Sarabhai,



John Cage composing *Sonatas and Interludes*, 1947

who came to New York from India to study Western music, and worked with Cage. Over many months, he taught her counterpoint and contemporary music, while she taught him Indian aesthetics. When Sarabhai returned to India, she left Cage with another concept of the “purpose” of music, according to her own teacher: “To sober and quiet the mind, making it susceptible to divine influences.”<sup>66</sup> This is another extensively used Cage quote in need of fresh thought. Rather than referring to performance it referred to the performer (ultimately, the listener). Not merely pointing to a mode of meditation, this notion of *susceptibility* gestures towards alternative models of hearing and perception in relation to a new, almost unimaginable degree of openness. This figuring of receptivity, as I will show, positions “Asia” as a bridge to Cage’s rare capacities for shifting the power base of sound in order to absorb the *influences* of all manner of change, noises, and an horizon of as yet unfathomable technologies.

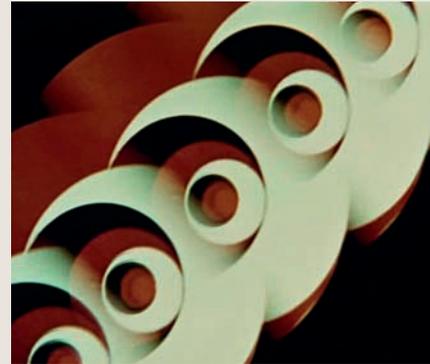
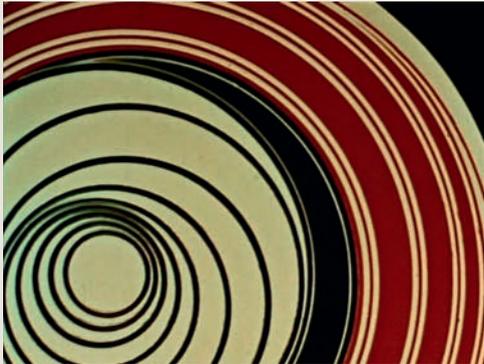
66. *Ibid.*, p. 37.



**Marcel Duchamp with the “rotoreliefs”, which he will use in the Hans Richter’s film *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1947)**

67. Cage would not make paintings again till much later in his life. However his work appeared in galleries from the late 1950s onward (e.g., the score for *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* [1957–58] at the Stable Gallery, New York, at the time of his 25 Year Retrospective. There was also the performance of *Music Walk* at the Galerie 22 in Dusseldorf in 1958, to which we will return).

*Sonatas and Interludes* is certainly Cage’s grand achievement in the prepared piano but in the same period, he wrote a very short piece that dramatically informed his work for that instrument, in general. In 1947, the artist Marcel Duchamp asked Cage to develop a musical work to support his contribution to the Hans Richter film, *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. Some years earlier, Duchamp had been the reason for Cage to cross the boundaries between music and painting, when Cage was invited to contribute a work to an exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery dedicated to Duchamp’s interest in chess. Cage made his first and only painting in what would turn out to be decades, a gouache chessboard filled with musical notes. There was also a score, *Chess Pieces* (1943), which comprised Cage’s working notes for the musical “cell” division of the painting.<sup>67</sup> The 1947 piece for prepared piano, to be used in the Richter film, was unassumingly titled *Music for Marcel Duchamp*.



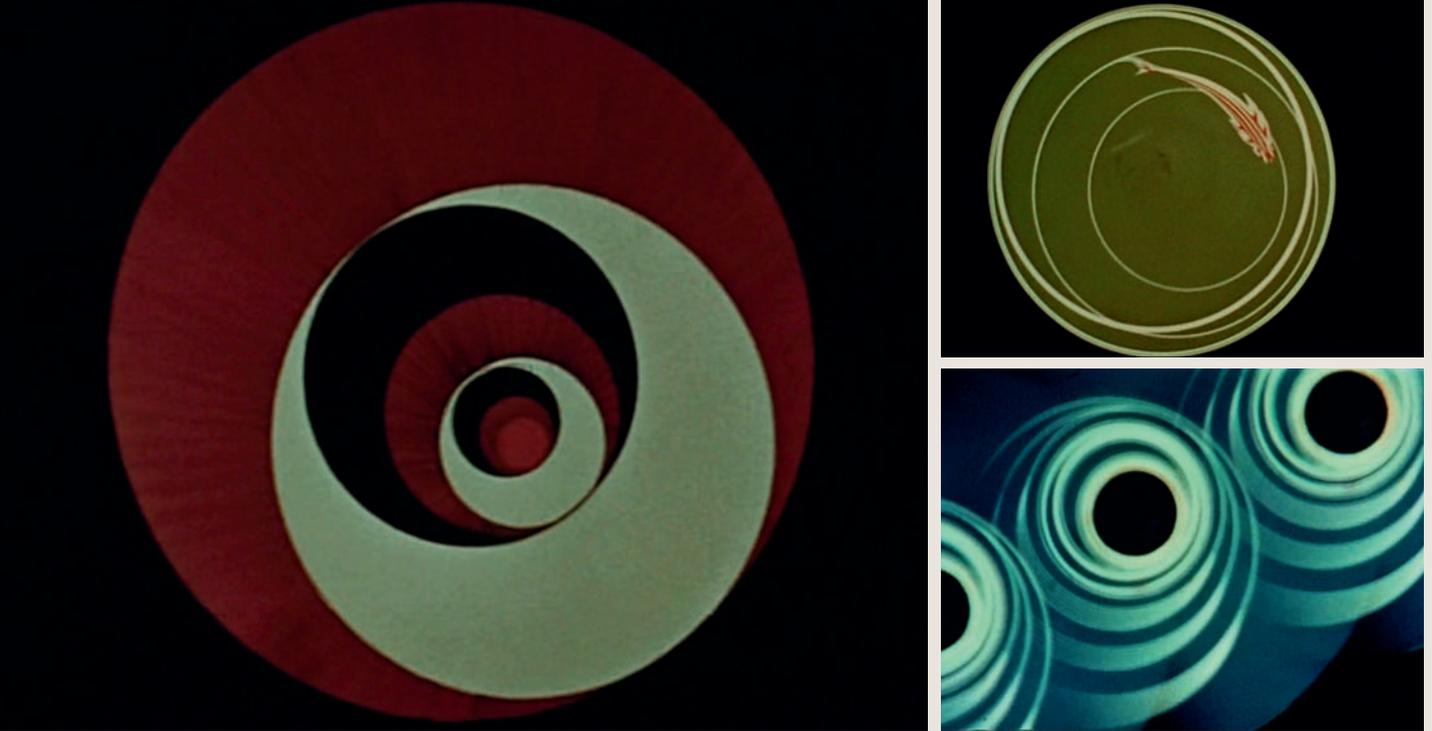
Since this work was to accompany a short segment of film its parameters were highly circumscribed. The music was there to set off the visual effects of Duchamp's colored rotoreliefs, the odd movements of which evinced a kind of paradoxical condition of dynamic, not-quite-repetition via an abstract, unemotive, mechanical operation. Pritchett notes that a new idea in Cage's *Music for Marcel Duchamp* is "the use of silences to punctuate the melodic phrases."<sup>68</sup> Alluding to the way in which Cage was apparently approaching the "static" quality he had long admired in the work of Duchamp's compatriot, Erik Satie, Pritchett adds: "The flatness of the materials, set off by silences, creates a taut yet static music." He concludes that *Music for Marcel Duchamp* is "perhaps the summit of this style of prepared piano composition."<sup>69</sup> It seems the unusual conditions of this commission, its necessary brevity, and its modest role – in short, its limits – moved Cage to work with a new clarity and economy.

"Brevity is a characteristic essential to the establishing of a principle," Cage stated in his "Defense of Satie" lecture one year later, as if having learned from his concise and resolved *Duchamp* score.<sup>70</sup> In this lecture, given at Black Mountain College, Cage began to map his new philosophical findings and his own relation to musical history. Advocating the organization of composition on the basis of

68. Pritchett explains that at the end of the composition Cage uses this device to great effect, repeating the four-bar pattern seven times. Pritchett, p. 26.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

70. John Cage, "Defense of Satie," repr. in Kostelanetz, (ed.), *John Cage: An Anthology*, p. 82.



Hans Richter, *Dreams That Money Can Buy*, 1947. Stills

rhythmic structure rather than harmonic progression, Cage argued for the exemplary nature of Satie’s work over that of Beethoven. This was a mode of performative “heresy,” calculated for its effect on the audience, which happened to comprise mostly German émigrés teaching at the College. He thus posed the scandalous question: “Was Beethoven right or are Webern and Satie right?” The response, from the 35-year-old experimentalist, was jaw-droppingly decisive: “I answer immediately and unequivocally, Beethoven was in error, and his influence, which has been as extensive as it has been lamentable, has been deadening to the art of music.”<sup>71</sup>

71. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

This was the first *legislative*, performative counter-action Cage generated to recalibrate the “law elements” and “freedom elements” of composition. In highly controversial terms, the lecture sought to establish Cage’s claims for what is “correct” in music, announcing his concern with making a structural place for silence. It is noteworthy that he opens the lecture with a disciplinary swerve, discussing art, and then literature, before moving on to music. He also begins to build a rhetorical platform made up of multiple references from vastly divergent sources – Western and a mix of Western and Eastern philosophy – which will become a critical oppositional device framing his practice from here on.<sup>72</sup>

72. Meanwhile, in his music, Cage was developing an aspect of the prepared piano work called a “sound gamut,” which led to a process of composing in which the selection of sounds to be used was made before the composition was notated. Pritchett, pp. 39–45.

## Staking out Territory at the Turn of the Decade: “Forerunners” and “Raison d’être”

The most structured declaration of Cage’s new arguments to date appeared in March 1949 as an essay called “Forerunners of Modern Music,” in the journal *The Tiger’s Eye*.<sup>73</sup> Since this was conceived to appear in print, rather than as a lecture, its format, including its deployment of such textual conventions as footnotes, is particularly significant.<sup>74</sup> In its overt structural organization, divided by titled sections; its consciously path-breaking series of categorical pronouncements; and its array of references, this text is a fascinating model of Cagean symbolic investiture. In admittedly rudimentary form, “Forerunners of Modern Music” charts Cage’s battles, pressures, and grievances, his aims, and the strategy that would begin to render them intelligible.

The “Forerunners” essay comes at a key moment in the development of Cage’s project, when he was appearing at the center of the most advanced circles of both the music world and the art world.<sup>75</sup> It is an early indication of Cage’s emergent ambitions, now not only restricted to music but opened up onto an aesthetic program relating to advanced artistic practice at large. Defining a mandate for “composing” that was broader than those being embraced in the dynamic models of painting that were rapidly gaining notoriety, Cage ended this text by pointing to the relationship of his ideas to new technologies.<sup>76</sup> Of course, as the text was to appear in *The Tiger’s Eye*, an Abstract Expressionist stronghold, surrounded by painting illustrations, none of this could have been innocent.

“Forerunners of Modern Music” builds upon Cage’s earlier approach of enlisting an array of philosophical sources (South Asian and Christian mystic, specifically Meister Eckhart), which we have been calling, with Patterson, a mode of “appropriation.” Here he extends that strategy, superimposing some of his own earlier rhetorical terms (especially from the Satie lecture), and enacting a merging of his own voice with those of his sources. Formally, Cage initiates a patchwork model for the text layout and new graphic tactics that it is tempting to describe as a mode of *pastiche*. This term will require development as we proceed; it is simply important to register it as a new operation at this juncture. The material, and its assembly, accrue additional weight in a developing framework, as Cage became an increasingly adept player in the game of symbolic investiture. A clue to this process is that Cage’s most provocative ideas and his strongest new convictions are ushered in verbally with the tremendous symbolic buttressing of “God” and “Nature.” It is thus hardly surprising that when this essay was translated for a European

73. Cage, “Forerunners in Modern Music,” pp. 62–66.

74. See my discussion of the reweighting of such conventions in Santner/Freud (note 16).

75. At this time, Cage was the Music editor of *Possibilities*, which published a rare statement by Pollock on his work. See Harold Rosenberg and Robert Motherwell, (eds.), *Possibilities* No. 1, Winter 1947–48. The journal lasted for just one issue.

76. Cage, “Forerunners in Modern Music,” p. 66.

77. *Contrepoint* No. 6, Paris, 1949. Reasserting its particular role of investiture, Cage makes a point of mentioning this in the headnote to "Forerunners in Modern Music," p. 62.

audience in the same year, the title changed from "Forerunners of Modern Music" to the rather more assertive: "Raison d'être de la musique moderne."<sup>77</sup>

Cage starts the text with three categories: "The Purpose of Music," "Definitions," "Strategy." He leads with a quote from Meister Eckhart to launch a discussion of "structure," thus echoing his Satie lecture but placing its main principles in more rigorous terms. Cage's advocacy of structure leads again to praise of Satie and Anton Webern. He then moves to a critique of harmony (with strikingly large stakes), lancing forth grand "others" to modern practice in support of his case:

78. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

In the Orient, harmonic structure is traditionally unknown, and unknown with us in our pre-Renaissance culture. Harmonic structure is a recent Occidental phenomenon, for the past century in the process of disintegration.<sup>78</sup>

79. *Ibid.*

After this sweeping annihilation of a vast heritage of precursors Cage gets specific. He goes on to explain in almost dismissive terms that "the disintegration of harmonic structure is commonly known as atonality," which, unfortunately, has only led to musical ambiguity. The most pertinent and pressing "problem" for the composer according to Cage, is "to supply another structural means."<sup>79</sup> The object of his critique is named, via the crucial device of footnotes; not only is it his beloved Schoenberg but also Stravinsky: the duo that constituted the choice of a valid musical direction for Cage's generation. "Neither Schoenberg nor Stravinsky did this"; that is, provided new structural means.<sup>80</sup> In an unexpected but poignant reference to postwar Europe Cage evokes a "bombed-out city" that nonetheless has the opportunity to rebuild. The metaphor is converted to speak of the European musical edifice, and again, it is delivered (from the lower register in the literary hierarchy, as if to signal Cage's turning of the tables) as a footnote: "The twelve-tone row offers bricks but no plan. The neo-classicists advise building it the way it was before, but surfaced fashionably."<sup>81</sup> Harsh criticism indeed, it opens the way for an American alternative.

80. *Ibid.*, footnote 7, p. 63.

81. *Ibid.*, footnote 8, p. 64.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

83. Here he asks his readers to tighten their focus, as they squint to read the 6-point type, which is, coincidentally, the same size as the footnotes. *Ibid.*, p. 64. He will return to this move – and describe the type size as "pontifical" – for the printing of his "Indeterminacy" lecture (discussed below); see *Silence*, pp. 35–40.

At this point the text is broken by a musical division: an "Interlude." Cage anchors this in a European source, Meister Eckhart, evoking a model of "unselfconsciousness" and ennobled "ignorance."<sup>82</sup> After this, the text dramatically shrinks in font size for a section titled "At Random." Here amid the dressing down of false cultural ideals about music, including a critique of its lowest forms – "distraction" and "entertainment" – Cage advocates "disciplines not dreams."<sup>83</sup> We are then brought back to the subject, and its

84. Cage, "Forerunners in Modern Music," p. 64, footnote 9. This atomization of units extends the first idea in Cage's "Future of Music: Credo," discussed above, where he defines the aim of composing not as "music" but rather, "the organization of sounds," *Silence*, p. 3. Other models of time that Cage uses in the "Forerunners in Modern Music" text are significant. He states: "In the case of a year, rhythmic structure is a matter of seasons, months, weeks, and days. Other time lengths such as that taken by a fire or a piece of music occur accidentally or freely without explicit recognition of an all-embracing order, but nevertheless, necessarily within that order." "Forerunners in Modern Music," p. 65. The impact of such statements is felt in George Brecht's definition of his Event model, where he says "We can feel Spring but not Thursday," unpublished manuscript (1961), and in La Monte Young's famous *Compositions 1960*. In particular, Young's *Composition 1960 No. 2*, which asks the performer to build a fire on stage.

85. To make the *3 stoppages étalon* Duchamp took three pieces of string, each a meter long, and dropped them from the height of a meter. The result was three lengths of a meter, none any longer a straight meter, which he therefore considered to have redefined the meter. He then glued these to three strips of canvas, mounted them on three sheets of glass, and placed them in a croquet box. Since the meter was a revered French invention, or convention, this was a particularly poignant joke/work. Cage mentions "the string Duchamp dropped" in his 1961 lecture "Where are we going? What are we doing," *Silence*, p. 195. Another such example of Cage's vision of composition apparently merging with that of an artist, as a kind of emptying and simultaneous rigidifying or neutralizing of representation, is particularly relevant to the present exhibition. In his 1961 score *Atlas Eclipticalis*, Cage superimposes a transparent grid to generate a composition from the given points in a map of stars, using the limitless to impose limitations on his composing practice. A decade earlier, Ellsworth Kelly took the opposite view – looking down rather than up – and used street pavements as the template for his painting. This work was made in Paris (c. 1950–51) at around the time that he met Cage, though we would not want to push this coincidence too far. Yve-Alain Bois discusses what these two figures

essence: rhythmic structure. Cage delivers a didactic description of "what rhythm (actually) is": as if he thought it necessary to reskill in order to deskill.

The diverse references in "Forerunners to Modern Music" suggest that Cage was interested in having his ideas resonate in wider avant-garde circles. And here in particular, at least for art historians, the text evokes the concise convention-dismantling in the work of Duchamp, with whom Cage had become warmly acquainted. Cage describes rhythm, plainly and dispassionately, as "relationships of lengths of time," with the key footnote: "Measure is literally measure – nothing more, for example, than the inch of a ruler – thus permitting the existence of any durations, any amplitude relations... any silences."<sup>84</sup> By translating the spatio-temporal articulation of music as standard measurement, this statement deskills musical composition in a manner that remains startling. It reads as the musical equivalent of Duchamp's assault on line/drawing in his *3 stoppages étalon* (1913–14).<sup>85</sup> As strong as Cage's statement is here, it would become even more decisive in the next three years as he turned to chance operations.

While the suggestiveness of this text is intensified from the perspective of the present, Cage's efforts even at this stage attest to the model quality of his work on composition. As I have suggested, the work on the form always comprehended the field of its reception in increasingly far-reaching ways. Already, he suggests means of framing external stimuli – here still "sound events" – that evoke an atomized (sonic) field of newly dispersed power relations. "Coincidences of free events within structural time points," far from being daunting or destabilizing, "have a special luminous character, because the paradoxical nature of truth" (whatever it may be defined as at a given moment) "is at such moments made apparent."<sup>86</sup> Cage's care with words, like his tireless efforts at refining the very structure he is inventing to seize change, consistently builds newly resonant frameworks of relations. Pritchett indicates the territory being charted in this part of the "Forerunners" text: "What is new here is the description of rhythmic structure without any mention of measures, phrases, or sections – in other words, without any musical, expressive, or syntactic implications at all."<sup>87</sup>

The emerging profile that made Cage "Cage" is clarified at this point through his means of establishing his work on a larger cultural stage. If the generational choice early in his musical career had been either Schoenberg or Stravinsky, avant-garde circles in New York would prompt another choice: Duchamp or Pollock.

did and did not have in common in his essay in this volume, pp. 192–207.

86. “Forerunners in Modern Music,” p. 65

87. Pritchett, p. 47.

88. Cage, “Indian Sand Painting or the Picture that is Valid for One Day,” Lecture, Artists’ Club, New York, Spring, 1949.

89. Cage, “Forerunners in Modern Music,” p. 65.

90. *Ibid.*

91. *Ibid.*, footnote 11.

92. These are the rudiments of the dispersed subject model Cage would develop in the next two or three years. It is perhaps not coincidental that Virgil Thomson uses the metaphor of a kaleidoscope to describe Cage’s grand chance work, *Music of Changes*, to which we now turn. Virgil Thomson, “The Abstract Composers,” *The New York Herald Tribune*, February 3, 1952; cited in Pritchett, p. 88.

93. Pritchett, p. 45.

For their part, young American artists of the decade ahead – from Robert Rauschenberg, to Allan Kaprow, to Fluxus – often, at least initially, chose both. But already in 1949 Cage was clear. While he was establishing his move out of expression (through the “Forerunners” lecture), he resisted even the mention of Pollock’s name. Of course, the dynamic drip painting that was making Pollock’s reputation was antithetical to Cage’s program in every way. Why? Because it was so close, and so opposite: it was chance in the service of expression, and manifest unstructure as opposed to (Cagean) structure. So when Cage took on the issue of “sand painting” – Pollock’s famous metaphor for his work – both in the “Forerunners” essay and in a lecture at the Abstract Expressionist base, the Artists’ Club on 8<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City, in the same period (spring 1949), it would have been at least symbolic, if not also strategic.<sup>88</sup> Cage used “sand painting” to stake the claim that pure, ephemeral temporality belonged to music, and its field of performance. “Sand painting” had nothing to do with painting, Cage argued, in another well-placed footnote; “permanent pigments” were the province of “posterity’s museum civilization.”<sup>89</sup>

Given Cage’s strategies, Pollock’s “rhetorical skills” must have rated somewhere between inestimable and pathetic in Cage’s estimation, and thus hardly posed a threat in the new stratagem of investiture-by-discourse. Still, he did feel some need to stave off (pun intended) an expressive model of painting that had pretensions toward performance, temporality, and ephemerality. Painting’s permanence was to be rejected – left behind, if not completely swept away in a crusty landscape of obsolescence; it was to be eclipsed by the “technological means” of the future.<sup>90</sup> Finally, in case Cage’s gregarious interdisciplinary aspirations were in doubt, we only have to witness his alignment of his structural model of music with the neutral, spatial, structural divisions constituting frames of *film*, which he delivers, in a final blow, via a painting metaphor: “Twenty-four or *n* frames per second is the ‘canvas’ upon which this music is written.”<sup>91</sup>

The *Forerunners* essay remains the messy sketch in advance of the most significant clarification and consolidation of Cage’s vision. It uses oppositions and a kaleidoscopic mosaic of sources to hazard a set of decisive investiture strategies.<sup>92</sup> In the year ahead, Cage would make his most substantial leap into new territory yet. For Pritchett, the major change in the “Forerunners” text is that “the language is new and reflects his commitment to a religious view of art.”<sup>93</sup> It is difficult to accept this ideal characterization, given the inordinate amount of “work” such references accomplished struc-

turally and semantically in that context, not to mention the extraordinary dismantling value this “religiosity” would deliver. Perhaps more pertinent than a “religious view of art” is the *authorizing* function this appropriation of sources would contribute to “Cage.”

### **1950–51: Lecture on Nothing / Lecture on Something, Chance, and Change**

At the turn of the 1950s Cage made a rather dramatic shift from the earlier South Asian and Medieval mysticist references to East Asian sources such as Taoism, Buddhism, and Zen. As an auxiliary to his inventions in composing, Cage’s discovery of Zen philosophy allowed him to float ideas of detached, enlightened receptiveness. The first rhetorical materialization of this is his landmark “Lecture on Nothing” of 1950. A chief device in this lecture is its complex process of dismantling and recomposing material via a resolved series of *positive negations*, which circulate through the lecture. Through the use of affirmative verbs – “to be,” “to have,” “to possess” – juxtaposed with nouns that express negation, Cage poses the dissolution of simple opposition. For example: “I am here and there is nothing to say”; “I have nothing to say and I am saying it”; “we possess nothing”; “nothing is anonymous.”<sup>94</sup> The sense of ambiguity – the momentary feeling that equally positive/negative values can be derived from the same clause or sentence – turns out not to be ambiguity at all but more like the beginning of a convincing dualism (if not yet multiplicity), introduced by means of a performance.

Patterson describes Cage’s use of this philosophical material not as a gradual process but rather a “sudden influx” of new terms and concepts. “‘Lecture on Nothing’ is rooted in a startlingly new and well-developed rhetoric,” he states, and it marks the beginning of a systematic “use of ‘paradox’ [that] became central to Cage’s rhetorical strategy of this period.”<sup>95</sup> Patterson concedes that the new East Asian conceptual repertoire does have metaphoric “cousins” in the South Asian material Cage was drawing from in the 1940s (i.e., Coomaraswamy and the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*):

But if East Asian philosophy was, in fact, seeping into Cage’s psyche during the 1940s, his subsequent rhetorical appropriations did not seep into his prose during this same period as much as they simply appeared in 1950, as demonstrated by the rhetorical lurch between “Forerunners of Modern Music” (1949) and “Lecture on Nothing” (1950).<sup>96</sup>

Cage walked onto the stage before the usual audience at the Artists’ Club that evening in 1950 to deliver his “Lecture on Nothing.”

94. Cage, “Lecture on Nothing,” pp. 109–26.

95. Patterson, “Cage and Asia,” p. 51.

96. *Ibid.*, pp. 50–51.

97. Cage, "Lecture on Nothing," p. 110.

"I am here," he began, "and there is nothing to say." In all its brevity, this opening line also included spacing and silence in addition to the words. Continuing, he used all events – prescribed, and circumstantial – to perform his emergent concept of composing as a palpable operation to be apprehended as it unfolded. "This is a composed talk," he stated, "for I am making it as I make a piece of music."<sup>97</sup> And he was making it on the spot. Of course it was written out and in front of him but the conditions of its delivery – the silences, the rhythm, the slippage in the structure of repetition, the concrete conditions of the space at the Artists' Club, and the mood of the audience – all added dimensions of signification to Cage's structure and his performance. The slowly accumulating reality of that particular context built the talk in its first iteration. "It is like an empty glass," he said, "into which at any moment anything may be poured."<sup>98</sup>

98. Ibid.

99. Patterson, "Cage and Asia," p. 51.

It is particularly pertinent to our analysis that Patterson considers what he calls "Cage's network of East Asian rhetorical appropriations" as not only "elaborate" but, more strongly, as among "the most provocative to be found in his prose."<sup>99</sup> Cage's aims at this moment make such a strategy of provocation almost urgent. He was in fact inaugurating an entirely new model of artistic apprehension and translation of the changing material of the world. Cage recognized that the extraordinary model of negation in East Asian thought signified a negation that was never negation but rather, a mode of *receptiveness* that could help him generate a counter-model in relation to Western music. Irrefutable in its authenticity, it could be deployed to destabilize conventions. A dynamic model of thought, it could *authenticate* the "change" that was emerging at the center of Cage's practice.

100. Cage, "Lecture on Nothing," p. 111.

101. "He believes the world is changing more rapidly and drastically than most people realize," wrote Tomkins. He goes on to link Cage's use of "Asia" to his views on change: "A great many of the traditional attitudes of the Western thought will soon be obsolete, he feels, and a great many of the older traditions of Oriental [sic] thought are becoming increasingly relevant to life in the West. Cage insists that the true function of the art of our time is to open up the minds... of contemporary men and women to the immensity of these changes...." Tomkins, pp. 74–75.

One of the most significant concepts in the "Lecture on Nothing" regards Cage's programmatic elaboration of "structure" in his work: "It is a *discipline* which, accepted, accepts whatever...."<sup>100</sup> "Structure" would ultimately materialize as a receptacle that Cage would adapt, continually, to apprehend changes in the sound environment.<sup>101</sup> While the *whatever*, in the case of the lecture, was his "source" material whose strategic appropriation would be used programmatically to theorize his position. His treatment of the lecture "material" – such as the six "stock" answers he prepared in advance for question time – is a clear indication of the emergent dimension of performativity in Cage's project.<sup>102</sup>

102. The prepared answers can be found in Cage, "Afternote to Lecture on Nothing," p. 126.

Cage was concerned with altering expectations, and he did this with the best means he had at his disposal. That is to say, the way

composition allows you to structure content through time. Pritchett observes that the “Lecture on Nothing” is derived from Cage’s sound-gamut work on composition. Cage wrote the lecture in the form of the rhythmic structure he aimed to demonstrate. Its key idea is that sounds, within a structure, should be allowed to *be themselves*, “free of the intellect.”<sup>103</sup> This is indeed a critical feature of the model of “discourse,” or more properly, counter-discourse, which Cage was beginning to construct here. Against the Foucauldian model of discourse as the organization of life into laws and their micro-structures, the disciplines, Cage’s interest in stopping the disciplining acts of the intellect deserves our attention.<sup>104</sup> Ostensibly, the discipline he is attending to is music: he creates a conception of sound that opens both the composer and the audience to the *anything that happens*, to the actual sounds of the world, to a whole new landscape of fluid and changing content. More generally, he begins to exemplify his repudiation of the fixed ideas that the disciplines impose on subjects and objects. By filling his rhythmic structure with words, and by subjecting the lecture format to a staggered temporality that over-rides standard channels of textual meaning, Cage demonstrates the scope and potential of his new methods of composing. He troubles the conventions that structure music and pedagogy (harmonic progression, narrative order), disqualifying the established “rules” of the particular disciplines he is drawing on with an inevitable ripple effect toward others. “Each moment presents what happens. How different this form sense is from that which is bound up with memory: themes, and secondary themes; their struggle; their development; the climax; the recapitulation,” he announced.<sup>105</sup> Meanwhile, in this same process, Cage was conditioning his audience’s approach to perception, inviting them to be open to a new field of stimuli arriving in an unfamiliar order, or no order.

At a formal level, Cage’s “Lecture on Nothing,” deployed “repetition” in several catalytic ways: both as the *exact repetition* of words appearing at different stages in the progression of the “argument,” which had the effect of generating a false sense of predictability; and as *near repetition*, which drew attention (à la Gertrude Stein) to subtle semantic changes wrought by the same words appearing at different points in time.<sup>106</sup> The use of repetition in this way allowed Cage to place emphasis on temporal or rhythmic structure as it defines content, while seemingly emptying the “composition” of that content. As a demonstration of the composing means he was in the process of inventing it remains one of the most important landmarks of Cage’s project in this period.

103. Pritchett, p. 56.

104. Foucault develops his theory on discourse in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York: Pantheon, 1982, and later, to different ends, in his *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*.

105. Cage, “Lecture on Nothing,” p. 111.

106. Gertrude Stein famously stated (in a 1934 lecture) that she never repeats; that there is in fact no such thing as repetition. Stein, “Portraits and Repetition,” *Lectures In America*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1957, pp. 165–208. In his essay on postmodernism, to which we will turn, Fredric Jameson refers to Stein – along with Duchamp – as postmodernist *avant la lettre*. See Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” in Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks, (eds.), *The Jameson Reader*, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 191.

To grasp the scope of Cage's *operation* in the "Lecture on Nothing" the reader must resist the fairly natural response of frustration with what appears as its difficult, halting, and willfully eccentric format, which would become more insistent in subsequent lectures. These elements must be read as "information." The formal construction and its performance constitute the "message" that is realized in/ as the conditions of its delivery. Cage's lectures should not be denatured by attempts to draw "meaning" from them conventionally, or by expecting from them a literal explanation of his working processes and ideas – a decoding, as it were, of the increasingly radical directions of his composition practice. "Lecture on Nothing" is the first of Cage's lectures that one should see not as an explanation so much as a composition in its own right.

"Lecture on Nothing" is the first indication of the scope of Cage's new composition models. It reveals what he is presenting as a template for a wider field of experience. His use of words like "life" and "nature," is sometimes shorthand for this. Moreover, each musical or temporal-linguistic map begins to make a space for changing technological demands on the senses. Dismissing the obsolete, subjective concept of "beauty," he remarks: "Beware of what is breathtakingly beautiful, for at any moment the telephone may ring or the airplane may come down in a vacant lot."<sup>107</sup> Shifting older more proprietary models of authorship and creativity, Cage introduces ideas of "susceptibility" – included, albeit allusively, in the "to sober the quiet mind" concept – receptiveness and even connectivity. In all of these nascent terms, Cage proffers what I would argue is an early "poetics" of the postmodern:

Our poetry now is the realization that we possess nothing.... We need not destroy the past: it is gone; at any moment, it might reappear and seem to be and be the present. Would it be a repetition? Only if we thought we owned it...<sup>108</sup>

Cage walked out in front of the audience at the Artists' Club on 8<sup>th</sup> Street one more time in 1951. As if evoking the mirror image of the previous year's presentation, this time he offered a "Lecture on Something." A great deal had changed in the meantime. In his own work Cage had shifted from the charts of sounds and dynamics used in his *Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra* (1950–51) to the hexagram charts of the *I Ching: Book of Changes*, discovering a means of uniformity in a new process of chance composition. As Pritchett explains in detail, the last part of the *Concerto* showed a major change in Cage's approach.<sup>109</sup> And with major new directions came performative lectures *to invest* them.

107. Cage, "Lecture on Nothing," p. 111.

108. Ibid. By "poetry" Cage means text that incorporates the structure of time. He defines it as such later in the Preface to "Indeterminacy," which begins with a discussion of the "Lecture on Nothing." Poetry is defined as such "by reason of its allowing musical elements (time, sound) to be introduced into the world of words." Cage, "Preface to *Indeterminacy*," in Kostelanetz, (ed.), *John Cage: Writer*, p. 76.

109. Pritchett, pp. 70–75.

The “Lecture on Something” was another test space. Like the “Lecture on Nothing,” it was composed as though it were a piece of music. Interestingly, this was announced as a lecture about Morton Feldman. Why? The complicated, Cagean answer to that question, one would speculate, has to do with Feldman’s having just come out with a radical “graph” score with undetermined (as opposed to “indeterminate”) elements, leading the way among his peers toward something like a diagrammatic potential for the score (e.g., *Projection 1*, 1950).<sup>110</sup> Cage immediately saw the need to enter this into his developing *counter-discourse*, for the record, so to speak. Another tentative way of putting this might be to suggest that Feldman had touched an aspect of what Cage planned to do more comprehensively. At this moment, Cage was involved with the idea of “no-continuity,” which, in the “Lecture on Something,” he attributed to Feldman, only to give it a particularly Cagean gloss: “No-continuity simply means accepting that continuity that happens. Continuity means the opposite: making that particular continuity that excludes all others.”<sup>111</sup> When Feldman was asked what he felt about this lecture on him, he replied: “That’s not me; that’s John.”<sup>112</sup> Another question thus arises: If Feldman had effectively trumped Cage with his new graphic score, how did Cage take the lead in the “New York School” of Experimental Composers? Though the answer took the best part of the 1950s to be realized, it might be considered to have started with Cage’s *Music of Changes*.

*Music of Changes* (1950–51) consumed eight months of Cage’s time and energy. From the seventy page score of the *Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra* he did not go towards the simpler – this was a foundational moment – but rather toward the more complex, multifaceted, and elaborate.<sup>113</sup> *Music of Changes* ultimately ran to eighty-six pages. Among the many reasons for the critical importance of this composition in Cage’s project is its exhaustive redefinition of the composer function. Fracturing the authorial act through the systematic use of chance operations, Cage sought to define a newly dispersed subject model, on the one hand, and a *spatial* field of musical possibility, on the other. The chart system Cage used as a tool for composing was critical to both of these far-reaching changes. It simplified his process, and the means by which he could move beyond old habits. The neutral, uniform, eight-by-eight cell structure of the charts, which corresponded to the 64-cell hexagram chart in the *I Ching*, meant that Cage could toss coins, obtain a hexagram, and then match its number to the corresponding cell in whatever property chart he was using. Sound charts, durations charts, and dynamics charts fractured every part of every “event” that made up the *Music of Changes*.

110. In 1950–51 Feldman initiated a groundbreaking series of graphic scores called *Projections* and *Intersections*. For one account of these see Thomas DeLio, *The Music of Morton Feldman*, Oxford: Routledge, 2001. The concept of “the diagrammatic” here, which Cage will fully develop in his Indeterminate pieces toward the latter part of the 1950s, is meant in its full relational sense. As we will see, this points to a link between Cagean Indeterminacy and Duchamp’s ready-mades, or Cage’s expansion of the scope of the readymade. This point is developed later, see footnote 140.

111. Cage, “Lecture on Something,” p. 132.

112. It is pertinent that Cage quotes this statement by Feldman, in effect entering it into the history, in the introduction to the printed version of the “Lecture,” both in its first printing, in *It is* (1959) and in *Silence*, p. 128. This underscoring of Feldman’s distancing of himself actually becomes Cage’s distancing of Feldman. By the time of the *Silence* publication in 1961, Cage adds the comment: “To bring things up to date, let me say that I am always changing, while Feldman’s music seems more to continue than to change.” *Ibid.*

113. See Pritchett, pp. 60–66. Branden W. Joseph discusses the *Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra* in some detail in his essay in this volume, pp. 210–39.

Because each event was created by recourse to no less than three charts, Cage could be assured that he was not going to be imposing his own intentions on the final form each constellation would take.

The concept of a composition now made up of independent events, rather than the interdependent components of conventional musical continuity, suggests a revised focus for “music.” Cage’s atomization of the parts created a new correspondence between time and space in the score; so, for instance, one-quarter note equaled two-and-a-half centimeters of space on the page. “All other rhythmic values are related to this scale, so that an eighth of a note takes up one-and-a-quarter centimeters, while a half note takes up five centimeters,” explains Pritchett. Such emergent uniformity – a uniformity delivered by metric rather than musical measure – suggests the nascent applicability of Cage’s model beyond his own discipline. Pritchett seems to evoke the *un-disciplining* significance of this change to proportional notation, as an intervention Cage could demonstrate visually: “Using this system Cage was able to display easily the ametrical durations within the framework of the metrical structure.”<sup>114</sup>

114. Pritchett, pp. 80–81. Cage would go further in the display of his constantly developing scores, above all with the 1952 *Water Music* score, which appeared in the form of a poster to be placed near the performer but in full view of the audience. Its deskilled graphic score – with its elegant calligraphy, replete with large numbers and words – meant that it was also legible to those who could not read music.

Several events in Cage’s life at the time of composing *Music of Changes* contribute to its complex and ambitious statement. The one most often mentioned is his meeting the virtuoso pianist David Tudor in 1949. Tudor worked on and through the entire composing process with Cage; he performed each part as soon as it was ready, allowing Cage to progress with a systematic sense of how his brand new techniques were working. Another encounter, possibly in some sense the shadow of this one, was Cage’s correspondence with Pierre Boulez whom he had met in 1949. The connection with Boulez added to Cage’s project the consciousness of a European counterpart, one who told him that they were “at the same stage of research.”<sup>115</sup> The third aspect of the context of *Music of Changes* was Cage’s fabled visit to the anechoic chamber at Harvard University in 1951.<sup>116</sup> The latter story is repeated so often in the first generation of the Cage literature that, again, it requires thought from a new perspective.

115. Nattiez, p. 97. At this point, Cage and Boulez had a warm and mutually respectful relationship, even if some investiture issues were probably an undercurrent of their dialogue. For a thorough account of the Boulez-Cage relationship and split see Rebecca Y. Kim, *In No Uncertain Musical Terms: The Cultural Politics of John Cage’s Indeterminacy*, PhD dissertation, Columbia University, Department of Music, 2008.

116. This will be described below. See also Cage’s accounts, such as “Experimental Music,” pp. 7–12; see especially, p. 8.

### **Space and Technology: A Landscape of the Postmodern**

The anechoic-chamber account amounted to a critical origin story for Cage at what we can now recognize was a “founding” moment. What becomes important at this stage of the history is to separate the anecdotes – whether true or false – from the character Cage was to give them in the service of the point he needed to make. The raw

material of the anechoic chamber story is that Cage entered this putatively “silent” environment – from which echoes are technologically removed – and proceeded to, in a sense, defy technology with his listening capacities, managing to hear, after a while, two distinct sounds: his blood in circulation and his nervous system in operation.<sup>117</sup> If the interpretation of these sounds seems at all far-fetched, Cage anticipated that reaction; in later retellings, he relinquished his own claim to this part of the story, instead attributing the diagnosis to the engineer at Harvard.

Cage made the event critical because of what he said about it, how he made it work for himself. As he told and retold the story, the point became that in a space where all the sound is removed, one still hears something – sounds one does not intentionally make, sounds one does not intend – and therefore that sound is not governed by intentionality. Transferring this revelation to the evolving conceptions of his work, Cage launched a particularly clear critique of intentionality – shaped, above all, by his conceptualizing acuity and his rhetorical skills – stunningly relativizing the longstanding primacy of time, or rhythmic structure, in composing. And with an extraordinary model of space, the space of the chamber, as a “technological architecture” determining his discipline’s model of aural experience unfolding in time, Cage had a tabula rasa for composition going forward.

The value of the anechoic chamber event is that it made sonic space physical, it made the non-intentional palpable, and crucially, it ushered in these new theoretical premises under the auspices of “technology.” A critical aspect of Cage’s account is that the protagonist, a composer, had an experience of sound *he* could not instantly identify. It is not a mere detail in the story that he deferred to the Harvard engineer. This is the expert explanation of sound under “silent” conditions that Cage would use to authorize his next moves. This sound environment – one in which silence is punctuated by incidental sound – begins to make the structured spaces that Cage exhaustively generated in *Music of Changes* infinitely more meaningful. The complete story (developed retroactively), generated a profound logic for Cage’s next two landmark scores: *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951) and *4’33”* (1952).

For Cage, the regime of musical expertise and accumulated knowledge had limited what could be composed to a stifling degree. He advocated listening instead of shaping sound via interpretation: “the wisest thing to do is to open one’s ears immediately and hear a sound before one’s thinking has a chance to turn it into something

117. It is clear that Cage told this story years later, at the start of his 1958 New School course in “Experimental Composition” as it appears on the first page of George Brecht’s June-September 1958 notebook: “At one time Cage conceived of a sound-silence opposition, but after the anechoic chamber experience (hi-note nervous system noise, low note blood circulating) concluded silence was non-existent.” Dieter Daniels, (ed.), *George Brecht. Notebook I*, Cologne: Walther König, 1997, p. 3.

118. Cage, quoted in Pritchett, p. 76.

logical, abstract, or symbolical.”<sup>118</sup> Another way of putting this is, before it gets turned into what Foucault would call “discourse.” As Zen had done at the macro level (i.e., in relation to the history of Western music), the anechoic chamber account, at a very concrete, micro-level, helped Cage to theorize his way out of the oppositions in musical thought, including those he had been struggling with himself, and to justify his realizations. Rhythmic structure was the last significant conventional enforcement Cage had operating in his music. If the anechoic chamber is an environment in which the subject is sound, its thick and palpable physical space materialized as a kind of counter to the dominance of sound for composers, and allowed him to redefine the organization of sound as part of a larger spatial field. Pritchett explains that the concurrent chance techniques freed Cage from musical form, allowing him to identify with a new idea of “infinite space.” He describes *Music of Changes* as generating “a spaciousness and isolation of individual events in time,” adding that Cage would spend “the next decade finding compositional methods which... would make more of that space available to him.”<sup>119</sup>

119. Pritchett, pp. 78–79.

120. Cage links the concept of “sound-space” to the anechoic chamber experience in the New School class of 1958. On the first day, after his notes on the anechoic chamber, George Brecht writes: “Events in sound-space (J.C.).” See Daniels, ed., p. 3.

121. Since Cage’s “automatic minimum” for a sufficiently diversified experience of sound was two, (radios for example), this twelve stands out all the more. See Cage, “Experimental Music: Doctrine,” p. 14.

122. Cage’s teacher, Henry Cowell was present. As Michael Nyman notes, Cowell was apparently disappointed that the “instruments” could not capture sound “diversified enough to present a really interesting, specific result.” Cowell found it striking that such a negligible effect did not bother the composer: “Cage’s own attitude about this was one of comparative indifference, since he believes the *concept* to be more interesting than the result of any single performance.” My emphasis; see Nyman, “Towards (a definition of) Experimental Composition,” in *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, esp. p. 24.

In *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951), a work often considered alongside *Music of Changes* because its composing methods were the same, Cage attempted to render this new, desubjectivized “sound-space” as mediated by technology.<sup>120</sup> The “instruments” for the piece are twelve radios, operated by twenty-four performers (two on each: one for tuning, one for volume). The move made in *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* is as striking as the voiding of composerly intention that created the fame of the subsequent *4'33"* – though the two scores are rarely examined side-by-side – and its symbolic move is as great. Confronting the formidable “twelve” in Schoenberg, Cage posed the technological organization of sound via exactly twelve radios.<sup>121</sup> Because *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* includes whatever will come up in the radio broadcasts, its sounds cannot be predicted. The first performance happened late at night when many of the radio stations had stopped broadcasting for the evening, which produced a more silent piece than expected.<sup>122</sup> As Cage was not a great fan of radios, this score reveals all the more clearly his efforts to contend with the inevitable changes that audio technology brought to the field of perception; this is the first such instance of which many more would follow. By confronting what he found as antithetical to the composer, Cage disrupted the control exerted by the “pleasures” of music. Explaining this score, he wrote:

It is thus possible to make a musical composition the continuity of which is free of individual taste and memory (psychology) and also of the literature and “traditions” of the art. The sounds enter time-space centered within

themselves, unimpeded by service to any abstraction, their 360 degrees of circumference free for an infinite play of interpenetration. Value judgments are not in the nature of this work as regards either composition, performance, or listening.... A “mistake” is beside the point for anything that happens authentically is.<sup>123</sup>

123. Cage, “Composition: To Describe the Process of Composition Used in *Music of Changes* and *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*,” *Silence*, p. 59.

Technological means thus dismantle the traditions of music and restructure attention. Generating the idea of a “landscape” with a cluster of twelve radios as the expanded field of the contemporary “imaginary,” Cage used the piece to give a new form to the unpredictability he was introducing into the act of composing. *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* positioned the work in a network of communication in which perception is subjected to *reception*.

In defining postmodernism thirty years ago, Fredric Jameson singled out “the more temporal arts” and the emergence of “deep constitutive relationships” to “technology.”<sup>124</sup> Jameson diagnosed new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships in these temporal arts. To represent the implications of these relationships, he invoked Jacques Lacan’s model of a breakdown in the signifying chain (in his theory on schizophrenia), which generates “an experience of pure material signifiers,” and used an experience of Cage to make his point (*vis à vis* culture):

Think, for example, of the experience of John Cage’s music, in which a cluster of material sounds (on the prepared piano for example) is followed by a silence so intolerable that you cannot imagine another sonorous chord coming into existence, and cannot imagine remembering the previous one well enough to make any connection with it if it does.<sup>125</sup>

124. Jameson, p. 193.

125. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

This inability to remember is an aspect of the postmodern condition in which Jameson recognizes “the waning of historicity,” and with it “a strange occultation of the present.”<sup>126</sup> Both phenomena foreshadow the conditions of the critic’s larger model of *pastiche*. For Jameson, postmodernist pastiche amounts to “speech in a dead language,” “mimicry without any of parody’s ulterior motives,” or simply “blank parody.”<sup>127</sup> Cage’s “pastiche,” or what we have been considering as his “appropriation” of sources as a means of structuring and authorizing his texts – from Schoenberg to Christian mysticism, and from Zen to the anechoic chamber – conforms to none of Jameson’s categories. As distinct from the superficial (albeit pervasive) effect Jameson diagnoses, pastiche in Cage is an active process and an operation. Cage enlisted sources and gave each a function as they entered his program. At every stage, the source material emblemized a new move, or acted as its catalyst. It is Cage’s performative apparatus – the writing and the lectures he

126. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

127. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

gave to mark each new phase – that renders this difference discernible. Of course, had Jameson considered Cage’s project through a slightly wider frame – had he selected any composition beyond the prepared piano work, that is, anything from *Music of Changes* onward – he would have had a very different Cage example.

128. Ibid., p. 205.

For Jameson, pastiche demonstrates “the enormity of a situation in which we seem increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience.”<sup>128</sup> This appears as a strange statement. Its odd allusion to something like direct representation seems misplaced in the context of a definition of postmodernism. On the other hand, the idea of *representing current experience*, precisely what he sees as foreclosed upon, seems to be just what is accomplished in a work like *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*. In contrast to this dead end, Jameson goes on to present an apparent solution:

In the most interesting postmodern works, however, one can detect a more positive relationship which restores its proper tension to the notion of differences itself. This new mode of relationship through difference may sometimes be an achieved new and original way of thinking and perceiving....<sup>129</sup>

129. Ibid., p. 213.

This would seem an apt definition of either *Music of Changes* or *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*. Instead, Jameson uses it to announce his key example here, which is Nam June Paik’s “stacked and scattered television screens, positioned at intervals within lush vegetation.”<sup>130</sup> I take this reading to be something between historical amnesia and caricature – perhaps Jameson’s own mode of waning historicity – or what he himself calls a “category mistake.” That Jameson reads “Cage” in this way, or that he fails to read the Cage example adequately, stems from the fact that he bases his ideas on early work and not on Cage’s complete project, which by the time of Jameson’s essay, in the 1980s, had been defined for over two decades.

130. Ibid.

### **The Hybridity of 4'33"**

The famous score for 4'33" is at the heart of the most comprehensive period of change in Cage’s oeuvre. Its fame derives as much from decades-worth of Cage’s own statements, as from its having been understood, largely, as one definitive thing. In fact Cage wrote and rewrote the score for the piece, at least three times in the 1950s, as his chance operations in composing developed toward indeterminacy in the realm of performance. Cage recast 4'33" in the course of his parallel work on lectures; its forms reflect a period of intense consolidation. As a hybrid object, situated between these two Cagean landmarks (Silence and Indeterminacy), it is the

spearhead of the many approaches Cage used to change not only music, but the function of the creative act in the mid-late twentieth century. *4'33"* provides us with a crucial example of what I will define as Cage's "unmanning" of the conventions of music through the template that was unique to the composer: the mediating structure of the score.

As he moved toward Indeterminacy, Cage would critique *Music of Changes* for its not having taken chance operations beyond the sphere of the composing phase; that is, into the realm of performance/reception.<sup>131</sup> He addressed this issue first in *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*, with the unpredictability of its received radio sounds and then more overtly in *4'33"* with its complete openness. *4'33"* asserted the Cagean concept developed in the 1950s, that the score was not an object but a process. It did so, not merely because it signaled both chance operations and Indeterminacy but above all because Cage defined it in several significantly divergent formats. Indeed, the changes in this score, and when they occur, are telling. The first version of *4'33"*, composed in 1952, was written as staff notation, as were *Music of Changes* and *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*. In 1953 *4'33"* was recast in proportional notation, where 1/8 of an inch equaled 1 second; that was the score dedicated to Irwin Kremen. The final version came as Cage was establishing Indeterminacy through a series of performative acts – lectures and scores – beginning in 1958, in the period in which he was teaching Experimental Composition at the New School for Social Research in New York.<sup>132</sup>

The "statement" of *4'33"* – an "empty" score, with only a temporal framework (defined initially and then later removed) – gave Cage's stunning assertion of "silence" material, structural form. Cage in effect realized the contained "silence" of the anechoic chamber as a score, sutured in perpetuity to a changing world of sounds. *4'33"* developed both with Cage's rhetoric, and with what he needed the score to accomplish as the decade unfolded. The first form – as lines on grand staff pages – asserted the way in which chance can compose "nothing" as well as "something," and how time is all that need remain to concern the composer. The second, graphic, line-drawing version of 1953 opened Cage's project to an intervention beyond the confines of music as it was coupled with the landmark statement of Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* (1951). Cage would go on record, connecting the two moves, in the form of a statement in *Silence*.<sup>133</sup> Making this point allowed him to suggest that *4'33"* brought music into sudden alignment with advanced art, an ambitious move, albeit one indicated through a

131. Cage, "Indeterminacy," p. 36.

132. This is a key subject of my dissertation; see esp. chapters two and six. Branden W. Joseph discusses the New School class in this volume in pp. 210–39.

133. "To Whom It May Concern: The White Paintings came first; my silent piece came later." See Cage, "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work," *Silence*, p. 98.

134. Cage, interview with Alan Gillmor and Roger Shattuck (1973); repr. in Kostelanetz, (ed.), *Conversing with Cage*, New York: Limelight, 1994, p. 67.

135. *Ibid.* In 1962 Cage wrote a score called *0'00"* (also referred to as *4'33"* No. 2, though as we have discussed, with three preceding versions it would technically be No. 4). The instructions read: "In a situation provided with maximum amplification (no feedback), perform a disciplined action." Pritchett, has discussed the mystifying place this piece holds within his oeuvre: "the fact remains that it stands apart from all that Cage had composed before it." "Part of the problem of approaching *0'00"*," he continues, "is that it does not appear to be 'music' in any sense...." He offers a possible explanation: "Later in the 1950s, Cage taught classes in composition at the New School for Social Research in New York City, classes that were attended by artists who would go on to develop the performance art genre: George Brecht, Allan Kaprow, Al Hansen, and Dick Higgins, among others. *0'00"*, with its simple prescription of a concrete action, is similar to many of their performance art pieces, especially the 'events' of George Brecht, where the focus is on a single action described in simple prose – Brecht's *Piano Piece 1962* consists of the phrase 'a vase of flowers on (to) a piano'." Pritchett, p. 139.

136. Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, introduction by Rosemary Dinnage, Ida MacAlpine and Richard A. Hunter (trans.), New York: New York Review of Books, 2000.

137. The notion of disciplines "in a state of emergence/cy" is Santner's concept. He also glosses the work of the abovementioned theorists; see Santner, pp. x–xiv and pp. 3–62.

reversal of the equation: he said he *had* to write *4'33"* "otherwise I'm lagging, otherwise music is lagging."<sup>134</sup> The inference being that having written it when he did, the stakes were changed. The final version, which will make more sense once we come to Cage's full expression of Indeterminacy at the end of the 1950s, was written as pure text: *tacet, tacet, tacet*. It included a note at the bottom of the page describing the specific conditions of the first performance, since the "reader" had little else to go on. That description mentioned the timing of the original divisions of the three movements in the 1952 realization, while implying that those timings were circumstantial; an idea later rendered definitive by Cage in a statement to Richard Kostelanetz, that we do not need movements anymore. At that stage, Cage added that he did not even need *4'33"* anymore.<sup>135</sup>

Cage's affirmation of "silence" foregrounded what was generally understood to be the opposite of sound as a crucial dimension of progress in music. *4'33"* played this out in three ways: by removing musical notation, in the 1952 version; by echoing advanced painting via a "musical" score in 1953; and finally by converting the "musical" score to a textual proposition by the end of the decade. It is through these clear moves – paralleled by all his other *legislative* acts, both verbal and formal/score-based – that we can track Cage's dismantling of music as the first of many conventions to be "unmanned."

The term "unmanning" is the core concept in the case study connected to the founding of the discipline of psychoanalysis, centered on the figure of Daniel Paul Schreber and the model of "symbolic investiture" with which we began.<sup>136</sup> Schreber is faced with taking on the symbolic order when he is named Supreme Court judge in Saxony at the turn of the twentieth century. Unable to assume this function at the pinnacle of patriarchal society, he suffers psychic collapse. What has been most striking to readers of this case is that the "fantasy" that allows Schreber to survive is that of "unmanning," a literal stepping-down from the injunctions of his position in the social order and all that it implies. The Schreber Case has captured the interest of key thinkers of the twentieth century – from Freud to Lacan, and from Foucault to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to Eric Santner – because it is a crucial account of investiture, symbolic orders, juridical and patriarchal injunctions, and disciplines in a state of emergence/cy.<sup>137</sup> In all of these respects, it has an important bearing on Cage, his changing strategies, and his particular means of establishing Experimental Music beginning in the decade of the 1950s, to which we will turn next.

Crucial to the Schreber case is that through his memoirs the subject provides a record of his own demise from the patriarchal order. This demise was figured literally, when he had a breakdown in the face of his investiture as *Senatspräsident*, and began to fantasize about having his masculinist role taken away; hence the term “unmanning” (*Entmannung*).<sup>138</sup> That Schreber failed as a subject in relation to a power system and figured this breakdown as the relinquishing of hetero-normative subjectivity has allowed theorists such as Santner to sketch important symbolic connections between law – or legislative and, by extension, disciplinary functions – and the modern subject. A significant aspect of the elaborate imaginary resources that are part of Schreber’s “recovery mode” – which Lacan de-literalizes and renders as symbolic features of a “signifying chain” – might arguably be read as a model of pastiche.<sup>139</sup> As I noted at the outset, symbols of power in the Schreber account appear sequentially as so many simulacra – severed from their sources – generated by a subject who has freed himself from the patriarchal order enough to figure, even arrange, its operations, at least as a partial map.

An analogy is suggested here to Cage’s “unmanning” of musical composition, not via a *partial map* but as a systematic and thoroughgoing framework, which is clarified by the late 1950s. Schreber’s fragile, susceptible, even masochistic position within a field of power relations is a structural condition Cage programmatically establishes for composition. Schreber becomes an utterly open, hyper-sensitized, receiver of outside stimuli, converting the bounded modern subject into a dispersed, uncentered *process*. Cage’s transformation of the score, as a desubjectivized matrix of relations, effectively performs this radical opening out of subjectivity on the authorial control of composing. Departing from 4’33”, he begins to generate such receptive conditions, using the template of the score to evacuate content, opening composition to the unimaginable effects of changing sound environments and a technological future not yet fully in evidence.

The Schreber case allows us to grasp the particular relationship of unmanning and investiture as strategies that made Cage “Cage.” Of course Duchamp had first dismantled the conventions of visual art through other genres and meaning structures, such as the linguistic, the kinetic, the psycho-sexual, and crucially, through chance’s dissolution of authorship. The first example here is the aforementioned 3 *stoppages étalon* (1913–14) his “joke on the meter,” as he called it. But Duchamp had also marked the correlation between chance and the unmanning of convention explicitly

138. Schreber describes his visions of the experience of having relinquished his masculinity, and the conditions under which “a human being... must be unmanned” (his term is “*Entmannung*”). See Schreber, p 46–53.

139. Jacques Lacan, “On a Question Preliminary to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis” (1957–58), in *Écrits*, Bruce Fink (trans.), New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007, p. 445–88.

through the *un*performance of gender: being photographed in drag as his own artistic “alter-ego” Rose Sélavy, who also authored his works (and *performatively* signed them). This relentless process of new definitions continued most notably, through his ready-mades, from the bottle rack defined by its new context in a museum, to the *Ready-made malheureux* shattered through its subjection to radical relationality<sup>140</sup> Cage’s *4’33”*, his lecture-performances, and his later modes of investing the multi-faceted aspects of his project at large should be plotted along this trajectory.

140. Duchamp’s *Ready-made malheureux*, 1919 – one of his least-known ready-mades – was a found geometry book left out on a balcony for the wind to go through it, and change it. Duchamp did not do this himself, but sent instructions to his sister Suzanne to do so; thus giving the piece a quality of the realization of a score. Footnote 110 mentioned the emergent “relationality” in Feldman’s first diagrammatic (graphic) score, leading to Cage’s development of that trait is his Indeterminate scores. For a discussion of this idea in Duchamp see, for example, David Joselit, “Dada’s Diagrams,” in Leah Dickerman with Matthew S. Witkovsky, (eds.), *The Dada Seminars*, Washington D. C.: The National Gallery of Art; New York: D.A.P., 2005, pp. 221–39.

141. In a 1959 notebook, amid notes on Duchamp, George Brecht wrote, “Note that Cage uses ambient sounds like ready-mades,” Hermann Braun, (ed.), *George Brecht. Notebook IV (September 1959–March 1960)*, Cologne: Walther König, 1997, pp. 129–31.

142. As we will now discuss, there were three Experimental Music lectures, all of which are published in *Silence*. Duchamp’s lecture, as mentioned above (note 3), was given in Houston.

143. Cage, “History of Experimental Music in the United States,” *Silence*, pp. 67–75.

From his encounter with Duchamp – if not earlier – Cage understood his relation to artistic practice, and represented it. And artists were regularly the ones who best grasped his project. The way *4’33”* creates a framework for “found sound” has been read as analogous to Duchamp’s model of the readymade, as a redistribution of emphasis in the creative act – turning to the audience as much as the artist – as the work enters a network of relations.<sup>141</sup> It is significant that in the very same year, 1957, both Cage and Duchamp used the lecture format to theorize the position of the spectator as effectively the one who “completes” the work of art. Cage did so in his second lecture on Experimental Music (1957), and Duchamp, in his lecture “The Creative Act.”<sup>142</sup>

### Experimental Music and Performativity

Between 1955 and 1959 Cage wrote three texts on the subject of Experimental Music. The first, entitled “Experimental Music: Doctrine,” was written and published in 1955. The second, titled simply “Experimental Music,” was given as a lecture in 1957 and then published on the occasion of Cage’s 1958 *25-Year Retrospective* in New York. The third, commissioned in 1959 by Wolfgang Steineke, Director of the Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik at Darmstadt, was called the “History of Experimental Music in the United States.”<sup>143</sup> To consider how these texts are positioned in *Silence* – the first one actually coming *second*, for example – and the way the language and speaker position shift, gives a compelling map of Cage’s management of his project at this moment. It reveals how he shaped the concept of “Experimental Music,” as the platform for Indeterminacy, between its first rhetorical consolidation (and performance) in 1955, and its anchoring in the arrangement of *Silence* by 1961.

To register the performativity of these texts, as Cage intended it to become manifest, we will examine them as they appear in *Silence*; that is, out of their chronological order. Immediately after

the trailblazing lecture “Future of Music: Credo” (discussed above), Cage positions the second of the three texts – the most overtly performative one, and the only *lecture* – the one called “Experimental Music.” Cage obviously perceived this to be his strongest statement to date, given that he published it on the occasion of his retrospective. It begins in an almost casual manner with Cage describing how he used to object to the term “experimental” because it seemed to mean that composers did not know what they were doing. As he seeks to inform his audience of the contrary, he *performs* what comes across as *his own* getting of wisdom. He speaks of the realizations that have reconciled him to the term; not only reconciled him to it but rendered it central. Once again strategically opposing a reskilling to a deskilling – using one performatively to justify the other – Cage speaks of his use of the term “experimental” for all the music he now considers important. This paves the way for a landmark move of *unmanning*, the radical evacuation of the authority position of the composer, which *he* personifies: “What has happened is that I have become a listener.”<sup>144</sup>

It quickly becomes evident why this version is positioned first, as its far-reaching definition of Experimental Music unfolds. Cage begins by speaking of sounds not intended, evoking a wider set of unintended *effects*, as part of a new openness, which he points to in art and architecture as well as music. As the sensory landscape gets filled – crossing disciplines all the way through – Cage moves to the anechoic chamber account, reiterating its representation of technology’s role in perceptual experience. Again he refers to the engineer who decoded the enigmatic sounds for him. This important *authorization* of a new Cagean concept leads to reiteration of the model of the non-intentional – or a turning away from the intended – and a second grand unmanning: “This turning is psychological and seems to be a giving up of everything that belongs to humanity – for a musician, the giving up of music.”<sup>145</sup>

The “environment” Cage leaves in place after he defines “silence” is a technological one. He quickly moves to what he calls a “striking coincidence,” that just as the turning away from the intentional is becoming a musical given – at least from the perspective of Experimental Composition – “the technical means to produce such free-ranging music are available.”<sup>146</sup> Drawing a concrete link like the one we have been sketching between the parts of his trajectory to date – from the dispersed subject of *Music of Changes* to that of *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* and *4'33"* – Cage moves from the anechoic chamber account to a “total-sound-space” that merges the “ear-determined,” the visual, and new technology. “That is, one

144. Cage, “Experimental Music,” p. 7. This is a clear precedent to Roland Barthes’ “Death of the Author,” *Image, Music, Text*, Stephen Heath transl. New York: Hill & Wang, 1977.

145. Cage, “Experimental Music,” p. 8. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has explored the extension of this (Cagean) dispersal of the author/subject position in the computer-assisted poem by Alison Knowles (with James Tenney), *A House of Dust*, Cologne: Gebrüder Konig, 1968, in relation to the work of Foucault and Maurice Blanchot, in his *The House of Dust: The Book of the Future*, (unpublished).

146. *Ibid.* As mentioned earlier, this subject is thoroughly treated by Liz Kotz in this volume, pp. 118–35.

may take advantage of images without visible transition in distant places, which is a way of saying ‘television,’” he adds, generating a sudden disruption in the anticipated flow of meaning. From here he returns to “musical habits,” for one more move of unmaning: “They resemble walking – in the case of pitches, on stepping-stones *twelve* in number.” And affirming the explicit formal move at stake in *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*, with its *twelve* radios, he again replaces habit and tradition (that of his own Schoenberg), with new media. “This cautious stepping is not characteristic of the possibilities of magnetic tape.” And completing the circle as he completes the paragraph: “we are, in fact, technically equipped to transform our contemporary awareness of nature’s manner of operation into art.”<sup>147</sup>

147. *Ibid.*, p. 9. This technological model marks Cage’s reformulation of the term “nature” that runs through his work. He goes on to refute the sense of “nature” as a poetic construct: “Does not a mountain unintentionally evoke in us a sense of wonder? otters along a stream a sense of mirth? night in the woods a sense of fear? ... What is more angry than the flash of lightening and the sound of thunder?” adding, significantly, “These responses to nature are mine and will not necessarily correspond with another’s.” Cage, “Experimental Music,” p. 10.

148. Jameson, p. 213.

149. For a recent reading of Paik in regard to the political functions of television see David Joselit, *Feedback: Television against Democracy*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007.

150. Cage, “Experimental Music,” p. 10.

As the characterization of Experimental Music becomes increasingly open, the reference to wider practices, especially art, becomes more prominent in his rhetoric. We recall that this is the moment when Cage’s work was becoming important to artists. The period of this text (1957–58) was the height of his New School classes, as well as the time when figures like La Monte Young, Nam June Paik, and Daniel Spoerri – just to name a few – would encounter Cage’s work (and lectures) at Darmstadt. This constellation of events and encounters calls to mind Jameson’s reference to Paik. For Jameson, Paik was the key example of a mode of *representing* “our own current experience” through restoring the “proper tension to the notion of differences” and a “new and original way of thinking and perceiving.”<sup>148</sup> And indeed, Paik is justly admired today for his important move of “composing” with the broadcast signal of television, thereby taking over its mechanism of control.<sup>149</sup> What is much less discussed is the core of this move in Cage’s work.

In “Experimental Music,” Cage suggests to the composer/artist: “If he does not wish to give up his attempts to control sound, he may complicate his musical technique towards an approximation of the new possibilities and awareness. (I use the word ‘approximation’ because a measuring mind can never finally measure nature.)”<sup>150</sup> If for “nature” we now clearly register “technology,” this reads as a statement about representing “our own current experience” precisely through Jameson’s idea of a new tension, and a new model of awareness. Cage’s means of composing, and their adaptation to the field of perception/reception, *are* that new model. And if we were in doubt as to whether artists actually registered the scope of his project, we only need turn to George Brecht’s 1959 notebook from the Cage class, where he ponders ways to extend *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*, sketching a bank of nine televisions (three by three).

151. Dieter Daniels (ed.): *George Brecht. Notebook III (April 1959–August 1959)*, Cologne: Walther König, 1991, p. 87. The sketch is titled “Television Piece,” and dated 6.25.59. The concept includes nine TV sets behind a plastic sheet and is composed out of the differential axes of picture and sound.

152. This exhibition was Paik’s 1963 *Exposition of Music–Electronic Television* at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal. Paik had positioned himself in a particularly Oedipal relationship to Cage, having cut off Cage’s tie in a performance at the Mary Bauermeister loft in Cologne a few years earlier, in a piece he titled *Homage to John Cage*.

153. Cage, *Silence*, p. 13.

154. Cage, “Experimental Music: Doctrine,” p. 15.

155. *Ibid.* Another important move is what appears as the subtle disqualification of the role of his peer Morton Feldman. To a made-up question that begins: “I understand Feldman divides pitches... leaving the choice up to the performer” (i.e., that he his working with Indeterminacy)? Cage’s teacher protagonist responds: “Correct. That is to say, he used sometimes to do so. I haven’t seen him lately.” *Ibid.*, p. 16.

156. The audience was expecting to hear something on the order of Cage’s *Music of Changes* and was incensed by what were perceived as his and Tudor’s performance antics. For two accounts of this see Amy C. Beal, *New Music, New Allies: American Experiment Music in West Germany From the Zero Hour to Reunification*, Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 2006, p. 69; and Kim, Chapter 2, pp. 112–13.

157. Cage, headnote to “45’ for A Speaker,” *Silence*, p. 146.

The note on this page concerning *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* and its treatment of radios proposes applying “these compositional principles to television.”<sup>151</sup> In this light, it hardly seems a mere coincidence that after Cage’s statement in relation to the Schoenbergian twelve tone row (with the deployment of his twelve radios) that Paik chose to feature exactly *twelve* televisions in his first exhibition, which applied concepts of Experimental Composition to television.<sup>152</sup>

Cage’s second Experimental Composition text in *Silence*, which, we recall, comes chronologically first (1955), is more distanced. The aim here is to instate the idea that Experimental Music has no truck with judgments regarding “success” and “failure.” To do this he introduces the figure of the sage, and a dialogic unfolding of this “doctrine” performatively framed as a student’s questions, followed by the “right” answers.<sup>153</sup> As the headnote to this text in *Silence* Cage explains, the term “doctrine” and the teacher-student construct are drawn from Huang Po, thus offering a model of non-control, one that opposes Western structures of “authority.” Of course, the “scientific” distance performs the work hinted at by the (investiture-focused) title “Experimental Music: Doctrine.” From the seemingly casual, conversational form of the previous “Experimental Music” text, this one appears distinctly rigid and formal, shifting the voice from the first person to the third. “Objections are sometimes made by composers to the use of the term *experimental* as descriptive of their works....” The third person abets the work of performative investiture as Cage redefines events that happened *to him* in the guise of neutrality. “One enters an anechoic chamber,” he states.<sup>154</sup> The dialogue culminates in an unmaning of the key power relationship at the heart of music – composer, performer, and audience – as the teacher position states: “Composing’s one thing, performing’s another, listening’s a third. What can they have to do with one another?”<sup>155</sup>

We can read the scope of performativity in Cage’s approach at this time through a lecture he delivered in the same year called “45’ for a Speaker” (1955). This lecture was written in relation to a score called *34’46.777” for Two Pianists*, which Cage and Tudor performed in September 1954 before an outraged audience in Donaueschingen, Germany.<sup>156</sup> In *Silence* Cage introduces “45’ for a Speaker” by explaining the new ground broken with *34’46.777” for Two Pianists*: “The piano parts shared the same numerical rhythmic structure but were not fixed together by means of a score. They were made mobile with respect to one another.” And for the lecture Cage decided to use the same structure “thus permitting the playing of music during the delivery of the speech.”<sup>157</sup> He made a list of gestures and actions for the lecture that

reveal a kind of “recipe” structure, in the absence of fully determinate notation. This anticipates the emergence of the extremely indeterminate scores that Pritchett characterizes as “tools.”<sup>158</sup>

Unmanning the lecture structure as much as the convention of determinate notation, “45’ for a Speaker,” like 34’46.776” becomes a temporal frame in which anything can happen. This continues the work of “Lecture on Nothing” and “Lecture on Something” but extends their strategies of performativity by making them more overt. The text was timed, like a musical composition but it recycled previous lecture material collaging it together with new ideas, and asserted the pedagogical frame by scripting the speaker’s gestures such as: “Lean on elbow,” “slap table,” “cough,” “brush hair,” “blow nose.”<sup>159</sup> Cage asserted the mechanisms of the lecture form to demonstrate what had to happen with all convention, above all, with the *undisciplining* of music he was affecting through Indeterminacy. Published as Cage’s contribution to the landmark *An Anthology* edited by La Monte Young in 1961, this lecture became a model for artists seeking to escape the limits of painting in the decade ahead.<sup>160</sup>

Integral to his work of establishing Experimental Music, “45’ for a Speaker” was at the center of an intensification of Cagean investiture strategies at a time when he was being denounced by his former friend and colleague Pierre Boulez, and breaking away from his peers, both European and American. All groups refused to follow Cage from chance to pure indeterminacy. It is in the very intersection between his scores, lectures, and the laying out of his “doctrine” of Experimental Music that the scope of Cage’s project, and his impact, emerges.

The distanced language of “Experimental Music: Doctrine” *qualifies* the deskilling of “musical” sound, liberating its role as just one element of spatio-temporal perception. This clears the way for Indeterminacy and something even more heretical: the concept of “theater” in Cage’s work.<sup>161</sup> Again we witness Cage’s strategy of asserting the new and difficult through the play of paradox. He anthropomorphizes sound just enough to give it an agency in relation to “music,” a dimension of independence, while transforming it into a unit of perceptual transmission:

A sound does not [need] another sound for its elucidation... it is occupied with the performance of its characteristics....

Urgent, unique, uninformed about history and theory... central to a sphere without surface, its becoming is unimpeded, energetically broadcast. There is no escape from its action. It... [is] transmission in all directions....

158. “No longer defined in advance, these scores become tools for how to enact a performance, which contain many alternatives.” See Pritchett, pp. 126–37.

159. Cage, “45’ for a Speaker,” pp. 150–53.

160. La Monte Young, (ed.), *An Anthology* [1963]; 2nd ed., New York: Heiner Friedrich, 1970. *An Anthology* was the important collection of what Liz Kotz has called “post-Cagean” scores, but a collection with the addition of Cage (represented by “45 for a Speaker”). One key example that would seem to have followed directly from the model of “45 for a Speaker” is Robert Morris’s *21.3* (1963), a lecture using the work of art historian Erwin Panofsky as “content,” with scripted moves such as sipping water, touching one’s glasses, etc., Morris was a close friend of La Monte Young, and was present at the time *An Anthology* was compiled (he removed his own contribution at the last minute). A lesser-known example of a faux-lecture that was probably also loosely inspired by Cage’s model is George Brecht and Robert Watts’ “Yam Lecture” of January 1962, now in the collection of the Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna. It should also be noted that *An Anthology* was designed by George Maciunas, founder of Fluxus, who used its scores as the basis of the program for the first Fluxus concerts (fall 1962). On this subject see my “Maciunas As Producer: Performative Design in the Art of the 1960s,” *Grey Room* No. 33, pp. 56–83.

161. For the critical importance of this “theater” model to the art of the 1960s, particularly Minimalism, see Branden W. Joseph, “The Tower and the Line: Toward a Genealogy of Minimalism,” *Grey Room* No. 27, Spring 2007, pp. 56–81, and Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage*, New York: Zone Books, 2008.

Relevant action is *theatrical*... each human being is at the best point for reception.

...(action, art) can be made with any number... of sounds.  
The automatic minimum... is two.<sup>162</sup>

162. Cage, *ibid.*, p. 14.

Sound's singular performance of its own characteristics, renders it as something like a pure signifier in the expanded field of perception that Cage was theorizing/realizing. This concept anticipates some of the most important theories of the technological landscape to follow, notably the famous catch-phrases of Marshall McLuhan. As with his *composed* lectures and his score models, each format demonstrates Cage's aims vis à vis the refunctioning of perception. Or, put in McLuhan's terms: the medium is the message. The pure signifying role of the Cagean soundscape likewise has echoes in McLuhan's concept of the light bulb as "pure information."<sup>163</sup>

163. Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message," *Understanding Media*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994, p. 8. Cage's later reference to McLuhan in the 1960s is almost a footnote to his own practice by the time he makes it.

164. We will return to these; for a thorough account of the theater pieces see Fetterman, *op. cit.*

165. Cage, "History of Experimental Music in the United States," p. 67. This vacillation over factual details, or rather, the negation of their importance in what he is demonstrating, extends that of his "Lecture on Nothing." There he speaks of content, ideas, like "something seen momentarily as through a window while traveling. If across Kansas, then, of course, Kansas. Arizona is more interesting... nothing but wheat, or is it corn? Does it matter which?" Thus, the structure is like the aforementioned empty glass into which anything may be poured (as Cage stated in this context). See Cage, "Lecture on Nothing," p. 110.

166. In particular, it recalls Stein's famous reference to history, and the tautology of its performance (as mindless recitation) through her own performative act: "Let me recite what history teaches, history teaches." Gertrude Stein, "If I told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso" (1923), in Ulla E. Dydo, (ed.), *A Stein Reader*, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993, p. 466.

By the time Cage wrote his "History of Experimental Music in the United States" he had established his model and presented it in many ways – as *Indeterminacy* – both in the form of lectures and, increasingly of theatrical performances.<sup>164</sup> Following on from the collection of stories that make up the *Indeterminacy* lecture Cage gave in Darmstadt the year before, to which we will return, "History of Experimental Music" functions dialogically. He starts with a very loose story about the Zen philosopher Daisetz Taitaro Suzuki in a manner that transforms his earlier "appropriation" of Zen to overt pastiche. But again, pace Jameson, Cage's pastiche model is an active process, a knowing nod to symbolic investiture and the performative means that make it take hold as "reality." Immediately trotting out the "symbols" of investiture, only to unman them, Cage begins:

Once when Daisetz Taitaro Suzuki was giving a talk at Columbia University he mentioned the name of a Chinese monk who had figured in the history of Chinese Buddhism. Suzuki said, "He lived in the ninth or the tenth century."

He added, after a pause, "Or the eleventh century, or the twelfth or thirteenth century or the fourteenth."<sup>165</sup>

As he is inaugurating his history, one that is nationally specific (to the United States), he cites the concept of "history," and a master-teacher, provides the authoritative context of a University, and then removes the authority figure's claim on the facts. This *enacts* the transformation of the signifying chain in its very process in a manner that recalls Cage's early *American* model, Gertrude Stein.<sup>166</sup> Written for a European audience in the first instance – but later appearing in *Silence* – this "history" requires all the strategies Cage

has built to date. In Cage's opening salvo Suzuki represents "Asia" versus "Europe," and a new model of history, more concerned with performance and exemplification than with timeless facts.

In the course of the lecture Cage effectively defines "Experimental Music" as "Indeterminacy," he trawls the history of advanced American music of the twentieth century to recoup the major players for his purpose. The essay is filled with names – from Cowell to Edgard Varèse to Boulez, to Stockhausen, and his own New York circle – as Cage works his "performative magic," somewhat scandalously aligning everyone with Indeterminacy. Giving his teacher Henry Cowell rare credit for the move of intervening in the piano strings – without stating, of course, that this was the grand precedent to his own prepared piano model – he describes several of Cowell's musical "actions" as being "close to current experimental compositions which have parts but no scores" (i.e. his own).<sup>167</sup> Continuing through an extensive list of composers whose work is not in any sense *obviously* aligned with his, Cage defines what "America" represents, and sutures it to his history of Experimental Music in that country. Mentioning Stein by name, as part of this historical investigation, he states: "Actually America has an intellectual climate suitable for radical experimentation. We are, as Gertrude Stein said, the oldest country of the twentieth century."<sup>168</sup> With this brilliant turning of the tables on old Europe, and positioning of America as the heir to modernity, Cage then brings his set of "appropriations" into a new performative alignment. If Stein first *invests* America with status, the American visionary architect R. Buckminster Fuller links Asia and America in a universe of inventiveness – of which Fuller's work and Cage's are an integral part; or so Cage's text would have us understand. Asserting another model of *history* and at once weaving his entire "symbolic" repertoire together as one concept, Cage continues:

Buckminster Fuller, the Dymaxion architect, in his three-hour lecture on the history of civilization, explains that men leaving Asia to go to Europe went against the wind, and developed machines, ideas, and Occidental philosophies in accord with the struggle against nature; that, on the other hand, people leaving Asia to go to America went with the wind, put up a sail, and developed ideas and Oriental philosophies in accord with the acceptance of nature.<sup>169</sup>

The Fuller reference exemplifies the acuity of Cage's approach by this time, as it weaves together both the significant philosophical alignments – between his ideas and Fuller's – and the pure projection that *performs* the alignment of Asia, America, nature, and so on. All of this does critical work for Cage at this point as he tries to occupy a position rejected by all the figures he is still co-opting for

167. Cage, "History of Experimental Music in the United States," p. 71.

168. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

169. *Ibid.*

170. In the 1950s Cage found himself falling out with Boulez and to a great extent with his New York peers as he tried to develop his chance approach to still more radical ends. Almost everyone except Cage believed that chance could only enter into the work in moderation; that there had to be some level of authorship and originality (conventionally understood) left in composing. See Kim.

171. Cage, "History of Experimental Music in United States," p. 75.

172. Patterson cites this statement from an interview between Cage and William Duckworth in 1989; see Patterson, "Cage and Asia," p. 54. What affirms the investiture quality of Cage's relationship to Suzuki even more is the lack of clarity that remains about when Cage actually studied with Suzuki. After searching for the facts of Suzuki's teaching tenure at Columbia University, Patterson writes, "his particular role in Cage's aesthetic development remains a frustratingly speculative issue." Ibid. Patterson's historical frustration is another fact of Cagean performativity. Patterson adds that Suzuki was none too thrilled about his American reception in general, suggesting that his work had been appropriated for ulterior motives: "They are struggling, rather superficially, against 'democracy,' bourgeois conformity... conventional middle-class consciousness, and other cognate vices and virtues of mediocrity." Ibid., p. 55.

the cause of Experimental Music. Cage is seeking in this lecture to define his project as a "history," and in the process, he does nothing short of advancing a new definition of history itself. "History is the story of original actions," he states. Since the question of originality was at the heart of criticisms leveled at Cage vis à vis the move to full Indeterminacy (e.g. by Boulez), the stakes of clarifying, and claiming this term were high.<sup>170</sup> He proceeds to generate a model of agency on the part of the subject in relation to history not unlike his activation of the performer, and the audience – giving them "composer" rights – in his model of Indeterminate Composition. Thus he opposes something like the study of history to the concept of "making history" – those who will, and those who won't. He also qualifies the undeconstructed concept of "originality" – as it exists, for example, in the language and priorities of Boulez – suggesting that there are many kinds of originality. Some are "involved in success," others that are not he designates, interestingly, as "neuter" (perhaps because they have succeeded in unmanning the system, for themselves). Another concept he opposes to the active sense of "making history" is the passive concept of history as merely "the past."<sup>171</sup>

"History," then, is not only the title of the essay Cage writes for the director of the Darmstadt courses. It is a *process* rather than an *object*, to use Cage's formulation, and its transformation occurs as the text unfolds. Cage establishes bookends, with Suzuki at one end and history at the other. The anecdotal Suzuki opening – a "story" rather than a "history" – features a pedagogical "performance" in which the one who is authorized to represent the facts loses track of them (performatively negating the priority they are conventionally given). Then there is the closing attempt at nothing short of the redefinition of the concept of history. These two calculated moves are the text's performative acts. In case we were in doubt as to Cage's sense of their effect on his audience, or the related effects that had been driving Cagean investiture for a decade by 1959 – beginning, roughly, with the "Defense of Satie" and "Forerunners of Modern Music" lectures – Cage later announced the symbolic value of his source material. Speaking of his "elite" pedigree, he stated: "I didn't study music with just anybody; I studied with Schoenberg. I didn't study Zen with just anybody; I studied with Suzuki. I've always gone, insofar as I could, to the president of the company."<sup>172</sup>

### **Indeterminacy and Television: Unmanning the System**

1958 was a critical year in instating Cage as "Cage." It saw the demarcation of his project against the work of his peers, and the realization of the crucial concept Indeterminacy that would

open onto artistic practice. The year began with *Variations I*, the first fully indeterminate score, which used transparencies of radial lines to define a field of perception and creative agency that was adaptable and changeable well beyond the rigors of the paper score.<sup>173</sup> As in Cage's reading of Duchamp's *Le Grand verre* – which he looked *through* more than at – one could look at his transparencies, and through them, to a relational world in all its circumstantiality.<sup>174</sup> May 1958 marked Cage's *25-Year Retrospective*, arranged by Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Emile de Antonio, which introduced his work to a wider audience of New York locals, and notably, to a number of young artists who would join his class at the New School that year. This was the period in which Cage changed his course title from "Composition" to "Experimental Composition." The 1958 class included artists such as Allan Kaprow, George Brecht, Dick Higgins, and Al Hansen. In the fall of that year, Cage was invited to speak and perform at Darmstadt – ironically, replacing his rival Boulez who had cancelled – and he gave a landmark series of lectures entitled "Composition as Process," which included the infamous (anti-Boulezian) lecture on "Indeterminacy."<sup>175</sup>

Those three lectures clarified Cage's new position, which was against most of his peers – despite his continued use of them as examples – and against the European front, from Boulez to Stockhausen. Citing the headnote in *Silence*, where Cage announces that the Indeterminacy lecture is "intentionally pontifical," Christopher Shultis has explained:

Delivered on Monday, September 8 [1958], Cage gave examples of European music that he regarded as being indeterminate ranging from Bach's *Art of the Fugue* to Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI*. However he used these two examples for entirely different purposes. Bach was cited in order to give credibility and historical context to indeterminacy in music. Stockhausen was cited in order to criticize European appropriation of Cage's work, through what Boulez called "aleatory," a completely different subject from either Cage's use of chance or indeterminacy.<sup>176</sup>

As Rebecca Kim has discussed in detail, Boulez was the unspoken subject of critique.<sup>177</sup> The year before, the French composer had given a lecture entitled "Aléa," which aggressively criticized Cage, somewhat unscrupulously using his former friend's doubts and speculations in their earlier correspondence as ammunition.<sup>178</sup> The examples of contextual work that Cage discussed in "Indeterminacy" were systematically laid out to oppose the "madness" of which Boulez had accused him.<sup>179</sup> Through the three lectures Cage gave at Darmstadt, which were reproduced in distinctly different formats

173. The moves surrounding *Variations I*, and the score itself, are discussed by Kotz, Joseph, and Bois in this volume.

174. Here we come to Cage's full development of the diagrammatic and relational properties of the Indeterminate score foreshadowed earlier; see footnotes 110 and 140.

175. The three lectures were: (1) "Changes"; (2) "Indeterminacy"; and (3) "Communication" – all appear in some form in *Silence*. The first was a kind of bluff; anticipated as dealing with Cage's *Music of Changes* it announced changes in Cage's outlook and compositional processes. "Communication," premiered at Rutgers University on the invitation of Allan Kaprow.

176. Christopher Shultis, "Cage and Europe," in Nicholls, (ed.), p. 36.

177. Kim devotes a section of her dissertation to this subject: "Claims to Truth: Boulez's 'Aléa' and Cage's 'Composition as Process: Indeterminacy,'" Kim, pp. 44–56.

178. As Kim describes in detail, Aléa outlined Boulez's "aleatory" model of composing, which was starkly different to Cage's approach, as Cage would make clear. Ibid.

179. Ibid.

in *Silence* – from the musical (“Changes” lecture) to the “pontifical” (“Indeterminacy”), to the interrogative (“Communication”) – Cage built a broad scaffolding for his controversial new approach to composing. Through the lectures, he had established *the principle*, the sphere of indeterminate performance would then come to function as the example.

Since Indeterminacy constituted one of the most radical “unmannings” of composition in modern music, the conditions that would establish it had to be rigorous and lucid, and the audience would have to be new, open-minded, and receptive. For this, Cage returned to an art space, Galerie 22 in Düsseldorf, and the new piece performed on October 14, 1958 – a month after the Indeterminacy lecture at Darmstadt – was *Music Walk*. This “score” consists of twelve pages and one instruction sheet. Ten pages contain constellations of dots – numbering between two and fifty-two. There are also transparencies: one sheet consisting of five parallel lines and another of eight (3 x 3”) squares each containing five intersecting lines. Transparencies become Cage’s elegant emblem of the indeterminate, if not the endlessly relational. Indeed, in *Music Walk*, the transparency pages make Cagean unmanning radically explicit, radically figurative. One transparency presents “five parallel lines,” which Cage never allows to be called a staff but which cannot help but evoke it. The other sheet, a grid of squares, fractures that shadow of musical convention refracting the five-line format into networks, offering eight possibilities, via eight different constellations that can be cut from the grid matrix. The fact that Cage retains the five parallel lines on one transparency asserts the “symbolic” move he features on the others. Having completely changed the meaning of the score, the transparencies are pressed into the role of radically transforming the field of performance.

The title, *Music Walk*, asserts the quotidian rejoinder Cage attaches to the pure condition of “music.” Performers walk around the stage, from instrument to instrument, whether radio, piano, or other. As with Cage’s first grand percussion performance at the Museum of Modern Art two decades before, the gallery setting and the formal attire, invested this highly visual performance and its unconventional instruments with a degree of seriousness and purpose. As if to test the longstanding relationship of the visual and the musical he had first experienced in Seattle, Cage expanded this piece as *Music Walk with Dancers* with the “musicians” appearing in tuxedos. We note that the title, again – as in the “walk” attached to the “music” – uses the single word “with” to change the relationship between dance and music, where dance becomes secondary.



Subsequent performances, one at the Teatro Fenice for the Venice Biennale in 1960, included Cunningham and Carolyn Brown, and the new condition of dancers sharing space with the musicians, who had been promoted *up* to the stage. Cage had already used Cunningham as a means of unmanning the authority of the conductor role in his *25-Year Retrospective*, as the dancer took up the position of the conductor on stage and simply beat time (with the circular movement of his arm). In *Music Walk with Dancers*, Cunningham and Brown structured their actions with a stopwatch, demonstratively attending to that instrument's assertion of music's emphasis on time. Later discussing this work with Cunningham, who had by that point lost the performing notation he had made for Cage's piece, William Fetterman made the following observation: "*Music Walk* may well be a minor work within Cunningham's historical repertoire, but it is a rare example where musicians have occupied the stage simultaneously with the dancers, and does not reflect his usual staging style."<sup>180</sup> Obviously not.

180. Fetterman, p. 49.

In short order, Cage wrote many new scores to express his theory of Indeterminacy. This marked a role reversal in Cage's *modus operandi*, the scores, coming after his lectures on Indeterminacy, now acted as examples of the theory given in the lecture, rather than the other way around. Cage was gaining a sense of his potential impact, as he expanded the performative field of reception. In the period after Darmstadt Cage and Tudor booked more than twenty performances featuring *Music Walk*. The *demonstration* (not to say *investiture*) aspect of these executions of the "score" is important.<sup>181</sup> With Cage and Tudor darting about the stage, there is an ethics to

181. Kim notes that the variable elements in the score asserted Cage's concern with an ethics in the space of indeterminate performance where the players respect the positions of others (Put simply: if someone is on the record player you are supposed to use, you wait, or choose another). See Kim, pp. 193–94.



**John Cage, *Music Walk with Dancers*, 1960.  
Performed by Merce Cunningham, Carolyn Brown, John Cage and David Tudor  
at the Friedrich-Wilhelm Gymnasium, Cologne, October 5, 1960**

182. Kim, p. 193.

183. Ibid.

the unspoken conditions of performance: “self-governing actions... [are] as important to its conception as the emphasis on movement.”<sup>182</sup> In spite of all this varied activity, all these contingencies, *Music Walk* tended to look quite similar across many of the first performances. As Kim notes: “An issue is sometimes made of the observable consistency of performances by Cage and Tudor due to their written-out scores, limiting the potential variabilities of an indeterminate work.”<sup>183</sup> Why would this be so? This significant factor belongs to a larger criticism of Cage: that he cared very much how his work was performed, even as he espoused freedom through Indeterminacy. The answer to this has everything to do with what we have been describing as the meeting of “performativity” and “performance” in Cage’s project, or his strategy of symbolic investiture. Just as he could not allow earlier devices such as “Schoenberg,” “Coomaraswamy,” or “Suzuki” to signify ambiguously (as discussed above), so Indeterminacy had to be instituted with programmatic clarity. The “Indeterminate,” like the “Experimental” – like the “Nothing” and like “Silence” before them – were Cagean concepts pulled from the ambiguity or ephemerality connoted by their conventional meanings and established as new “givens”; the clarity revealed across the “consistent” performances was an essential part of that process.

It is interesting to underscore, in this context, that Cage’s “workshop” of Experimental Composition back in New York, his New School class, was the diametric opposite to this international program. Fluxus artist Dick Higgins – a member of Cage’s class, who with Brecht and Kaprow had been sketching scores that Cage would

184. Higgins: "Some of us [in the New School course], particularly [Al] Hansen and myself, couldn't for the life of us imagine why Cage was interested in those things. They seemed so abstract, compared with the very concrete observations that Cage favored in connection with the pieces played in class, and so terribly old-fashioned in their implications. Mostly, they read like legal contracts." Dick Higgins, "[June–July, 1958]" in Richard Kostelanetz, (ed.), *John Cage: An Anthology*, op. cit., p. 123. Cited in Kim, p. 129.

185. The precedent for the latter is *Water Music* (1952), which Fetterman calls the first of Cage's "theater pieces." As mentioned above (footnote 114), for this work Cage included the idea that the score would be displayed to the audience: an early democratization of the privileged knowledge of the composer and performer, involving the sharing of previously undisclosed information. Cage became a star in this period, with many fans particularly in Italy. According to Calvin Tomkins the filmmaker Federico Fellini wanted Cage to appear in "his next film" (*La Dolce Vita*); see Tomkins, p. 133.

186. We will keep the term score, even through in the Indeterminacy period, Pritchett's term "tool" is more accurate.

187. Cited in Fetterman, p. 32.

188. The program aired on February 24, 1960, and the host stated that the review was from the Sunday before (February 21).

then have them perform in class – read Cage's Indeterminacy lecture from Darmstadt and was amazed at the fact that it struck him like a "legal contract."<sup>184</sup> This remains one of the best explanations of the function of performativity in Cage to date.

Covering many different cities over several months between October 1958 and March 1959, "The Indeterminacy Tour," eventually included the important dimension of Cage presenting the new work through the medium of television. In fact, a number of the new scores were written expressly for TV – including *TV Köln*, *Fontana Mix* and its offshoots: *Aria*, *Sounds of Venice*, and the infamous *Water Walk*.<sup>185</sup> When Cage appeared on the Italian game show, *Lascia o Raddoppia* in early 1959, answering increasingly difficult questions on mushrooms over a period of five weeks, he insisted on presenting his new scores as a kind of prelude to the putative main event.<sup>186</sup> A few months after its premiere in Italy, *Water Walk* was repeated on US television: on *The Henry Morgan Show* (June 1959) and on *I've Got a Secret* (January 1960). Fetterman explains that *Water Walk* consisted of "scrupulously determinate notation" involving a series of actions – mostly having to do with water (using items such as a bathtub and a vase of flowers, which would reappear in Fluxus) as well as Cage's staples, the open piano with objects on its strings, with the addition of a mirror to show the audience what was happening, radios, and a stopwatch – in the challengingly brief period of three minutes. Cage commented on his experience of executing *Water Walk*:

I... rehearsed very carefully, over and over again with people watching me and correcting me, because I had to do it in three minutes. It had many actions in it, and it demanded what you might call virtuosity. I was unwilling to perform it until I was certain I could do it well.<sup>187</sup>

On those programs Cage again appeared impeccably dressed (albeit in a suit as opposed to a tuxedo) and with his trademark smile and warmth constantly operative. On *I've Got a Secret*, the host seemed complicit in the interests of "indeterminacy," as he offered the audience the option of responding in whatever ways came naturally; and complicit also in the process of investiture, he quoted from a review on Cage in *The New York Herald Tribune*, which he had on hand, announcing that *The Tribune* takes Cage seriously as a composer and his music as a new art form.<sup>188</sup> As if preparing for the worst, the host asked Cage if he minded if the audience laughed. In an elegant response that sparked that very process, and instantly diffused any hostility, Cage stated that overall he preferred laughter to tears. He then proceeded to execute the piece, without a hitch, to roaring applause.

## To Conclude: The Cage Effect

Cage's decision to demonstrate the effects of the Indeterminate score through television, a new frontier of "reception" – at a high point in the early history of that medium – reflects the inherent logic of his project. By the time television had fully arrived, the very period in which Cage was canvassing Indeterminacy, he could enlist it as a kind of "subtext," or as another vehicle of an ever-widening concept of "composition" and "communication."<sup>189</sup> If the score, in its many forms, always mapped a field of future attention, TV was being developed increasingly to control it. Time, relationality, and the networked circulation of source material surrounding the televisual, were echoed in the mutating field that Cagean Indeterminacy had set in relation to the macro circumstances of the transformation of attention. In order to render his composition relevant and applicable, Cage put to use all the devices we have outlined – from the discursive framework to increasing assertion of the visual and the theatrical – triangulating the forms and reception of his music within an expanded field. In so doing, he drew what was perhaps the first (artistic) map of the new conditions of constantly modified power relations – between modernity and postmodernity – that Foucault had diagnosed as "disciplinary," and Gilles Deleuze would update in terms of "control."<sup>190</sup>

Following Foucault, Jonathan Crary characterizes attention as having taken shape as an "object" in the course of the twentieth century, in relation to the organization of labor and subjective desire more generally.<sup>191</sup> Such a formulation of the sphere of "attention" further elucidates Cage's repeated assertion that he was making *processes* not *objects*. This statement reveals the composer's explicit confrontation of the objectification of attention. For Crary, the massive organization of attention through the advancing media developed in the past century constitutes a reconfiguration of the disciplinary mechanisms Foucault identified; that is, those discursive and disciplinary frameworks with which we (and Cage) began. Cage's constant adaptation of the score, his systematic restructuring of the relationships between composer and audience (and between transmission and reception), and the discourse he enacted to establish these moves – culminating in the television appearances he used to launch Indeterminacy – reveal the broad scope of his extension of composition. The relationship between visuality, attention, and control, which Cage continually tried to *change* and modify in his work, is identified by Crary as one ever more relevant in the present: "Attentive behavior in front of all kinds of screens is increasingly part of a continuous process of feedback and adjustment within what Foucault calls a 'network of permanent observation'."<sup>192</sup>

189. This idea was part of an exchange I had with Branden W. Joseph at Princeton in 2002. I thank him for that discussion.

190. "We must not look for who has the power...", Foucault argued. "We must seek rather the pattern of the modifications which relationships of force imply by the very nature of their process." And further that: "Relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are 'matrices of transformations'." Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 99. Jonathan Crary discusses Deleuze's updating of Foucault in *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press [October Book], 2001, p. 76.

191. Crary, p. 73.

192. *Ibid.*, p. 76

193. A tentative counter-model posed by Crary, to the ubiquitous forms of the control of attention is the daydream, whose history, he adds, will never be written: "...for every mutation in the construction of attentiveness there are parallel shifts in the shape of inattention, distraction, and states of 'absent-mindedness.' ... Because so many forms of disciplinary attentiveness... have entailed cognitively 'processing' a stream of heterogeneous stimuli (whether film, radio, television or cyberspace), the kind of swerves into inattentiveness increasingly have produced experiences of... temporalities that are not only dissimilar to but also fundamentally incompatible with capitalist patterns of flow and obsolescence." *Ibid.*, p. 77. Crary characterizes his model of the daydream in distinctly Cagean terms: "The daydream, which is an integral part of a continuum of attention, has always been a crucial but indeterminate part of the politics of everyday life." *Ibid.*

Against this dominance of the visual, Cage pitted the dispersal of power relations that lies at the heart of Indeterminacy, and placed a whole set of new tools in the hands of "composers" (whether they be artists or their audiences).<sup>193</sup>

Cage's strategies of investiture began in earnest when he first eradicated the functions of subjectivity and expression – confronting the question: How do you subtract the author and "authorize" the act at the same time? – and they were developed in recognition of the public sphere that governs the creative act, and indeed, all communication. Cage used every mechanism at his disposal to make his project enter the system, simultaneously unmanning the singularity of the discipline that was his platform through an evolving "chain of signifiers" he created from scratch. Perhaps most radically of all, Cage showed that he was willing to give up music in order to leave us with an expanded concept of composition.

James Pritchett's insistence on the concept of "Cage-the-Composer," with which we began, can perhaps now be read in a new light. The late twentieth and early twenty-first century have witnessed a total transformation of the function of "medium" in artistic practice: from engagements with television and manifold new media, to more recent artistic declarations of a kind of obsolescence in regard to making choices (in advance) about tools, or a priori formats of any kind. No analysis of the history of this process can ignore the space cleared by Cage. As we have tried show, even a partial map of Cage's parameters for "communication" – the score's mediation of both creation and reception, and the dialogic investiture of that process – cannot but shed light on what has followed. In redefining the "composer," emphasizing a complex, politicized model of "organizing" whatever material is at hand (at the twilight of medium specificity), Cage left a plan for an indeterminate future. In an age of exponentially expanding mediatic forms and stimuli, recognizing the matrix Cage bequeathed to all composers is the beginning of an appreciation of his pervasive and still-changing impact.