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### **Why Cage, Again Now?**

Let us recall where Cage found himself at the beginning of the 1960s. He sets out the core of his convictions at the time in the foreword to *A Year From Monday*:

“My ideas certainly started in the field of music. And that field, so to speak, is child’s play. (We may have learned, it is true, in those idyllic days, things it behoves us now to recall.) Our proper work now if we love mankind and the world we live in is revolution.”

This prophet of revolution (a revolution of certain kind) already had become world famous; already he was honoured as an artistic and, perhaps, even, as a religious visionary. Cage, who died in 1992, achieved world fame and lasting influence in 1952 when his epoch-making anti-composition 4'33" was first performed. It seemed to me that 25 years ago, thousands flocked to his concerts (the first *Musicircus* in 1969 was attended by over two thousand people), and he was regarded somewhat as a wizened older guru to youth culture. Numerous books on him appeared. The Vietnam War and Watergate forced moral issues to the fore; but as the moral earnestness faded, so North America’s cultural ambience. The utopian aspiration faded in the political and cultural spheres alike, ‘til a jargonish use of the important term “totalizing” was all that was required to dismiss a position from consideration. that and in both politics and culture and moved toward a more self-centered materialism. As the ‘70s wore on, Cage no longer had the esteem he once held as a functioning radical thinker. A politic that emerged under the twin banners of multiculturalism and globalisation saw the development of the stabilization of “identity” (rather ironic in an era when Gilles Deleuze was the *maître penseur*).

But Cage himself never foresook his mission. He pursued the radical line he had begun to investigate in the 1940s. As Elliot Caplan’s many video tapes show, he continued to live his revolution. And now, of course, he is back (along with so many other “dead white guys” of the sort the Toronto International Avant-Garde Congress were reviled for present). What accounts for the return? What cultural factors have made his advocacy urgent?

Though John Cage published several manifestos about music over his long life, the statement that has come to be taken as the canonical expression of his own interpretation of 4'33" came in 1956 as a remark to a midwestern student audience about to watch a performance by the Merce Cunningham dance company. On that occasion, Cage said:

Our intention is to affirm this life, not to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply to wake up to the very life we’re living, which is so excellent once one gets one’s mind and one’s desires out of its way and lets it act on its own accord.

Cage’s music focuses on being in the moment, being present and alert to what is happening in the whole environment in which we find ourselves. He eschews distinctions, of sorting sounds into categories of aesthetically valuea, or aesthetically trivial. His notion that “music is sounds heard,” is an invitation to listen closely in a non-discriminatory fashion, accepting all aspects of life.

These attitudes are rooted in spiritual convictions. In an interview with George Leonard, author of *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage*,

Cage said:

Since the forties and through study with D. T. Suzuki of the philosophy of Zen Buddhism, I've thought of music as a means of changing the mind... an activity of sounds in which the artist found a way to let the sounds be themselves.

D.T. Suzuki was a teacher of Zen in America modelled himself after St. Paul; his writings on Zen Buddhism in the fifties and sixties had a profound influence on several American artists, in addition to Cage. He was hardly an orthodox Zen monk, however. The Zen that impressed Kaprow and Cage in the 1950s was based on his writings, and in the case of many artists (including John Cage, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac), his classes. The Zen enthusiasts who went to Japan in the sixties to study were shocked to discover how odd Suzuki's Zen had been. Few Zen professions any longer take his teachings as central, though his remains a imp in the art world is unchanged. Suzuki became a Zen expert when he came to the United States in 1897. Back in Japan he was no roshi, no master, not even a monk. He was an English teacher. His first publication, back in Japan, had been titled "On Emerson." He came to the United States in his twenties to translate for a family-run Illinois philosophic publisher, Open Court, whose most famous author was John Dewey, a pragmatist author whose writings owe much the New England Transcendentalists. Suzuki worked for Open Court from age 27 to 38 and first reached satori riding his bicycle through the Illinois fields.

Leonard demonstrates the reason for the extraordinary welcome Suzuki's ideas had: they accorded with a strain of thought in the West that had been gathering strength since the time of William Wordsworth and that sought beauty and indeed a kind of religious experience by seeing anew what the great romantic poet had called "the simple produce of the common day." In each successive generation between Wordsworth and Cage, this movement enlarged the boundaries of what could be considered art until, at length, there was no difference between art and reality itself. For those with eyes to see, anything could be art. Cage took the disinterested contemplation inherent in aesthetic experience — as it is traditionally understood — and extended it to all phenomena thus massively increasing what in our environment could be understood to be beautiful. The "idyll" of art is, therefore, only a proving ground for a sensibility that, once acquired, can bear witness to the excellence of *all things*. Cage once inquired of a musician trained in the classical traditions of India: "What is the purpose of music?" Her reply made a profound impression on the composer: "The purpose of music is to quiet the mind, thus rendering it susceptible to divine influences". Cage continued to repeat this belief throughout the remainder of his life: he declared to Kathan Brown and the printers at Crown Point Press that "art's purpose is to sober and quiet the mind so that it in accord with what happens." We are grateful to music for helping us develop such a sensibility, but we honour it by dispensing with it, as Cage writes: "We open our eyes and ears seeing life each day excellent as it is. This realization no longer needs art though without art it would have been difficult to come by." (Cage, Diary, LXII, *A Year From Monday*, p. 146.) Around 1949, Cage experienced a revelation that non-expressive music can bring peace more surely than the titanic emotions of Bach or Brahms.

This form of attention, of Gelassenheit, of willing acceptance which lets beings be, alters the self. In one interview, Cage said, "Instead of self expression, I'm involved with self alteration." John Cage one remarked (in conversation with Morton Feldman):

I think one of the things that has happened is that it's become clear that we can be — not just with our minds but with our whole being — responsive to sound, and that that sound doesn't have to be the communication of some deep thought.

It can be just a sound. Now that sound could go in one ear and out the other, or it could go in one ear, permeate the being, transform the being, and then perhaps go out, letting the next one in.

Cage's advocacy had its critics: In 1969 the Harvard theologian and culture critic Harvey Cox in a book entitled *The Feast of Fools* faulted him sharply for "assum[ing] a creation that is not only good but perfect." This is Zen-like view: While meeting with two renowned scholars of religion Henry Corbin and Mircea Eliade in 1954, Suzuki was asked what similarities he found between Mahayana Buddhism and the theology of Swedenborg. According to Corbin, Suzuki grabbed a spoon and said suddenly, "This spoon now exists in Paradise. . . ." He later added, "We are now in Heaven." Cage similarly avowed "confidence in the plan to make life on Earth a success for everyone." To Cox, though he astutely recognized the theological dimension in Cage's work, the composer's stance risked becoming "a supine acceptance of the world as it is." And there were artists and art critics who had similar objections. Rather than awaken her audience to "this excellent life," one performance artist said in 1981 she wanted to awaken it to "the ways in which we have been led to believe that this life is so excellent...." During the 1960's when the most influential galleries and journals in New York were dedicated to Pop, and to what Arthur Danto later called "the transfiguration of the commonplace," Cage's remarks about art awakening us to life's excellence seemed prophetic. But by the 1980s the well-known lines were becoming unpopular, particularly among the growing ranks of feminist artists. The performance artist Yvonne Rainer acidly protested, in 1981, that "only a man born with a sunny disposition" could have said anything so fatuous. (She is quoting one of Cage's unguarded comments about himself.) The fine critic of performance art, Henry Sayre, in turn quotes Rainer in his 1989 University of Chicago book, *The Object of Performance*, as late as 1989, himself pausing to lament Cage's dictum as "so vastly apolitical, so vastly unconscious of social and political reality."

Of course, the criticism misses the mark. This is partly because Cage's work did have a political edge – an anarchist edge (and that anarchism is the contemporary magnet of political dissent is surely one factor that accounts for the recrudescence of interest in Cage). Cage's social thought reflects his aesthetic ideals and his aesthetic ideas reflect his politics: both artistic and political aggregates should acknowledge the validity of numerous, unfixed centers of society – none should be relegated to the service of a dominant element. Cage's political and aesthetic idiom is a language of questioning, of self-alteration – and open, multi-vectoral language that everywhere strives against closure. Thus, his *Musicircus*, those wonderful, Utopian works that had such an impact on the early 70s, is a model for a just society. It proposes an inclusive community – decentered, non-judgmental community which can accommodate all who wish to participate. A traditional orchestra functions as an efficient machine, each part subserving the whole. Cage, following Emersonian, imagines another form of aggregate: in his *Musicircus*, each musician follows his or her own inclination: musicians stop trying to play in time with the other around them, so the aggregate functions as an interdependent, non-interfering entity. This is the opposite approach to Western music where an orchestra, say, is supposed to function like a well running unified machine. This requires openness on the part of the individual performers: each performs with the other in parallel – and because there are not "winners" and "losers" in a social hierarchy, this engenders ego-dependence. And that promotes freedom. John Cage hated improvised music, and was especially averse to jazz: he felt that, in jazz, egos took over as one musician would try to play louder than the others in the name of "self-expression." Avoiding self expression, Cage seemed to feel, would result a society free of the social excesses emotion produces: hatred and oppression. Cages meditative practices allowed him connect his highly individuated experience

with a larger social/ethical politics of monadic non-interference.

Cage's musical groups serve as a working model of co-operative anarchy. Though the 1980s and early 1990s couldn't acknowledge it, they should have been able to, for Cage was not unique in this regard. A number of the composers for whom Cage had special enthusiasm (e.g., Ives, Cowell, and Partch) offer a music of integration and inclusion, a music that serves as a model of radical democracy." Cage's renouncing of compositional control through chance and indeterminacy represents an quintessentially American antiauthoritarianism.

There is another, equally important political advocacy in Cage's work. This *parti pris* relates to Cage's ideas about the transformation of the "self." We should try to achieve some precision about this transformation. There is a long history to the belief that the social revolution must develop out of revolution in the self. We see this in Surrealism: The Enlightenment cast illusion in the role of reason's adversary. But many artists, and other thinkers, came to question the wisdom of the wholesale destruction of illusions. Even Freud, the author of *The Future of an Illusion* (a book which we might understand as a latter-day Enlightenment tract) pointed to the necessity of illusion as a precondition for emotional growth. Illusion, the critics of modernity pointed out, was connected non-rational mental faculties (especially the imagination) whose well-being was essential to the health of humankind. Furthermore, the experience of twentieth century discredited the belief that that a moral value system may be built out of rational principles. Consequently, the revolt against the modernity's regime often took the form as the celebration of the imagination as the agency that would break with the existing order: André Breton was typical in this regard: Breton strived to forge a link between the political revolution and the revolution in consciousness: the two requirements for Surrealism, is proclaimed, were to heed Marx's injunction to transform the world and Rimbaud's injunction to change consciousness.

What is radical in Cage's advocacy is that he preserves the idea of the first importance of the revolution of the self, but alters the understanding of the true nature of the self in a profound way. Amongst the Surrealists, the idea of the self was linked that of the imagination. Cage dissolved that link, and the consequences were momentous. For the idea of imagination is itself linked with that of *techne* (engineering magazines carry profiles on visionary, imaginative engineers). Cage's notion of the self in its highest state (it is really that of 'non-self') is radical, for it breaks with the tradition of metaphysics which has eventuated with taking *techne* as its founding relation to beings, and to be-ing..

The transformation of the self that Cage effects results in ( what I (adopting a term from Simone Weil) call the self's "decreation" (Cage refers to simply as getting the mind and desires out of the way) to allow ourselves to enter into the being of everything we perceive. To find communion, we must lose perspective. What, after all, is perspective but a way of removing ourselves from experience? In the lecture 'Composition as Process' in "Silence" Cage identifies aspects of works by Earle Brown, Morton Feldman, and Christian Wolff that seem to him to relate to Eckhart's thought: of Wolff's "Duo II for Pianists" he says that it requires each performer to 'turn away from himself and his ego sense of separation from other Beings and things [so that] he faces the Grund of Meister Eckhart, from which impermanencies flow and to which they return. "Thoughts arise not be collected and cherished but to be dropped as if they were void. "

For Cage, the challenge of Zen, as he understood it, was not to attempt a musical equivalent for the 'emptiness' of a Zen garden but to achieve, through chance operations, the demolition of the borders of his taste and, consequently, a music 'in which everything was welcome. In 1968, in Conversation with Daniel Charles in *For the Birds*, Cage explains that it's impossible to naively believe in Zen in the middle of the twentieth century ... but Zen ... would be useful to open our eyes to what the technological universe means. We'll never understand it unless we adopt an attitude at least related to that of Zen". This same attitude led to a

reinterpretation of his relationship to Eckhart's thought and in 1968 in *M* he writes: 'Meister Eckhart spoke of the soul's simplicity. But Nature's complicated. We must get rid of the soul or train it to deal with countless numbers of things'.

In fact, we must honour Cage's belief that chance processes and the use of the *I Ching* (the English translation was introduced to Cage by Christian Wolff) in composition imposes a greater discipline than control, in that it removes the influence of personal choice; no attempt is made to "improve" on the chance relationships of sound events in the interests of artistic taste as altered from life. Cage's growth as an artist showed him working consistently, throughout his life, to eliminate exclusivity of choice, thereby promoting an all-inclusive environment. By dint of an extraordinary resoluteness (to use that very Heideggerian term), he anticipated postmodernist artists (postmodernist avant la lettre, to be sure) in creating musical composition of a decidedly theatrical character. In commenting on the theatrical quality of Cage's work William Fetterman's *John Cage's Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances* (Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996) analyzes features of Cage's oeuvre that most of us would identify as postmodernist: Cage attempted to blur generic boundaries. Fetterman highlights Cage's efforts at expanding our conception of musical performance by pointing out the ways that performance's theatrical aspects influence our understanding of musical composition. His interest in performance (and specifically with way that visual features of performance affect our aural comprehension) helps explain Cage's well-known antipathy towards recorded music. His conception of performance also problematized distinctions between music and theater. Responding to the challenge posed by the array of theatrical devices that Cage deployed, and the challenge that range of devices poses for one that would frame a comprehensive concept of theatre, Fetterman suggests that any time the process of making music draws attention to the performer's body in the course of unconventional sound-production, Cage has created a theatre piece. Fetterman's concept of the theatrical derives loosely from Cage's own expansive notion of theatre: "theatre is something which engages both the eye and the ear."

The whole of life experience is incorporated in Cage's work, which comprehend a pluralism not only of styles through singular art forms, but encompassed his interests including music, theater, literature, dance, the visual arts, media-arts, mycology, macrobiotic cooking, chess, and horticulture. A new, orientation, an anti-*techne* orientation towards purposeful purposelessness allowed Cage's art to cherish everything. I preferred to accept rather than make sounds:

It can be seen as changing the responsibility of the composer, in making choices to asking questions. And then the questions come by means of one thing or another, that is beyond the control of the person asking the question.... So what I've had to do is to decide what questions to ask. Once I've decided that, I become, as it were, simply a means by which other things can happen that are outside of me, in which I don't myself change. . . . I hope in that way I become open to possibilities and events that were not in my mind to begin with.

John Cage, quoting Charles Ives, accepts this vitality with pleasure:

"What music is and is to be may be somewhere in the belief of an unknown philosopher of a half a century ago who said, 'How can there be any bad music? All music is from heaven. If there is anything bad in it, I put it there—by my implications and limitations. Nature builds the mountains and meadows and man puts in the fences and labels.' The fences have come down and the labels are being removed. An up-to-date aquarium has all the fish swimming together in one

huge tank.”<sup>19</sup>

We must all feel free to share in this optimism. Life demands it from our art.

Suzuki, who had learned of with this Western movement by reading Ralph Waldo Emerson while still in Japan; he recognized Emerson’s ideal as analogous to the satori sought by the Rinzai Zen sect to which he belonged. Among American artists, this school of Zen--which Americans initially equated with the whole of Zen--provided an artistic evolution that was already under way with a new rationale and a thrilling acceleration.

“Suzuki’s satori,” Leonard writes,

is largely identical to transfiguration of the commonplace. “Satori finds a meaning hither-to hidden in our daily concrete particular experiences,” Suzuki explains, regarding the world from the “religious aesthetical angle of observation....” The “artist’s world,” therefore “coincides” with that of the Zen man except that the Zen-man, Suzuki was teaching by 1938, has freed himself of art objects. “While the artists have to resort to the canvas or brush or mechanical instruments or some other mediums to express themselves, Zen has no need of things external.... The Zenman is an artist,” but he “transforms his own life into a work of creation!”

Many artists have associated their interest in direct perception with the belief that language imposes the deadening weight of tradition on experience, and only the raw, unformed experience of the natural body has an authentic relationship to the immediate conditions of living (i.e., related to what, in Williams’ sense of the word, is “local”). Concern with direct perception also leads to the stress on the individual, autonomous existent and denial of the reality of relationships—to the belief that only individual sensations and the connections between them are real, to the uncompromising positivism that Leonard B. Meyer call “radical empiricism” or “transcendental particularism” in his great, classic work, *Music, the Arts and Ideas*.

In *Silence*, his famous statement of his aesthetic credo, Cage wrote

. . . [O]ne may give up the desire to control sound, clear his mind of music, and set about discovering means to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments. . . . And what is the purpose of writing music? One is, of course, not dealing with purposes but dealing with sounds. Or the answer must take the form of paradox: a purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play. This play, however, is an affirmation of life—not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we’re living, which is so excellent once one gets one’s mind and one’s desires out of the way and lets it act of its accord.

We glimpse how radical Cage’s methods (and resulting forms) are when we contrast them Ives’: Ives was the more truly Emersonian two (Cage was closer to Thoreau) and Ives and Emerson sought to forge a unity in experience. Ives’s music models this effort; its stylistic diversity and multilayered textures suggest the diversity, even the chaos of the natural world, and the tightly composed forms that the composer effected models the process that integrates this diversity into a pluralistic whole. Thus, it rehearses the struggle for human struggle for truth, which entails an act of will of a controlling “self.” However, as Christopher Shultis points out in *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition*, Experience for Thoreau is

nondualistic. Humanity and nature are not separate: Conceptualisation splits the primal unity of being-in-the-world into the subject-object dyad. However, close observation, rather than conceptualization, leads to unified experience: "Observation need not be interpreted; one may instead seek to discover things 'as they are'," Shultis writes. For Emerson, the self was centred discourse. Thoreau did not believe that. Shultis states that, unlike Emerson's, Thoreau's philosophy of coexistence posits a decentred creative self that is a part of and not distinct from the world around us. As Thoreau states in his Journal, "The peculiarity of a work of genius is the absence of the speaker from his speech. He is but the medium" (quoted in shultis61). Cage, like Thoreau, was committed to what Shultis calls "silencing the sounded self," a notion beautifully expressed in Cage's mesostic poem "Composition in Retrospect":

Thoreau said the same  
ThIng  
Over a hundred yearS ago  
I want my writing to be as Clear  
As water I can see through  
So that what I exPerienced  
Is toLd  
wIthout  
My beiNg in any way  
In thE way

Shultis asserts that both Thoreau and Cage deemphasized the role of human intervention in the creative process: "coexistence replaces control." For Cage, nonintention, facilitated through chance and indeterminacy, allowed for the observation (and enjoyment) of sound for itself, a focus he shared with Thoreau. Silence, for both thinkers, encourages an appreciation of the entire field of ambient sound, thus removing the distinction between sound and silence.

Cage's favourite composition is the famous 4'33"; it's silence enfolds aleatory piece of music (different for every performance) inasmuch as chance determines what real-world sounds will fill the silence. During the first performance of the work at Woodstock, New York a rainstorm broke out, and the silence was filled by the sound of raindrops on the roof of the concert shed. Cage has written other kinds of aleatory music, but he and everyone else regards 4'33" as his most important and most visionary work. For that reason, it is interesting and much to the point of today's investigation to learn, as one does in Leonard's book, of the degree to which he later turned against his own vision.

To speak poetically, silences speaks of the character of the world Cage's music inaugurates. In Cage's world, the basic event of silence is noise that has no meaning and comes before language. The piece 4'33" is openness itself. It is a piece that breaks with the entire Western tradition of art, i.e. techne, bringing forth into unconcealedness on the basis of knowledge. Neither the composer nor the performer brings forth; rather the composer gives or takes no more and no less than a timeframe, and the performer stages an openness that allows an audience to hear noises as music. Cage's ideas on harmony have a relation to a profound (and non-technocratic) ideas about time: that is an aspect of the greatness of Cage's aesthetic ideas.

Cage preferred what he called "continuity" over "structure." He states this in his writings of the 1950 – in "Lecture on Something," he states: "Nocontinuity simply means accepting that continuity that happens. Continuity means the opposite: making that particular continuity that excludes all others." Here "making a continuity" refers to a composer's intentional act of creating a structure that he wants the listener to hear. Such a continuity excludes other

possibilities because it originates in the composer's mind.

The artwork here is the openness itself of the timeframe. The world is what is taken in at random. This elicits openness, receptively, something approaching Heidegger's *Sorge*. Ordinarily we are given a timeframe that calls us into receptive openness for the world. Our first act is an open receptivity that is no means passivity: this receptivity takes the form of listening to and attending, perhaps inquisitively, to what happens in the timeframe granted us. We hear in the difference of world sounds as sounds, which is what characterizes us as human beings. We are put out into the difference of the world, hearing this sound as that of bird, that of a violin (hear the contents of the world "as" – what Heideggerians refer to as the "hermeneutical as"). Sometimes we can even hear beyond that "as": as John Cage observed in *Silence*: "Every something is an echo of nothing." We are called beyond interpretation, to the free play of perception. The truth of free perception is revealed through patient, attentive listening that reaches past everyday clamour.

Through listening and being able to hear sounds as sounds can we respond with understanding. This is an act by which we build/become attuned to the world. But all acts are based on will, i.e. all acts of the subject, are, in Cage's universe, not originary (for no pursuit of interests, which entails being among and immersed in entities, is originary). But there is that which is originary: we know this because we know that we are here for no reason in particular: thus, the willing subject and its interests are derivative. World is first and foremost given and granted as time before a subject, who comes to presence, already having understood entities as such, acts intentionally within it. World is time, like 4'33". This artwork sets the truth of world as time to work. It is slight and simple in conception. Heidegger wrote

The Simple preserves the riddle of the abiding and the great. Spontaneously it takes abode in men, yet needs a long time for growth. In the unpretentiousness of the Ever-Same it conceals its blessing. The expanse of all grown things which dwell around the Fieldpath bestows the world. It is only in the unspoken of their language that, as the old master of letter and life, Eckhart, says, God is God.

But the message of the Fieldpath speaks only as long as there are human beings who, born in its air, are able to hear it. They are hearers of their Origin, but not servants of machination. Man in vain attempts to bring the globe in order through his plans whenever he is not in harmony with the message of the Fieldpath. The danger threatens that men of today remain hard of hearing to its language. They have ears only for the noise of the media, which they take to be almost the voice of God. So man becomes fragmented and pathless. To the fragmented the Simple seems monotonous. The monotonous becomes wearisome. Those who are weary find only uniformity. The Simple has fled. Its quiet power is exhausted.

Indeed, the number of those who still recognize the Simple as their acquired possession is quickly diminishing. But the few will everywhere be the abiding. From the gentle might of the Fieldpath they will some day be able to outlast the gigantic power of atomic energy, which human calculation has artifacted for itself and made into a fetter of its own doing.

The message of the Field path awakens a spirit which loves the open air and, at a favourable place, leaps over even heaviness into an ultimate serenity. This protects against the nuisance of mere toil, which promotes only futility when pursued for itself. (From Martin Heidegger, *The Fieldpath*)



Scott Michaelsen has pointed out that in the music of John Cage “enlightenment is endlessly proximate and endlessly deferred—each sound is its own sound, and yet our contemplation of this ‘enlightenment’ is constantly interrupted by the next note and the next and the next.” This is the openness of the Open.

Music is the paradigmatic artform for this radical widening because it comes back to the paradigms of open behaviour in attentiveness and listening. Silence is the event beyond intention and interest, the event of being beyond or before relating to any specific entity. Sound is primary here rather than sight, the supremely metaphysical sense], because listening is the sense of human being’s receptivity par excellence. This listening must not be understood merely as the auditory sense, but as the openness of existing in the difference of world that lets entities be themselves. Inquisitiveness is a basic trait of this open human essence.

Heidegger understood that intentionality (using that term in the strict philosophical sense derived from Husserl) is the subject’s directing the will towards entities; Heidegger, and Cage, understood the will is at the base of the metaphysical understanding of action that is with us from the very start of the Western tradition. Aristotle defines action as striving plus intention (*orexis + + proairesis*). This definition proceeds from an understanding of the human essence as being the subject of action (*hypokeimenon tou dramou*). Similarly, thinking is also intention as a directedness of mind towards specific entities. Metaphysics issues in action, because its form of knowledge, grasping: graspings things for their utility. This form of knowledge offers insight into the utility of beings. It is not fortuitous that the word “sight” figures in “insight,” because, as Aristotle notes right at the beginning of his *Metaphysics*, that amongst all the senses, it is sight that most of all grants knowledge, i.e. Sight is that sensory modality that most furnishes the sense of directedness towards entities, of grasping an entity, a being in its be-ing. It is the archetypal prying sense. Listening, by way of contrast, listening is receptivity and attunement, not knowledge of entities: it so much less brings its entities under the conception, it is so much less involves the apophantic “as”; it so much more easily moves beyond the hermeneutical as of world-building, and, through the free play of perception, returns to that primal that Heidegger terms “earth.” It takes things in as they are without necessarily understanding them, of grasping them by bringing them under concept, or understanding them through the apophantic “as.” Hearing stands for openness of and to the world, the originary transcendence that lands human being in a mood out there in the there of the world, without necessarily being attentive to specific entities. Only on the basis of this originary openness for being can the being of beings be perceived.

We can well understand the idea of opening that takes use beyond apophantic, and even beyond hermeneutical understanding of beings, towards an attunement to be-ing, in Heideggerian terms; but in the case of Cage, the inspiration was Buddhist. Cage’s poetics reflects the Buddhist idea of *Sunyata* (a key inspiration for Cage’s “Lecture on Nothing”), of the “emptiness” of self-existence that understands that being really dissolves into that of the whole environment.

Cage’s understanding of the status of the work or art is radical: it changes how artworks are understood, freeing them to carry out what become their most urgent task, that of providing a model for a form of awareness that is no longer either apophantic nor hermeneutical. It can accomplish this task because artwork is comes to presence in the form of that-which-has-been-brought-forth. The artwork is no longer thought poiêically. Like Heidegger, Cage artistic theory professes that art is not originally *poiêsis*. Eschewing the idea of the artwork as an autonomous construction – a “com-position” – represents a break with the metaphysical tradition whose implications can scarcely be overestimated.

“Metaphysics” signifies a manner of unfolding relations into power, power that produces and runs through powers: “The essence of power as manipulative power annihilates the

possibility of the truth of beings. It is itself the end of metaphysics” (“Das Wesen der Macht als Machenschaft vernichtet die Möglichkeit der Wahrheit des Seienden. Sie ist selbst das Ende der Metaphysik.”) It is the occurring of being into and as power that constitutes history as metaphysical; or, to put it differently, as long as being occurs in terms of power, there is metaphysics. Metaphysics means that being unfolds into makingness (Mache): “The essencing of this makingness is manipulative power [*Machenschaft*]: the preparing for the empowering of power and the makesomeness [or powersomeness] of all beings readied by this power and predemanded by the overpowering.”<sup>8</sup> To recognize the fluid operations of power as the intrinsic powersomeness of being, that is, as the power-oriented unfolding of what is, constitutes only the first critical step in the direction of initiating the other beginning of being in the midst of metaphysics: the unfolding of being as a relationality free from power.

The step back from the power of metaphysics dissolves the boundary between art and existence, as art becomes artlessness. Both become openness for the event of being, the originary happening. A corollary of this: the artist cannot have an intention he or she wants to get across. And another: the artwork’s coming to be is not means of expressing an emotion or of affecting an audience. Rather, the artwork is an event – a happening – which can be experienced disparately by various members of the audience. The audience, as the word says etymologically, is originarily aural, not visual. The viewer is rather the suitable title for the one experiencing a metaphysical artwork. The artwork happens at various independent points and is experienced at various independent points by the audience. Events overlap and interlace and interact without impeding each other. There is no unified meaning to be taken. In particular, the artwork does not tell a story. (We all remember, some of with profound dismay, and that intellectual phase when stories were demanded of everyone from painters to historian to politicians: the story of an identity’s coming to be was alleged to be an aspect of its be-ing.) It is consistent for Cage, the first performance or happening artist, to have moved freely beyond the bounds of music to painting, film, theatre and dance because the post-metaphysical artwork is not primarily what has been brought forth, and thus not definable in terms of a medium, but is rather the setting up of an open timeframe for an event or events. This setting up is not a presentation of something already imagined. Cage even describes the new composer as an entrepreneur:

Composer who no longer arranges sounds in a piece, simply facilitates an enterprise. Using a telephone, he locates materials, services, raises money to pay for them.

Not only music is in its element in time, but time is the fundamental dimension for art and existence sans phrase. The artist conceives a timeframe; the audience is framed within its lifetime. The artist acts within the openness of the event of being and cuts out a frame from it, clearing a space for something to happen. The artist is no longer an artist but a clearer, not in the sense of a clarifier but as someone who clears a space in the originary clearing of the openness of the revealedness of being. The frame cleared should not be thought of as a duration, which would be a linear segment of time. Instead, it should be thought of as a three-dimensional slice cut out of the originary, ecstatic time; thus, a work of art is an open frame excerpted from time. Being there as lifetime is standing out into the three ecstasies of time: future, present and foregone. *Dasein* has a past, a future and a present, to all of which *Dasein* lies exposed. In the time of the happening of a work of art, a slice of the originary time of existence draws attention, through the disparate multiplicity of events within that coming-to-presence, to this or that entity (for example, this or that sound, from this or that instrument). The listener cannot know what will happen next. Events erupt, as though at random (certainly in a fashion that cannot be brought unto a concept) into the temporal clearing the artwork has open.

Attentiveness pays heed to the more originary events drawing attention to themselves. Knowing or understanding what is going on is preceded by being open for what is going on, which presupposes only an openness for the being of the beings taken in. The being of beings is understood, which allows things to be taken in as something. The randomness of what happens happens on the foil of the schema of understanding the being of entities. This schema is part of the originary donative of being to being there (*Dasein*). The gift opens up the as of being able to perceive beings as beings, so appropriating *Dasein* for the sake of being. Within the schema, entities come and go as events, without cause and without purpose. Nothing precedes the event that would have caused it; nothing proceeds from the event that would be its purpose. There is neither efficient cause nor finality.

In *Besinnung*, Heidegger makes an emphatic statement that being (or, more precisely, what I term “be-ing”) occurs beyond power and powerlessness: “ausserhalb von Macht und Ohnmacht west das Seyn” (“being occurs beyond power and powerlessness”). Heidegger insists on the possibility of a relationality in which power does not course—a possibility toward which we need to question. Equating metaphysics with power, Heidegger introduces a crucial distinction between *Ohnmacht*, or powerlessness, and das *Machtlose* (“power-free”). Although “*machtlos*” means literally power-less (*macht-los*), Heidegger clearly distances it from powerlessness (*Ohnmacht*), from having no power. Powerlessness operates as part of the dynamic of power, and the opposition *Macht–Ohnmacht* is a metaphysical categorization of power in terms of its presence or absence. By contrast, the term “*Machtlos*” is affiliated with to *loslassen*, to releasing or letting free, and indicates a relationality that is power free, otherwise than power: “Sey– das Machtlose, jenseits von Macht und Unmacht, besser ausserseits von Macht und Unmacht, wesentlich unbezogen auf Solches,” (“Being –the powerfree, beyond power and unpower, better yet, outside of power and unpower, essentially unrelated to them,” that is, unrelated to the opposites of power and its absence (Unmacht)”).<sup>12</sup> The power-free occurs beyond the opposition between power and absence of power. It is also not a counter-power, which, like power and powerlessness, still operates within the same domain of the intensification of power. Heidegger makes it clear that being as power-free is not powerless. It has the force of letting-be that is otherwise than power, that is, the force that, as Letter on Humanism and Heidegger’s later texts on poetry and language make amply clear, has a certain ethical resonance. Taking issue with the Hobbesian idea of being as war and primary violence, Heidegger insists on the possibility of a ‘transformation’ in being into a non-violent and power-free relationality. For Heidegger, power and violence mark the erasure of the originary non-violent disposition of relations, which produces the formation of relationality into power. This power-free disposition has a broad ethical force, not unrelated to though also not identical to what Levinas articulates in the context of the face of the other as an injunction which paralyzes and undoes the very power to have power.

The other beginning does not denote the start of a new epoch, the dawn of a new power formation, but, rather, points to the breaking open, in the midst of power relations, of a power-free relationality, of a kind of a power-free margin internal to the formation of being into power. This other beginning has to ‘begin’ or break open each moment anew; it cannot be formed into a political orientation or articulated into forms of power. It can only begin being otherwise than power, to modify the well known Levinasian phrase. If being in metaphysics produces/makes itself as makesomeness (*Machsamkeit*) and, therefore, as power, then the Levinasian ‘otherwise than being’ rings a note of proximity to das *Machtlose*: the power-free occurs otherwise than power, otherwise than being (as power).

Like Emerson, Thoreau and W.C. Williams before him, Cage breaks with the European tradition; indeed Cage goes so far as to ask why we bother about tradition. Instead of being concerned about “history”, Cage’s entire thinking is oriented towards the future, not just in the

sense that it is *avant garde* rather than conservative and thus furthers what is new, but in the more fundamental sense that his music is concerned with opening up the dimension of future in time. He was never concerned with *l'art pour l'art*, with taste, pleasantness or aesthetics, but with doing "what must be done." In the article quoted, which was first published in 1959, he elaborates on a statement by Christian Wolff in an article published in 1958 characterizing the new music as "Sound come into its own." Cage comes up with profound insights into this.

Being concerned with experimental music, he asks "What is the nature of experimental action?" and replies "It is simply an action the outcome of which is not foreseen." The word "foreseen" hits the nail on the head. "Foresight" is sight to the fore, sight ahead, i.e. sight into the future. Sight into the future means one can see what is coming. The ecstasy of future in the time is transparent to foresight. "Sound come into its own" means that this transparency becomes opaque. Instead of sight into the future, attentiveness for what comes unforeseen out of the space of future is called for. Hearing then has no foresight, no forehearing, but is called on to be open for what sound comes. Inquisitiveness gains a pre-eminent status. Cage relates this most radically to indeterminacy in performing music. The composer works directly with procedures for producing sounds in a performance, "for nothing one does [as a composer] gives rise to anything that is preconceived," *i.e.*, there is no pre-existing work that is performed but instead instructions for producing indeterminately unforeseen sounds. Another precise and essential word occurs here: "preconception", the essential characteristic of *techne*, which is foresight in the form of foreknowledge. *Techne*, as Aristotle first thinks it, is a *dynamis*, a power or potential. In his metaphysics, Aristotle thinks the *dynamis* as having dominion over a change in something else. As knowledge, and more specifically, as foreknowledge, *techne* is a "point of departure having dominion over a change in something else". The carpenter who knows his or her art knows in advance how to change wood, transforming into a bed. Carpentry as an art (or *techne*) is in the first place foreknowledge or know-how, a potential as knowing how, not the actual making of the bed itself, which is actualization of the potential of know-how. The foreknowledge is the preconception on which the carpenter acts. He or she preconceives the bed that is to be made. On this basic level, this is no different from the composer preconceiving the piece to be written "to express sentiments or ideas of order." *Techne* is fundamentally foreknowledge: it is an form of understanding on which our for a change in something else and is thus control over what happens in the future. As insight into and control over the future in this broad sense, *techne* is the quintessence of controlling power. In music, the performance of the work has to measure up to what was preconceived. Cage's music, because it is indeterminate, comes to presence without preconception: there is an element of surprise at the unexpected, for the composer has opened the clearing for the unforeseen.

To allow chance a key role in a work's coming-to-be, foresight and foreknowledge must be renounced. Composition ceases to be *techne*, the control over change in beings on the basis of knowledge or preconception; it becomes, rather, an experiment, a discovery of what might come to presence in an open time. Time's openness is primary here. The future of this time is no longer transparent but opaque. Cage hinted the requirement for openness when he remarked

There are temptations for us to stop what we're doing and make a connection that will be overwhelming. Well, perhaps it is. I haven't seen yet. I've seen some. But I'm losing my ability to make connections because the ones I do make so belittle the natural complexity.

In its opaqueness it is open nevertheless, keeping possibility open. Openness here means first of all the cleared opening of time and second, receptivity on the part of listeners for what sounds

arrive from the future into the present. Openness does not mean being able to see or intuit what comes. This opaqueness means the sound resists being grasped as a concept. Heidegger has pointed out the connection between the “metaphysics of presence” (essentially, understanding truth as representation) and *techne*; Cage’s embrace of opacity is similarly anti-*techne*. Openness prevents grasping the sonic (or aural-visual) field to which one attends as an object. The elements involved in the performance of this new music are mostly uncontrolled, the composer only laying down certain parameters to stake out the time-frame. And this is what is needed historically:

For it is the space and emptiness that is finally urgently necessary at this point in history (not the sounds that happen in it - or their relationships) (not the stones - thinking of a Japanese stone garden - or their relationships but the emptiness of the sand which needs the stones anywhere in the space in order to be empty).

Primary is the emptiness of the future from which the sounds come. Music then becomes - unleashed from taste and preconceptions and expectations - surprising. With the step back, it is opened up to possibility and thus loosens up. Historically necessary is the openness for the clearing of time into which sounds burst like bubbles. Music first has to be cleared of preconceived, pre-ordered sounds, the slate wiped clean to clear the time for openness and receptivity. “Then things - sounds, that is - would come into being of themselves.” This is a matter of urgent necessity, whereas “much of modern music is no longer urgently necessary.” And Cage asks:

Why is this so necessary that sounds should be just sounds? There are many ways of saying why. One is this: In order that each sound may become the Buddha.”

Sounds, standing for things or entities in general, can become the “Buddha” if the openness of stillness is allowed to prevail. Stillness is the time in which things, including sounds, happen. Happening comes towards us out of the future. Cage proceeds from the insight that music happens in time, and that time is the most fundamental element of music. But everything happens in time; sounds are only exemplary for entities in general. “We are in time itself...” We exist in the still clearing and cleared stillness of time itself, so long as we exist. We exist towards the future, as long as we exist. Things come toward us out of the clearing of the future, mostly unforeseen. Only as long as we exist is this time with its three ecstasies open to us. Another way of saying this is to observe that we exist in the clearing of being as mortals. As mortals existing in the openness of time, everything that happens in this time “may become the Buddha”. Being there as mortals precedes, is more ordinary than having insight and foresight, since the future is essentially opaque, although open. This opacity is not a lack but is the fullness of elusive possibility, which can be experienced as such. *Techne*, including modern technology, presupposes the clearing of time in which mortals can also perhaps have foresight and know-how and be technicians in the widest sense. The foresight and control provided by technology are secondary to the richness of possibility.

The one-hundred and seventy-second text in *Indeterminacy* states “Standing in line, Max Jacob said, gives one the opportunity to practice patience. “Patience, of course is an orientation towards emptiness, the richness of reality’s dynamus. This orientation towards emptiness, of cherishing the nothingness, is a psychologically radical.

*"The subject matter of creation is chaos."*

-- Barnett Newman

I am not interested in sending messages, but in finding a way to commune with that which is most near to us (and yet most foreign) – with communion not expression.

What lies behind this world of chance is view of the world of contingency and chance. The contingency that inhabits the world, the world as itself contingent: perhaps it is that that Cage was pointing out when he said: "Here we are. Let us say Yes to our presence together in Chaos." The image of the world that Cage offers with his thinking and music and contributions to the other arts is that the world is what happens at random, at haphazard, by chance. Contingency, accidentality, randomness, haphazard, chance are words characterizing the new world we live in, the world that carries on where modernity and the modern subject left off. Cage's use of chance can be seen in Heideggerian terms as a contribution to the overcoming of metaphysics: The neo-dada movements, the writings of Eckhart and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, and his study of Zen led Cage to question Western ideals as they pertained to linearity in choice, form, logic, and meaning. Said negatively, randomness is characterized by a lack of control, "having no definite aim or purpose" (OED), being free from restraint, or positively: "made, done, occurring at haphazard, by chance" (OED). Whereas "made" and "done" still refer to an acting subject, "occur" is open to the happening of events without special agency. Cage's draft of the world implies an abstaining from restraint, a relinquishing of control over things. What is left is, said in Zen terms, nothingness, or in Heideggerian terms, the truth of the openness of being as such. Cage employs random procedures that ensure that one can never bring the aural event under a concept. Using chance in both the composition and the performance of a work obviates the possibility of apprehending the work theoretically. It lets the openness of opaqueness be. The musical work becomes in principle technically non-understandable, incomprehensible. Said positively, Cage's music lets the chaos of contingency be such. Contingency *as* contingency is let be; there is no attempt to transmute contingency into explicability by means of some chaos theory or other, as modern mathematics is wont to do. Cage's acceptance of incomprehension and opacity: that separates him from most of European counterparts (and has sometimes annoyed them, as Boulez' or Xenakis' sometimes condescending attitudes toward Cage's music shows). European composers have remained committed to the European tradition of *techne*, so regard Cage's iconoclasm as anathema. Pure aleatorics in the way Cage used it means relinquishing control, suspending comprehension and allowing sounds to happen without asking why. Cage's aleatorics are a leap into – simplicity, yes, but sometimes an unfathomable simplicity.

According to Heidegger, a lot is at stake, namely, the decision "between history or loss of history, i.e. between a belonging to be-ing or abandonment among non-entities". Abandonment would mean the "transition to the technicized animal"; history by contrast would mean "dread in the jubilation of belonging to being."

Only the most extreme decision from and about the truth of being can still produce clarity. Otherwise, the twilight of innovations and covering over will continue, or a total breakdown will occur.

In the realm of technology, the people of today - we - have been abandoned by be-ing. We have not simply forgotten to think of something but have ourselves been forgotten by be-ing in its self-concealment. For Heidegger therefore, thinking can be nothing other than preparing human essencing to be adopted by be-ing, the appropriation of human essencing to the

property of be-ing.

With the event, we leap into authentic being, into the *there* of being-there (Da-Sein), for the event founds Da-Sein. Be-ing conceals itself: however the *there* of Da-sein is the open clearing for the truth of be-ing, i.e. an opening for what is self-concealed. The leap would be the “founding of the open place of momentariness for an historical being of humankind.” Heidegger has solely the possibility of this founding in mind, which “places humankind first of all in the space for the play of the incidence and nonappearance of the advent and flight of the gods”. The decision in favour of history would make the passing by of the “last god” possible

The event, this leap into authentic being, represents a break with the tradition of metaphysics in which be-ing was only experienced as the be-ing of beings. Thinking is first consolidated in Plato and Aristotle who proceed from the entity as such and never leave it and therefore can only think be-ing as beings. Beings, entities, dominate everywhere in metaphysics, they are the arché that still rules today. The event raises us out of the sway of beings. Technology itself cannot ward off distress of Western history; but the event puts an end to what caused that distress in the first place. With the event, technology would lose its dominion as that which puts everything and holds everything, humans and things, in place.

So I begin to glimpse how to bring the forth the cinema that, twenty years ago this fall, I declared we needed. It's been arduous to try to bring it forth, but at last I am beginning to understand. And, of course, perhaps may be it is too much. Heidegger himself is by no means certain that the event will come to pass. Even though he is prophetic, he is a prophet on recall. Everything he writes on the event and the decision must be couched in the subjunctive.

Whether humankind can cope with both, to endure the chiming of the event as refusal and the performance of the transition to founding the freedom of entities as such, to the renewal of the world through saving the earth, who could decide and know that?

and

The voice of the people speaks seldom and only through few, and whether it can still be brought to resonance is uncertain.