ILLUMINATING POSTMODERN ELEMENTS

IN THE MUSIC OF JOHN CAGE

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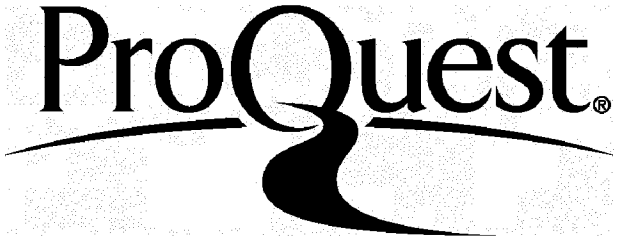

Dedicated to my parents Les and Diane, and my sister Megan, for their everlasting support and encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

While the American composer John Cage is often classified as an influential figure in the realm of modernist music, the controversial nature of Cage's work has proven to be more far-reaching than many had initially contended. Through a process of re-examining the work of Cage through a postmodern lens, this thesis rejects the notion that Cage was confined to the realm of modernism, and demonstrates that the composer not only exhibited postmodern tendencies through his ideas and concepts, but also aesthetically in his compositions. By illuminating these postmodern compositional practices and postmodern-influenced belief systems expressed by Cage as an artist, a re-interpretation of the composer and his work is carried out, while also addressing criticisms leveled toward Cage as a postmodernist. Through this contemporary re-analysis, the thesis demonstrates that Cage was a composer that transcended genres and classifications to ultimately resonate as a viable figure of postmodern music.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since its introduction in Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History,* published in 1947, the term postmodernism has gained a notorious reputation for generating countless problems for those attempting to analyze it. Despite these theoretical challenges that it has brought forth, the term has gained considerable attention and notoriety in numerous fields over recent decades through the philosophical work of those such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty. Though infiltrating some fields for many decades, the term has also been associated with a 'conceptual lag' in certain disciplines, notably demonstrating a more elusive relationship with the realm of music and the study of musicology than in other areas. Artistic fields of the humanities such as literature have seen a burgeoning of interest in postmodern thought and concepts through the extensive study of celebrated authors such as Italo Calvino, but in musicology there has not been the same level of scholarly integration, with the term receiving only passing attention, or even at times, avoidance from many scholars (Perloff 63). To some extent, such action may be justified through the overshadowing nature of modernism, but with postmodernism infiltrating so much of Western culture in recent decades, it could easily be argued that there is need for more serious scholarship in regard to postmodernism and musicology.

While a commonplace term in some disciplines, for many entering studies in musicology at the post-secondary level, the concept of "postmodernism" may not even be

addressed in their studies unless they happen to have interests of an interdisciplinary nature. For example, the term is entirely absent from the indexes of prominent music history texts used at the undergraduate university-level from noted authors such as Salzman, Gann, Hitchcock, Ewen, Tomkins, and Austin. Even the comprehensive Grout-Palisca textbook *A History of Western Music* concludes with a mere four pages in passing on the topic of postmodernism, mainly addressing the works of composers such as George Rochberg, Lukas Foss, and Luciano Berio. It is also true that scholars of postmodernism have relayed relatively minor interest in the concept of postmodern music, with a text from postmodern scholar Frederic Jameson essentially summarizing it in passing as simply "not bad to listen to" (102). While this connective absence could in part be attributed to postmodernism's relatively recent shift toward greater significance, it must be recognized that the limited amount of coverage within musicology appears to demonstrate a certain lack of critical attention towards this particular movement when discussing the avant-garde, especially when compared to the historical and conceptual juggernaut of modernism, for example.

While significant attention has been projected upon postmodernism in certain disciplines, the very term itself has often exuded divergent tendencies for each field to which it has been ascribed. With this in mind, the elements of postmodernism in one discipline may not be compatible with another, and may even at times appear contradictory. Scholars of contemporary social analysis such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari metaphorically describe the term as a type of "rhizome" (9), but perhaps the

most descriptive analogy was coined by Charles Jenks, who depicted postmodernism as "a sinuous, torturous path. Twisting to the left and then to the right, branching down the middle, it resembles the natural form of a spreading root, or a meandering river that divides, changes course, doubles back on itself and takes off in a new direction" (2). With this stated, one must also not assume the associated postmodernism of a given field to be static in nature either. There must be a certain approach taken, one that is almost organic in practice, which allows for not only growth, but also evolution; whether convergent or divergent in its pathways. Needless to say, postmodernism is often viewed as a theoretical concept of troubling intelligibility to anyone desiring a concrete, unified structure to work within. It is therefore not surprising that such profound conceptual issues have diminished its allure towards musicology for many scholars in recent decades.

When examining the life and work of John Cage, a similar situation arises. Many have written extensively on the composer's role within the avant-garde and modernism, but only a limited number of academics have ventured far enough outside of this established realm of classification to explore the rather clouded relationship of the composer to postmodernism. Throughout his lifetime, and even posthumously, Cage has also been a problematic figure within music circles, often attaining greater acceptance with visual artists than musicians (Williams 239). Within discussions of his immediate circles, such as his association with Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp, many appear to have also avoided examining whatever role Cage played (whether large

or small). This has led some in recent scholarship such as Larson to claim: "Within music and art orthodoxies, though, Cage is somewhat of a sidelined figure – an interloper, even. The 'conventional avant-garde' as we might call it, treats Cage's importance as one of those inconvenient facts that would be better off ignored" ("Five Men" 8). Such issues are also amplified when the majority of studies concerning postmodernism carried out tend to not be of a comprehensive nature, but rather limited in reach, most often exploring a very narrow aspect of the issue. Despite the limited breadth of study, some have made rather significant claims in this area such as Henry Sayre who claim that Cage (along with Rauschenberg and Cunningham) were the originators of postmodernism through a redefining of the nature of composition in the performative aspects of the *Happening* (8) which Nancy Perloff describes:

> The experimental performance or "Happening" which Cage created and staged in the dining hall at Black Mountain College placed the performers in the aisles among the audience and presented a range of simultaneous but unrelated events: John Cage on a ladder reciting either his Meister Eckhart lecture, lines from Meister Eckhart, a lecture on Zen Buddhism, the Bill of Rights, or the Declaration of Independence; Merce Cunningham dancing around the chairs; Rauschenberg standing in front of his paintings or playing scratchy Edith Piaf recordings at double speed; David Tudor playing a prepared piano and a small radio; and M.C. Richards and Charles Olson perched on a different ladder and reading

> from their poetry. No narrative unfolded. But the events witnessed by the audience were staged and could be enhanced and refined by the performers, in the course of performance. (64)

Sharing Sayre's viewpoint, Nancy Perloff also explains why this particular experimental performance was so significant:

> Cage redefined the nature of composition. Composition was not a finished, static object performed before an audience of passive listeners, but, rather, a changing acoustical experience subjective to each individual (performer and auditor) in the performance space. Since the performance action might have no beginning, middle, or end, and no discernible ordering of events, the composition as process opened the possibility for many different receptions and critiques by the audience. (64)

The philosopher Roland Barthes also agrees with this notion, adding that the usage of multiple signifiers in constant production created a stark contrast with classical music. This "new music' that he believed to have been exemplified by Cage required listeners to decipher the construction of a piece from a code. With a "shimmering of signifiers," Barthes draws comparison with the reading of a modern text: "Just as the reading of the modern text...does not consist in receiving, in knowing or in feeling this text, but in writing it anew, there is a kind of composition that requires us 'to perform' it, 'to operate' its music, to lure it (as it lends itself) into an unknown praxis" (259). For Perloff, both Sayre and Barthes arrive at the same conclusion about the performative

requirements embedded within Cage's music, which concurrently establish both its novelty and interconnected postmodernism (64).

More recently in 2013, Kay Larson arrived at a similar conclusion though through the association of Cage with Marcel Duchamp; controversially displacing Duchamp as the so-called father of postmodernism and elevating Cage to this position. For Larson, the term "post-Modern" evokes a type of "factual watershed" between what she describes as past and present: between European and American art pre-1950, and a post-1950s internationalism that includes performance art, Fluxus, Pop Art, installation art, and a host of exotic forms unimaginable in the 1940s. She contends that there is essentially a type of converging timeline chronologically between this notion of postmodernism and what she describes as Cage's "revolution in life and art circa 1951-1958 and beyond" ("Five Men" 3). For Larson, the tactics that influenced the artists whom she believes to have "began to change the world" during the 1950s were actually derived from Cage, and the revolt that allowed "post-Moderns" to shake off a century of modernism was only influenced by Duchamp to a certain extent. This line of thinking is also evidenced due to the fact that Duchamp was a very much isolated figure that did not interact with others in the same manner that Cage did. For Larson, this fact is perhaps best exemplified by George Maciunas, who claimed "Wherever John Cage went he left a little John Cage group, which some admit, some not admit [sic] his influence. But the fact is there, that these groups formed after his visits" (qtd.in "Five Men" 8). While Sayre, Barthes and Larson provide rather convincing evidence of Cage's postmodernism through singular

premises, this study aims to take a more comprehensive approach with the goal at hand to demonstrate that the composer had elements of postmodernism in a vast array of his ideologies and aesthetics, and while certain aspects were more notable than others, there was essentially no single, all-encompassing watershed moment of postmodern creation for Cage. Rather, postmodernism resonated in a multiplicity of areas pertaining to Cage's ideologies and aesthetics. Even scholars such as Williams who believe Cage took a rather significant type of "postmodernist turn" during the 1970s also admit that postmodernist elements were present in his music as far back chronologically as the 1930s, and at the same time, modernist elements still resonated in his final works of the 1990s (241) . Such information demonstrates that a chronologically-driven theory is rather problematic toward generating a full picture of this issue, and while a move away from singular events of a chronological nature toward a multi-faceted approached is undoubtedly a more complex and challenging pathway of association, it also demonstrates that Cage's postmodern tendencies were much more frequent in nature than a mere one-off occurrence that acted as a precursor to later work in this movement. Thus, with postmodernism emerging as a concept of discussion that in many aspects developed more substantively toward the end of Cage's life, there is a certain amount of reverse-theorizing that must be undertaken as such discussions would have been largely absent during much of Cage's lifetime. It is also important to note before proceeding that the following thesis does not aim to absolve or diminish Cage's connections to modernism, but instead bring into focus his evolving and transcending nature which not only reveals

his well-established place within modernism, but also illuminates ways in which the composer strongly resonates as a notable figure of postmodernism.

As previously established, the term "postmodernism" can be a rather elusive concept across disciplines, so this thesis employs a series of parameters of postmodern aesthetics within music as laid out by scholars such as Tim Woods, Donald J. Grout, and Claude Palisca. By utilizing the conceptual framework of these three scholars, I introduce a clear definition of postmodern music that will be used for the analysis of Cage's beliefs, ideologies, and aesthetic practices. These attributes of postmodern music in Woods' view often include combating the self as an expressive agent, along with a rejection of rational and scientific systems in favor of irrational, mystical, or non-rational belief systems. He also describes postmodern experimental music as expressing a contradistinction to the complex and cerebral music of serialism for a "new simplicity," coupled with a move away from highly notated, texted-based forms towards those which are more practice-based. In addition, he describes postmodernists as expressing a rejection towards linear, cumulative and teleological practices of composition (188). Similar parameters fixed upon postmodern music aesthetics were also reflected by Grout and Palisca who posited a central concept of postmodernism as "a turning away from the belief that history progresses in an irreversibly linear fashion. In music, this amounts to an abandonment of the related notion of the continuous development of musical language. To the post-modernist, history has ceased to place such demands; the styles of

all epochs and cultures are equally available as musical material, to be utilized as the composer sees fit" (782).

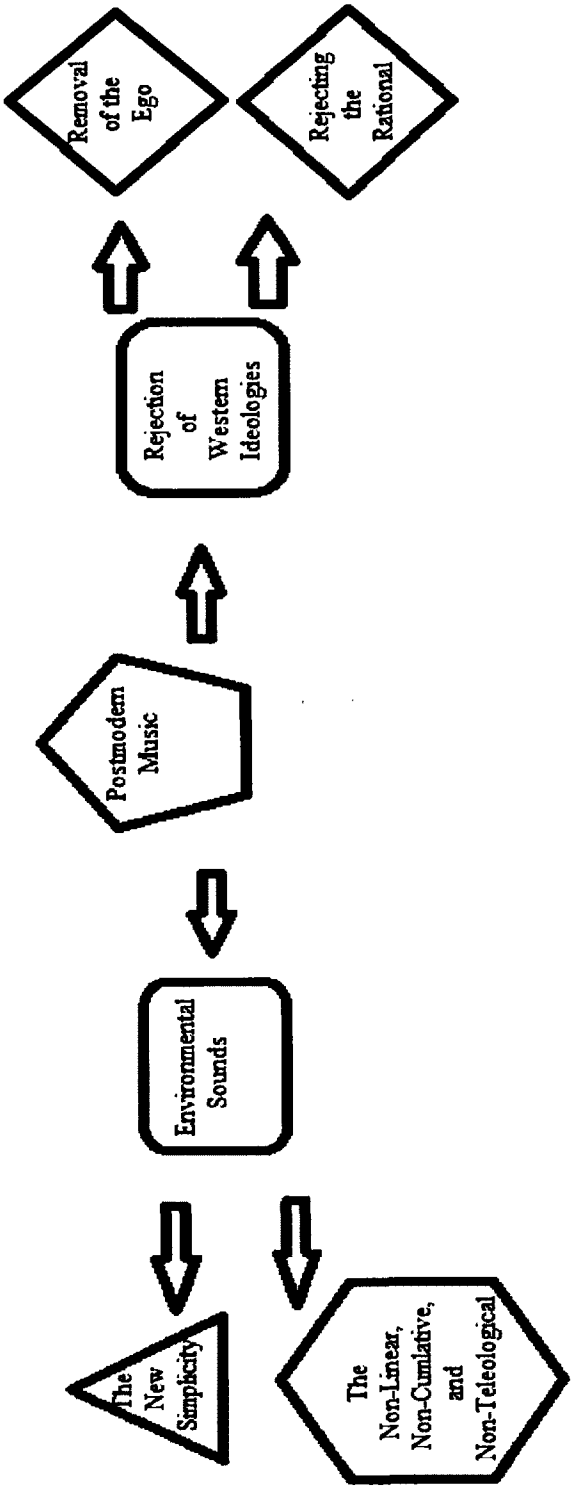

Fig. 1. Flowchart of Postmodern Music

While there has been a workable framework developed thus far, it is important to clarify certain problematic areas of postmodernist scholarship that frequently surface. Within this study, the development of postmodernism is never assumed to be a logical successor to modernism, nor a movement related by linear chronology, but rather a type of conceptual outgrowth with relative tangible elements deemed capable of examination. It is important, according to those such as Woods, to avoid totalizing systems of rigid classification when dealing with postmodernism's fragmented and fractured nature of aesthetics. Careful attention must be carried out with the recognition that postmodern knowledge is not only provisional, but also dependent upon the context of inquiry (7). When applying these factors to the study of John Cage, the intended goal is not to forge or solidify the composer's status within this framework, but rather to prove convincingly that his ideologies and aesthetics exhibit and reflect enough of these elements to illuminate his connections and ultimately his significance within this context. A certain amount of elasticity must also be exercised, and certain concepts will not only overlap throughout chapters, but also transcend to into other disciplines of postmodern practice and theory that will undoubtedly require some explanation to justify their relevance. Thus, the underlying foundation of this study will be executed through that of a loose, flexible application of postmodern aesthetics that will allow the following thesis to illustrate that Cage and his music reside within these parameters of postmodernism quite significantly.

CHAPTER 2

REJECTING WESTERN IDEOLOGIES, BELIEF SYSTEMS, AND PRACTICE-BASED FORMS

Prior to discussing the actual aesthetic processes and output of Cage, it is important to examine the composer's underlying ideologies and belief systems. While Cage is most commonly associated with the realm of modernism, he did not exist within a strict, rigid ideological realm or vacuum. Many are reluctant to address Cage from a postmodern standpoint, but at the same time, few would argue that his work did not evolve and change throughout the various decades of his life. This transcending nature causes not only the collapse, but also the dissolution of any rigid classification processes, and brings forth the need for a contemporary re-examination. With clear conceptual limitations, the practice of strict categorization can often be an arbitrary function of mere simplification exercised historically upon many composers when discussing their ideologies. The French economist of music Jacques Attali reflects upon this notion in his monograph *Noise: The political Economy of Music*, where he likens Cage to his predecessors Johann Sebastian Bach and Carl Gesualdo. Neither of these influential figures were confined to any single ideological system, and despite the immediate convenience, doing so would be a mistake (18). In Attali's view, composers such as Cage do not serve to mirror the productive relations of their era. Rather, they are merely "witnesses of the impossible imprisonment of the visionary by power, totalitarian, or otherwise" (18). Without diverging into the economic aspects of Attali's study, one can

grasp that Cage was not a static figure or one that should be viewed as a direct reflection of any socio-economic conditions of his era, but rather an individual that evolved and progressed in a multiplicity of ways within his surroundings. For Attali, one must also allow for a certain level of elasticity when examining the ideologies of those such as Cage which have been prematurely dismissed at times due to their seemingly paradoxical or contradictory nature evident in the problems surrounding 'codes': "The simultaneity of multiple codes, the variable overlappings between periods, styles, and forms, prohibits any attempt at a genealogy of music, a hierarchical archeology, or a precise ideological pinpointing of particular musicians" (19). The musicologist Richard Toop also reflects upon this notion in a very much postmodern vein, adding that when addressing Cage's output, one must recognize that not only did the outward format change, but he was also a composer constantly evolving in various pathways over nearly six decades which has also caused him to become a type of Rauschenbergian blank canvas for a whole series of special interest groups attempting to situate him within their own agendas. Toop believes that there is essentially a multiplicity of what he refers to as "John Cages," forcing those who discuss the composer to stipulate "which John Cage," or more precisely, *when* exactly they are discussing John Cage (102). Combine these issues with the fact that Cage rarely addressed others' views of his work (even critical ones), and a portrait of a very problematic figure emerges for many. On one of the few occasions that Cage did address interpretations of his work, he not only expressed what he described as "discomfort," but also a certain sense of uneasiness with what he believed to be attempts to construct a discourse that started from certain premises in order to draw conclusions

from them (Toop 102). Regardless, however, of the inherent challenges at play, due to this complex nature, the simplicity of depicting Cage as a clear-cut modernist through either ideological or aesthetic practices has a number of conceptual problems that become increasingly evident when one chooses to ignore or dismiss the examination of his evolution through a postmodern lens.

As previously mentioned, it should be understood that while aesthetics clearly play a prevalent role in the arguments of this study, the ideologies and belief systems are equally critical in establishing the composer's postmodern leanings. For Woods, aesthetics undoubtedly shape a composer's postmodernism in a fragmented nature, but the concept is primarily hinged upon the underpinning "mood" or "attitude" present that ultimately forges them. These ideological foundations are fundamental to a figure such as Cage as he frequently exhibited a certain discomfort towards Western thought in virtually all aspects of his life (Patterson 53). While certain scholars describe postmodernists as embodying a generalized antagonism toward popular culture (Born 65), Cage would ultimately sidestep much of Western ideology completely and look abroad to embrace Eastern thought and ideologies. Despite often speaking in vague tones regarding his own personal struggles, various scholars have attributed his ideological shift toward the East to factors very much embedded in numerous strands of postmodern thought when examined to form a contemporary context. While those such as Toop attribute events such as the holocaust and the bombing of Hiroshima as factors initiating Cage's move away from Western thinking (98), others such as Jonathan Katz correlate Eastern philosophy as a form of escapism for Cage which allowed him to break free from

the shackles of authoritative Western orthodox traditions such as medicine, education, and religion. For Katz, this abandonment of Western thought also allowed Cage to reconcile his sexual identity, which was also marginalized through these Western institutions (61). Musicologist Mina Yang also draws a connection here, stating that queer-identified composers such as Cage sought refuge in the philosophies of the East during times of homophobic state policies and practices in America that caused widespread alienation amongst many who resided outside of this period's perceived societal norms and practices. With this said, however, Yang contends that gay Californian experimentalists such as Cage may not have been entirely forthcoming about these connections:

> Although these composers make the connection between Asia and California in their music explicit, they are less forthcoming about the connection between their music and sexuality, not surprising given the homophobic and repressive conditions of pre-Stonewall American culture. But their silence does not refute the possibility, as Hubbs and Philip Brett assert, that composers' sexual identity—in the form of their membership in gay subcultures, reaction to their minoritized status in relation to the mainstream, and inculcation in the codes of the closet—influences and shapes their creative outlook in fundamental ways. Further, the Californians' common recourse to Orientalism in their otherwise very different experimentalist systems suggests that perhaps their interest in

> Asia, like their homosexuality and West Coast origins, provided a bond with one another that gave them the requisite fortitude to break so dramatically from accepted conventions and traditions. In an environment that tolerated and even commodified sexual and racial difference (albeit within strict limits that were constantly under negotiation), the Californian experimentalists found in their imagined Orient a rich trove of alternative and subversive ideas, hidden codes potentially meaningful to other queer sensibilities, and a colorful banner to flag their exceptionalism vis-à-vis Atlantic culture. (38)

Though near the end of his life many postmodernists would work toward alternative outlets for marginalized sexual and gender identities, Cage appears to have done so decades earlier if one is to ascribe to the views of Katz and Yang. While it is true that Cage did not speak often about such personal issues and how they related to his ideologies, he did refer to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna as* "a gift from India, which took the place of Psychoanalysis" (qtd. in *Where the Heart Beats* 125). Kay Larson has also attributed this ideological shift directly to Cage's embodiment of Zen, which she believes to have not only shaped his aesthetics significantly, but also served as an outlet to guide him through the personal struggles associated with the divorce from his wife Xenia and his emerging relationship with partner Merce Cunningham. She uses the following passage from Cage to illustrate what she believes to demonstrate the profound effect of Zen:

> I got involved in Oriental thought out of necessity. I was very disconcerted both personally and as an artist in the middle forties... I saw that all the composers were writing in different ways, that almost no one among them, nor among the listeners, could understand what I was doing... So that anything like communication as a raison d'etre for art was not possible. I determined to find other reasons, and I found those reasons because of my personal problems at the time, which brought about the divorce from Xenia... I substituted the study of Oriental thought for psychoanalysis. In other words, it was something that didn't amuse me, to grope with myself. But it was something I absolutely needed. I found that the flavor of Zen Buddhism appealed to me more than any other. (qtd. in *Where the Heart Beats* 121)

Scholars may place varying levels of importance on whether personal reasons, ideological ones, or a combination triggered Cage's deep involvement with Eastern philosophy, but regardless of whichever angle is taken, this ideological shift away from the dominant forces of the West resonates with an overarching postmodern framework quite significantly. Though establishing this connection is not a particularly daunting task, developing a concise understanding of the exact influences and their actual function in Cage's work is quite a difficult undertaking. To further cloud understanding of this complex area, certain scholars throughout Cage's lifetime ignored, or even manipulated

the extent to which Cage was involved with ideologies such as Zen, which Larson recently reflected upon:

> Zen is so opaque and strange, if approached by a mind conditioned by the Judeo-Christian worldview, that until recently Cage's passion for Zen was disturbing and/or mystifying to his commentators. The art world has maintained studied ignorance. Even though Cage explicitly said, for instance, that Suzuki's Zen teachings led him to create *Theater Piece No. 1*, the first *Happening*, at Black Mountain College in August 1952, I have seen art historians delete Suzuki's name from the interviews in which Cage talks about it. And what happens when Cage's work is put in an art museum? Or a concert hall? The boundaries between arts are constructed out of assumptions that are almost impossible to destroy. ("Five Men" 15)

When such practices are understood alongside with the fact that Cage was also known for laying what has been described as "false trails' ("Five Men" 15), any attempt to develop an accurate picture of this area of Cage's life is a formidable task. Those who have attempted to address this problem such as David W. Patterson (through his influential paper "Cage and Asia: History and Sources") believe that Cage's association with Eastern thought was essentially a type of evolution with early roots actually taking grasp in South Asian philosophy and then ultimately the more readily apparent Eastern Zen influences. It is important to note that Cage's relationship with the East is largely philosophical. Though he took hold of selected ideologies, his compositions, however

experimental, were still relatively Western in context. His actual aesthetics were not so much Eastern in the same musical sense as those readily apparent in the works of his mentor Henry Cowell, or even contemporaries such as Lou Harrison, Colin McPhee, or Henry Partch. The intertwined nature of Cage's philosophies and aesthetics also highlight a conceptual challenge when one attempts to separate any of these elements. To even further complicate this matter, there also appears to be significant influences that Cage may not have credited with the same weight as his much revered figure, D.T. Suzuki. For example, Patterson draws significant correlations between Cage and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, and while Cage invokes elements of Indian traditions in his first orchestral score *The Seasons* (1947), and even cited the "permanent emotions" of the Indian tradition in *Sixteen Dances* (1950-1951), it should also be understood that his incorporation of non-Western aesthetics such as the rasas and their seasons did not reflect any particular transferred authenticity from their original compositional structures.

It is interesting to examine the evolution of Cage's Eastern ideology phases as it appears that certain areas took somewhat considerable durations to ignite ideologically. For example, Cage was actually exposed to the *I Ching* text during the 1930s by Lou Harrison, and also attended a lecture by Nancy Wilson Ross titled "Zen Buddhism and Dada" at the Cornish School, but despite these experiences, it was not until during the Second World War that much of Cage's attention would shift from South Asian to East Asian philosophies. Much of this rather sudden evolution could be attributed to his boarding tenure with the mythologist Joseph Campbell, who not only introduced him to medieval Christian mysticism, but also Coormaraswamy's 1934 publication titled *The*

Transformation of Nature in Art. Cage would first reference Coomaraswamy in his 1946 article titled "The East in the West," which cited the philosopher to support correlations proposed between Western Medieval music and Asia. For those such as Patterson, this signaled a type of fundamental shift in new creative thought for the composer. But with this said, however, though Cage cited Coomaraswamy initially, he did not continue to do so in the same context as his new emerging interests took force.

Certain concepts of Coomaraswamy such as "impersonality" appear to resonate with obvious correlations to Cage's processes, especially in relation to proper artistic practice, and the philosopher's statement denouncing "aesthetic exhibitionism" that appears almost precursory to themes that would later dominate Cage's work for decades to follow:

> As to the Indian drama, the theme is exhibited by means of gestures, speech, costume, and natural adaptation of the actor for the part; and of these four, the first three are highly conventional in any sense, while with regard to the fourth not only is the appearance of the actor formally modified by make-up or even a mark, but Indian treatises constantly emphasize that the actor should not be carried away by the emotions he represents, but should rather be the ever-conscious master of the puppet show performed by his own body on stage. The exhibition of his own emotions would not be art. (Coomaraswamy 14)

Like Coomaraswamy, Cage would also become a proponent of merging art and life together in a manner similar to the philosopher's critique of the post-Renaissance definition of artistic practice when he claimed "all alike have lost, in that art being now a luxury, no longer the normal type of activity, all men are compelled to live in squalor and disorder and have become so inured to this that they are unaware of it" (qtd. in Patterson 65).

Coomaraswamy may not be credited greatly towards Cage's emerging philosophical thought during this period, but it seems quite hard to dismiss these very much converging strands of thought as mere coincidence. For Patterson, Cage's adoption of Coomaraswamy is nothing short of categorical, and many of Cage's statements bring such relationships into clear focus: "Art's obscured the difference between art and life. Now let life obscure the difference between life and art" (*A Year from Monday* 16). Through these applications of Cage, one could describe a type of postmodern repackaging of Coomaraswamy's ideologies at hand that utilizes them within a context of contemporary music, and this usage was probably selective due to certain ideological differences that would have been very much irreconcilable between these two thinkers. For example, with Coomaraswamy's distain for modernist art and his efforts to place it within the processes of communication, there would undoubtedly be a notable divergence with Cage, especially due to Coomaraswamy's efforts to consolidate communication with tradition; a most objectionable concept for Cage. Despite the fact that Coomaraswamy's oppositional stances toward artistic processes were never responded to directly by Cage,

Patterson still contends that he was not only aware of them, but also addressed them through his criticisms of tradition; a concept that would emerge as very much the antithesis of Cage's philosophic and aesthetic processes.

Perhaps the second most important figure of South Asian philosophy for Cage was Sri Ramakrishna, whose work was introduced to Cage by Sarabhai Mayor, a young woman from India who would form a highly engaging influential cultural exchange with Cage during her six month visit to the United States in 1946 (*Where the Heart Beats* 125). For Cage, the late nineteenth and early twenty century philosophies of Indian mysticism from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* would prove very much complementary to his own views on the role of an artist, and his meetings with Mayor would serve to further his efforts against the self-expressive functions as an artist. According to Sarabhai, both Cage and herself believed that music was to integrate and center one's personality or being, to bring it to a state of repose or tranquility and that communication, as understood in the west, is not its prime function (Patterson 49).

Cage would echo these sentiments when he would add:

> We learned from Oriental thought that those divine influences are, in fact, the environment in which we are. A sober and quiet mind is one in which the ego does not obstruct the fluency of the things that come in through the sense and up through our dreams. Our business in living is to become fluent with the life we are living, and art can help this. (qtd. in Kostelanetz 77)

The philosophical ideologies of Coomaraswamy and Ramakrishna were without a doubt heavily influential to Cage's development, but in a way one might describe as being rooted in a more spiritual or transcendental sense than one of aesthetic nature. There is a very strong probability that the South Asian influence of Ramakrishna exerted a far more significant influence upon Cage than earlier scholars or biographers had contended from the rather significant points of mention that have attained more attention in recent years.

To this point, this discussion of Eastern influence upon Cage has been very much ideological and philosophical. This is not to say that the South Asian influences upon Cage were superficial in any sense, but their aesthetic effects upon his compositional output were relatively minor in comparison to the profound personal weight they appear to have exerted. It would be during the following decade of the 1950s that Cage would make drastic aesthetic leaps though East Asian aesthetics that initiated his most significant stylistic shifts in artistic output as a modernist, and as argued here, a postmodernist composer. Patterson cites three compositions of this period which define what he believes to be the third, and final stage of evolution Cage derived from Eastern ideologies. These works are *Music of Changes* from 1951, the famed *4'33"* premiered by David Tudor in 1952, along with the multi-media work known as *Black Mountain Piece* also premiered the same year. Being very much conceptual cousins to the preceding influences of Coomaraswamy and Ramakrishna, the proceeding East Asian philosophies harnessed would provide the grounds for a type of natural evolution artistically, as well as inspiration for Cage's burgeoning aesthetic practices of this period.

One could contend that it was entirely possible that Cage was concurrently involved with East Asian philosophy during his intensive tenure with South Asian philosophy throughout the 1940s, but the first overt mention of their influence would not surface until his 1949 essay "Forerunners of Modern Music" and around the same time, his infamous "Lecture on Nothing" (both published in *Silence).* These two works of Cage mark a rather interesting point in his development; one that demonstrates notable conceptual leaps rather significantly in a matter of mere months. To demonstrate this phenomenon, "Forerunners of Modern Music" embodied the previously discussed influences of both South Asian philosophy and Christian mysticism through the explanation of music and art entailing the conciliation of dualities, reflecting the past decade's move towards more spirituality-based concepts from Ramakrishna and Coomaraswamy. This influence was expressed by Cage when he stated "Music is edifying for from time to time it sets the soul in operation. The soul is the gatherer-together of the disparate elements (Meister Eckhart), and its work fill one with peace and love" (*Silence* 62), but the proceeding *Lecture on Nothing* would illuminate a stark shift towards the explicit applications of East Asian influences. Here, Cage begins with a paradoxical remark "I am here and there is nothing to say" (*Silence* 109). This notion of paradox is what Patterson contends to be the emergence of a new phase of Cage as an artist. The use of paradox would form an integral part of Cage's rhetorical strategy that would also reflect his burgeoning interest in the philosophies of East Asia, and these applications of the paradox are also very relevant to Cage's association with

postmodernism, with those such as Alastair Williams stating that the composer's appetite for unresolved paradoxes is perhaps his most consistent attitude of this realm (227).

For this third phase of Cage's Eastern development, the rhetorical applications of the paradox would provide deep insight into his rather complex relationship developing with Buddhism, and particularly Zen methodologies of teaching. Like Cage's appropriations of South Asian philosophies, his adaptations of those from East Asia were not conducted comprehensively, nor necessarily in a fashion to preserve the integrity of the original ideologies in any rigid sense. Instead, Cage practiced a type of selective borrowing that was very much suited and tailored to his particular uses; a methodology to emerge amongst many postmodern artists to follow. Despite his selective usage, this relationship is crucially important to understanding Cage, and should not be dismissed or devalued in any manner. With this mentioned, however, information pertaining to early East Asian influences is rather elusive (partly due to Cage selling much of his library during difficult financial times in the 1950s). Still, there are definite instances of him explicitly citing Buddhist and Taoist works such as Huang Po's *Doctrine of the Universal Mind*, and various writings of Kwang-tse such as in his 1955 essay titled "Experimental Music: Doctrine." Cage was also well-acquainted with much of the work translated by Reginald Blyth such as his publications of *Haiku* and *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*. His borrowing can be witnessed in various instances where he appears to meld stories, teachings, or antidotes with his own writings, such as his fusing of a biography of the Buddha with his own:

> But no ivory tower exists, for there is no possibility of keeping the Prince forever within the Palace Walls. He will, willy, nilly, one day get out and seeing that there are sickness and death (tittering and talking) become the Buddha. Besides at my house, you hear the boat sounds, the traffic sounds, the neighbors quarreling, the children playing and screaming in the hall, and on top of it all the pedals of the piano squeak. There is no getting away from life. (*Silence* 135)

While not all his references of borrowings were conducted in a direct fashion, he does identify inspirations from works such as Huang Po's *Doctrine of the Universal Mind* through his Manifesto, from which he appears to have acquired the rhetorical concept of "accomplishing nothing." According to Patterson, Cage not only borrowed individual rhetorical figures from Huang Po for his 1955 *Experimental Music: Doctrine* essay, but also openly copied the formal substructures, parodying its master-student question-and-answer (mondo in Zen) sections (56).

Though often overlooked, Cage's associations with Taoism must also be recognized. Explicit references to Kwang-tse are perhaps best exemplified through the frequent mention of "chaos," a term scholars consider to be very much analogous to Coomaraswamy's notion of a primordial Ultimate Reality. For Cage, this notion of chaos served as a mechanism of not only dynamics, but also a function of usage to enact against purposeful action and intention. By coupling this device with the notion of

"purposelessness" from Huang Po, Cage arrived at a definition of music that would resonate throughout his work for decades to come:

> 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 a paradox: a purposeful purposelessness or 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 its way and lets it act of its own accord. (*Silence* 12)

It is not surprising that Cage would identify heavily with the published works of Reginald Horace Blyth. With their similar thematic material reflecting the previously studied works of Coomaraswamy, they would further the various notions of East Asian poetry and philosophy with elements of Western literary sources from a vast timespan ranging from the late Renaissance to nineteenth-century themes of transcendentalism. Patterson cites the first explicit acknowledgement of East Asian sources to have occurred in Cage's 1950 apologia of Satie through a reference to Beethoven:

> If we glance at R.H. Blyth's book on Haiku (the Japanese poetic structure of five, seven, and five syllables), we read: Haiku thus makes the greatest demand upon our internal poverty. Shakespeare (cf. Beethoven) pours out his universal soul, and we are abased before his omnipresence and

> overflowing power. Haiku require of us that our soul should find its own infinity within the limits of some finite thing. (qtd. in Kostelanetz 89)

Cage would also make frequent citation of Blyth's *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*: "No matter how rigorously controlled or conventional the structure, method, and materials of a composition are, that composition will come to life if the form is not controlled but free and original. One may cite examples of the Sonnets of Shakespeare and the haikus of Basho" (*Silence* 35).

For Cage, his burgeoning interests in the East were also aligned in a manner that allowed for maximum fruition. Shortly after the "Lecture on Nothing" began to receive attention, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki would arrive in New York City to deliver a series of lectures, transforming his philosophical reach from relatively esoteric American circles to what critics would describe as a "full-blown New York fad" (Patterson 53). This new accessibility also gave Cage the opportunity to attend Suzuki's Columbia University lectures, though it should be understood that while he did in fact have first-hand contact with Suzuki, and even visited him in Japan, the exact records and details of Cage's attendance at the Columbia lectures remain somewhat elusive, and at times even contradictory. This makes a clear, comprehensive understanding of Cage's exact relationship with Suzuki's pedagogy from this period near impossible to construct without many underlying questions of accuracy. Additionally, even after completing his extensive study on Cage and the East, Patterson stated that much of the information

attained regarding Cage and Suzuki is highly speculative, and drawn from relatively anecdotal statements from the composer such as the following example:

> There was an international conference of philosophers in Hawaii on the subject of reality. For three days Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki said nothing. Finally the chairman turned to him and asked, "Dr. Suzuki, would you say this table around which we are sitting is real?" Suzuki nodded his head and said Yes. The chairman asked in what sense Suzuki thought the table was real. Suzuki said, "In every sense." (*A Year from Monday* 35)

Perhaps the greatest (and most safely identifiable) influence of Suzuki upon Cage was the actual pedagogical teachings of *Zen*, which in the most general sense he described as "in opposition to the Western rational way of thinking, an irrational, non-rational way of thinking." Cage most effectively summarized his evolution of thought when he described the Eastern influences upon his works:

> The early ones could have been considered expressive. It sometimes seemed to me that I managed to 'say' something in them. When I discovered India, what I was saying started to change. And when I discovered China and Japan, I changed the very fact of saying anything: I said nothing anymore. Silence: since everything already communicates, why wish to communicate?... The silences speak for me, they demonstrate that I am no longer there... They say nothing. Or, if you prefer, they are beginning to speak nothingness! (qtd. in *Where the Heart Beats* 268)

It should be understood that though this Eastern influence upon Cage was without a doubt significant to his development on virtually all levels, it is important to note that his applications may not have carried the original philosophies as they were intended by their proponents. Like Coomaraswamy, Suzuki was one not to wholeheartedly embrace the rather postmodernist manner in which Eastern philosophies were being adapted and integrated into the artistic mediums of various Western twentieth century movements. It appears that Suzuki's most overt criticisms appear to have been leveled toward the "Beat" authors whom he described as not yet tapping the headspring of creativity, and at the same time, claiming they "have not quite passed through their experiences of humiliation, and affliction, and may I add, revelation" (452). In his article titled "Zen in the Modern world," Suzuki also stated his feelings towards a general misrepresentation of Zen's integration into the contemporary culture of the United States:

> Zen is at present evoking unexpected echoes in various fields of Western culture: music, painting, literature, semantics, religious philosophy, and psychoanalysis. But as it is in many cases grossly misrepresented or misinterpreted, I undertake here to explain most briefly, as far as language permits, what Zen aims at and what significance it has in the modern world, hoping that Zen will be saved from being too absurdly caricatured. (452)

It is not only challenging to assess Suzuki's exact feelings towards Cage's Zen applications, but it is also incredibly difficult to construct any clear understanding of

Cage's personal relationship with Zen without stepping into rather subjective grounds of inquiry. Some have recently attempted to do so such as Larson, who placed Zen into a much more personal realm for Cage, and connected Zen ideology not only in the sense that Patterson described, but in various aspects of Cage's day-today life through various interpretations. For Larson, there was a type of personal evolution from Cage's contact with Zen that began with his discovery of Erik Satie's scores in Paris during 1949, which was "the beginning of the change" that altered Cage's attitude toward life, art, and music ("Five Men" 15). This apparently allowed for Suzuki's transformative ideologies to take hold the following year, as she proclaims:

> Suzuki's words propelled the "changed attitude" into new dimensions, by pointing to Buddhist mind-training practices such as "living with interior mobility," a meditative concentration that reduces one's mental clinging and grasping by learning how to tame the violent emotions. The outcome is bliss, or as Cage says, "enjoyment in the midst of countlessness," in parallel with "accomplishing nothing, as though nothing had happened." When "nothing happens," the human mind is freed from self-obsession and able to be present for the parade of being that passes by and through us at all moments. Cage himself recognized that he is on a journey through "countlessness" and he trained himself to live "as though a tourist always." But these are spiritual conclusions, existing in an uneasy accord with the materiality of connoisseurship. ("Five Men" 15)

With Larson's personal background and knowledge related to the practice of Zen, she appears to depict a more substantial connection between Cage and Zen than most scholars previously contended. She also uses this association to proclaim Cage as a leader through his inspirational way of "seeing the larger picture, the cosmic frame that encompasses our lives, and living within it 'as a tourist always'" ("Five Men" 15). She generates a strong intersection between Zen Buddhism and postmodernism, and also uses its associations with chance to essentially place Cage as the forerunner of this aesthetic ideology:

> Bare attention, in which the mind observes the world without judgment – awareness uninterrupted by the narratives we humans create to make ourselves feel better – is the construct that informs the postmodern gaze. Actions are now art irrespective of interpretation. Electronic and other mediums are mixed willy-nilly. Performative interventions are universal in all kinds of aesthetic experiences. A deliberate gesamy-kunst sensibility has made it commonplace, now, to regard every component of a staging – movement, sets, costumes, music, and so on – as of equal importance, and none more important than any other, as Cage repeatedly said. Indeterminacy – a fundamental principal of Buddhism – is both a Cagean factor in art – creation and a trope for recognizing the non-duality of art and life. Cage's response: What gap? (Cage thought Rauschenberg was being a little dualistic; a little "Roman Catholic.") None of these new

> modes originated with Duchamp. The sole exception – chance – is a minor aspect in Duchamp's work, but a major one in Cage's... Cage changed his life; Duchamp took up chess. Cage exported his performative vision around the world; Duchamp closed the door to his secret studio. Cage sang the praises of chance operations – of "going nowhere" and "accomplishing nothing, as though nothing happened. ("Five Men" 18)

Such accounts are nonetheless impressive, but must also be carefully tempered due to their capacity toward subjectivity. East Asian philosophy is a rather difficult area to develop a concrete stance upon as Cage was never formally associated with any official communities of Zen, but clearly had some level of involvement with the ideology. Certain stories and accounts from Cage also tend to illustrate his rather selective borrowings and applications of ideologies. In particular, his response when questioned about the symbolism related to the death of Buddha from eating a mushroom:

> I explained that I had never been interested in symbolism, that I preferred taking things just as themselves, not as standing for other things. But a few days later when rambling in the woods I got to thinking. I recalled the Indian concept of the relation of life and the seasons. Spring is Creation, Summer is Preservation, Fall is Destruction, Winter is Quiescence. Mushrooms grow most vigorously in the Fall, the period of destruction, and the function of many of them is to bring about the final decay of rotting material. In fact, as I had read somewhere, the world would be an

> impassable heap of old rubbish were it not for mushrooms and their capacity to get rid of it. So I wrote the lady in Philadelphia. I said, "The function of mushrooms is to rid the world of old rubbish. The Buddha died a natural death. (*Silence* 85)

Clearly, such a response places Cage outside of the realm of what one might describe as a devout or fundamentalist practitioner of Buddhism, but it also demonstrates his selective, multifaceted approach exercised upon ideologies. Here, he generates a response from South Asian philosophy, and while some might debate the seriousness of such a comment, it demonstrates that within a single given context, Cage paradoxically embraces both Zen and mushrooms, and responds to this apparent problematic relationship with prose from another unrelated stream of philosophical thought. With such information brought into focus for this particular study, the importance of Cage and Eastern philosophy lies primarily in the associations and applications established. Whether Cage was involved with Zen at the same level personally that Larson contends, or more so on the surface level as Patterson believes (an intermediate level is most probable), the mere associations easily provide sufficient grounds for establishing the postmodern nature of Cage in this area. One might draw a similar comparison to Cage's relationship with Marcel Duchamp. Rather than immersing himself in the workings and processes of Duchamp's work as an artist and attempting to understand it, Cage preferred to simply enjoy what he readily attained from his relationship with Duchamp:

> Many people approach Marcel's work as though it was a puzzle to be solved, and reasons to be found for doing what he did. This attitude has never appealed to me. What appealed to me far more were the correspondences that I saw which I've written about, between him and what I learned from Oriental Philosophy... But what interested me more than anything was just being with him and noticing, insofar as I could pay attention, how he lived. (qtd. in Cummings 33)

Similar to his association with Duchamp, Cage's associations with Eastern philosophy were very much self-directed and generated without significant concern for the functional or operational background that many would inquire so heavily into. The constructions behind Duchamp or "inner-workings" as an artist were of little interest to Cage, and one could argue that the same was true if one attempted to ascribe any fundamentalist sense to Cage's applications of Eastern philosophy. Simply put, his subscriptions were both selective and independent, and not necessarily straight-forward.

Similar issues arise when examining constructions of identity, a complex area for Cage. Such applications often borrowed aesthetics of a cultural sense that could be somewhat confusing as with the 1992 work *Roaratorio. An Irish Circus on "Finnegans Wake."* This particular work was neither about Joyce, nor an interpretation of him, but rather a presentation of him. Though the work makes specific use of Irish-American identity, Cage's procedures also work against any concrete modes of interpretation, leading those such as Williams to claim that through a novelty-driven recreation of Joyce,

Cage also evokes sustenance from romantic perceptions of Ireland, while also bringing the audience or listener into a politics of identity (239).

Certain scholars such as Georgina Born also depict Cage as a type of leading figure among what she coins as the West Coast experimentalists that she posits against what she describes as the East Coast postserialists led by Milton Babbitt. She contends that through their West Coast association, these "Cagean postmoderns" were also influenced heavily by Eastern cultural elements, displacing ideologies of influences shared amongst the postserialists who were embedded within the modernist circle's desire to retain Europe as a model for compositional influence:

> Placing the two traditions geographically and socioeconomically, the split between the postserialists and experimentalists was also one between the East and West Coasts of the United States, with Babbitt and followers based in the East, Cage and followers in the West. The Cagean postmoderns were thus susceptible to the Pacific and oriental cultural sympathies of the American West Coast and to the influence of Californian rock music in the '60s, while the East Coasters looked toward and identified with Europe, birthplace of the modernist avant-garde. And institutionary, they had different bases. Rather than seek tenured professorships in the WASP universities, experimental composers taught in liberal arts colleges, untenured, or performed for a living. Experimentalists often depended on their close associations with the visual

> arts, with dance or film and their subsidizing circuits, thereby gaining support from galleries, museums, and art centers. (62)

Born also describes this division as very much reactionary, especially through the efforts of Cage to disrupt the postserialists place as *the* music of the United States (62). For the many modernists that viewed the outgrowth of serialism as the logical historical successor in the American musical landscape, one might place Cage within the confines of Grout and Palisca's view of postmodernism through his efforts to rupture any perceived chronological progression or continuity of musical language in this realm.

These Eastern ideological influences upon Cage would also evolve and resonate significantly. As later chapters will discuss, scholars such as Nikolaus Bacht and Matthew Mendez have proposed significant points of intersection with the emerging postmodern thought of Jean-François Lyotard. Though Bacht states that the significance of Eastern thought (along with medieval mysticism) was ignored entirely by Lyotard (235), in 2013 Matthew Mendez described a certain level of interest during the postmodern philosopher's "Cage phase":

> we should observe that Lyotard's engagement with Eastern thought also reached its apogee during the 1980s. Characteristically, Lyotard's interest in Buddhism and Taoism lay with what he saw as their respect for events as irreducibly singular, ephemeral occurrences or haeccities. In this sense, his fascination with non-Occidental thought was consistent with the "Cage phase": eschewing the energetic dimension of the earlier analyses, the

> primary thrust of approaching sensible phenomena without them becoming objects for knowledge remains intact. Lyotard had a particular affinity with the Zen monk Dōgen's noncognitive approach to aesthesis, his refusal to "emancipate mind from the sensible." (179)

This is not to say that Lyotard was not without reservations regarding Cage's applications of Zen, especially when he described the potential for "extreme nihilism lurking in Buddhism" (qtd. in Mendez 178), but as the proceeding chapters will demonstrate, the significant amount of influence Cage exerted upon Lyotard was not entirely void of these Eastern elements..

To conclude this area of discussion, it should be understood that Cage's ideological applications were without a doubt not wholesale, and the outcome aesthetically resonated through means which were most often both unpredictable and unorthodox. As the next chapter will demonstrate, the evolution of influence from Eastern philosophy would significantly shape Cage's aleatoric methods through his extensive use of the *I Ching (Book of Changes)* text that would reflect a most important shift in his work for decades to follow (Refer to fig. 2 on the proceeding page for timeline of Cage's philosophical changes discussed in this chapter).

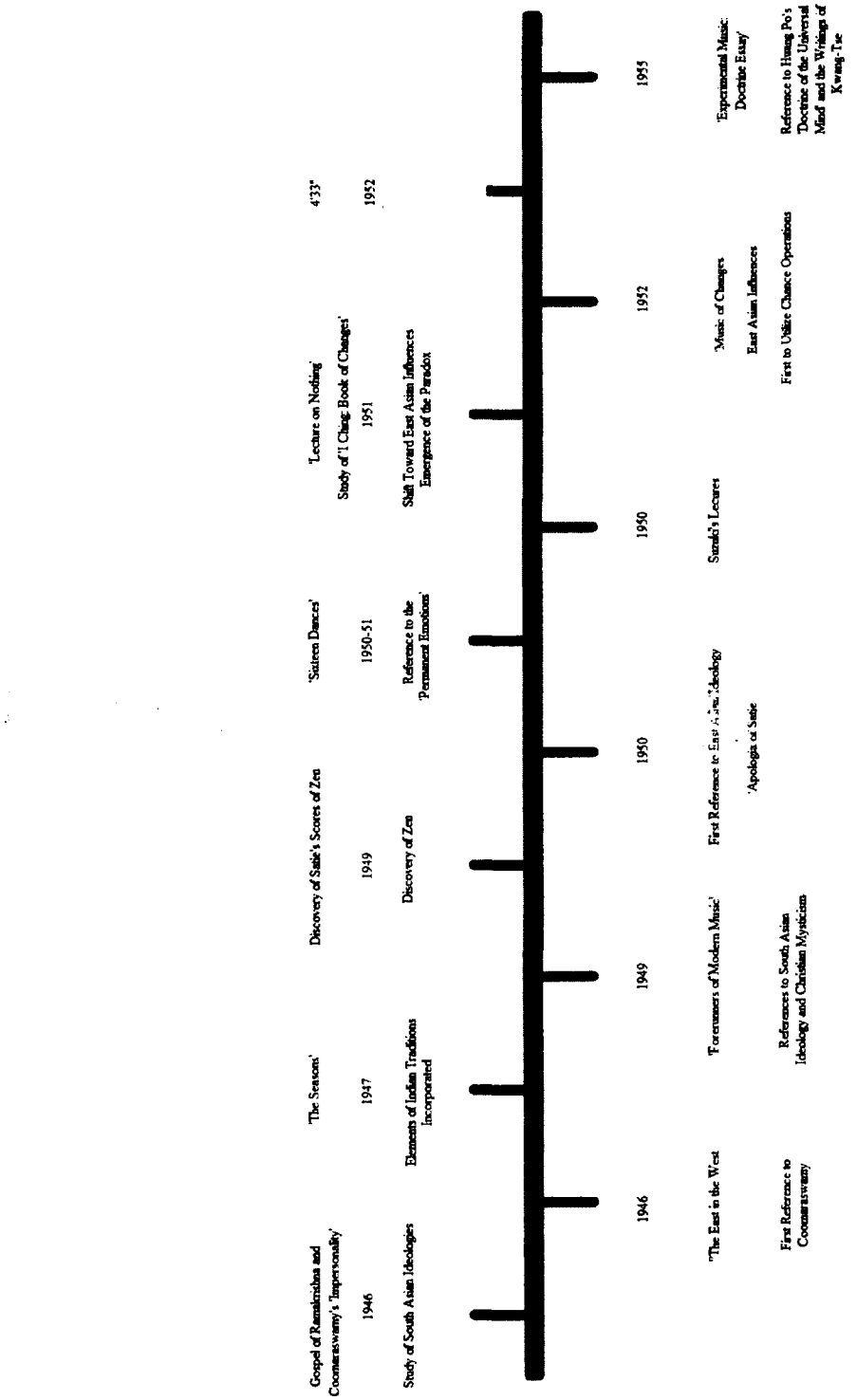

Fig. 2. Timeline of Philosophical Changes

CHAPTER 3

THE REMOVAL OF THE EGO

The concept of the ego or self has long been an area of preoccupation, not only among artists, but also with philosophers, psychologists, and those of numerous other disciplines. The concept of removing the ego or self from any capacity of existence has always been a controversial topic with psychologists such as Julian Jaynes creating tremendous controversy during the 1970s by the mere suggestion that humans once existed without an ego or self in the stream of metaconsciousness readily known throughout modern history (8). Within the realm of modernism, the self is a dominant factor, reaching extensively into virtually all matrixes of existence as Jameson so eloquently summarized:

> The great modernisms were... predicated on the invention of a personal, private style, as unmistakable as your fingerprint, as incomparable as your body. But this means that the modernist aesthetic is in some way organically linked to the conception of a unique self and private identity, a unique personality and individuality, which can be expected to generate its own unique vision of the world and to forge its own unique, unmistakable style. (114)

For postmodernists, however, this notion of self is displaced, and artistic expression has taken a new route, one that avoids such long-entrenched valuations as Woods proclaims:

> Postmodernism on the other hand describes the broad aesthetic and intellectual projects of our society, on the plane of theory. Thus, for instance, people refer to minimalist art which combats notions of art as ego-centered self-expressions of the 'inner self,' or to literary works which take pleasure in 'playing' with language for its own sake rather than with a moralistic or realistic purpose. Or they refer to poststructuralist philosophy's claim that ideas which maintain that these are centers of truth which escape or stand outside the logic of language are merely convenient or ideologically motivated illusions – all of these might be referred to as postmodernism. (10)

Despite such widespread reluctance of many to entertain the concept of sidestepping these cognitive processes that have been said to shape the human condition and its greatest accomplishments, few issues appear to have preoccupied Cage throughout his lifetime with the same weight and fortitude as the concept of removing the ego or self from aesthetic expression. Prior to exploring this topic, it should be noted that such an effort was shaped largely from an outgrowth of his associations with the Eastern philosophies discussed in the previous chapter, but this particular aspect of Cage's work evolved to such a significant point in itself that its relation to postmodernism in this study

has a separate dedicated section. This form of personal evolution is often told as having been initiated by the processes derived from the *I Ching (Book of Changes)*, but this lifelong obsession dedicated to absolving one's role in aesthetic output could be said to be actually much more far-reaching than enacting mere randomization procedures toward composition. Even prior to Cage's usage, this particular text penetrated many disciplines and areas of human activity, with those such as Carl Jung finding utility in its applications, and even writing the foreword to one of the popular English translation editions:

> For more than thirty years I have interested myself in this oracle technique, or method of exploring the unconscious, for it has seemed to me of uncommon significance. I was already fairly familiar with the *I Ching* when I first met Wilhelm in the early nineteen twenties; he confirmed for me then what I already knew, and taught me many things more. (qtd. in Wilhelm xxii)

As a pioneer of analytical psychology, Jung was fascinated by the I *Ching's* relevance towards the act of generating answers and decisions, often embedded with what he would refer to as synchronicity:

> A certain curious principle that I have termed synchronicity, a concept that formulates a point of view diametrically opposed to that of causality. Since the latter is a merely statistical truth and not absolute, it is a sort of working hypothesis of how events evolve one out of another, whereas

> synchronicity takes the coincidence of events in space and time as meaning something more than mere chance. (qtd. in Wilhelm xxii)

One of the most cited examples of Jung's application of the *I Ching* was a situation in which he utilized its oracle for a psychotherapy patient he was treating. For the patient stricken with ambivalent feelings toward to a woman he desired, Jung utilized the *I Ching*, and the attained response was *Hexagram #44*, entitled *Coming to Meet*, which stated: "One should not marry such a maiden" (Aziz 147).

With influential thinkers of innovation such as Jung being fascinated by the methods that the *I Ching* had in relation to an individual's psyche and experiences, one may contend that such a text had much more substantial uses and applications than the mere processes of randomized chance sometimes prevalent in the more simplified explanations leveled toward Cage. Though he would use the text through different applications from Jung, Cage would become even more preoccupied with how to use the book in his day-to-day life as an artist. Like Jung, he also believed this text to be invaluable toward generating answers, but as noted when he described chance procedures in relation to Thoreau's *Walden*, Cage also leveraged such applications to free the ego:

> The fifth paragraph of *Walden* speaks against blind obedience to a blundering oracle. However, chance operations are not mysterious sources of 'the right answers.' They are a means of locating a single one among a multiplicity of answers, and, at the same time, of freeing the ego from its

> taste and memory, its concern for profit and power, of silencing the ego so that the rest of the world has a chance to enter into the ego's own experience... Rome, Britain, Hitler's Germany. Those were not chance operations. We would do well to give up the notion that we alone can keep the world in line, that only we can solve its problems. More than anything else we need communion with everyone. Struggles for power have nothing to do with communion. Communion extends beyond borders: it is with one's enemies also. Thoreau said: "The best communion men [sic] have is in silence." (*Empty Words* 5)

For Cage, the *I Ching* and its chance procedures initiated concepts which had deep ideological roots that when reexamined, appear to resonate in a number of postmodern tenets largely yet to be to br discussed during his lifetime. While the previous section of this study dealt largely with the significance of strands of philosophical thought from South and East Asia, this section will reflect upon how Cage not only removed the ego, but also how this notion intersects significantly with postmodern ideologies and concepts. While undoubtedly overlapping with themes from the previous chapter, this area of discussion centering around the *I Ching* text includes greater focus revolving around actual aesthetic processes, and is therefore a separate section from the previous segment on non-Western thought.

Prior to discussing this aspect of Cage, it should be understood that throughout his career, Cage embodied an ideology and attitude towards the art of musical composition

that was quite foreign to those who were pivotal figures of the previous generations, but this particular aspect of actually removing one's ego was perhaps the most groundbreaking. Before Cage, the social status of the composer evolved from the servant of nobility to the elevated status of creative genius, but the composer's basic function essentially remained the same from the days of emerging polyphony to the most well-known composers of the early twentieth century. The composer was viewed as the creator who used his intellectual and creative faculties to generate compositional works of high artistic value. Cage, however, essentially desired to minimalize or absolve entirely the role of the composer from the act of musical composition, and the notion of self-expressive art would be disposed of; removing preferences dictated by the imagination, tastes and desires of the artist in favor of a new compositional system governed by chance and indeterminacy known as aleatory music. In Cage's words, writing music (or any artistic endeavor) was "purposeless play," but at the same time, an affirmation of life. He also viewed composition as not an attempt to bring order out of chaos, or improvement upon creation, but rather to "wake up to the very life we're living" (*Silence* 95).

By removing the ego through the practice of aleatoric music, a powerful force of postmodernism in both ideology and aesthetics becomes very evident, with a sense of indeterminism also unpinning the entire compositional process. Cage essentially desired to dissolve the ego or will of the composer from the process to the greatest extent possible. While improvisation methods dating back to J.S. Bach released some grip from

the composer's artistic exertion and control, Cage's aleatoric methods were much different from improvisatory methods, and practically any solidified musical formula previously known to this point in history. Every effort was undertaken to remove the artist from the composition, encouraging artistic discovery in one's daily life as opposed to the previous commonly perceived role of the composer to generate masterpieces. Chance, as Cage embodied it was largely derived from the Chinese text of the *I Ching* given to him by his pupil Christian Wolff. It should be noted, however, that there is also a relative amount of intersection with Suzuki in this area as Cage noted during his lectures that the human ego – the "control of the rational," stifled the free flow of the mind, and proposed for "the removal of boundaries wherever they exist" (qtd. in "Five Men" 14). Though Suzuki seems to be a type of precursory figure here, when Cage acquired the actual I *Ching* text from Christian Wolff (whose father published its English translation during 1951 through Pantheon books), he would utilize it for compositions by the end of that year through experimenting with the tossing of coins, and would soon write *Music of Changes*; his first composition entirely determined through chance operations.

For Cage, the chance protocols of the *I Ching* were essentially a way to imitate nature and further his ideological pursuits of composition. While his modernist contemporaries such as Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen would also employ this concept within a limited scope, they were reluctant to wholeheartedly embrace indeterminism with the same boldness as Cage. This point of contention would later

become a breaking point, and certain composers would eventually distance themselves from Cage as an artistic colleague (Shulitis 39). Those firmly rooted within modernist steams of ideology and practice such as Boulez would accuse him of having weak compositional technique through his chance operations (Boulez 45), and Iannis Xenakis would even go as far to refer to Cage's aleatoric methods of indeterminism as an "abrogation" of the composer's function (qtd. in Bois 12). Perhaps this was one of the points of divergence between Cage's burgeoning postmodernist tendencies of indeterminism, and his modernist contemporaries who refused to follow in this radical stylistic evolution. These cited examples: Stockhausen, Boulez, and Xenakis employed a much more tempered application of aleatoric function in their work. Unlike Cage, they all appeared to have a need to still retain some extent of the ego or artistic control that someone of a postmodern framework would typically absolve. This point of divergence also reflects what Woods described as the "mood" or "attitude" associated with postmodernism. These other figures of modernism, especially Stockhausen, however innovative, very much still ascribed to traditional attitudes of the role of the composer.

This notion of removing the ego from one's aesthetic practices was very significant, if not groundbreaking during Cage's lifetime, so much so that one might contend that the overarching concept itself often overshadowed the overlap with other fields of postmodernism, notably that of literature. Authors of this genre such as Barth experimented in a similar manner, openly questioning whether the existence of a self can be detached from the act of writing, along with questioning concepts of authorial control

over a text in works such as his 1969 publication *Autobiography: A Self-Recorded Fiction*. As experimental performances such as the *Happening* demonstrated, Cage also altered the artist-audience relationship by removing the dominance or control of the composer. He essentially bridged the void or gap between these two traditionally separated realms. Near the end of his life, Cage explicitly described this desire:

> So I like that music by many, many people. And here, more and more in my performances, I try to bring about a situation in which there is no difference between the audience and the performers. And I'm not speaking of audience participation in something designed by the composer, but rather am I speaking of the music which arises through the activity of both performers and so-called audience. (qtd. in Kostelanetz 117)

This "music by many, many people" reflects not only a postmodern tendency towards a sense of universalism associated with the breakdown of high and popular culture embraced by postmodern authors (vehemently shunned by serial modernists), but also advocates for the deconstruction of the composer-performer/audience divide. Works such as *Musicircus* (1967) demonstrate such a concept, with Cage shifting the burden of comprehension to the listener through what he referred to as "the play of intelligent anarchy" (Pasler 3). This deconstruction of roles could be described as very much precursory to literary devices such as the metafiction employed by postmodern authors such as Italo Calvino in novels such as *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Both Cage and

Calvino break down the construction of the audience or reader to merge their formerly passive observational roles into that of active participation and engagement with the work. Much like Cage working against the harmonic traditions taught to him by Schoenberg, Calvino worked against the traditions of the literary world, displacing the signifier upon the reader as he proclaimed "The process of literary composition has been taken to pieces and reassembled, the decisive moment in literary life is bound to be the act of reading" (qtd. in Weiss 167). For Calvino, the basis of reality in the world appeared to be fundamentally tied to meaning carried out through the concepts of language and culture. His use of "I," for example, that is experiencing what is known as reality is not an operational entity free of language and culture; rather, it is their construct. Calvino also appeared to not believe that objective reality can exist outside of language and culture with any meaningful function. Such notions illuminate epistemological problems centered around the awareness of reality, and demonstrate his use of literature as a personal avenue of knowledge or knowing. *Both If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* and his later work, *Mr. Palomar* reflected a notion that their genre must evoke the participation of the reader to acquire meaning. In his processes, Cage argued that the listener must also play a similar role: "...the final speaker is the listener. And how the listener is listening we don't know, because he or she hasn't done it yet. So we don't really know what the significance of anything is until it is heard." Through such pathways of rupturing nature, both individuals worked toward redirecting importance or significance upon the receivers of their mediums, and the processes of interpretation; especially with Cage in relation to the traditionally understood poietic and aesthetic

process in relation to the poietic process/producer, trace, and the aesthetic process/receiver.

Upon initial examination, some have not readily recognized the weight of such efforts to shift the focus of aesthetic thought through language, but the intersection between reality and language has been a longstanding problem, as Wittgenstein described decades earlier:

> People say again and again that philosophy doesn't really progress, that we are still occupied with the same philosophical problems as were the Greeks. But the people who say this don't understand why it has to be so. It is because our language has remained the same and keeps seducing us into asking the same questions. As long as there continues to be a verb 'to be' that looks as if it functions in the same way as to eat ' and 'to drink,' as long as we still have the adjectives 'identical,' 'true,' 'false,' 'possible,' as long as we continue to talk of a river of time, of an expanse of space, people will keep stumbling over the same puzzling difficulties and find themselves staring at something which no explanation seems capable of clearing up." (qtd. in Kanterian 172)

If one is to agree with Wittgenstein, it also appears true that for thinkers such as Cage and Calvino, there is a definite effort to rework language in a very much postmodern context that also generates the potential for new avenues of experience and expression not readily attainable through the methods of their predecessors, and even modernist contemporaries.

Though Cage claimed that he had minimal interest in the work of Wittgenstein due to his use of "too many words," he contended that there was still a certain level of similarity between Wittgenstein and Suzuki, especially during a particular occasion when asked by a student why none of the questions posed that evening were solved, to which Suzuki responded "That's why I love philosophy; no one wins" (qtd. in Retallack xx). For Joan Retallack, there is also a relative amount of philosophical similarity between Cage and Wittgenstein, leading her to correlate the latter's move from "picture" to "use" theory with Cage's decision "to imitate nature in her manner of operation" (xivi).

Though the similarities between Cage's practices and numerous devices of postmodern literature can be pinpointed quite clearly, one of the inherent problems at hand is that this comparison establishes Cage in a precursory nature, and his postmodernism was not necessarily intentional at the time. According to Williams, it would not be until the final two decades of his life that Cage would actually become consciously aware of the pull that postmodernism had on concepts such as meaning and identity. Still, works such as the *Europeras* and *Roaratorio* demonstrate aspects typically associated with this genre such as the decentering of the subject by discursive systems, narrative fragmentation and reflectivity, and the abolishment of the high culture-popular culture divide. There is also an underpinning theme which very much mirrors both the thought of Cage and the literature of postmodernism; the notion of displacement. To describe the premise of his *Europeras*, Cage proclaimed "For two hundred years the Europeans have been sending us their operas. Now I'm sending them back" (qtd. in Revill

273). Such efforts also aimed to displace separate constructions of art and life, while authors such as Calvino similarly attempted to displace the real by simulacra. When the objective goals of Cage and Calvino are compared, there is a certain similarity embedded within these expressive goals: Cage blurring art and life, and Calvino blurring fiction and reality.

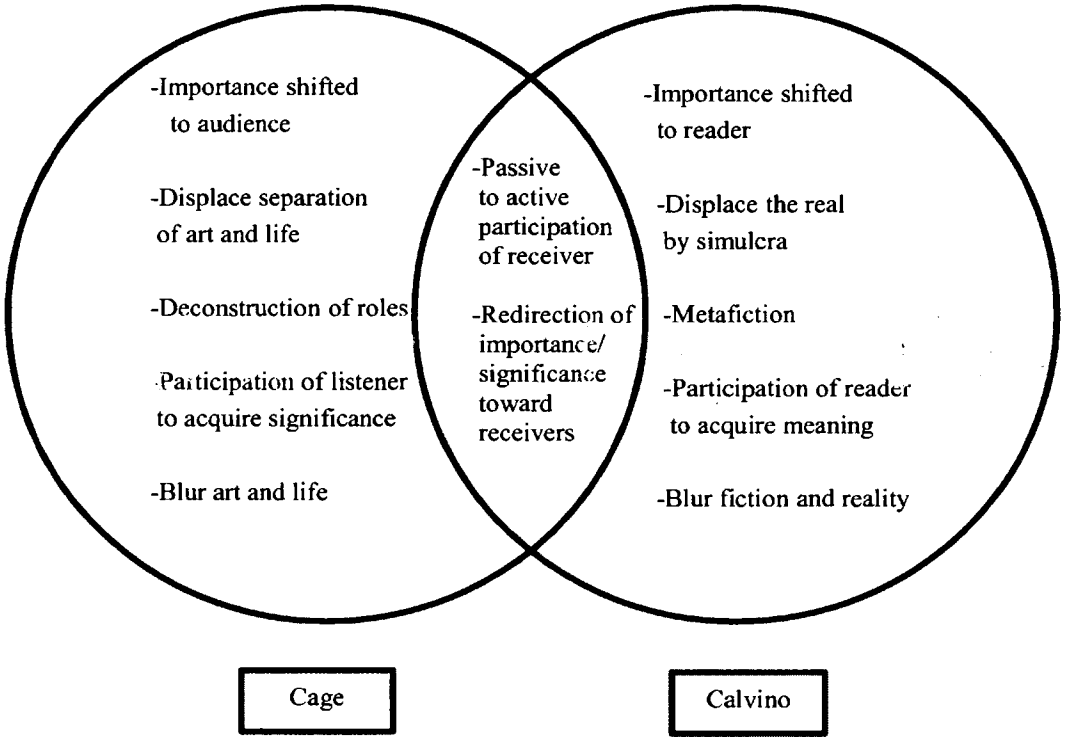

Fig. 3. Venn diagram of Cage and Calvino

While often overlooked, such efforts of ego displacement by Cage have also been correlated more recently with postmodern concepts of identity. Richard Dellamora, who discussed Cage's influence upon the postmodern author William Burroughs in an essay titled *Queer Apocalypse* (in his text *Postmodern Apocalypse),* places Cage as an influential forerunner in this realm, particularly in the area of postmodern queer theory.

In this particular essay, Dellamora describes how the work of James Creech established that deconstruction has played an important role in contemporary queer theory by demonstrating that supposedly natural forms of gender and sexuality are power-effects produced within the institution of compulsory heterosexuality, and for Dellamora, deconstruction is connected with "queering" even more significantly. He cites what he describes as the opening skirmishes between modernist and postmodernist literary critics, and between poststructuralists and academic humanists, which provoked humanists to state that there was something "perverse" about deconstruction. Dellamora describes this slur was a "an ambiguous gift to deconstruction" that impelled American deconstructionists of the 1970s toward a texualist mode that turned deconstruction into the more refined practice of the so-called New Criticism, leading a number of theorists such as Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, and Eve Sedgwick to embrace both deconstruction and its queerness (136).

Dellamora attempts to exploit the deconstruction of a binary model of sexual difference in Derridean apocalyptic theory to articulate a genealogy of male sexual difference, and cites the 1960s debates between modernism and postmodernism, focusing upon the repudiation of humanism when literary critics such as M H. Abrams and Frank Kermode responded to attacks by depicting the author of *Naked Lunch,* William Burroughs as the one responsible for this apparent disorder. When exploring the construction of masculinity implicit in what he describes as a "panicked invocation of Burroughs" signifying the collapse of Western civilization, Dellamora analyses the

apocalyptic narrative and tone of the author's work, and references Burroughs's aesthetic of silence, which he describes as a homage to Cage (137) that offers an example of deconstruction avant la letter in the context of hip queer culture of the 1950s. Dellamora, along with Caroline A. Jones describe influence from Cage's 1949 *Lecture on Nothing*, and contend that this new aesthetic ultimately initiated several reactions, notably Burroughs's resistance to the military-industrial nation-state, a central aspect in the critique of the heroic (re)presentation of the male heterosexual ego in the postwar aesthetic of abstract expressionism; a movement also very much in conflict with Cage's artistic ideology, especially when one recalls his various conversations and general discomfort toward Jackson Pollock; a leading artist of this ego-driven movement. Described by fellow *New York School* member Morton Feldman as the "raving heterosexual" (qtd. in *Where the Heart Beats* 209), Pollock embodied many exaggerated stereotypes of the ego-driven abstract expressionist, causing Cage to not only pass up opportunities to work with him, but even personally avoid the abrasive artist when encountering him in public spaces (*Where the Heart Beats* 209).

Katz also depicts a reactionary stance from Cage towards the ego-centered Abstract Expressionism sphere through his use of silence which was actually much more rooted in resistance-based ideology than many initially contended:

> Closeted people seek to ape dominant discursive forms, to participate as seamlessly as possible in hegemonic constructions. They do not, in my experience, draw attention to themselves with a performative silence, as

> John Cage did when he stood before the fervent Abstract Expressionist multitude and blasphemed, "I have nothing to say and I'm saying it." (50)

Such evidence depicts Cage as a very much postmodern thinker, and for Dellamora, the recovery of Cage's theory in the context of the different forms of queer theory that exist in a contemporary context is a rather extensive project in need of further study. At the same time, Jones believes that Cage's practices to remove the ego attempted to withdraw "the body" from what Michel Foucault would later refer to the "body politic" entailing the "discursive construction of the body, its affects and desires" (655). This manner of withdrawal enacted by Cage would be described by Burroughs as "a shocking disintegration," which Dellamora situates in a type of precursory postmodern queer identity for Burroughs: "In contrast to queer existence today, which is predicated on disidentification from both normalcy and minority sexual identities, Burroughs was a queer without benefit of knowledge of what a sexual minority might be. For him, the consequences of this absence were apocalyptic" (137). Evidently, such forms of analysis and discussion were largely absent during much of Cage's lifetime, but the work of postmodern scholars such as Dellamora and Jones provides rather convincing evidence that connects concepts from the previous chapter to Cage's stance toward the artistic ego which appears to have been involved in expressing strands of early precursory postmodern-identity to be later expanded upon by theorists such as Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, and Eve Sedgwick. When such concepts are brought back into focus with the framing that postmodernists outline, one could argue that Cage's practices initiated two

concepts that Woods describes to reside within a type of postmodernist "theoretical alliance": the first being the celebration of the confusion of gender boundaries, and the second being the erosion of the self in the face of the rigid demarcations of the masculine Cartesian universe (39).

One might also connect aspects of Cage's ego displacement to what Woods refers to as the demasculination of music from the male hegemony. Though Cage's relationship to other movements such as serialism will be explored in a succeeding chapter, it should be established that the removal of the ego is an important initiating factor in postmodern reactions. Like Dellamora and Jones, Woods speaks of a postmodern crisis of representation in relation to sexuality and music. For Woods, such a crisis not only loosens the grip of so-called 'male rigor' prevalent in in this period, but also opens up new navigable avenues for women in in music. Katz also draws a similar conclusion through Cage's efforts against the hegemonic Abstract Expressionist movement by means of his unexpressive nature:

> That Cage's increasingly unexpressive mein was at least partly strategic is clear from his friend Morton Feldman's account of the culture in which Cage traveled throughout the 1940's, the macho, often homophobic community of Abstract Expressionism (Jones 643). Feldman underscored the degree to which Cage's unexpressiveness may have done double duty as shield... But for a closeted gay man, not only was the Abstract Expressionist premium on self-expression anathema, but so too its too-

> anxious rehearsal of a performative machismo. The Abstract Expressionist agreement with dominant cultural attitudes regarding sexuality and gender--including a general assumption of masculine privilege premised at least in part on the exclusion of women and gay men-- made the painters alliance with Cage somewhat tenuous. (51)

For Katz, it appears that Cage was a type of figure who worked against the dominant codes of Abstract Expressionism, creating a strained relationship, but at the same time, forging an identity that resonates very much in the postmodern tenets that Woods outlined.

Though such theories must be tempered in the reality of a still very much male-dominated field that Cage resided in during his lifetime, the processes to displace the classical notion of a dominant artistic ego did allow for greater varieties to emerge in relation to gender and sexuality. Woods correlates such openings of space with the opportunity for female composers such as Judith Weir, Pauline Oliveros, Kajia Saariaho, and Elaine Barkin to achieve serious attention not afforded within the traditional modernist realm (184).

While the evidence presented in this chapter has demonstrated that Cage's efforts to remove the ego from his aesthetic processes are extremely far-reaching, and constantly merging influence into numerous disciplines, the extent to which Cage made efforts to displace the self from aesthetics and expression were second to none. While many would later experiment with similar concepts in succeeding decades, his early efforts to remove

the ego illuminate his place as an artist very much within this tenet of postmodern ideology, even if his efforts originated before it was possible to fully understand and analyze how influential they actually were. As the next chapter on the rejection of the rational will demonstrate, the ideologies that shaped Cage to this point will develop even more significantly to ultimately exert influence upon significant postmodern figures to follow such as Jean-François Lyotard.

CHAPTER 4

REJECTING THE RATIONAL

One of the critical tenets of postmodernism (music and otherwise) is a notable suspicion toward the traditions of rationality and universalism. For postmodernists, philosophical ideologies of reason and progress derived from the enlightenment have seemingly lost much of their value, especially after the unspeakable horrors committed during the Second World War. This paradigm shift was most explicitly brought to the forefront of discussion by the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard's 1979 work *The Postmodern Condition*, which was originally commissioned as a report for the Conseil des Universités of the Québec government on the current state of knowledge in highly developed societies, but ended up having unforeseen consequences for decades. Although somewhat embarrassed about the work's reach, *The Postmodern Condition* would ultimately overshadow the entirety of Lyotard's writings, and remain in the forefront of postmodernism despite its controversial nature.

In the most basic sense, Lyotard's postmodernism embodies "an incredulity towards metanarratives" (also known as grand narratives); a concept that he depicts as incorporating all-encompassing stories relating to human history and goals that have ultimately been used as tools of legitimation in relation to cultural practices and knowledge (xxiv). It is through this legitimization by means of metanarratives that Lyotard associates the concept of modernity, which is essentially anchored by two defining metanarratives; the first being a notion of social progress relating to

enlightenment and emancipation, and the second being the progression of knowledge through a movement of totalization (34). According to Lyotard, the use of these metanarratives has become an antiquated concept. He is led to reject their modernist application in favor of a postmodern state of knowledge that exists outside of their functionality. Lyotard contends that this current knowledge state of existence has arrived into being by a type of continuing evolution since the 1950s that has led societies into a postindustrial age, and cultures ultimately into what he refers to as the postmodern age. While not the first publication to make use of this term, *The Postmodern Condition* retains much responsibility for the widespread dissemination of the concept within the field of philosophy (Malpas 36), and its massive assault upon the universal narratives of reason to undermine much of the existing traditional epistemological thought (whether viewed through an empiricist or rational lens). For those who have embraced this work, *The Postmodern Condition* would also shatter grand historical narratives, and transform them into relativistic micro-narratives lacking any universal sense of rationality.

When Cage is brought into the discussion of Lyotard's postmodernism, it is true that he may not ascribe entirely to the dismissive nature of some in this ideology, but as Retallack explains, he is still a relevant figure in this discussion:

> Utopianism, along with a belief in large-scale human progress, is currently on the postmodern list of banned (Enlightenment and Modernist) ideas. Cage's work and thought help us ask whether we might need to restore and renovate rather than abandon them. Certainly the mono-rational

> Enlightenment vision deserves to be in serious trouble. The purist clarity of its one-way directional beacon leads to suffocating visions (see, e.g., Foucault's "Panopticism") of Reason's centralized control. Might there be more complexly realistic ways to think about a global hopefulness? Whatever one may think of Cage's decentralized vision of anarchic harmony, it certainly suggests that there can be other models. That there may be a way into a post-skeptical poetics of public language, a post-ironic socioaesthetic modeling without denial or naiveté— a complex, not naive, realism. (xxxi)

The above passage seems to point to Cage having some level of involvement with postmodern thought, though for many, the exact manner and capacity have been debatable. With this said, however, when the ideological writings of Cage are examined in correlation to Lyotard, a number of surprising correlations begin to surface which not only provide a significant foundation for the basis of anti-rationalism in this study, but also demonstrate precursory influences of Cage upon Lyotard's post-1960s thinking. Even though he was not part of Cage's inner circle, it is not surprising that a postmodernist ideologue such as Lyotard found the ideologies of the composer particularly attractive. Through his writings, various scholars have agreed that the French philosopher identified deeply with Cage, (Bacht 241, Mendez 171). It is also quite possibly that he did so more than with any other artistic figure of the period, and though it seems that the composer had little serious interest in Lyotard's work in the same manner

that he did with social theorists such as Marshall McLuhan, their ideological connections are actually quite significant.

While it is true that he attained significant notoriety from *The Postmodern Condition*, much of Lyotard's early work (particularly on aesthetics) often invoked an intensive tone and unserious argumentative style that was not highly regarded, and often played-down or ignored, even by some of his proponents (Bacht 228). It is interesting to note that prior to the publication of his report, Lyotard was not only familiar with Cage's writings such as *Silence, A Year from Monday,* and *Notations*, but he also attended some of Cage's performances during the 1970s, notably a 1972 performance of Cage and David Tudor during the period when he was writing *The Aesthetics of Intensities* (*Des dispositifs pulsionnels*).

Despite this obvious evidence of Lyotard's familiarity with Cage, the examination of such connective strands of thought between Cage and Lyotard has not been always been an area of great interest for scholars. In 2002, however, Nikolaus Bacht, published an intertextual analysis of Lyotard's work during the 1970s (primarily *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*) that revealed a significant influence from the ideas of Cage. Bacht demonstrated numerous stylistic correlations between works from Cage such as *MUREAU* and Lyotard's *The Aesthetics of Intensities,* through which he proposes a connectedness of thought that is rather difficult to dismiss as mere coincidence:

> In Lyotard's texts from the "intensively unserious" phase, by contrast, Cage is omnipresent as a standard bearer for a peculiar aesthetic doctrine,

> designated "aesthetics of intensities," "affirmative aesthetics" or "libidinal aesthetics" (esthtique libidinale). Lyotard devised this aesthetic doctrine, just as his postmodernist aesthetics that has become so influential, as a theory of the avant-garde. Cage serves not just as its focal figure; arguably, the aesthetics of intensities might not even have materialized without his influence. (228)

It appears that Cage very likely not only influenced Lyotard's *dispositifs pulsionnels,* but also much of the ideology to be later harnessed for *The Postmodern Condition.* For Bacht, a work such as MUREAU is essentially a "mute" text that resembles a defense wall built against meaning (238). Much of this particular work consisted of extracted segments from the journals of Henry David Thoreau, often of a music-related nature. By fashioning a collage-type execution, Cage, along with David Tudor generated a performance that shifted between intelligible and non-intelligible elements, embodying contextual meaning, along with abstracted uses of language or what one might describe as "vocalize." What makes this performative work particularly relevant to this discussion is its notable departure from any sense of conventional syntax. Through a barrage of letters, syllables, words, phrases, and sentences executed through randomized uses of personal pronouns, Cage demonstrated not only a type of hybrid work of poetry and music, but also that one steps outside the traditional boundaries of linguistic communication and rationalism.

The very idea of Cage having an influence toward the ideologies that structured *The Postmodern Condition* is without a doubt profound and controversial, but an analysis such as Bacht's is rather convincing, and at the very least aligns Cage's anti-rational thinking along the postmodern lines of Lyotard's (even if the latter's use of the composer's ideologies were somewhat contorted or distorted to fit his often fragmented, radicalized discourses). When such research is brought into focus, interesting connections begin to emerge between Cage and Lyotard, particularly with the application of certain terminologies such as Cage's frequent use of "affirmation" that Lyotard appears to have taken and converted to "affirmative aesthetics." Despite a notable conceptual gap here (or "wide semantic hiatus" for Bacht), there is a rather strong sense of alignment between Cage and Lyotard, and though it seems that Cage was the precursor, the composer definitely resides within the realm of Lyotard's anti-rationalism. Furthermore, is very probable that Cage was much more influential to Lyotard's thinking than many have credited him for, and though Lyotard is not mentioned explicitly by Larson, it seems quite reasonable to suggest that he could have easily been placed within the vast "network" of 'post-Moderns' she believes to have emerged from the influence of Cage:

> These "post-Moderns – visual and performance artists, musicians and composers, poets and writers, dancers and choreographers, architects and installation artists, multimedia crossover performers and experimentalists of all kinds – sought creative refuge in the permission he gave to "be

> yourself." Whether they knew Cage personally or just by his writings and news reports, these pro-Cageans maintain a network of interconnection whose common link is the example set by Cage's own life. The network is so enormous and intertwined, now, and so much a part of our mental furniture, that it's almost impossible to trace – or even to see. One can forget that it was not always here; that this "dance" began somewhere. ("Five Men" 104)

Recently, this ideological relationship between Cage and Lyotard was explored further by scholars such as Matthew Mendez in 2013. In his journal article *A Power of Sonorous Paradoxes: Passivity, Singularity, and Indifference in Jean-François Lyotard's Readings of John Cage*, Mendez believes that both Lyotard and Cage were interconnected by two shared concerns; a mutual interest in creative strategies hinging upon passivity and indifference, along with a related desire to approach singular events in a manner free from the interference incurred by means of human cognition. For Cage, he conceives of music as striving toward a Jungian "transcendent function" that he believed to have the ability to synthesize conscious cognition with the personal unconscious. Initially, this was not a particular point of contention, but as Lyotard became preoccupied with *the differend* in the post-1970s period, this amalgamation of the ego and id evolved into a particular problem of significance, leading him to call the consolidation of these two notions both "a factual impossibility and a dangerous delusion" (Mendez 172).

According to Mendez, when one analyzes Lyotard's oeuvre synoptically, it draws out certain continuities and contradictions significantly present in Cage's constant negotiation between "Nietzschean" and "Kantian" tendencies, and whether one examines the ideological correspondences or divergences of Lyotard and Cage, their philosophies hinge upon the transversal between passivity and indifference which brings out a traversal for the series of logical paradoxes embedded in both individuals' musical theorizing (Mendez 174).

While many of Cage's contemporaries, especially those residing around his mentor Schoenberg, ascribed to a new level of musical rationalization, the importance of tenets such as intelligibility and meaning were notably absent in his aleatoric compositions. The very notion of "sounds in themselves" shorted the circuits of any sense of logical form, and at the same time, brought a new focus upon these anti-rational practices. By expressing a shift toward placing value in experience over knowledge, Cage would bypass any "logical minimizations that we are at each instant tempted to apply to the flux of events" (Mendez 177). In his study, Mendez concludes that this practice of nonjudgmental ethos established without reference to a coordinating telos is only possible through a state of total amnesia. There is a reflective postmodern sense that not only binds the aesthetics thought of Lyotard and Cage, but also distances the composer from the tendency towards rationalized structure and absolutist control (especially prevalent in those ascribing to the *Second Viennese School*). While it could be argued that not all modernists believed in this formidable grasp of intellectual of aesthetic control, the Cagean shift towards this apparent state of amnesia clearly resides

outside of the realm of modernism, and must be examined and brought into focus without being ignored or prematurely dismissed.

This ideology also applied to the very notion of sounds themselves. Cage desired to essentially hear sounds before cognitive processes converted them into something logical. By presenting sounds in their mere "thisness" lacking association with language and intelligence, a number of anti-rational and paradoxical situations appear to arise that will be later addressed in this study, but the notable reaction from Lyotard is most interesting. Here, he posits that Cage has essentially generated "a sonorous Zwischen-Welt" (or in-between world) circling in a constant transient nature between figural sensation and discursive signification (Mendez 176). This "in-between world" also seems to be very much reflective of Cage's own efforts to merge art and life in unification, and is perhaps the other important tenet of his anti-rationalism. One is then led to draw correlations with Lyotard's post-structural thinking that led him to place value within the realm of sense and sensations, avoiding concrete observations of self-knowledge in a manner similar to Cage.

The sidestepping of rational systems has definitely led to some rather fascinating associations for Cage, especially from those such as the sociologist Charles Lemert, who has taken a rather bold move to associate the composer with what he refers to as the 'relativistic paradigm'. For Lemert, Cage is embedded into the realm of "complimentarity," which exercises the rejection of the classical form entailing rational relationships based upon ordered tones (113). This term also branches into other

disciplines including the field of physics through scientists such as Neils Bohr, who argued that if two observational situations are in a complimentarity relationship, then complete knowledge of one necessarily means incomplete knowledge of the other. Lemert contends that Cage viewed music in the juxtaposition of noise (or sound) and silence. This juxtaposition of hitherto irreconcilable elements ultimately then resulted in the undermining of the very heart of traditional "logical" epistemology with the subject object dichotomy. It could be said that complimentarity reveals the anti-rational, absurd nature of reality, and through the postmodern views of Cage, rationally absurd conclusions are brought into focus by Lemert; notably when the composer made claims such as "A sound accomplishes nothing; without it life would not last out the instant" (Lemert 70). These viewpoints also place Cage, along with other figures associated with the relativistic paradigm such as Pablo Picasso, Werner Heisenberg, R.D. Laing, and Eugène Ionesco. While the work of these individuals is often compartmentalized, Lemert insists this action is merely an artificial act for the sole purposes of functionality (113). Thus, the work of those such as Cage that resides within the relativistic paradigm is not easily analyzed through systematic function due to the view that reality itself is not self-evident and orderly (as typically associated with traditional strands of thought).

Cage's anti-rational rejection of systematic meaning was perhaps best exemplified in his controversial 1949 "Lecture on Nothing", in which he began by stating outright that his lecture would not only be void of meaning, but also would also lack any formulated form of progression. He began this talk by stating "I am here and there is

nothing to say. If among you are those who wish to get somewhere, let them leave at any moment" (*Silence* 109). Despite the unusual nature of this appointment, Cage still encouraged the audience to enjoy each and every "pointless" moment of their lecture together. This particular session has often been said to have reflected Cage's views upon Western thought, which he believed to have coerced the general populous to only attain value in things that appeared to have deep meaning or embedded paths to eventual goals or aims. He elaborated on this view further when he stated "Our poetry now is the realization that we possess nothing. Anything therefore is a delight (since we do not possess it) and thus need not fear its loss" (*Silence* 110). Cage also believed that individuals create their own likes and dislikes that are not inherent upon any particular object or situation: "It is not irritating to be where one is. It is only irritating to think one would like to be somewhere else" (*Silence* 119). This illustrated Cage's belief that the notion of preference was detrimental towards human experience, and how he felt that personal taste should be left out of one's judgment upon a given situation. In a manner similar to Lyotard, Cage has demonstrated here an application of non-prioritized beliefs. It is important to note, however, that Cage's sense of anti-rationalism had firm roots in the Eastern philosophies discussed earlier. The anti-rational language and stories of Ramakrishna (and certain elements of medieval mysticism) were without a doubt influential readings for Cage, but as reflected upon earlier, were very much ignored by Lyotard. Still, without question, both Cage and Lyotard shared ideologies of very similar resistances toward meta-narratives, external logic, and acts of synthesis to resolve

productive tensions. As Cage conveyed during an interview, any attempts at infusing logic into his work were retrograde interpretations at best:

> In indeterminate music, such as I conceive it, there is a priori no such logic... You are free to infuse it with all the logic you care to, [but] I'm not the one who put the logic in the score... Unfortunately for logic, everything we understand under that rubric 'logic' represents such a simplification with regard to the event and what really happens, that we must learn to keep away from it. The function of art at the present time is to preserve us from all the logical minimizations that we are in each instant tempt to apply to the flux of events. (qtd. in Charles 81)

Through Cage's efforts to deconstruct long-established traditions and create a music for everyone, his ideologies and practices working against dominant codes appear very much comparable to the overarching themes of *The Postmodern Condition*. Both Cage and Lyotard worked against the dominant metanarratives and prevailing discourses of their fields; Lyotard on the state of knowledge, and Cage working against the dominant Western traditions of musical language and composition. While Schoenberg aimed to establish a dominant compositional form for the next era, Cage desired to break down any dominant institutional language and coding of music to serve whatever localized arena it served (see fig. 4 below for Venn diagram of Cage and Lyotard).

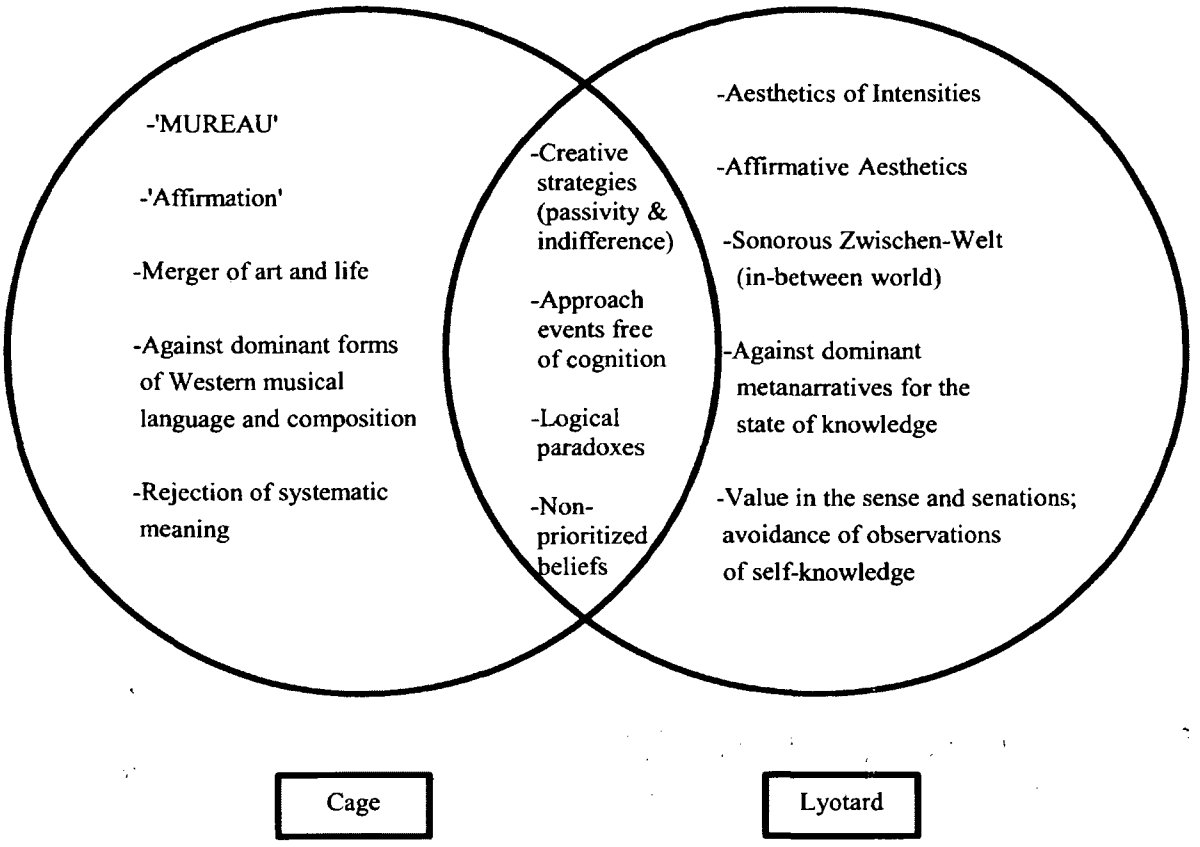

Fig. 4. Venn diagram of Cage and Lyotard

CHAPTER 5

PIONEERING ENVIRONMENTAL SOUNDS

Cage was arguably the greatest proponent of his time for the advancement of what could be referred to aesthetically as "environmental sounds." This movement within aesthetics is relevant not only in its nature to expand the definition of music into the realm of non-traditional structures of harmonic, tonal, and rhythmic organization, but also

in its ability to warrant a further examination into the relationship between perceptions of sound and noise. The conflicts centered upon how to divide these two notions can be traced back to aesthetic practices long before Cage, and there is undoubtedly a substantial amount of cultural conditioning that shapes viewpoints and attitudes in this area. To complicate matters further, these stances are by no means homogenous throughout a given singular culture or society. What is deemed musical and what is deemed cacophony in relation to sonic events is far from universal, and most often anything residing outside of traditional harmonic traditions is initially deemed noise until it finds a desensitized place within the musical architecture of its period. Though often overlooked, this was even the case with innovations such as the Tristan Chord, which was essentially regarded as noise by many upon its introduction in 1859 due to its sonorous configuration that resided outside the typical practices of its time. Clearly, much musical evolution has occurred in this area throughout the past century with a relative amount of the Western Ethnocentric grip loosened from such definitions. Still, there are varying ideologies, with some attempting to reconcile these conceptual problems in the semiology of music. Jean-Jacques Nattiez takes a rather open-ended approach defining this distinction as: "Music is whatever people choose to recognize as such, noise is whatever is recognized as disturbing, unpleasant, or both" (47). When correlating this definition to Cage's perceptions of aesthetic ideologies and practices, it seems evident that few if any sonic events would be relegated to Nattiez's definition of noise; leaving him with a seemingly endless palette of "sounds" to work with as compositional tools.

As Cage worked at reconstructing culturally entrenched notions of noise into environmental sounds, their relationship with postmodernism exhibits an interesting phenomenon with what appears to be multiple facets to its existence. For Williams, the postmodern movement has often been driven through vehicles in response to modernism either embodying hyper-modern or anti-modern alternatives, and for the latter, he associates a certain countering of technocratic incursion upon nature through ecology and new age movements. When attempting to situate Cage within this concept, one could argue that he actually fits almost seamlessly. As someone who was raised in Los Angeles during a period when the state still had an aura of open wilderness, it is not surprising that the influences of California luminism and West Coast Transcendentalism would be early platforms for Cage, leading him to evolve into a passionate naturalist in numerous aspects.

When discussing environmental sounds, one of the most overt examples was the 1977 work *Inlets*. Inspired by Cage's interest in "contingency" that he defined as improvisation using elements in which there is a discontinuity between cause and effect, this work included natural artifacts such as water-filled conch shells used for generating gurgling sounds, and single trumpet-like tones, in addition to burning pine cones. If one looks back retrospectively, however, there are numerous connective elements situated much further back in Cage's aesthetics. His connections to Zen have already established an early relationship with the environment, and Cage was also the co-founder of the *New York Mycological Society* (Bock 31). His inspiration from figures such as Henry David

Thoreau was also pivotal in shaping works such as MUREAU. Cage would also embrace his naturalism in a literal sense by utilizing organic, naturally produced sounds which occurred within a given environment. He once stated "I am not interested in the names of movements, but rather in seeing and making things not seen before" (*Empty Words* 171), expressing his rather postmodern-driven desire to abandon highly notational and text-centered composition in entirety in favor of the ambient music of a given environment. By using the sounds of nature, Cage would become a pioneer of furthering this rather radical concept, moving forward despite whatever concerns or criticisms his audience and contemporaries expressed. Woods cites this postmodern concept in Cage's most controversial and discussed work *4'33"*, a composition premiered by David Tudor during 1952 (183). For this performance, the pianist sat for the duration of the work which was comprised entirely of a score lacking any performable notation. Rather than the performance being executed by Tudor, the actual music was generated through the ambient sounds of the audience in attendance. This performance of *4'33"* not only introduced the notion of environmental sounds to the masses, but it also demonstrated the conceptual impossibilities surrounding the experience of silence.

Cage had initially expressed interest in generating a work of silence during a 1947 talk at Vassar College, and even presented a one-minute talk of silence at New York University's Studio 35 during this period, but one could argue that the actual transformation from utilizing silence to ambience would occur during an experience in an anechoic chamber at Harvard University in 1951. While in the state-of-the-art facility

designed to be as soundproofed as modern engineering could construct, Cage realized that an inherently different situation developed: "I heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation" (*Silence* 8). Upon this discovery, Cage concluded that in actuality, the notion of true silence was impossible, and stated: "There is no such thing as empty space or empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make silence, we cannot... Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music" (*Silence* 8).

This controversial work of *4'33"* also not only challenged the traditional role of the composer and the act of composition, but also drew rather unsettling questions for many pertaining to the definition of music and the absence of silence. While some critics referred the particular work as a type of musical joke of sorts, this was clearly not the intent of Cage, who in fact, not only intended this work to be one of very serious nature, but also one of profound significance. Three years prior to his death, he explained its prominence in his life, stating

> No day goes by without my making use of that piece in my life and in my work. I listen to it every day... I don't sit down and do it; I turn my attention toward it. I realize that it's going on continuously. So, more and more, my attention, as now, is on it. More than anything else, it's my source of my enjoyment of life." For Cage, the significance of *4'33"* lied

> in that "it leads out of the world of art into the whole of life. (qtd. in *Where the Heart Beats* 387)

This work also fits conveniently into the ecology and new age faction of Williams' anti-modernism, which he describes as being embedded with a type of "nascent environmentalism," while also anticipating one of the most pressing concerns of the late twentieth and twentieth-first centuries (233). Like with many other beliefs and aesthetics of Cage, the significance *of 4'33"* lies most profoundly in its legacy of precursory function; something of which the full aftermath may only be truly examined decades later.

To fully grasp the conceptual intent behind such a work, one must also recognize the connections and influences from Zen, and its core text, the *Heart Sutra*. Larson contends that in the teachings of Suzuki (and Buddhism in general), the concepts of silence and emptiness are shorthand terms for the inconceivable ground luminosity-the absolute "nothing"-out of which all the "somethings" of the world arise in their multitudinous splendor (*Where the Heart Beats* xvi). The conceptual significance of silence also emanates from acquired philosophies of Ramakrishna, offering the promise of silence equaling God, the Hindu's silence of the Brahman, and notably the consolidation through the Zen teachings of D.T. Suzuki.

Cage would also repeat a similar aesthetic through his 1962 work *0'00"* (also referred to as *4'33" No. 2*). In a similar vein to its predecessor, *0'00"* took an active role in attempting to convert the common everyday into aesthetic experience. For this

particular work, the score consisted in entirety of one line that stated: "In a situation provided with maximum amplification (no feedback), perform a disciplined action." Cage would also add additional instructions for future renditions which allowed interruptions of the action performed, not repeating the same action in another performance, and a note to ask that proceeding actions not resemble the performance of a musical composition. During a notable 1965 performance of this work, Cage sat in a chair in front of an audience, and the generated sounds included the typing of letters, Cage drinking a glass of water, and the squeaking sounds of his chair. Responding to such a performative concept, Cage stated: "I am speaking of nothing special, just an open ear and an open mind and the enjoyment of daily noises" (*A Year from Monday* 34).

Cage would also make use of a performance environment in the most literal sense through works such as *Variations IV*. In the instructions for this particular piece, performers were required to visualize and actually map out their performance space. To execute this task, they placed plastic transparencies upon a map, working with nine points and three circles. All of the points and circles were cut for the creation of a program and dropped on a performance space map. By drawing lines from the circles to points, a type of graphic representation is generated. Through this process they would use the sounds that took place upon the corresponding trajectories. By carrying out such performative actions, two important resultant factors occurred; the first being sonic events of an undetermined nature, and most importantly in this particular discussion, the transformative process of converting the performance space from a mere static entity to

that of an active agent of participation in the performance outcome. Such a work brings into focus Cage's adaptations of environmental sounds to not only include the ambient noises and actions in works such as *4'33"* and *0'00"*, but also the very environment itself as a critical entity of production in itself.

Both *Variations IV* and *0'00"* were also part of a trilogy that began with the 1961 work *Atlas Eclipticalis*; a composition that was created by using the *Atlas Eclipticalis 1950.0*, which was an atlas of the stars published by the Czech astronomer Antonín Becvár in 1958. Cage generated the work by means superimposing music staff paper over Becvár's star charts. Though this work's music originally used for a choreographed piece by Merce Cunningham titled *Aeon*, and later his *Museum Event #1*, *Atlas Eclipticalis* would come become a stand-alone work itself when Cage received a commission from the *Montreal Festival Society*. This particular work was rather interesting as its score could be performed in whole or partially by any number of performers (up to the maximum of eighty-six. For its compositional structure, each event contained between one to ten notes, with a division of randomized nature into two groups. Though the pitches were transcribed in an intelligible fashion, the manner was rather unorthodox with the note sizes determining factors such as amplitudes. The note durations were indicated above events, but any mention of tempo was omitted and left to the conductor's discretion. Cage also left open the possibility of utilizing contact microphones for the performers' instruments, though this would then require an assistant to the conductor.

Like the *0'00"* and *Variations IV*, *Atlas Eclipticalis* also plays an important role in establishing Cage's importance to environmental sounds. One could say that *0'00"* made use of a space's sounds, *Variations IV* utilized the very sonic environment itself, and *Atlas Eclipticalis* incorporated a type of grand thematic sense of space, transcending beyond even the immediate perceived environments of experience. Though the act of creating music from star charts is a rather abstracted concept, it not only brings forth the notion of making music through the visuals of everyday experience, but also forges the concept of environmental music, correlating aesthetics to the naturally occurring environmental, whether terrestrial, or in this case through the cosmos. With these works, Cage extended the concept of environmental sounds beyond their initial confinements, and in-turn challenged thinking to compose through the use of multiple dimensions and methodologies. Cage would also utilize Becvár's star charts in later works such as his *Etudes Australes* (1974–75), *Etudes Boreales* (1978) and the *Freeman Etudes* (1977–80, 1989–90). These works also connect back to Cage's associations with East Asian philosophy as all three were said to be representative of Hidekazu Yoshida's interpretations of Japanese Haiku Poetry. *Atlas Eclipticalis* was said to represent nirvana, *Variations IV* to represent 'samsara' which was said to be the turmoil of everyday life, and lastly *0'00"* to represent individual action. Works such as these are representative of how the intertwined nature of Cage's aesthetics resonate as postmodern in a multiplicity of ways, even when examined from different vantage points.

Throughout the period of the 1950s, Cage also conducted other experiments to further the area of environmental sounds, notably within the area of recorded sounds by means of magnetic tape. A prominent example can be experienced through the 1953 *Williams Mix* (named in dedication to its funder Paul Williams). This work using the chance operations of the *I Ching* was produced with quarter inch magnetic tape for eight tracks, and was composed of a 192-page score that was essentially a pattern of the cutting and splicing of approximately six-hundred recorded tape sounds. Set to a rhythmic structure of 5-6-16-3-11-5 with notations for pitch, timbre, and loudness, it utilized six categories of sound types which were categorized as the following: A (city sounds), B (country sounds), C (electronic sounds), D (manually produced sounds), E (wind produced sounds), and finally F (small sounds requiring amplification). Though this work has often been cited as a significant precursor to the development of algorithmic composition, granular synthesis, and sound diffusion, it is also important to the postmodern aesthetic of environmental sounds due to its use of sonic elements from a vast variety of sources and venues. What makes the application of these sounds even more relevant to this discussion is their incorporation through chance processes. By applying the aleatoric processes of the *I Ching* to these sounds, they were perhaps presented in their most natural occurring state. During this period, other composers such as Pierre Schaeffer and Karlheinz Stockhausen were also experimenting with recorded mediums through magnetic tape, but the profound difference separating Cage from these modernist contemporaries was his much more "organic" or "naturalistic" treatment that he approached recorded content with. Unlike Schaeffer and Stockhausen, Cage did not

desire to exert control or manipulation upon his sounds; there is a true sense of environmental divergence of an almost anarchic tradition avoiding the absolutist control of modernism that places Cage in a rather unique category in this scenario. With this stated, the raw sonic material has been collected and utilized with as little human interference as possible, generating the ability in Cage's words: "to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories" (*Silence* 10). While ambient music would later develop by name and infiltrate popular culture, it would be very difficult to discount the significance of works such as the *Williams Mix*, and its naturalistic processes derived through a combination of precursory postmodern elements such as chance applications and commonplace everyday environmental sounds.

The 1969 work *33 1/3* also expressed similar aesthetic practices, which consisted of a score merely instructing the performance to entail a gallery filled with about twelve record players, and two-to-three-hundred vinyl records. The gallery visitors were encouraged to act as composer, performer and audience by simply playing the records in whichever manner they pleased. Like *4'33", 33 1/3* established a type of equality between composer, performer, and audience; neglecting any sense of overarching priority amongst the typically partitioned groups. Art designed for viewing in museums for Cage was akin to "refrigeration"; ensuring preservation, yet slowing the livelihood of art itself. Cage did not believe in this segregated nature of museum culture, which he believed attempted to separate art and life. He instead advocated for both to have a type of

intertwined, inseparable relationship. When questioned on his views upon musical performance, Cage stated:

> The two kinds of music now that interest me are on the one hand a music which is performed by everyone... And here, more and more in my performances, I try to bring about a situation in which there is no difference between the audience and the performers. And I'm not speaking of audience participation in something designed by the composer, but rather am I speaking of the music which arises through the activity of both performers and so-called audience. . . The other kind of music that interests me is one which has been traditionally interesting and enjoyable down through the ages, and that's music which one makes oneself without constraining others. If you can do it by yourself you're not in a situation of telling someone else what to do. (qtd. in Breicha 79)

This attitude reflected by Cage in compositions such as *4'33"* and *33 1/3* ultimately illustrated what Perloff proclaimed in his work as a fusion of art with its environment without constraint, encouraging a de-centered, collaborative, and heterogeneous principal for music performance (62). In recent decades, the importance of Cage's contributions to environmental sounds may be overlooked as sonic evolution has continued in this realm rather significantly since his death, but his place as a precursory figure in this arena is near impossible to deny (Refer to fig. 5 on the proceeding page for a timeline of Cage's environmental sound developments).

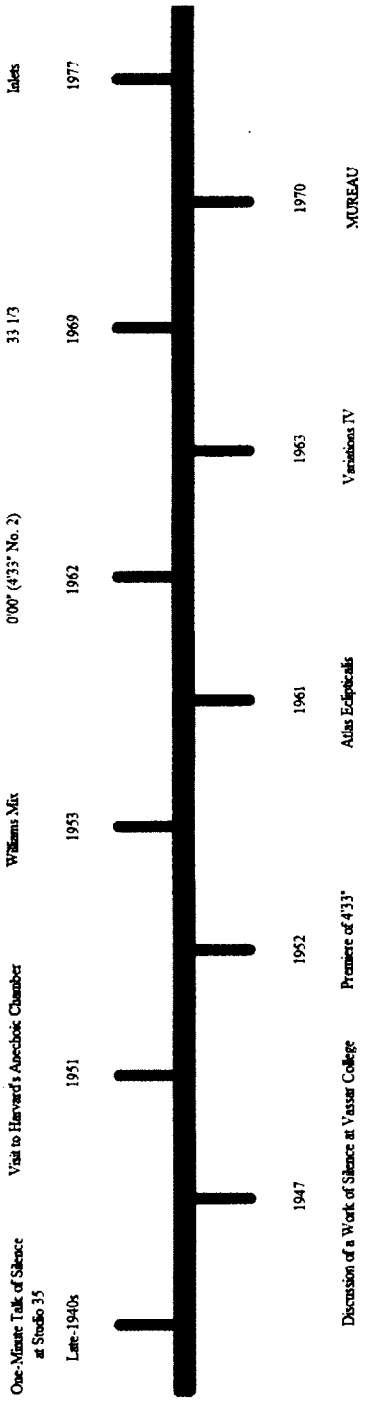

Fig. 5. Timeline of Environmental Sound Developments

CHAPTER 6

EMBRACING THE NEW SIMPLICITY AND THE REJECTION OF COMPLEXITY

By the latter half of the twentieth century, the concept of postmodern music would become very much associated with aesthetics of a reactionary stance against the complexity of serialism. While this division is very much straight-forward in its divergence, the actual movements embodying the conceptual ideology of the new simplicity are relatively more complex in nature. With this in mind, prior to proceeding forward with this particular discussion on the new simplicity, it is relevant to briefly examine how Cage resides in this area as a type of precursory figure. It is also important to preface this section by noting that while the new simplicity has most often been pitted against serialism, it is also very much at odds with minimalism as the following discussion will iterate.

While serialism captured the creative capacities of many of his contemporaries, Cage perhaps best summarized his ideological and aesthetic antithesis when describing his mentor Schoenberg's twelve-tone-row during the writing of *Music of Changes*: "The twelve-tone-row is a method; a method is a control of each single note. There is too much there. There is not enough nothing in it" (qtd. in *Where the Heart Beats* 238). Notions of "nothing" and "emptiness" were recurrent themes derived from Zen that influenced Cage heavily, and pitted his work significantly against modernists striving toward greater complexity through not only twelve-tone methods, but also advanced technology mediums such as the RCA Mark II synthesizer that allowed even greater

precision for the reproduction of sound events than living performers were capable of. This is not to say that Cage rejected technology, but rather his applications of such a medium were aligned toward an opposite direction. While modernists such as Milton Babbitt employed so-called "high tech" methods rooted what were perceived as applications of mathematics and science, one could describe Cage as utilizing those of the "low-tech" idiom. Technology was often utilized, but not in a manner to enact more artistic control and precision. Instead, Cage's application of technology reflected his desire for "music performed by everyone" in an openly experimental way. According to Tomkins, the early elements of *Imaginary Landscapes* such as constant and variable frequencies on test recordings, and other electrical engineering devices make them the first electronic scores ever composed (92). The use of common everyday devices such as radios and turntables clearly illuminated a stark contrast to serialists such as Babbitt, whose infamous 1958 essay titled *Who Cares if You Listen?* regarded the technical nature of modernist serialism as beyond the grasp of the general populous, and therefore requiring more insulation within academic institutions (3). Here, there was a quite observable divergence between the emerging new simplicity and serialist modernism, with the latter being not only influential, but also progressing rapidly toward levels of new unparalleled complexity that Stockhausen so aptly described:

> All elements had equal rights in the forming process and constantly renewed all their characteristics from one sound to the next. ... If from one sound to the next, pitch, duration, timbre, and intensity change, then the

> music finally becomes static: it changes extremely quickly, one is constantly traversing the entire realm of experience in a very short time and thus one finds oneself in a state of suspended animation, the music "stands still." If one wanted to articulate larger time-phases, the only way of doing this was to let one sound-characteristic predominate over all others for some time. However, under the circumstances then prevalent, this would have radically contradicted the sound- characteristics. And a solution was found to distribute in space, among different groups of loudspeakers, or instruments, variously long time-phases of this kind of homogeneous sound-structure. (69)

While it is true that did Cage study with Arnold Schoenberg, who was viewed as the leader of the *Second Viennese School*, he spent his entire career without ever embracing Schoenberg's highly controlled, mathematical methods of harmonic practice (as most explicitly described by his often cited statement about dedicating his life to beating his head against the wall of harmony). Perhaps this contrast between these two figures was best summarized when Schoenberg allegedly described Cage as "not actually a composer, but rather an inventor of genius" (qtd. in Tomkins 85). As serialist proponents such as Milton Babbitt and Schoenberg (with pupils Anton Webern and Alban Berg) were pioneering a new standard of compositional control through rhythmic and harmonic complexity, Cage embodied a much more physical, and performative "new simplicity" to later be associated with postmodernists. By executing this notion through the concepts of

chance and indeterminism, those such as Woods have situated Cage, at the forefront of this movement:

> One of serialism's main postwar alternatives sprang from the experimentalism of the American John Cage. With other American composers like Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, Earle Brown, and Cornelius Cardew, Cage sought to liberate the parameters of sound from the hypercontrol of serialism by introducing chance and indeterminate procedures. (182)

Though Woods only mentions such connections briefly in passing, composer Michael Nyman (whom Woods also cites) goes further to argue that Cage initiated the new simplicity through a significant shift in composition, bringing forth the radical concept of unfixing relationships (81). According to Nyman, all post-Renaissance music to this point had been concerned upon fixing with increasing exactitude the relationships between sounds. Nyman also pointed to the rather stark contrast of compositional ideology through the arrogant attitude of composers such as Stockhausen who said of *New York School* member Morton Feldman, "[I] once told Feldman that one of his pieces could be a moment in my music, but never the other way around" (qtd. in Nyman 81). For Nyman, commentary such as Stockhausen's reflected an attitude that was essentially incapable of ever comprehending true complexity in music. With this said, serialists such as Stockhausen may only recognize a simple movement when it is combined against another, more complex moment, and must therefore, fulfill a complex role in the ultimate

compositional structure. The opposite, however, tends to be true in the "new simplicity" of those in the *New York school* such as Feldman and Cage. For example, a simple work may be a complete field in which movements of greater of lesser simplicity (if present) entail no intended relational significance in the same traditional sense of the serialist followers of the *Second Viennese School* (Nyman 81).

Despite his purposeful efforts against complexity in music, one of the most common problems with a sober discussion of Cage and complexity is the common tendency to casually dismiss his abilities as a composer without appropriate merit. For example, in an article discussing the movement of new simplicity, Josiah Fisk makes a number dismissive comments towards Cage's compositional faculties that while rather curious, reflect a rather prevalent attitude in a number of discourses:

> The days when Cage's music carried automatic shock value are long past. But many do still bear him a grudge for other reasons. It wasn't just that Cage was musically incompetent? That much he cheerfully admitted. It was that he insisted his incompetence was as valid as anyone else's skill. Implicitly, Cage was asserting that if he couldn't hear something, it wasn't there. It was an attitude tailor-made to twentieth-century sensibilities: the substitution of personality for ability, the cultivation of ignorance behind a shield of arrogance. (398)

While it is true that not all scholars ascribe sympathetically to Cage's radical attitudes towards aesthetics, those aware of his studies with Schoenberg should be more

cautious to claim his output was merely rooted in sheer incompetence. Even prior to his tenure with Schoenberg, Cage undertook immense preparation before approaching him as a potential pupil. This background preparation was discussed in rather substantial detail by Tomkins, who described the intensive training regimen that Cage took prior to his studies with Schoenberg:

> He studied harmony and composition with Weiss for two hours after work each day and usually spent his evenings playing bridge with Mr. and Mrs. Weiss and Henry Cowell, who was then teaching at the New School for Social Research on Twelfth Street. No matter how late the previous evening's bridge game had lasted, he got up at four a.m. every day and composed for four hours. He eventually became a scholarship student at the New School and took all of Cowell's courses, which put him in touch with the whole world of modern music. By the fall of 1934 he felt sufficiently enlightened to approach Schoenberg, who had recently come to America and was teaching, by coincidence, at the University of Southern California. (84)

Since he could not afford to pay for lessons, Schoenberg agreed to train Cage if he would dedicate his life to music, and with this agreement in place, he not only studied with Schoenberg at his home, but also attended all of his courses at USC and UCLA.

Such background information on Cage's dedication to intense training not only reveals a composer who was trained and technically competent in a similar manner to that

of his contemporaries, but it also discredits detracting claims that Cage's simplicity was rooted in technical inability rather than progressive ideological practices. Perhaps this misunderstanding of Cage is further constructed in the lack of serious discourse, with certain critics viewing him as a type of musical pariah. Humorous stories also cloud judgment such as when Lukas Foss invited Cage to play the role of the Devil in a 1966 performance of Stravinsky's *Histoire du Soldat* to which he claimed "everybody thought I was well cast" (qtd. in Taruskin 262). In response to such unseriousness, Taruskin argues that while such attitudes softened towards the end of Cage's life, there was a rather peculiar evolution that took place:

> By the time the enfant terrible qualified for Medicare, he had been transformed into a grand old man (well, a sweet old guy) at whom no one ever got angry, at whom everyone grinned back, on whom everyone showered praise and thanks... He was no longer a threat. And that, if anything, defined the transition from the modern to the postmodern. (266)

With this said, however, Taruksin also believes that others did not "catch up" aesthetically with Cage. Rather, musical evolution took a type of detour after this postmodern transitionary period occurred:

> It is not that the world caught up to Cage. He was, rather, left behind; or kicked upstairs. (Babbitt, too, went suddenly from pariah to elder statesman, and Boulez became caught up in institutional power politics and has not produced an important work since *Repons* in 1981). Revill

> senses this, and his conclusion is shrewd, if a little wistful: Cage has lived through a time when the "avant-garde" meant what it said. As the twentieth century nears its end, there is no avant garde of which to speak: the term has come to refer to a midcentury movement, and not to each successive advance on received artistic wisdom. Indeed, arguably times from the '80s have been recuperative rather than revolutionary. (267)

Clearly, the term recuperative being attached to any stream of musical evolution is problematic in a number of senses. When first encountered, one is initially to assume that something has to be fixed, healed, or regenerated, though such connections are not necessary accurate in context. This term, particularly used by Revill, appears to reflect various aspects discussed earlier that correspond to the new simplicity movement, and if the information presented thus far is pieced together, it appears that though Cage was not one of the primary cited figures of this particular movement, it would not have arisen without his prior aesthetics and ideologies, particularly those residing around the aesthetics stemming from the "not enough nothing" attitude.

It would be toward the end of Cage's life that a number of composers began to be associated with the movement typically referred to as the new simplicity, which as stated earlier, was notable for its reactionary stance against complexity, particularly of that associated with those entrenched in the ideological streams and practices of serialism. With this said, however, a number of figures emerging from this movement were also disinterested in minimalism, and though some have been tempted to associate these two

streams, it is important to recognize them as separate, unique aesthetic movements. While both minimalism and the new simplicity were reactionary forces against complexity, the most typical binding aesthetic processes of minimalism would be notably absent in the emerging new simplicity. The systematic development and formation through repetition would be displaced by a type of wayward execution of extensive steps to sustain a work, often containing nominal material. Although overlooked, such differences mark a significant divergence in compositional style that make the two terms very much incompatible.

During this period there was a relative amount of dogmatism surrounding both schools of serialism and minimalism, especially between those who studied with Stockhausen and Kagel. With the notion of "new music" during this period often being affixed to one of these schools, the new simplicity essentially could be described as a response to a crisis in musical language (Fox 29). For proponents of this movement such as Kevin Volans, the very notion of modernism was also becoming "a parody of itself" (qtd. in Fox 29) in a manner very much similar to the breakdown and crumbling of musical codes proposed earlier by Attali. With this combination of ideological dogmatism, and stale musical codes, there appears to have been a general attitude toward "renewing" music, as opposed to simply continuing whatever trend was prevalent in so-called "new music."

The present context of the term "new simplicity" has been traced back to a number of instances through figures such as Wolfgang Becker, who used the term during

the *Westdeutscher Rundfunk (West German Broadcasting)'s Musik der Zeit* concert series of January 1977, and Aribert Reimann, who grouped together German composers such as Hans-Christian von Dadelsen, Hans-Jürgen von Bose, Wolfgang Rihm, Wolfgang von Schweinitz, Ulrich Stranz, Manfred Trojahn, and Detlev Müller-Siemens as collectively embodying an effort for an immediacy between creative impulse and the musical result; working against the structural regimens of pre-compositional planning often associated with the avant garde (25). Still, years earlier, Cage's pupil Christian Wolff's 1974 Darmstadt lectures also described an inherently similar trend through the vehement rejection of the notion of evolution, particularly related to increasing compositional complexity (Chase and Thomas 46). Even Stockhausen has been purported by some to have predicted this trend, claiming that such figures essentially carried out a "radical simplification" of his aesthetic practices occurring between 1966-1975, which produced his *Tierkreis* melodies (Faltin 192).

Attempts to generate a workable grouping or "school" for the new simplicity have also proved to be challenging. Scholars have tended to differ in opinion as to who best embodies or represents this trend, even in contemporary contexts. For example, those such as Fisk describe Henryk Górecki, along with John Tavener and Arvo Pärt as the three principal proponents of this movement. He contends that these three composers are mutually linked by their careful avoidance of the development of ideas in the manner of Western classical music, with a goal to attain a simplicity and "purity" of musical material and character (402). Perhaps the common fabric of these composers was an

effort to return to more traditional forms and earlier tonal language, but even more significantly, there was an overarching goal of communicating more effectively with audiences. Others tend to cite what is often referred to as the *Cologne School.* In 2007, Christopher Fox published an article that examined this trend and cautiously placed its key figures as Walter Zimmermann, Clarence Barlow, Gerald Barry, and Kevin Volans. Similarly, Volans himself described the movement as having two waves; the first being through Zimmermann and Barlow, followed by Barry and Newman. Barry places Zimmermann, Barlow, and Volans as the key figures, while critic Bruce Chatwin also arrived at the same conclusion. Needless to say, without an entirely clear or unanimous consensus on this movement, coupled with the often arbitrary nature of categorization, generating an accurate picture of the new simplicity can be a daunting task. Still, there are certain intertwining and overlapping aspects that can be utilized to progress with this discussion (see fig. 6).

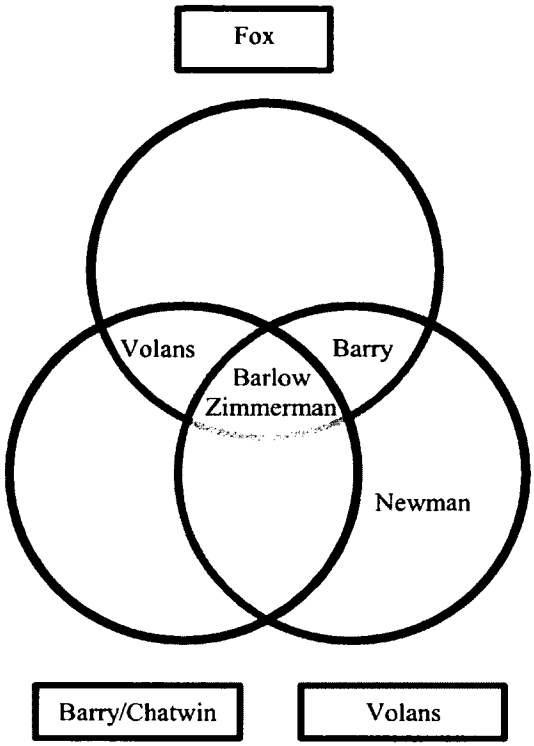

Fig. 6. Venn Diagram of New Simplicity Circles

Aesthetically, the new simplicity has been described by as embodying a colorless palette, and a tendency to reduce unnecessary formal complexity in a work (Meyer 77), and like other associated musical streams of postmodernism discussed in this study, its relationship with the topic has also been associated with a conceptual lag that may not have always been recognized or discussed as "postmodern" during its initial emergence. According to Hermann Danuser, the term could also be considered a type of precursory descriptive of interchangeable nature for those actually discussing postmodern music in a general sense:

Just as there is often talk of a "belatedness" of music *vis-à-vis* the other arts with respect to a general historical development of art – of course only partially justified – so such a statement also appears to be true for musicology or music theory itself, if we consider its contribution to such discussions as the debate on reception aesthetics, which took place earlier and more intensively in other fields, or, for that matter, to the discourse on postmodernism, with regard to which it seemed for a long time as if it had taken place leaving music completely aside. Certainly, some relevant phenomena have been thoroughly discussed since the end of the 1970s in terms other than those of postmodernism, terms such as "new simplicity," "new expressionism," or "new subjectivity." And since the beginning of the 1980s, triggered by Habermas' Adorno Prize acceptance speech, texts dealing with postmodernism from a musical point of view have occasionally been written. Yet only towards the end of the decade did a coherent discussion arise: in a series of articles in the *Neue Zeitschrift* für *Musik* (1988-89), in a concurrent series of lectures at the Conservatory of Freiburg, as well as in the 1990 and 1991 conferences, organized by the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts and the Graz Institute for Musical Research, respectively, the proceedings of both of which have been published. This "belatedness" also has its good side, however, in that it allows us to relate the facts of the matter – musically and musicologically – from a certain distance to a discourse on postmodernism which seems to

have gone from a phase of dogged polemics to one of calm discussion. (157)

While Cage may not be the commonly cited figure of the new simplicity, it appears evident that the discussion thus far has depicted his body of work to be not only in deep contrast with the serialists of his era, but also very much precursory towards the aesthetics of what would eventually become the new simplicity. If one is to examine the groupings proposed earlier by Fox, Volans, Barry, and Chatwin, Zimmermann is a commonly cited leading figure (as seen in Fig. 6). When one examines the body of work from Zimmermann, there is also a clear influence from Cage's musical principals, most notably through the modal aesthetics that he was experimenting with during the late-1940s in works such as the *String Quartet in Four Parts*, the piano composition *In a Landscape*, and the work *Six Melodies* for violin and piano (Fox 30). Much like Cage, Zimmermann was also influenced by Thoreau and Zen Buddhism. In particular, his work *Beginner's Mind* was inspired by Shrunryu Suzuki's text *Zen Mind*. For Fox, such a connection is significant as Zimmerman follows a similar structure to that of Suzuki's three phases for a spiritual journey toward the enlightened state of Zen mind: "leave the old," "clean the mind," and "change your consciousness" (qtd. in Fox 30). Similarly, the composition is structured with an introduction, "Five moments in the life of Franz Schubert," which contains five versions of the old mind that is to be transformed, represented in a musical context by short extracts transcribed by Zimmermann from his personal piano improvisations. As the work progresses to leave "the old," the content is

incrementally simplified to coincide with the new consciousness emerging, with the pianist performing as well as well as vocalizing and introducing fragmented segments of what ultimately becomes Zimmermann's *Beginner's Mind Song*. For those such as Fox, such a work is very reminiscent of Cage's *String Quartet*, especially in their structural foundations engineered toward sustainability. This particular composition is also an interesting example of aesthetic process in the new simplicity, especially due to the fact that Zimmermann manages to sustain the work through quite a limited amount of notes, which was made possible through extensive planning structures containing thirty steps.

A particular point of interest in this discussion is also Cage's transcending influence, even when opinions on the new simplicity differ. For example, in his alternative conception of a new simplicity circle (including Pärt, Górecki, and Tavener), Fisk also depicts Cage as a type of precursory figure in this context, claiming:

> John Cage, with his chance-determined pieces and his all-sound-is-music philosophy, was the first to tread this path. He did it knowingly and gleefully - first as a lark, and later, trapped by success, with a seriousness that kept growing while effectiveness dwindled. Cage was always too artsy for the wider public, who couldn't see the fun in music that advertised its intent to defraud and then made good on the promise. But he did win attention within the cosmopolitan culture-world by capitalizing on the rift that separated the Babbitt/Boulez school of composers (the so-

> called Post-War Serialists) from the art-music audiences of mid-century. (398)

To cite specific examples, Fisk references the work of Arvo Pärt, in particular the work *Festina Lente*, in which the recording's linear notes state "The sacred numbers three and seven determine the work's structure . . . The three groups of instruments . . . play the melody seven times at three different tempos." For Fisk, one only need to substitute the numbers of the *I Ching* for Pärt's sacred numbers "blessed by God" into this context, and the work is suddenly Cagean in nature (403).

In his rather critical article *The New Simplicity: The Music of Górecki, Tavener and Pärt*, Fisk also describes a similar trend to that of Fox. If Cage pushed Western Art to the absolute edge "of a cliff" as Taruskin contends, these figures associated with the new simplicity movement enacted the recuperative action described by Revill in partial response, but also redirected aesthetic evolution from where Cage appears to have left off. Though rooted ideologically in a number of Cage's tenets, new simplists such as Górecki take the notion of absolving communication much further than Cage ever did throughout his lifetime, which Fisk describes in an analysis of Górecki's *Symphony No. 3*:

> What about the musical content of the canon? Here too the listener is sent away empty. Rather than any perceptible form of interaction among the voices of the canon, any mutual acknowledgement, there are merely simultaneous monologues. The composer has scrupulously followed the

> basic specifications for a canon, taking a musical line and overlapping it with itself at regular intervals, but has ignored the principles which give the form interest and life. Not by coincidence, these are also the principles that require far greater skill and effort to satisfy. The resulting music is still a canon, but in name only. The voices, as they overlap, do not create a pattern of meaning. What is left are the bare rudiments of the form, which Górecki uses as a rather primitive mechanical means of building and then unbuilding a sonic texture. It is this texture that offers the music's one communication: a tide of undifferentiated emotionalism. In all other potential aspects of communication, the piece is essentially mute. It has an absence of communication that surpasses Cage's own efforts in that direction. (309)

This recuperative notion also takes a rather interesting turn in relation to ideology as Górecki, Tavener and Pärt all embody a sense of religious fundamentalism that shapes their aesthetic practices and compositional output. It is important to note that this sense of collective fundamentalism also has a certain sense of detachment from contemporary chronology, and emphasizes a type of yearning for the earlier periods; a notion seemingly unique to these new simplists. Though these figures all achieved rather impressive commercial success, Fisk finds this shared ideological stance to be rather problematic in numerous areas:

Of course, there is no danger that they actually would find themselves in the distant past, and that brings us to the biggest flaw in the New Simplicity's foundation. What the New Simplists are asking us to do is to return to a past of putative innocence: not just to use old texts or musical ideas in creating something new, but to go back to being as we once were. There are two impossibilities associated with this wish... The first impossibility is that we cannot go back. We cannot be what we are not. We cannot forget what we know too well to forget, or to believe what we were born too late to believe. We cannot pretend to be Medieval monks, or Greek soldiers surrounded by Saracens, or an eighteen-year-old woman in a Gestapo prison, or anyone in another time or place. We are not in their position. We do not have the right to express ourselves as they did and still call it self-expression. To attempt to do so is not to honor them but to expropriate their identities; it is not to know them better, only better to supplant the difficult facts of their lives with our own emotional fantasies. Does the impossibility of transporting ourselves into history also mean that we can't return to the musical world of Bach or Mozart or anyone else? Obviously it does, even though we may continue to find use and value in old music. But we are not spared the need to try to devise new forms of music that have an inner life, difficult though the challenge may seem. And while we cannot in good faith act as if we were our own forebears, we are still free, as artists have always been, to adopt elements

> from other times and places in fashioning an art that is new and is uniquely ours, an art that acknowledges its time as the present. The problem begins when we excuse ourselves from the responsibilities of that task under the pretense of following some other era's rules - especially when we don't really follow those rules at all, but only an arbitrarily primitivized version of them (Górecki's canon, for instance)... The second impossibility is the notion that life has ever been as simple as the New Simplicity tries to suggest. Using the hindsight afforded by history, it ascribes to the people of the past a sense of innocence that didn't exist at the time; the present, after all, never seems simple or innocent for those who are in the midst of it. Using faux naivete, the New Simplicity tries to revive times and people who, whether artful or artless in their expression, were certainly not naïve - or to put it another way, it tries to revive times and people that never actually existed. Under the guise of simplification, it strips an ancient art of its brains, then presents the lobotomized result to us as something our forebears would have understood. (411)

Though Fox acknowledges what he describes as a sense of naïveté in his grouping of the *Cologne School*, Fisk appears to be much more critical of this element in his circle. As Boulez once said of Cage, he not only conducted his work with naïveté, but also irony; an element seemingly absent from much of the new simplists:

> John Cage is responsible just as Satie is responsible. He had a beneficial influence to the extent that he helped to burst the fetters of the 1950s discipline. He did it with ingenuity and naivety. There was much humor in his work, and this ingenuity in wanting to break down discipline by showing up its absurdity and academicism. (qtd. in Nattiez and Samuels 23)

While the use of naïveté is prevalent not only in the works of new simplists such as Zimmermann, but also in the aesthetics of Cage, and Even Satie (if one desires to generate a type of genealogy in this area), the absence of irony and humor appear to be consistent in this movement of new simplists. Referring back to Fisk's rather harsh account of this movement, while a significant amount of ideology and influence appears to have been derived from Cage in this particular scenario, there are also a number of clear points of divergence that begin to resonate. While both Cage and this particular grouping of composers drew inspiration from past ideological texts, whether it be Cage's numerous South and East Asian and medieval mysticism influences, Pärt's Western Medieval and Eastern asceticism, Tavener's conversion to Eastern Orthodoxy, or Górecki's devout Catholicism, the applications appear to be very much differing in approach when one arrives at the new simplists. For example, though Cage incorporated significant ideological elements from the distant past, he did so in a very much postmodern-infused fashion of hybrid nature as an earlier chapter reflected upon. Cage was influenced by East and South Asian beliefs, he was influenced by medieval

mysticism, but he was also influenced by social theorists of the twentieth century (McLuhan in particular), and perhaps most significantly in this case, his applications of flexibility, irony, and humor are notably absent in Fisk's circle of new simplists. This is not to say that Cage did not have strong beliefs; for Taruskin, Cage subscribed with purity to the fundamentals of Western Art (10), and the composer's belief that experimentalism was *the* music of America (Bourne 62) demonstrates a more dominant stance than some are willing to admit. However, to cite Fisk once again, there is a deeper, rather rigid application of ideology depicted in the new simplists that appears to have still exerted itself far beyond Cage:

> With the religious aspect we get closer to the nub of the problem. We are asked to accept that the New Simplists' elimination of the play of ideas in music isn't born of highhandedness, confusion or lack of ability. It is authorized by powers far beyond human comprehension. Their ignorance of musical wisdom is indeed deliberate, but justified, because it is nobly wrapped in the Spartan robe of self-denial. This may be a form of religiosity, but it is neither Eastern nor Medieval. In some ways it is closer to New Age spiritualism, with its intellectual flabbiness and fuzzy blend of platitudes from miscellaneous sources. New Age thinking values ritual over intelligent action, superstition over knowledge and logic. In psychological terms, it is founded on denial. But even more than New Age, what the New Simplicity resembles is fundamentalism. It aims to

> return us to "simpler times." It invokes higher authority. It casts itself as the force of good that is fighting off evil. It attempts to be self-consistent and closed. It prizes austerity. It takes offense at playfulness. It demands unquestioning acceptance. It has shown up at a time of confusion with The Answer. It is utterly devoid of humor or irony - a main point of difference with the Soviet religious-influenced composers like Sofia Gubaidulina and Alfred Schnittke (who have always attempted to give their music at least a modicum of inner life) as well as with the Minimalists like Philip Glass and Steve Reich. It turns all opinions to its support: if you like this music, it's because you perceive its simple beauty; if you criticize it, it's because you are blinkered or elitist. (406)

It appears that much of what Fisk has been discussing can be also traced back to Nyman's discussion of unfixing relationships. Such a concept was also prevalent in those from the *Cologne School* such as Barry's 1979 work simply titled "_____." With a concern emphasizing disposition over material, such a work has also been described by some as embodying no material at all (Fox 37). Not surprisingly, Volans has also proclaimed a similar desire to "get rid of content" (qtd. in Fox 39). For the new simplists, common connective themes from the past such as a given source and the resultant music have been abolished. As Volans put quite simply in a letter to Zimmermann, "It doesn't matter a damn how dry or random or arbitrary the source is, all that matters is what one does with it" (qtd. in Fox 39). Evidently, there is definitely an increased effort to

generate works that are not only embedded in postmodern-derived localisms, but also situated in a very much ahistorical, immensely contemporary context. It is important to note that others have taken a more tempered approach to analysis of this movement. Those such as Gann state that it is wise to exercise caution without being prematurely critical of various contemporary movements, including the new simplicity (tonality):

> The switch from an overelaborate style to a new simplicity has happened often enough that we ought to be used to it, able to get through it without a lot of name-calling. Charges by Wuorinen and Babbitt that minimalism encourages musical illiteracy exactly parallel complaints by Zarlino and Artusi about the early Baroque: equally true, equally irrelevant. Technology can't speed up the fact that a new musical language takes generations to find its expressive power. Minimalism, or postminimalism, or the New Tonality, or Bang Music, hasn't died. It's waiting for its Monteverdi. (*Music Downtown* 172)

In another interesting twist to this discussion, Taruskin's article which described the so-called aesthetic "decline" of the second half of Cage's career still referenced two particular redeeming works toward the end of his life: *Music for...* (revised in 1987) and *Four* (1989). *Music for...* consisted of seventeen parts for voice and instruments, but lacked an overall score. Its title was also completed by adding the number of given performers. Each part comprised pieces and interludes notated on two systems utilizing flexible time-brackets. Throughout the work, performers executed the pieces by means

of single sustained tones, proceeded by silences. Such tones were conducted in a soft subtle fashion (*p* to *ppp*), with the option of repetition. The work was also notable through its applications of microtonal pitches, varying timbres, dynamics and freely played interludes of five, ten, and fifteen seconds. The piano strings were to be bowed, and the percussionists had fifty instruments each chosen by their performers, who then had to generate sustained tones.

In the other work, *Four*, performers were instructed to sit in a conventional relationship to one another, and perform sections of a five-minute duration labelled A-C. Like *Music for...*, each section also had flexible time brackets, though one was designated as fixed; these were notated from 0'00"-5'00." There were four parts which could be played by any of the performers. If this particular composition's performance lasted ten minutes, it also required performers to exchange parts. For example, the two violins might exchange their parts with the other two played (one with three, two with four, four with two, and two with three). Once the performers' chronometers were reset, they would play section B again, and if the performance lasted twenty minutes, all the performers would play section A and C without any break between. To conclude, performers one and two would typically exchange their parts with performers three and four, and play parts A and C again. A typical completed performance with repetitions lasted thirty minutes.

Upon examination, some of the most obvious aspects of these works is their relation to other postmodern-associated compositions, notably the string parts of *Music*

for... embodying the same notational style as the *Freeman Etudes*. Like Zimmermann, Cage appears to go to substantial lengths to use similar processes to "sustain" or extend aspects of these works. Also present is a somewhat similar context of naïveté. Perhaps Taruskin's description best places them in the realm of the new simplicity (though not intentionally):

> both of them restrained, elegiac studies in sustained tones reminiscent of, and perhaps a tribute to, Cage's old friend Morton Feldman. When performed as plainly and devotedly as the Arditti Quartet performs them they are sublime lullabies, gloriously realizing not only the quietism of Zen as Cage professed it, but the qualities of "naive poetry" as described by Schiller: "tranquillity, purity and joy." (9)

Though it seems tenable that the new simplists (of whichever categorization) expanded upon the discussed concepts of Cage quite significantly, it still appears evident that the entire trend would not have been possible without the previous work in aesthetics enacted by Cage and his attitude of "not enough nothing"; a simple-sounding, yet startlingly involved aesthetic concept. This movement is not only very much attached to Cage, but also others in his circles such as Jasper Johns (especially in the work of Barry and Volans), and even those whom influenced Cage himself such as Erik Satie. As a movement very much hinged upon the 1970s and 1980s (an era emerging toward the end of Cage's life), there is still much examination and discussion required in relation to understanding this musical form through a contemporary lens. Still, despite its

underdeveloped nature in scholarship that Fox has emphasized, one can at the very least situate Cage as a precursory figure here, especially in the work of Zimmermann; perhaps this strand of postmodernism's most prominent figure.

CHAPTER 7

EMBRACING THE NON-LINEAR, NON-CUMULATIVE, AND NON-TELEOLOGICAL

The last aspect of postmodernism that this discussion will focus upon is Cage's work against what one could describe as the linear, cumulative and the teleological notions of composition. When discussing this notion of teleological motion or progression, it is often an area that can be either overlooked or granted inadequate attention, particularly due to cultural conditioning within the aesthetic realm that has been long-entrenched, especially within the musical sense. While some struggle to define the concept of teleological music, Leonard B. Meyer provided what appears to be a rather succinct definition:

> What characterizes the music with which most of us are most familiar – the music of Bach or Haydn, Wagner or Bartók? Think, for instance, of the "Liebestod" of Wagner's Tristan, rising in cumulative sequences toward its powerful moment of climax; or of the kinetic intensity with which the slow introduction of Bartók's *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion* surges toward the Allegro which followings; or of the way in which the rondo-finale of a Haydn symphony plays with our expectations that the main theme will return – failing to appear just when everything seems ready for its return or arriving just when it is least expected... Because of its marked, though not necessarily obvious, structure and

> pattern, as well as because of our past experience with its grammar and syntax, such music is perceived as having a purposeful direction and goal. As we listen, we make predictions – albeit unconscious ones – about where the music is going and how it will get there. Of course, our predictions may not be correct. What we expect may not occur or may do so at an unexpected time or in an unexpected way. But whether expected or not, what actually does take place is colored by the fact that predictions were made. That is, musical events are felt to be normal and regular, surprising, amusing, or even shocking, as they conform to, or deviate from, our predictions. Such goal-oriented music I shall call teleological. (Similarly, the converging lines of perspective in a painting by Raphael or David, the swirling kinetic curves in a Delacroix or Van Gogh, the directional "arrows" in a Tintoretto or Picasso, all focus the viewer's attention upon particular points of structural culmination – upon visual goals. And in literature the normal syntax of language, the delineation of human motivation, the explication of casual relationships among the sequential events of a narrative, and the presentation of dialectically structured thought processes – all combine to create a purposeful, goal-oriented art). (72)

Contrasting this definition with his concept of the musical avant-garde, he states:

> The music of the avant-garde directs us toward no points of culmination – establishes no goals toward which to move. It arouses no expectations, expect presumably that it will stop. It is neither surprising nor, once you get used to its sounds, is it particularly startling. It is simply there. And this is the way it is supposed to be. Such directionless, unkinetic art, whether carefully contrived or created by chance, I shall call anti-teleological art. Here is what one young composer Christian Wolfe, has to say about this music: "The music has a static character. It goes in no particular direction. There is no necessary concern with time as a measure of distance from a point in the past to a point in the future... It is not a question of getting anywhere, of making progress, or having come from anywhere in particular." (72)

This concept is probably best depicted through Cage's tape collage of 1958 titled *Fontana Mix* (originally titled *Performance Mix*, but later renamed in honor of Cage's Italian landlady Signora Fontana). In this composition, Cage utilized chance operations to essentially suspend the flow of time with the sounds determined by chance intersections of dots and lines graphed upon sets of transparencies. These intersections of straight and curved lines then determined the sound on tape that would be utilized for a given audio event. The absolute horizontal distance between two given intersecting points on the graph, along with the straight line then determined the duration of a given audio event. In the most basic sense, this rather unorthodox method of composition was

intended to demonstrate Cage's view that time was not fixed. This was evident when he stated "time is inevitably beyond measure. It can't ever again be clock time" (*For the Birds* 129). With this in mind, Cage was demonstrating his interest in both imposed structural methods, and their relationship with the perception of time passage. By simply omitting the structural foundations of imposed structures, Cage believed that he could essentially break away entirely with linear "clock" time, so to speak. The methods of aleatoric chance employed within this piece were also non-recursive, and each segment attained its own unique process, while at the same time, the non-causal relationship between each segment that occurred also negated any notion of internalized structural format.

The main goal of a work such as *Fontana Mix* appears to have been to demonstrate that time was not an entity which was independent of cause and effect. This illustrated a viewpoint towards causality and time, which through the random generation of numbers by non-recursive means, provided the ability to generate groups of sound events which showed individual events as irrelevant to any type of sequence. With this said, if causality is absent, then time in Cage's view is in fact suspended, and by challenging the notion of simultaneity, no given event may be viewed as the corresponding result of another (much like the correlations to Lyotard mentioned previously). Clearly, this particular example of tape collaging could be described as the most overt example of Cage's postmodern leaning towards a rejecting of time within the linear context, while doing so in a very much non-cumulative, non-teleological fashion.

It is interesting to note that while he very much opposed to the chance operations of Cage, the 1956 work of *Pithoprakta* from Xenakis shares relatively similar compositional properties; also utilizing "vertical" time that is disassociated with the subjective experience of the audience, and rather that of the compositional structure. Noting these similarities (and the rather critical nature of Xenakis in general towards his aleatoric methods), Cage once recalled "I wonder if Xenakis is that far away from what I'm trying to do; not of course in what he says, but in what he achieves" (*For the Birds* 199).

Other examples of these efforts are also observable in various forms in works such as Cage's *Music for Piano* series which essentially exercised an application of indeterminism between the time passing on the score and that of the actual performance. Those such as Martin Iddon refer to such efforts as developing toward indeterminacy "proper." This is due to underlying structural factors such as the extrapolation of temporal principals. These particular works were also playing with the choreographed dance of Cunningham, and this was significant as the choreography was not generated for the music, but rather intended to be executed alongside it; essentially disrupting any unified sense of time progression. With these works being performed by Tudor, certain performance alterations which may have been carried out for purposes of simplification also appear to demonstrate their apparent anti-teleological aspect, and the shift of focus toward specific events or points rather than any underpinning motion driving the piece. For Iddon, Tudor's notation not only demonstrates the shift of attention towards single moments where an event occurs, but it also illuminates the destruction of any

expectations of drawing links between these events (51). Such detachment from teleological senses of conclusion were also present in Cage's writings as Peter Jaeger describes:

> And it is precisely this form of holographic, infinite interdependency that Cage finds in Rauschenberg's 'all-over' compositional method. Where Tu Shun writes, "[i]f you sit in one jewel, then you are sitting in all jewels in every direction multiplied over and over," Cage writes, "each small part is a sample of what you find elsewhere (*Silence* 100). As a compositional method, the all-over net is also employed by Cage, for in the introductory head note to his essay on Rauschenberg, he writes that the lecture "may be read in whole or in part; any sections of it may be skipped, what remains may be read in any order" (*Silence* 98). Much like the metaphor of the net, in which "there is no going or coming" (Tu Shun 66), Cage's compositional method offers reads no place of origin, no continuous narrative, no logical argument, and no teleological conclusion. (56)

Clearly, this aspect of Cage is connected quite significantly to the topics referenced earlier, notably anti-rationalism, and quite explicitly, Eastern philosophy. Others such as Jonathan Stalling have expanded on this connection referring to it as Buddhist-inspired anti-teleological indeterminacy, notably present in Cage's *Lecture on Nothing*. In his publication *Poetics of Emptiness: Transformations of Asian Thought in*

American Poetry, Stalling draws significant correlations between anti-teleological ideology and Buddhism:

> a break with the belief in ontological stability itself, and furthermore as a move toward releasing the teleological ends of many core American values. As Stephen Fredman writes, "If American culture bases so many of its ideals upon the furtherance of individual self-interest-lauding the person who can 'take change' and promoting the 'pursuit of happiness' and the American Dream of getting ahead - Buddhism stresses letting-be, nonattachment, the cessation of desire, and the illusory nature of the 'self.'" Most of these challenges to Western values privilege various kinds of "nothing" (or doing nothing) over a "something" (or doing something) by way of challenging the *a priori* acceptance of the ontological values placed in various guises of "somethingness." Here, "no-self" is privileged over self/soul/spirit, process (procedure) is valued over product, mindfulness (loose awareness of the mind itself) over directed cognition and analysis, et cetera - and of course, many poets interested in integrating these Buddhist ideas into American poetry look into existing Asian poetic techniques already used to communicate or enact Buddhist (and Daoist) philosophical insights. (12)

As noted earlier, Henry Sayre made the rather significant claim about Cage, along with Robert Rauschenberg and Merce Cunningham as the originators of postmodernism

through their theatrical work referred to as the *Happening*. Sayre referenced a 1962 interview in which Cage redefined the art of composition as a form which was not static with a passive audience, but rather a constantly changing acoustical experience that was subjective to each individual, whether they were the performer or audience member (Perloff 64). Performative works such as the *Happening* also fit rather appropriately into this particular discussion. As already mentioned, the *Happening* was quite influential toward postmodernism in its own regard, but it is also important to emphasize its role in also displacing the notions of continuity as it essentially generated a piece without a beginning, middle, or end, with no apparent ordering of events. This deconstructed sense of continuity what largely what led philosophers such as Sayre and also Barthes to believe that Cage essentially created a whole new form of music.

Cage's pivotal work *4'33"* also fits within this realm depending on whose view is adopted. Though even the most select sampling of scholars would yield differing analytical stances toward the work, Jonathan Kramer's synopsis is particularly relevant, not merely to this particular discussion, but also to this study in general. Kramer not only states that the listener becomes a creative participant in the performance, but also contends that the he or she is essentially more important to the music than the composer (382). This much has already been established in this study, but Kramer goes further to add that by minimalizing this distinction between the self and the other, the listener and the music, the role of the listener is emphasized while partaking in "vertical" or "non-teleological" music. For Kramer, they are participating in a music that is in a blissful

state of "fusion of the self with the environment" (qtd. in Clarkson 70). Adding to this stance, Austin Clarkson draws parallels between Kramer's idea of fusion and Dewey's notion of aesthetic experience, which calls for not understanding, but rather "undergoing" on the listeners' part (71).

Though is appears safe to place Cage within the confines of anti-teleological music, this section would not be complete without also including more contemporary reexaminations of this area. In recent years, some have revisited Meyer's definition of teleological and anti-teleological music and argued that the concept is not as binary-based as initially believed in earlier decades. Interestingly, Robert Fink ties such a notion to the concepts of Butler, particularly those of a postmodern lens in relation to the gender and sexuality themes discussed earlier:

> It is not at all clear why we should remain attached to the essentialist binary opposition "teleological/nonteleological," when the equally essentialist binarisms of sexuality and gender with which it is so often coordinated have been so repeatedly deconstructed. Stealing an apposite term from Butler, we can begin by hypothesizing that teleology is performative. By this I do not simply mean that the experience of goal-directedness in music is dependent on the vagaries of performance (though this is obviously true). A more radical antiessentialism asks that music perform its teleology as nimbly as the Butlerian subject performs (with) traditional sexual and gender roles. A disco tune (or an avant-garde

> process piece) should have the right to "pass" as goal-directed (for a while); to assume and then cast off whatever pieces of the old, supposedly totalized structure of teleology please it, whenever and wherever it chooses; to maintain a distanced and perhaps even ironic stance toward "traditional" teleological dictates even as it plays with their undeniably pleasurable aspects. (43)

Referencing Meyer's definition, Fink argues that the notion of nonteleological experience in the music of Western culture does not exist, though at the same time, he appears to feel the need to leave some room for negotiation around this hypothesis when addressing the work of those such as Cage:

> Or, more to the taxonomic point, perhaps we should be discussing the multiplicity of what might dub, paraphrasing Weimar sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, *teleologische Zwischenstufen* – "intermediate teleological types." What Leonard Meyer saw as a stark divide between the teleological and the "antiteleological" (redolent now of old barbed-wire borders between gay and straight, masculine and feminine) we will remap as a wide field of intermediate possibilities, of para- and semiteleology – even, in the case of disco, of polymorphous-perverse teleology. Instead of parsing musical styles as either teleological or not, we can contrast musics that perform *classical teleology* – Beethoven, Brahms, Berg, the Beatles – with the various recombinant teleologies displayed by the repetitive

> concert and dance music. (I borrow the terminology of gene splicing to emphasize the radical metamorphosis – through technology – of codes that we once thought "natural" and immutable)... The strong version of this hypothesis would claim that there is in fact no nonteleological experience of music in Western culture, only new recombinations of teleology not yet recognized as transformations of goal-directedness. I believe the position could be argued, but there is no need for its extremity here. Let us accept a weaker, but still broadly revisionist claim: there are some truly nonteleological musical styles (John Cage, La Monte Young, Brian Eno), but any music with a regular pulse, a clear tonal center, and some degree of process is more likely to be an example of recombinant teleology. (43)

Despite these reservations toward Meyer's rather binary-based separation of the term, Fink still appears to agree that Cage is one of the true anti-teleological figures of this movement. While a vast number of composers would reside within the grey area, Cage's efforts clearly resonate in pioneering this concept, which was very much an outgrowth of his continuing postmodern evolution, both ideologically and aesthetically. The mere thought of having this particular discussion without Cage seems near impossible, and the reach of his influence upon the anti-teleological is without a doubt in need of further study and examination.

CHAPTER 8

CRITICISMS AND RESPONSES

The topic of Cage and criticism is not only vast, but also expansive in nature due to a lifelong relationship with controversy in virtually all aspects of his life as an artist. Even with over two decades now passed since his death, Cage remains a figure of significant discussion and debate, especially in relation to artistic and cultural movements in the contemporary twenty-first century. With this in mind, the proceeding section will refine its focus to be primarily upon those criticisms which relate mostly significantly to the topics of focus throughout this study of Cage and postmodernism.

One of the first items that should be mentioned in this segment is that when addressing Cage, or any artist from a postmodern framework, there are several inherent problems that arise, especially when attempting to use any sense of rigid classification. Williams succinctly describes this dilemma when he states that postmodernism is as much an interpretative ethos as a way of creating art/music that easily renders modernist scores that are in any sense "opaque" to be susceptible towards a postmodernist reading (228). Even Lyotard once stated that a work must first be postmodern to become modern; very much amplifying existing confusions. Williams also contends that most artifacts exhibit what he refers to as "mixed characteristics," especially in Cage's work due to the inherent tension between detached procedure and the specific movement (228). Even some who support the concept of Cage exhibiting postmodern characteristics point

out that like many other areas of Cage's life, one may grasp paradoxes, depending upon how these attributes are interpreted, as Nancy Perloff argues:

> This de-centered, collaborative, and heterogeneous principle for musical performance seems very postmodern. Yet the decisive presence of Cage's ego ("I like," "I try to bring about"), as well as the value he attached to historical musical practice, steered a modernist course. He designed and determined the performance situation, no matter how many participants were involved, and relied on his invention of chosen traditions from the past. (62)

Perloff's concerns are definitely relevant, especially due to the fact that she is one of a rather selective group of critics that give serious examination to Cage's postmodernism. While it is true that Cage did indeed place a certain level of value in historical musical practice, it should also be recognized that such value did not override or play a dominant role in his radical break from the traditions of many of his contemporaries. As a figure of transcending nature, Cage exhibited certain modernist tendencies, but it was his bold steps forward into a multiplicity of postmodern aesthetics and ideologies that this study believes overshadowed the residual modernist attributes still attached to them. A similar response may also be addressed towards Perloff's concerns directed at Cage's use of what she views as essentially ego-driven language such as "I like" and "I try to bring about." Though upon first examination, such statements appear to reflect a sense of ego per se, one cannot develop a thoroughly accurate picture of Cage by simply studying

certain segments of interviews or personal correspondences. As a figure who often resided within a complex realm of paradoxes, simple verbal statements must be examined in correlation to the corresponding aesthetic output that the composer produced. Such statements may appear to be relatively modernist in context, but the works themselves were very much detached from any such ego-driven processes. Undoubtedly, personal statements can often serve to greatly enhance insight or understanding of an artist's work, but at the same time, they can also become a source of confusion or misguidance. Similar issues frequently arose when attempting to create an accurate picture of Cage's own biographical details in relation to his studies of Zen with Suzuki, which often contradicted themselves depending upon which interviews and correspondences were examined. With this brought to attention, it seems to be overreaching to dismiss all of Cage's advances toward postmodernism discussed in this study due to a relatively minor amount of rather vague conflicting statements. Comments from Cage towards his practices should probably be afforded a certain amount of flexibility, as with any artist when attempting to explain their rationale of a given aesthetic process.

In the previous section on non-Western thought, it was established that Cage had a complex and evolving relationship with Eastern philosophy which essentially had numerous stages that one could argue were not entirely congruent if there was a hope to seamlessly superimpose one over another. As Toop points out, Cage's opinions expressed during the 1988-1989 Harvard lectures might reflect similar principals to those reaching back to 1958 in Darmstadt, but one could expect very different responses to the

same questions when he resided on the West Coast during the late nineteen-thirties, or during his New York years throughout the late nineteen-sixties. Toop also reflects on the fact that various critics have generated some rather curious analyses of Cage, with Frederic Jameson arbitrarily fusing his practices of silence and the prepared piano, and others such as Susan Sontag and Heinz-Klaus Metzger with tendencies to lag behind when discussing Cage in a given context; essentially bringing an outdated 'version' of Cage ideologically into a contemporary discussion (101). These cyclical or pendulum-type changes in ideological and aesthetic stances make it incredibly difficult to isolate a single view or statement at a given period of time without a referential point of the practice it was correlated to. Thus, great caution must be taken, and what Cage may have relayed verbally in a given interview does not necessarily depict the entirety of the representative or semiotic processes embedded within a work. Even when setting aside what Cage may or may not have stated, it should be recognized that the act of entirely removing an artist's ego from their aesthetic work would be a near impossible feat, especially if one is willing to trace back further along the semiotic line of a given work's signifiers. Still, one could argue that few during the past century came even remotely close to accomplishing this notion of removing the ego as successfully as Cage did. These conceptual issues, coupled with a generalized hostility of certain critics toward the postmodern movement outline the rationale for a study such as this one to address such assessments, however objective or subjective they may appear in context.

While there have been many critical of Cage's ideologies and methods in this realm, many of his detractors, refer back to cite the renowned social theorist of the *Frankfurt School*, Theodor Adorno. As a staunch advocate of the *Second Viennese School*, Adorno was highly critical of Cage's applications of indeterminacy, and his very notion of the freedom to allow sounds to be themselves (287). For Adorno, the appropriate method to embrace would have been to allow for a relative sense of autonomy in a work from its social conditions, but he also believed that with the composer's independence, some exertion of control was required for a work to maintain a sense of critical function in relation to society (283). This frequent stream of criticism expressed towards Cage's aleatoric works continued throughout his lifetime, and even in contemporary contexts, with critics frequently perceiving Cage's use of chance to have demonstrated apathy and a lack of social commitment. Those such as Jonathan Katz have also expressed concern over Cage's lack of involvement in the gay liberation movement; a significant area of ideological develop for postmodernists in the latter part of the twentieth first century. Katz essentially generates a portrait of a lifelong closeted-figure that permanently behaved within a pre-Stonewall context while watching contemporaries (especially those of the postmodern movement) become increasingly engaged socially in liberation movements. To respond to this claim, it could be argued that while Cage was not necessarily a leading figure in this movement, it should be recognized that unlike contemporaries such as Thompson or Bernstein, who carried out a lifelong struggle with their sexual identities, Cage appears to have accepted his early in life. In the post-stonewall period, Cage and Cunningham cohabited a New York

residence, and though he tended to not discuss details regarding their relationship, he appeared to have moved very much beyond the sexual identity struggles of modernists examined by Hubbs in her 2009 journal article "Bernstein, Homophobia, Historiography" (24).

Douglas Kahn expressed similar concerns about Cage politically, claiming that his preoccupation with the notion of silence also "silenced" any sense of social responsibility (163), while Michael Steinberg described Cage's methods as not only a departure from tradition, but also correlated Cage's division between composer and music to a type of estrangement between the composer and the public (158). When responding to critics such as Kahn and Steinberg who contend that music without any element of social commitment is problematic as artistic expression, Cage is not a clear-cut case. When contrasted with certain modernist composers such as Arnold Schoenberg, it appears true that others expressed more overtly social commentary through their works, such as views of a more egalitarian society through the harmonic traditions of twelve-tone dodecaphony (Albright 337). With this said, however, it would also appear rather presumptuous to dismiss Cage as entirely avoiding any notion of social commitment.

One could believe that Cage did express social commitment through his works, but through means of a more cryptic and non-traditional nature. Attempting to view Cage through traditional avenues of social and political organization is indeed troublesome, so to attain an accurate understanding of Cage, one must allow for more than merely a superficial or surface-level reading of the Eastern, mystic, and

transcendental philosophies that shaped a type of anarchistic form of passive resistance against many of the dominant narratives and discourses of power throughout his lifetime. According to William Brooks, Cage avoided affiliations and causes, yet was at no point unconcerned about the connections between society, politics, and art (214). For example, it was true that he was not particularly fond of the explicit themes of power and political subject matter in the work of Christian Wolff, but the same time, his rather abstract anarchist notion of allowing sounds to "be themselves" without external influence through the "no-continuity" structures of his compositions brings into focus a definite level of political engagement (Brooks 214). Such anti-teleological processes are often easy to overlook, but nonetheless provide a significant response to such criticisms. At the same time, such action also reveals methods to illuminate alternative models of social and political organization. As mentioned previously, Cage not only considered himself an anarchist, but was also well-versed in the works of the Thoreau such as *Civil Disobedience* and *Walden*. Such influence of these works also extended quite far back to his early years (Bock 22). Though such views may not reside within the mainstream political thought of certain critics, they undoubtedly shaped his ideologies. Cage's unique views on cultural and social anarchy also challenged conventions of social control and illuminated a number of narratives relating to gender, ethnicity and sexuality often ignored by historical narratives as Williams has recently argued (227). His aesthetic practices also challenged these conventions quite explicitly. By applying chance procedures in works such as the *Europeras*, Cage essentially disrupted the Western operatic traditions, and brought to the forefront these reexaminations of gender and

ethnicity constructions that would later become significant tenets for postmodernists. Though not overt commentary on the social and cultural conventions of society, the simple act of disrupting a centuries-old canon revealed entrenched stereotypes and assumptions that were often overlooked without question for numerous dominant eras of prestige. To further elaborate upon this notion of disruptive action, Nattiez contends that though not always explicitly expressed, the actions of composers such as Cage largely revolved around a methodology to "speak" in music about music in the second degree, with an overarching goal of exposing or denouncing the institutional aspects of music's functioning (85). Similarly, Attali argues that "noise" or more precisely, music that resides within the culturally defined adjectives of disturbing or disruptive is essentially a harbinger or premonitory voice of a new social order. For Attali, the contemporary "noise" of a culture is often a more effective lens to foreshadow social and political disruptions and upheavals than by relying on traditional fields of research and their specialists (214). As fascinating as such a theory is, Nattiez believes that Attali's thesis is a type of "musical sociology" that is actually rooted specifically in the Pythian stream, with the more important task being rather to evaluate what is actually considered noise in a given context; an area seemingly avoided by Attali (47).

Even decades after Attali's monograph *Noise* was released, the political reverberations of Cage's aesthetics are still emerging into discussion, with those such as Williams arguing that Cage's automated procedures carried out during the peak of mass production in the 1950s appear to have reflected a certain sense of detachment between

mass manufacturing processes and individual experience (231). Regardless of how one views the stances of these theorists, one can gather that at the very least, more attention should be granted towards the sociological repercussions of the aesthetic practices from a figure such as Cage. As Larson recently contended, Cage was also aligned quite early in life with figures such as the futurist Luigi Russolo, whose manifesto *The Art of Noise* was listed among his ten most important books ("Five Men" 149). By embracing the ordinary sounds of society, Russolo proclaimed "Every manifestation of our life is accompanied by noise. Noise, therefore, is familiar to our ear, and has the power to pull us into life itself" (qtd. in "Five Men" 149). For Larson, this last statement had a significant influence upon Cage, not just in relation to pure aesthetics, but also upon moral grounds. Attali also brings Cage into his discussion of Russolo, and situates his aesthetic practices as even more bold and disrupting:

> In Cage, the disruption is more evident; it can be seen in his negation of the channeled nature of music and the very form of the network, in his unconventional use of classical instruments and his contemptuous sneering at the meaning attributed to Art. When Cage opens the door to the concert hall to let the noise of street in, he is regenerating all of music: he is taking it to its culmination. He is blaspheming, criticizing the code and the network. When he sits motionless at the piano for four minutes and thirty-three seconds, letting the audience grow impatient and make noises, he is giving back the right to speak to people who do not want to have it. He is

> announcing the disappearance of the commercial site of music: music is to be produced not in a temple, not in a hall, not at home, but everywhere; it is to be produced everywhere it is possible to produce it, in whatever way it is wished, by anyone who wants to enjoy it. The composer should "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. (137)

Too often, attention is focused rather excessively upon the overt processes of social commentary, and not enough on the efforts to disrupt the long-entrenched codes, processes, and institutions of a society. When addressing the accusations of estrangement toward Cage, it could be said that indeed, such efforts could indeed be tied to processes of estrangement, but rather than creating the void between composer and society as Kahn and Steinberg argue, Cage reoriented this estrangement as between composer and music's institutionalizing forces. His "music for everyone" appears to have misled certain critics; perhaps a better way of expressing his intentions would have been "music for the common person."

To cite Attali once more, he entertains the possibility that even Cage's views on environmental sounds are embedded with disruption, and the jamming of dominant cultural codes:

> This music is not innocent. It is not just a way of drowning out the tedious noises of the workplace. It may be the herald of the general silence of men

before the spectacle of commodities, men who will no longer speak except to conduct standardized commentary on them. It may herald the end of the isolable musical work, which will have been only a brief footnote in human history. This would mean the extermination of usage by exchange, the radical jamming of codes by the economic machine. This is given explicit approval by musicians who think music should insinuate itself into the everyday world and cease to be an exceptional event. John Cage, for example, writes:

> "Nevertheless, we must bring about a music which is like furniture - a music, that is, which will be part of the noises of the environment, will take them into consideration. I think of it as melodious, softening the noises of the knives and forks, not dominating them, not imposing itself. It would fill up those heavy silences that sometimes fall between friends dining together. It would spare them the trouble of paying attention to their own banal remarks. And at the same time it would neutralize the street noises which so indiscreetly enter into the play of conversation. To make such music would be to respond to a need." (*Silence* 76)

Is Cage simply speaking of atmosphere music, or does he see this in the long run as a strategy for the radical destruction of usage in music, a politics of the liquidation of meaning, opening the way for a subsequent

> renaissance? So-called learned music, which is the context of his remarks, arrives at the negation of meaning announced by mass music (112).

Lastly, since Cage was one to believe that solutions could be generated through musical questions rather than answers, it is conceivable that while the composer did not employ a straight-forward concept of working toward social progress, his efforts must still be recognized for their underlying nature. Cage believed that the right question at the right time could precipitate a change of mind that would produce both artistic and social reverberations (Williams 214).

Clearly, such views and actions of Cage resided outside of mainstream thought on social or community engagement, but such ideology cannot be dismissed outright either. To refer to Cage as an artist lacking any sense of social commitment would be an attempt to skim only the surface of a complex identity. While his methods and actions did not reside within the traditional avenues of political organization, his adoption of Eastern philosophies illuminate a level of anarchistic passive resistance towards intrusive and exclusive institutions of the West, whether they were of social, cultural, or artistic factions. These views were very much brought into focus when he described the relevance of the avant-garde:

> My belief [is] that there will always be one, because without the avant-garde, which I think is flexibility of the mind and freedom from institutions, theories and laws, you won't have invention and obviously,

> from a practical point of view, the society needs invention. Whether they accept the fact or not, they need it. (qtd. in Zurbrugg 166)

Such commentary conveys rather strong opinions, especially toward what Cage believed to be both necessary and beneficial for society. The underpinning connotations of "freedom from," and the resistance from institutions, theories, and laws is very much not only engaged, but also reflects anarchist and postmodern frameworks for reexamining society.

Cage undoubtedly shared the concerns of many of his contemporaries, though often through a different "refracted" or reactionary lens. For example, during the massive uprisings in France during May of 1968, Cage stated that these actions of protest only fanned the flames, which understandably drew quite a reaction from those accusing him of being apolitical, but if one examines his Thoreau-influenced *Songbooks*, lines such as "The best form of government is no form of government" may place him much closer to political thinkers of this period such as Lyotard than many of his detractors were willing to admit. Whether such subversive commentary is comparable to the Parisian Situationist students' desire to overthrow the regimes of power is a matter of debate, but revealing such possibilities demonstrate a figure not nearly as removed socio-politically as often depicted. Mere surface glossings of Cage may resonate with attitudes of social or political indifference, but if one is to believe that Cage did indeed have more than a superficial relationship with Eastern thought, his actions of passive resistance uncover an

individual that was not so much indifferent or apathetic, but rather non-traditional in the typical sense of Western thought and expectations.

In contemporary scholarship, researchers and critics have come to increasingly accept Cage's frequent efforts to work against the dominant aesthetic and artistic organizational structures of his time, but frequently when asked to refocus the same efforts towards examining the social or political structures revolving around the composer, they often appear to not have been given the same level of credit or consideration. Perhaps the inherent problem in this area of study is the focus upon the perceived effectiveness of Cage's views in this realm which would be more conductive if attention was shifted toward the underpinning rationale that shaped these ideologies of passive resistance. For example, dancer Yvonne Rainer was critical of Cage's attempts at nonhierarchical organization, arguing that such methods still failed at initiating one to "wake up to the excellent life we are living" (64). For Rainer, these indeterminate functions essentially led to the opposite outcome, causing one to question what was so excellent or great about the life being experienced. Though this is an understandable concern, this appears to be very much an issue of context. With all of the challenges that Cage faced, it appears difficult to believe that his commentary describing "the excellent life we are living" was related to dominant narratives or discourses that were problematic throughout his lifetime. It seems certain that he was well aware of Rainer's concerns in day-to-day existence, but this "excellent life" statement was most likely a reflection of the aleatoric functions efforts to free not only sounds, but also individuals from the

shackles of the dominant political, social, and cultural institutions of his time; not to glorify them. Such an ideology is most problematic unless viewed through a sense of passive resistance and anarchic ideology, heavily shaped by Eastern and transcendental philosophies. Thus, a figure such as Cage who undertook such disruptive radical efforts in the area of aesthetics should also be afforded the same openness when formulating opinions on any other area of his life. Though not overt in the most explicit manner, Cage was consistent in his attempts to shatter hierarchical constructions, from his aleatoric methods, to the most simple organizations of publications such as *Notations*, which allotted the same amount of page content for every score included (regardless of their content or length), his efforts remained the same. In his later years, he also clearly reflected upon the same disappointments of many of his contemporaries in a comment made to Geoffrey Barnard:

> I think that current events in the years since then [i.e. the mid-sixties] have been what you might call dumbfounding, so that optimism which was implicit in my remark – that is to say, the optimism that there was a possibility of changing society – has become less...and taking its place has been a kind of silence. (qtd. in Barnard 7)

Here, Cage revealed a certain level of introspection that was rarely verbalized overtly, but nonetheless still present. He appeared to share similar disappointments of Lyotard, also coming to terms that the dominant political structures of power in their world would continue to exist during his lifetime despite such compelling efforts for

revolutionary change in earlier years. While the promise of this era ended for Lyotard in the *Aesthetics of Intensities*, it ended for Cage in silence. Most importantly, however, when examining any aspect of Cage, whether aesthetic or ideological, an understanding of his fundamental desire to merge art and life together must always be diffused into the concepts in question. Only through doing so will an effective sense of clarity resonate with an understanding that is not clouded by attempts of compartmentalization.

Such a request, however, can become a tall order in the field of musicology, especially with the frequent partitioned nature of its subdisciplines, which Nattiez so pointedly describes:

> If, however, musical analysis shows *how a work of art functions*, it is impossible to reduce that work to only one of its three dimensions. The work's immanent "configurations" do not harbor the secrets of compositional processes or of perceptive behaviors. Knowledge of history or culture does not suffice to explain why the work is what it is; the work can no longer be shrunk to that which we perceive in it. The *essence* of the work is a once its genesis, its organization, and the way it is perceived...Each of the three points of view defined above springs from particular (and often limited) biases of the various specialists. The music historian is scarcely concerned with perception. Work done by a theorist of achronic bent, or an experimentalist inclined toward perceptive

> mechanisms, may seem questionable when no appeal to history is made. (x)

Nattiez also reflects upon the problem that proponents of any of these approaches tend to rarely acknowledge the existence of the other levels. This leads him to argue for a large-scale synthesis to all the results of the tripartitional conception of semiology being applied to "thinking of music" (x).

Whether one decides to work from a singular approach, or attempt to take the more comprehensive approach of Nattiez, the main aspect that needs to be addressed is that Cage's work is near impossible to attain a full picture of from theoretical analysis without coupling it with a knowledge of historical factors, and the same problem arises if a mirrored approach is taken. If one only looks for overt historical factors to understand Cage as an artist without also analyzing his processes, the more subversive aspects of his aesthetic output can be easily overlooked, which is perhaps one of the primary reasons his ideologies and aesthetics are so often dismissed or misunderstood.

CHAPTER 9

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Though this study has examined multiple connective pathways of Cage and postmodernism, there are certain key points of discussion that may be brought into focus to summarize. Prior to examining Cage and postmodernism, it must be understood that his relationship to this realm was very much infused with similar conceptual hurdles

that many other postmodern figures have also been associated with. Cage's postmodernism was neither rooted in linear chronology or any sense of dogmatic application, while his role in this area was not only very much precursory in nature, but also not appreciated or even explored by many until the end of his lifetime. It is also important to note that while this study has recognized the efforts of scholars who have affixed certain watershed moments of postmodern creation to Cage, the stance taken in this thesis hinges on Cage exhibiting a multiplicity of postmodern tendencies of both ideological and aesthetic natures which demonstrate a more complex relationship in this realm.

Through the adoption of non-Western beliefs and ideologies; particularly those of South and East Asia in a fragmented, multi-faceted nature, Cage found an avenue to reconcile both his sexual identity and generalized discomfort toward Western thought, its institutions, and discourses of power. Such efforts of resistance toward Western belief systems were highly influential toward shaping Cage's lifelong efforts to remove the ego from artistic forms; a significant element of his postmodernism which also demonstrated early connective elements to queer theory. The removal of the ego not only redirected the significance of a work to the receiver, but also initiated a shift from passive to active participation very much analogous to the techniques used in postmodern fiction by authors such as Italo Calvino.

The anti-rationalism of Cage exhibited notable aspects of postmodern thought in its own regard, but when cross-examined with the work of Jean-François Lyotard, a

number of overlooked similarities arise such as creative strategies hinging upon passivity and indifference, efforts to approach events free of cognition, logical paradoxes, and even a shared preference for non-prioritized beliefs. Such connective strands of thought point quite convincingly toward Cage being much more influential toward the author of *The Postmodern Condition* than many initially contended.

Through his aesthetic practices, Cage also exhibited a strong sense of musical postmodernism, becoming perhaps the greatest proponent for the advancement of environmental sounds through works such as *4'33"*, *0'00"*, *Variations IV*, and *33 1/3*. At the same time, his reactionary stance toward his serialist contemporaries' applications of complexity, coupled with revolutionary processes to 'unfix relationships' situate him as a type of precursory figure for the new simplicity, regardless of which circle or formation one believes to be most representative of this particular movement. It is also evident that the ideologies and aesthetic practices associated with Cage in this study situate him as a clear-cut figure in the stream of postmodern music which is described as the non-linear, non-cumulative, and non-teleological. This is observable whether one uses the original definition ascribed to this movement by Leonard B. Meyer, or those from more contemporary theorists such as Robert Fink, who infuse postmodern concepts of gender and identity from Judith Butler to breakdown Meyer's binary-based conception.

Finally, it is important to address criticisms leveled toward Cage, notably from those claiming him to be a figure of detachment, apathy, or one of an entirely apolitical nature. Such allegations are dismantled if one is to accept the composer as an anarchist,

and believe that his associations with South and East Asian philosophies, mysticism, and transcendentalism were sincere. Many of the criticisms in this area are incomplete depictions which do to not fully account for the complex evolving matrix of Cage as an artist. With this stated, the same openness afforded towards his aesthetic practices must also be applicable toward his ideologies and belief systems. As someone who very much ascribed to these tenets of non-mainstream thought and organization, Cage practiced a type of passive anarchist resistance rooted in South and East Asian philosophy that easily creates numerous problematic areas of understanding when any particular aspect is either ignored or overlooked. Cage was not indifferent or apolitical, and his very methods of creating music caused the jamming and rupture of dominant musical and cultural codes, which are still yet to be fully understood. Thus, only when viewing Cage through a comprehensive lens which accounts for both ideological and aesthetic practices can one yield a picture of the artist which is not clouded by inaccuracies, bias, or misinterpretation of his attempts to fuse art and life together in unification.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated a number of key findings correlating to the discussion of Cage and postmodernism that are important to understand for future study. Chapter 1 has illustrated that through a re-examination of Cage and postmodernism, one may deduce a number of frequently overlooked findings, but only when recognizing that the development of postmodernism is never assumed to be a logical successor to modernism, nor a movement related by linear chronology. By recognizing this

development as a type of conceptual outgrowth with relative tangible elements deemed capable of examination, one may avoid totalizing systems of rigid classification when dealing with postmodernism's fragmented and fractured nature of aesthetics. In addition, it is important to accept that postmodern knowledge is not only provisional, but also dependent upon the context of inquiry. When applying these factors to the study of John Cage in a loose, flexible application, his ideologies and aesthetics exhibit and reflect enough of these elements to illuminate his connections of transcending nature that ultimately forge his significance within this context.

When examining Cage's rejection of Western ideologies, belief systems, and practice-based forms in Chapter 2, there appears to be a tendency by some to depict the composer's relationship with South and East Asia in superficial contexts at one end of the spectrum, and others depicting almost devout dedication at the other. In reality, evidence points to ideological applications of South and East Asian belief systems and aesthetics which were without a doubt not wholesale, and for Cage, their incorporation generated outcomes that resonated through means which were most often both unpredictable and unorthodox. In doing so, Cage practiced a rather selective, but passionate postmodern hybrid of non-Western ideologies, belief systems, and aesthetic forms that would exert significant influence upon his emerging aleatoric methods.

The controversial notion of removing the ego from aesthetic practices examined in Chapter 3 demonstrated that Cage's efforts to remove the ego from his aesthetic processes were extremely far-reaching, and constantly merging influence into numerous

disciplines; the extent to which were much very second to none. By shifting the significance away from the artist toward to the audience, Cage created postmodern parallels with authors of postmodern metafiction such as Italo Calvino, while also laying the groundwork for deconstructive concepts of postmodernism, not only countering the ego-centered movement of abstract expressionism, but also forging concepts of identity outside of European artistic expression entrenched for centuries. While modernist contemporaries experimented with indeterminism, they were all reluctant to take it to the extremes of Cage to essentially shatter the traditional role and function of a composer. Though this study argues that Cage's efforts in this realm were without a doubt groundbreaking, citing significant connective strands, it also emphasizes the problematic aspect that Cage's postmodern treatment of the ego was very much precursory to the development of terminology and scholarship in this realm that emerged largely toward the end of the composer's life.

In Chapter 4's examination of rejecting the rational, the shared ideologies of Cage and Lyotard are brought into focus, demonstrating very similar resistances toward meta-narratives, external logic, and acts of synthesis to resolve productive tensions. Through Cage's efforts to deconstruct long-established traditions and create a music for everyone, his ideologies and practices working against dominant codes appear very much comparable to the overarching themes of *The Postmodern Condition*. Both Cage and Lyotard worked against the dominant metanarratives and prevailing discourses of their fields; Lyotard on the state of knowledge, and Cage working against the dominant

Western traditions of musical language and composition. While his mentor Schoenberg aimed to establish a dominant compositional form for the next era, Cage desired to break down any dominant institutional language and coding of music to serve whatever localized arena it served.

The fact that Cage is one of the greatest proponent of environmental sounds during his time was the topic of Chapter 5. While many scholars in the past have cited the importance of the notoriously controversial *4'33"*, the engagement of Cage with environmental sounds actually extends into multiple conceptual aspects of this realm through multiple other works heavily influenced by not only his associations of Zen, but also through his interest in the writings of Henry David Thoreau. Though the importance of Cage's contributions to environmental sounds may be overlooked as sonic evolution has continued in this realm rather significantly since his death, his place as a precursory figure in this arena is near impossible to deny.

The discussion in Chapter 6 contends that the postmodern new simplists movement (of multiple categorization) expanded upon the concepts of Cage quite significantly, yet it appears evident that the entire trend would not have been possible without the previous work in aesthetics enacted by Cage such as 'unfixing' relationships and his attitude of "not enough nothing"; a simple-sounding, yet startlingly involved aesthetic concept. As a movement very much hinged upon the 1970s and 1980s (an era emerging toward the end of Cage's life), there is still much examination and discussion required in relation to understanding this musical form through a contemporary lens.

Still, despite its underdeveloped nature in scholarship, one can at the very least situate Cage as a precursory figure here, especially in the work of Zimmermann; this strand of postmodernism's most prominent contemporary figure.

When examining the realm of the non-linear, non-cumulative and non-teleological in Chapter 7, Cage emerges as one of the true anti-teleological figures of this movement regardless of whether one ascribes to the parameters set out originally by Meyer, or the more recent Butlerian-influenced postmodern framework of Fink. While a vast number of composers would reside within the grey area for this topic, Cage's efforts to resist linear organizations of compositional process and time progression clearly resonate in pioneering this concept, which was very much an outgrowth of his continuing postmodern evolution, both ideologically and aesthetically. With works such as the *Happening*, *Fontana Mix* and *4'33"*, Cage forged new territory, and the reach of his influence upon the anti-teleological is without a doubt still in need of further study and examination.

When finally addressing the criticisms of Cage and postmodernism in Chapter 8, the problem of rigid classification is exposed as a frequent source leading to misunderstanding; especially with a figure such as Cage who was in a constant state of evolution throughout his lifetime. Such rigid approaches also cloud depictions of the sociopolitical presence of Cage, which though very much cryptic and non-traditional in many aspects, was not as detached or removed from responsibility as some have contended. As an anarchist with a significant engagement with mysticism, South and

Eastern philosophies, Cage worked to disrupt many of the embedded codes, processes, and institutions of society, both musically and socially. Though such measures could be described as most unorthodox, Cage was not a figure of apathy, but rather one of passive resistance and anarchic ideologies. Thus, many of the problematic depictions of Cage frequently arise when one attempts to merely understand the composer's work without knowledge of the interconnected historical and social factors associated with it, or vice versa.

In closing, one could state that perhaps the most commonly occurring theme throughout this discussion is the rather evident fact that the compositional output of Cage spanning his career is without a doubt, difficult to categorize with any concrete sense, and there are endless contradictions through endless interpretations if one desires to search for them. It is most plausible that the work of Cage actually resides within multiple domains; a rather uncomfortable, but intelligible concept. It is interesting that earlier composers have often been viewed as transitional figures between chronological periods of varying aesthetics; for example, Claudio Monteverdi from the Renaissance to the Baroque, or Ludwig van Beethoven between the Classical and Romantic periods. Both of these figures appear to reside comfortably in more than a single period or artistic movement, yet in the case of Cage, many seem less willing to allow for such flexibility. Despite the arguments and criticisms leveled towards Cage as a postmodernist, however, it appears evident beyond a reasonable doubt that he did indeed exude many of the attributes

associated with this medium, however problematic this may be for some critics that wish to continue with rigid categorization.

With this stated, it undoubtedly appears that the music of Cage embodied a definite sense of postmodern aesthetics when viewed through the proper lens. While it may be true that the term "postmodernist" is quite often bypassed by scholars and critics in favor of other terms such as "modernist" or simply the "avant-garde," it seems rather difficult to ignore the referenced postmodernist tendencies that Cage both exhibited and embraced, not only through his compositional output, but also through his more deeply embedded ideologies. Perhaps the most appropriate method to examine Cage's body of work is one which is not of rigid categorization, but rather one of open-flexibility that can account for the composer's fluidity between what sometimes appears to be the contradicting genres of modernism and postmodernism. While this study has carried out the task of exposing the postmodern nature of Cage as an artist, the related question of his influence upon postmodernism itself is still very much in need of further examination. With this in mind, it is very possible and also very probable that the controversial nature of John Cage will continue on for eras to come.

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