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John Cage and the 'Freshening' of Education.

The ambition in what follows is to begin a consideration of the lessons that might be learnt from a reassessment of 20th Century avant-gardist practice within the domain of musical composition. The goal here will not be an evaluation of the compositional outputs of this period but, rather, some reflections on the place and role of teaching within and amongst the musicians themselves; remembering that many of them gained a considerable reputation as teachers: Schoenberg, Messiaen, Stockhausen and Cage being the preeminent examples.

And, as an aside, before too quickly assuming that the radical newness and futurism associated with much avant-gardism is somehow at odds with our educational institutions, we should acknowledge the extent to which, if nothing else, the *vocabulary* of the avant-garde has long since come to dominate the promotional language and marketing jargon of the university itself. Everything is now cutting edge, innovative and revolutionary; we are all expected to re-new ourselves eternally; as every Vice-Chancellor proclaims: 'education *is* transformation'—forget that ever-present cliché at your peril! Forever making everything that we once argued was new, old in the name of a new newness that must then await its own future oldness...and so it goes...newer and newer: 'forever young' as Bob Dylan might say—remember him? The longstanding debates about the 'future of the university' going back to the young Nietzsche and beyond are now brushed aside by the bold claims of the 'university of the future,' one that in the aspiration to become 'future-proof' (more jargon) effectively removes the futurity of the future leaving us with the same old newness; what Deleuze would describe as diversity rather than difference.

That by way of preamble.

So, and not forgetting his involvement with the musical avant-gardism of his own day, Nietzsche's 1872 text *On The Future of Our Educational Institutions* (1909) is above all else concerned with *listening*, not to what is said but, rather, to what remains unsaid in the said (*sotto voce*) and then what is yet beyond (or other than) that. Nietzsche writes:

> One speaking mouth, with many ears, and half as many writing hands—there you have to all appearances, the external academic apparatus; the university engine of culture set in motion.[1]

And adds:

> The proprietor of this mouth is severed from and independent of the owners of the many ears; and this double independence is enthusiastically designated as 'academic freedom.'…except that behind both of them, at a modest distance, stands the State…to remind the professors and their students from time to time that *it* is the aim, the goal, the be-all and end-all, of this curious speaking and hearing procedure.[2]

Behind the freedom then, so celebrated by academia and the avant-garde alike, lies the State; meaning that it will be necessary to free ourselves from *that* freedom in order to 'hear' the calling of another/different future beyond or outside of the future such freedom appears to create. Gary Schapiro captures exactly this point in his essay on Nietzsche's lectures. Drawing attention to what he calls the 'weightiness' of the word 'On' (*Uber*) in the title, he continues by suggesting that 'beyond' rather than 'on' would better translate the significance of this otherwise insignificant word:

> 'Beyond the future' might suggest that the future of *Bildungsanstalten* (educational institutions) is already inscribed in the machinery. *That* future, given its determined place in a series of legitimizing metanarratives, is already a past. We can see *that* future all too clearly…The task perhaps is to think beyond that future. To do so we must think beyond the politico-narratological principles that circumscribe the enormous and still burgeoning series of reports, conferences, studies and research projects that bear titles that are variants upon 'the future of the university.'[3]

And, we might add, 'the university of the future.'

In short, there is a need and demand to renew our concepts of the new and the future that, together, circumscribe our conception of what is yet to come. To make this possible Nietzsche believes that it is necessary to introduce art into the university, not it should be emphasized as a simple addition to the curriculum, but rather as a radically different manner of thinking and, one presumes, teaching. He writes:

> In what relationship these universities stand to art cannot be acknowledged without shame: in none at all. Of artistic thinking, learning, striving and comparison, we do not find in them a single trace…[4]

It is here that Nietzsche's involvement with the musical avant-garde, his own musicianship and, above all, what might be called the very musicality of his thinking and writing takes on significance. As is clear throughout his work 'artistic thinking' is in essence a form of *listening*, hence his obsession with ears. It is this aspect of his thinking/listening that allows us to link him to John Cage, to whom we now turn.

The self-appointed task of Cage, if we might call it that, was to teach people how to listen: not to his 'teachings' (he didn't have a 'teaching' as such) and certainly not to his music or even music in general for that matter. No, for him music (as it is normally heard) is precisely what gets *in the way* of listening. If avant-gardism often has an emancipatory dimension, which it does, then the emancipatory consequence of Cage's work is a freedom-from musical listening coupled with a freedom-to truly hear what is there to be heard. But can this be taught? That is the question.

If much of teaching is by example and through examples, then how does the teacher provide examples of the radically new without simultaneously betraying the very novelty that is sought? For example, if one looks at the first wave of European musical avant-gardism—the Viennese *School*—we find a teacher and two students: Schoenberg, Berg and Webern and we have, if not a doctrine or theory, a method of composing that,

in its adherence to strict laws, is capable of being taught. But therein lies the issue: while Schoenberg was universally celebrated as a teacher (rather than as a composer!) it is common knowledge that he was the *last* person to study with if you wanted to engage with the avant-garde of which he himself was at the forefront. Always quick to reject his dubious reputation as a 'revolutionary,' Schoenberg was at pains to root his own compositional methods and discoveries in the unbroken *evolutionary* path traced back (by him) through Mahler, Brahms and Wagner to Beethoven, Mozart and Bach. Hegelian rather than Kantian, Schoenberg himself set an example not by adhering to self-imposed maxims but, rather, by developing a method of composing that, while new, was nevertheless the continuation of a strict style that could be traced back through history and indeed gained its authority from that very history. Consider this passage from Schoenberg's *Style and Idea*:

> [Atonality] called into existence a change of such an extent that many people, instead of realizing its evolutionary element, called it a revolutionary…I always insisted that the new music was merely a logical development of musical resources….And perhaps the greatest surprise may have been the fact that my *Harmonielehre* did not speak very much about 'atonality' and other prohibited subjects but almost exclusively about the technique and harmony of our predecessors…[5]

Famously, and as unlikely as it might seem, John Cage was a student of Schoenberg's describing him as his greatest (and probably only) teacher within the musical realm, and as a 'brilliant musical mind.' That said, his stories of Schoenberg's music classes make for disturbing reading:

> Schoenberg asked a student to play the piece on the piano. She said it was too difficult for her. "You're a pianist?" She agreed. "Then go to the piano." On the way, she said she would play slowly in order not to make mistakes. He said, "Play at the proper tempo and do not make mistakes." She began. He stopped her: "You're making mistakes!" She began again. He stopped her: "You're not going fast enough!" After several tries, each of which he interrupted, she burst into tears, explaining between sobs that she had been to the dentist that morning and had a tooth pulled out. Schoenberg: "Do you have to go to the dentist in order to make mistakes?"[6]

And another brief snapshot from Cage:

> He was capable of laying down the law. In counterpoint classes, the laws he gave were no sooner followed than he demanded they be taken less seriously. Liberties taken, he'd ask: Why don't you follow the rules? He kept his students in a constant state of failure.[7]

Those were the days!

And yet Cage genuinely idolized Schoenberg throughout his life, never missing an opportunity to remind everyone that it was Schoenberg who got him to 'devote his life' to music and to 'banging his head' against the wall of harmony which, as Schoenberg assured him, he would never master.

But why?

The very idea of a 'mistake' would quickly become anathema to Cage once *acceptance* of everything that chance offered became his guiding principle. Questions of obedience and transgression (quickly punished); of problems and solutions; of right and wrong; friends and enemies, all of this Schoenbergian paranoia seems so remote from the 'sunny disposition' (as he so often describes it himself) of Cage. So what did he learn from Schoenberg his teacher?

To begin with, and even though his guiding principles were, as said, radically different, the very idea of having underlying principles at all comes, in part at least, from Schoenberg. Another Schoenberg snapshot:

> Schoenberg sent everyone to the blackboard. We were to solve a particular problem he had given and to turn around when finished so that he could check on the correctness of the solution. I did as directed. He said, "That's good. Now find another solution." I did. He said, "another." Again I found one. Again he said, "another." And so on. Finally, I said, "There are no more solutions." He said, "What is the principle underlying all your solutions?"[8]

Of course, the idea of exhausting all solutions within a Cagean world is absurd, but nevertheless, as is all too clear in reading Cage's copious writings, he does indeed adhere to principles which, while non-law-like, do require a high degree of discipline which, as was often the case amongst orchestras performing his music, when ignored resulted in a serious devaluation of his work. Sunny disposition aside, Cage was utterly scathing when it came to the undisciplined and unprofessional performance of his apparently undisciplined work. Much of his own teaching was concerned with exposing and rectifying this inability to 'hear' or sense the source of these underlying principles.

One more thing: in spite of the intense expressionism and, indeed, ego-mania evident in Schoenberg's very post-romantic work, the imposition not only of discipline and underlying principles but of an objective impersonal law of composition introduced an anti-humanist, indeed inhuman quality into his music which, in its alienating neutrality, is wholeheartedly embraced by Cage, at least from his *Music of Changes* onwards. His words on the latter are revealing:

> The *Music of Changes* is an object more inhuman than human, since chance operations brought it into being. The fact that these things that constitute it, though only sounds, have come together to control a human being, the performer, gives the work the alarming aspect of a Frankenstein monster.[9]

Interestingly, Cage like Schoenberg is even now frequently celebrated as primarily a teacher/guru/writer rather than as a proper composer (an absurdity not to be discussed here) but, unlike Schoenberg whose avant-gardism as we have seen did not extend to his teaching, Cage's pedagogical practices, of which there were many, are quite different. Just as a contrast consider the following memoir of being in one of Cage's classes.

Each student was obliged to present their work to the rest of the class, however the decision on who should make such a presentation was determined by chance operations, one of Cage's central principles of course. One particular student took exception to this as, repeatedly, chance determined that she was not to present her work. As the first day progressed she frequently complained to Cage who nevertheless stuck to his principles and allowed chance to do its work. On the following day, the same again, and once again the student began her complaints, however on this occasion Cage stopped the class, turned to the student and said: "OK, you're quite right, present your work."

It is hard to imagine Schoenberg caving-in like that but then, all appearances aside; this is not the essential area of difference between them. In fact it is here they are closest pedagogically. As already observed, both were men of high (albeit different) principles. Where Schoenberg places intentionality at the very center of his aesthetic and, thus, at the center of his teaching, Cage devoted his life to removing intentionality from the creative and, thus, the teaching situation: hence his use of chance but also, as in this case, the chance encounter with the intentionality (or 'will') of another to which he submits. Or, more accurately, *accepts*: 'acceptance rather than composition' being one of his central credos. Intentionality assumes goals and goal orientation, what we would call 'learning outcomes' in the academic world: Cage's pedagogy renounces such goals. Here he is in conversation with Daniel Charles in a section from his essay 'From the Birds':

> Cage: If I pursue anything, it is the absence of a goal…
>
> Charles: *Therein is what must be the difficulty of being a student of John Cage! How could you have students, and teach them without goals?*[...]
>
> Cage: Recently…I offered a class…with… the hypothesis that we would not know what we were about to study and that we would not divide ourselves into students and non-students; but that all of us, myself included, would be students.
>
> Charles: *What happened?*
>
> Cage: We subjected the library to chance operations, and in groups of about a hundred [and *we* complain about excessive student numbers!!], each one performed two chance operations to determine the works he or she should read. Then, by drawing lots, we formed flexible groups: each group was to meet and exchange information on what everyone had read….freshening information by means of information.[10]

Clearly, Cages classes were no more *about* chance composition than Schoenberg's were *about* atonality or twelve-tone composition, but the key difference is that his pedagogical method allowed for the creation of chance and/or indeterminate situations *from out of which* a teaching took place. But what kind of teaching is this and what exactly is being taught?

Firstly, and returning to the central concept of 'listening,' who listens to whom in a teaching situation where all become students as Cage describes it above? As any teacher knows well, pretending to be a student—'one of them'—rarely works because, like it or not, our knowledge economy invests the teacher with an authority (warranted or not) that is almost impossible to shake off. And even the 'ignorant schoolmaster' as described by Rancière,[11] does not offer a solution to this problem given that the so-called ignorance of the ignorant schoolmaster is only subject-specific (French, the piano, trigonometry…etc.): localized. Beneath this surface ignorance, the ignorant schoolmaster knows perfectly well that ignorance is a proven road to *knowledge*. This knowledge remains unshaken, as does the authority that accompanies it.

Cage's pedagogy is much more radical. By completely removing the linearity of ignorance to knowledge and the associated pursuit of intentional goals, and replacing this with a flattened and neutral structure of infinite information, equally available to all—teacher and student alike—he effects a dramatic expansion of what might be called the zone of listening, one that explodes the teacher/student and student/student (peer to peer) model rooted in either a regime of mastery or an ethics of dialogue. As Walter Benjamin observed in his famous essay The Storyteller[12] through the course of history (and not only in the modern age) the story is progressively replaced by information with a consequent diminution of the powers of listening. For him, the storyteller speaks from out of his or her own experience, giving counsel to those who listen and come to an understanding of the story through an interpretive process rooted in their own experience: a kind of hermeneutical dialogue. Essential to this process is the absence of *explanation*: Benjamin writes:

> Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one recounts it…the psychological connections among the events are not forced on the reader. It is left up to him or her to interpret things the way he or she understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.[13]

As a contrast to this, information, Benjamin claims, is 'understandable in itself'[14] precisely because it is already 'shot through with explanations.'[15] This, for him, is responsible for the decline in listening.

Cage sees things completely differently. For him it is precisely the great storytellers (or the great composers in his examples, particularly Beethoven) who in forcing the infinitude of *sound* into the finitude of 'their' *music* or 'their' story effectively rob the listener of the ability to hear sound in itself, 'understandable in itself' and, as Cage often expresses it, from within its 'own center.'

To the extent that he offers a pedagogy devoid of explanations and explication, Cage bears some resemblance to Rancière's 'ignorant schoolmaster,' but this similarity is deceptive. While it is true that Rancière is the sworn enemy of the teacher as explicator, coming between the student and the text, he nevertheless remains in thrall to the authority of the text itself as the fount of a knowledge that is by no means inexplicable but, rather, perfectly explicable albeit (the important point) *without* the interference of the teacher as explicator. So, once again, this is by no means a pedagogy of ignorance or inexplicability as it would seem, but quite the opposite. By describing his pedagogy as a 'freshening' of information by information itself Cage completely removes (because

already ‘shot through’ with explanations) the necessity of explanation and, in so doing, radically transforms the role of the teacher: but how?

Trying to imagine a teaching situation such as Cage describes, where random information arrived at by chance is exchanged (rather than shared…you cannot share what you do not own, and here perhaps we approach the ‘event’ of education) without explanation or interpretation requires us to think outside of the epistemological, dialogical and hermeneutical categories that continue to dominate pedagogy; all ‘depth’ models that have to a large extent superseded the ‘height’ model of teaching proposed most radically by Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*. If anything, we might describe Cagean pedagogy as a *breadth* model, something that, through the acceptance of an information society, links him to Benjamin who does not in fact see this completely negatively as the following passage from a short piece on ‘The Newspaper’[16] confirms:

> Thus, science, belles lettres, criticism and literary production, culture and politics, fall apart in disorder and lose all connection with one another. The scene of this literary confusion is the newspaper; its content, “subject matter” that denies itself any other form of organization than that imposed on it by the reader’s impatience….Hand in hand…with this indiscriminate assimilation of facts goes the equally indiscriminate assimilation of readers, who are instantly elevated to collaborators. Here, however, a dialectical moment lies concealed: the decline of writing in this press turns out to be a formula for its restoration in a different one. For since writing gains in breadth what it loses in depth, the conventional distinction between author and public…is disappearing in a socially desirable way…at the scene of the limitless debasement of the world—the newspaper—that its salvation is being prepared.[17]

Without succumbing to Benjamin’s characteristically redemptive language, it is perhaps here that we can begin to identify an essential moment of teaching within an imagined Cagean pedagogy; the moment where the disorder and confusion, or what Cage would describe as the anarchy of disconnected information offers up a *new* space or *breadth* of possibility outside of culture, the cultural hierarchies and the educational institutions that give us the teacher/student; composer/listener: artist/viewer; writer/reader dichotomies. Instead of using education to impose order on chaos, rendering it explicable through the imposition of stories and narratives that allow us to take ownership of the world around us and wield power and authority over those less knowledgeable or educated than ourselves, the exchange of randomly selected information as described by Cage is (unlike ‘knowledge exchange’) not strictly speaking exchange at all given that, to repeat, such information is not properly in the possession of—owned by—those who have been submitted to it, whether by chance (as in this instance) or not. In the class described, Cage’s students (and himself) were the subjects of a fourfold determination analogous to what for him are the four elements of a composed work: Structure, Method, Form and Materials. He describe these in turn as follows:

- **Structure**: the division of the whole into parts.
- **Method**: the note-to-note procedure.
- **Form**: the expressive content.
- **Materials**: the sounds and silences of the composition.

Let's see what happens if we think of both teachers and students as performers within a situation (a learning situation) composed of the above elements.

Structure. Returning to the Cage class: the 'hypothesis' (different to intention?) was to 'not know what we were about to study,' an indeterminacy that at the level of structure however is strictly determined beforehand. Here we immediately see a radical departure from the spoken and unspoken humanism that continues to dominate pedagogical theory and teaching practice in our supposedly post-humanist age. As with his *Music of Changes*, the use of chance at the level of structure effectively removes the human (whether knowing or ignorant) from the determination of the teaching situation. To use the language of Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy: From Enowning*, whatever *choices* are made *within* the method, form and materials of the situation, they are secondary to the *a priori decisiveness* of the structure itself.

> To be sure, it is scarcely possible to come near the essence of decision without…starting again with the human being, with ourselves. Then we think of 'decision' as choice, resolution, the preferring of one thing and the setting aside of another, and we end up with freedom as a cause and a capacity. We divert the question of decision in the direction of 'morals' and 'anthropology'…[18]

> What is decision anyway? Choice? No; choosing always concerns only something pre given, something that can be taken or rejected. Here decision means grounding and creating, disposing in advance and beyond oneself…[19]

This helps explain why Cage always insisted that you cannot improvise at the level of structure hence his skepticism towards improvisation, something that echoes (for the same reason) Nietzsche's skepticism towards so-called 'academic freedom' (and improvisation for that matter). Indeed, the latter's recognition of the *decisive* structure of the State beneath and within all teaching practice (and the choices available and made) is shared by Cage and his suspicion of the university system:

> Charles: *At the university…I have the impression that certain of your students learned quite a bit from you.*
>
> Cage: In any case…they taught me that I'd rather not teach.
>
> Charles: *And yet you haven't really renounced all pedagogic activities?*
>
> Cage: I've tried, as much as possible, to avoid the universities.
>
> Charles: *Why?*
>
> Cage: They're too intimate with the governments, be it in France where nothing occurs without an official's stamp on it, or in America, where the authority is private: but it comes to the same thing, doesn't it?[20]

In the face of this, Cage, like Nietzsche, was committed to introducing art into the university not, to repeat, as an agreeable addition to the curriculum at the level of

method, form and materials but at the level of *structure*. What this meant for both of them was emancipation from human determination in the form of an affirmation of fate and chance respectively. It is often forgotten that, for Nietzsche, the 'strongest' form of the will to power is the will *not* to will; Cage's pedagogy shares this acceptance of the unwilled or non-willed as the following response to Daniel Charles confirms.

> Charles: *Then your teaching…could be defined as a pedagogy of non-volition? A detachment in relation to the will?*
>
> Cage: A progressive detachment, yes, that will not fall back into attachment. A detachment that will repeat nothing.[21]

Clearly, for Cage, such a detachment from the will cannot take place at the level of *choice*, within the teaching situation. Rather, teaching must take place within a structure that is already in place and unwilled by the participants: *decisive*. And, to respond to the obvious objection, it is not a question of Cage willing the unwilled—an intentional unintentionality—but, as he says himself: 'the question is not one of wanting, but of being free in relation to one's own will.'[22] For him, it is this exemplary freedom that allows him, as teacher, to reveal rather than impose the determination of chance at the level of structure. This revelation is something close to the very event of teaching to which we will return.

Method. In Cage's class, as described, the 'monstrous' inhumanity of chance is a given, untainted by the subterranean interference of the State. Having said that, in order for a teaching situation to arise and function pedagogically, a method is required, one that is *chosen* either by the teacher alone, or with the students or, indeed, by the students alone: these choices take place within the situation and are intentional. At the level of method then the class is determined. But it should be recognized that, unlike a methodology that by definition exceeds the parameters of any specific teaching situation, method can be improvised on the spot in response to the immediate situation and its specific relation to the chance structure that underpins it. Analogous to the 'note-to-note procedure' of a musical composition, the organisation of an actual class requires, for its duration at least, what Blanchot (speaking of method) calls a 'mode of progressing,'[23] one that is not absolute, has no Absolute to progress towards, but is rather an 'incessant' movement that must discipline itself in the absence of a singular goal and its associated laws. Not to be disciplined by the will of self or other requires an equal force of discipline as a method to avoid the re-attachment to the will, this perhaps is where we can begin to see the first fruits of Cage's teaching.

Form. Unusually, Cage does not distinguish form and content but, rather understands form as itself 'expressive content.' For him, form, unlike structure, comes into being performatively as the giving of a particular form to an underlying structure: something close, perhaps, to Deleuze's actualization of the virtual. But as Cage explains in his lecture on indeterminacy, form can be either determinate or indeterminate, which means that in addition to performatively *giving* form we must also consider performatively *accepting* form, something much more in keeping with Cage's non-intentionalism. This raises an issue regarding his conception of form as 'expressive content.' While we are familiar with the idea of *giving* as an expressive act, this is not the case with *accepting* where causality and determination contrive to thwart any expressive potential. This challenges us to re-conceive of expression as a non-subjective, non-intentional event:

something more akin to the expressivity of life itself. Deleuze tries to grasp this peculiar modality of expression through a transformed notion of causality, what he describes as 'quasi-causation' and the expressive relation between events rather than a characteristic of subjective human acts.

> On the one hand, event-effects maintain a relation of causality with their physical causes, without this relation being one of necessity; it is rather a relation of expression. On the other hand, they have between them, or with their ideational quasi-cause, no longer a relation of causality but rather, once again and this time exclusively, a relation of expression.[24]

He continues with a passage that beautifully captures the expressive relations assumed by a Cagean sound world/event.

> …an aggregate of noncausal correspondences which form a system of echoes, of resumptions and resonances, a system of signs—in short, an expressive quasi-causality, and not at all a necessitating causality.[25]

Thought pedagogically rather than compositionally, it is at the formal level that those within a teaching situation are either given or not given the opportunity to exercise choice as regards the unfolding shape of the teaching process. It is not clear from Cage's description of the class we are considering exactly what the instructions were once the groups of students were actually in the library gathering their information, but it is probable that this performative moment introduced indeterminacy into the situation; for the sake of argument let us imagine that to be the case. While it is clear what such indeterminacy contributes to the performance of a musical composition—variation, difference, expressive possibilities and a degree of freedom…etc.—it is by no means as clear what it might contribute to an unfolding learning situation: Cage himself offers no explanation or rationale. However, what he does offer is a description of the three most likely responses of a performer (or student for us) when faced with indeterminacy and the necessity of choice.

First, the performer/student might proceed in an organized way that creates a comprehensible and communicable form that is capable of analysis. This, one assumes, is close to our dominant pedagogies which tolerate indeterminacy as long as it results in determinate (analyzable) ends or assessable learning outcomes.

Second, the student might respond arbitrarily in what Cage describes as an *inward* direction, following the dictates of the ego, the unconscious whether individual or collective, ultimately determined by the universal force of human instinct: and thus communicable if not analyzable. One might recognize this as a familiar counter-movement to the inherent rationality of the previous response, one that remains human-all-too-human.

Third, and most Cagean, is the choice of what he describes as a movement *outwards*:

> Or he may perform his function…arbitrarily, by going outwards with reference to the structure of his mind to the point of sense perception, following his taste; or more or less unknowingly by employing some

> operation exterior to his mind: tables of random numbers, following the scientific interest in probability; or chance operations…[26]

What all three options or models of choice have in common is that they are *all* determined: the first by an objective analytics, the second by a subjective, intentional, expressivist aesthetics, and the third by what might be called a neutral, non-intentional fatalism. It is, of course, the last of these three that posed the greatest challenge to the musical orthodoxy in Cage's lifetime, and it continues to do so now both as music and as a teaching.

Amongst other things, the above is a reminder that Cage always made a clear distinction between two things that have often since been confused: chance and indeterminacy. For him chance operations can produce works that are absolutely determined or absolutely undetermined, in this chance is no different to design in its possible outcomes. That said, the interplay of chance and indeterminacy at the formal rather than the structural level must be the key moment in any re-thinking of both performance and pedagogy as an avant-gardist practice.

Imagine yourself in Cage's class; you are now in the library, which has now become a performative space. The form of this space has been rendered indeterminate by prior chance operations and thus the 'expressive content' of this form is now dependent upon your response to the indeterminacy. Using Cage's threefold typology of choice, you might 'proceed in an organized way' like, for instance, Sartre's 'autodidact' in *Nausea* who is working his way through the library from A-Z;[27] or you might move 'inwards,' follow the arbitrary dictates of you ego and subjective taste, thus gravitating towards sections of the library that feed your own interests and desires; or you might move 'outwards' and introduce arbitrary chance operations again that having nothing to do with your own mind or body and thus nothing to do with your own interests and/or expertise. Reflection on the choices we make is at the heart of this pedagogy, as is the *acceptance* of the outcomes particularly where chance has been allowed to intervene.

Choice one will introduce into the classroom, once the library has been excavated, something approximating a body of organized knowledge that can be learnt: a familiar scenario.

Choice two will introduce into the classroom a plethora of opinions, viewpoints, commitments, beliefs and 'positions' that can be debated, challenged, believed or rejected: a familiar scenario.

Choice three will introduce into the classroom random information that, in its neutrality and absence of human agency and predilections, is incapable (certainly within the parameters of a single class) of either providing knowledge and understanding or of sparking any meaningful debate: a very *unfamiliar* scenario that, in our system, would no doubt give an external examiner much to condemn!

But *is* it so unfamiliar? As a general principle, especially outside of the arts, the answer must be yes. Even within the arts, to the extent that the arts have been subsumed within the university system as a 'professional' as much as (or even more than) a creative practice, the answer must still be yes. But, that said, for anyone who has spent any time with practicing artists, across any discipline within or outside of a teaching situation it

soon becomes evident that, what Niklas Luhmann describes as the 'emancipated contingency'[28] of the creative act maps much more convincingly onto the Cagean exchange of random information than it does the dominant pedagogical model of empathic dialogics and instrumental knowledge exchange. For many artists it is not a question of whys or wherefores but, rather, of (as Beckett says) this is 'how it is:' take it or leave it. Discussion of art works is largely redundant not because they are ontologically inexplicable but, quite the opposite, because they are already 'shot through with explanations' which is what brings them into existence in the first place. In this regard, returning to Benjamin's terminology, artworks resemble information more than they do stories. Of course, the academic world conceived, as it is, as an interpretative community will always strive to transform information into this or that story; that is what allows the dominant dialogical/narratological pedagogy to exist and persist. But the fact remains that, while artists might not be very good at interpreting their own work (it varies) they are often very good at *explaining* their work. The reason why such explanations, grounded as they are in a rightly discredited concept of artistic intentionality, are generally mistrusted or ignored is that they provide us with little more than information. No one but a fool would restrict the meaning of an artwork to the intentionality of an individual artist, but we are not talking about meaning, we are talking about the *coming into being* of the artwork: it's creation—that's what the artist can explain. And the point: how is this so different to the monstrous inhumanity of a pedagogy ruled by chance events? As Cage is quick to remind us, for all of the horror of chance operations, they are in fact simply a re-duplication of the longstanding dictatorship of the artist/genius and the transformation of their contingent and arbitrary intentions into laws to be learned and obeyed. Let us re-cite Cage's earlier passage on *The Music of Changes* with the next sentence added.

> The Music of Changes is an object more inhuman than human, since chance operations brought it into being. The fact that these things that constitute it, though only sounds, have come together to control a human being, the performer, gives the work the alarming aspect of a Frankenstein monster. This situation is of course characteristic of Western music, the masterpieces of which are its most frightening examples, which when concerned with humane communication only move over from Frankenstein monster to Dictator.[29]

What art education generally fails to confront is that, shot through with intentions and thus explanations that are themselves rooted in chance, artworks, while allowing infinite interpretation, are locked into the absolute finitude of chance that brought them into being: yes, anything can happen but in the contingency of the moment *this* happened: that's how it is.

Material. This, remember, concerns the 'sounds and silences of a composition.' Notice the terminology, no mention of music or its components, harmony, melody, rhythm etc., and certainly no mention of composers, genres or styles: just sound and silence. Transposed into our pedagogical thinking and the materiality of the teaching situation understood, in this instance, as the neutral exchange of random information, we find ourselves in a learning environment devoid of the usual, ethical, dialogical, humanistic assumptions that continue to underpin our pedagogical hegemony. Just as Cage repeatedly stated throughout his life that 'sounds are not men and men are not sounds,' (and it is men and women who, by attaching themselves to particular sounds, transform

them into music: 'their' music), so in the same vein teachers with their will-to-knowledge, their will-to-explicate, their will to persuade, their will to indoctrinate take possession of the sounds and silences of the teaching situation, transforming the random noise of information into 'their' theories, 'their' positions, 'their' beliefs. What kind of noise would issue from a classroom where both the teacher and the students were dispossessed and forced to acknowledge that every sound comes from what Cage describes as its 'own center:' no conductor/teacher/dictator/explicator in the center with students huddled around that center, in the same tiny space beating to the same time, but an infinitely expanding periphery of information, unowned but endlessly exchangeable: what Deleuze and Guattari, discussing Cage, describe as a form of 'floating.'[30] I hear a buzzing, a cacophonous din that, over time, I learn to hear differently, a transformation of listening that emancipates or detaches me from my will and the will of others.

Freshening

What Cage describes as 'freshening' has nothing to do with the infinite renewal associated with hermeneutical appropriation and reappropriation, of hearing the same thing differently and then differently again in an infinite variation that displaces the real difference of difference with what Deleuze would describe as the mere 'diversity' of the same.[31] The sounds and silences associated with such 'freshening' cannot be located in or limited to the human voice and the mouths and ears of the speaking-hearing community described by Nietzsche at the outset; just as the 'expressive content' of form described by Cage cannot be restricted to human expression alone. Instead we need to try and imagine a pedagogy—an avant-gardist pedagogy—where the educational value and transformative potency of the 'new,' while retaining its authority, is no longer harnessed to human ingenuity and individual creative innovation but is, rather, witnessed as a moment in the revealed co-presence of an infinite multiplicity of centers. Each center has its own sound and each sound has its own value, but without a singular value system to validate or invalidate any one of them; only the ever-proliferating structures, methods, forms and materials necessary for the fateful emergence and collision of different bodies of information to take place. Here the 'new' is liberated from the tragi-drama of post-romantic individualism and the anti-pedagogy at its core—'original genius cannot be taught'—and reinstated as a process or re-newal or re-freshening which has nothing to do with either creative or interpretive originality but with something closer to the origin and what might be called the originarity of sensation in the broadest terms, or more specifically 'listening' as it figures in the thought of Cage.

Sensation does not speculate, originate or innovate, nor does it interpret, explain or judge; sensation *accepts*. Passive rather than active, it is affected by what is *already there*, the given, the 'there is' (*Il y a*) to use Levinas's terminology. And, to draw upon Deleuze's 'logic of sensation,' to sense is not just to be affected by what is immediately there in *actuality*, but also potentially by the *virtuality* of an infinitely multiplicitous being that is 'vertically' co-present with the localized horizontality of 'actualization.' It is this co-presence that allows Deleuze to conceive of passivity as a form of creativity just as, in turn, Cage regards acceptance as a form of production, albeit one emancipated from the 'dictatorship' of the composer and his or her compositions. What is produced? For both of them, not new works but new space-times. Just as with Cage's chance-determined class discussed above, Deleuze and Guattari (most particularly in *A*

Thousand Plateaus) create space-times, territories, zones, lines and so on, not through the painstaking creation of bodies of knowledge to be learnt and understood by the reader, but by colliding disparate chunks of predigested information and *accepting* the results. 'We will never ask what a book means…we will not look for anything to understand in it.'[32] This, the affirmation of chance, is what they share with Nietzsche, Mallarmé and John Cage.

If chance does 'freshen' information, not by human interpretation or explication but by the acceptance of everything's co-presence with everything else, then we must also accept (as teachers and students) the consequent drop in the pedagogical temperature: freshness requires coldness. In Hermann Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* (one of Cage's favorite books incidentally) there is an interesting passage where Tegularius witnesses the transformation of his friend, the hero of the book, Joseph Knecht.

> From Knecht's look, it was clear that his remoteness and objectivity were not pretence, but uncannily genuine, and that the man before him who treated him with this matter-of-fact courtesy, accompanied by intense intellectual alertness, was no longer his friend Joseph, was entirely a teacher and examiner…enveloped and isolated by the gravity and austerity of his office as if by a shining glaze which had been poured over him in the heat of the fire, and had cooled and hardened.[33]

Notwithstanding Cage's 'sunny disposition' then, the dark, cool and somber places associated with his lifelong search for mushrooms might, perhaps, give us a different insight into the real complexities of his character as a composer and teacher. Behind the winning smile that accompanied his infinite acceptance of the given remains the Nietzschean strength of will necessary *not* to will or what Heidegger describes as the 'resoluteness' necessary for 'letting-be' (*Gelassenheit*). In an age when the student/client expects the teacher to be parent-figure, counselor, psychoanalyst and, above all, friend, don't be fooled by Cage's 'hypothesis' that all, including himself, should be students within the space-time of his chance teaching environment. Such a gesture does not introduce one shred of intimacy, togetherness or communal warmth into the situation because it is not a question of the distance between one person and another but, rather, the distance between one block of information and another, one product of chance and another, all immune to interpretation, explication and understanding: This is a distance that can be sensed but not explained and which, as sensation, has the potential to reveal the *event* of education itself, something that has little if anything to do with knowledge or ignorance, understanding or misunderstanding, comprehensibility or incomprehensibility, and all of the other pedagogical binaries that separate teacher and student while secretly tying them together in a pedagogical embrace rooted in the animal warmth of empathy and dialogue.

The 'freshening' of information by information is more chilling, it prolongs life, reinvigorates, renews and reawakens by separating life from the possessive grasp of human and withdrawing into the inhospitable regions of what Maurice Blanchot calls 'the neutral' and Brecht, in his pedagogy of distance and distancing, the 'alienated.' While it true that the clarion call of many avant-gardist movements was the re-introduction of 'art into life' and life into art, Cage (who felt the same) recognized that merely bringing art *as it is* into life *as it is* seriously misses the point. For him, as for Marx, the point was not to interpret (or re-interpret) the world, but to *change it*.

Anarchist rather than Marxist, Cage sought to do this by *accepting* rather than rejecting the world, and in so doing, allowing it to change *itself*. This might almost be considered a form of passive aggression, but with one major difference: passive aggression operates within the world *as it is*; passive creativity (to return to Deleuze's concept) creates or (better) allows for the self-creation of an endlessly *re-newed* and endlessly *re-freshed* world.

The Event

The *event* of education does not take place in the classroom, not even in John Cage's classroom, in fact, *especially* not in John Cage's classroom. As Deleuze proposes, the event never actually takes place at all, has no place in the here and now, being that which has always already happened and, simultaneously, that which has yet to happen.

> The event…has no present. It rather retreats and advances in two directions at once, being the perpetual object of a double question: What is going to happen? What has just happened? The agonizing aspect of the pure event is that it is always and at the same time something which has just happened and something about to happen; never something which is happening.[34]

This offers some insight into the co-presence of determination and indetermination in the game of chance played out in the Cagean classroom. Once the dice is thrown and chance affirmed there can be no further human intervention or interference in the process of this contingent yet fateful originary act and its subsequent unfolding. What has happened has happened; it is fixed and absolutely determinate. The only freedom (academic or not) is the freedom to affirm this arbitrary determination and *accept* the fixity of the pedagogical situation one finds oneself 'thrown' into, to use Heideggerian language. And yet, paradoxically, *what* is determined is indeterminate to the extent that it has yet to happen, at least as what Deleuze calls the 'pure event.' Of course things happen in the classroom—exchanges, discussions, agreements, disagreements, work, idleness and so forth—activities that activate the individual participants as actors in a pedagogical plot (in both senses), one that fills up what Badiou describes as the 'void' of the event with the be-lated immediacy and substance of the 'situation.'[35] But such a web of competing wills and intentionalities, hell-bent on taking possession of the moment (what we nowadays call 'taking ownership' of 'our' education) fails to learn the primary lesson of the event: waiting. Waiting and then accepting. And, prior to that, accepting waiting and accepting accepting itself as the evental pedagogical moment. Of course, such acceptance is, if misunderstood, highly dangerous, as Adorno makes abundantly clear in his promotion of negation above affirmation:

> We have to ask *what* has to be or has not to be affirmed, instead of elevating the word 'Yes' to a value in itself, as was unfortunately done by Nietzsche with the entire pathos of saying yes to life.[36]

But, to return to the distinction Heidegger makes between decision and choice, while Adorno's advice regarding the specific *choices* we might make, when affirming this or that, is certainly to the point, nevertheless at the *decisive* level it is irrelevant: how could we and why would we say no to life? No to this or that life*style* perhaps, but to life itself? And anyway, there is no sense of what Adorno might mean by 'life,' and

certainly no recognition of the issue being considered here, that is to say, the *event* of life that regardless of our acceptance or rejection of it (whatever that might mean) simply happens—has in the past, and will in the future. Judging, critiquing or negating life here and now from the perspective of the intentional ego weighed down with the baggage of theories, desires, positions and opinions is as pointless as objecting to peanut butter. In fact more so, given that life without peanut butter is conceivable, while peanut butter without life is not…but we digress.

Together, Nietzsche's 'yea-saying,' Heidegger's 'letting-be,' Deleuze's affirmation, and Cage's acceptance all recognize one simple but often overlooked fact: that life is not a thing or object which we can take ownership of, gain and exchange knowledge of, but that, more essentially, life *lives*, with or without our intervention *it* lives. *Es Gibt* in German, meaning 'it is given:' not by us, not through human intervention and interference; *it*, life gives itself to itself, we only have to accept that incontrovertible fact. This explains why Heidegger prefers to use 'worlding' rather than world, and why Deleuze and Guattari prefer 'territorialization' and 'deterritorialization' to territory. Similarly, Cage's lifelong promotion of acceptance was never in the name of a static objectified given but, rather, the endless attempt to sidestep the entrapment of the world within the structures of the experiencing mind, and sense the churning chaos of the event.

> We have come to desire the experience of what is. But this "what is" is neither stable nor unchanging… "what is" doesn't depend on us, we depend on it. And it is for us to approach it. [….] Unfortunately for logic, all that we construct under the rubric "logic" represents such a simplification relative to the event and to what really happens that we must learn to be wary of it. This is the function of art today: to preserve us from all those logical minimalizations that we are tempted in each instant to apply to the flow of events. To bring us closer to the process that is the world.[37]

If the 'function of art' is to bring us closer to the flow of events or (better) the flow *of* the event, then the same should also be able to be said for art education. Crazy or not, the collective reportage of disparate information arrived at by chance operations is, as suggested, not so different from the increasingly obscured actuality of art education as it *already* exists. Outraged external examiners accepted, it is true that the experimental pedagogical methods adopted by Cage are unlikely to find favor with even the most radical of today's educationalists. And it is also true that, outside of art and art education, the adoption of such methods would be catastrophic, a fact which has (also catastrophically) psyched art educationalists into an inglorious retreat from the essential principle of art: 'the emancipation of contingency.' In the face of such a retreat, there is no better time to re-assert the one essential fact that is being progressively and insidiously effaced by the creeping 'professionalisation' of art: only artists, art educationalists and those able to think 'from out of'[38] art are capable of productively playing the game of chance, and only the game of chance will allow us to both think and create the event of education. Cage's life was the enactment of this fact, and Deleuze's life was dedicated to thinking it.

> Only thought finds it possible *to affirm all chance and make chance into an object of affirmation*. If one tries to play this game other than in

> thought, nothing happens: and if one tries to produce a result other than the work of art, nothing is produced. This game then is reserved for thought and art.[39]

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