



University of HUDDERSFIELD

University of Huddersfield Repository

Smith, Geoff

Composing after cage

Original Citation

Smith, Geoff (1996) Composing after cage. Doctoral thesis, University of Huddersfield.

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/6915/>

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/>

COMPOSING AFTER CAGE

GEOFF SMITH

**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

The University of Huddersfield

September, 1996

Abstract

This thesis aims to identify and explore the ideas of John Cage, then looks at their impact on and absorption by a variety of American composers. This in turn provides the context for my own compositional work which forms the main substance of this submission and which is presented on compact disc (accompanied by indicative scores). The source material for the second half of the thesis comes largely from my own book of interviews with composers, *American Originals* (co-authored with Nicola Walker Smith), which is included as an appendix.

Acknowledgements

I should like to acknowledge the generous support of The University of Huddersfield which enabled me to meet many of the composers discussed in this thesis at first hand. I should also like to thank Dr. Michael Clarke for his guidance, Professor Gavin Bryars for encouragement above and beyond the call of duty, Martyn Harry of Sony Classical and Jane Feaver of Faber and Faber.

Contents

Cage as Liberator.....	p1
Cage as Catalyst: a commonality of individuals.....	p16
Preface to the Compositions.....	p31

COMPOSITION SUBMISSION:

on compact disc, *fifteen wild decembers*

on compact disc, *black flowers*

(both accompanied by indicative scores*)

Appendix

Geoff Smith and Nicola Walker Smith: *American Originals - Interviews with 25 Contemporary Composers* (London, 1995)

*The indicative scores were printed from the MIDI software (CUBASE Score) used to compose the music for the recordings. They are not intended as performance scores (the recordings themselves form the composition submission) and suffer from all the shortcomings associated with software designed as a compositional rather than notational tool. Nevertheless, I believe they offer a useful accompaniment to the recordings for the purposes of this examination.

1. Cage as Liberator

'Get out of whatever cage you find yourself in' J. Cage quoted on the book jacket of R. Kostelanetz: *Conversing with Cage* (New York, 1988)

There can be few twentieth century composers about whom more has been written, in both specialist and popular literature, than John Cage. This criticism continues to span both the insightful and the sensational but, in almost all cases, those writers who address the question of Cage's musical origins do so with little unanimity and thus a variety of historical perspectives have been drawn. Virgil Thomson, for example, casts him as the heir of the Futurists, the artistic movement initiated by the poet Marinetti in 1909 and applied to music in 1912 by the composer Luigi Russolo who believed that all noise should be regarded as potential musical material. Yet, for all the common ground Cage and Russolo shared in seeking to widen the definition of 'music' to include noise, it is an over-simplification to suggest that Cage merely 'follow[ed] out the Futurist noise principle as a career'.¹ This ignores a fundamental conceptual difference in that, whilst the Futurists aimed to systemize and regulate the sonic spectrum, Cage's concern was 'to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories'.² This, in turn, is hardly the sentiment one would expect of a one-time pupil and votary of Schoenberg although it has been speciously argued that the two composers belong to the same tradition of a goal-less, objective music. Wim Mertens, for example, writes of an 'anti-dialectic' trend that stemmed from the ideas of Schoenberg and which 'reached its culmination with John Cage...'.³

However, the search for historical continuity has led other writers to quite different conclusions. According to the New York Times critic John Rockwell, for example, Cage was another eccentric pioneer following Ives, Cowell, Partch and Ruggles in the struggle for

¹ V. Thomson: *American Music Since 1910* [Twentieth Century Composers Volume 1] (London, 1971) p69

² J. Cage: *Silence* (London, 1968) p10

³ W. Mertens: *American Minimal Music* tr. J. Hautekiet (London, 1983) p87

American aesthetic autonomy, a group whose virtues 'are the virtues of America itself'.⁴ By contrast, Christopher Butler⁵ has drawn an evolutionary line from Debussy through Varèse to Cage even though Cage's own regard for Varèse (who believed his own finished work was anything but 'experimental'⁶) was often negative. For Cage, the relevance of Varèse was that he too embraced noise but this is the only connection (however important) that he acknowledged: in many other respects, he regarded him as 'an artist of the past'.⁷ It seems inappropriate then to exaggerate this link and regard Cage as the torch-bearer of Varèse. One ought not to assume, for example (as H. Wiley Hitchcock does⁸), that Cage's use of variable-speed phonographs, tin-cans and wire coils was directly inspired by the sirens and anvils of Varèse for, as Cage himself has explained,⁹ his percussion orchestra used unconventional instruments not to follow the lead of Varèse but because they could not afford to rent timpani, woodblocks or tam-tams. And when asked in an interview in 1968 whether his percussion music was guided by Varèse's example, Cage replied, 'To tell the truth, it didn't happen that way'.¹⁰

Butler suggests that we need a sense of evolution and continuity to 'preserve us from having to treat the new work as somehow totally unexpected',¹¹ a response that seems to confirm Marshall McLuhan's belief that we 'look at the present through a rear-view mirror'.¹² Yet, whatever the psychological reasons, any attempt to contextualize Cage in an historical overview of precursors and influences is bound to fail as the Zen Buddhist ideas that motivated him for over forty years challenge the very tenets (such as linearity and causation) of such an approach. Cage's study of Zen was extremely important to him and in 1961, he wrote:

⁴ J. Rockwell: *All American Music - Composition in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York and Toronto, 1983) p48

⁵ C. Butler: *After the Wake - An essay on the contemporary avant-garde* (Oxford, 1980) p9

⁶ Cf. C. Wen-Ching: 'Varese - A Sketch of the Man and his Music' *The Music Quarterly* Vol.52 No.2 (April, 1966) p163

⁷ J. Cage: *Silence* p84

⁸ H. Wiley Hitchcock: *Music in the United States - A Historical Introduction* (New Jersey, 1969) p215

⁹ J. Cage: *For the Birds - in conversation with Daniel Charles* tr. R. Gardner (London, 1981) p74

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p73

¹¹ C. Butler: *Op. cit.*, pp9-10

¹² M. McLuhan & Q. Fiore: *The Medium is the Message* (New York 1987) p19. Cage championed the work of this sociologist for many years.

'Without my involvement with Zen I doubt whether I would have done what I have done'.¹³ Obviously then, one cannot hope for a real understanding of his ideas without some knowledge of this branch of Buddhism but if it were also considered when attempting a causal explanation of his origins, then it would show that such an approach was not only inappropriate but impossible.

Fundamental to Zen Buddhism, for example, is the idea of interpenetration which maintains that all events and all things are interrelated and transcend causal explanation so that 'to explain something means, ultimately, to show how it is connected to everything else'.¹⁴ This idea helps us to understand Cage's denial of linear notions such as 'influence' and his statement that 'we live in a field situation'¹⁵ where one becomes aware of the past only through one's own work. For example, he became interested in Ives' early use of indeterminacy through his own later work and, similarly, on reading Thoreau's Journal, he discovered '...every idea [he'd] ever had worth its salt'.¹⁶ Morton Feldman also realised that 'If there is a connection to be made with history, it is after the fact and can perfectly be summed up in the words of de Kooning, "History doesn't influence me, I influence it".'¹⁷ This non-linearity, characteristic of Marshall McLuhan's new world of 'all-at-once-ness', is fundamental for an understanding of Cage's ahistorical position.

Of course there is much cynicism, particularly in the West, of anything that cannot be grasped by linear concepts and to deny the reality of causation seems absurd. It is not, however, a mystical idea shared only by Buddhists and a handful of individuals with an exotic interest in the Orient, but one that is corroborated by relativistic physics which conclude that ours is a 'multidimensional world which contains no straight lines..., where things do not happen in sequences, but all together'.¹⁸ Cage, with characteristic lightheartedness, explained thus: '...a group of scientists have begun thinking, as Buddhists do, that everything causes everything else - it's called the Butterfly Effect. Apparently, some butterfly in China waves its wings and causes something else!'.¹⁹

¹³ J. Cage: *Silence* pxi

¹⁴ F. Capra: *The Tao of Physics* (London, 1983) p321

¹⁵ J. Cage: *A Year From Monday* (London, 1968) p41

¹⁶ J. Cage in R. Kostelanetz: *Conversing with Cage* (New York, 1988) p44

¹⁷ M. Feldman: *Essays* ed. W. Zimmerman (Cologne, 1985) p96

¹⁸ F. Capra: *Op. cit.*, p35

¹⁹ J. Cage in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *American Originals* (London, 1994) p84

The musical implications of this denial of the notion of line were many and can best be illuminated with further reference to Zen Buddhism as the concerns of Cage (from around 1948 until his death) were inextricably linked with those one finds in Zen. Common and fundamental to both, for example, is a mistrust of the intellect and its linear expression of dualistic thought.²⁰ Alan Watts suggests that these linear thought processes are partly a result of the alphabetic nature of the language that articulates them.²¹ By representing experience through a sequence of letters, the western mind perceives ‘...an abstract, one-at-a-time translation of a universe whose concrete reality always escapes perfect description in these terms’.²² An alphabetic language transforms events into static entities whilst ‘experience is continually flowing, dissolving and reforming them’.²³ (By contrast, the Chinese language is largely ideographic and, though still linear, contains words that can function both as nouns and verbs and thus allows the Chinese mind to perceive objects as events, entities as processes.) It is our language, according to Marshall McLuhan, that has separated us from reality: ‘Until writing was invented, man lived in acoustic space: boundless, directionless, horizonless, in the dark of the mind, in the world of emotion, by primordial intuition, by terror’.²⁴ James Joyce was similarly aware of language’s compromise and believed that one cannot deal with reality in clear, concise terms for ‘to be real is to be surrounded by mystery’.²⁵ To Cage, clear messages implied government and the military as these are reflections of the alphabet’s technique of transforming experience into uniform, repeatable and controllable units and thus even the most revolutionary pronouncements, if they rely on language, can have no effect: ‘...we need a society in which communication is not practised, in which words become nonsense as they do between lovers, in which words become what they originally were: trees and stars and the rest of the primeval environment. The demilitarization of language: a serious musical

²⁰ Whilst recognizing the singularity of all things, Buddhists believe that relative distinctions such as ‘good and evil’ or ‘life and death’ belong to an all-embracing unity: ‘...above each pair [of opposites] is the apex of the triangle, a point of consciousness which includes and absorbs these pairs’. [C. Humphreys: *A Western Approach to Zen* (London, 1985) p55]

²¹ A. Watts: *The Way of Zen* (London, 1957) pp23-9

²² *Ibid.*, pp27-8

²³ N. Crohn Schmitt: *A John Cage Reader - In Celebration of his 70th Birthday* ed. P. Gena & J. Brent (New York, 1982) p28

²⁴ M. McLuhan & Q. Fiore: *Op. cit.*, p48

²⁵ J. Joyce quoted in J. Cage: *M - Writings '67 - '72* (London, 1973) p54

concern'.²⁶

According to D.T. Suzuki (whose lectures on Zen Buddhism Cage attended from 1949 to 1951 at Columbia University), one's aim in Zen is to go beyond dualistic thought and restore the experience of primeval inseparability from nature and reality. This re-unification with nature was very much the aim of Cage who based much of his thinking on Ananda Coomaraswamy's quotation of St. Thomas Aquinas on the function of art: "ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione".²⁷ The Zen artist, for example, '...proceeds by way of opening his eyes to a like spiritual essence in the world of Nature external to himself'.²⁸ This is an intuitive art in which 'no least stroke of the brush can be erased or modified; the work is as irrevocable as life itself'.²⁹ Here, the act of creating is the form as '...form only comes/ into existence when/ the thing is born'.³⁰

Enlightenment or reunification with nature is, however, contingent upon the transformation of the ego³¹ into a 'pervious organ of life'.³² Like the Zen artist, Cage believed that perfection could only be achieved if he died to himself and became one with reality, rid of his ego. This 'precogito' state, where the mind functions intuitively, is known in Zen as 'no-mindedness'. As Alan Watts explains, however, this state is not one of 'moronic vacuity' but rather one that induces the mind's 'innate and spontaneous intelligence by using it without forcing it'.³³ For the Indian philosopher Krishnamurti, this state of 'no-mind' distinguished the ability to express an idea from true creativeness 'in which the mind is no longer a focus of our experience, our ambitions, our pursuits, and our desires...'.³⁴

Cage realized that this egoism was partly due to a specific characteristic of

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p184

²⁷ Cage translates this as 'Art should imitate nature in her manner of operation' [J. Cage: *A Year From Monday* p32]. Originally quoted in A.K. Coomaraswamy: *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (New York, 1956) p15

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp40-41

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp41-42

³⁰ C. Olson: *The Maximus Poems* (New York, 1960) p4

³¹ Buddhism denies the reality of the 'ego' or 'self' generally believed to constitute the basis of every individual and to be the one constant amid a life of change. Zen Buddhists see the idea of a permanent ego as simply another intellectual concept born of a fear or denial of change.

³² K.G. von Durckheim: *The Japanese Cult of Tranquillity* tr. E. O'Shiel (London, 1960) p24

³³ A. Watts: *Op. cit.*, p41

³⁴ J. Krishnamurti: 'Self-knowledge', *The Gospel According to Zen* ed. R. Sohl & A. Carr (New York, 1970) p103

our language. In his *DIARY: HOW TO IMPROVE THE WORLD (YOU WILL ONLY MAKE MATTERS WORSE) CONTINUED 1973-1982*, he explains:

...English pronoun
I's always capitalized, no matter
where in a sentence it is.
Microbiologist (Japanese) said: Go East;
in Germany ich's never capitalized
except when it begins a sentence; in
Russia you can use I or let it go,
as you choose; in the Far East - he made
a gesture upwards with his hands
word for I has disappeared.³⁶

But this, according to Cage, was only one of our language's failings. He felt that syntax, for example, rationalizes reality and that the resultant demystification deadens us to experience. In his mesostics,³⁶ he aims to 'demilitarize' language by using a means of writing that avoids syntax and produces words free of intention. To not understand is essential and herein lies the essence of the Zen ko-an, an irrational riddle intended to spring the follower into spontaneous enlightenment: 'I really think it's important to be in a situation both in art and in life where you don't understand what's going on ...where you're bewildered. [...] If you're not in such a situation, you find yourself dealing, so to speak, with dust for which you have no use'.³⁷

Cage enjoyed the freedom of non-sense and felt neither words nor sounds need be used for communication. He regarded the expression of ideas and feelings through sound as self-aggrandizing: '...the most that can be accomplished by the musical expression of feeling is to show how emotional the composer was who had it. If anyone wants to get a feeling of how emotional a composer proved himself to be, he has to confuse himself to the same final

³⁶ J. Cage: *X - Writings '79 - '82* (Connecticut, 1983) p155

³⁶ In mesostics, a word is defined vertically on a central axis. Cage usually chooses material from a pre-existing text by working through it chronologically. If the axis contains a 'J', then the first word containing a 'J' is selected from the text. If the next axis-letter is an 'A', however, a word in the text that contains both a 'J' and an 'A' cannot be chosen.

³⁷ J. Cage in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p76

extent that the composer did and imagine that sounds are not sounds at all but are Beethoven and that men are not men but are sounds'.³⁸ Similarly, to appreciate a composer's musical ideas, it is necessary to mistake sound for something to look at rather than hear and thus we have come to know music through the filter of notation. But as Marshall McLuhan explains, 'The rational man in our Western culture is a visual man'³⁹ even though, according to the scientist-philosopher Buckminster Fuller (whose work Cage admired greatly), man can see only about one-millionth of universal reality.⁴⁰ Cage, however, refused to bind sounds to any visual abstraction and always aimed to let sounds 'be themselves': '...sounds don't worry about whether they make sense or whether they're heading in the right direction. [...] They are, and that's enough for them. [...] A sound possesses nothing, no more than I possess it'.⁴¹

Whereas other composers express themselves by drawing from a pre-existent body of generally-accepted, communicative means, Cage did not regard music as a language and is, in Roger Reynold's terms,⁴² a 'searcher' rather than a 'maker', as his intention is to reveal music rather than create it, to give the listener opportunities for unfamiliar experience rather than convey messages or offer distraction. As Morton Feldman points out, the emphasis could no longer be on compositional construction if the sounds were to exist in themselves rather than as 'symbols, or memories which were memories of other music to begin with'.⁴³ Rather than *saying* something with sounds, Cage was simply *doing* something and preferred to leave any possibility of communication to the sounds themselves.

As he became more involved with Oriental thought, he felt a shift in responsibility from 'making choices' to 'asking questions', from 'self-expression' to 'self-alteration', and he set about finding 'a means of writing music as strict with respect to [his] ego as sitting cross-legged'.⁴⁴ This he found through the *I Ching*, an ancient Chinese book based on intuitive interpretations of hexagrams derived from the tossing of coins or, more traditionally, yarrow

³⁸ J. Cage: *A Year From Monday* p97

³⁹ M. McLuhan & Q. Fiore: *Op. cit.*, p45

⁴⁰ Cf. R.B. Fuller: 'Man's Changing Role in the Universe', *Liberations* ed. I. Hassam (Connecticut, 1971) p199

⁴¹ J. Cage: *For the Birds* p150

⁴² R. Reynolds: 'A Perspective on Form and Experience', *Contemporary Music Review* Vol.2 No.1 (1987) pp279-80

⁴³ M. Feldman: *Op. cit.*, p49

⁴⁴ J. Cage: 'Tokyo Lectures and Three Mesostics', *Perspectives of New Music* Vol.26 No.1 (Winter, 1988) p7

sticks. He applied its methods to determine the sonic parameters of his works to produce a music free of egoistic decision-making. The *I Ching* afforded him 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'.⁴⁵ By subjecting *each* sound to question, there could be no continuity: believing that all things are already interrelated, Cage saw no need to forge or impose abstract relationships.

However, just as Thoreau believed that the universe is always wider than our view of it, so Cage came to regard his work with chance operations as simply another means of creating a known and finite world. Though he had removed any personal control over the sounds during their composition, his scores were still fully determined and thus did not offer the performer the same freedom as the composer: that is, to identify with 'no matter what eventuality'.⁴⁶ That Cage had produced such a complex and closed work as *Music of Changes* (his first chance-derived composition) by freeing the sounds led him to regard the piece as Dr. Frankenstein did his monster and he sought a means of composing a music indeterminate with respect to its performance. This he did by continuing to ask compositional questions of the *I Ching* whilst leaving the performance of the answers open. For this step, Cage was accused of removing his self from his work *ad absurdum* but, as Roger Reynolds notes, though 'Less is given...more is offered'.⁴⁷

As Cage moved towards indeterminacy, he became less concerned with the conception of a work than with its perception and he began to realize that a work should no longer be 'an object distinct from ourselves, but an experience, an event, including the observer'.⁴⁸ To emphasize to the listener that the hearing of a work is his own action seemed more consistent with the Zen idea of unimpededness, where every being is at the centre of the universe. This is a view again corroborated by contemporary science which has shown that the observer and the observed are inextricably linked. The observer is not passive: rather, he participates in and even creates what he observes.⁴⁹ If reality comprises a plurality of unique centres, there can be no universal forms of thought or perception upon which a composer can

⁴⁵ J. Cage: *Empty Words - Writings '73 -'78* (Connecticut, 1979) p5

⁴⁶ J. Cage: *Silence* p36

⁴⁷ R. Reynolds: *Op. cit.*, p306

⁴⁸ N. Crohn Schmitt: *Op. cit.*, p21

⁴⁹ Cf. M. Crichton : 'The Function of the Observer', *Jasper Johns* (London, 1977) and N. Crohn Schmitt: *Op. cit.*, pp31-4

rely for communication as each listener's consciousness perceives experience differently. Cage no longer saw a need to conceive of and create a single, central focus in a proscenium situation as each person is such a centre. Thus, the listener rather than the composer brings structure into being and Cage saw his role simply as bringing each individual's structuring faculty actively into play. Here, the perceiver becomes part of the work which unfolds only 'through the presence of the perceiver - it is his presence which defines the art-work'.⁵⁰

This music demands a whole new approach to listening and Cage suggested that the 'wisest thing to do is to open one's ears immediately and hear a sound suddenly before one's thinking has a chance to turn it into something logical, abstract, or symbolical'.⁵¹ No music comes closer to the essence of Zen painting that '[grasps] the joy as it flies, the winged life that is no longer life when we have taken thought to remember and describe it'.⁵² Value judgments are irrelevant as, without intentional relationships, anything may happen. Indeed, just as there are, for example, no 'right' or 'wrong' constellations, Cage suggested there could be no 'right' or 'wrong' sounds as 'all things have equally their Buddha nature'.⁵³ According to Cage, one must cultivate an attitude of acceptance, of 'no-mindedness' and welcome whatever happens next. Moreover, one must use every experience even if one finds oneself at a performance of a work of which one could be wholly critical. If, for example, one finds a piece of music boring after two minutes, Zen suggests one tries it for four. If it is still boring, one should try it for eight, sixteen and so on until it becomes interesting. As the composer-poet Dick Higgins writes, '[boredom] is a necessary station on the way to other experiences'⁵⁴ and beyond the ego there can be no boredom. It is also necessary to listen with dispassion and realize that the attractive or unattractive qualities of things are without substance and so to ask whether or not a particular piece is interesting, is in itself uninteresting. When asked if he thought some pieces were better than others, Cage replied, 'Don't you see that when you get a value judgment, that's all you have? They are destructive to our proper business, which is

⁵⁰ M. Hamman: 'Towards a Morphology of Presence: The Sound Installations of Thomas DeLio', *Interface* Vol.16 Nos.1 - 2 (1987) p72

⁵¹ J. Cage: *A Year From Monday* p98

⁵² A. Coomaraswamy: *Op. cit.*, p42

⁵³ J. Cage: *Silence* p143

⁵⁴ D. Higgins: 'Boredom and Danger', *Source - music of the avant-garde* Vol.3 No.1 (January, 1969) p15

curiosity and awareness'.⁵⁶

He sees his work as 'an affirmation of life'⁵⁶ and by re-introducing us to the very presence of sound he hopes, by analogy, we will re-discover the 'such-ness' of reality and '[wake] up to the very life we're living'.⁵⁷ Feldman, too, sought to work with sound in a way that was 'more direct, more immediate, more physical'⁵⁸ just as his friend the poet Frank O'Hara aimed to write with 'no mediation of metaphor or symbol'.⁵⁹ As the Russian critic Viktor Shklovsky wrote in 1917, 'Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony...'.⁶⁰

Cage's concern, however, was not only to reveal and affirm reality but also to imitate the manner of its operation. The pluralistic universe of 'all-at-once-ness' could no longer sustain the narrative singularity or linear conveyance of information of past art. Like Marshall McLuhan, Cage realized that 'there is nothing lineal or sequential about the total field of awareness that exists in any moment of consciousness'⁶¹ and, through indeterminacy, he found a music that transcended the world of causation and the purpose it presupposes: his aim was to remove purpose in accordance with Zen Buddhism which teaches us to 'awake to universal mind and realise that there is nothing whatsoever to be attained'.⁶²

To Buddhists, the essence of life is change, and suffering arises when one resists its flow and attempts to cling to fixed forms. According to the Buddha, all things arise and pass away into the universal flux that is reality. This idea that 'things' have no material substance is again one that is corroborated by physicists who have come to regard particles not as matter but as dynamic processes. Philosophers too, such as Merleau-Ponty, have found that 'perceived things...are not bounded entities whose laws of construction we possess *a priori*, but that they are open, inexhaustible systems...'.⁶³ Thus, Cage felt that art could be useful in drawing our attention to this process and so rather than creating fixed musical objects that

⁵⁶ J. Cage in R. Kostelanetz (ed.): *John Cage* [Documentary Monographs in Modern Art] (London, 1971) p27

⁵⁶ J. Cage: *Silence* p12

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p12

⁵⁸ M. Feldman: *Op. cit.*, p38

⁵⁹ F. O'Hara quoted in M. Perloff: *Frank O'Hara - Poet Among Painters* (Texas, 1979) p23

⁶⁰ V. Shklovsky quoted in *Ibid.*, p19

⁶¹ M. McLuhan: *Understanding Media* (London, 1964) p85

⁶² *The Huang Po Doctrine of Universal Mind* tr. Chu Ch'an (London, 1947) p17

⁶³ M. Merleau-Ponty: *The Primacy of Perception* (Illinois, 1964) p5

represented fully determined worlds-unto-themselves with their own internal order, he aimed to create opportunities for experience that would accommodate multiple views of reality and reflect and embody the open nature of its process. As the composer and theorist Thomas DeLio writes in his excellent study of open-form music, '...rather than representing form as an entity ontologically prior to process, the open structure treats process as ontologically prior to form. [...] Ultimately, both the work and the world emerge not as circumscribed objects but as circumscribing events...'.⁶⁴ Thus, the musical events in Cage's open works are only related in that they are contemporaneous and he would not presume to impose relationships above and beyond this. Rather, he feels that his role is simply to 'brush information against information, it doesn't matter what. By that brushing we will be made aware of the world which is itself doing that'.⁶⁵

Cage did not deny the validity of fixed musical objects but, through the rich and complex processes his scores set in motion, he hopes to show that although the various elements that may be incorporated are uniquely themselves, they interpenetrate into one. Thus, he regarded past musical literature, for example, not as art but as potential material for new work and suggests that rather than taking a Mozart sonata seriously in its own terms, it would be more useful to incorporate it into the processes of new and open compositions for, as in life, even the most sanctified of objects must surrender to the process.

Cage believed that to respond emotionally to music is to respond dualistically and thereby emphasize the ego and separate it from reality. Although he did not deny emotions *per se*, he believed it was vital to feel sadness, for example, 'in a way that you can then let it drop'.⁶⁶ Thus, when asked after a performance of Handel's *Messiah* if he liked being moved, he replied, 'I don't mind being moved, but I don't like to be pushed'.⁶⁷ Emotions are too personal, he believed, to be imposed on others although they can be incorporated into his enlarged musical processes for, as he explained, they can do so 'without determining the nature of that situation'.⁶⁸ They are carried along in the flow and cannot then receive undue

⁶⁴ T. DeLio: *Circumscribing the Open Universe* (Washington DC, 1984) p3

⁶⁵ J. Cage: *For the Birds* p194

⁶⁶ J. Cage: *Ibid.*, p56

⁶⁷ Quoted in C. Gagne & T. Caras: *Soundpieces - Interviews with American Composers* (New Jersey, 1982) p79

⁶⁸ J. Cage: *For the Birds* p145

attention.

These works reflect the Buddhist idea of 'plurality in one' where all things belong to an all-embracing unity beyond dualism. This concept is central to Cage's philosophy and led him to declare in 1966 that 'The boundaries have gone...'.⁶⁹ In a world where 'what you see, framed or unframed, is art...[and] where what you hear on or off the record is music...'⁷⁰ all distinctions disappear. Not only did Cage reveal the unity beyond the dualistic concept of sound versus silence,⁷¹ he also unified art and life by creating a music that was no longer 'spoilt' by ambient sound but which embraced it as material (his 'silent' piece, 4'33" for example). In the same way, the white paintings of Robert Rauschenberg (a close friend of Cage's) are not objects that can be 'spoilt' by shadows but open works that embrace their changing environments.⁷²

Cage excluded nothing from his work, and not only are noises and dissonances welcome in his music, but 'so is the dominant seventh chord if it happens to put in an appearance'.⁷³ As the American composer Ben Johnston noted, one cannot deny the multiplicity and interpenetration of today's musical world 'in which Machaut, the Beatles, Wagner, Ravi Shankar, Pete Seeger, Bach and Xenakis meet... This musical world, too, is proof against any takeover by such exclusive points of view as tonality, serialism, indeterminacy...'.⁷⁴ Though Cage was aware that 'To affirm or deny is to limit',⁷⁵ many European avant-garde composers seemed less so and indeterminacy became another 'point of view' when it was adopted as another means of control.⁷⁶ It is this aspect of 'control' that

⁶⁹ J. Cage in R. Kostelanetz: *John Cage* p29

⁷⁰ J. Cage: *M* pix

⁷¹ After spending some time in an anechoic chamber at Harvard University where he heard his nervous system functioning and his blood flowing, he concluded that there was no such thing as 'silence'.

⁷² Cf. Catalogue of the Tate Gallery exhibition of R. Rauschenberg, 1981 (unpaged)

⁷³ J. Cage: *Silence* p11

⁷⁴ B. Johnston: 'On Context' *Source* Vol.2 No.2 (July, 1968) p44

⁷⁵ *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po - On the Transmission of Mind* tr. J. Blofeld (London, 1968) p18

⁷⁶ For a detailed discussion of the differences between indeterminacy in America and its use in Europe (as 'transserial aleatorics') see H. Sabbe: 'A Logic of Coherence and an Aesthetic of Contingency: European versus American "Open Structure" Music', *Interface* Vol.16 No.3 (1987) pp177-185. For a more general discussion of the differences between American 'experimental' music and the European 'avant-garde', see M. Nyman: *Experimental Music - Cage and Beyond* (London, 1974)

differentiates the avant-garde's use of indeterminacy from the wholly open approach of Cage. He was not concerned with 'prescribing a defined time-object'⁷⁷ where all the elements are calculated and arranged *a priori* but with outlining a situation, 'a field delineated by certain compositional "rules"'.⁷⁸ Boulez, however, introduced indeterminate elements into his music whilst 'respect[ing] the finished aspect of the Occidental work'.⁷⁹ Similarly, Stockhausen regarded indeterminacy not as a way of perceiving, reflecting and embodying the open nature of reality but as an 'expansion of the traditional concept of organization'.⁸⁰ He admits a degree of indeterminacy as a compositional technique only at one level and as long as the large-scale aspects of a work are ordered and determined.

It is sometimes suggested that Cage's ideas in particular and much American music in general represent a reaction to the intellectual complexity of much European avant-garde music. John Rockwell, for example, believes that American composers work 'in blissful ignorance of or defiant opposition to their European heritage'.⁸¹ However, not only is the concept of 'reaction' a dualistic one and therefore inappropriate here, but Cage's position was never 'anti-' anything for, as Marcel Duchamp points out (an artist much admired by Cage), 'whether you are anti or for, it's two sides of the same thing'.⁸² Disagreement amongst people working in the same field can, according to Cage, only 'weaken the activity of people in the field'.⁸³ Aware that belief is divisive, his aim was always to promote an all-inclusive commonality for, as he said, 'An up-to-date aquarium has all the fish swimming together in one huge tank'.⁸⁴ He hoped that the blurring of distinction would bring people together both in the musical world and, by analogy, in society in general. As he explained: '...the old idea was that the composer was the genius, the conductor ordered everyone around, and the performers were slaves. In our music, no-one is boss. We all work together'.⁸⁵ This interpenetration, he felt, is partly due

⁷⁷ M. Nyman: *Op. cit.*, p3

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p3

⁷⁹ P. Boulez: 'Alea', *Perspectives of New Music* Vol.3 No.1 (Fall/Winter, 1964) p51

⁸⁰ K. Stockhausen quoted in M. Williams Karlins: 'Freedom and control in twentieth-century music', *Tri-Quarterly* No.52 (Fall, 1981) p251

⁸¹ J. Rockwell: *Op. cit.*, p97

⁸² J. Goldberg: *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors* (London, 1973) p57

⁸³ G. Barnard: *Conversation Without Feldman - A Talk Between John Cage and Geoffrey Barnard* (Darlinghurst, 1980) p10

⁸⁴ Quoted in P. Gena: 'Freedom in experimental music: the New York revolution', *Tri-Quarterly* No.52 (Fall, 1981) p238

⁸⁵ J. Cage in R. Kostelanetz: *Conversing with Cage* p106

to the nature of technology, a force that is 'Orientalising the West'⁸⁶ by unifying the separate and distinct into a 'global village' which does not discriminate between styles, cultures, space or time.

The idea of Cage and many American composers that we live in a non-linear, field situation is one shared by few of their European avant-garde colleagues. The New York composer Philip Corner, for example, recalls being shocked by the attitude of Boulez that new work had to be a linear continuation from the past and that rather than making an open search of the field, one had to 'go in a straight line from what the past has done and make the next step'.⁸⁷ This is a belief that Boulez has more recently reiterated: speaking of the need for an evolution of musical language, he continues, 'I am sure that as long as you haven't absorbed the history which comes before you, you certainly cannot go very far'.⁸⁸ Cage also noticed that Schoenberg was not interested in a non-linear view of history but 'in Bach, in Beethoven, in Brahms and in Schoenberg'.⁸⁹

Virtues much valued in Zen Buddhism (and by Cage himself) are 'bewilderment' and a sense of 'non-understanding'. These enable Zen to shake off all religious, philosophical or indeed any conceptual definitions as it is a 'way of being' that cannot be understood intellectually, only grasped intuitively. Cage was equally averse to definitions for, in a world that is continually changing and where all things interpenetrate, 'it's quite clear...that nothing can be defined'.⁹⁰ However, if any aspect of Cage's philosophy can be defined, it is this need to continually defy boundaries. In explaining the title of the first edition of his book of conversations with Daniel Charles (*Pour les Oiseaux*), Cage declared that he is 'for the birds, not for the cages in which people sometimes put them'⁹¹ and when asked to sum up his convictions, '[Cage] put it like this: "Get out of whatever cage you find yourself in".⁹² The need to change and be constantly bewildered underlaid all of his ideas as, without 'non-understanding', one will always be confined by one's intellect. It was his aim to free sound from

⁸⁶M. McLuhan & Q. Fiore: *Op. cit.*, p45

⁸⁷P. Corner in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p88

⁸⁸P. McCallum: 'An Interview with Pierre Boulez', *The Musical Times* Vol.130 No.1751 (January, 1989) p10

⁸⁹J. Cage: 'On collaboration in art', *Res* No.10 (Autumn, 1985) p103

⁹⁰J. Cage: *A Year From Monday* p9

⁹¹J. Cage: *For the Birds* p11

⁹²J. Cage quoted on the book jacket of R. Kostelanetz: *Conversing with Cage*

its use as communication, to free the composer from his 'self', music from linear notions of history and, finally, the mind from all intellectual limitations.

2. Cage as Catalyst: a commonality of individuals

'The question is no longer "Can we do it?" - that goes without saying - but "What do we want to do?">' Rhys Chatham in interview with the author (unpub. MSS, 1988)

Cage's own highly individual musical style was, according to Christian Wolff, like a thunderstorm or the growing of grass, beyond imitation, and Robert Ashley has pointed out that Cage 'never suggested that anyone ought to compose music using chance procedures'⁹³ Cage himself believed that one could not 'really know what, if any, effect our work has on others'⁹⁴ and that whatever function he may have performed is one that would have been performed in any case, as even the most novel ideas are ones 'that one or other of us is about to have'.⁹⁵ The notion of his 'influencing' other composers seems inappropriate for, as Wolff points out, it is a notion involved with 'the exercise of power and control'⁹⁶ and therefore could not have been further from Cage's concern. He never held up his work to younger composers as a model of how to proceed, but aimed merely to stimulate activity and free composers from all limitations. As Yoko Ono⁹⁷ recalls, 'What Cage did for us on an artistic level was to tell us that we were alright. That gave us an incredible sense of freedom and confidence'.⁹⁸ The fact that many composers 'got inspiration and encouragement from the direction he went but didn't necessarily follow him'⁹⁹ also suggests that it is more accurate to regard Cage as a catalyst

⁹³ R. Ashley: 'Just One Complaint', *A John Cage Reader* p80

⁹⁴ J. Cage in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p76

⁹⁵ J. Cage in C. Gagne & T. Caras: *Soundpieces* p81

⁹⁶ C. Wolff: 'Under the Influence', *A John Cage Reader* p74

⁹⁷ Although not known primarily for this, Yoko Ono was an extremely active experimental composer during the 1960s when she was involved with the New York-based *Fluxus* movement.

⁹⁸ Y. Ono in interview with the author (unpub. MSS, 1988)

⁹⁹ Y. Ono in *Ibid.*

rather than as an influence. Cage explained thus: 'I think that what appears to be my influence is merely that I fell into a situation that other people are falling into. And what is so nice about this situation is that it admits a great deal of variety'.¹⁰⁰ Indeed the post-Cagean field has been described as 'a complex mosaic whose integrative logic would seem to support a multitude of propositions'¹⁰¹ and the sheer diversity of the field cannot be overstressed.

Many composers remember their first encounter with John Cage during his lecture-cum-concert tours of the 1960s visiting academic institutions 'like a hit-and-run driver'.¹⁰² For many, like George Crumb, that encounter was extremely important: 'I was teaching at the University of Colorado and Cage came through to do one of his "events". I was taken with his totally refreshing way of challenging the basic things in music we had never questioned. He was a liberating influence for all kinds of composers throughout the world, even composers one would never associate with his own very personal style'.¹⁰³ Almost all of the composers in *American Originals*, for all their diversity of style, have expressed some debt to Cage as a 'permission giver', an inspirational catalyst who disarmed the system that might have stifled them. Both Steve Reich and Robert Moran, for example, studied with Luciano Berio at Mills College, California, in the early 1960s. For Reich, study with Berio was only useful in that 'it helped clarify for me that I had absolutely nothing to do with that tradition, which was basically the end of German Romanticism - through Schoenberg into Stockhausen and Boulez'.¹⁰⁴ Moran remembers that there were 'at that time far too many people sounding like Stockhausen and Boulez but luckily we passed through that migraine. What Cage did in music, besides throwing the windows open and letting the sunlight come in upon academia and the "concert-hall situation", was to allow the sense of humour to come back into music. I know that having musicians bark like dogs is really off the wall, but why not? That was allowed - it was just as valid as any other sound, and it was so refreshing'.¹⁰⁵ Another Californian, Harold Budd, remembers Cage's university visit in the stifling climate of an imported European avant-garde: 'Cage was the solution here - it just threw the avant-garde totally out of sync, it just

¹⁰⁰ J. Cage in R. Kostelanetz: *Conversing with Cage* p206

¹⁰¹ T. DeLio: 'Avant-garde Issues in Seventies Music', *Breaking the Sound Barrier* ed. G. Battock (New York, 1981) p254

¹⁰² J. Cage in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p73

¹⁰³ G. Crumb in *Ibid.*, p98

¹⁰⁴ S. Reich in *Ibid.*, p213

¹⁰⁵ R. Moran in *Ibid.*, p198

ruined it, which was the best thing that could have happened'.¹⁰⁶

These comments all point to a sense of relief gained from Cage's Zen-inspired ideas that offered a release from notions of historical line. For Philip Glass, 'the whole tyranny of history, the historical imperative of contemporary music, was demystified entirely.... It simply didn't matter anymore. If you took one step outside those institutions, it didn't matter anymore. Of course, that's what Cage was very good at...he was the only Western composer that hinted at that'.¹⁰⁷ Reich, too, found the courage to step outside of that historical imperative: 'Boulez said, "It's historically necessary to write this way". I felt, "Well just count me out of history then".'¹⁰⁸ Glass continues: 'contemporary music had become, from our point of view, over-institutionalized. You more or less needed permission to write music. The only one that gave you permission to write the music you wanted to was John Cage...'.¹⁰⁹

Whether labelled as 'experimentalists' or 'minimalists', Cage inspired a generation of composers who, for all their stylistic diversity, were linked by a fundamental desire to rediscover the essentials of shared musical experience with little or no reference to European models or traditions. Just as George Crumb has 'always believed that music doesn't compartmentalize',¹¹⁰ so Philip Glass regards post-Cagean composers as 'a generation rather than a category'.¹¹¹ He continues: 'I mean, I like Phil Niblock's music a lot but I don't know what to call it. The same would be true of Terry Jennings or Meredith Monk or Robert Ashley - it's not important'.¹¹² Robert Moran, whose own music is often referred to as 'minimalist', does not 'even know what it means. [...] We can thank journalists for words like 'minimalism' and 'avant-garde'. When was the last time you heard someone say "I'm an avant-garde artist"? They don't. They wouldn't'.¹¹³ Of course, as Terry Riley concedes, these terms are 'easy handle[s] for people to recognize a group of composers that do similar things, but it certainly doesn't acknowledge the individuality of its members'.¹¹⁴ Michael Torke also admits that 'labels have

¹⁰⁶ H. Budd in *Ibid.*, p66

¹⁰⁷ P. Glass in *Ibid.*, p127

¹⁰⁸ S. Reich in *Ibid.*, p214

¹⁰⁹ P. Glass in *Ibid.*, p134

¹¹⁰ G. Crumb in *Ibid.*, p95

¹¹¹ P. Glass in *Ibid.*, p133

¹¹² P. Glass in *Ibid.*, p133

¹¹³ R. Moran in *Ibid.*, p203

¹¹⁴ T. Riley in *Ibid.*, p232

been very useful. If you talk about Impressionist painting, you're not confining Monet, you know that...his work transcends that'.¹¹⁶ The 'isms' that have been used to compartmentalize music in the post-Cagean field more accurately refer to a common 'climate' rather than any clearly codified techniques. There is a huge stylistic difference, for example, between the Indian-inspired, just intonation, sine-tone drones of La Monte Young, and the pulsing, equal temperament arpeggios of Glass, two of the four composers often lumped together as the founding fathers of the 'minimalist movement'.¹¹⁶ For Riley, 'minimalism' is simply 'not playing anything you don't have to. You can still get to the nerves and bones and fibres of what music is without great decoration'.¹¹⁷ Riley goes on to characterize the post-Cagean climate as one of hope: 'The musics of Webern and Schoenberg were created during a time of very great distress on the planet...The influence of the very gnarled, anguished music continued on through most of the first half of the century in some form or other. [Then] there was a change in the climate, just before the 1960s - in my view the high point of the twentieth century in terms of really wanting to be free, to tear off the bonds of society which said you had to live a certain way or do certain things to be a valid individual'.¹¹⁸

It was Cage who inspired a healthy coexistence of a multiplicity of viewpoints and gave countless individual composers the courage to cultivate their own musical identities with or without reference to the work of others. Whilst as a result the post-Cagean scene is strongly characterized by the highly personal styles of individuals, it is nevertheless a commonality of individuals. From Cage's belief that one should hear music as sound rather than language, through Alvin Lucier's refusal to complicate his processes with 'composerly intent', to Riley's re-assertion of music's fundamentals or Lou Harrison's 'not being afraid to make something pretty', all sought to re-affirm the primacy of sound over metaphor. Thus, of Philip Glass's generation, 'almost nobody talked about minimalist music from a theoretical point of view. [...] Part of the reason was that the generation older than us had done so much writing and talking that we were sick to death of it. [...] [But] it still goes on: I have volumes of *Perspectives of*

¹¹⁶ M. Torke in *Ibid.*, p246

¹¹⁶ On a recent trip to Holland, Glass 'was accused of betraying the minimalist movement. I never thought there was a movement to begin with...'. [P. Glass in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p133]

¹¹⁷ T. Riley in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p231

¹¹⁸ T. Riley in *Ibid.*, p231-2

New Music and you still see that kind of stuff. It created the idea that minimalism was an intellectual movement which wasn't the case at all - it was simply a generation that wasn't going to fall into the trap of talking more than doing'.¹¹⁹ And, as a student of Berio, Steve Reich recalls that 'I used to spend my evenings going to jazz workshops and hearing John Coltrane play. It was a wonderful counterbalance to sitting in a class with a lot of students who were writing music that had a lot of black ink on the page but they couldn't play it at the piano or hear it in their head. At night I'd go and hear someone pick up the saxophone and just play. It was a kind of moral choice'.¹²⁰

Cage also inspired the proliferation of extra-institutional composer-performer groups, so much so that the composer John Mizelle concluded in 1968 that it 'was rare to find a composer...writing really significant music but not associated and interacting with a group'.¹²¹ Gordon Mumma gives some idea of the scale of this proliferation, citing 'the Christian Wolff group in Boston; the international revolutionary group...Fluxus; the ONCE Group; the Foss improvisation ensemble; La Monte Young's Theater of Eternal Music; Jerry Hunt's Dallas Chamber Ensemble; the group around Charlotte Moorman in New York; the New Music Ensemble of Davis; the Musica Elettronica Viva of Rome; the Sonic Arts Group of New York City; Joseph Byrd's New Music Workshop,...the San Francisco Tape Music Center...'.¹²² Collaborative effort was needed, according to Cage, both in art and in life in order to '[bring] people and their energies and the world's material resources...together'¹²³ and many experimental composers, such as James Fulkerson, came to regard music primarily as 'a social situation in which willing people interact'.¹²⁴ If people could work together successfully to create music, then they could work together to create peace and plenty by taking 'advantage of synergy, an energy greater than the sum of several energies had they not been brought together'.¹²⁵

Furthermore, just as Cage felt that it was possible to remove personal intention

¹¹⁹ P. Glass in *Ibid.*, p132

¹²⁰ S. Reich in *Ibid.*, p214

¹²¹ J. Mizelle: 'Groups', *Source* Vol.2 No.1 (January, 1968) p15

¹²² G. Mumma in *Ibid.*, p16

¹²³ J. Cage in *A Year From Monday* px

¹²⁴ J. Fulkerson: 'From the "Preface to Triad" 1971', *A Folio of Scores for The Composer's Forum* (unpub. MSS) unpagged

¹²⁵ J. Cage: *A Year From Monday* px

and expression by increasing the number of egos involved in a work's creation, so many of these groups aimed to function as single organisms free of the ego's domination. Alvin Curran, for example, of *Musica Elettronica Viva* (an American composer-performer group based in Rome and founded in 1966) believed that collaborative effort could result in 'the absorption of the self'¹²⁶ and his colleague Richard Teitelbaum explains that, when the group performed, individual identities vanished and 'we [were] all one'.¹²⁷ According to Robert Ashley (a founding member of the ONCE group and, later, the Sonic Arts Union), all music ought to be collaborative as he finds 'the idea of a single vision, the idea of the "auteur", incompatible with the demands of maintaining a mode of actuality'.¹²⁸ Like Cage, Ashley aims to draw our attention to or reflect the nature of reality where, as Cage would say, everything interpenetrates, and for this reason, the majority of the new groups created mixed-media work and 'tried to junk the notion of great communicable ideas'.¹²⁹

The ONCE group, for example, which formed in 1963 as a touring, mixed-media performance ensemble based at Ann Arbor in Michigan, comprised film-makers, architects, sculptors, painters and theatre artists as well as composers. Interdisciplinary collaboration was of course necessary in mixed-media work and the groups shared technical knowledge and resources as well as creative ideas. Of particular significance to Gordon Mumma (a member of the ONCE Group and the Sonic Arts Union), was the range of the groups' 'artistic, technological, and social concerns, which generally surpass[ed] the more parochial "establishment" projects'.¹³⁰

Indeed, the formation of many of these groups was in many ways a reaction to institutionalized music and the problems it posed for younger composers. The groups allowed composers to function without intermediaries such as publishers, professional musicians, orchestras, conductors, and perform their own work without having to rely on anonymous third parties. The Sonic Arts Union, for example, was, according to David Behrman, 'a kind of performing co-operative for unconventional performance and it felt good because we weren't

¹²⁶ A. Curran: 'Groups', *Source* Vol.2 No.1 (January, 1968) p26

¹²⁷ R. Teitelbaum: *Ibid.*, p27

¹²⁸ R. Ashley quoted in J. Rockwell: *Op. cit.*, p106

¹²⁹ R. Ashley: 'The ONCE Group', *Arts in Society* Vol.5 (1968) p82

¹³⁰ G. Mumma: 'Live Electronic Music', *The Development and Practice of Electronic Music* ed. J. Appleton & R. Perera (New Jersey, 1975) p318

asking anyone for any favours'.¹³¹ Glass feels this was an important aspect of the work of this generation of post-Cageans: '...we didn't have the institutional support, either financially or academically, and so we were a generation that evolved new places to play'.¹³² Independence was much valued by the groups although this often made for shaky financial existences. The San Francisco Tape Music Center, for example, which was founded in 1961 by Ramon Sender and Morton Subotnik and later directed by Pauline Oliveros, functioned solely on 'pooled, begged, borrowed and stolen equipment'.¹³³ Lack of money, however, eventually led to the demise of these groups as the scale of their work was continually limited by financial constraints. As Robert Ashley explains, 'We were operating on exactly the same scale of ambitions as...Wagner, but we had no money and there was no money in sight'.¹³⁴ Yet the idea of performing one's own music without the involvement of institutional intermediaries continued due largely, Ashley believes, to the work of Cage and David Tudor (Cage's lifelong performance colleague) - 'just amazing pioneers in inventing the idea of a personal music'.¹³⁵ Of course the music of certain post-Cageans, most notably Philip Glass or Laurie Anderson, has enjoyed enormous commercial success, although the networks of interdependence established by the composer-performer groups of the 1960s and '70s continue to function informally and support the work of lesser known experimental composers.

Many of the composers in *American Originals*, such as Glenn Branca, Daniel Lentz or Meredith Monk, still present their work primarily through the activity of their own groups or ensembles. Certainly many of the composers prefer to work directly with performers whom they know and trust and with whom they can develop more meaningful and personal realizations of a work. David Behrman, for example, who writes largely indeterminate pieces using instruments in combination with interactive computer software, '[likes] to work out some situation where the music has an identity but the performer has a lot of opportunity to shape it, so the music that results has a lot to do with both personalities'.¹³⁶ Much indeterminate music of course, such as that of Behrman, is difficult to adapt to score form for it is that very notion of

¹³¹ D. Behrman in interview with the author (unpub. MSS, 1988) unpagged

¹³² P. Glass in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p135

¹³³ P. Oliveros: 'Groups', *Source* Vol.2 No.1 (January, 1968) p16

¹³⁴ R. Ashley in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p47

¹³⁵ R. Ashley in C. Gagne & T. Caras: *Soundpieces* p19

¹³⁶ D. Behrman in interview with the author (unpub. MSS, 1988) unpagged

fixing the identity of a piece that his work eschews. Meredith Monk, for example, feels that 'In Western culture, paper has sometimes taken over the function of what music always was. I feel that my music is between the barlines: what is really happening is underneath the page, and I don't know how to deal with that'.¹³⁷ Behrman also aims to create a music 'that isn't frozen, that's different, that changes... You don't just want to make complicated scores - you want to make something that's almost alive'.¹³⁸ This is a view shared by James Fulkerson who tries to blur the distinctions between composer and performer in his music as he feels that it is 'important that people can really react in a situation and make a mutual creation'.¹³⁹ The performer is no longer simply told what to do by the composer - he collaborates with him, and the process is completed by the creative involvement of the listener who is equally liberated to perceive the work in his own way rather than in the composer's. The New York composer Phill Niblock, for example, is not interested in telling performers or listeners what to do, but 'in making pieces which everyone can have a different reaction to, or a different perception of'.¹⁴⁰ To use Cage's terms, the music does not 'emerge' but the perceiver 'enters in'.¹⁴¹

This is also true of Alvin Lucier's work in that it does not assume universal modes of perception through which to communicate some personal vision but instead 'leads the perceiver to recognize that the only basis for a commonality of experience is in the sheer individuality of each perception'.¹⁴² Lucier, like Cage, is concerned with sound as sound, its pure physical presence, and avoids to a great extent any composerly techniques of shaping his material as he feels he is in no position to make decisions of that kind. Similarly, the artist Robert Irwin, whose work Lucier much admires, has written that 'The object of art may be to seek the elimination of it'¹⁴³ and Thoreau too believed that the highest condition of art was artlessness. Lucier's intention is, purely and simply, to *present* sound though, in order to do this, he consciously has to skim away the layers of imagery, abstraction and metaphor that,

¹³⁷ M. Monk in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p189

¹³⁸ D. Behrman: *Op. cit.*

¹³⁹ J. Fulkerson quoted in 'Musicians instead of Technicians', *ethos* (March 25, 1971) p5

¹⁴⁰ P. Niblock in interview with the author (unpub. MSS, 1988), unpagged

¹⁴¹ J. Cage: *A Year From Monday* p39

¹⁴² T. DeLio: *Circumscribing the Open Universe* p104

¹⁴³ Quoted in L. Weschler: *Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees* (California, 1982) p218

as an artist., he is continually tempted to apply. By not shaping the materials in any way, Lucier sharpens the listener's awareness of those materials, of sounds as sounds rather than what they might be trying to represent. He aims simply to isolate and present natural, acoustic phenomena as, for example, in his *Music for Solo Performer* (1965) for enormously amplified brain waves and percussion in which electrodes are attached to the scalp of the performer to transform his brain's alpha waves into electrical energy. This is then fed to loudspeakers which, with very low but highly amplified frequencies, cause a variety of percussion instruments to resonate sympathetically. During the making of this work, many of his friends and colleagues suggested that Lucier made a tape piece using the alpha waves as a sound source to be variously manipulated and transformed. However, to Lucier, the sounds already existed as ends in themselves and to attempt to add anything would distract from this simple fact. Similarly, Cage felt that one should 'accept that a sound is a sound..., give up illusions about ideas of order, expressions of sentiment and all the rest of our inherited aesthetic claptrap'.¹⁴⁴

Phil Niblock is also interested in the pure physicality of sound and, though he works primarily on tape, the sound sources he uses are always acoustic instruments. He records a cluster of tones with great precision (during the recording session, the musician is tuned by a calibrated sine wave on an oscilloscope) which are usually very close together and of long durations. He then mixes these tones together on an eight-track tape machine into expansive walls of sound to which is added a live soloist who wanders through the performance space playing similar or adjacent tones to create shifting harmonics and acoustical beat patterns. He is not interested in sound manipulation or signal processing as he feels that 'music modifies itself so much anyway in the air'.¹⁴⁵ Even Alvin Lucier's few pieces that use magnetic tape are concerned not with sound manipulation but with exploring acoustical space. In his *I am Sitting in a Room* (1970), for example, a passage of recorded speech is simultaneously replayed and re-recorded many times in a room of any size until those pitches contained in the recorded speech that correspond to the resonant frequencies of the room are amplified and those that do not correspond fade away. Gradually, the speech becomes pure, continuous sound but it is the space, not an electronic device, that filters the

¹⁴⁴J. Cage quoted in M. McLuhan & Q. Fiore: *Op. cit.*, p119

¹⁴⁵P. Niblock: *Op. cit.*

speech and thus the nature of the work is still very much acoustic.

Pauline Oliveros' *In Memoriam Nikola Tesla, Cosmic Engineer* (1969) works on a similar idea. At the beginning of the work, the performer tries to locate the resonant frequencies of the performance space. This is then flooded with low sounds from audio generators set at the resonant frequencies to bring out the building's sonic characteristics. In Oliveros' words, the low frequencies cause the performance space 'to add its squeaks, groans and other resonance phenomena... [so that it] performs in sympathy with the musicians'.¹⁴⁶

More permanent sound environments have been created by La Monte Young using a selection of sine waves which, since they have only single frequency components, present Young's desired acoustic phenomena more clearly than any other waveforms. These continuous, live installations of sine waves produce areas of high and low air pressure where the relative amplitudes of the cluster of frequencies are modified. As the listener wanders through the environment, his slightest movement affects not only his own perception of the work but also, by affecting these patterns of air pressure, that of other listeners. Young chooses his frequencies precisely in order to evoke what he terms a 'drone state of mind' in the listener where the vibrating patterns of air cause sympathetic internal vibrations within the listener's nervous system (via his eardrum) from which point he is 'free to discover a veritable world of possibilities'.¹⁴⁷ The idea is to alter or expand the consciousness of the perceiver, an aim shared by other composers such as Pauline Oliveros.

Oliveros first became aware of the limitations of our everyday levels of perception when she placed a microphone on the window-ledge of her San Francisco apartment and recorded the environment. Upon replay, she was amazed to discover the number of sounds that initially went unheard. Her aim ever since has been to extend our awareness and perception of sound. In the 1960s, for example, she explored perceptual extremes in her work with combination tones and sub-audio and supersonic frequencies.¹⁴⁸ She has also tried to expand awareness and perception of the universe through the use of *all* our

¹⁴⁶ P. Oliveros quoted in H. von Gunden: *The Music of Pauline Oliveros* (New Jersey, 1983) p64

¹⁴⁷ J. Cage: *For the Birds* p150

¹⁴⁸ During such work, she 'felt like a witch capturing sounds from a nether realm' [P. Oliveros: 'Some Sound Observations', *Source* Vol.2 No.1 (January 1968) p79] and, in one electronic studio, she was accused of black magic and her equipment sabotaged.

perceptual faculties. Her fourth *Sonic Meditation*, for example, requires extra-sensory perception: 'Divide into two or more groups. Each group must have a tape recorder and be sound insulated from the other groups. The distance might be small or large i.e. thousands of miles or light years...Each group tape records its own sounds during the telepathic transmission for later comparison'.¹⁴⁹ Like La Monte Young, she is interested in seeking a commonality in the perceptual processes of humans in the way we 'interact with the intelligence that is music'.¹⁵⁰ This, she feels, can best be achieved through meditative exercise, an approach closely related to what Cage felt is the traditional reason for making music: that is, 'to sober and quiet the mind thus making it susceptible to divine influence'.¹⁵¹ This principle has of course been variously interpreted though many post-Cageans have come to regard their work as a means of increasing awareness and expanding consciousness. Many of Yoko Ono's works, for example, from her book of scores entitled *Grapefruit*, are intended to challenge the perceptual techniques of performers and listeners so that we will eventually be able to 'reach our ears to the stars'¹⁵² and in her tape pieces, for example, she instructs the performer to 'Take a tape of the sound of the stars moving'¹⁵³ or 'Take a tape of the voices of fish at the night of a full moon'.¹⁵⁴ In her *Collecting Piece*, the performer is instructed to record sounds in his mind and 'replay' them, in a different order, at a later date. By such practices, she aims to re-draw one's attention to the life of sounds (particularly those that otherwise go unheard) and help one truly hear again.

Similarly, Alvin Lucier hopes that his works will help people 'to open their ears to their environments'¹⁵⁵ and Thomas DeLio feels that Lucier's work successfully manages to bridge 'the traditional boundaries separating the composition from its environment',¹⁵⁶ boundaries which Cage also sought to remove. Lucier's 1970 work, *(Hartford) Memory Space*, for example, instructs performers to go to outside environments, record the sounds they hear with any 'memory device' (tape recorders, mental recall etc.), and later re-

¹⁴⁹ P. Oliveros: 'Sonic Meditations', *Source* Vol.5 No.2 (1971) p104

¹⁵⁰ P. Oliveros: *Software for People* (California, 1979) p3

¹⁵¹ J. Cage in R. Kostelanetz: *Conversing with Cage* p215

¹⁵² Y. Ono in interview with the author (unpub. MSS, 1988), unpagged

¹⁵³ Y. Ono: 'Tape Piece IV - Moving Piece', *Grapefruit* (London, 1971) unpagged

¹⁵⁴ Y. Ono: 'Fish Piece', reprinted in *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ A. Lucier & D. Simon: *Chambers* (Connecticut, 1980) p11

¹⁵⁶ T. DeLio in *Breaking the Sound Barrier* p269

create those environments using voices and instruments. In another piece, *Gentle Fire* (1971), the score asks the performer to collect, on tape, examples of such sounds as 'Colliding Meteors...Spurting Blood...Rattling Snakes...Crashing Planes...[and] Erupting volcanoes'.¹⁵⁷ Then, using an electronic synthesizer these sounds are to be transformed into others such as 'Passing ships...Rising Bread...Buttering Muffins...[and] Assuaging terrors'.¹⁵⁸ Given that even with today's computer synthesis technology such transformations would present problems suggests that the importance of this work was largely conceptual. Indeed the score ends with the following directive: 'Based on these procedures and experiences, design for your personal use and store in your mind an imaginary synthesizer with which...you can wilfully bring about such transformations at any time in any place without the help of external equipment'.¹⁵⁹ Thus, Lucier is aiming to make us conscious not only of our sonic environments but also of our own consciousness and thereby heightens our awareness of the very act of perception.

Parallels to these ideas may also be found in the visual arts, most notably perhaps in the work of Robert Irwin. Together with scientists James Turrell and Ed Wortz, Irwin was involved in a research project which explored the possibility of 'Allowing people to perceive their perceptions - making them aware of their perceptions...conscious of their consciousness...'.¹⁶⁰ In the course of this work, Irwin spent many long sessions inside UCLA's anechoic chamber (Cage underwent a similar experience several years earlier) which, he recalls, greatly heightened his perceptual awareness: 'After I'd sat in there for six hours...and then got up and walked back home...the trees were still trees and the street was still a street...but the world did not look the same; it was very, very, noticeably altered'.¹⁶¹

In a similar way, Robert Ashley tries to make his listeners more conscious of themselves and their global situation. Ashley himself is acutely self-conscious as he feels a composer can no longer make naive musical decisions in the midst of today's musical and aesthetic pluralism. The truly contemporary composer cannot help but 'associate every

¹⁵⁷ Taken from the score of *Gentle Fire* which is reproduced in *Source* Vol.5 No.2 (1971) pp47-8

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p48

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p48

¹⁶⁰ J. Turrell quoted in L. Weschler: *Op. cit.*, p127

¹⁶¹ R. Irwin quoted in *Ibid.*, p128

musical thought with a reason for it'.¹⁶² The present global situation makes his attitude towards composition even more self-conscious. He explains: 'You start to work and you think, "They're killing people in Israel. What am I doing?".'¹⁶³ Although his music does not, unlike Cage's, propose any solutions to global problems, it certainly does not pretend that they do not exist or that we can ignore them. As a composer, he does not shut the world out of his mind and he feels his audiences have similar responsibilities: 'When I go to a concert, I don't forget about South Africa - I'm thinking about that and I'm listening to music at the same time. ...I'd expect everybody else to do that - it's the civilized thing to do'.¹⁶⁴ So although he does not subscribe to the notion that music can *alter* peoples' consciousness, it is probably only the tacit implications of the term that he objects to: that is, that the listener is preoccupied with a transformation of his self to the exclusion of global issues or awareness.

At the other extreme, Pauline Oliveros is often accused of creating apolitical work in concentrating solely on personal spiritual development. Yet, she considers her *Sonic Meditations*, for example, 'to be deeply political in that it challenges certain premises in the musical establishment, that it opens up for people to participate who aren't musicians'.¹⁶⁵ Just as the formation of extra-institutional composer-performer groups had produced what Cage called a 'commonality of individuals...free...from anything resembling economic or political structures',¹⁶⁶ several experimental composers gradually moved further from the establishment in creating a music that was open to all.

Again, whether tagged as 'experimentalists' or 'minimalists', many of the 'first generation' post-Cageans, such as La Monte Young, Steve Reich, Alvin Lucier and Phil Niblock, were united not only in their re-assertion of sound over metaphor, but also by a common approach to musical structure. This approach was most clearly outlined by Reich who sought to develop an audible structural technique that determined 'all the note-to-note details and the overall form simultaneously.. [to produce]...a compositional process and a sounding

¹⁶² R. Ashley in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p49

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p49

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p50

¹⁶⁵ P. Oliveros in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p209

¹⁶⁶ J. Cage in R. Kostelanetz: *Conversing with Cage* p206

music that are [were] one and the same'.¹⁶⁷ Thus, although the composer 'may have the pleasure of discovering musical processes and composing the material to run through them, once the process is set up and loaded it runs by itself'.¹⁶⁸ This aesthetic often produced a music of 'inherent impersonality' and it was a shift away from this structural purity that characterized the work of many 'second generation' post-Cageans, whether they be labelled 'post-minimalists' or 'post-experimentalists'. The young San Francisco-based composer Paul Dresher, for example, was clearly influenced by Riley and Reich but, like 'John Adams, Ingram Marshall, Daniel Lentz...we all wanted to expand the vocabulary and not be quite as limited as the pristine sonic palette which had characterized the music of Phil Glass, Steve Reich and Terry Riley'.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, Rhys Chatham (who studied with Maryanne Amacher and La Monte Young) feels free to combine aspects of experimental music and rock music. His *Guitar Trio* (1977), for three electric guitars, electric bass and drums, mixes 'extended time melodies using overtones as primary...vocabulary with a rhythm that owed its existence to the rock genre'.¹⁷⁰ Another New York composer, Glenn Branca, also straddles the experimental music and rock divide. The Glenn Branca Ensemble was formed in 1980 and is best known as the platform for his radical, concert-length symphonies which use a compositional system based on the intervals of the harmonic series. The ensemble largely uses instruments of his own invention, such as various mallet guitars, the harmonics guitar and the motorized harmonic keyboard. The Glenn Branca experience is an explosive one which has sent critics worldwide scurrying for superlatives and which led one writer to suggest that, had the composer lived three hundred years earlier, he would have been hanged for witchcraft.

Some experimental composers, such as Laurie Anderson, have moved more overtly towards popular music. She feels, however, that it was not her work that changed (she was deeply involved in New York's experimental music scene of the 1970s) but that it was placed in a new context by the popular media who thought that she alone had originated this new music. As each newspaper vied to say how original and extraordinary she was, she found herself no longer performing at lower Manhattan's modest new music venues but in vast arenas throughout the world. Working in this new context has, of course, its

¹⁶⁷ S. Reich: *Writings About Music* (Halifax, N.S., 1974) p10

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p11

¹⁶⁹ P. Dresher in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p107

¹⁷⁰ R. Chatham in interview with the author (unpub. MSS, 1988) unpagged

advantages of which the West Coast minimalist, Harold Budd, is well aware. He has released several recordings of his own music and of collaborative efforts with such artists as Brian Eno and The Cocteau Twins, and thinks that it's 'damn healthy to obliterate the arbitrary line between commercialism and art. To confuse the boundary as much as possible'.¹⁷¹

Removing boundaries was, of course, central to the philosophy of Cage and, at last, 'The fences have come down and the labels are being removed'.¹⁷² Cross-fertilization between experimental work and its hybrid forms in all media has produced a creative environment, particularly in America, where distinctions and definitions are neither possible nor important. Thus, for example, 'one doesn't worry about where to "place" Laurie Anderson'¹⁷³ or Glenn Branca's symphonies which are equally at home in both rock and classical music venues. It was Cage, however, who best defied definition, for he [was] 'known to some as a composer, to others as a mycologist, a poet, or a graphic artist, or to still others as an influential writer on social and economic issues'.¹⁷⁴ This is perhaps because he himself has always tried to make definitions that do not exclude, a Zen idea that has engendered an open, all-embracing attitude towards music in many post-Cagean composers. Pauline Oliveros, for example, writes: 'All music speaks to me as music, no matter how apparently simple, or complex, no matter what its origin whether human, animal, artificial, or extra-terrestrial'.¹⁷⁵ The post-Cagean field is one open to any and every approach and, as Rhys Chatham notes, the question now facing young composers is no longer "Can we do it?" - that goes without saying - but "What do we want to do?".¹⁷⁶ For this, 'we owe John Cage and the Buddha a great debt'.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹ H. Budd quoted in *Performance* Vol.50/1 (November, 1987 - January, 1988) p15

¹⁷² J. Cage: *Empty Words* p179

¹⁷³ A. Harman & W. Mellors: *Man and his Music - The Story of Musical Experience in the West* (London, 1988) p1091

¹⁷⁴ G. Mumma: *Op. cit.*, p326

¹⁷⁵ P. Oliveros: *Software for People* p2

¹⁷⁶ R. Chatham: *Op. cit.*, unpagged

¹⁷⁷ R. Ashley: 'The ONCE Group', *Source* Vol.2 No.1 (January, 1968) p19

3. Preface to the Compositions.

Like the composers discussed in the previous pages, I too am indebted to Cage for revealing a freedom beyond what was seen as the historical imperative of contemporary music. His non-linear, 'all-at-once' reality offers a place for composers who do not necessarily regard themselves purely as the heirs of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. Cage validated other viewpoints and gave countless composers, myself included, courage to stand outside that tyranny of history. I also much value his mistrust of an intellect that can too easily deaden us to experience and feel that there is a price to pay for the over-emphasis of intellectual complexity which characterizes much new music. John Adams, a frequent visitor to the UK, seems well aware of the problem: 'The British classical music establishment bought the post-war modernist, Boulezian ideology whole cloth and digested it, but I think they're gagging on it now. It must be very hard to be a young composer there'.¹⁷⁸

Like the many composers I have discussed, I too champion the primacy of sound over metaphor: I am grateful for Terry Riley's re-assertion of music's fundamentals and inspired by Lou Harrison's 'not being afraid to make something pretty'. Like Viktor Shklovsky, I would like to believe that 'Art exists that we may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony...'.¹⁷⁹ It is here, perhaps, that my ideas may begin to appear at odds with the work of Cage as, like the many composers who gained an enormous sense of freedom, permission almost, to follow their own creative selves, I have less in common with him on a purely musical level. Of course, whilst Cage used music almost as a philosophical vehicle to 'offer a behavioural alternative, a kind of prototype, paradigm or template of what human behaviour could be',¹⁸⁰ he never suggested that the compositional techniques involved in the creation of these prototypes were the future of music. His concern was to reflect the nature of

¹⁷⁸ J. Adams in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p13

¹⁷⁹ V. Shklovsky in M. Perloff: *Op. cit.*, p19

¹⁸⁰ M. Monk in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p193

reality (or, indeed, the reality of nature) and create musical equivalents of, for example, interpenetration or unimpededness. Within this reality, he believed that all manner of approaches could co-exist and thus countless composers who may be stylistically worlds apart continue to draw encouragement from his work.

Musically, my work is closer to that of the second generation minimalists who, like John Adams for example, tended not to absorb the structural purity of Reich. Rather, he 'rob[bed] minimalism of its austerity, for his intuitive, highly expressive rhetoric is the result of an eclectic array of musical influences rather than the result of a "pure, single system".¹⁸¹ I develop my work by 'feel' and again identify with Adams who has likened his approach to that of an architect building on an empty site without a blueprint. Aware that, despite the impact of the ideas of Cage, there remains a suspicion that the intuitive is somehow subservient to the rational, Adams is careful to define intuition as 'a mixture of conscious and unconscious activity that is both feeling and thinking'.¹⁸² He is also aware that his approach is quite different to the rationalist principles championed by the European avant-garde: 'The material you start working on is like the "gene pool" for the piece, and it takes time to get to know what the genetic structure, the personality of the piece is. It's like a human foetus. I can't impose an arbitrary, imagined shape or personality on the material that I really don't know myself very well. I think that's a very Germanic point of view - this business of the composer controlling the whole image'.¹⁸³

Adams' music is the product of an eclectic range of influences covering a variety of historical and vernacular traditions, only one of which might be called 'minimalist': 'I don't think it's a retroactive attitude. In a hundred years or more, people will look back on the period of serialism, atonality and aperiodicity as being more of a little pocket in music history that happened and then had its closure. I don't agree with the polemics that say this is the future, the kind of hotly-debated polemics that you find at Darmstadt or that you can read about in Boulez's books and even in Schoenberg'.¹⁸⁴

Like many 'post-minimalist' composers, I feel that, in its abandonment of tonality

¹⁸¹ K. R. Schwarz: 'Process vs. Intuition in the Recent Works of Steve Reich and John Adams', *American Music* (Fall, 1980) p256

¹⁸² J. Adams in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p7

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p8

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p6

and pulse, much avant-garde music traded any sense of 'directness' for an almost wilful obscurity. But Daniel Lentz, for example, 'got tired of going to concerts where the only people in the audience were other composers'¹⁸⁵ and Ingram Marshall 'a long time ago...gave up the idea that modern music has to be a bitter pill that you must swallow. I think that's one of the great corruptions of our age'.¹⁸⁶ Over-complexity, according to James Fulkerson, is an easy cover for a young composer afraid of a 'boundless, directionless, horizonless'¹⁸⁷ reality who would rather not live 'in the dark of the mind, in the world of emotion, by primordial intuition, by terror':¹⁸⁸ 'I think the whole education system encourages the English composer - as long as they go through the normal channels (the channels of elitism) - to repress feelings. They opt for the supposed profundity of thought in complex music. But I think it's actually the British way of ducking the important questions. There's a great deal of hostility towards both the new tonality and the simplicity of Americans, but I think that anything that enables feelings to arise in British classical music is ultimately unacceptable to the people in charge, like the BBC, Arts Council, ISCM, Sinfonietta et cetera'.¹⁸⁹

The fact that my compositional work leads me to make recordings rather than to produce scores is for me an important one. I have previously described some of the composer-performer groups who grew out of a reaction to institutionalized music and many of the composers I have referred to, such as Meredith Monk, Glenn Branca, Harold Budd, Paul Drescher, Daniel Lentz and Pauline Oliveros, continue to control their own groups as the primary vehicle for their music's performance. My own approach parallels that of most rock or pop artists who record (rather than notate) what they compose (either to tape or computer), then work directly with a core of performers to produce a record which they will then re-create live on tour.

My music might not necessarily lend itself well to critical prose though there are parallel situations in other artforms. The poet Robert Lowell, for example, believes that 'Any number of people are guilty of writing a complicated poem that has a certain amount of symbolism in it and really difficult meaning, a wonderful poem to teach. Then you unwind it and

¹⁸⁵ D. Lentz in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p158

¹⁸⁶ I. Marshall in *Ibid.*, p178

¹⁸⁷ M. McLuhan & Q. Fiore: *Op. cit.*, p48

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p48

¹⁸⁹ J. Fulkerson in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p116

you feel that the intelligence, the experience, whatever goes into it, is skin deep'.¹⁹⁰ By contrast, Frank O'Hara refused to 'make up a lot of prose about something that is perfectly clear in the poems. If you cover someone with earth and grass grows, you don't know what they looked like anymore. Critical prose makes too much grass grow, and I don't want to hide my own poems, much less kill them'.¹⁹¹ And, like John Adams, if I could describe my music, 'I probably wouldn't bother to write it'.¹⁹² Similarly, when asked if he could describe how he makes his pieces, Harold Budd replied, 'No. I can't because it's a complete mystery to me'.¹⁹³

There are no theories or systems at work in my music, but an intuitive combination of thinking and feeling. Like all of the composers in *American Originals*, I should like to believe that I have cultivated my own creative voice or, to quote Morton Feldman, "The system is me. I'm the system".¹⁹⁴ Self-consciously subscribing to existing formulae will lead almost certainly to oblivion as 'what you like about Bartok or Debussy isn't the style of music, what you like is them. It's the artist in the work that we are finally drawn to, whether it's Tolstoy or Picasso or John Cage'.¹⁹⁵ I am not interested in imitating reality's manner of operation, or in transcending the dualistic human condition but am compelled by my own ego, taste, memory, *humanity*. Like George Crumb, I believe that 'no super-rational system [can] deliver the right notes, that these can only resonate in the inner ear'.¹⁹⁶ Whilst a super-rational system might make for impressive critical prose, it would only add to the already overgrown mound of unwanted music. I echo Crumb's plea for 'No more "university music" -that will have to go'.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁰ R. Lowell quoted in M. London and R. Boyars (eds.): *A Portrait of the Artist in his Time* (New York, 1970) pp269-70

¹⁹¹ F. O'Hara quoted in D. Allen (ed.): *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* (New York, 1971) p?

¹⁹² J. Adams in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p7

¹⁹³ H. Budd in *Ibid.*, p67

¹⁹⁴ M. Feldman quoted by Philip Glass in G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *Op. cit.*, p136

¹⁹⁵ P. Glass in *Ibid.*, p136

¹⁹⁶ G. Crumb in *Ibid.*, p97

¹⁹⁷ G. Crumb in *Ibid.*, p99

Bibliography

G. Battcock (ed.): *Breaking the Sound Barrier - A Critical Anthology of the New Music* (New York, 1981)

C. Butler: *After the Wake - an essay on the contemporary avant-garde* (Oxford, 1980)

J. Cage: *Silence* (London, 1968)

_____: *A Year From Monday* (London, 1968)

_____: *Empty Words - Writings '73-'78* (Connecticut, 1979)

_____: *M - Selected Writings '67-'72* (London, 1973)

_____: *For the Birds - in conversation with Daniel Charles* tr. R. Gardner (London, 1981)

_____: *Themes and Variations* (New York, 1982)

_____: *X - Writings '79-'82* (Connecticut, 1983)

_____: 'On collaboration in art', *Res* No.10 (Autumn, 1985) p103ff

F. Capra: *The Tao of Physics* (London, 1983)

A. Coomaraswamy: *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (New York, 1956)

T. Delio: *Circumscribing the Open Universe* (Washington D.C., 1984)

_____: *Contiguous Lines - Issues and Ideas in the Music of the 60s and 70s* (Washington D.C., 1984)

M. Feldman: *Essays* tr. W. Zimmerman (Cologne, 1985)

C. Gagne & T. Caras: *Soundpieces - Interviews with American Composers* (New Jersey, 1982)

P. Gena & J. Brent (eds.): *A John Cage Reader - in celebration of his 70th birthday* (New York, 1982)

P. Gena: 'Freedom in Experimental Music: the New York Revolution', *Tri-Quarterly* No.52 (1981) p223ff

R. Goldberg: *Performance Art* (London, 1988)

P. Griffiths: *Cage* [Oxford Composer Studies] (London, 1981)

H. von Gunden: *The Music of Pauline Oliveros* (New Jersey, 1983)

I. Hassam: *Liberations* (Connecticut, 1971)

C. Humphries: *Studies in the Middle Way* (London, 1984)

_____ : *Zen Buddhism* (London, 1984)

_____ : *A Western Approach to Zen* (London, 1985)

I Ching - The Book of Changes tr. J. Blofeld (London, 1976)

R. Kostelanetz: *John Cage* [Documentary Monographs in Modern Art] (London, 1971)

R. Kostelanetz: *Conversing with Cage* (New York, 1988)

A. Lucier & D. Simon: *Chambers* (Connecticut, 1980)

M. McLuhan: *Understanding Media - the Extensions of Man* (London, 1964)

M. McLuhan & Q. Fiore: *The Medium is the Massage* (New York, 1967)

W. Mellors: *Music in a New Found Land* (New York, 1964)

W. Mertens: *American Minimal Music* tr. J. Hautekiet (London, 1983)

M. Merleau-Ponty: *The Primacy of Perception* (Illinois, 1964)

L.B. Meyer: *Music, the Arts and Ideas - Patterns and Predictions in Twentieth-century Culture* (Chicago and London, 1967)

M. Nyman: *Experimental Music - Cage and Beyond* (London, 1974)

_____ : 'Against Intellectual Complexity in Music', *October* No.13 (1980) p82ff

Y. Ono: *Grapefruit* (London, 1970)

M. Perloff: *Frank O'Hara - Poet Among Painters* (Texas, 1979)

Revue D'esthetique Nos.13-15 (1987-8)

J. Rockwell: *All American Music - Composition in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York and Toronto, 1983)

G. Smith: *John Cage and Electro-acoustic Music in America* (unpub. thesis, University of Oxford, 1989)

G. Smith & N. Walker Smith: *American Originals : Interviews with 25 Contemporary Composers* (London, 1994)

Source - music of the avant-garde All volumes (1967-83)

E.J. Synder: *John Cage and Music Since World War II* (unpub. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1980)

S. Sontag: *Styles of Radical Will* (New York, 1966)

D.T. Suzuki: *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (London, 1951)

C. Tomkins: *The Bride and the Bachelors* (London, 1965)

A. Watts: *The Way of Zen* (London, 1957)

B. Willis: *The Tao of Art* (London, 1987)

The Zen Teaching of Huang Po - On the Transmission of Mind tr. J. Blofeld (London, 1968)

W. Zimmerman: *Desert Plants - Conversations with 23 American Musicians* (Vancouver, 1976)