PERSONAL IMMERSION: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNEY WITHIN THE WORLD OF JOHN CAGE

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Introduction: 'Adored or Ridiculed?'

Simply put, in Stephen Montague's words (1985: 205), John Cage hardly needs an introduction. Nicholls (2002: Preface) epitomises the view that Cage is 'without doubt one of the most important and influential figures in twentieth-century culture', a judgement echoed by Cox and Warner (2017: 27), claiming 'no figure has had a more profound influence on contemporary musical thought and practice'. At the same time, Cage is also recognised as being 'one of the least understood' composers, his work still treated with disparagement and scorn (Nicholls 2002: Preface). Revill (1992: 6) neatly captures the tension: 'at first ignored or ridiculed, Cage is now in an even harder position - adored or ridiculed'. The extent of this debate motivated me to focus my research for a Master's degree in Musicology, and this paper now addresses my autoethnographic position with Cage. It uses my lived experiences as a musician, educator, and music examiner in the popular music industry, applying my work as a musicology researcher. I am seeking to demonstrate that far from being an object of ridicule, Cage, and specifically his seminal silent piece *4'33"*, remains powerful: a dominant influence to the present day and (specifically for me) a luminary, assisting at a fundamental level in pinpointing and understanding my position in popular music. In essence, I am using autoethnography to help understand what I perceive as an incomplete musical journey to date, affording greater meaning, purpose, and direction to its future course.

I have deliberately avoided a lengthy preamble 'justifying' the approaches taken. At the same time, it is prudent to recognise considerations given to methodology briefly; namely, an autoethnography within the context of Merrill and West's articulation of post-modernism: the 'liberation' of dialects, cultural, perhaps, aesthetic voices 'finding more space'; a 'plurality of perspectives', distinct from a sanitised or single agent (Merrill and West 2009: 191). In a sense, this orientation echoes Kerman's 1980s musicological shift, calling for an approach to move beyond 'outmoded positivistic' thinking (Pontara 2015: 4), for musicologists to engage with 'humane' praxis 'orientated towards criticism' (Bohlman 1999: 99). It is, therefore, also worth reminding ourselves of Kramer's positioning here, advocating 'aesthetic insight into music with a fuller

understanding of its cultural, social and historical dimensions' (Kramer 2003: 6). Accordingly, the underlying theme is an auto/biographical, self-reflexive, in part confessional approach, and it is from this platform my journey with John Cage begins.

Self-Framing

I was raised in a non-musical family in which I was the only one who tended towards music as a serious interest. Because there was little direct influence in my immediate milieu, it required several years and a first (non-music) related degree and career before the field of music emerged as a viable profession, and in turn, an academic research possibility. Now in my early fifties, it took until my thirties to move into full-time music, initially as a performer and studio session player (drums), then as a music education provider (drum school established in 2003). Such percussion groundwork extended into melody, harmony and theory and subsequent incorporation into a music school. From here, my reach extended to the role of examiner for a contemporary rock and pop music board, initially a UK appointment, soon spreading to international regions, ultimately becoming worldwide. My examining and music board representation work over the last 15 years has, to date, required tours of c.30 countries, several visited numerous times. As a graded music exams specialist, this function developed into broader consultancy for the board; firstly, as an author, including writing pieces and syllabus content creation across the full instrument range; secondly, into management and strategic roles, including creating and delivering examining procedures, examiner training, judgement, and process alignment systems, feeding collectively into overall service quality delivery. My current professional position comprises line management of the entire exam panel globally, whilst in the meantime, my music education provision continues to serve local communities, and as a live performer, my theatre shows continue to be enjoyed by audiences throughout the UK, the latter retaining a (necessary) relationship with my first discipline.

Fig. 1: The author as performer (UK, 2018).
Photo: Personal Collection.

From the outset until my mid-twenties, the dual paths of my first career and music proved to be enlightening; at the same time, I did not recognise myself as being on a musical pathway in professional or academic terms. I was also not aware of John Cage. The progressive journey into, and as, a full-time music professional, has occurred in stages, admittedly accelerating over the last 20 years, from slow, organic steps initially. The absence of formative co-ordination, readily available formal instruction, an immediate musical environment, or direct encouragement in the early years did not signpost the musical experiences to follow.

With each successive advancement in my music career, my response has been non-celebratory, matter of fact, without anticipation beforehand or meaningful retrospection afterwards. I have consistently employed a phrase that each development is, simply, '*not enough*'; instead fleeting, pragmatic, a stepping-stone to the next progression. Of course, each step has played its part, to a point enjoyable in itself, adding to my arsenal of musical experience and skill sets to call upon, but never a deeper fulfilment. Ellis and Bocher (2000: 746) explain that the 'work of self-narration is to produce [a] sense of continuity: to make a life that sometimes seems to be falling apart come together again, by retelling and restorying the events of one's life'. I am not suggesting my musical story has ever reached the point of having 'fallen apart'; however, I would say it has been 'arbitrary', unsatisfied. I am also very aware that more professional years are behind me than ahead; therefore, increasingly mindful that a more targeted approach is necessary.

In parallel with this, as I have become acquainted with other musicians, educators, examiners, and performers, I have recognised much less in common than expected. For example, in terms of early musical development and training paths, I am conscious of a 'less-orthodox' route into senior music education positions and an extensive international musical social construct, seldomly a comfortable 'fit'. Moreover, I have been struck by the limited philosophical approaches to addressing music and the easy acceptance of the rules of convention. My feeling is a directly proportional link here – I have increasingly realised that I have much more in common with Cage.

Fig. 2: The author as lecturer (Singapore, 2017)
Photo: Reproduced with kind permission from Cristofori, Singapore.

Cage-Framing: Setting out the breadth

Described as 'one of the fathers of experimental music' (Goehr 2015: 16), employing 'techniques and practices that have become central to contemporary music-making (Cox and Warner 2017: 27), Kahn captures Cage's aesthetic, observing simply that he 'concentrated on sounds of the world and the interaction of art and life' (Kahn 1997: 557). A summary of his canon and impact is, sensibly, impossible to achieve, spanning 300 compositions, with considerable influence extending 'in many directions, affecting not only musical practice and the theory of composition, but postmodern choreography, poetry, performance art, and even philosophy' (Carroll 1994: 93).

In his early 'composition' period, Cage wrote using the 12-tone method established by his teacher Arnold Schoenberg. Later termed 'serialism', each note of the chromatic scale needs to be sounded an equal number of times, 'such that no priority is given to [any one] note' (Campbell 2015: 19). Early examples include *Sonata for Clarinet* (1933) and *Sonata for Two Voices* (1933), the more mature latter using two chromatic octaves, in which no pitch in either octave repeats until all twenty-five notes are played. By the late-1930s, Cage's invention manifested more considerably with the 'prepared piano' (Figure 3); namely, the fixing of screws, bolts, rubber, and weather stripping to the strings, seeking a wider range of percussive and auditory possibility than the traditional piano (John Cage Trust 2016). The modification was a solution to the logistics of percussion music, for instance, acquiring instruments, transportation, multiple arrangements; therefore, impractical as an accompaniment for dance recitals. As Cage recounts, Cornish School dancer Syvilla Fort requested music for her dance *Bacchanale, Cage* duly obliging, adapting the piano as a replacement for a complete ensemble. In his book, *Empty Words*, he exudes: 'I wrote the *Bacchanale* quickly and with the excitement continual discovery provided' (Cage 2009b: 7-9).

Fig. 3: John Cage at work: the 'prepared piano'. Photo: Cromar, W. (2011). *Photograph: John Cage at work: the 'prepared piano'*. Available at https://flic.kr/p/97QdPT. (Accessed: 16 October 2021)'.

Such experimentation extended to Cage's use of emergent technology; a praxis he maintained throughout his life. *Imaginary Landscape No. 1* (1939) is one of the earliest electro-acoustic compositions in music, with Cage's ongoing use of live electronics characterised by *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951), for 12 randomly tuned radios and 24 performers; *Fontana Mix* (1958), a piece superimposing graphs for the arbitrary selection of electronic sounds, and *HPSCRD* (1967–69), a vast multi-media work, amplifying performed harpsichord and computer-generated sounds 'in whole or in part in any combination with or without interruptions to make an indeterminate concert of any agreed-upon length'. Also of note, during Cage's latter years, *Roaratorio* (1979) is an electronic composition employing thousands of words taken from James Joyce's novel, *Finnegans Wake,* the piec*e* described as translating the book 'into a performance without actors' (John Cage Trust 2016).

It is worth contextualising that Cage turned to Indian philosophy from the mid-1940s, mainly influenced by Ananda Coomaraswamy and Gita Sarabhai. Both helped him to discover, respectively, that the function of Art is to imitate Nature in her manner of operation' (Cage 2009a: 31), and music serves to 'sober and quiet the mind and thus make it susceptible to divine influences' (Cage 2009c: 1). For example, *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946–48) – credited as his prepared piano 'masterwork' – was Cage's first composition using Hindu philosophy. The piece replaces composer expression with eastern-philosophy 'expression'; specifically, the permanent emotions of Indian tradition: the Heroic, Erotic, Wondrous, and Comic (the four light moods); Sorrow, Fear, Anger, and Odious (the four dark moods), and their 'common tendency toward (central) Tranquillity' (John Cage Trust 2016).

Increasingly drawn to Zen Buddhism, the 1950s saw Cage's use of 'chance operations, employing the Chinese I-Ching method of coin-tossing to 'ask questions', distinct from 'making choices' (Cage, during interview with Duckworth, 1999: 27). Cage explains this beautifully: 'if we proceed non-intentionally, then nature remains our proper teacher (Scheffer 2012: c.28'40"). As such, 1951 saw *Music of Changes*, a ground-breaking indeterminate piece using the I-Ching, and 1952 saw *4'33"*, indisputably Cage's most famous work, a 'silent' piece, intending to *reveal* ambient sound. It is arguably his principal contribution extending the definition of music to include *all sound*, reinforcing that: 'In India they say: "Music is continuous, it is we who turn away". So, wherever you feel in need of a little music, all you have to do is pay close attention to the sounds around you' (Cage, during interview with Montague 1985: 213).

4'33"

4'33" holds the central position in my relationship with Cage. Gann (2010: 10) summarises the impact of work, that 'Cage's so-called silent piece is as resonant with philosophical, historical, and acoustical complexities as many a noisier composition…[I]t was a logical turning point to which other musical developments had inevitably led, and from which new ones would spring'. The piece does, of course, present something of an ontological dichotomy. Pritchett (1996: 37) observes 'the majority of concert-goers and musicians in New York seemed to miss the point', treating the work 'as some kind of joke'. Campbell (1992: 90) succinctly captures the predicament of most interest to me when he attests '(o)ur mind struggles to make sense of *4'33".* Is it music?'. Quite simply, entirely subjectively, the answer is yes. For me, it feeds into 'the corporealisation of the intelligence that is in sound' (Wronsky, quoted in Cox and Warner 2017: 20), and the interpretation of musically framed noise and ambience as 'sound objects', with 'chance' as composer and performer. Moreover, I share the view 'the grammar of music is ambiguous, subject to interpretation, and in a perpetual state of evolution' (Roads 2004: 12); therefore, Brian Eno's observation is most pertinent, illustrating the post-Cagean-shift in music form and teleology: 'if

you sit in Hyde Park…it's such a beautiful sound…as good as going to a concert hall at night' (Cox and Warner 2017: 85). With Murray Schaffer's conclusion that the 'blurring of the edges between music and environmental sounds is the most striking feature of twentieth-century music' (ibid.: 88), not only is *4'33"* a work of 'music', it is in my view one of the pivotal works *creating* the ontology of its own definition.

Convention

Cage is undeniably frank in his self-perception of 'conventional' music limitation, for example, reinforcing that innovation 'was the only thing I would be able to do in the field of music' (Duckworth, citing Cage in an interview, 1999: 8). He readily acknowledges 'I don't have an ear for music, and I don't hear music in my mind before I write it. And I never have' (ibid.). Relating this to my circumstances, it would be incorrect to claim a comparable absence of musical ear; however, the parallel of diminutive yearning for conventional music composition or, in its reciprocal, the aspiration for combined 'sounds' within the framework of time and percussive structure, offers meaningful connection underpinning our relationship. It is worth adding that a greater professional reliance on harmony and melody has, for me, surfaced and forms an integral part of my work today. However, this is borne of commercial realities, a necessary step to reach the point where I could progress from sole dependence on professional live performance. Interestingly, this gives rise to a notable paradox: the need to embrace a core characteristic of orthodoxy that Cage rejected to gain access to Cage today.

In a different conversation, Schoenberg explained to Cage that in order to write music, there needs to be a 'feeling for harmony' (Nicholls 2002: 93-94). Cage's response was resolute, confirming this was a feeling he did not possess. As Cage explains, '[Schoenberg] then said that I would always encounter an obstacle, that it would be as though I came to a wall through which I could not pass. I said, "In that case, I will devote my life to beating my head against that wall"' (Cage 2009c: 261). The symmetry in this regard is reassuring, giving impetus to continue the same path in contemporary music: on the one hand, there is a need to pay commercial deference to the needs of convention, but on the other, for me, there is a corresponding need to follow non-convention in post-Cagean context.

Music

Cage's effect on me intensifies with his extended episteme of 'music'. His tenet that all sound is 'music' is encapsulated in his own words (Cox and Warner 2017: 36): 'music is sounds…heard around us whether we're in or out of concert halls'; however, several academics and commentators are troubled with this stance. For example, Davis (1997: 23) argues that *4'33"* 'does not show that "music is all around us"', claiming it is more appropriately attributable as 'performance art'. Kania (2010: 343-353) similarly concludes the work is not music, but 'sound art', and Dodd (2013) contends *4'33"* exclusively amounts to art, adding his view that it demonstrably represents a valid 'comment' on music, without amounting to music in itself. I cannot share these views, which seem arguably entrenched in the restrictive parameters of tonality and easy attribution into 'art'. To my mind, Cage here provides illumination, correctly 'rescaling' tonality, for me permitting much academic and professional roaming in a much broader scope of musical possibility. Furthermore, I am not alone. In selecting from numerous observers, Eno writes, 'John Cage made you realise that there wasn't a thing called noise, it was just music you hadn't appreciated' (quoted in Wilcox 2013). Carroll (1994: 93) also posits 'new music' is 'new listening', the 'attention to the activity of sounds'. Katz (1990: 204) writes that Cage helps us recognise sounds that were not considered 'musical' at one time, targeting percussion, 'including found objects and "prepared" pianos', and electronics,

'in amplifying things like pens and cactuses'. As he clinches: 'All these sounds were gradually becoming part of the music'.

In effect, Cage is taking us to first principles, questioning the nature and scope of 'music'. Such a challenge to established convention is the most significant aspect of my association. It becomes immediately apparent that by repositioning all sound as musically viable, tonality becomes a 'pinprick' in the infinite vastness of sound and, in turn, all component material, contributors, and outcomes in tonality take on an infinitesimally small scale. Of course, that is not to say to the point of invalidity or irrelevance, but much as pre-Kerman music analysis has not been removed from new musicology (Kerman 1980: 331), Cage has simply served to realign the weighting, with traditional analytical emphasis and overall heed to tonality now in more appositely-scaled proportion.

Function

I must confess to having difficulty resolving Cage's musical role, his 'function'. It is the moment to admit I have never been entirely convinced that he was either a 'composer' or 'musician'. This said, there are ample grounds to advocate Cage did not see himself as a composer or musician either. For instance, as Schoenberg proposes, he is less a composer than 'an inventor of genius' (Haskins 2012: 37). Cage also readily concedes that he offers 'what he can' to the musical world, 'namely, invention' (Duckworth 1999: 8). Less subjectively, Revill (1992: 20) and Gann (2010: 27) respectively explain that Cage's grandfather (Gustavus) and father (John Sr.) were both inventors; therefore, putting 'considerable emphasis on innovation' in Cage's immediate domain. Gann also cites Cage's delightful, oft-told observation, which I include here for emphasis: 'I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas…I'm frightened of the old ones'. Here, Cage reveals an approach that sits comfortably with me, specifically that his aesthetics tend much more towards philosophy than music. As such, it is easy to agree with Pritchett (1996: 2), who posits that, for Cage, the 'philosophical underpinnings' are more significant than the manifesting sound. Thus, Cage has become 'a philosopher, not a composer'. In Cage's orbit of 'silence', it is not without irony this conception resonates most loudly.

Silence

Having established the premise that 'silence' *is* music, can it be subject to traditional music 'analysis'? I am reminded of Bartlett and Ellis (2009: 6), suggesting 'there is still a musical dimension that remains open for further investigation in autoethnography…a dimension that goes beyond text and moves into the auditory world of musical sounds and relationships'. With Cage, I can further the reach of this proposal, that autoethnography is, in fact, capable of moving into Cage's auditory world of *silence* and relationships. I opted to test the hypothesis using one of my Cage-influenced pieces, written during a UK Covid lockdown. The composition, *Cageance* (Slater 2020) is a worldwide collaborative website, extending Cage's *4'33",* combining new (externalised) performances of *4'33",* each successive participant increasing the uniqueness of chance-determined website combinations (Figure 4).

Fig. 4: A moment from *Cageance*: combined performances of *4'33"* (Denmark and New Zealand, 2020). Photo: Personal Collection

To better contextualise my conclusions, it is necessary first to outline the central tenets of *4'33".* It is a piece framed in units of time, namely 'durational structuring', the 'keystone of [Cage's] compositional technique since 1939' (Nicholls 2002: 103); on the basis that 'duration' is the common factor between sound and silence (ibid.: 54). As Akiyama (2010: 54) explains, this achieves an 'unmediated world of sound; by inviting listeners to attend to an acoustic experience not structured by a performer', where, in heeding Cage's directions accompanying the score, the work may be 'performed by any instrumentalist(s)' (Cage 2012). It may also be performed by 'means of any instrument' (Nyman 1999: 11), each delivery comprising 'essentially one long rest or silence' (Weagal and Cage 2002: 250), where the duration of each performance is accordingly a decision for each performer. Therefore, the audience is 'given the opportunity to concentrate and listen to the sounds around them' (ibid.). As claimed by Kania (2010: 348), 'it seems clear that Cage intended audiences at performances of *4'33"* to listen actively to the sounds in the performance space', in order to oppose 'the valorisation of traditional musical works' (Davies 1997: 4).

Cageance

Cageance's objectives can, therefore, be précised as follows:

- Extend *4'33"*'s reontologisation of sound in contemporary settings.
- Create musical experiences 'analogous to life and feeling' (Campbell 1992: 83).
- Continue manifestation of Cage's chance operations.
- Continue Cage's musical possibility via new technology.
- Widen the scope of participation and audience to an international arena.
- Bring people and nations together during the global Covid lockdown through *4'33".*
- Reinforce Cage's locus in a broader art context.
- Align with Cage's epistemology for the future of music.

With this in mind, *Cageance does* offer a sound basis for Cagean-inspired non-conventional music analysis. I achieve this by converting Cage's environmental sound into written format, to which can be applied a hybrid of 1) 'Schaferian' Analysis: investigating soundmarks, signals and keynotes plus

assessing ecological broader references: biophony, geophony and anthrophony (Figure 5), and 2) 'Musical' Analysis: attributing conventional musical characteristics and employing Schenkerian layer reduction principles to chance-emergent environmental sound (Figure 6).

Fig 5. Analysing 'silence': the author's creation of 'sound lines' to base Schenkerian Reduction (Slater 2021).

This conclusion recognises the advancement of discourse stemming from Cage's (McKinnon 2013: 71) 'repurposing of the intentional listening of music' and Schafer's subsequent ecological soundscape context. On balance, the analysis is arguably more suited to macro and supra timescales (see Roads 2004) within larger spatial environments, and the application of Schaferian thinking to such a mesoscale piece (ibid.) achieves limited analytical potential from a single visual vantage and recording location. Additionally, the assignment of ecological classifications yields only partial insight. However, the technique successfully attributes conventional musical features to environmental sounds, framing the fluidity in fixed time, suggesting a form of 'notation' to display Cage's silence. Interestingly, the exercise also revealed validity in extending Cage's re-definition of music and musical roles into the arena of 'drama', in the context of a real-time play, the soundscape portraying the narrative, with scope for progressive tension and anticipation; acted out on chance-determined stages and settings.

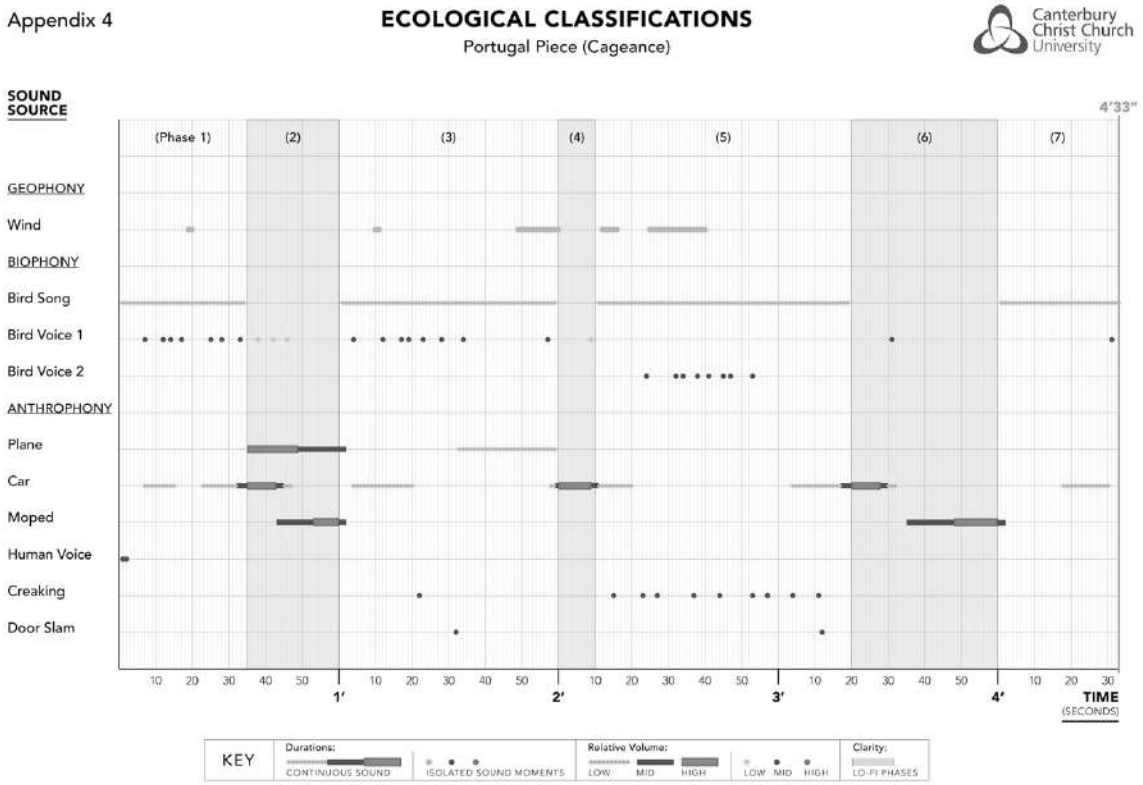

Fig. 6. Analysing 'silence': the author's creation of 'sound lines' to base Schenkerian Reduction (Slater 2021).

Community

There is no question Cage has affected my taste and appreciation of other artists and genres. Most notably, environmental soundscape artists, including The Wandelweiser Group (to whom Cage is similarly, centrally important); minimalism (notably Steve Reich and Philip Glass) and Brian Eno: predominantly his use of 'ambience', *Music for Installations*, the iterative *Reflection* app and his creativity-prompting 'Oblique Strategies'. Over recent years, many artists have also acknowledged Cage as a direct influence, for example, Cage student John Cale (Velvet Underground), Thom York (Radiohead), and Sonic Youth. Further, excluding *Cageance*, there are specific pieces that derive directly from Cage's work. For instance, Bang On A Can's *An Open Cage* (2015) is a brilliant work where Florent Ghys' reads an excerpt from Cage's *Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)*. Here, the music steadily subsumes the words as the piece progresses, gradually, then altogether.

With regard to *4'33"* itself, the piece stimulates what seems to me three objectives in subsequent use: ongoing cover versions, jest or protest. For example, in 2010, Cage Against The Machine collaborated with numerous artists, including Pete Doherty and Billy Bragg, recording a version of *4'33"* to prevent an X Factor winner from reaching No 1 in the UK charts (Michaels 2010). In 2016 the Death Metal band Dead Territory recorded a YouTube performance in 2016, with viewing figures currently sitting at two-thirds of a million, and during a Covid lockdown, one of The Guardian's suggested songs to achieve the government's recommended 20-second hand washing duration was, of course, *4'33"* (Dowling 2020). In the same period, 400 musicians played 20% of Holst's *Mars* in Parliament Square before standing in silence, reflecting the maximum 20% salary

support that freelance musicians were eligible to receive from the government's then-latest version of the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (Moore 2020).

Finally, the paradox of the BBC's 2004 live-televised performance of *4'33"* cannot go without mention. Initially, this suggested to me that Cage may perhaps be better understood since 1952, perhaps for reasons best summed up by Kostelanetz (1993: xiii) 'once the majority has caught up to something new, whether as creators or as an audience, what is genuinely avant-garde will, by definition, be someplace else'. On the other hand, Cage's 'acceptance', from a position of classical high-culture rejection, does not sit comfortably as authentic. As Thomas observes, 'within the classical musical establishment', Cage is 'still considered a joke' (quoted in Toronyi-Lalic 2010).

Subversion

At this point, it is fair to say that my immersion into the world of John Cage is not a case of infatuation. Indubitably revealing, unequivocally thought-provoking and decidedly influential, but also critical. Accusations of Cagean subversion are, for me, well-founded; for instance, Cage's use of chance to exclude his preferences (Brown 2009: 23), rejecting composer authority, is a clear challenge to the western concert tradition. Additionally, his negation of the piano, Classical music's primary instrument (Pepper 1997: 32), is, for me, a strong indicator of seditious gesturing, both in its alteration as a prepared piano (Pritchett 1996: 24-25), and potentially more impacting in its arguable 'humiliation' through non-performance at *4'33"*'s 1952 premiere.

Further, in shifting responsibilities away from composer and performer, elevating the audience's role, it follows that *4'33"* feeds into musical ethics. Beard and Gloag (2016: 92-93) contend there exists behavioural expectations, 'rules' of participation within music creation, delivery and reception. As such, the disapproving reaction to David Tudor's 1952 *4'33"* premiere, knowingly anticipated by Cage (Cage 2012), is a strong justification for an indictment of audience maltreatment alone. More than this, Gann (2010: 4) reinforces that at the Woodstock premiere, Cage appreciates 'all kinds of interesting sounds as [the audience] talked or walked out', a provocative elucidation as to how Cage views such an unfavourable response. Not for the audience reaction in itself, but how the sounds of rejection *contribute* to the performance.

4'33" was in effect a rally cry to *listen,* a position underscored by Wilcox (2013): 'Although it was Luigi Russolo who opened our minds to the art of noises, it was Cage who opened our ears'. It consequently seems a considerably unjust imposition when Cage expounds, with more than a hint of condescension, the audience 'thought' the audience were sitting in silence 'because they didn't know *how* to listen' (Gann 2010: 4, my emphasis). We have to question the extent to which the audience was likely to recognise, or accept, Cage's definition of 'music', to appreciate the requirement to listen, given the onus of burden and reliance on the necessity to 'understand'. Riethmüller (2008: 169) stresses that music is capable of engendering such *dissociation* with ethics, and this is my contention with *4'33"* in 1952. The inequitable liability placed on the audience, coupled with the creation of musical material which permitted contributory sounds through audience repudiation, 'in the same gesture where they abandoned it' (Lau 2015: 6), arguably, overwhelmingly, breaks the ethical, collaborative, 'norm'.

Ridicule

This all said, if we take *4'33"* – arguably the quintessence of Cagean derision – and further explore the allegations of the piece being a 'joke', it is clear Cage intended it as a serious work, 'out of the world of art into the whole of life' (Cage, quoted in Larson 2013: xviii); a culmination of much causal stimulus at that time. In addition to his 'burgeoning interest' in Asian philosophy (Campbell, 2015: 108), we can include, for example, Rauschenberg's 1951 White Paintings, which Cage advocates as a 'passivity against composition and order' (Díaz 2014: 97), and Cage's oft-told 1951 Harvard

anechoic chamber experience (Robinson 2011; Scheffer 2012: c.25'30"). This experience, of course, resulted in Cage's infamous declaration, 'until I die there will be sounds…One need not fear about the future of music' (Campbell 2015: 13-14; Díaz 2014: 88). Amongst others, these events inputted directly into Cage's then-emerging thinking, centred on removing self-expression from composition (Dodd 2018: 630), deftly summarised by Katz (1990: 204): substituting 'chance and silence' for 'taste'.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to demonstrate why Cage remains influential, provoking, necessary, and far from an object of ridicule. By studying and interpreting Cage's approach to music, I recognise that his philosophies and approach impact significantly, helping me understand my motivations in music; also redirecting what has hitherto been an unsteered journey onto a more gaged, fulfilling course. Irrefutably, autoethnography has played a predominant role. As Webber (2009: 268) describes: 'That's the point of it, observing what you are doing and how you are doing it, constantly evaluating, critiquing…so there can be a tendency for the two processes to feed off each other'. Similarly, borrowing from Bartlett and Ellis (2009: 9), autoethnography 'frees musicians from writing dry descriptions or reports of musical experiences', such an approach encouraging the conveyance and meaning of musical experiences where the 'focus becomes telling a tale that readers can enter and feel a part of'. It is, therefore, worth further sharing that following a relatively 'successful' career to date, perhaps one even giving a perception of 'accomplishment' over the years, it is a little difficult to admit a certain directionlessness and this extent of unfulfilled feeling. However, I feel unexpectedly comfortable yielding to this exposure. Furthermore, the thought of unlocking my position has been stimulating; indeed, I have needed to write this paper in several sittings, such is the depth of immersion self-reflexively, which, I would add, still has potential for further exploration.

In short, I acknowledge Cage's outlook and practice have become profoundly pivotal, indeed, vital, shaping my understanding, involvement, and direction in music, to the extent of opening up a PhD pathway that seeks to target his use of silence in current and future contexts. As Clandinin and Connelly (quoted in Bartlett and Ellis 2009: 181) explain, 'in ethnography, people are viewed as embodiments of their own lived stories'. Relative to my narrative, I am, overall, moved to recognise the extent to which Cage has become integral to my direction, against whom I can measure past and present musical orientation, and with whom I will continue to confer as my principal reference point from here.

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Stuart Slater is a music educator, worldwide music examiner (contemporary repertoire), music consultant, and performing musician. As a musicology researcher (Canterbury Christ Church University, UK), Stuart is currently investigating contemporary applications of John Cage's work and praxis, specifically the musicological perspective of 'silence' as an extended episteme of 'music'. 2022 is the seventieth-anniversary of Cage's seminal silent work: 4'33"; therefore, Stuart's research aims to capitalise on the piece's anticipated spotlight, with articles establishing historical salience and critically exploring its repurposing, ongoing influence, and current/future relevance.

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