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## Meaning, Presence, Process

The Aesthetic Challenge of John Cage's Musicircus

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Trondheim, February 2012

Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Music



**NTNU – Trondheim**  
Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology

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Guro Rønningsgrind

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Come now, I will tell you – and bring away my story safely when you have heard it – the only ways of inquiry there are to think:  
the one, that it is and that it is not possible for it not to be, is the path of Persuasion (for it attends upon Truth),  
the other, that it is not and that it is necessary for it not to be,  
this I point out to you to be a path completely unlearnable,  
for neither may you know that which is not (for it is not to be accomplished)  
nor may you declare it.<sup>1</sup>

Heracleitus is supposed to say that all things are in motion and nothing at rest; he compares them to the stream of a river, and says that you cannot go into the same water twice.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 The boundary

Change and permanence, evasive presence and stable notions, a drama of epistemological questions staged throughout the history of philosophy whose germ is already witnessed in intriguing fragments surviving from Parmenides and Heracleitus – the epistemological problem of change and the experience of a river that is never the same.

Plato's cave of sense impressions; the form-matter unification of Aristotle's philosophy; the rationality of Descartes contrasted by the empiricism of British philosophers and Kant's reconciliation. Though a thesis within musicology, the questions that have inspired my work have had this story, this big narrative of various solutions to the epistemological question of change and permanence, the logic of thinking and the necessity of sense impression, as a reverberating background to aesthetic questions. The questioning of the musical work-concept and the event of performance have in this respect been sited within a broader context, an epistemological framework where the schism between spirituality and materiality, subject and object, mind and body, enlightened thought and deceitful sensualism has played a distinctive role.

The line of demarcation between permanency and evasive change has traversed the Western landscape of theories that have explained our abilities to know the Truth – to reflect Being – at the same time as this boundary zone has both troubled (in its danger of leaving sense impressions in a trap of illusion, secluding the knowing subject in a solipsistic state, or

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<sup>1</sup> Parmenides, fragment 2. McKirahan 1994, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Cratylus*, p. 61.

presenting a gap between mind and body difficult to bridge) and acted as a principle of re-unification.

The teasing question for me has in this respect been connected to the *schism* itself and the need for a dividing line to foster epistemological possibilities, because connected to the marker of difference there are questions of value – the *is* does not pop up at an equal base, but Truth is loaded with valuations. This is of course a territory already outlined by Nietzsche and explicitly followed up by Post-Structural thought. The Truth is not a novice but shows a will to power, and behind recognized knowledge there are structures of exclusion and concealment.

The artistic project of the American composer John Cage could in this respect be seen as a very optimistic business that aims to view a possibility of knowledge – an experience of Being – not based in the operative difference but the presence of an abundance of diverse qualities. The necessary “violence” of Truth that can be felt in the Nietzschean approach, or the Foucauldian account, is countered by Cage’s belief in the affirmative experience of complexity and the possibility to create an *anarchic harmony* of different positions, a peaceful existential and experiential opportunity in a flat structured co-existential frame.

We might find Cage “naïve” in this respect, or that his approach would leave us with an unfavourable devaluation, a paralysing indifference. But his positive approach is also interesting in the challenge it represents to the position of the line of demarcation, the inclusive/exclusive boundary, as the hub of epistemological horizons. The meaning-giving function of *difference* is effectively questioned through his methodological use of chance, indeterminacy and an abundance of non-coordinated simultaneous activities (*musicircus* as a technique of performance). Dualism, and contrarily, non-dualistic approaches have therefore been important problems for discussion in this thesis.

## **1.2 The hermeneutic circle**

There lies within the artistic realm a freedom to pursue the limits of comprehensibility, twist and turn what is familiar, even to the point of being chaotic, and yet being experienced as meaningful. Cage’s experimental music does this to the full extent. As texts, Cage’s musical works render the hermeneutic tool of meaning formation senseless. Cage’s compositional

strategies of chance and indeterminacy challenge the foothold of the hermeneutic circle's productivity. He puts musical *koans*<sup>3</sup> up against the inclination to interpret the musical material in light of projected meaningful coherences. For instance, does it make sense to interpret the musical constellation in light of a meaning-giving totality (a whole meaning) when the music has come about by the tossing of coins? Or, what about the compositional strategies that invite multiple things to happen simultaneously without a master plan for the offerings? These techniques shatter unifying frames of reference. Chance operations interrupt intentional connections that might have organized the material and thereby given it intentional meanings, and the abundance of non-coordinated simultaneity bewilders the establishment of a single superior frame of reference. Cage provokes complex situations to appear that question the relevance of the dialectic between what underlies structuring principles (whole-meaning, musical idea, vision) and the handling of the material in order to create aesthetic meaning.

Cage's artistic project can be seen as a radical attempt at creating situations of aesthetic anarchism where all the sonic and aesthetic elements that appear have the same existential value and the same right to be there. They are not differentiated in value with reference to a superior, or underlying organisation governed by a unifying, centralised perspective – a certain meaning, idea, or intention. He does this by letting the relation between the totality and parts be randomly defined.

But is it possible to think such an anarchic project in epistemological terms? Would we not at least need some provisional totalities through which details get their prominence, and would not that mean that even though we could dream about the utopian equality of existential adequacy, to be heard, seen and voiced will never be an innocent business?

My initial entry to this complex of problems was prompted by an encounter between the philosophic hermeneutics of Martin Heidegger and Cage's artistic practice. Thought provoking issues arose out of the seeming closeness, yet disagreement between Heidegger's philosophic account and Cage's extensive use of 'chance' and 'indeterminacy' as

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<sup>3</sup> *Koan* is a technique in Zen Buddhism. It is a puzzling, often paradoxical, statement or story that cannot be understood or answered in conventional terms. These puzzles are used to challenge the Zen students' reliance on ordinary ways of understanding – framed in a dualistic manner and influenced by egoistic desires – in order to make the students susceptible to a spiritual awakening – enlightenment.

compositional methods. While Heidegger's theory could explain epistemology in terms of process and change so emphatically stressed by Cage's aesthetics and artistic practice, Heidegger's dynamic approach presupposed the need for hierarchic principles of organisation. The meaning-giving *difference* was at the core of his epistemology; the sense of the *is* arose from centre-periphery, whole-part dialectics, where phenomena could be seen, heard, acted upon, and included in a life world through a grid of differentiating valuations.

Heidegger's position seemed convincing. He had managed to place the knowing subject within the experienced historical world, avoid the problem of solipsism and still present a foundation for epistemology within the conditional character of our lives. His a priori structures of knowledge were not based upon the Kantian subject of consciousness opposed to things in themselves, but a unified phenomenon of being-in-the-world, where knowledge was not based in the opposition between subject and object, but the involvement with, and attachment to the things of the world already present. In addition, the apparently groundless, non-fixed quality of our lives was in Heidegger's theory not secured through the installation of an essentialist superstructure, but, by elaborating the logic of the hermeneutic circle into existential conditions for the human way of existing in the world, he outlined horizons of persistence within the experienced state of never-ending alteration.

Cage, though, within an artistic practice could cut the moorings of hermeneutic logic without leaving us in a vacuum of no sense, no meaning, no world. Instead the scattered circle could function as an invitation for an altered approach to presence. This, however, I found easier to understand in view of personal experiences, than through philosophical explanation. The initial problem for discussion was therefore: *How to think meaning formation, or even an epistemological horizon, when there is a collapse of a meaning-giving dialectic between underlying/overlying structural principles and the handling of materials.*

As we are going to see throughout the thesis, this is also a question addressed to a certain work-concept, because we could argue that the hermeneutic circle of whole meanings and worked out details exactly describes the logic of meaning production that we associate with the organic work of music, an unfolded drama, which however is neatly composed to a coherent unity.

### 1.3 Meaning

I started this work with a concept of meaning that was not clearly defined but included that sense of meaning we experience, for example in the presence of an artwork, which is difficult to account for through a linguistic explanation. Adorno, for example, presents musical meaning as inseparably connected to the musical presentation itself – its specific constellation and handling of the musical material.<sup>4</sup> This ‘meaning’ incorporates the ambiguous and complex that cannot be reduced to the delimited content associated with a linguistic definition of meaning. But while he sees the aspect of sense in music as differing at important points from linguistic systems, he finds that music also resembles language: It is through a form of articulation, a specific organisation of the musical material, that its meaningful presentation is created. It could perhaps be argued that Adorno points at the need of some form of hermeneutic logic, a coherence between the understanding of the grand form/intention/idea and the presented details, to get a sense of musical meaning. However, Adorno’s clarification can also function as an example of ‘meaning’ sited within a different landscape, or more correctly, a broader scope where ‘meaning’ has the capacity to include the ambiguous, complex and embodied quality that transgresses the logic of linguistic concepts.

In other words, I had in mind a broad concept of meaning, included in ordinary speech, which embraces the experience of meaningfulness that exceeds a linguistic definition of meaning but expresses that something is felt to be relevant, that it affects me, or is found worthy of being held on to and included in my life’s horizons.

Through working with this thesis I have been presented with more narrow definitions that contrast ‘meaning’ with ‘presence’ and differentiate between ‘meaning effects’ and ‘presence effects’ in connection with the impact of artistic activity and aesthetic experience.<sup>5</sup> However, in the end I have kept my broad definition that partly overlaps a conception of presence and shares with Adorno a view on meaning that cannot be split from the embodied presentation itself, but at the same time can be associated with aspects of prolongation, continued relevance and possible re-actualisations.

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<sup>4</sup> Adorno, “Music and Language: A Fragment”, pp. 1-6 in Adorno 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Gumbrecht 2004.

## 1.4 Presence

The experience of meaning referred to above is also easily associated with an experience of presence. Martin Seel, for example, understands works of art as presentations in the medium of appearing that “produce a special presence and present a special presence.”<sup>6</sup> Art’s potential to bring about a distinctive experience of presentness is further connected by Seel to a perceptive ability that is characterized by a constitutive *openness*: “Aesthetic perception is open to the simultaneous and momentary play of appearances on its objects; it is open to the specific phenomenal particularity of its objects and therefore to what remains underdetermined in any determination (and in any number of determinations) of an object of perception.”<sup>7</sup> This openness also includes the possibility of extending the sensuous appearances by imaginative implementation, continuation, and expansion, “a sensuous imagining that loads the presence of the real and present objects of intuition with a making present of relations that are more general, or more unreal, or spatially and temporally more unreachable (and through this loading enriches the presence).”<sup>8</sup>

‘Presence’ can thereby represent an alternative entry to the impact that aesthetic situations can bring about. As will be presented in the thesis, the aesthetics of performativity elaborates through the notion of presence, a sense of aesthetic importance that does not work strictly through the logic of interpretation, but the urgency of actuality. The quality of presence presents a phenomenon that is intimately connected to us as embodied beings, with a reality that is immediate in the sense that we cannot avoid being marked by it. This reality confines our existential possibilities, but also unfolds opportunities to be seized upon. We are here presented with a kind of sense that matters through its actuality, by creating opportunities and restrictions for our embodied life.

The aesthetic category of presence connects in this respect the relevance of art to conceptions of embodiment and reality. Art is not just about mirroring the realities of life. It also creates a playground for exploring alternative realities through the mode of *doing*. The urgent aspect of presence becomes, in this respect, also tied to the conditional dynamics that characterise action, and aesthetic awareness as an object of study becomes not secluded in a domain of disinterested contemplation, but can be approached in the intertwined mode of execution.

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<sup>6</sup> Seel 2005, p. 97.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 88.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 89.

My use of ‘presence’ has been informed by this embodied conception, and in that respect, connected to an almost touchable sense that reverberates in its full-blooded actuality. Like the concept of meaning, my discussions have not been guided by a clear-cut notion, but the concept of presence has highlighted qualities bounded to an experience of locality and actuality that is rich in sensuous character. As Seel explains, this rich experience is not limited to the sensuous quality of what is physically present, but includes, in its sensuousness, imaginative abilities that extend the particularity of the experience both temporarily and spatially, specific and general, bounded and transferred – to engage both memories, imaginings, and general reflections. Meaning and presence denote in this respect not distinctively different phenomena, but overlapping areas, or a range of processes, that make art and artistic situations matter. However, the terms are not used as identical categories. While ‘meaning’ and ‘presence’ do not exclude each other, the sense of ‘meaning’ highlights the operative quality of prolongation – an extendable sense – while ‘presence’ accentuates a sense of locality, the irreducible quality associated to being *here at this site* where *exactly this happens* and occurs, a focal point of diverse axes – temporal, spatial, concrete and imaginative – where the effect matters not least by making marks on bodies.

## **1.5 Process**

We could argue that a collapse of a meaning-giving dialectic between totality and parts leave us within a process, in its middle, but with hegemonic schemes of interpretation afloat. This aesthetic situation of disintegration, of bewildered orientational directives, can easily be associated to postmodern problematics of bursting the belief in homogeneous frames of reference, while having the problem of replacing the sense of rootlessness that this fragmented worldview creates. How are we to think the creation of a common sphere of action, meaning and presence when general referential frames lose sense, when a homogenous totality is out of reach? Would we not end in another form of solipsism, not the potential lonely consciousness of the subject, but the lonely, non-communicative, experience?

Cage invokes Buddhist rhetoric and presents Buddhist influenced conceptions, in this respect, on which to base, ontologically and epistemologically, his flat structured artistic aspiration. The seemingly solipsistic trap is countered by a worldview of interdependence, whose complexity is possible to experience in the cracks of conceptual thought through the potential

of the personal experience.

Cage's pronounced flat structured aesthetics underpinned by Buddhist flavoured aspirations could perhaps site our aesthetic project within an epistemological horizon of spiritual mysticism; there is a ground of reunion informing the perplexity of Cage's disintegration, the mystic experience of connectedness in touch with the all-encompassing flow of Being, the *is* that pervades all that exists equally. Another path, guided by Cage's insistence on sounds' aesthetic character as vouchsafed by their own unique existence, could perhaps point to a foundation of sense that is created as part of the phenomenal reality itself, independent of interpretations, but significant with respect to the outlining of our common physical environment. This could be seen as a shift from the ideality of notions to the resistance of physical phenomena – their unquestionable significance for states of affairs. But this given, though non-interpreted solidity of a fluidity, would so to speak only give a view of a deterministic blind process with no regard to anticipation and envisioned choices.

I have taken neither of these paths, but approach the post-modern problem from a middle position. The concept of performativity here enters the epistemological discussion in line with the Heideggerian projecting gesture of understanding that gives a view of a collected phenomenon of past, presence and future, though with an accentuated emphasis on the embodied constitution that we could argue is missed in the Heideggerian account. Therefore, through the concepts of *performativity* and *embodiment* the question of the flat structured Cagean model does not become a pure surface, but rolls up significant moments in complex structures both physically and imaginatively. I have therefore not totally left the hermeneutic perspective, but through readings of Cage's Buddhist inspired conceptions paired with theories of performativity and embodiment, the pivot of the perspective has been displaced, giving view of a radicalised version that leaves a place for an heterogeneous view of orientation and a transformed logic of sense-making processes that alter the function of the dividing line from demarcation to a zone of exchange.

## **1.6 Work, or staged event**

From the broad philosophic landscape of epistemological issues, the problem at hand is transferred to a more specific aesthetic and musicological field through aesthetic questions surrounding 'work' and 'event,' the objectified expression and communal happening, lasting



artefacts and elusive occasions, universal form (model) and local boundedness. Cage's challenge to the work as an intentionally organised totality also challenges the established conception of the musical work within Western music that, in its ontological foundation, can be seen as intertwined in a dualistic framework of epistemological conditions, a two-world perspective where we find, at one side of the spectrum, the spiritual, ideal and exemplary, and at the other side, the physical, impure and imperfect.

My research has in this respect been guided by the artistic example set by Cage's *Musicircus*, presented in the next chapter, and the thesis is shaped as a constellation that enters the theoretic scene by approaching this Cagean circus from different angles.

## **1.7 The course of this thesis**

Chapter two presents *Musicircus* and we are introduced to the ambiguities that the Cagean circus presents in terms of musicology and aesthetics. Chapter three approaches this complex through the musical work-concept. Lydia Goehr's famous analysis from 1992 has, in this respect, a double function. Through her presented work-concept a politicized landscape of artistic practices is drawn up where *Musicircus* can be seen as an anti-work that actively opposes the regime of the established practice that it is part of. And, through its artistic form it directs the attention to this regime's blind spots and non-questioned subjections, the Foucauldian mechanisms of exclusion. Secondly, through Goehr's analysis we are presented with a notion that intimately connects the musical work to a dualistic framework of epistemological conditions. The meaning and teleological purpose of ephemeral performances rely in the creation of ideal norms, a stable ontological platform of abstract models, that such perishable performances strives to materialize. The aesthetic question about the work becomes thereby intimately connected to the general epistemological question of dualism.

The fourth chapter alters the approach from the work-critical activity of Cage's practice to the positive side of his artistic "arguments". Through Erika Fischer-Lichte's aesthetic theory of performativity the attention is directed towards what is posed more than what is criticised. But this implies also the exploration of a transformed and altered aesthetic language. How are we to conceptualize the Cagean circus in positive terms and elaborate appropriate theoretic notions? As in chapter three, this is not only a narrow aesthetic question, but includes an epistemological framework. Through a changed focus from the stable 'work' to the *event* of

performance, a concept of *performativity* and a re-interpreted notion of *embodiment*, the epistemological split between the spiritual qualities and physical manifestation is also questioned and a non-dual framework of body and mind is suggested. Chapter five mirrors the fourth in its approach but extends this to a more specifically analytical application of this performative turn. This implies also an extension that introduces us to an ecological perspective for the performative logic.

Chapter six enters this thesis's landscape of outlined questions from a Cagean point of view, with his expressed non-dualistic aesthetics through his notions of *interpenetration* and *non-obstruction*. Though this entry is a little altered from chapter four, it continues discussions presented in that chapter and develops a reading of the performative perspective coloured by ecological thinking<sup>9</sup> and a post-humanist concept of performativity presented by Karen Barad.

Chapter seven concludes this thesis by discussing the *Musicircus* we did in 2006. The presentation of the historical circus in 1967 (chapter two) is in this respect contrasted with (confronted by) a contemporary version that represents a re-realisation. Through this practical example of doing a Cagean circus today, the theoretical discussions of the former chapters also become animated by the challenges, the specificity, practicalities, et cetera, that the concrete resistance of doing art represents.

## 1.8 Sources and methods

The aim of this research project has not only been to analyze Cage's music and his compositional strategies, but to use his aesthetics and artistic practice as contributing to arguments and discussions, bringing up themes within a broader aesthetic-epistemological debate that the more narrow discussion of *work* and *staged event* is brought into. I have in this respect combined theoretical discussion with the execution of fieldwork. I organized a production of *Musicircus* in 2006, and the experience of *doing* this production and being part of the process of realisation has been brought into my theoretical discussions and used as a case to reflect upon.

*Musicircus* does not have a published score. I have therefore not had specified text as the authorized source for the composition, or what we could call the production design. Instead

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<sup>9</sup> See for example Code 2006.

my main sources have been descriptions and instructions to be found in Cage's archived correspondence at Northwestern University,<sup>10</sup> a rudimentary sketch in the collection of musical manuscripts at New York Public Library,<sup>11</sup> commentaries in interviews, such as the series carried out by Daniel Charles,<sup>12</sup> and Cage's own published writings, a film from the first *Musicircus* made by Ronald Nameth,<sup>13</sup> presentations and a review of the first *Musicircus* to be found in local newspapers and magazines,<sup>14</sup> also archived at Northwestern University, and other studies, especially Steve Husarik's article "John Cage and LeJaren Hiller: HPSCHD, 1969"<sup>15</sup> and Johanne Rivest's study of Cage's stay at the University of Illinois from 1967-1969.<sup>16</sup> Because there is no score, the historic events themselves – the productions – become even more significant as sources for the work, than if this had not been the case. I have in this respect focused my attention to the first realization in 1967 and contrasted this with our own production in 2006.

Besides published sources, the historic material that has mainly informed my study is, as mentioned, to be found at Northwestern University and New York Public Library.<sup>17</sup> There is also a third Cage collection at Wesleyan University that I have not visited, which houses the literary manuscripts by Cage.<sup>18</sup> I have also interviewed Ronald Nameth who took part in the first *Musicircus*,<sup>19</sup> contributing with films and visuals, and who has also made a 20 minutes film with recorded material from the event in 1967 supplemented by written information. But otherwise I have not interviewed the participants of the first realization. If this had mainly been a historic study, more could have been done to track down sources, both with respect to the first event in 1967 and not least with respect to different realizations of this Cagean design for an evening of music, theatre, dance and art.

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<sup>10</sup> John Cage Collection, Northwestern University.

<sup>11</sup> [Realization of *Musicircus*], JPB 95-3 Folder 344 in John Cage Music Manuscript Collection, New York Public Library.

<sup>12</sup> Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*.

<sup>13</sup> Nameth, 1967/2006.

<sup>14</sup> Sibbert, Yahn, Zumstein and Converse (author of three items).

<sup>15</sup> Husarik 1983.

<sup>16</sup> Rivest 1999.

<sup>17</sup> For one month I surveyed material archived at NYPL and for three weeks material housed at Northwestern University. The archive at Northwestern has a lot of material. The correspondence that mentions *Musicircus* is, though, scarce. In searching through the material I was helped by earlier research carried out by David Patterson that I was lucky to be informed about.

<sup>18</sup> John Cage Papers, a collection of Cage's literary manuscripts at Wesleyan University see <http://www.wesleyan.edu/libr/schome/FAs/ca1000-72.html> for more information.

<sup>19</sup> Interview done in 2006.

Besides *Musicircus*, other compositions by Cage – with published scores – have been used as analytical sources to discuss similar phenomena to those we find in the Cagean circus from 1967. In this respect the series of *Variations* have been important, composed in the period from 1958 to 1978, as has the multi-media work *HPSCHD* (1967-69).

Since the 1980s a growing amount of Cage studies have been presented. Of this literature I will here briefly mention some contributors that have been important in my approach to Cage. James Pritchett's overview of Cage's music and his reconstruction of Cage's chance compositions in the dissertation from 1988 have been decisive in furnishing an understanding of the compositional design of Cage's indeterminate music.<sup>20</sup> William Fetterman's *John Cage's Theatre Piece : notations and performances*<sup>21</sup> has been priceless as a source of information and for the contextualisation of Cage's theatricalised music. David Patterson, Sor Ching Low and Magnus Andersson have been important sources with regard to Cage's Buddhist appropriations converted to the aesthetics of avant-garde music.<sup>22</sup> Leta Miller has made me especially aware of the collaborate aspects of Cage's artistic practice through her articles,<sup>23</sup> and Christopher Shultis has coined the term 'coexistent artistic self' for the role of creator in Cage's approach.<sup>24</sup> The composer is a participant, and the works emerge as collective results of intertwined contributions and factors. Joan Retallack accentuates, not meaninglessness, but the plural quality of meaning that the Cagean project illuminates.<sup>25</sup> Katherine Hayles presents a reading of Cagean chance operations that emphasises their decisive character.<sup>26</sup> Brendon Joseph made me aware of a link between Cage and Deleuze in a conversation in 1999. He saw Cage's project more in line with the post-structuralist thought of Deleuze than the de-construction of Derrida. Even though I have not followed this path and Deleuze is hardly mentioned in my thesis, this approach to the Cagean project, where the empirical and material is not lost sight of, has directed me to theories of performativity and "fleshy" approaches to ontology. Jonathan Katz has sited Cage research in the context of queer studies.<sup>27</sup> Though I have not explicitly adopted his approach, Katz demonstrations of the issues of exclusion and categorisation in an *existential* sense have inspired my approach.

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<sup>20</sup> Pritchett 1993 and 1988.

<sup>21</sup> Fetterman 1996.

<sup>22</sup> Patterson 1996, 2002a and 2002/2009b, Low 2006 and 2007, Andersson 2009.

<sup>23</sup> L. Miller 2001 and 2002 (two items).

<sup>24</sup> Shultis 1998.

<sup>25</sup> See especially Retallack 1994.

<sup>26</sup> Hayles 1994.

<sup>27</sup> Roth and Katz 1998, and Katz 2001.

I must also mention Richard Kostelanetz whose collections of Cage texts and interviews have become important sources of Cage research, also for me,<sup>28</sup> though sometimes his editorial stamp makes source references scant. Included in the first collection of Cage texts edited by Kostelanetz, *John Cage* from 1970, is also a one page long description of the first *Musicircus* that later appears in Kostelanetz's *Scenarios*. The last entry, in fact, invites the reader to see the text as a script.<sup>29</sup> It can therefore be understood as a score. As an art critic, Kostelanetz has also, together with Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner, from the beginning sited Cage within the performance art scene – the theatre of mixed means – and communicated his impact in that respect.<sup>30</sup> Besides those briefly mentioned here I will present other contributions as the discussions proceed. These include studies of a more recent date, such as Mia Göran's thesis from 2009 and Hans-Friedrich Bormann's study from 2005, whose findings and theoretical elaborations I have found very helpful in outlining my own argumentation.

This thesis has been informed theoretically through an interdisciplinary approach that has combined musicological questions with aesthetic-epistemological problematics and has approached the field by combining selected readings from different areas of study, such as the tradition of hermeneutic philosophy, phenomenology and post-structuralism, theories of performance and performativity and the discussion of the musical work. All of these areas have a broad range and a great variety of approaches. I have concentrated my reading on selected contributors, aspects and concepts that will be presented as the discussions proceed. My approach could in this respect probably be called eclectic. I have found it thought-provoking to bring ideas from different fields together, but still felt the need to probe deeper into some arguments. My selection has of course also been guided by my agenda, and by the coincidences, suggestions and encounters that a research projects offers, and I have appropriated these sources more as resources for thinking – as tools for my reflections – than purely as projects of interpretation. However, without these readings I would not have arrived at the reflections that are presented in this thesis.

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<sup>28</sup> Especially, Cage and Kostelanetz, *John Cage*, and Kostelanetz 2003.

<sup>29</sup> This will be discussed in length in chapter two.

<sup>30</sup> Kostelanetz 1968, and Cage and Kirby and Schechner 1995.



## 2 MUSICIRCUS, 1967

The noise of the musicircus could be heard in the parking lot near Mamford Hall and the participants in this Centennial event were greeted by crescendoes of screeches, thunderclaps of sound, and flashes of multi-colored light as they entered the Stock Pavilion.<sup>31</sup>

### 2.1 Introduction

Abundance; flashes of lights, images projected on weather balloons, sounds all over the place produced by several groups playing different music simultaneously, a film showing over and over again a man smiling, frowning and laughing, balloons, balloons, dancers making dramatic movements projected as silhouettes on screens, popcorn, cider, the audience's own blackboard drawing glowing in rays of black light; a circus of activity, intermingling and interpenetrating into an anarchic nexus to be experienced through all the senses; no composer, no score; the performers audience, the audience performers; the musical work, something to walk inside where beginning, middle and end are everywhere, nowhere, following in the steps of an explorer – a multitude of possible routes, perspectives, impressions/expressions.

The first *Musicircus* took place on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 1967, at the University of Illinois, Urbana Campus (UIUC). Presented as a “stand-up, eat-in, music-out, freak-down”<sup>32</sup>, this avant-garde public-minded celebration of abundance and multiplicity was initiated by John Cage during his stay at UIUC, appointed there as Associate Member of the Center for Advanced Study and Visiting Professor of Music for the academic years 1967/1968 and 1968/1969.

Even though Cage did not himself graduate from college or university,<sup>33</sup> creative communities at such places played an important role in his career. Colleges and universities throughout the U.S. offered opportunities for workshops, concerts and performances that were important for the dissemination of Cage's music and artistic enterprise, not least as part of his

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<sup>31</sup> From the review “Musicircus Rocks Stock Pavilion” by Bruce Zumstein. *The Daily Illini*, Nov.18, 1967.

<sup>32</sup> “A stand-up, eat-in, music-out, freak-down” is how John Cage describes the ‘Music Circus’ he will direct at 8 p.m. Friday in the Stock Pavillion.” Converse, “Cage Plans Music Circus”. *The Daily Illini*, Nov. 11, 1967.

<sup>33</sup> Cage ended his studies at college before graduation and often referred to himself as a “dropout”. (E.g. Kostelanetz 2003, p. 4, 6 and 257.) However, Cage was not untaught. He studied composition with prominent composers in the years 1932-37. Starting with the pianist Richard Bühling (1932-34/35), these included Adolph Weiss (1934), the American Pioneer Henry Cowell (1933-34) and not least Arnold Schönberg (1935-37). (See for example, Cage: “An Autobiographical Statement” (1989) in Cage and Kostelanetz 1993 p. 237, and Emmerik, *A John Cage Compendium*, 1912-1971, for the dates.)

joint projects with the dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham.<sup>34</sup> Further, Cage had several long term appointments at different educational institutions, several of which are part of the pioneering history of American establishments of higher learning: The Cornish School in Seattle (1938-40),<sup>35</sup> Mills College (Summer Sessions, 1939-1941),<sup>36</sup> the School of Design in Chicago (1941-42),<sup>37</sup> the notorious Black Mountain College (Summer Session, 1948 and 1952),<sup>38</sup> the New School of Social Research (1956-1961),<sup>39</sup> Wesleyan University (1960-1961),<sup>40</sup> and the University of Cincinnati (Spring 1967). The first *Musicircus* is part of this story. It happened in the context of the Centennial Celebration at UIUC and involved the creative communities at the campus.

Though Johanne Rivest informs us that the Centennial Celebration was an occasion that contributed to Cage's appointment at the University,<sup>41</sup> the circus project appears to have been a rapidly organized event not sketched as one of his main projects.<sup>42</sup> The main purpose for Cage's stay was to work with computer music. This resulted in the multimedia-work *HPSCHD*, composed in collaboration with Lejaren Hiller (1924–1994), premiered in May 1969 and in its style of performance, having many similarities with the *Musicircus* done two years earlier.<sup>43</sup> Cage's artistic activity moved in the 1960s into directions that can be characterized by keywords such as: Music being explored as theatre, and theatre explored as music, abundance, multiplicity, crossing of art forms (mixing media) and experimentations with the situation of performance. Both *Musicircus* and *HPSCHD* are examples of artistic extravagances that put these ingredients into play on a large scale.

Cage's career really took off in the 1960s. At last his music had been published through an exclusive contract with C.P. Peters in 1960,<sup>44</sup> some recordings were available, and in 1961

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<sup>34</sup> Cage met Merce Cunningham during his stay at the Cornish School, Seattle (1938-40). They collaborated extensively from 1942. Cunningham established the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in 1953. Cage was associated to the company from its inception until his death.

<sup>35</sup> Cage taught "Creative composition", "Percussion instrument" and accompanied classes in modern dance. (Emmerik, *A John Cage Compendium*, 1912-1971.) For Cage and Cornish School, see Miller 2002b.

<sup>36</sup> Cage was appointed as composer and accompanist for dance sessions. (Emmerik, *A John Cage Compendium*, 1912-1971.)

<sup>37</sup> Established by László Moholy-Nagy in 1937 in line with the ideals of Bauhaus. Cage gave classes in "Sound Experiments". (Emmerik, *A John Cage Compendium*, 1912-1971.)

<sup>38</sup> For Black Mountain College, see Duberman 1974. For Black Mountain and American music, see Brody 2003.

<sup>39</sup> Cage taught classes in experimental composition. Several of Cage's students, such as Allan Kaprow, George Brecht, Al Hansen and Dick Higgins, became leading figures at the scene of mixed media and performance art that emerged in the 1960 and 1970s.

<sup>40</sup> *Silence* was compiled and edited while Cage was at Wesleyan and published by the Wesleyan University Press, which he continued to collaborate with. See Silverman 2010, p. 174-176. Wesleyan houses now the Collection of Cage Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Rivest 1999, part one.

<sup>42</sup> The archived correspondence from this period, bears witness to Cage's plans for *HPSCHD* and an unrealized project. *Musicircus* is barely mentioned. Further discussion of this source material at p. 40.

<sup>43</sup> *HPSCHD* is further described and discussed in chapter five, p. 190 ff.

<sup>44</sup> Cage was given a 25-year retrospective concert in 1958 but still his musical works were unpublished. Cage



*Silence* was published – a collection of Cage’s lectures and writings dated from the late 1930s to 1961, which was as important, if not more important, than his published music in helping popularize his work and ideas.<sup>45</sup> Cage became not only famous, he became notorious and very busy.<sup>46</sup> Besides, he was very much engaged in The Merce Cunningham Dance Company as musical director, composer and at times organizer. The company toured extensively but this was not a luxurious business. Correspondences from the period witness Cage’s efforts to collect money for the continued existence of the company and for new projects. He was at the time president of the Cunningham Dance Foundation.<sup>47</sup> Privately, Cage had economic responsibility for his mother who needed help and was at a nursing home. The possibility of taking up an appointment as artist in residence seemed therefore attractive, both economically and creatively for the spare time it could give him to compose, and in the case of UIUC, to experiment with computer music.

UIUC was in the forefront in this field. Lejaren Hiller, a composer and former chemistry professor, had established an Experimental Music Studio there in 1958 – the first of its kind in the West.<sup>48</sup> Besides this, the university hosted from 1948 to 1971 a festival dedicated contemporary art with the aim “to show current developments in the various fields of art, and the relationship of contemporary art forms to each other and to our times”.<sup>49</sup>

Cage appeared at this festival for the first time in 1952. The next year he met Hiller there, and they presented together one of the first American concerts of electronic music. Cage was at the festival again in 1965. In the mean time, his presence at the program had been maintained through performances by David Tudor.<sup>50</sup>

The members of the music faculty therefore knew Cage’s work and aesthetics. Cage, likewise, had contacts there and knew the place’s possibilities. A pro-Cage faction at the

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had problem getting a publisher not least because of the graphic challenges involved. This changed with Cage’s contract with the Henmar Press of C. F. Peters Corporation. Peters took Cage on published his work: “Cage would receive an advance for each of his compositions the company printed [...] and a 10 percent royalty on sales. The agreement covered future works as well: the company would publish two of his works a year for ten years.” (Silverman 2010, p. 173.) The contract secured wide distribution. Peters had firms in Frankfurt, Zurich and London and also worked through outlets in Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium and Japan. Peters could thus make Cage’s music easily available internationally. (Ibid. pp. 172-174.)

<sup>45</sup> Patterson 2002, “Words and writings”.

<sup>46</sup> Pritchett, for example, uses this change in Cage life to partly explain the different direction Cage’s music took in the 1960s. From composing by applying meticulous procedures involving chance, musical performances were created by more rapid techniques that had music-theatrical qualities. (Pritchett 1993, pp. 140-146.)

<sup>47</sup> A large amount of the archived correspondence at the time is devoted to the task of getting donations to the Merce Cunningham Foundation. Cage was its president from 1965-1968. (Emmerik, *A John Cage Compendium*, 1912-1971.)

<sup>48</sup> Hiller had become known as a composer and pioneer of computer music with works as *ILLIAC Suite (String Quartet no. 4)* from 1957.

<sup>49</sup> Rivest 1999, part one.

<sup>50</sup> Loc. cit.

music faculty tried after Cage's visit in 1965 "to obtain a George A. Miller Professorship in order to have Cage on the faculty for the next year."<sup>51</sup> This failed, but for the academic year of 1967-68 Cage became an Associate Member of the Center for Advanced Study, an appointment free of professorial duties, and a Visiting Professor of Music at the Graduate College,<sup>52</sup> an appointment that later was extended by a year.

The University of Illinois was, in 1967, 100 years old. The Graduate College and the Center for Advanced Study organised a "Centennial Year Series" including a Creative and Performing Arts Symposia, called "University in Motion: Matrix for the Arts". The *Musicircus* took place within the context of this symposium, presented at the Stock Pavilion, a campus building used for showing cattle.

Quite a vivid description of the chosen venue is given in the one review kept in the John Cage Collection at Northwestern University:

The musicircus began at 8 p.m. Friday and was to last until 1 a.m., when the floor would be cleared for livestock to return the next morning. At the Happening only one dog – sleeping in fits of paroxysm – was able to make the scene. An hour earlier a sheep exhibit cleared the pavilion.<sup>53</sup>

The event is further described as "the night not so much for blowing your mind as it was for blowing an eardrum [...] it was a real Happening".<sup>54</sup>

This "real happening" of a generally loud character was generated by a mix of different music, sounds, visuals, varieties of light arrangements and dramatic movements created by residential artists and visitors to the symposium. The performers and contributions included:<sup>55</sup> David Tudor and Gordon Mumma who amplified the ventilation system and made the hall into an instrument for live electronics; James Cuomo and Tony Zamora with respective jazz bands; a Baroque orchestra that among other things played Bach's Fifth *Brandenburg Concerto*; the composers Salvatore Martirano and Hiller who both gave a program of their own music that also included electronics; pianist Jocy di Olivera who gave a recital including Ben Johnston's *Knocking Piece* together with percussionist Richard O'Donnell; Michael Udow, a percussionist, who played Morton Feldman's *The King of Denmark* at pianissimo, so

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<sup>51</sup> Rivest 1999, part one.

<sup>52</sup> Loc. cit. Later Cage's appointment was extended by a year.

<sup>53</sup> Zumstein 1967.

<sup>54</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>55</sup> This information is collected from: Husarik 1983, pp. 4-5, Rivest 1999, part one, Nameth, *John Cage – The 1st Musicircus* (film), Cage in Kostelanetz 1980 (this text is quoted in its entirety at p. 31), and Emmerik, *A John Cage Compendium*. In addition, see transcribed sketch of the performance site at p. 184 in this thesis. (Part of the sketch that is archived in the John Cage Music Manuscript Collection.)

quietly that nearly just his movements could be seen, and it was hardly possible to hear what he played; and Norma Marder who sang *Aria* by Cage as many times as she had wished.

Barney Childs had designed a percussion platform where percussion students improvised and the audience was invited “to beat with anything they had, as loudly and violently as the inclination might carry them.”<sup>56</sup> The audience was also invited to draw on a blackboard with special chalk so their drawings glowed under the rays of black light. Claude Kipnis, the mime-artist, did “a pantomime of a person struggling against a wall of sound,”<sup>57</sup> and Ronald Nameth arranged a presentation of his films and slides. These visuals were projected simultaneously on multiple screens placed around the entire periphery of the giant hall.

Balloons floated. Some large weather balloons were used as screens for projected rotating spirals and other variegations made by Nameth. Dancers were also present: Members of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company improvised “dramatic movements that appeared as silhouettes on screens across the pavilion.”<sup>58</sup> Cage himself turned on and off the amplified light switchboard thereby altering both the lighting arrangement and producing new sonic feeds for his electronic set up. Not only the eye and ear were stimulated, there was also something to eat: At each end of the hall were places to buy apple cider, doughnuts, and popcorn, etc.

The audience, about 5000 visitors, could walk freely around, and according to the review quite a multifarious group of people attended the event from little boys fascinated by floating balloons to university students dressed in bed sheets:

It was a highly heterogeneous audience. Little boys caught freely flying balloons and carried them off. Their parents sat in the stands and tried to believe they were not really going through this mish-mash of sight and sound. University students walked through the performance. [...] Persons dressed in bed sheets tried to avoid drafts from the open stock doors, and girls on dates climbed on boy’s shoulders to see who was there and doing what.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Husarik 1983, p. 5. Rivest informs that there was a sculpture made by pieces of metal hanging from a scaffolding in the center of the Pavilion, that people could strike (Rivest, part one).

<sup>57</sup> Husarik 1983, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> Zumstein 1967.

The experience, writes Nameth, “was one in which each participant created their own ‘composition’ – their own unique experience by being free to move at any time into any space.”<sup>60</sup>

## 2.2 Musicircus, what is it?

### 2.2.1 Historic event / work / genre...?

What is *Musicircus*? Does it just name this single historic event in 1967? In fact, several *Musicircuses* have been done, for example in Minneapolis (1970), Paris (1970), London (1972 and 1982), Bonn (1979), California (1980), Turin (*Musicircus for children*, 1984), Los Angeles (1987), Amsterdam (1988), East-Berlin (1990), Stanford University (1992),<sup>61</sup> New York (1992), and more recently at the Barbican, London (2004),<sup>62</sup> Chicago (2005), Ludwigshafen (2005),<sup>63</sup> Melbourne (2007), and Trondheim (2006),<sup>64</sup> among others.<sup>65</sup> The 1967 event has also taken a place in Cage’s oeuvre. Kostelanetz’s collected catalogue of compositions from 1970, organised according to instrument and chronology, lists *Musicircus* under the heading “Audio-visual,”<sup>66</sup> and Revill’s chronological list (1992) in his full length biography – the sole one until recently – includes it as “*Musicircus*: for diverse performers.”<sup>67</sup> And *Grove Music Online* does not exclude it from their account of works. The lexical entry is: “Musicircus, mixed-media event, 1967, unpubd.”<sup>68</sup>

An elaborate entry is to be found at the easily accessible Internet resource, *John Cage database*.<sup>69</sup> At this last site *Musicircus* is described as:

<b>Musicircus</b>	
Category:	Musical composition
Dated:	1967
Instrumentation:	For any number of musicians, being prepared to perform in the same place (event)
Duration:	Indeterminate

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<sup>60</sup> Nameth, *John Cage – The 1st Musicircus*, film.

<sup>61</sup> This production is discussed by Junkerman 1994. His analysis of the event will be presented in chapter five.

<sup>62</sup> More info about this production at pp. 273-274.

<sup>63</sup> I attended this production. More information at p. 214.

<sup>64</sup> This production which I initiated is discussed in detail in chapter seven.

<sup>65</sup> Several of these productions can be found by a search on the Internet. This gives also an idea of the felt relevance of this Cagean circus still today.

<sup>66</sup> Cage and Kostelanetz, *John Cage*, p. 214.

<sup>67</sup> Revill 1992, p. 361.

<sup>68</sup> Pritchett and Kuhn, “Cage, John”, *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>69</sup> Chaudron, *John Cage database*. The information to be found in the presented catalogue is said to be collected from various sources: Paul van Emmerik’s “Thema’s en Variaties” (Amsterdam, 1996), works by James Pritchett, Richard Kostelanetz, David Revill, Larry Solomon and many others, such as several online library catalogues and liner notes from CD/LP recordings.

Premiere and performer(s):	November 17, 1967 in the University Stock Pavillion at the University of Illinois
Dedicated to:	
Choreography:	---
Published:	---
Manuscript:	Realisation (holograph, signed, in black and blue ink - 4 p.) in the New York Public Library.

The idea of this composition is nothing more than an invitation to a number of musicians, who perform simultaneously anything or in any way they desire. The manuscript is a list of musicians with various pieces of music by Cage and Satie and some non-musical works, also including a diagram for positions of various individuals.<sup>70</sup>

But how relevant is it in discussing *Musicircus* to speak about a musical work, or a composition? Cage describes *Musicircus* as one of his initiated performances that do not involve notations, in the foreword of *M*, Cage's book from 1973:

While I was writing the texts in this book, I was also writing music [...] And I initiated a number of performances which have not involved notations: *Musicircus* (bringing together under one roof as much of the music of the surrounding community as one practicably can) [...]<sup>71</sup>

William Fetterman, in his book *John Cage's Theatre pieces* (1996), uses the name not just to denote specific art events called *Musicircus*, but also as a broader label for a Cagean genre that consists of works and initiated events, which are variations on this large-group simultaneity.<sup>72</sup> Briefly, this genre is characterized by an abundance of simultaneous and independent performances, presented often in non-traditional performance spaces, with a large number of participants, and lasting longer than concerts usually do. In addition, these circuses most often unfold as multimedia events:

The musicircus is a multi-media event of simultaneous and independent performances, often presented in non-traditional performance spaces, with a large number of participants, and lasting for several hours. The first performance designated as a musicircus was in 1967, however the development of this genre may be said to begin with the untitled event at Black Mountain College in 1952 and *Theatre Piece* in 1960.<sup>73</sup>

We could therefore, from Fetterman's outline, presume that we have two usages to take account of: Firstly, the name of a kind of work; and secondly, the term for a Cagean genre. The distinction though, even here, is not straightforward. What really denotes *Musicircus* as a

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<sup>70</sup> Chaudron, "Musicircus", *John Cage database*. The manuscript referred to is a rudimentary sketch to be found in the John Cage Music Manuscript Collection at New York Public Library, JPB 95-3 Folder 344.

<sup>71</sup> Cage, *M: writings, '67-'72*, p. xiii. In addition Cage lines up here: "*Reunion, 33 1/3, Demonstration of the Sounds of the Environment* (three hundred people silently following an I Ching determined path through Milwaukee's University of Wisconsin campus), and *Mureau* not vocalized by myself alone but together with others (Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo)."

<sup>72</sup> Fetterman calls the chapter where *Musicircus* is discussed: "The Musicircus: Variations on large-group simultaneities" (Fetterman 1996, pp. 125-148.)

<sup>73</sup> Fetterman 1996, p. 125. My italics.

work? Would the similarities between different realizations not be more alike similarities of genre than those of performances of the same work?

Indeed, *Musicircus* challenges established understandings of what characterizes a musical work. Who is the composer? What was intended with this specific constellation of sounds? Where does this musical work start and end? What is the aesthetic difference between attending a concert of serious music and being at a market in the city, or a carnival?

Even Cage finds it doubtful that *Musicircus* can be called *his* composition:

Furthermore, it is doubtful whether my work in connection with that piece [*Musicircus*] is as integral a part of it as the work of all the actual performers of it.<sup>74</sup>

The puzzles of naming and categorization become apparent even in typographic considerations. Fetterman distinguishes typographically between those events called *Musicircus* and ‘musicircus’ used as a genre designation. The interview collection *For the Birds* uses “a *Musicircus*” (singular) becoming “*Musicircuses*” (plural) when Cage and Charles speak about several realizations.<sup>75</sup> This is a usage that differs from the ordinary practice of denoting performances of works. It would be strange to say “a Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony” about one certain performance, or “Beethoven’s Fifth Symphonies” about a collection of different performances even though we would think of them as being different interpretations. This may seem like conceptual quibbling, but behind this uncertainty of how to name, denote and typographically represent (uncertainties that I myself have felt when working on my dissertation theme) is hidden an instability in how to categorize this/these Cagean circuses, that even includes the oscillation between different categories, such as the art work, event, technique of performance, genre, et cetera.

In the continuation of this thesis, I am going to differentiate my designation of the discussed Cagean circus in three ways: In singular and italics *Musicircus* denotes both the proper name (the title) of a design for staging – a work – and specific productions (realisations). *Musicircuses* in plural refers to several productions, while the plain written ‘musicircus’ designates a general technique/method of performance/arrangement.

### **2.2.2 Technique of performance**

Fetterman’s genre description includes a certain applied method for organizing a performance. I will in fact single out this element. As I see it, ‘musicircus’ can also be

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<sup>74</sup> John Cage, letter dated May 1, 1973.

<sup>75</sup> Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, 1981.

understood as a concept that denotes a technique of performance. We can even call it a performative strategy. The basic elements of this method are simultaneity and abundance added to by space. Seen as a technique musicircus can be understood as a continuation of Cage's compositional methods of chance operations and indeterminacy.

'Chance operation' and 'indeterminacy' represent two different techniques of composition within Cage's terminology. 'Chance operation' denotes a worked out method where the element of chance has been given a decisive function. It determines the detailed elaboration of events, note by note, in the composition. One can in this respect bring to mind Cage's definition of 'method' that appears in "Forerunners in modern music" written in 1949: "Method is the means of controlling the continuity from note to note."<sup>76</sup> According to this definition 'chance operation' denotes a method where the element of chance has been put into operation to determine the "continuity from note-to-note" in a composition.

In his chance-determined pieces, Cage creates frames for the musical setting before the compositional process of putting sounds and silences together begins. He selects the material and formulates procedures for the execution of chance. It is as if he has created a board game and the rules for how to play it. When Cage has done this, he begins to play the formulated compositional game; he begins to compose. But the composing is done by chance. It is not the composer's vision, his image of what the piece should sound like "note by note" that stipulates what is going to happen and how the material is organized. It is instead by, for example, tossing coins that the note-to-note arrangement is worked out.<sup>77</sup>

Cage's indeterminate pieces are similar in design to the "board game" of the chance-determined compositions, but in these pieces the composer has, so to speak, left it to the performers to play the game and make a distinct version of the given general directions. An indeterminate piece is therefore an open-ended work that has to be complemented by the performers' contributions. Artists who want to perform one of Cage's indeterminate pieces have to contribute to the compositional process themselves, often by undertaking chance

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<sup>76</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 62.

<sup>77</sup> Cage developed a method based on the ancient Chinese text *Book of Changes (I Ching)*. This book presents 64 hexagrams that can be found by tossing coins. Cage transferred the consulting method of *I Ching* to a compositional method where his chance-derived hexagrams led him to preformed charts of worked out material. Chance thereby determined, from the outlined material possibilities, what would be actualized in the worked out composition.

operations. An example of such an indeterminate piece, *Variations II* will be discussed in chapter four.

‘Indeterminacy’, therefore, denotes a compositional strategy where the procedure of deciding the detailed course of musical events, note-to-note, has to a greater or lesser degree been handed over to the performers, or the specific situation of a performance. A specific realisation would be dependent upon the contribution of the performers before arriving at a specific “note-to-note” execution.

Musicircus as a technique of performance can be understood to take the exploration of chance and indeterminacy a step further to the live site of performance and include the audience in these processes. The play of chance and indeterminacy are here methodically invoked and explored through the non-coordination of simultaneous performances and the freedom of performers to choose their own program in addition to the audience’s freedom to walk about and choose their own routes of exploration.

### 2.2.3 Simultaneity and Cage’s concept of ‘no-continuity’

Cage writes in a letter from 1973:

I have not made detailed directions for *Musicircus*. You simply bring together under one roof as much music (as many musical groups and soloists) as practical under the circumstances. It should last longer than ordinary concerts, starting at 7 or 8 in the evening, and continuing, say, to midnight. Arrange performers on platforms or within roped-off areas. There must be plenty of space for the audience to walk around. If you have more groups than places, make a schedule: Group 1 in Place A from 7-9:30; Group 23 in Place A from 9:45-midnight. Etc. There should be food on sale and drinks (as at a circus). Dancers and acrobats.<sup>78</sup>

Basically, *Musicircus* is an event that consists of simultaneous performances: “*Musicircus* (bringing together under one roof as much of the music of the surrounding community as one practicably can.”<sup>79</sup> This simultaneity is also presented in the previews of the first *Musicircus*:

The Music Circus will be an artistic happening, an interpretation of the arts, featuring Cage’s long-time friend, David Tudor, electronically transforming the ventilator sounds, a poetry reading by Michael Holloway, a jazz band, numerous electronic recordings, Norma Marder singing, and a piece so silent that nobody can hear it. All these sounds and many more will be produced simultaneously.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> John Cage, letter dated June 6, 1973.

<sup>79</sup> Cage, *M: writings, '67-'72*, p. xiii.

<sup>80</sup> Yahn 1967.



The simultaneity outlined by Cage's descriptions, comments and practical advice has certain characteristics. Cage says in a conversation with Daniel Charles: "In a *Musicircus*, you have the right to bring together all kinds of music which are ordinarily separated. We're no longer worried about what there is to be heard, so to speak. It's no longer a question of aesthetics."<sup>81</sup> "*It's no longer a question of aesthetics*". This is a radical statement. All types of music can be part of a *Musicircus*! And, not just music, all kinds of artistry are welcome: "There should be food on sale and drinks (as at a circus). Dancers and acrobats."<sup>82</sup>

Neither does Cage express an ideal for coordinating performances in any way. On the contrary, he advises the participants to perform independently of each other.<sup>83</sup> These performative preferences can be connected to conceptions of 'continuity' and 'no-continuity' that Cage brings up in lectures in the 1950s. He writes for example in "Lecture on Something" (1951):

The idea, consequences, suggests the musical term continuity and that produced a discussion last week for Feldman spoke of no-continuity, whereas it was argued from a rational point of view that no matter what there is continuity. [...] No-continuity simply means accepting that continuity that happens. Continuity means the opposite: making that particular continuity that excludes all others.<sup>84</sup>

'No-continuity', in the context given above, represents a break from narrative structures. Thus we are presented with musical situations without a clear beginning, middle, and end. Nicholls in the article "Getting Rid of the Glue" (2002) emphasizes how the group of composers, later labelled the New York School of composers,<sup>85</sup> intensely explored different compositional methods in the early fifties, including methods to get rid of "the glue" – of habitual ways of binding sonic material together into coherent units. One result was the evolvement of the graphic notation pioneered by Morton Feldman. Behind these glue-less compositions were efforts to explore the physical character, per se, of the musical material. Cage expresses this effort in his emphasis on sounds as sonic phenomena freed from symbolic functions:

Where people had felt the necessity to stick sounds together to make a continuity, we four [Cage, Feldman, Wolff, Brown] felt the opposite necessity to get rid of the glue so that sounds would be themselves.<sup>86</sup>

'No-continuity' does not only refer to conditions that highlight the concrete qualities of sounds, but alludes also to an inclusive notion of presence:

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<sup>81</sup> Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, p. 52.

<sup>82</sup> John Cage, letter dated June 6, 1973.

<sup>83</sup> See quote at p. 37: "Let each thing..."

<sup>84</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 132.

<sup>85</sup> Besides Cage, this group consisted of Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, Earl Brown, and David Tudor as their important performer.

<sup>86</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 71.

This is what is meant when one says: No-continuity. No sounds. No harmony. No melody. No counterpoint. No rhythm. That is to say there is not one of the somethings that is not acceptable. When this is meant one is in accord with life.<sup>87</sup>

Following this argument, the continuity of the discontinuous denotes an inclusive phenomenon of time where a multiplicity of life lines appear, interact, add to each other's conditions, break apart and form new units. This complex situation expands linear conceptions of time and extends the temporal dimension spatially. In line with this understanding of continuity,<sup>88</sup> we can argue that the performative strategy of the Cagean circus explicitly explores this spatial extension of time and the potentiality of co-presence that this creates.<sup>89</sup>

Even though neither the content nor the articulation of time is sought to be coordinated, Cage sketches a spatial organization of the simultaneous performances:

Arrange performers on platforms or within roped-off areas. There must be plenty of space for the audience to walk around. If you have more groups than places, make a schedule: Group 1 in Place A from 7-9:30; Group 23 in Place A from 9:45-midnight.<sup>90</sup>

We could remark in this respect that though the temporal articulation is freed from singular continuities and made highly conditioned by a plurality of voices, the space is not in the same degree exposed to these chance ridden strategies. That is, while the simultaneity of this circus in a temporal sense is left to chance by the organisers, the spatial organisation is not in the same degree accidental.<sup>91</sup> In fact, Cage's concept of 'no-continuity', as pronounced in the 1950s, approves of a certain deliberate organisation of space. A spacious distribution of performers makes it easier to free the performance from the habitual glue of conventions:

In connection with the physical space of the performance, where that performance involves several players (two or more), it is advisable for several reasons to separate the performers one from the other, as much as is convenient and in accord with the action and the architectural situation. This separation allows the sounds to issue from their own centers and to interpenetrate in a way which is not obstructed by the conventions of European harmony and theory about relationships and interferences of sounds.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p.132.

<sup>88</sup> "The continuity that is no continuity is going on forever; and there is no problem about accepting whatever." (Cage, *Silence*, p. 140.)

<sup>89</sup> This argument is discussed in length in chapter six.

<sup>90</sup> John Cage, letter dated June 6, 1973.

<sup>91</sup> We could of course argue that the spatial character would, in any case, be dependent upon the sonic activity (the temporal articulation). See presentation under the heading "Performative space" in chapter four.

<sup>92</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 39.

## 2.3 Score

### 2.3.1 Scenarios

The most comprehensive description given by Cage of the first *Musicircus* appears in *John Cage*.<sup>93</sup> The same text appears also in *Scenarios – Scripts to perform*, an anthology edited by Kostelanetz and published in 1980:

The Stock Pavilion, not “Stockyards Pavilion,” is a building used for showing cattle. The arena floor is covered with a soft earth and a carpetlike material – a kind of amplified sawdust, but of a dark red-and-black color. The bleachers are cement. The structure itself is reminiscent of the turn-of-the-century exhibition buildings or, say, those in Paris of that time. (Metal structural members visible, plus glass.) *Musicircus* was done on November 17, I believe, in 1967. It consisted simply in inviting those who were willing to perform at once (in the same place and time). There were: the composer Salvatore Martirano, who, like the others, used a group of performers and gave a program of his own; Jocy de Oliveira (Carvalho) who gave a piano recital including Ben Johnston’s *Knocking Piece*, music by Morton Feldman, etc.; Lejaren Hiller; Herbert Brün; James Cuomo and his band; another jazz band; David Tudor and Gordon Mumma; Norma Marder giving a voice recital sometimes accompanying a dancer, Ruth Emerson; the mime Claude Kipnis, who responded with a whole sound environment; perhaps others I don’t remember – and my notes and papers regarding it are packed now. In the center of the floor was a metallic construction upon which the audience could make sounds. (This is actually someone’s composition – but I don’t now remember whose.) No directions were given anyone. I connected contact mikes to the light switchboard, changing the lights and, at the same time, producing sounds of the switches. At either end of the Pavilion but beyond screens, were places to buy apple cider and doughnuts, popcorn, etc. (A reference to Ives.) Ronald Nameth arranged the play of films and slides. And also obtained dark light and large balloons. We advertised it with the remark: You won’t hear a thing; you’ll hear everything. No admission was charged. Jack McKenzie, who was coordinator, estimated that five thousand people attended. The various musics each had a stage or platform near the bleachers so that the floor was free for use by the audience. The general sound was of a high volume, though not everything was amplified. Loudspeakers were high up around the perimeter. The general shape of the building is rectangular but with rounded ends.<sup>94</sup>

The context for this last appearance opens a puzzle; it implies that the text does not need to be understood purely as a description of a past event. Cage’s sketched record appears in an anthology of *scripts to perform*. The editorial assumptions behind the anthology are that “innovations in theatrical art in part depend upon *scripting so radically alternative it insures that a performance cannot be realized in conventional ways* [...] an alternative script [...] offers other kinds of text, to induce radically different kinds of performance.”<sup>95</sup> The anthology is collected and published with an eye to the performing artist and to the delivery of “scenarios for live performance”,<sup>96</sup> conducive to alternative performances. The fact that these scripts are collected with view to being performed is even specified in the preface:

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<sup>93</sup> Cage and Kostelanetz, *John Cage*.

<sup>94</sup> Kostelanetz 1980, p. 194. I have here quoted the text in its entirety.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* p. 18.

- “A secondary requirement was that all these extra texts could be performed by someone other than the author.”<sup>97</sup>

And:

- “it is expected that anyone performing any of these scripts publicly (and, especially, commercially) will obtain performance rights from the authors or publishers at addresses listed in the acknowledgements to this book.”<sup>98</sup>

To understand Cage’s text as a contribution to an anthology of theatrical scripts opens other interpretational possibilities than a reading of the text as descriptive of a past event. It changes the status of the text from a view of the past, into one directed towards the future – towards realizations to come.

The text is one page long. No title is given. It begins with a description of a building, a description written in the present tense. This building, the stock pavilion, appears to be, by reading the rest of the text, the venue for a performance – the *Musicircus*. A supplementary description of this site appears also at the end of the text. This is also written in the present tense. The rest of the text is written in the past tense. It is descriptive in its form and shows signs of being written down by memory alone:

- “*Musicircus* was done on November 17, I believe, in 1967.”
- “perhaps others I don’t remember—and my notes and papers regarding it are packed now.”
- “(This is actually someone’s composition—but I don’t now remember whose.)”

The event referred to is *Musicircus* done in 1967 – what it consisted of, who performed, what they performed, and remarks about how it was organized. The descriptive form is rudimentary, but informative. Fetterman, for example, quotes from this text to describe the event in 1967 and calls it the most concise performance description.<sup>99</sup>

The text invites a descriptive reading. In fact, the remarks that introduce this text in its 1970 appearance (*John Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz) enforce such an interpretation:

Cage’s major recent pieces have been environmental extravaganzas, where many unexpected events occur within a delimited space. A letter written in 1969 to the book’s editor describes *Musicircus*

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>98</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>99</sup> Fetterman 1996, p. 139.

(1967), done at the University of Illinois.<sup>100</sup>

The puzzles begin when we in *Scenarios* are confronted by the text as a *script to perform*. Transferring the descriptions in the text to instructions or a map,<sup>101</sup> demands a creative response from the reader and those who might want to use the text as the script for a performance. Should we try to reconstruct the past event as closely to the description as possible? This would of course be impossible and absurd. It would depend upon getting hold of all the people Cage mentions, making them do what they did, and getting a stock pavilion like the one in Urbana for the realization among other things. As well being impracticable this would also contradict other information given in the text:

- “It consisted simply in inviting those who were willing to perform at once (in the same place and time).”
- “No directions were given anyone.”

The text is made ambivalent and open-ended by being written in a style of description and of remembrance, but put in the context of a possible script. The text does not map how we should proceed from the past event to new realizations. However, some of the information given is more easily transferred to instructions:

- You simply invite those who were willing to perform at once (in the same place and time).
- Give no directions to anyone.
- Charge no admission.
- Leave free space in the middle to be used by the audience.

Straightforward, though, it is not. For example it is not apparent whether we should amplify sounds and aim for a general sound level of high volume, or should we interpret this part of the text as an example of how it turned out in 1967.

Kostelanetz’s anthology was published in 1980. However it had actually been conceived in 1973 and had resided in the editor’s cabinet before enough funding had been raised for it to be published.<sup>102</sup> As shown in the quote above, the same editor had received Cage’s description of *Musicircus* in 1969, which in *Scenarios* can be read as a score. It is not apparent who decided to use the *Musicircus*-text from *John Cage* in an anthology of scripts to perform – whether it

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<sup>100</sup> Cage and Kostelanetz, *John Cage*, p. 171.

<sup>101</sup> “A script is the playwright’s road map for the performers, telling them how to proceed.” (Kostelanetz 1980, p. 17.)

<sup>102</sup> Kostelanetz 1980, p. 9.

was the editor or Cage himself – but several of Cage’s scores use a descriptive style within the instructive frame of a score and thereby provoke forms of interpretational ambivalence, as in the reference to the first performance in the published score of 4’33’’ from 1960,<sup>103</sup> the a priori score of *Variations V* (1965) discussed later, and the sketchy reminiscence of a performance making up the score of *Variations VIII* (1978). In this way, Cage’s text in *Scenarios* is not extraordinary, sharing the character of other published scores by Cage.

### 2.3.2 The significance of the non-score

As we have seen, Cage categorizes *Musicircus* as one of his initiated performances that does not involve notation. The text, the script, we have just discussed can be understood as a score, and even a published one, though not through Cage’s ordinary channel, his publisher Henmar Press of C. F. Peters Corporation (New York).<sup>104</sup> However, as a project that had been dormant for several years, the anthology does not seem to be a reliable way of getting a work published, especially in view of the fact that Cage had a contract with Peters that enabled him to publish very unconventional and at times rudimentary scores.<sup>105</sup>

In a letter (April 13, 1973) directed to Henmar Press, Charles Hamm asks about the published status of some of Cage’s works, among them *Musicircus*. The answer Cage’s publisher gives is that “the remaining five titles (MUSIC FOR XENIA, SOUND ANONYMOUSLY RECEIVED, MUSICIRCUS, NEWPORT MIX, and REUNION) are improvisations which do not exist in print and, therefore, do not appear in the attached list of all the works by John Cage.”<sup>106</sup>

A lot of music starts life without being written down and goes on living without having a score as its transmitting point of circulation. Cage however began his artistic career as a composer by *writing music*. He took part in the Western practice of art music, concerned with constructing music through the technique of notation. At the same time, Cage explored the tools of writing to the point where notation as a form of fixed prescription was made ambiguous and was destabilized.

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<sup>103</sup> “NOTE: The title of this work is the total length in minutes and seconds of its performance. At Woodstock, N.Y., August 29, 1952, the title was 4’ 33’’ and the three parts were 33’’, 2’ 40’’, and 1’ 20’’. It was performed by the pianist David Tudor, who indicated the beginnings of parts by closing, and endings by opening the keyboard lid. However, the work may be performed by any instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time.” (4’33’’, 1960.)

<sup>104</sup> Named only Peters hereafter.

<sup>105</sup> See footnote no. 44.

<sup>106</sup> Letter from C.F. Peters Corporation, dated April 17, 1973.

Initially I had not been so concerned about the theme of a published score, or what a non-score could mean. My main interest had been in *Musicircus*'s abundance of simultaneous activity, and how this excess, combined with the performers' freedom to choose their own program and the mobility of the audience, took Cage's concept of *indeterminacy* to its utmost form. In fact I had viewed the non-score as an indication of the ultimate application of this concept.<sup>107</sup>

Over a coffee table in Berlin I was confronted with the question of the non-score: Why didn't Cage make a score for *Musicircus*? He wrote a lot of rudimentary scores, why not one in this case? The score of *Variations V* (1965), for example, was written after the first performance and Cage used the first performance as a reference for his "thirty-seven remarks re an audio-visual performance"<sup>108</sup> which constitutes the score. It is an "*a posteriori* score"<sup>109</sup>. Another example is *Rozart Mix* (1965) that consists of a collection of correspondence between Cage and Alvin Lucier. Could it be that Cage didn't publish a score for *Musicircus* because he didn't want anybody else to realise such an event? The non-score, or the non-publication of a score, could be seen as a strategy to protect authenticity and ownership in an alternative way to the enforcement of copyright of published scores. By not publishing a score, nothing is formally given away. I mention this, because the practice of writing music can be viewed with a dual perspective. On the one hand, unlike in oral traditions where origins are often unknown, the tradition of written music has made the originator – the composer – prominent. Who would consider playing a written work without telling the audience who had composed it? Indeed, a body of laws supports and protects this respect for ownership. On the other hand, when music is published the composition enters into a process of distribution – it is imparted to those interested and lives its own life detached from the composer's sheltering wings.

A discussion of the genesis of *Variations V* will highlight these questions. *Variations V*, an audio-visual performance, was first staged in 1965. It was a multi media event with dance, music and visual images, and a specially designed technological system had a defining role in the formation of the event. By using photoelectric cells, capacitive antennas and contact microphones, information from the dancers' movements was converted to sound information. The technical devices made it possible "to 'brush information against information', to cross one art with another, and thus to generate a complex experience."<sup>110</sup> This interaction between the dance and sound produced a complex situation where the origins of the output were impossible to detect. What emerged did not have one single cause but was a result of a complex of interpenetrating factors and actions. "While the musicians were constantly mixing

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<sup>107</sup> Fetterman expresses similar views. (Fetterman 1996, p. 139.)

<sup>108</sup> Score, *Variations V*.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Pritchett 1993, p. 153.

and routing their sound sources to the loudspeakers in the hall, these sources were gated (switched on and off) by various devices controlled by the dancers”.<sup>111</sup> Beside the dance and music there were also visuals – distorted television images by Nam June Paik and film by Stan VanDerBeek – and Beverly Emmons designed the lighting.

A reference to the first performance figures already in the title page of the score:

VARIATIONS V  
Thirty-seven remarks re an audio-visual performance  
(Foot-notes refer to performance at Philharmonic Hall,  
July 23, 1965, Lincoln Center, New York City.)

For Mary Sisler

John Cage [signature]  
Stony Point, September-October 1965

The score does not hide the fact that *Variations V* resulted from collaboration. Cage informs us in his remarks who made the different devices for the event at Philharmonic Hall and who was responsible for what. For example, the sound-system was designed by David Tudor, the oscillators, electronic percussion devices and capacitive antennas were devised by Robert Moog, Billy Klüver had devised the photoelectric cells, the mixer was designed by Max Mathews, the choreography was by Merce Cunningham, film by Stan VanDerBeek and so on.

Already here, two distinct characteristics of what a score is are questioned:

- The score as a notation and prescription of a specific sonic art object.
- The role of the composer as the work’s originator.

Why did Cage write a score? Cage gives an answer at a discussion panel<sup>112</sup> where this theme is brought up. David Tudor, Gordon Mumma and Cage discuss their performances of *Variations V* and the piece’s character of interactivity where no one could control the final result of their actions. The theme of the score also comes up. After the interviewer comments that conceptually, *Variations V* lacked a controlling composer’s mind that said “this is the way the piece is going to sound”, Gumma remarks that the piece does have a published score written by Cage, and Cage explains that it is not a traditional score, but “remarks following the performance”. Gumma comments further, that anyway Cage gets royalties for the piece. Cage laughs and says “Right”, but continues by saying something that offers an explanation for why he wrote the score. He says that he was endeavouring to write remarks that “suggest

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<sup>111</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>112</sup> *A kind of anarchy: Merce Cunningham and music*, videotaped panel discussion. Merce Cunningham Dance Foundation Collection, New York Public Library.



the possibility of making a similar performance”. The score, in other words, makes it easier for the further distribution of re-realizations of something similar to what was done on July 23, 1965 at Lincoln Center, New York City – anyone interested can go to the publisher, obtain the score and produce their own realisation without Cage, Tudor, Cunningham et cetera being present. The score is a readily available invitation to anyone interested in a re-realization of *Variations V*.

Cage could have done the same thing with *Musicircus*. Perhaps the score could have looked like my list here:

#### **Musicircus**

You simply invite those who are willing to perform at once (in the same place and time).<sup>113</sup>

Bring together under one roof as much music (as many musical groups and soloists) as practical under the circumstances.<sup>114</sup>

There should at all times be many people performing simultaneously.<sup>115</sup>

Let each thing that happens happen from its own centre, whether it is music or dance. Don't go in the direction of one thing 'using' another. Then they will all go together beautifully (as birds, aeroplanes, trucks, radios, etc. do).<sup>116</sup>

Arrange performers on platforms or within roped-off areas.<sup>117</sup>

Exercise no aesthetic bias.<sup>118</sup> Give no directions to anyone.<sup>119</sup>

There must be plenty of space for the audience to walk around.<sup>120</sup>

There should be food on sale and drinks (as at a circus). Dancers and acrobats.<sup>121</sup>

It should last longer than ordinary concerts, starting at 7 or 8 in the evening, and continuing, say, to midnight.<sup>122</sup>

Since none of the musicians are being paid, there being too many of them, the entire event must be free to the public.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Cage, text in *Scenarios* quoted at p. 31.

<sup>114</sup> John Cage, letter dated June 6, 1973.

<sup>115</sup> John Cage, letter dated December 23, 1979.

<sup>116</sup> John Cage, letter dated February 17, 1979.

<sup>117</sup> John Cage, letter dated June 6, 1973.

<sup>118</sup> John Cage, letter dated February 17, 1979.

<sup>119</sup> Cage, text in *Scenarios*.

<sup>120</sup> John Cage, letter dated June 6, 1973.

<sup>121</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>122</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>123</sup> John Cage, letter dated December 23, 1979.

Writing and publishing a score can be understood as a gesture of invitation to anybody interested in realising the work. The published score thus represents a gesture, *giving* the work to the public, and is not merely to be understood as *somebody's* property. From this perspective – that of the non-score, existing within a practice dominated by the written score and a distribution system connected with published scores – not to write a score can be understood as a strategy to protect artistic endowment from being separated from its originator. In other words: It was not meant that others should do *Musicircus*. An authentic realisation of *Musicircus* needs the presence of Cage. However, this is not the impression I get from source material. Cage elaborates on the answer given by his publisher to Hamm, formerly quoted:

A number of pieces recently are not given to Peters because I wish to keep them free of copyright restrictions e.g. *Musicircus*. Furthermore, it is doubtful whether my work in connection with that piece is as integral a part of it as the work of all the actual performers of it.<sup>124</sup>

The non-published score of *Musicircus* seems to have a deliberate reason: to keep it free of copyright restrictions. A reason that is further elaborated in another letter:

In harmony with the separation of this work [*Musicircus*] from conventional economics, I have not made a score nor have I published one of course.<sup>125</sup>

Cage does not find it problematic either that other people organise a *Musicircus*. Cage tells us, in fact, that he himself didn't organise the first production. He was "happy to just throw out an idea."<sup>126</sup>

*Daniel Charles: In the Musicircus, can there be an organizer?*

John Cage: Yes, but it is better if there are several!

*D.C.: And you didn't organize anything. Someone else organizes, but the essential thing is the collecting together, which you have only suggested.*

J.C.: Yes.

*D.C.: Is the fact that there is someone else who organizes without importance?*

J.C.: No, why?

*D.C.: Don't you run the risk of creating a new centering, as in the happenings, other than your own?*

J.C.: No, in music, there can be much organization or a lot of disorganization – everything is possible. In the same way, the forest includes trees, mushrooms, birds, anything you wish. Although we can still organize a lot and even multiply organizations, in any case, the whole will make a disorganization!<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> John Cage, letter to Charles Hamm, dated May 1, 1973.

<sup>125</sup> John Cage, letter dated December 23, 1979.

<sup>126</sup> Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, p. 196.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 52-53.

The reason for the non-score is not to protect his idea of an arrangement from misuse. The motivation is rather to keep this event-design free from a distributive system infiltrated by conventional economics and give the ownership freely to the participants.

## 2.4 The title

### 2.4.1 Music Circus

I have raised the question of how to identify *Musicircus*, pointing to its ambiguous status. What does the title indicate? Fetterman's designation of musicircus as a Cagean genre labels a whole string of works and initiated performances that share certain common features of musical and performative character. Genre indications, however, can function more broadly than just as a signification of conditions inherent in the artwork alone. Jeffrey Kallberg emphasizes their communicative and persuasive capacities – their rhetorical potential – and what this means for the perceptions of audiences.<sup>128</sup> Genre, he argues, is a social phenomenon. By indicating the genre of a composition, the composer communicates something to the audience; the suggestion actively informs the experience of a musical work and exerts a suggestive force: “It guides the responses of listeners [...] The choice of genre by a composer and its identification by the listener establish the framework for the communication of meaning.”<sup>129</sup> The genre establishes, by this, “a code of social behavior”<sup>130</sup> and “a horizon of expectation”<sup>131</sup>.

The title *Musicircus* plays with the terms *music* and *circus*, giving rise to a wide variety of associations and expectational horizons. The generic term *music* (itself extended in Cage's aesthetics to include all types of sounds and theatrical activity by his equation of music to theatre)<sup>132</sup> is combined with *circus*, a term that both denotes the art form of circus, the venue where it is performed, and the type of company that offers such entertainment. Its associations therefore can vary from a public-minded entertainment including anything from trained animal acts, exhibitions of human skills and daring to clowning, companies having a variety

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<sup>128</sup> Kallberg 1988.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. p. 243.

<sup>130</sup> E. D. Hirsch is stated as the source of the term, *ibid.* p. 243.

<sup>131</sup> The term is said to be Hans Robert Jauss' expression, derived from Husserl's phenomenology of perception, *ibid.* p. 243.

<sup>132</sup> This theme is briefly brought up and discussed later in this chapter under the heading “Circus and happening.”

of employees from different countries and continents, and *circus*, having the same root as circle and circumference, bringing to mind the distinctive environment in which such entertainment is presented – the ring, a circular performance arena – and that gave the circus its name.

The genre indication, or what we in this instance could call an indication of a cross-art-form, is even more striking in the working title of the event at UIUC: *Music Circus*. The event has this title, or is called the musical circus, in the previews I have had access to.<sup>133</sup> It is firstly in the review “*Musicircus* Rocks Stock Pavilion”<sup>134</sup> that the final title *Musicircus* appears. And the few letters by Cage from the time that mention the coming event reveal that the final title came up late in the planning process:

It’s not yet certain whether that “music circus” will take place at Lincoln Sq. Perhaps not take place. Perhaps some place else. At any rate Ben Johnston is the person to get in touch with regarding making a film of it.<sup>135</sup>

I have no objections to a press conference but I will be quite occupied, being necessary for rehearsals and performances of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and that of the Musical Circus, the former in the Assembly Hall, the latter in the Stock Pavilion.<sup>136</sup>

After Redlands/TV get me back to Urbana. 16th is concert here. 17th is going to be a glorious music circus arranged by yrs. truly 18th in the morning is the panel I’m on.<sup>137</sup>

The working title of the event in 1967 was not exceptional. The actor and ex-carnival showman St. John Terrell established in 1949 a summer-theatre scene called Music Circus in Lambertville, New Jersey. Here, during the summer season, light operas and operettas were staged ‘in the round’, within a circus-style big top.<sup>138</sup> Edward M. Greenberg and Joel E.

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<sup>133</sup> I have found three items on presentations from local newspapers collected in the John Cage Archive at Northwestern University, Evanston. (Sibbert, Converse (three items) and Yahn.) The first article is from Sep. 29, 1967, the others appeared just before the event Nov. 11th and Nov 17th. The context for the earliest article is to present Cage as one of the new faculty members, a visiting one, of the Centre for Advanced Study. The other previews are written in the context of the upcoming event – *Musicircus* – and the symposium “University in Motion: Matrix for the Arts” that *Musicircus* was part of. All the articles have broad presentations of the composer John Cage, including his challenging aesthetic and musical philosophy.

<sup>134</sup> The review “*Musicircus* Rocks Stock Pavilion” by Zumstein provides my first source where *Musicircus* is used as the title of the event. I must though add that I have not had any access to posters, program notes or other such items, which we can assume used the name *Musicircus*. Such sources are not represented in the Cage archive at Northwestern University. According to existing source material at Cage archives, Ronald Nameth informed me in an interview I did in 2006, that because of the presence at the campus of those involved in the event, there was little need for written correspondence. This explains partly the scarcity of sources and existing notes about the planning process of the event.

<sup>135</sup> Cage, letter dated Oct. 2, 1967.

<sup>136</sup> Cage, letter dated Oct. 26, 1967.

<sup>137</sup> Cage, letter dated Oct. 29, 1967.

<sup>138</sup> See for example Case, “Lambertville Music Circus – Show, Casts and Playbills” (Web Page).

Rubin report in 1952:

Something new has been added to the American summer-theatre scene: a type of theatre which bids fair to become one of the most popular of summer entertainments, the Music Circus. In 1949, in Lambertville, New Jersey, a young actor and ex-carnival showman, St. John Terrell, opened a season of operetta favorites played on a center stage to audiences of nine hundred seated in fourteen graded rows of canvas chairs, all enclosed within a large canvas circus tent.<sup>139</sup>

The name Music Circus, associated to Terrell's establishment, sits easily within the worlds of popular culture and "light entertainment". We could remark that terms such as "public-minded", "popular" and "commercial" could also easily be associated to traditional circuses. And these associations further nourish questions about the Cagean Music Circus in relation to popular culture and the schism between "light entertainment" and "serious art". This schism has been used to distinguish so called fine arts from those of utility and pure entertainment and to justify the fine arts' autonomous and elevated position. And, as we will see in the next chapter, the music philosopher Lydia Goehr emphasizes the connection between what has been regarded as serious and valuable in music, and the work-concept that has come to dominate Western art music.

Furthermore we could note that Terrell's Music Circus designates nothing like a work or a specific performance. We are here considering an establishment and productions that use the design of the circus to present their repertoire. The new setting though opened new possibilities for productions. Greenberg and Rubin quoted above write: "The Music Circus provides excellent opportunities for experimentation in staging, design, and lightening not elsewhere available in the theatre today."<sup>140</sup>

Having the discussion of the character of the work in mind, or its loss as previously introduced, the term Music Circus above designates nothing like a work, but rather, a form of presentation. Cage's circus can also be understood in this way. It denotes a way of organising and evening of music, dance, theatre and art – a type of music theatrical production in Cage's terminology – and not a single piece. The discussion of work, non-work, or even anti-work, a

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<sup>139</sup> Greenberg and Rubin, p. 26. St. John Terrell's summer shows were an instant success, and it inspired the launch of several other Music Circuses. About 40 "tune tents" became scattered around the country. St. John Terrell's Music Circus went on until 1970. Today three of the other establishments still exist: Sacramento Music Circus, South Shore Music Circus (Cohasset, MA), and the Melody Tent (Hyannis, MA, on Cape Cod). See Case, "Music circus" in *Wikipedia*, "Music Circus" in *California Musical Theatre* (home page), South Shore Music Circus (home page).

<sup>140</sup> Greenberg and Rubin, p. 26.

discussion I will come back to in the next chapter, can accordingly seem irrelevant and beside the point. Instead it is the means of organization, staging and the significance of the physical design of the venue itself that indicate the aesthetic nature of these kinds of arrangement.<sup>141</sup> The continuation (re-realizations/new productions) of the first *Musicircus*, as an idea to re-organize the norm of performance, could in this respect be seen as a type of music-theatrical production, a technique of performance extended to a means for arranging alternative “concerts.”

However, the seeming irrelevance of the work category becomes less tenable when confronted by the task of doing a *Musicircus* today. How would we present it? What rhetorical means would we rely on? In considering these questions I believe the work related discourse is found close at hand, including the emphasis on composer, the intention of the work, what characterizes it, and so on. In the next chapter I am going to present Lydia Goehr’s argument that the musical work-concept, consolidated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, still has a strong influence on how music is practiced and presented, including the experimentations of composers such as Cage.<sup>142</sup>

The presentation of the Music Circus, or musical circus at UIUC, in local newspapers and university magazines opens several avenues of interpretation in response to these questions. From one point of view, Cage is presented as helping to organize the event. He is not at all mentioned as its composer. The article “Presenting John Cage’s Electric Music Machine”<sup>143</sup> informs us that Cage will “participate in the Centennial Musical Circus”. His role is later expanded on to indicate an active role as initiator and organizer: “I hope to involve the public in this. I want the performers to be the public. My job is to facilitate their performance.”<sup>144</sup> Later presentations also express Cage’s role as a kind of initiator and organizer. However, his role is presented somewhat ambiguously:

The “Music Circus” which he [Cage] is *helping to engineer* Friday in the Stock Pavilion is a development of this theme [the happening at Black Mountain College in 1952].<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> The significance of staging in this respect points to aspects that we are going to discuss in chapter four and five under the headings “A performative turn, theory” and “*Musicircus* as a staged event”.

<sup>142</sup> Later in this thesis these questions become relevant when we are going to discuss the realization of *Musicircus* in Trondheim in 2006.

<sup>143</sup> Sibbert 1967.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Converse 1967b. My italics.

Cage will *present* what he calls a Music Circus tonight in the University Stock Pavilion from 8 to 1. [...] Cage's *organization* of the Music Circus tonight illustrates his essentially anarchic view of the world as a global village.<sup>146</sup>

There is an announcement in the same magazine, from which the last quote is taken, wherein the circus is presented as Cage's Music Circus:

JOHN CAGE'S MUSIC CIRCUS. 8 pm to 1 am, Stock Pavilion. No charge.<sup>147</sup>

Even when Cage is not presented as the composer of the coming circus, and though his role is presented in a slightly ambiguous way, Cage's views and thoughts about art, music, life and society are emphasized to contextualize the upcoming event. From another point of view, therefore, the previews play on work related discourses to explain the event and outline a horizon of expectation. The forthcoming Music Circus is basically explained in terms of Cage's aesthetic thinking and his former activity as composer and organizer of happenings:

The arts will interpenetrate and people will become involved within a work of art. An example of this is the "happening", which Cage pioneered while teaching at Black Mountain College. Several forms of art – films, paintings, poetry, music and dance – are performed at the same time, relevant to each other only in that they are concurrent, yet by this very fact closely related. The "Music Circus" which he is helping to engineer Friday in the Stock Pavilion is a development of this theme.<sup>148</sup>

Therefore we could argue that the first *Musicircus* was also presented in the mould of the work discourse. We are presented with a *Cagean* Music Circus where the term 'circus' is explained by referring to Cage's former artistic experimentations and his current aesthetic view which is not least inspired by social considerations.

#### 2.4.2 The circus's circle

The term *circus* has the same root as circle and circumference, and this aspect is accentuated by Cage's usage of the word.<sup>149</sup> Dan G. Hoffman, in a comment from 1951 upon new words from the Music Circus, connects Terrell's Music Circus to inventions of the theatre-in-the-round, the "staging of a dramatic presentation upon a platform completely surrounded by

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<sup>146</sup> Yahn 1967. My italics.

<sup>147</sup> "Focus on the Week Ahead", *Focus on the Arts at Illinois*, Nov. 17, 1967.

<sup>148</sup> Converse 1967b.

<sup>149</sup> An aesthetic-philosophical discussion of the concept of circle in Cage's aesthetics will be taken up in chapter 6.

specta-action – like that in the prize ring or the circus.”<sup>150</sup> The circus term’s association to a circular form, extended to the-theatre-in-the-round, is played on symbolically in the presentations of the first *Musicircus*:

The audience will be in the round, with performers going in between them, around them, maybe even over them, because, says Cage, “The audience must be in the round because we live in the round. Art and life as an individual experience surround the audience with activity rather than vice versa. Art, if it has any use, must teach us to live in the round.”<sup>151</sup>

Arena-style theatres with the stage in the middle and audiences placed around were not uncommon in the USA in the 1960s. After the Second World War theatre-in-the-round became quite common as an alternative to the proscenium theatre, not least in the rapidly expanding world of American university drama, both for economical reasons – entailing relatively low costs, though still great flexibility – and for its capacity to evoke intimacy.<sup>152</sup> Cage plays with the image of the circular arrangement when he adopts the term circus. He indicates a performance situation where the audience moves in the middle and between performers.<sup>153</sup> Kallberg, already referred to, accentuates how the rhetorical function of genre adoption includes choices where the norms of a specific genre are not followed – their fulfilment delayed, broken or even contradicted. The Cagean Music Circus turns the usual situation on its head. In a *Musicircus* it is the audience that is in the middle with the performers around.

“To live in the round” is, in the formerly quoted preview, an elaboration of Cage’s “anarchic view of the world as a global village”.<sup>154</sup> This condition is associated with a multiplicity of living that represents a “both/and” view of the world rather than an “either/or” perception and includes a view that makes value judgments irrelevant: “Beauty is everywhere; we must stop distinguishing between beauty and ugliness. Cage explains that in the present era of the global

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<sup>150</sup> Hoffman 1951, pp. 75-76.

<sup>151</sup> Yahn 1967.

<sup>152</sup> Grove 1989, Aronson 1996, Barnes 2003, Aronson 1996, “Theatre-in-the-Round” in *The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, and “Arena-Style Theatre” in *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre*.

<sup>153</sup> Cage and theatre: Cage did not only know about modern dance, but knew also explorations within the current avant-garde scene of theatre such as those made by the Living Theatre in New York, and he knew Antonin Artaud’s “The theatre and its double”, translated from French by M. C. Richards, a friend of Cage and one of the residential artists who performed in the untitled event at Black Mountain. Artaud’s book was a formative source of inspiration for the happening organized at Black Mountain College in 1952. For Cage and the Living Theatre, see for example Silverman 2010, pp. 94-99, Cage and theatre, see Deufert 2001, Cage and Kirby and Schechner 1995, Kostelanetz 1968, Meyer 1998.

<sup>154</sup> Yahn 1967.



village we need a both/and view of the world, rather than an either/or perception.”<sup>155</sup>

It could be interesting to introduce the big three-ring American circuses here, such as the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus that had their hey-days around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are not included in the previews of *Musicircus*, but as a part of American culture and history it is natural to think of them, both when the event at UIUC is linked to diversity, quantity of offerings for the senses, and a community embracing the multiplicity of living having an international character that in the previews is expressed with reference to Marshall McLuhan’s term, the ‘global village’.<sup>156</sup>

The big American circuses at the turn of the century criss-crossed the continent by train and offered a remarkable spectacle when coming to town. Barnum and Bailey’s circus had by 1890 a vast big top that contained three rings, two stages, a peripheral hippodrome track, and a space for ten thousand spectators. This expansion of the classic one-ring circus redefined this type of entertainment. Displays could go on simultaneously, although they were organized so the most promoted acts took place in the centre ring. Even though seating was differentiated with the best view reserved for those in high-priced seats, no spectator could take in everything at once, leaving a sensation of unfathomable excitement and a reason to visit the show again. These circuses did not only include an abundance of offerings under the big top. Adjacent to the main tent there could also be freak shows, exotic animals, carnival performers, and animal menageries.<sup>157</sup>

The golden age of the big travelling circuses was definitely over by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>158</sup> New media of popular entertainment like cinema and television made their presence less

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<sup>155</sup> Yahn 1967.

<sup>156</sup> Cage credits McLuhan with the term ‘global village’ that describes the modern world as “electronically contracted, the globe is no more than a village. Electric speed in bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden implosion has heightened human awareness of responsibility to an intense degree.” (McLuhan 2001, p. 5) Furthermore, Cage adopts McLuhan’s argument that the new technologies of communication and transport systems reduce not only literally the distance between people but also transform our mode of being through extending our faculties to impart and know: “Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man—the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media.” (Ibid. pp. 3-4.)

<sup>157</sup> Davis 2001 and 2002, Stoddart 2000, Weitz.

<sup>158</sup> The period from 1871 to 1915 forms the Golden Age of the big North American circuses. See Stoddart 2000, p. 23.

significant, but still the circus flourished and three-ring shows were put on, though the leading company Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus<sup>159</sup> had abandoned using the tent in 1956 in favour of permanent exhibition halls and sports arenas.<sup>160</sup>

The historic three-ring circus, like the *Musicircus* at UIUC, represents an excessive abundance – a crazy mix (not least when side shows of freaks, exotic animals et cetera are included) – a multitude of offerings to stimulate the senses, a simultaneous way of presenting all its offerings and an institution of global and international colouring. Still, even though the big American circuses could easily be associated with plurality and the multiplicity of life, Janet M. Davis (2002) emphasizes how these big travelling circuses also mirrored the norms operating in a society that compartmentalize people into segregated categories:

The railroad circus represented a “human menagerie” (a term popularized by P. T. Barnum) of racial diversity, gender difference, bodily variety, animalized human beings, and humanized animals that audiences were unlikely to see anywhere else. But the circus’s celebration of diversity was often illusionary, because the circus used normative ideologies of gender, racial hierarchy, and individual mobility to explain social transformations and human difference. At first glance, this is a problematic claim because the nomadic circus travelled on the fringes of community life— in fact, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, its workers consciously felt that they were a breed apart from the rest of society. Indeed, performers themselves embraced cultural diversity within this international, multiracial “travelling town.” Still, the circus clearly promulgated the major social currents of the day.<sup>161</sup>

From one point of view, the Cagean circus plays along with expectations of the genre by magnifying the term circus’ association to a celebration of diversity. From another point of view, and taking note of Davis’ remarks quoted above, Cage also in this instance questions norms by giving a twist to the “codes of social behaviour” and “horizons of expectation”. The Cagean circus exaggerates the simultaneous character of what is offered, placing the audience in the middle, multiplying the “rings” infinitely so the space designed for performance versus viewing becomes ambiguous – fluctuating and overlapping – and it all comes about without payment, thereby de-commercializing the highly commercialized image of the ordinary circus.

### 2.4.3 The circus of decentralization

Following the event in 1967 the ‘circus’ begins to appear and recur in Cage’s oeuvre and

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<sup>159</sup> Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, two leading companies on the American continent at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, merged in 1919.

<sup>160</sup> Parkinson and more, “circus” in *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

<sup>161</sup> Davis 2002, pp. 10-11.

aesthetic vocabulary. Besides the mentioned productions called *Musicircus*, scores appear like \_\_\_, \_\_\_ circus on \_\_\_, (1979), realized as the radio play *Roaratorio, an Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake* (1979), and *Scottish Circus* (1990) based on Scottish traditional Music, in addition to all those compositions and productions that include musicircus as a technique for performance.<sup>162</sup> The crazy mix of the three-ring circus is by Cage transferred to a method of generating a performative collage of a multi-focal quality that de-centralizes the situation of performance.<sup>163</sup>

By “circus” I mean many pieces going on at once, rather than one alone. Because seen from a particular point of view, music is simply the art of focusing attention on one thing at a time. In my recent works, since about '68, I have tried not to focus the attention on one thing at a time, and have used this principle that I call “musicircus” – of having many things going on at once.<sup>164</sup>

However, the practice of letting unrelated material be performed simultaneously was not new. The untitled event at Black Mountain College is the most famous example, but Cage had before that event in 1952 explored the possibilities of teamwork within a mix of independent solutions for more than a decade through his work with dancers, and in the 1940s Cage and Cunningham had developed methods for putting dance and music together based on neutral time structures filled independently and put together as a joint performance. In the 1950s series of works were composed, such as the time length pieces,<sup>165</sup> which could be performed in portions or complete, and alone or together with other pieces in the series. And Cage’s *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* from 1958 has no master plan but a collection of parts that operate as independent units in an orchestral play of interpenetrations.<sup>166</sup>

But while Cage explored the simultaneity of non-coordinated acts in the 1950s mainly within a paradigm of modernism – judged by Clement Greenberg to be a highly self-critical business, questioning the limits of a field of competence by addressing the specificity of an art form and exploring this art form’s possibilities through media specific methods –<sup>167</sup>

Cage’s adopted term ‘circus’ reflects a post-modernistic orientation of mixed means and a

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<sup>162</sup> Some examples of compositions and events besides *HPSCHD* (1969): *Renga* (1975-76) and *Apartment House 1776* (1976), *Thirty pieces for five orchestras* (1981), *Dance / 4 Orchestras* (1982), *Mewantemooseicday* (1969), *Silent Environment* (1979), *A house full of music* (1982), *Rolywholyover: A Circus for Museum* (posthumous exhibition, 1993, planned before Cage died).

<sup>163</sup> *Musicircus* as a live generated collage is discussed in chapter five.

<sup>164</sup> Cage (interview, 1975) in Kostelanetz 2003, p. 88.

<sup>165</sup> 31'57.9864'' *For a Pianist* (1954), 34'46.776'' *For a Pianist* (1954), 26'1.1499'' *For a String Player* (1955), 27'10.554'' *For a Percussionist* (1956).

<sup>166</sup> The concept ‘interpenetration’ is presented and discussed in chapter six.

<sup>167</sup> Greenberg 2004, p. 141.

hybridity that becomes clearly present in his oeuvre from the 1960s. When Daniel Charles asked in 1970: “What do you consider a ‘circus situation’?”, and Cage answered:

The process opens up to include things which have no emotive properties, but also to reinclude objects charged with significance and intention. These objects are carried along in the process, they no longer dominate it and turn it into an object.<sup>168</sup>

‘Circus’, as a method involving “simultaneity of unrelated intentions”<sup>169</sup> includes the ready-mades of socially encoded sounds in the play of surprises, chance and indeterminacy.<sup>170</sup> The aura of a referential atmosphere, though, is juxtaposed with other fragments; meta-narratives are broken down, a fluidity of non-exclusive positions is enforced so any collective frame of reference is dismantled – there is not a unified story to tell. ‘Circus’ denotes an abundance of simultaneity where “there is not one center, but [...] plurality of centers”.<sup>171</sup> It characterizes situations of plurality and diversity that quantitatively shatter unified schemas for making differences.

This method of de-centring a situation that includes material loaded with intention and coded objects is, though, underpinned by aesthetic formulations moulded in the 1950s. The aesthetics of decentralization, of undermining the relevance of a superior point of view, enforced by chance operations and indeterminacy, is in the 1950s elaborated by an adoption of Buddhist ideas, such as the notion of unique though interpenetrating centres of being.<sup>172</sup> The issue then is not to present a certain idea, but to provide situations that open our experiential openness for the *is* of the aesthetic situation, a presence fashioned not by a dual construct of the ideal versus the implemented but a non-dualistic experience of the spirituality of matter and the matter of spirituality.

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<sup>168</sup> Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>169</sup> Cage (interview, 1983), in Kostelanetz 2003, p. 64.

<sup>170</sup> Marcel Duchamp had presented the ‘ready-made’, an ordinary object transferred from the sphere of use and everyday life to the contemplative atmosphere of an art exhibition, already in 1913 (The Bicycle Wheel). Firstly in the 1960s its significance was felt in the art world. Milan’s Schwartz Gallery exhibited recreations of lost readymade works by Duchamp in 1964 and the ‘ready-made’ was embraced in a drive to generic art expressed in minimalism, conceptual art, land art and performance art. Cage had, though, worked with kinds of ready-mades already in the 1930s and ‘40s with his “found sounds” of percussion music. Cage met Duchamp personally for the first time in 1942, and he expresses a high esteem for Duchamp’s work. Later, from about 1965, he met Duchamp on a regularly basis with the excuse of playing chess.

<sup>171</sup> Cage quoted by Junkerman 1994, p. 63, in a footnote. The full quote is: “The world ‘circus’ means to me that there is not one center, but that life itself is a plurality of centers. This is a Buddhist idea.” (Loc. cit.) Junkerman refers to *Conversing with Cage*, ed. R. Kostelanetz, (New York: Limelight Press, 1979), p. 232, as the source, but as I know the first edition is from 1987. I have not found this quote in Kostelanetz 2003, neither in the edition from 1987.

<sup>172</sup> Cage adopted term *interpenetration* will be discussed in chapter six.

Compositionally, this is expressed by a non-dualistic approach to structure and material, form and content.<sup>173</sup> While Cage still in the 1940s sees the necessity of organizing material,<sup>174</sup> in the 1950s it is enough to stage it. The material does not need deliberate structuring to effect aesthetic impact; sonic phenomena have already an agential structure with both form and content. What matters is to release actional potentialities within a delimited field and provide opportunities for creative interactions.<sup>175</sup> The circus concept employed by Cage continues with this non-dualistic shift in his aesthetics, and accentuates its social bearings:

The question is: Is my thought changing? It is and it isn't. One evening after dinner I was telling friends that I was now concerned with improving the world. One of them said: I thought you always were. I then explained that I believe – and am acting upon – Marshall McLuhan's statement that we have through electronic technology produced an extension of our brains to the world formerly outside of us. To me that means that the disciplines, gradual and sudden (principally Oriental), formerly practiced by individuals to pacify their minds, bringing them into accord with ultimate reality, must now be practiced socially.<sup>176</sup>

#### 2.4.4 Circus and happening

All the previews connect the upcoming *Musircircus* with Cage's former experimentation with happenings, especially the happening at Black Mountain College which took place during the summer of 1952:

Cage organized a show there [Black Mountain College] in which all the resident artists performed at the same time. He drew his inspiration for the original happening from two sources: his own work with chance operations in structuring musical compositions and from the idea that each thing that can be experienced [...] is a strength in itself; each single unity does not have to lead to another thing or be an interconnected part of some larger composition.<sup>177</sup>

This untitled event, created collaboratively, but without a unifying plot or directions for the contributive content provided by each of the participants other than a shared frame of real time and the specificity of a place, has retrospectively been called the first happening – an event that heralded the performative turn of the 1960s that explicitly found expression in the emergence of performance art.

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<sup>173</sup> The transformation is described in the lecture "Composition as process" (1958), where Cage presents his current stance to composition to being a non-dualistic approach to structure and material, form and content. Cage, *Silence*, pp. 18-34.

<sup>174</sup> See for example Cage, *Silence*, pp. 3-6 and 89-93.

<sup>175</sup> The material as having its own agential structure will be discussed later and especially brought up as an argument in chapter six.

<sup>176</sup> From Cage's foreword to *A Year from Monday*, p. ix.

<sup>177</sup> Yahn 1967. My underlining.

Connected to the presentation of the event as a happening, the event is presented as an art event where different art forms interpenetrate each other and where the interpenetrations reflect an anarchistic form of organization. Michael Kirby, in an article from 1965, compares developments within the new theatre with the American three-ring circus:

If a circus were a work of art, it would be an excellent example of a Happening. Except for the clowns [...], the performances are non-matrixed. The acrobats, jugglers, and animal trainers are “merely” carrying out their activities. The grips or stagehands become performers, too, as they dismantle and rig the equipment – demonstrating that non-matrixed performing exists at all levels of difficulty. The structure of a three-ring circus makes use of simultaneous as well as sequential compartments. There is no information structure: the acts do not add meaning to one another, and one can be fully “understood” without any of the others. At the same time the circus is a total performance and not just the sum of its parts. The flow of processions alternates with focused activity in the rings. Animal acts or acrobatic acts are presented at the same time. Sometimes all but one of the simultaneous acts end at the same moment, concentrating the spectators’ previously scattered attention on a single image. Perhaps tumblers and riders are presented early in the program, and a spatial progression is achieved by ending the program with the high wire and trapeze artists. And the circus, even without its traditional tent, has strong environmental aspects. The exhibits of the side show, the menagerie, and the uniformed vendors in the aisles are all part of the show. Sometimes small flashlights with cords attached are hawked to the children: whenever the lights are dimmed, the whole space is filled with hundreds of tiny lights being swung in circles.<sup>178</sup>

Kirby points here to several moments that are not only relevant for the Cagean ‘circus’ but generally for Cage’s aesthetics and his understanding of music as theatre.<sup>179</sup>

- the performances are non-matrixed; activities are “merely” carried out,
- the grips or stagehands becomes performers too; non-matrixed performing exists at all levels of difficulty; everybody is a performer,
- there is no information structure: the acts do not add meaning to one another, and any one can be fully “understood” without any of the others,
- there is a strong environmental aspect.

It is not the epic drama that Cage uses as model for his theatricalised music. Music as theatre emphasises the multi-sensory quality of musical performances. The musical experience is not only related to one sense – hearing – but the whole of our sensory apparatus: We see as well as hear somebody perform a piece of music.

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<sup>178</sup> Kirby 1965, pp. 30-31.

<sup>179</sup> The aspects pointed out by Kirby are also important for the German theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte’s historical reading of the arts from the 1960s and 1970s. She argues that a performative turn appears that calls for other ways of thinking about art than those expressed by the dominant approach that focuses upon the artistic artefact – the work of art – its creator and reception, and less upon the live situation of performance. Chapter four and five will draw attention to a performative shift in perspective where the aspect of *doing* and the *how* is highlighted together with the art event’s environmental and social belonging (embeddedness).

We could think that by defining music as theatre Cage has in fact stressed the fictional aspect of art: Art operates on a different level than the courses of actual facts. This though is not the case. It is not the fictional aspect that is accentuated by Cage, but theatre as an art form that includes all the senses, involves all types of media and emphatically displays the character of process: “Relevant action is theatrical (music /imaginary separation of hearing from the other senses/ does not exist), inclusive and intentionally purposeless. Theatre is continually becoming that it is becoming; each human being is at the best point of reception.”<sup>180</sup>

This accentuation of the performative that Cage had already explicitly advanced in the fifties is from a broader historic view an indication of a performative turn that fully blossomed in the new art forms of performance art and in the happenings that really began to flourish in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>181</sup> As Kirby emphasises, these performances transform ordinary conceptions of theatre by accentuating purely performative qualities independent of plot, fictitious characters and narrative structures. The live situation of the performance is highlighted; this unique quality that evades duplication and commodification. The work concept becomes thereby also questioned. We have now, in a sense, jumped over the next chapter and begun to introduce chapter four, because the elements pointed to by Kirby are also important for the historical reading of the German theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte. This reading informs Fischer-Lichte’s development of the aesthetics of performativity that we will rely on heavily when our approach takes a performative turn. However, I am still not ready to leave the work concept. In the next chapter we are going to scrutinize this concept further and discuss its relevance/irrelevance for the Cagean circus and its connected aesthetics.

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<sup>180</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 14.

<sup>181</sup> Kostelanetz calls this movement “the Theatre of Mixed Means” in 1968. (Kostelanetz 1968, p. xi.)

### 3 WORK – ANTI-WORK?

What, precisely, does this, this beautiful profound object, this masterpiece, have to do with Life?<sup>182</sup>

#### 3.1 Introduction

*Musicircus* evades easy classification. It does not have a composer in the ordinarily understood sense, the status of a score is ambiguous if we can indeed say there is a score, it wasn't *composed* in the way that activity would ordinarily be understood and when staged, the performance will vary every time. In other words, *Musicircus* completely breaks with the paradigmatic notion of a musical work.

I have already here alluded to a knot of concepts (composer, score, composition, performance) making up a network of meanings attributed to the musical artwork without scrutinizing the conceptual bearings any further. Most often this is the case. We do not need to describe and define what a work is to proceed, for example, with a musicological argument. Its meaning is somehow taken for granted even if its ontological status has been found troublesome by many music philosophers.<sup>183</sup> The status of the work has not become less troublesome through musical studies of ethnomusicologists and scholars of popular music: How adequate is it to conceptualise music according to works of art when confronted by types and practices where the emphasis appears to be put somewhere else, for example on improvisational skills?

The challenge is not just brought about from outside the field of Western art music. Striking in this respect is the experimental music pioneered by Cage, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff and Earle Brown in the early fifties, and developments within the *new music* of post-war Europe. And at the other end of the historical spectrum, there has been a growing interest in early music and its reconstructions with a quest to reveal how it was originally presented

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<sup>182</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p.130.

<sup>183</sup> Treitler ("History and the Ontology of the Musical Work", 1993) illustrates this situation by quoting several philosophers who have questioned the ontological status of the work (Kendall L. Walton, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Jerrold Levinson, Roman Ingarden) and goes on by quoting Karl Popper: " 'A musical composition has a very strange sort of existence' [...] which 'is neither the score [Mozart] wrote ... nor is it the sum total of the imagined acoustic experiences Mozart had while writing the symphony. Nor is it any of the performances. Nor is it all performances together, nor [...] the class of all performances.' " (p. 483.)



and played. Implied in this pursuit of authentic rendering, established practices of presenting works from the early repertoire of Western music have been reconsidered. The *work* as a legitimate pathway into the world of music has therefore come under attack from different sides.

In view of *Musicircus*'s genesis and its realisation in 1967, it may in fact seem awkward to categorize it as a musical work at all and therefore to discuss it according to a work concept. Would it not be more adequate to speak about it in other terms? I have already mentioned, in the last chapter, reasons why the work concept is still relevant: *Musicircus* appears in compiled lists of Cage's work, and when realised today it would seem unthinkable not to acknowledge Cage as a kind of originator.

These reasons are connected to the prominent position the *work* has within Western art music. Cage is situated within this tradition, and is located there by his audience. He started his compositional career by *writing* music; he composed works. He did not enter the musical art scene as a folk or jazz musician. And, as we have seen, even though Cage categorises *Musicircus* as one of the un-notated performances he has initiated and doubts his relevance to it as an author (from which we could conclude it belongs to a category of *non-works*), the event traverses Cage's compositional practice. Cage initiated the event during the time he spent as resident composer at UIUC. Cage, the avant-garde composer, is given a prominent position in the presentations of the happening, and his compositional experiments are referred to as a background for how the event was organised. Further, the experience seems to have inspired Cage to include 'musicircus' on a broad scale as a performative technique and way to create decentralized collages.<sup>184</sup> *Musicircus* re-realised emphasises this location within the Western tradition of art music, even though this is within a strain that emphatically questions hegemonic features of this very same practice.

It is precisely this questioning I am interested in and within which context I think the work-concept can be appropriately discussed. However, my interest is not in simple classification, but in what the uneasiness of classification can tell us about a broader climate of aesthetic negotiations, of musical-political activity. The work-concept appears in this view not as a neutral concept, but a concept that has bearings on normative principles that operate within a

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<sup>184</sup> See former chapter, p. 43 ff.

practice – a social practice with a certain history and tradition that Cage is part of.

The discussion I introduce here is not new. Lydia Goehr's critical analysis of the work-concept from 1992,<sup>185</sup> on which I will heavily rely, is well known within musicological circles. Further, from the beginning on, Cage have stirred audiences and critics by his questioning of the art of music, like the “noise” of his percussion music and the non-intention of his chance derived compositions. Therefore, some of the arguments appearing in this chapter will probably merely kick in open doors for the reader. However, through the discussion I am going to present, I hope to both clarify my reading of some basic positions in Cage's aesthetics, such as his non-dualistic world view, and prepare a terrain for discussions to come. Cage, through compositional methods, mixing of media and initiation of non-notated performances, challenges and criticises the ordinary understanding of what a musical work is. This critique is followed up by a performative turn in our theoretic approach in the next chapter. Nevertheless, we could still ask: Do his “anti-works” really transform a practice focused upon creating lasting artefacts, and do they provide alternative views to an aesthetic-epistemological field called music? Further, how are these questions dealt with when confronted by the task of doing a *Musicircus* today? Goehr, for example, argues that composers like Cage have not managed to transform the work-concept profoundly, an argument that will be presented more fully later in this chapter.

A discussion of *Musicircus* in terms of the work-concept can therefore be clarifying in two ways. Firstly, it can shed light on what is attacked by the questioning activity performed by the Cagean circus, and secondly, it can illuminate the complex state of artistic explorations that in any case are bound to some form of established practice to execute their interrogations.<sup>186</sup>

Connected aesthetic arguments expressed by Cage become thereby read as part of a discourse – as part of negotiations that goes on within an art practice. Later in this chapter I am going to present Douglas Kahn's argument that Cage's aesthetics represent a continuation of a

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<sup>185</sup> Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*.

<sup>186</sup> I mainly discuss *Musicircus* according to the practice of Western art music in this chapter. We could of course argue that it is not only this practice with its tradition that the Cagean circus alludes to, but also several other art practices, as well as to popular entertainment like the circus (as mentioned in the last chapter), and in fact argue that it is through the displacement of norms/customs from one practice to another (e.g. the walking contemplator (gallery), the allusion to circus (popular entertainment)) that effectuates the questionings of norms.

modernistic approach that a-politicizes sounds – sounds are treated merely as aesthetic phenomena. The sounds’ social and political references are thereby repressed.<sup>187</sup> Many examples could be given to support such a reading. I would however argue that even modernist pronouncements, such as Cage’s accentuation of the aesthetic qualities of sounds as “pure” sounds (and not signs), are best read as polemics, for instance, against a dual world-view that the aesthetics of the masterwork is seen as representing, where the spiritual, ideal and abstract form the superior meaningful reference for physical manifestations. In this sense, his argumentation does not leave the politics of living practices and beings, but addresses questions that have social and political bearings.

I use ‘politics’ in this respect as a general and broad term that reflects the will to influence and change (or conserve) the ruling structure of a social field. In this sense my use of the term goes beyond the ordinary definition restricted to “that part of ethics which has to do with the regulation and government of a nation or state”, and “the management of a political party; the conduct and contests of parties with reference to political measures or the administration of public affairs.”<sup>188</sup> The term ‘politics’, in this chapter, therefore is characterised by an activity that intentionally aims to influence and shape the normative guidelines and framework of a social practice, the practice of Western art music. This activity is in Cage’s case not restricted to music alone. His aesthetic argumentation includes spheres of social life in a general way; the questioning are expressed as a general criticism, a form of structural criticism of hierarchical structures and rules that organize our daily lives and indicate mechanisms of exclusion, rather than as a criticism of individual issues. In speaking of his music, Cage compares the musical field with the organization of our existence at large, and the criticism he presents is grounded in reasoning concerning existence and togetherness in general. Put rather pompously perhaps, one can see an ambition to challenge the scopes of cognition and assessment themselves which structure and organize our lives existentially, culturally and societal in Cage’s artistic project.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Kahn 1999, pp. 161-199.

<sup>188</sup> “Politics”, *Webster’s 1913 Dictionary*. My broad application of the term is not at all in line with Cage’s restricted use (reflecting the definition above), denoting an activity that he in fact disliked and did not find necessary: “I am interested in social ends, but not in political ends, because politics deals with power, and society deals with numbers of individuals; and I’m interested in both single individuals and large numbers or medium numbers or any kinds or numbers of individuals. In other words, I’m interested in society, not for purposes of power, but for purposes of cooperation and enjoyment.” (Cage (1969) in Kostelanetz 2003, p. 274.)

<sup>189</sup> Kösterke presents a similar approach to Cage’s artistic project in her study *Kunst als Zeitkritik und Lebensmodell* (1996).

In the context of artistic negotiations within artistic practices, *Musicircus* can even be seen as an anti-work, drawing on Cage's criticism of a masterwork-centred practice understood as a practice devoted to the creation of elevated artefacts. If we see the Cagean circus as an anti-work challenging a dominant work-concept, such a perspective would reflect a fundamentally non-neutral approach to the 'work' as a genuine musical category. Artistic strategies are thus seen as working actively with or against certain frames and conditions that are understood as governing and organizing music, what I have called a kind of musical-political work, and these structures are seen to be intimately connected to the work conception.

To cite *Musicircus* in an area between 'work' and 'anti-work' is close to considering the normative activity surrounding the musical work and how this contributes to structuring how we hear, practice and talk about music. In such a context, Cage's positions, seen as negotiating operating norms, can more clearly come forward as precisely coloured by being part of certain artistic practices, even if some of his aesthetic statements express a view that we can make a perspectival leap beyond the constraints of traditional thinking and doing. These questions become even more urgent when one decides to do a *Musicircus*. The 'anti-work' redone stresses the impact of established norms and the difficulties involved in breaking off from these. The redone fashion also questions the prefix 'anti' in another way, for is it not the character of the 'work' that is reinforced by staging similar events?

I am going to present a work-concept in this chapter through a reading of Goehr's study presented in *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 1992, and use this conception to discuss an imagined realisation of *Musicircus*. As music working within the dominant guidelines of Western art music, how does *Musicircus* question these frames for doing and understanding music, and what does this questioning indicate?

### **3.2 The work-concept**

Goehr's study of the work-concept focuses on the normative activity implicit in theoretical dealings with the musical work-concept and implicit in the treatment of musical works within the practice of Western classical music. She approaches the concept from the field of philosophy by combining analytical and historical methods. The project has as a backdrop the dominant position analytical theory has had within the Anglo-American philosophy of music. According to Goehr, the main problem with analytical theory as it is applied here is its a-

historical treatment of the work concept. Analytical theory has tried to trace the concept's ontological status – its essential being and function – without looking at its practical and historical context. A chasm has formed between theory and practice, which the analytical way of theorising has not managed to overcome. Goehr sees this situation and the theories it produces as unfruitful in giving good answers to the questions: What characterizes the work-concept, how does it function and why is it so central both in musical theory and practice? The concept's history and the practices the concept operates within have to be taken into consideration for an appropriate exploration of these questions.

Her position has not gone unnoticed. Critical musicological voices have been raised, especially in regard to the watershed theory she outlines, in which the work-concept in its contemporary form is dated from around 1800 and not the Renaissance. Reinhard Strohm, for example, finds the conception revealed by her analysis too narrow, too normative in its conceptual content and being in danger of building a reductive history of "one-line developmental models and philosophical categorisations."<sup>190</sup> Through Goehr's chosen methodology, Strohm argues, the history of classical music becomes the meta-narrative of an epoch before and after the concept of the musical work. Strohm criticises this and emphasises the importance of being aware of the complexity of historical phenomena and how complicated and intricate their lines of development may be. Other historians agree to a great extent with the conclusions Goehr arrives at, but argue about her dating. The consolidation of the work-concept, which Goehr refers to, appears from other historical studies to have occurred later, during the last half of the 19th century, when conservatoires of music were well established and concert halls built. Others again argue for a changed accentuation where it is an emerging culture of composer-centeredness that creates the way for the work's prominence and not the other way round.

The exact dating of a watershed is less important for my discussion than the analysis's articulation of a normative work-concept, including its aesthetic and artistic bearings on a musical practice, which can illuminate and articulate what Cage so eagerly polemicizes against, and thereby, make Cage's positions clearer as standpoints working with and within the constraints of an established practice. That is, the dominant work concept Goehr arrives at may be found too narrow according to certain historical examples and genres, or, as I am

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<sup>190</sup> Strohm 2000, p. 150.

going to sketch in the next chapter, criticised through a work conception philosophically differently approached. I will however argue that the dominant concept Goehr outlines, with its implied norms, to the greatest extent articulates what Cage targets, caricatures and at times shadow boxes with: Music handled as secreted and elevated objects, the prominence of the artist as the creator of these unique objects, a separation off of art from ordinary life practices, and the musical language and grammar used to accommodate these ideals. For example, Goehr refers to how works by Beethoven have become paradigmatic examples of what a musical work is. Cage attacks Beethoven's emblematic position. An early example of this appears in a lecture from 1948, *Defence of Satie*, delivered during the Black Mountain College Satie Festival:

In the field of structure, the field of the definition of parts and their relation to a whole, there has been only one new idea since Beethoven. And that new idea can be perceived in the work of Anton Webern and Erik Satie. With Beethoven the parts of a composition were defined by means of harmony. With Satie and Webern they are defined by means of time lengths. The question of structure is so basic, and it is so important to be in agreement about it, that one must now ask: Was Beethoven right or are Webern and Satie right?

I answer immediately and unequivocally, Beethoven was in error, and his influence, which has been as extensive as it is lamentable, has been deadening to the art of music.<sup>191</sup>

The critique in this lecture is not directed to Beethoven's music as being badly composed. It is what underpins the activity of composing in the model of Beethoven, its guidelines, that Cage criticizes. That is, he polemicizes against the position tonality and harmony have had in structuring the art music of the West. Beethoven represents a tradition that, Cage argues, has forgotten the significance of silence:

If you consider that sound is characterized by its pitch, its loudness, its timbre, and its duration, and that silence, which is the opposite and, therefore, the necessary partner of sound, is characterized only by its duration, you will be drawn to the conclusion that of the four characteristics of the material of music, duration, that is, time length, is the most fundamental. Silence cannot be heard in terms of pitch or harmony: It is heard in terms of time length.<sup>192</sup>

Cage speaks out against the example set by Beethoven by referring to operating principles that blind us to what Cage sees as basic features of our sonic reality. We could here draw a parallel to the organizing of a *Musicircus*. Cage, as we have seen, expresses the point of view that the organizing of such an event in aesthetic terms should be as non-exclusive as possible ("no aesthetic bias").

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<sup>191</sup> Cage and Kostelanetz, *John Cage*, p. 81.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.* p. 81.

The aim to develop and explore structuring principles that function as non-exclusively as possible appears as a characteristic argument in Cage's aesthetic texts, though articulated and underpinned somewhat differently in various periods of his career. In the lecture referred to above Cage still regards sound and silence as opposite characteristics and he looks at structure as a necessary aspect of composition. These views are transformed in the fifties to articulate a more non-dualistic view, where silence is not seen as the opposite of sound, but as sounds perceived differently, and structure not an aspect that a composer needs to add, but that would in any case be operating in the material, or happen as a result of the initiating of events.

This quest for inclusion is founded in an understanding of the material as already having its own life and dynamics before being "staged" by a composition.<sup>193</sup> To let this life have a space to act of itself becomes a guiding motive. In Cage's aesthetic rhetoric this motive also becomes an element of his two-sided criticism of art as a practice separated from the courses and themes of ordinary life. On the one hand, the criticism is directed to mechanisms of exclusion that diminish the significance of aspects of the sonic environment we dwell in on a daily basis.<sup>194</sup> On the other hand, the critique is directed, also in Cage's rhetoric, to a kind of escapism where the world nearest to us is rejected in favour of glories that art can envision by guiding the attention elsewhere than over our "doomed" reality.<sup>195</sup> With these comments in mind let me briefly present Goehr's analysis as a preparation for further discussion.

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<sup>193</sup> Cage recurrently throughout his career referred to the filmmaker Fischinger as source for a remark, uttered during their collaboration in the late 1930s, that had had a great impact on him: "Fischinger told me that everything in the world has a spirit that can be released through its sound. I was not inclined towards spiritualism, but I began to tap everything I saw. I explored everything through its sound. This led to my first percussion orchestra." (Cage (1976) in Kostelanetz 2003, p. 43.)

<sup>194</sup> "When a com-poser feels a responsibility to make, rather than accept, / he eliminates from the / area of possibility /all those events that do not suggest the at that point in time vogue of profundity." (Cage, "Lecture on something", *Silence*, p. 130.)

<sup>195</sup> Cage adopts in this respect the attack on the "escapism" of bourgeois art performed by the avant-garde at turn of 20th century: "And what, precisely, / does this, this / beautiful profound object, this masterpiece, / have to do / with Life? / It has this to do with Life: / that it is

separate from it. / Now we see it / and now we don't. When we see it / we feel better, and when we are away from it, we don't feel so good. / Life seem shabby and chaotic, disordered, ugly / in contrast." (Cage, "Lecture on something", *Silence*, p. 130.)

"Formerly, one was accustomed to thinking of art as something better organized than life that could be used as an escape from life. The changes that have taken place in this century, however, are such that art is not an escape from life, but rather an introduction to it." (Cage (1966) in Kostelanetz 2003, p. 226.)

### 3.2.1 Goehr's analysis

Goehr does not question what kind of *object* the musical work is. The question is directed to the musical work as a concept: What kind of concept is the 'work', and what kind of musical conception does it represent? The guiding understanding is that music does not need to be perceived as works and that the work-concept represents a limited and historically conditioned way of apprehending music. However, the work category has had a dominant position within Western music during the last centuries. Goehr points at how the world of classical music encircles the work, the original musical *objet d'art* as written down in a score. To compose is to construct a musical work. To perform is to interpret works and as far as possible deliver nothing less than the work's inherent intentions. The audience arrive at the concert hall to listen to the presented compositions – "today Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is on the programme" – and it is a work or its interpretation on which the critics comment. Concert halls are built with an eye to arranging the optimal conditions for an undisturbed presentation of musical artefacts. Conservatoires and academies hold as their main task the production of students highly competent in performing canonized works as well as being flexible enough to appropriate new original items, and every week symphonic orchestras all over the world present programs of well-known as well as more obscure compositions of the tradition of Western art music, a treasure-house filled with unique musical objects. In Goehr's opinion, the concept of a musical work controls the production, performance and experience of music.

Pre-critically Goehr points at understandings widespread within musical practice, where the musical work is viewed as an original product manufactured through a particular creative activity by a composer; an artefact where tonal, rhythmic and instrumental properties constitute a structured and integrated whole that is symbolically represented in a score by notational signs.<sup>196</sup>

From a critical standpoint, Goehr approaches the topic of the work-concept through combining analytical and historical methods. The background to this lies in an understanding of concepts influenced by Wittgenstein's late theory of language where he abandons an essentialist understanding of what constitutes linguistic meaning.<sup>197</sup> The meanings of

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<sup>196</sup> Goehr 1992, p. 2.

<sup>197</sup> Wittgenstein's early theory (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1921) represents a form of essentialist theory of language. Words, expressions, concepts and sentences get their meanings by depicting essential structures of



linguistic utterances are generated through their part in a practice, in a language game, where the purposes defining this practice and thereby its language can differ from one language game to another.<sup>198</sup> Goehr adopts a Wittgensteinian position where a concept cannot be understood without taking into consideration the social practice the concept is part of. Notions are set, consolidated and defined through their use and function within particular contexts; their meaning is fundamentally based on conventions (not essences) and the way these are handled.

Further, Goehr adopts the view that even though concepts thus can be seen as constructions formed within social practices, we are not talking here about volatile and elusive – now this, now that – constructions. The concepts are consolidated in and by such practices; they are interwoven into linguistic traditions that maintain over time the worked out significances and functions of the concepts. Thus categories by which we orientate ourselves are shaped, categories that join in organizing the practice they are a part of and contribute to the continuity and sustainability of that very same practice.

Concepts are chiselled out that function within non-neutral social practices. All practices have rules and ordinances that indicate norms for how the practice works and how meanings are constructed – for example, what is acceptable or not, what is deemed as relevant, what one should strive for, criteria for evaluation of good and bad and so on. These rules and regulations are neither natural nor God-given a-historic units of measurement. They are historic and contingent but can function as an a-priori given framework in practice. I see here a parallel between Goehr's understanding of concepts and Foucault's emphasis on the ordinances of the discourse as a prerequisite for meaningful use of concepts. In Foucault's view, 'discourse' is first and foremost a system based on forms of practices that designate the conditions for the possibilities for meaningful speech and action. These conditions do not

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reality.

<sup>198</sup> Within one language game, for example a scientific language concerned with classifications of animals, the language can function, as described by Wittgenstein's early theory of language, as a collection of proper names where the concepts receive their meaning and significance primarily by reference (their functions as signs/symbols) to an entity presupposed to have real existence, here represented by groups of animals demarcated by such and such characteristics. This is however not a template for all language games. Within a different game, for example when one is learning a musical piece by heart, if we follow Goehr's train of thought, a concept receives its meaning and function by stating what is worth pursuing, it is defined according to teleological means: 'I play Beethoven's violin concerto' means that I strive to reach the *ideal* materialization of this concerto – that is my project. Even though I miss some notes, we can judge the project successful or not. In fact, Goehr uses this condition to criticise N. Goodman's nominalism and his use of compliance conditions to account for the shared identity between performances. (Goehr 1992, pp. 21-43.)

arise neutrally: “In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.”<sup>199</sup> The unspoken as well as the acknowledged norms within a discourse provide that something can be given a hearing (that it can be heard and that it can be articulated), they are necessary and inevitable, but these norms also indicate mechanisms of exclusion and procedures for expulsion in relation to what is allowable and to be included according to the framework of the discourse.

Goehr has a similar approach. Concepts are formed, crystallized and brought into play in value-loaded processes, in societal and institutionally based practices. It is a short way from such an understanding to an analytical method that also entails historical examination.

To trace the history of the work concept – its emergence, consolidation, stabilization and dominance – Goehr uses serious music as an indicator, that is, she uses music which has been considered serious and examines the kind of reasoning that has been given for this. This strategy is chosen because, she argues, from the earliest days theoreticians have distinguished between respectable and valuable activities, and activities deemed as entertaining and pleasant.<sup>200</sup> Around 1800 serious music broke its bond to the church and the court. Instead, public concert halls, sites dedicated to performance art, gained prominence. Serious music became tied to what we today call classical music and its main embodiment became the musical work – organised sound made into art.<sup>201</sup>

By tracing what has been considered serious, Goehr ends up identifying a paradigmatic change within musical practice and theory around 1800. The guidelines for how to view and judge music are changed and with that, the objects of the musical discourse are altered.<sup>202</sup> From being principally a discipline of skills and knowledge connected to the performance of suitable music to specific occasions and venues, music changes into a discipline of production

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<sup>199</sup> Foucault 1981, p. 52.

<sup>200</sup> Goehr 1992, p. 120.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. p. 121.

<sup>202</sup> ‘Discourse’ in terms of Foucault’s thinking establishes and orders a domain of knowledge and creates objects of knowledge that belong to this domain. The rest of this chapter will use this understanding of ‘discourse’ and play upon its productivity of a field of objects for aesthetic experience and knowledge.

that creates and recreates a special type of artefact – musical works.<sup>203</sup> Though the work concept is by 1800 in circulation, Goehr argues that it is not until early Romanticism that it is standardized into its contemporary function and meaning as a designation of a unique, created work of art with lasting existence beyond its own performances and copies of scores. The musical work appears as a category that designates a musical product with its own independent value, and it is handled as a musical *objet d'art* along the same lines as the work of art in painting and sculpture.

I want here, firstly, to draw attention especially to two points in the paradigmatic changes outlined above:

- 1) The work concept as conceptualising music as a collection of musical art objects;
- 2) These objects' lasting existence beyond their performances and copies of scores.

That is, the work category signifies an *objectification of music* and this objectification requires a *lasting existence*. The two aspects emphasized here are eagerly attacked by Cage, both as part of his aesthetic rhetoric and through his compositional practice, firstly through a focus on processes and secondly through his criticism of a form of idealism that is associated with a dualistic world-view.

### **3.2.2 Objectification of music**

What does the objectification of music represent according to Goehr's analysis? To get an idea, let us sketch Goehr's argument for not seeing the music of the period up to 1800 as part of the work paradigm.

The idea that a musical work existed as a completed work of art, independent of the infinite number of potential presentations, had no governing force within a practice that demanded adaptable and functional music and that allowed an unconcealed exchange of musical material amongst musicians. This constitutes in fact the main point in Goehr's argument for regarding music of the 17th and 18th centuries within a different frame of understanding than

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<sup>203</sup> Goehr does not cite an abrupt break with the past; the question is about consolidation and regulation – what are the dominant and regulative conceptions of a musical discourse, how can these be historically traced and what are the consequences.

that regulated by the musical work-concept. Musicians did not so much look at the *musical work* as at individual performances as the object of their composing. Only during early Romanticism did the notion of the musical work become standardized and consolidated with a regulating meaning within classical music. This is illustrated in the ideal of *Werktreue*. The ideal for the practice of music became to yield to the work's prescriptions, to deliver a work in accordance with its intentions – the musical work functioned as an ideal to strive for. Musical practice circled around the work, almost as if it were a transcendental ideal.

Goehr summarizes the transformation around 1800 by emphasizing how music acquired a need, as it developed into an autonomous art form on a level with painting and sculpture, to manifest itself into an object dissociated from an everyday context, and to be a part of a collection of *objets d'art* and thus contemplated in a purely aesthetic way.

Through *hypostatisation* Romanticism found an object that it called *work*. Music was beginning to be thought of as a collection of works wherein each item materialized and revealed the eternal, universal and glorious. Each individual work contained something valuable, worth contemplating aesthetically, or in a metaphysical manner. Musical works began to be dealt with on a par with other art objects, and in an aesthetic sense they were seen as permanent. Music could not however, unlike paintings and sculpture, be placed in a museum. The setting became therefore a metaphorical museum – ‘*an imaginary museum of musical works*’ – where the musical work was exhibited to be contemplated purely in an aesthetic manner emancipated from worldly and ordinary ties.<sup>204</sup>

The paradigmatic shift at around 1800 that Goehr outlines is therefore essentially linked to an objectification of music through the work-concept's status; music as an art form manifests itself through certain kinds of *objects*: musical works. What does this objectification really imply? As indicated above, this objectification is partly founded upon certain principles of separation, partly upon a projective move where a correlated entity to the performed work, representing the composed work in its abstract and ideal form, is hypostatized. This hypostatization guarantees the work an ontological lasting existence beyond performances and score copies. We could say, that the objectification of music through the work conception, translates the transitory and intangible quality of music into something capable of

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<sup>204</sup> Goehr 1992, pp.174-175.

being conceptualised in lasting and repeatable terms – like being ‘seen’ again and again as a painting. It is not difficult to see that Cage’s aesthetics is sharpened by arguments against music treated as delimited and lasting objects, not least exemplified by explicitly designing site- and occasion-dependent realisations of compositions. Contrary to Cage’s situation-dependent realisations, the paradigm emerging at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century conceptualises works’ independence of a specific site and occasion for performance, a notion that Goehr argues hardly existed before around 1800.<sup>205</sup>

### 3.2.3 Existence independent of local circumstances

Contrary to a musical practice oriented around specific occasions and sites for performances, we can say briefly that the objectification of music into works represents the *separation out* of an independent product from the situation where it is performed. Music represented by these products exists and has an identity autonomous of a specific place and occasion for its creation and performance. Further, the notion that the work has a lasting existence beyond performances – that it is a distinct durable object beyond the confines of temporary presentations – implies certain principles of *fixedness*, for example the possibility of performing comparatively similar manifestations of a work. Relatively similar repetitions sustain a concept of a permanent art object as the origin for what shows itself in temporary garments.

An axiom of Cage’s aesthetic argumentation is precisely that we do not need to envision art as a place undisturbed by the racket of everyday life. Instead art can open us up to this racket, not just as something to endure, but as an opportunity. The ruling aesthetics of the masterwork is attacked by Cage precisely for its maintenance of art as a separated domain from our ordinary activities.

An adoption of the historic avant-garde’s attack on the separation of art from life plays an important role in Cage’s aesthetic argumentation.<sup>206</sup> He extends it though to a general critique

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<sup>205</sup> The argument is based in how serious music before the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century mainly was tied to extra-musical functions such as the mass or some merry gathering at a court. The presentations were thus shaped keeping in mind the particular occasion and requirements – not to mention tastes – of the persons and institutions by whom the musicians and composers were hired. Listeners were not, either, so concerned about the composers of the music; the important thing was that the music should fit the occasion.

<sup>206</sup> See Kösterke 1996, pp. 25-38.

addressed to the hegemony of a two-world perspective where we at one side of the spectrum have the spiritual, ideal and exemplary, and at the other side the physical, impure and imperfect.

Cage's expressed positions, I will argue, form a kind of criticism of idealism, perhaps even an extreme form of materialism – nothing really exists beyond what you see; sounds are just sounds (not signs).<sup>207</sup> By taking into account his adoption of Buddhist rhetoric, this materialist position, though, may be softened. We are not in any way referring here to a materialist position that regards all perceivable phenomena as reducible to quantitative qualities of underlying matter. Instead there is a focus upon the irreducible quality of perceivable phenomena that exceeds conceptual logic; that exceeds in variety, plurality and transformation any form of ideal representation.<sup>208</sup>

### 3.2.4 Existence beyond performances and copies of scores

As mentioned, Goehr turns the question from what kind of object the musical work is to what conception of music the musical work represents. Through this Goehr both argues against a form of essentialism and reveals a conception that through hypostatization operates with workhood in practice as having an essential and real existence. That is, through a certain understanding of concepts, following Wittgenstein's theory of language games, an essentialist understanding of what founds the ontological status of musical works is undermined. However, through an analysis of how the concept is mainly used, this essentialist understanding is regained. The work-concept's meaning and function is linked to the projection of a type of object that is treated as having a real existence independent of being performed.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> "I have insisted upon the physicality of sound and the activity of listening." (Cage (1973) in Kostelanetz 2003, p. 248.) "It is thus possible to make a musical composition the continuity of which is free of individual taste and memory (psychology) and also of the literature and "traditions" of the art. The sounds enter the time-space centered within themselves, unimpeded by service to any abstraction, their 360 degrees of circumference free for an infinite play of interpenetration." (Cage, *Silence*, p. 59.) "I try to approach each sound as *itself*. Now I find I can do that better with sounds that *aren't* music than sounds that *are* music; but I try to make my own music, and I notice that more and more people are making music that is *like* the environment.

[Interviewer:] *Is this a kind of ultimate abstractness?*

No, I would say rather an ultimate reality. Wouldn't you?" (Cage, 1969, p. 16.)

<sup>208</sup> These questions and Cage's positions will be discussed in length in chapter six.

<sup>209</sup> Goehr introductory outlines and criticises different schools of analytic thought, among them the modified Platonism of J. Levinson. (Goehr 1992, pp. 44-68.) However, when she turns back after her historic survey Levinson's views are re-established. His definitions of the work are those closest to describe how the musical artefact is handled and which ontological status it has got in the discussed historic epoch.

Briefly then, the ontological status given to the work can be sketched as:

- 1) Something that exists independent of performances and score copies;
- 2) Having a lasting existence beyond performances and score copies;
- 3) Including 1) and 2) through the projection and hypostatization of an object with an abstract, idealized existence;
- 4) Operating as the model to be interpreted and manifested in performances (the ideal of *Werktreue*).

I have already connected the work's lasting existence to some kind of fixedness. The lecture *Composition as process* delivered in Darmstadt, 1958,<sup>210</sup> provides an explicit example of how Cage emphasises the processual quality of both composition, performing and listening, a quality he sees as having been concealed through a kind of objectification of music, essentially through techniques directed towards achieving fixedness. Cage, in contrast employs compositional techniques that can open the notational drive to fix a result and instead make notational techniques open-ended, non-fixed and processual in character. Cage's definition of experimental music demonstrates this emphasis on process and non-fixed qualities:

This is a lecture on composition which is indeterminate with respect to its performance. That composition is necessarily experimental. An experimental action is one the outcome of which is not foreseen. Being unforeseen, this action is not concerned with its excuse. Like the land, like the air, it needs none. A performance of a composition which is indeterminate of its performance is necessarily unique. It cannot be repeated. When performed for a second time, the outcome is other than it was. Nothing therefore is accomplished by such a performance, since that performance cannot be grasped as an object in time. A recording of such a work has no more value than a postcard; it provides a knowledge of something that happened, whereas the action was a non-knowledge of something that had not yet happened.<sup>211</sup>

We could ask why Cage criticises an aim to fix and of course argue that, especially when considering written music, there will inevitably be many open-ended processes involved in transferring a piece of music from score to performance. This open-endedness is an essential part of what we enjoy in performances, knowing that they constitute particular interpretations.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Published in *Silence*, pp. 18-56.

<sup>211</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 39.

<sup>212</sup> See for example Boorman 1999, Eco 1989, and Cook 2007b.

In fact, from one point of view, Cage argues according to these lines, though he exaggerates the point that because the transfer from score to performance eludes being fixed anyway, and this situation is extended to reality in general, efforts to fix an end result are deemed to be futile:

When I first placed objects between piano strings, it was with the desire to possess sounds (to be able to repeat them). But, as the music left my home and went from piano to piano and from pianist to pianist, it became clear that not only are two pianist essentially different from one another, but two pianos are not the same either. Instead of the possibility of repetition, we are faced in life with the unique qualities and characteristics of each occasion.<sup>213</sup>

The argument can be seen both as ontologically based – basically everything is transitory and changeable, nothing exists for ever – and it can be understood as existentially founded, in the sense that its argumentation is based upon our active relation to our own existence in the world: In what way can we, by the way we relate to our own existence, be happy?

The kind of criticism of idealism I mentioned previously I connect to the argument above, both as based in an ontological understanding and not least an existential interpretation. An idealist position, we could argue, exemplified by the work conception I sketched above, would require a two-world perspective where the ideals in a spiritual and abstract form resided at the one side and their material implementation at the other. Even if this Platonic model is modified in an Aristotelian way where the significance of the material aspect can not be totally discarded, one could argue that still the focus would be upon the spiritual plan as that which would give the present materialisation its *telos* and meaning. The material qualities would so to speak be of a second rate, needing to be shaped in the image of the ideal form (the abstract and superior order) to appear as something – to have a purposeful presence. The problem would probably best be seen or felt when the material qualities, which were seen as trying to form an ideal, failed, and the resulting presence would be interpreted as deficient, leaving a feeling of incompleteness.

To illuminate my Cage reading I would in fact like to introduce the function of *lack* (absence) found in Aristotle's ontology. *Lack* becomes a conceptual (logical) bridge between the unchangeable and eternal quality of abstract concepts and the transitory quality of individual

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<sup>213</sup> Cage, *Empty Words*, p. 8 (from "How the Piano Came to be Prepared," 1972).



appearances (materialisations of general forms). The individual materialises, so to speak, the eternal features of a general form in a sequential way. The unripe fruit has the quality of the ripe one as an immanent potentiality – as a lack that later will be redeemed and by that contribute to the accomplishment of the fruit’s ontological form.<sup>214</sup>

I would therefore first remark that the Aristotelian *lack* does not just denote a deficiency, but as a condition for change and transformation that is not of a random character but purposefully governed, it is also connected to potentiality. It represents, so to speak, the potential future in the state of the present, or the past as reverberation of qualities that have been present but faded away. However, even if we connect *lack* to the dimension of potentiality, transformation and change, *lack* represents a perspective where what is present in its transformative quality cannot be accounted for as present in a fully ontological sense. As transformative it will necessarily exist in a *lack-full* mode.

Secondly, the perspective dependant aspect of ‘lack’ means also that what is perceived has to be compared to an ideal, an abstract form, that gives a standard according to which what is perceived can be apprehended (read) as a certain (purposeful) materialisation. The third instance I would like to draw attention to, includes those appearances that do not fall within the standard, what we could call the outcast. Would we find their presence dignified with purpose at all, or would they appear as a kind of ontological noise that really represented the “lackful” mode of existence in the highest degree? This instance embraces questions about plurality, otherness, and what can be seen, heard and voiced by our perspectival approaches. The reading of this instance can be of an ontological and epistemological character, but I will emphasise an *existential* reading that expands on Cage’s rhetoric of inclusion that I have mentioned previously. To sketch this in a simplistic way we could point to two instances in this respect. Firstly, what would be given the opportunity to be seen, heard and voiced by the ideals in mind - what would be evaluated “good enough”, “representative enough”, “sufficient enough” to be counted on – to be ontologically justified and not just seen as disturbing. Secondly, we could emphasise the existential pain and unhappiness associated to the feeling of inadequacy. Cage, so to speak, uses this unhappiness as an argument for changing the perspective,<sup>215</sup> because the question remains about whether we need to approach the transient

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<sup>214</sup> Aristotle, Chap. 7-9, Book I, *Physics*.

<sup>215</sup> “clinging / or trying to force / life into one’s own / idea of it, of what it should be, / is only absurd. / The absurdity comes from the artificiality of it, of not living, / but of / having to have / first an idea about how one /

presence through an established associative category of lack. Do we need the ideal referent?

This leads to Cage's non-dualistic aesthetics. Cage's adoption of Buddhist rhetoric can be seen in the light of this criticism of a two-world perspective; a criticism that further is used to formulate a different foundation for aesthetic praxis and thinking. It is tempting in this respect to quote a poetic text that Cage wrote for an exhibition Rauschenberg had in 1953 where Rauschenberg's white paintings were shown:

To whom

No subject  
No image  
No taste  
No object  
No beauty  
No message  
No talent  
No technique (no why)  
No idea  
No intention  
No art  
No feeling  
No black  
No white (no *and*)

After careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing in these paintings that could not be changed, that they can be seen in any light and are not destroyed by the action of shadows.

Hallelujah! The blind can see again; the water's fine.<sup>216</sup>

The questions that I have touched on here will be more thoroughly discussed in chapter six dedicated to Cage's non-dualistic aesthetics. For the moment, let me again go back to Goehr's analysis. Goehr, as stated earlier, does not treat the musical work concept as a static notion. She treats it as an open concept where meanings and functions are changeable. What has happened to the musical work concept during the 20th century? Is it still the Romantic chiselling out of the work notion that indicates its meaning and function, and does this chiselled out conception still have a regulating power?

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should do it and then / stumblingly / trying. / Falling down on some one of the various banana peels / is what we have been calling tragedy. Ideas of separateness artificially elevated." (Cage, *Silence*, p. 134.)

<sup>216</sup> Cage and Kostelanetz, *John Cage*, pp. 111-112.

### 3.2.5 The paradox of the avant-garde

Goehr argues that the avant-garde's challenge to the work conception has neither succeeded in altering the work paradigm, nor neutralized the concept's normative function and Romantic meaning. Her argument is interesting because it points to the difficulties involved in seeking to change basic conditions of a musical practice from within. Composers who attack the notion of a work remain, in a manner, in a paradoxical situation: They criticize what upholds their own activity as composers. Goehr, for example, refers to Cage's project of undoing the composer's significance. The "death of the composer" becomes an impossible project if Cage at the same time considers himself to be a composer as such.

Goehr refers among other things to the use of chance and indeterminacy in composition. For example, Cage through his compositional methods challenges the notion of the repeatable worked out composition with a fixed instrumentation. Goehr however claims that these characteristics of randomness and unfixed quality are only applicable for performances and not the work as such. These methods do not rule out the ideal of *Werktreue* and the image of a consistent work (delivered from the composer's hand) at the base of its performances.<sup>217</sup>

Goehr through her argumentation accentuates the paradox many composers face when they seek to initiate or provoke revolutionary changes within their own institutions. Stated cynically, as soon as composers and musicians are accepted as participants within a specific practice of music, the tendency would not be to see the radicalism of the challenges presented, but to adjust the revolutionary content and characteristics to something known, or just disregard it: "More often, the mainstream will interpret and then accommodate the music to suit themselves; more often, they will simply pretend that the music does not exist."<sup>218</sup>

A tremendous expansion has appeared in the 20th century in the understanding of what can be called music and what can be deemed as musical material. Goehr, however, questions whether this has indeed brought about essential changes in how music is treated and referred to. Has the immense increase in musical material brought along an equivalent expansion and implicit change on the formal level? Goehr's answer is that actually it has not. She argues that material changes can appear without implying formal alteration. The practice of today –

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<sup>217</sup> Goehr 1992, p. 263.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. p. 265.

whirling around notation, performance, crediting, autonomy, repeatability, ingenuity, and product – shows how the musical work still has a regulating power, even if great changes have occurred at the material level.

### **3.3 Cage's musical-political work**

#### **3.3.1 Musicircus and the work-concept**

Goehr cites Cage as a composer who has challenged the work-concept and the practice implied by it, but she also emphasises how difficult it is to transform a tradition essentially, especially from within the system's established constraints. To be included at all – to be taken seriously – radical critique very easily is captured and modulated by the conservative tendencies of the practice. Goehr concludes that the work-concept still has a regulative function within Western art music, a conclusion she believes is valid also for the avant-garde of the 20th century and a composer like Cage.

I want to dwell for a while on this conclusion and reflect upon Cage's aesthetic and artistic negotiations within the context of the problem Goehr here outlines. There are three elements I especially want to emphasise:

- 1) The musical work understood as an abstract object that exists beyond performances and score copies – a mode of an ideal existence that operates as the model (ideal) to strive for in performances.
- 2) Principles of separation, especially the separation between art and ordinary life.
- 3) Role division (division of labour) between composer, musician/performer, conductor, audience and the institutions of the musical establishment.

The work-concept, through Goehr's exploration, is revealed as connected to regulative forces of musical practice from about 1800. In other words:

- a) The work-concept becomes part of the paradigmatic criteria for aesthetic evaluation and justification. As a paradigmatic criterion, the work-concept has an unquestioned function whereby it operates as a premise and a transcendental condition (a condition which is taken for granted and used as criteria for further elaborations) for what can

constitute music. Music becomes inconceivable without the notion of works.

- b) Within the paradigm supporting concepts and criteria are developed which sustain the paradigm's given concepts (transcendental conditions). The ideal of the *Werktreue* is one of these.
- c) A changed paradigm brings along an alteration of its 'fields of objects.'<sup>219</sup> For instance, if we understand Goehr's historic argument as an argument about a shift of paradigm, the new paradigm that breaks through around 1800 opens up a new domain of knowledge (artistic practice) where music is understood as a collection of musical art objects (artefacts). The preceding paradigm consisted of a collection of skills, genres and styles bound up to site-specific and occasion-dependent performances.

By drawing up this model of paradigms, it is possible to clarify a musical-political dynamic at play in happenings like *Musicircus*. By challenging the work-category with its associations with a delimited autonomous and abstract artefact, musical practice's own framework and self-understanding are put into question together with its 'objects of knowledge' – what we count as music, how the experience of music is structured, what constitutes the formation of meaning within the field of music.

It is now possible to imagine a Cagean circus in the light of the three aforementioned points: The musical work understood as an abstract object with a hypostasized existence as an ideal type, the work understood as something else than the unorganised sounds/noise of everyday life and within the context of the division of roles (labour) between composer, musician/performer, conductor, audience and the institutions of the musical establishment.

### 3.3.2 The ideal of *Werktreue*

Our imagined *Musicircus* is a hypothetical realisation, a mode in which we anticipate its potential. To approach *Musicircus* like this is akin to treating it as a work that exists independently of its actual realisations. What should we rely on to actually perform this hypothetical realisation? Should we use the example set by former events, or rather aim for the genuine concept/idea, thought of as the work's essence? From a practical point of view, such a mode of anticipation is often present in the preparatory state of new productions. The

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<sup>219</sup> 'Object' refers here to an 'object of knowledge' in the terminology of Foucault. See former footnote at p. 62.

imagined *Musicircus* operates then at an intermediary position between historical realisations, specific and singular in their nature, and the possibility of being re-done, re-realised, and re-initiated. Questions about *Werktreue* here become apparent – is it not a work in its *beyond-existence* that we are directing our investigations towards, with a view to implementing our findings in an imagined realisation?<sup>220</sup>

We could imagine that a lot of performers have been invited to participate in our envisioned Cagean circus. What they choose to do/perform has been left to the performers to decide, but the organisers have given some guidelines: The performers know that they are going to perform simultaneously and that the audience will be free to walk around. This is a situation the participants have to cope with and respect. Another condition concerns money. No money will change hands.<sup>221</sup> No payment will be offered to the performers and no admission fee will be collected from the audience.

We can now imagine that about 300 performers participate, and that the event happens at a venue big enough to house both performers spaciouly spread about and a wandering audience. The performers, however, are placed close enough to provide a collage of audiovisual offerings. They are under the same roof, and will automatically infiltrate each other's performances. We can therefore expect an abundance of perceptible impressions and a mix of different superimpositions.

We now probably have an idea of the setting of this imagined *Musicircus*. But in forming such ideas what do we rely on? Do we have an idea about an abstract musical object, hypostatized, as a reference for our imagined performance? And do we in that respect perform a kind of silent reading of that work as indicated in a supposed "score", such as the list presented in the former chapter?<sup>222</sup> That is, would we base our thought realisation upon the ideal of *Werktreue* presented by Goehr?

I have already, in the former chapter, discussed the status of a score for *Musicircus*, or the

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<sup>220</sup> The prominence of work-based discourses becomes even more striking when we progress from the hypothetical and become confronted the realities of organising an event like *Musicircus*. Then Goehr's argument about the work-concept's strong influence can be felt for example in our inevitable adoption of the most accepted strategies for presenting the event and so on. The last point will be discussed in chapter seven.

<sup>221</sup> This is not entirely correct. We can imagine that there might be food and drink for sale as at the first *Musicircus*.

<sup>222</sup> See list at p. 37.

lack of an authoritative text that can function as a tool to delimit what it is essential to try to maintain and what is of a more periphery character. A traditional score would of course also have a lot of interpretational openness, but in the Cagean circus these questions are raised in the extreme.<sup>223</sup> If we for the moment think of *Musicircus* as a traditional work compatible with the dominant work-concept outlined by Goehr, we could ask: What would indicate this work status? A singled out text with Cage's authorizing signature does not exist. No score has been published at Peters. If we were lucky, we would find the text in *Scenarios*, amongst a huge collection of contributions by a wide variety of artists, that invites a reading as a script (though in its character it is very ambiguous).<sup>224</sup> Therefore, if we were to consider the idea, or the genuine concept, as Cage's creation, and that it is exactly this expressed idea that represents the musical work in this case, we would not be presented an easy task of detection. Where do we find the concept in its genuine and authoritative form? That is, what belongs to it genuinely and what is of a more peripheral character? We could use the short description given in the foreword of *M* and interpret *Musicircus* basically to be an invitation to perform simultaneously under the same roof.<sup>225</sup> Or, we could add several other conditions as being essential and use, for example, my list collected from different sources to express our authoritative idea.<sup>226</sup> Another possibility would be to use the text published in *Scenarios* notwithstanding all its interpretative ambiguities. One more possibility would be to settle upon using a kind of oral transmission – the knowledge of how such events were initiated and organized by Cage, for example by having first-hand knowledge by partaking in the realisation of such events. This orally transmitted knowledge would constitute the idea behind realisations and guide other performances to come.<sup>227</sup>

The idea to be realised could therefore go from simply the bringing together of a lot of people to perform simultaneously, to a performance where besides the simultaneity of performances several other conditions would be considered normative, such as the idea of “no aesthetic bias”, the independent execution of performances, plenty of space for the audience to walk around, no entrance fees or fees to the performers (the event being as far as possible kept away from ordinary economic considerations), and lasting longer than ordinary concerts.

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<sup>223</sup> The problem of *Urtext* shows that the question of the primary authoritative text also is relevant for paradigmatic examples of works. See Boorman 1999.

<sup>224</sup> This text is discussed and commented in the former chapter at p. 31 ff.

<sup>225</sup> See quote at p. 25 in the former chapter.

<sup>226</sup> See same list as referred to above.

<sup>227</sup> A sense of oral transmission was in fact in operation in Trondheim, 2006. See p. 304, chapter seven.

Further, are we here speaking of a similar relationship between concept and realisation (performance) as the one presented by Goehr between the hypostatized work and its performance? Do we have a work that functions as the ideal model the performers strive to implement, or is it better to understand the relationship differently? We could understand the relationship between idea and performance not as one between a norm and its implementation, but as a relationship between an initiative – an impetus, a challenge – and the response that brings about new situations on which to act. In the last case, the significance of what happens is less dependent upon a referent – the supposed existence of an already worked out composition.<sup>228</sup>

However, in marketing this event, I can imagine that we would emphasise Cage's role as the originator of *Musicircus*. We would probably use established practice and present the event as a realisation of one of Cage's works. His name is known, so the audience would have something on which to rest their expectations, for example, that they would go to an avant-garde experimental event with a design that has become a part of music history in the 20th century. We probably would have chosen such a strategy, a strategy that supports Goehr's emphasis on how present the work-concept, with its associated emphasis on the importance of the composer, still is within Western art music and its institutions.

If we had chosen another strategy for marketing the event, for example colourful posters with the inscription *Musicircus at the mall today!!!* the public's associations might quickly have changed from an event presenting avant-garde experimental music to a public-minded gathering for children and their parents. We would not have asked for a clarification of who came up with the original idea in the last example. The envisioned experience would be enough. In that case, we would have moved away from the discourse on "serious" music with which Cage is, in any case, associated.

### **3.3.3 Model and implementation / initiative and new event**

I have pointed to the difficulties involved in delimiting a certain bulk of sources as the authoritative text, and questioned the perspective of a work that functions as the teleological

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<sup>228</sup> This approach will be discussed at length in the following chapters.



norm performances strive to realise. However, if, for the sake of argument, we look at the relationship between idea and realisation as one between a model and its actualisation, would the materialisation of *Musicircus* not exhaust the work-concept's relevance and make a decoding of the event difficult according to established interpretational schema preconditioned by the idea of a delimited musical artefact? A composition, a specific sound structure, elaborated out through the creative power of a composer and fixed in a symbolic form, the score, does not exist here. In that respect it breaks absolutely with paradigmatic features of a classical work of music. Our model does not prescribe any specific sound structures.

On the other hand, the strategy of simultaneous performances could be seen as its prescriptive content, i.e. a performative strategy where a large number of performers perform simultaneously "under the same roof" without being organised by unifying musical principles. This prescription realised, what would such a situation imply? Would we not likely have to deal with an event where many independent lines of causality would appear, mix and interweave, but where the lines themselves and their mixture would be out of the control of the idea? The idea, in this instance the work in its hypostatized abstract version, would be, as a normative model – according to which the actualisation would be judged and thereby made meaningful – without content.

We could now place ourselves in the position of being a wandering member of the audience. Would we not be as though "swimming" within the art event itself? Where is the object to be listened to, to be contemplated? We walk in the middle of it. Do we hear the artwork? Do we see it? Where does it begin, where does it end? Or, is the artwork, this cherished object, dissolved into a processual event where the musical meaning can hardly be detected through the interpretative tools moulded by the handed-down work-concept?

The aesthetic object to be experienced would be dependent upon the route we chose. We could, for example, choose to stop close by a flute player who softly intonates long sustained tones at pianissimo, and stay for a while. We could give these subtle variances of pitch and timbre a prominent position by our heightened awareness before we moved on to explore a noisy film projector.

Therefore, the strategy of simultaneous performances could be seen as a musical-political means to decentralise the musical meaning production. Obviously the event cannot be pinned

down to one unique source, musical idea or plot (Where does the work reside?). The multitude of contributions is striking. The conditions imposed by idea/concept, organisers, performers and audience are woven into each other in fluctuating structures.

### 3.3.4 Role divisions

What about the division of roles in our imagined circus? Cage indicates in previews to the event in 1967 that he wants to make the audience performers and the performers audience.<sup>229</sup> And at the first *Musircus* the performers were placed at the sides of the auditorium with free space for the audience in the middle.<sup>230</sup> The performers were somehow placed off their pedestal, having a role more equal to the visitors. Visitors were also invited to take an active part as performers. Therefore, the established division between the producers of music, the composer and performers, and those who receive the “product”, the audience, was destabilized and became unclear and fluctuating.

Nevertheless, even if the difference between performers and audience becomes more ambiguous, would not the role of those who have said yes to perform in our imagined circus, to a certain degree be defined by the ideal of *Werktreue*? The answer to this has two sides. The performers are on the one hand invited to choose and prepare themselves according to their own preferences, but on the other hand, there will be some framework given by the organizers and this framework will contribute to shaping the event. The performers will also know that they participate in an event where Cage is seen as a form of "author", both through his initiation of the event in 1967 and by several other realisations linked to his name. I imagine that most of the performers would *relate* their contributions, their performances, as if the whole was a predefined work they were realizing, especially today when Cage is canonized as one of the prominent composers of the 20th century. Still, even if the performers define their role according to the ideal of *Werktreue*, they have to prepare their own musical material; there is no written-out musical text to interpret. In that instance, they at least have to be willing to go beyond the musicians' traditional interpretative role and take on the role of a kind of co-composer.

What about the other roles associated to the work-concept's regime – the roles of composer

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<sup>229</sup> See former chapter p. 43-45.

<sup>230</sup> See transcribed sketch at p. 184.

and conductor? We do not see anyone conduct the event in its entirety – we do not hear a musical organism carefully conducted through its epic movements. We might, though, see an indication of a transformed role where the conductor has become a curator, like curators of exhibitions within the visual arts. A degree of organizing of a *Musicircus* is necessary, and to operate with a curator, or a curator-group, would be possible in a realisation. The curator would prepare the happening, function as a coordinator and to a greater or lesser extent give guidelines for what should happen. We could ask: In which way does this role differ from the traditional role at the podium in front of an orchestra? Quite obviously the leading figure guiding an army of performers is lost, and thereby the visual image of a clearly hierarchically structured organisation, but the curator of our imagined event would probably share with the traditional conductor's role the task of interpretation, associated to the ideal of *Werktreue*, and implement this task in the role as organiser and leader.<sup>231</sup>

Nevertheless, while we might think about the conductor's role as one that through leadership secures a unified interpretation of a work, our curator would not lead the materialization from one sonic sequence to another, but prepare an arena where sonic activity can appear and be mixed. This would be in line with setups of games where one realization is the result of many possibilities. The role of the curator would thereby be one that initiates something, makes it happen, but does not have the capacity to control the result in detail – like a game where the outcome intentionally is not fixed. The parallel could be drawn to sports events that are minutely planned and prepared though the thrill is connected precisely to the openness of the game – the unfixed result.

We could question if it is meaningful to speak about a composer in relation to *Musicircus* and see this as an instance where the role of the composer has lost relevance and been erased. This, though, is questionable from the perspective of Cage-reception: *Musicircus* appears in compiled lists of his work, is done several times, and it is nearly unthinkable to perform such events without accrediting Cage a kind of authorship. Historically, Cage himself has questioned his role as composer of circus events and points to the performers as those who really should have that type of credit.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> The curator's role is also discussed in chapter seven in relation to the production we did in Trondheim.

<sup>232</sup> See p. 38 in this thesis.

However, if not erased, the composer's role resembles the aforementioned role of curator who initiates and organises an arena for something to happen, simply that the composer was the first curator. If we follow this trail of thought, it is in the continuations, the re-realizations so to speak, that the idea of the "composer" is born and becomes something else than a curator. And yet even the situation that I sketch here is too simple when taking the history of the event into account. It would in fact not be accurate to name Cage as the single curator of the first *Musicircus*. Cage informs us that he just came up with an idea, presented it to a creative community, and this community responded positively and "took up the gauntlet".<sup>233</sup> The circus event happened as the result of a common effort.

We are then left with the presentation of an idea (the composer's role?) that a community responds to and acts upon. We could imagine dealing with the Cagean circus, not as the conception of a composer, but as a new type of performative practice that emerged, à la rave parties. In the last case, in practice, we would not feel obliged to credit a first originator before organizing one ourselves. That is, we are surrounded by a multitude of social practices that operate without authors. Why should we feel the need to plant a composer's stamp on our imagined event?

Cage's anarchic sympathies are well known, and his aesthetics and compositional activity can be described as eagerly questioning and attacking hierarchic relations within the practice of music. An important move here is to destabilize the established distribution of roles between composer, conductor, performer and audience. Through methods of chance and indeterminacy the composer is challenged to give away control, to be open for unforeseen eventualities and the contributions of other subjects. Likewise, the performer is challenged to be a kind of co-composer which often means to include the unforeseen (chance). Through the use of chance, indeterminacy and simultaneity as compositional and performative strategies, established role divisions are perforated and the hierarchic structure connected to the work aesthetics' meaning production is destabilized. However, even though *Musicircus* is an example where this perforation is taken furthest, the different roles can vaguely be seen, or, because of our tradition and established practice, the known roles are easy to attribute. We could however argue that we have to transform the content of these roles within a circus realisation. Changed tasks and challenges appear and the different roles' functions overlap

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<sup>233</sup> See former chapter p. 38.

and fuse: The performer is also composer, the audience are performers and also composers in a way (choosing their own route of exploration), the conductor is not really there, but somebody organises the event, perhaps as a kind of curator, and this curator would probably walk around amongst the audience or participate as a performer.

### 3.3.5 Art and life

What about the event as something unique lifted high above the ordinary? Cage polemicizes in many of his texts against an understanding of art as something separated from ordinary life. We can listen as attentively to the sounds emerging in everyday life as to a performance of Brahms's Fourth Symphony. To bring art and life together can be seen as a cornerstone of Cage's musical politics. An early example of Cage's rhetoric in this respect is found in the talk *The Future of Music: Credo*<sup>234</sup> where Cage proclaims the inclusion of noise in the exclusive party of musical material:

Whereas, in the past, the point of disagreement has been between dissonance and consonance, it will be, in the immediate future, between noise and so-called musical sounds. [...] Percussion music is a contemporary transition from keyboard-influenced music to the all-sound music of the future. Any sound is acceptable to the composer of percussion music; he explores the academically forbidden "non-musical" field of sound insofar as is manually possible.<sup>235</sup>

I would like to introduce Kahn's discussion of Cage's aesthetics here. Kahn's argument appears in his book *Noise Water Meat. A History of Sound in The Arts*, and the discussion of Cage's aesthetic position has its own chapter: "John Cage: Silence and silencing."<sup>236</sup> Kahn's argument follows from an understanding of Cage's position as a "battle" to extend what can be listened to as music, to convert all types of sounds to musical sound. Kahn argues that Cage's rhetoric that all sounds are music represses the sounds' cultural character as sounds (and not music). Cage's "liberation" of sounds as significant in themselves is interpreted by Kahn as a project of colonization. The phenomenon of sound is colonized into a paradigm of late modernism where the sounds cultural codes and associations are distilled away; one listens to the sounds as pure aesthetic phenomena. According to Kahn's interpretation, therefore, Cage's aesthetic position does not challenge the continuation of the Romantic understanding of music into late modernism profoundly; Cage transfers the modernist

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<sup>234</sup> This text is dated to 1937 in *Silence*. Leta Miller shows how this cannot be true, but that the text probably is written later, early in 1940. (See L. Miller 2002b, pp. 54-56.)

<sup>235</sup> Cage, *Silence*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>236</sup> Kahn 1999, pp. 161-199.

understanding to all sonic phenomena. The result, Kahn argues, is that Cage's aesthetic becomes one of absolute music.

Cage's emphasis on the sounds' own qualities, their intrinsic value and significance in themselves, can be seen as part of a musical politics which aims at renouncing the separation of art from life, and challenges a division between the sounds of everyday life and musical solemnity. In the wake of this emphasis, Cage argues for a handling of sounds as sounds and not as signs, or what we more moderately could say, not just as material for a musical arrangement. Taken to the extreme, it follows from this view that sounds are music in themselves; sounds are not just material, understood in terms of their potential, and which have to be given a specific form before becoming music.

It is therefore interesting when Kahn criticizes Cage's aesthetics from this perspective of sound, and finds Cage's position as one that colonizes sounds into a musical paradigm. Kahn's critique is directed to a form of aestheticizing of our sonic landscapes; a strategy which silences the sonic reality's cultural and political aspects. Kahn connects this to Cage's aesthetic strategies aimed at cancelling out and surpassing the sounds' representational character – their symbolic character – strategies which can be connected to Cage's project to erase the relevancy of the abstract work as a reference of meaning.

Two elements in particular tease my curiosity in Kahn's argument. First, the difference between a musical perspective and a perspective drawn from the phenomenon of sound: Sound dealt with artistically does not need to be equivalent with music. This division is in fact already established in artistic practices through a differentiation between music and sound art. We could ask if these different practices have developed because of dominant discourses and the need for alternative conceptions. Quite clearly Kahn expresses the need for other guidelines, other tools, than those traditional musicology has handed down to us in order to understand the sonic dimension of our time. In other words, the artistic exploration of our sonic dimension from the perspective of sound, not music, indicates another discourse than the musical one, and by that, other discursive possibilities – the objects of aesthetic experience sound different. Let us go back to our former discussion: Cage and the concept of a musical work. From Goehr's perspective, a musicological one, Cage's aesthetics and compositional practice challenge the work-concept. However, from being a challenge to the established practice, the challenge becomes, to put it bluntly, assimilated by that practice and

the music continues to exist as a purely aesthetic object (artefact) where the initial political power survives only as a teasing ornament: “Cage’s ‘real’ and ‘random’ sounds have not stayed real and random. The ‘real’ sounds of ‘his’ ‘work’ have been made subject to all the traditional, temporal, presentational, organizational constraints associated with any concert hall performance.”<sup>237</sup>

Kahn, however, from the viewpoint of the phenomenon of sound, does not find Cage’s aesthetic position at all challenging.<sup>238</sup> Cage, as a musical-political activist, works on transferring the musical discourse to the world at large. When Cage challenges a divide between life and art, he does not turn art into life, but life into art wherein the unmusical sides of life are repressed. Thus, the second element that provokes my curiosity is Kahn’s keeping the banner high for the “non-musical” sound – *noise*; that it could be deemed to be noise (not a discord that necessarily must be included in the good society of music in order to gain significance); noise that is actually there, that you do not need to enjoy, that can even be unpleasant and harmful, and that you at times may even want to remove.

Kahn criticizes Cage for separating the phenomenon of sound from its cultural and social basis. However, if we treat Cage’s statement about sound’s musical value in itself, and his argumentation for “naturalizing” the art situation as pointed polemic assertions,<sup>239</sup> and in addition explore the musical practice involved in performing his compositions, will Cage’s agenda still appear as a project aimed at aesthetic segregation with solipsistic “transcendence” as a goal?

Cage’s aesthetic project, if we follow Kahn’s train of thought, is to include all sound – almost to turn everything into sound – in the domain of musical entities. According to Kahn’s argumentation, this leads to an a-politicizing of sound; the cultural and social references of sounds are abstracted into pure aesthetic sound. Seen like this, Cage does not significantly break with the work paradigm and its association with an aesthetic wherein the work is being judged by purely aesthetic criteria independent of morality and truth. The disinterested yet

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<sup>237</sup> Goehr 1992, p. 265.

<sup>238</sup> The comparison between Kahn and Goehr is possibly a little contrived because they discuss Cage from two different standpoints: One of them with the musical work as a starting point, the other from how art forms have treated sound.

<sup>239</sup> Many of Cage’s writings and comments give the impression of an aesthetic project that aims to naturalize the art situation and revoke its created aspect, so that the art event appears as natural and without bias. For example: “There are, demonstrably, sounds to be heard and forever, given ears to hear. Where these ears are in connection with a mind that has nothing to do, that mind is free to enter into the act of listening, hearing each sound just as it is, not as a phenomenon more or less approximating a preconception.” (Cage, “Composition as Process” (1958) in *Silence*, p. 23.) However, as I am going to argue later, Cage assertions can also be interpreted as accentuating a different voicing: the ecological situation of our lives included the activity of making art.

attentive listening ideal is transferred to all aspects of life, not just the concert hall. The work paradigm's fundamental aesthetic attitude of giving approval to the independent aesthetic value of perceptible qualities begets a totalistic orientation – it embraces everything, includes everything, is everywhere. This approach, diverted from the barbarity of life, becomes universal. Life is made into art, and everything that exists can be heard as a work of music.

Kahn does not however dwell on what one needs to do in order to realize a piece by Cage; he does not reflect upon the performative aspects in Cage's project. These, I will argue, point to different interpretations. The performative strategies show a kind of duplicity: They call on discipline – to limit the boundless, anchor it through a commitment to choose and follow up on your choices, an attitude with an ethical aspect intertwined with the aesthetical – and challenge the performer, through the procedures of disciplining (which is not tied to creating a particular material outcome), to reach beyond his/her own standpoint, remaining receptive to the meeting of the different lifelines and to exist in these complex zones of interplay. Thereby an artistic approach is revealed, characterized by strategies that seek to thematize how our existence is marked by interaction between a number of independent yet co-existing elements. That is, from the point of view of realization, aesthetic awareness includes dealing with the harsh realities of life, and we could argue that Cage's prescribed performative methods in fact force us to let these realities perforate and shape the aesthetic worlds that we aim at in our performances.

### **3.4 Musicircus – work/anti-work?**

As we have seen, *Musicircus* challenges the musical work understood as a composed (composed before performance) musical object consisting of distinct courses of sonic events that are thought repeatable again and again in new performances. The work-concept's ontological condition of endurance (lasting quality) beyond the moment of performance is thereby questioned and undermined. In this respect, *Musicircus* also challenges the thought of the work, as an ideal reference for how the concrete staging should unfold – a specific sonic content is not prescribed. If we imagine a composition as a uniquely created work of art where the dissimilar sonic material is integrated in a well balanced and restricted unity, *Musicircus* also defies this, by, amongst other things, its simultaneity of many different activities that do not have a common musical point of reference. Institutionally this “circus”



challenges the established divisions of roles between the organizers, composer, conductor, performers and the audience.

When the musical work, as seen in Goehr's analysis and inquiry, so evidently is connected to the organizing of musical practice, the denotation anti-work carries with it a musical political meaning giving a context to why composers such as Cage choose their strategies and why involvement and the concurrent temperature become raised to such heights: "Percussion music is revolution. Sound and rhythm have too long been submissive to the restrictions of nineteenth-century music. Today we are fighting for their emancipation. Tomorrow, with electronic music in our ears, we will hear freedom"<sup>240</sup>

Nevertheless, the challenges that Cage puts forth are also based on established norms. It is in the play between utilizing established decrees and defying them that the musical political character of Cage's circus emerges. For example, because we associate *Musicircus* with a composer and with Western art music (and not to a children's arrangement at the mall) we can speak about *Musicircus* as an anti-work. If we follow the train of thought outlined in the discourse notion of Foucault, an anti-work must after all appear within an established practice in order to have a meaningful and comprehensive musical sting.

We noticed in the passage about our imagined Cagean circus how a realisation tends to utilize established forms of practice, both for reaching out to the audience and to simplify for the performers how to relate to what is happening. This can be interpreted as the conservative tendency of the practice, something Goehr for instance points to, but the play between utilizing the established and criticizing the norms of an institutionalized discourse, indicates also the dynamics which lay the terms for the anti-works' influence and aesthetic impact. These dynamics are also present for new realizations. How are we to stage a performance in the area between the well-known and unfamiliar that both can "ease" the availability and prepare a happening of radical potential? This question is tied to the musical-political character of *Musicircus* today. Does it still have any relevance as an anti-work and does the anti-work still have any musical-political sting? From Goehr's point of view the musical work still has a regulating position within the art of music. Seen in this light the anti-work is still radical. A relevant question in connection with realisations of happenings such as

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<sup>240</sup> From the article "Goal: New Music, New Dance", published in 1939. Cage, *Silence*, p.87.

*Musicircus* is therefore: How can one find a balance between the disposition to follow established patterns of practice and at the same time, prepare for the radical aspects of the anti-work?

If one views Cage as a musical-political composer working on the external conditions of the activity within which he operates, one could say that he, with his compositional strategies, tries to erase the abstract musical object (musical work) as a category for *comprehending* the musical events that are being put in motion. The musical events become to a certain degree incomprehensible as presented musical objects. To compose music by the method of chance operations, for example, contributes to making an abstract reference of meaning (musical idea, vision) absurd – the meaning reference becomes meaningless – in the sense that it becomes emptied of meaning – because the musical material has been put together, so to speak, by accident. Another challenge to the musical work, understood as a specifically shaped work of art that can be played again and again, is the use of indeterminacy – to leave choice to the performer – where the composer only sketches a framework for bringing about a musical event: The work has no particular course to characterize it, but the score sketches procedures for staging a musical situation. The score-less *Musicircus* adds to these work-reference undermining techniques simply by the contribution of many participants and their non-coordinated simultaneous activity that exceeds demarcation lines of where the work starts and ends, what is included, or not, who is the originator, et cetera. The image of an object, distinct from us, opposite us, that we can contemplate, becomes difficult to sustain. We swim within the staged event. We could possibly say that the musical object as the subject of music is sought to be dissolved for the benefit of music understood as a happening constituted by the interaction between several participants, a dynamic field populated by processual and transitory elements where performer and audience are being challenged to explore situations distinguished by complex forms of being together:

For this music is not concerned with harmoniousness as generally understood, where the quality of harmony results from a blending of several elements. Here we are concerned with the coexistence of dissimilars, and the central points where fusion occurs are many: the ears of the listeners wherever they are. This disharmony, to paraphrase Bergson's statement about disorder, is simply a harmony to which many are unaccustomed.<sup>241</sup>

This leads us to our next approach: *Musicircus* as a staged event. In this chapter we have

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<sup>241</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 12.

looked at *Musicircus* in terms of the work concept, and alternatively with an anti-work perspective that in a sense has focussed on aspects of Cage's artistic practice and aesthetics in terms of negation and resistance. By changing our perspective we will try to reflect upon and theorize on what *is* exhibited – what *is* presented and produced – what I will call the positive characteristics of such events/works. Do we need to change our aesthetic vocabulary to do this?

### 3.5 An aesthetics of performativity

The aesthetic theory of performativity, presented by Erika Fischer-Lichte, introduces alternative perspectives to our subject. From the point of view of theatre science and a striking drift to performance and performativity generally in the arts, she argues for a new orientation for aesthetics from the 'work' as the central category to the 'event'.

Though Fischer-Lichte and Goehr share a similar work concept,<sup>242</sup> their theorizing and arguments are initiated by different questions and done within different contexts. Goehr discusses Cage according to the dominant practices of Western art music. In this context, Cage appears as an *enfant terrible* challenging important concepts but does not manage to change the practice itself, remarkably. He appears as a minor revolutionary, doomed to be swallowed by the powerful conceptualisations already established, well rooted and nurtured by the practice. Fischer-Lichte operates within other strains of art history – theatre and the development of action- and performance art – and here Cage is given a prominent place, not just as a revolutionary, but as one of the artists that early articulates the turn to performance and performativity that has had an immense impact on the art world since 1960. This turn is among other things characterized by blurred borders between different artistic disciplines and new art forms that tend towards initiating experiences instead of presenting works of art. Focus is directed towards the *event* and its quality of process and transitions.

As I have argued, a discussion of *Musicircus* as an anti-work can shed light on important

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<sup>242</sup> Both Goehr and Fischer-Lichte operates with a concept that designates an *objectified* (produced and "finished") product of artistic creativity (imagination) that in correlated work aesthetics is treated as an autonomous instance of aesthetic meaning beyond the confines of its enactment. This product, this object, becomes at the centre of artistic activity and aesthetic experience. Fischer-Lichte refers in this respect to the position the dramatic text has had in theatre productions and the emergence of literary theatre in the second half of the eighteenth century.

polemical aspects of Cage's aesthetics, but such a discussion does not succeed in describing in positive terms the alternatives that Cage presents. The aesthetics of performativity worked out by Fischer-Lichte in fact aims at theorizing the alternatives demonstrated by artists since the 1960s, for example to discuss Cage's 'anti-work', not in a climate prescribed by the prefix 'anti', but by developing new concepts and theories to conceptualize its positive characteristics. Therefore, in the next chapter we are going to discuss this aesthetic theory more thoroughly and use it to approach our case of study from another angle than the one presented in this chapter. First though, let me present a preliminary reflection upon a shift of perspective from the category of an object to the concept of event.

### 3.6 From 'object' to 'event'

Through my reading of Goehr, a work concept has been presented that represents an objectification of music: The transient and intangible quality of sounds is solidified into a lasting and re-listenable entity. However, when we now turn the perspective from object to event, what does it really imply? Do we really gain access to areas that otherwise are not seen, or doomed to silence by the work conception?

Firstly, I would simply like to reflect upon the way we use the word in colloquial speech. An event does not denote a lasting condition, but something that comes and goes; something that happens. It is intimately connected to temporary conditions, to transitory and changeable circumstances. Further, we connect it to a certain outcome; an event is something that has become *real*. This reality is bound to the course of *time*, to chains of cause and effect, and happens at a certain *place*. To adapt Albert Einstein's definition of event from his famous theory of relativity: "the fundamental entity of observed physical reality represented by a point designated by three coordinates of place and one of time in the space-time continuum postulated by the theory of relativity."<sup>243</sup>

I have here connected the concept of event to:

- 1) Process and change;

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<sup>243</sup> "event", *Merriam-Webster.com*. "an occurrence, phenomenon, or complex of processes occupying a restricted portion of four-dimensional space-time : a happening represented by a point designated by *x*, *y*, and *z* as coordinates of place and *t* as time in the space-time continuum, it being a fundamental assumption of the theory of relativity that all physical measurements reduce to observations of relations between happenings." ("event", *Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged*.)

- 2) Reality – a certain outcome;
- 3) Being bound to a given place and time.

Whitehead's concept of event found in his process philosophy illustrates these three points expressed in a philosophic concept and in addition stresses the aspects of experience and involvement associated to the concept.<sup>244</sup>

The 'constants of externality' are those characteristics of a perpetual experience which it possesses...when we apprehend it. A fact which possesses these characteristics, namely these constants of externality, is what we call an 'event'.<sup>245</sup>

Here we have an example of how the concept of event is used to alter a philosophic focus. Instead of stressing being, permanence, and uniformity, the emphasis is put on the elements of becoming, change, and novelty in experienced reality.<sup>246</sup>

The concept of the event has here been connected to the character of process in a general and indiscriminate sense: All that exist appear and manifest themselves as events. However, we do not use the word only in this sense. 'Event' is in addition used to denote special and noteworthy happenings: "In modern use chiefly restricted to occurrences of some importance; hence colloquial uses such as *quite an event*. (Cf. Fr. *un véritable événement*.)"<sup>247</sup> This usage highlights the unique, irreducible and unrepeatable quality correlated to the concept. This sense of the word links 'event' to a kind of rupture, a break with ordinary routines and state of things: The 'event' stands out and heralds the exceptional and new – a state that has not existed before. In this sense, 'event' is also in a fundamental way connected to change, the

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<sup>244</sup> 'Event' not only denotes the dynamic character of nature crystallised into single determinate occasions in a grid of four-dimensional space-time, but includes also the point of experience and being configured by the event: Events are disclosed in sense-experience and potentially acted upon. Whitehead neither adopts an idealist position of epistemological conditions nor a purely empiricist's approach. Instead he develops a theory of a single system of multiple relations that includes both logical constructions and perceived qualities. (Bradley 1998, Lucas 2005.)

<sup>245</sup> "event, n.", *Oxford English Dictionary online*. This is a quote from Whitehead's book, *An enquiry concerning the principles of natural knowledge*, from 1919.

<sup>246</sup> "The shift towards the term 'occasion' and away from 'entity' [...] suggests that those actualities are not entitative, substantive, or material in the traditional sense, but are episodes or occasions of pure activity or 'process.' 'Actual occasions' designate the fundamental quanta, units, or building blocks ('monads') of which, according to Whitehead's Ontological Principle, all entities of whatever sort are composed. The Ontological Principle establishes the claim that, at the core, change and becoming are the primary characteristics of 'true things,' while being conceived as unchanging substance (Aristotle, Locke) or inert matter (Newton, Descartes) is either the product or the appearance of episodes or 'occasions' of creative, generative activity." Lucas 2005, p. 2576.

<sup>247</sup> "event, n.", *Oxford English Dictionary online*.

emergence of totally new situations.

The concept of event, therefore, is also used to denote something that *stands out* and breaks with the current flow of time; a certain incident, a certain moment, a certain span of time. Something is singled out when we speak about an object too, but in a different way. What does this difference consist of, and what can it tell us about different perspectives for thinking about a given phenomenon?

### 3.6.1 Object and event concepts

By chance I came over Xiang Chen's article "Object and Event Concepts: A Cognitive Mechanism of Incommensurability"<sup>248</sup> when I was trying to refine and explicate the event concept that appears in this thesis. I found the article very interesting and elucidating in articulating the main differences between how we think about something seen as an object contrary to when we see it as an event. Based on findings within cognitive sciences, Chen sketches how these differences are connected to basically different ways of cognizing phenomena. They are not only different linguistic categories; they describe different cognitive mechanisms involved in approaching, tracking down and recalling phenomena. Object concepts represent a different way to structure sense information and experiences than event concepts.<sup>249</sup>

The prototype used for 'object' is those entities that can be classified under the first definition of 'object' given in *Oxford Dictionaries*: "1. a material thing that can be seen and touched."<sup>250</sup> These concepts, like bird, car, xylophone, et cetera, represent something that has volume and mass, is containable and storable – they occupy a certain space. In contrast, event concepts, like "doing the laundry", denote something that have neither of these characteristics, but have a beginning and an end, and always vary with time.

It is precisely this difference between spatial and temporal character that Chen accentuates when he explains how these concepts represent different processes of cognition. While the conceptualization of an object concept involves a process of spatialization, event concepts are

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<sup>248</sup> Chen 2002.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. pp. 963-969.

<sup>250</sup> "object", *Oxford Dictionaries*.

connected to temporal sequences. Chen refers to Lakoff who suggests that “image-schema lie at the core of object concepts.”<sup>251</sup> These schemas are used to “map metaphorically the spatial structures of physical space into a conceptual space.”<sup>252</sup> In contrast, event concepts are built primarily upon a routine series of incidents, or some kind of temporal relations that are dimensionally organized in memory according to increasing or decreasing values on some dimension.<sup>253</sup>

Therefore, while representing object concepts involves “a process of conceptual partitioning, in which the mind extends a boundary around a portion of what would otherwise be a continuum of space, and ascribes to the contents within the boundary the property of being a single-unit entity,”<sup>254</sup> representing event concepts involves “a process of conceptual partitioning, in which the mind extends a boundary around a portion of what would otherwise be a continuum of time.”<sup>255</sup> But while object concepts circumscribe the partitioned space by properties (attributes), event concepts represent the ascribed time by an event sequence organized by cause/effect/goal and part/whole relations.<sup>256</sup>

Consequently, Chen sketches basically different ways of handling a given phenomenon according to whether it is considered as an object or an event. While objects are seen as entities identified by certain properties that they have or have not, event concepts in addition are identified by what is in *operation*, *when* it takes place, and the components’ (or participants’) *mutual relationship*, for example, the definition of an ‘engine’ (object concept) versus ‘engine cycle’ (event concept).) Therefore, returning to my own reflections, object concepts give way to a static perspective where something has or has not certain properties and exhibits a principle of “no-overlap”. For example, both swan and sparrow are birds, but a swan is not also a sparrow. Object concepts intra-conceptual relations make up a taxonomy where superordinate concepts denote a class of objects with certain attributes. The subordinate groups thereby embraced show essentially attributes that make them examples of

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<sup>251</sup> “Image-schema are schematic, spatial images that constantly recur either in our everyday bodily experience or in various orientations and relations. Examples of image-schema include ‘container,’ ‘paths,’ ‘forces,’ ‘up-down,’ ‘front-back,’ ‘part-whole,’ and ‘center-periphery,’ all of which are directly derived from perceptual experiences of spatial structures.” (Chen 2002, p. 965 with reference to George Lakoff, 1987: *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*.)

<sup>252</sup> Chen 2002, p. 965.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid. pp. 966-967.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid. p. 965.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid. p. 968.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid. p. 968.

their superordinate concept, but contrast according to the specific design (or value) of these attributes and denote thereby distinctly different entities within the domain of the superordinate concept. These subgroups cannot overlap; they conceptually occupy a certain amount of conceptual space that is not shared by the other subgroups – e.g. ‘swan’ and ‘sparrow’ occupy different districts, but they share the conceptual country of ‘bird’. There is in fact no other direct relationship between these subordinate groups than their inclusion in the superordinate concept of which they are examples, otherwise they are defined by their internal differences. We thereby arrive at an intra-conceptual system built upon inclusive and contrasting relations that makes up a taxonomy.<sup>257</sup>

Event concepts, bound to the temporal dimension, operate in a dynamic way: Cause and effect, the transfer from one state to another, either something is in operation or not. We have to deal with characteristics bound to movement and co-operation. The intraconceptual relations characteristic of the event concept do not make up a taxonomy, but a partonomy based on part-of relations, and they are directly related by causal links.<sup>258</sup> I would also add that the perspective of ‘event’ to a greater extent arises out from a centre, or a goal/effect, than pronounced outer borders, like the spread of ripples in water after a stone’s encounter with the liquid surface. Contrary, the ‘object’ perspective can be thought of as drawing boundaries in an imagined spatial landscape and defining, by this conceptual activity, what is, or is not within the marked out areas.

Of course, according to the described division between object and event concepts, the musical work becomes of a complex type. Viewed as an independent object it encapsulates a composed event that is performed and memorized as courses of events. These sequences of events however are thought able to be repeated again and again. Through this capacity for repetition, the sequences take on the character of properties – an artwork’s properties that define the work’s identity and make it possible to classify a performance as a faithful performance of a given piece and not a different work.<sup>259</sup>

We could perhaps say, with this model in mind, that according to actual performances we could think about the presented musical work as an event, but ontologically the work would

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<sup>257</sup> Chen 2002, pp. 963-965.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid. pp. 965-969.

<sup>259</sup> This reading is in fact close to N. Goodman’s nominalism that Goehr criticises. See former footnote at p. 61.



be seen as an object with such and such attributes that it has or has not – a static perspective on what defines its identity and unique character.

In this sense the work, thought of as an object, becomes like a package that wraps up an event. But this wrapped up event is not identical with the actual world surrounding the performance. Like a play that stages a fictive world with fictive characters and plots, the wrapped up musical event creates its own musical world, characters and plots – it creates its own musical drama<sup>260</sup> – that as an event follows its own logic (cause/effect/goal, part/whole relations) independently of what happens in the concert hall at the same time. In this way, the composed musical event creates its own musical space, time and agents that act autonomously of the specific place and time of performance.

We could argue that it is exactly the notion of the possibility of revisiting this “fictive world” and experiencing it again and again that forms the *object-ness* of the musical work, and we could link the object package to basically three aspects:

- 1) The creation of its own musical space and time, a “fictive world”;
- 2) The notion of the opportunity to revisit this fictive world again and again;
- 3) Point 1) and 2) create the foundation for a changeless perspective, even if the “wrapped up” music in itself is very eventful: The work has such and such properties, though its properties are sequences of musical incidents.

Cage, though, through his methods of composition and performative techniques bursts the object-wrapping: There is a collapse of a musical language that upholds this separate world (“fictive world”) detached from what is going on in the concert hall at the same time, and this collapse makes the notion of the possibility for re-visitation difficult to sustain. It becomes difficult to identify an art object with certain properties, independently of the specific situation where it is performed/created. The wrapping paper of changeless identity tears; we are presented only with the event.

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<sup>260</sup> The work concept Goehr describes emerges at the same time as the sonata form gets a prominent position within the “high” art of instrumental music. Though objectified into a re-listenable item, the word-less music adopts driving dramatic forms and means to present an evocative narrative of fateful events where characters are presented, plots elaborated and in the end a reconciliation of the dramatic ingredients into a recapitulatory section. The music is in this sense highly eventful and works through a logic of cause and effect, part and whole.

I have here moved in the direction of a different conclusion than that which Goehr arrives at. She argues that the expansion of musical material in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has not brought along a change on the formal level, and argues that the composer can do very little (giving the example of indeterminate compositions) while holding onto control over the work (whereby the ideal of *Werktreue* is still intact). The train of reflection, I have presented, nevertheless keeps the assumption that the musical work is associated to some kind of repeatable sonic structure, and if the notion about the ability to repeat is lost, then the work's *object-ness* is undermined.<sup>261</sup>

### 3.6.2 'Event' presented in the aesthetics of performativity

If we think about 'event' in the ordinary sense as an extraordinary happening, then what happens is intimately connected to those who are involved in it and stricken by its effects. The view of the distinct object at a distance is difficult to translate to the dynamics of events. What act and what are affected are intertwined and define together the event's character and outcome. In this sense, the concept of event lends itself to an inclusive view of the formation of music and art.

Fischer-Lichte's concept of event links up to this inclusive perspective. Her point of departure is the theatrical performance. The event – the performance, which is a certain constitution of reality, is the outcome of a particular interaction, namely the interplay between actors and spectators. The 'event' emerges in the *meeting* between performers and audience, by what is generated through their encounter. She stresses in this respect the impact of the bodily co-existence: Actors and spectators are actually at the same place at the same time. The event character of performances becomes intimately connected to the *live situation* and the performance's progress in *real time*. This is emphasised by her accentuation of performances' character of being singular and not repeatable. The performance as event cannot in its aesthetic character and effect be detached from its enactment. Thereby it can neither be fixed

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<sup>261</sup> Maybe there is another option: To think about the work in term of conceptual art. Not the repeatable sonic structure would be of interest but the artistic production's ability to create a climate for reflection. We could think about an intellectual idea as the assumed repeatable entity (even if such a goal seems a bit farfetched also in a conceptual frame). Then, however, our attention would be upon abstract pretensions and not the plethora of sensuous affirmations created by the artistic event. This seems at odds with Cage's accentuation of the perceptible qualities of experience and his brand of idealism-critique. His aesthetics and artistic practice does not undermine the value of sensuous features. The physicality of artistic productions is instead accentuated. I find therefore not the label of conceptual art so appropriate though Cage shares the conceptualists gesture of questioning. It signals the precedence of the idea, the abstract pretence, and less the actuality of a performance.

nor passed on. It is elusive and transitory, evades re-visitation and duplication.<sup>262</sup>

Inspired by the new type of theatre and performative art that appear in the 1960s and 1970s, this event concept becomes also linked to a focus upon the fact *that something happens* more than *what happens*; there is a focus upon the *actual reality* that is created in the theatre hall.

To a certain degree, the event concept used by Fischer-Lichte denotes extraordinary happenings that break with the courses of everyday life, unsettle habitual points of view and clear the way for the appearance of new understandings and realities. For example, she emphasises, and uses as examples, performances that consciously stage habitual expectations and categories, though do not meet these standards and make them thereby ambiguous. Through this play with and against ordinary conceptions – making way for a state of unsettledness – the event character is highlighted and intensified and a liminal space is created that creates the opportunity for transformative knowledge and experiences to emerge. The ‘event’, thereby, as an aesthetic category not only denotes the character of process exhibited by its cases, but signifies also what stands out and is fateful.

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<sup>262</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 326.

## 4 A PERFORMATIVE TURN, THEORY

### 4.1 Introduction

Our imagined *Musicircus*, which figures in the last chapter, oozes so to speak beyond the delimitations set by a work concept into other musical spheres: Situations and happenings created by complex forms of co-existence and interplay. However, through the discussion of our envisioned realisation, we can also imagine how we would rely heavily on work-based discourses and practises, for example in presenting the idea to performers, marketing the event, preparing the contributions (individual performances) and so on. We would probably have dealt with the idea of a *Musicircus*, what we could call its concept, as a recognised work that we were to give a performance of, and quite likely our approach would have been coloured by the spirit of *Werktreue*. Goehr's argument that the work concept, emerging around 1800, is still going strong and has a regulative position within Western art music thus seems convincing. John Cage and composers like him have not managed to change the concept profoundly, and they have not provided a changed paradigm for how music is talked about, produced and consumed. Pushing Goehr's argument to extremes, the music of the vanguard appears, in new canons of 20<sup>th</sup> century music, to be handled almost in the same manner as Beethoven's and Brahms's contributions to the "imaginary museum's" section of 19<sup>th</sup> century works. That which once appeared as radical and work critical, circulates securely within known frames.

Fischer-Lichte gives Cage's artistic challenges to the work concept quite a different historical prominence. In her article "Performance Art and the Ritual: Bodies in Performance",<sup>263</sup> the untitled event Cage organized at Black Mountain College in 1952 is referred to as "a remarkable event in the history of theatre in Western culture",<sup>264</sup> its historical relevance seen as no less than "founded on its discovery of the performative".<sup>265</sup>

We have seen in the last chapter how Cage's artistic enterprise can be understood as opposing music heard as a *thing*, especially a given and exclusive thing. Even consideration of the

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<sup>263</sup> Fischer-Lichte 1997.

<sup>264</sup> Fischer-Lichte 1997, p. 22.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

sound in itself, in its materiality, points to domains of processes and unforeseen events. The character of the event is accentuated amongst other things through the label “experimental music”, where the experiment aims not to settle matters, but to provide a situation to be explored and experienced (not necessarily to be understood).<sup>266</sup> The aesthetic rhetoric of the ‘here and now’ emphasizes this further, stressing the quality of being present and the temporal qualities of change and transition.<sup>267</sup> Simplified, therefore, it is tempting to “cage” Cage’s aesthetics and artistic practice as accentuating music as events, as opposed to objects.

However, as indicated in our former discussions, such a strict opposition may be difficult to maintain, both when confronted with the task of doing a work by Cage, and even as Nicholas Cook has argued, in a performance of a classic stalwart like Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. In the article “Making music together, or improvisation and its other” (2004) Cook points to the under-theorized dimension of performance within musicology which lies behind distinctions jazz scholars have drawn between jazz and the music of the Western art tradition. Cook quotes Ingrid Monson: “meaningful theorizing about jazz improvisation at the level of the ensemble must take the interactive, collaborative context of musical invention as a point of departure. This context has no parallel in the musical practice of Western classical composers of the common practice period”.<sup>268</sup> Cook argues that the lack of correspondence Monson refers to does not truly reflect the practice of classical music, but rather reflects the way music has been talked about. The performer’s role, as present and embodied – prepared and alert to engage with other musicians – is no less important in classical music than in jazz.

We could therefore argue that the character of *event*, as distinctive in the performance of music, is as crucial for 19th century classics as it is for Cage’s music, and as mentioned above, that the concept of the self-contained work as a delimited continuous entity surviving and informing different performances is not at all outmoded by Cage’s enterprise. Fischer-Lichte, however, emphasizes a genuine change, though her expression “discovery of the performative” is modified in a further elaboration. Western culture, she argues, has been predominantly performative – for instance from the Middle Ages to the end of the eighteenth century – but until the 1950s Western scholars understood culture mainly as “produced and

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<sup>266</sup> See for example quote at p. 67.

<sup>267</sup> For example: “It is quite / useless / in this situation / for anyone to say / Feldman’s work / is good or not good. / Because / we are in the direct / situation: / it is.” (Cage, “Lecture on something” in *Silence*, p. 133.)

<sup>268</sup> Cook 2007b, p. 321.

manifested in artefacts (texts and monuments), which accordingly have been taken as the proper objects of study in the humanities”.<sup>269</sup> It is this dominance of the artefact that the untitled event, so to speak, undoes. The happening “dissolved the artefact into performance” and the “artefact became actions”. Thus, “the borders between the different arts shifted. Poetry, music, and the fine arts ceased to function merely as poetry, music, or fine arts – they were simultaneously realized as performance art.”<sup>270</sup>

Fischer-Lichte sees this change of focus from the artefact to performed actions not only emerging in the arts. Within anthropology the American Milton Singer coined the term *cultural performance* in the 1950s to describe instances of cultural organization such as weddings, temple festivals, plays, dances, concerts and so on, and he understood these cultural performances to articulate a culture’s self-understanding and self-image.<sup>271</sup> John L. Austin coined the term *performative* within the philosophy of ordinary language to distinguish utterances whose significance was linked to their being performed within social contexts, and not as a statement or description of something. Fischer-Lichte, therefore, places the Black Mountain happening historically as one of the events that heralded a performative turn in Western culture where performance and performative aspects have again been put on the agenda:

The trend towards performativity which has gradually grown since the 1960s in theatre, the other arts and in culture in general, was unmistakably articulated and uncompromisingly realized in the ‘untitled event’. One could state that Cage’s ‘untitled event’ and Austin’s speech act theory heralded the era of a new performative culture and were its first momentous manifestations.<sup>272</sup>

Following in the steps indicated above, we will make a performative turn in our study.<sup>273</sup> We will twist our perspective from a delimited hypostatized object and its aesthetic characteristics, to the staged event as the focal point for theoretical reflection. The aim with this turn is firstly to employ:

- a) A perspective centred on process;

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<sup>269</sup> Fischer-Lichte 1997, p. 23.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>271</sup> Carlson 2004, pp. 13-14.

<sup>272</sup> Fischer-Lichte 1997, p. 26.

<sup>273</sup> Our performative turn would mainly consist in a perspectival alteration of our theoretical and analytical approach regarding the topic we discuss, Cage’s circus. I leave more or less for others to judge the adequacy of the performative turn used as a big narrative of western culture. Such a historical scope would not be the theme for my discussion here.

- b) A perspective that approaches aesthetic character as intrinsically connected to the specific place and time of production.

Secondly, as part of this move from object to process, from universality to locality, the schism described in the former chapter, between an ideal referent (an ideal conception of the work – the work in its abstract and ideal form) and its physical appearance (the individual performance of the work), will be called into question and alternative understandings will be presented. That is, to a certain extent we will address Cage's non-dualistic pretensions, though, in this chapter this will mainly be done from the perspective of an aesthetic theory of performativity.<sup>274</sup>

The main part of this chapter is devoted to a general theoretical presentation and reflection. I will present the concepts of performance and performativity, bring up questions arising with reference to these concepts and thereby discuss their applicability to our topic of research. As part of this discussion a new reading of the work concept will also be presented – this time with the help of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophy of art. In this respect a conception will be presented that sees the work of art as an *event* that incorporates the performative gesture within its character of workhood. Through these discussions, concepts and analytical approaches (mainly elaborated by Fischer-Lichte's aesthetic theory of performativity) will also be presented that attempt to come to grips with the analytical case as a conditional process – a staged event – and not as a lasting and autonomous entity.

## 4.2 The concept of performativity

### 4.2.1 Performance and performativity

I have already indicated an intimate relationship between the character of the *event* and the modality of performance. However, it will be interesting, in introducing the concept of performativity here, to explore this relationship a bit further. Fischer-Lichte, for example, sees the performative nature of the untitled event at Black Mountain College as something that demands other theoretical approaches than those available in the worked out conceptualizations handed down through dominant viewpoints of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as

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<sup>274</sup> The 'aesthetic theory of performativity' means in this respect the theory worked out by Fischer-Lichte.

hermeneutics and semiotics. Basically she concludes that these perspectives approach art in terms of entities made up of a specific constellation of signs. The staged event at Black Mountain evades being handled like that.<sup>275</sup>

What happened at the dining hall of the college was not only that the performative quality of different art forms was made central, producing performance art. Fischer-Lichte sees what happened as a turn to theatre, but not to the traditional theatre. Theatre, like the other involved arts, is redefined. The event's sequence of non-causal, non-linear, discrete actions elevated the performative function by radically reducing the *referential* function and stressing the *real* dimension of actions. For instance, the referential function was reduced by "the unrelatedness of actions, which could not be connected into a story or a meaningful 'symbolic' configuration, [and] by the refusal to give the 'untitled' event a title."<sup>276</sup> The venue of the performance, the dining hall, was not transformed to signify another fictional (imagined) landscape, and *real* time was the performance's time dimension: "real people performed real actions in a real space in a real time."<sup>277</sup> Fictional characters, their histories, actions, or psychological motivations were not at all at stake. What was emphasized "was the performance of actions – not the relation of actions to a fictional character in a fictional story in a fictional world, or to one another, so that a 'meaningful whole' might come into existence."<sup>278</sup>

The performance stressed its performative quality by making it difficult to decode the presented acts according to unifying and meaning-giving references – to an underlying, coherent work. The *what* of the performance, as a composition, a drama, an opera and so on, became somehow empty and the audience stood there with the simple acts - the *how*.

To describe this *how* Fischer-Lichte presents, in *Ästhetik des Performativen* (2004), an aesthetic theory of performativity that aims to outline an alternative to aesthetics centred on the work – the *what*. Here, the character of *event* is highlighted. Strikingly, the art scene in the 1960s begins to focus on the art *event* by heightening awareness of the non-repeated, processual and unforeseen qualities of artistic productions. With a changed focus from the

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<sup>275</sup> The approach of handling the artefact as a sign, or a constellation of signs will be further described later in this chapter under the heading "Art as sign, art as event."

<sup>276</sup> Fischer-Lichte 1997, p.23.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>278</sup> Loc. cit.



work (which we could call objectified artistic expressions) to the character of event, something happens also with connected understandings and concepts. Fischer-Lichte identifies a tripod – *work, production* and *reception* – characterising aesthetic theories that have the work concept at the centre of their aesthetic reflection. In contrast, her aesthetic theory of performativity operates with *event (Ereignis)*, *staging/production (Inszenierung)* and *aesthetic experience (Erfahrung)*, where the aesthetic experience is as much understood as a threshold experience as an interpretative activity.

The aesthetic theory of performativity, therefore, places the character of event at the centre of aesthetic reflection, and does this by building on the concept of performance and performativity, concepts whose rise in popularity during recent decades can be felt in a diverse field of disciplines from cultural studies to business, economics and technology, and which “reflects a major shift in many cultural fields from the what of culture to the how, from the accumulation of social, cultural, psychological, political or linguistic data to a consideration of how this material is created, valorized, and changed, to how it lives and operates within the culture, by its actions. Its real meaning is now sought in its praxis, its performance.”<sup>279</sup> However, both the concept of performance and performativity have given rise to a wide range of usages, which in certain instances have pointed to quite different aspects, such as the significance of conventions, or the potentiality of change and creation of new situations.

#### **4.2.2 Performance and event**

When ‘performance’ is presented as a concept with the capacity to reflect a shift of attention from the *what* to the *how*, and also by this shift to be able to include the body as part of this picture, it is amongst other things because of the concept’s linkage to the character of event and action. Therefore we could say that ‘performance’ is used to illuminate the event character of phenomena intimately linked to human activity. However, as we ordinary use the words, we do not mean the same by ‘performance’ and ‘event’, and I think, with respect to Cage’s aesthetics and praxis, that it is interesting to discuss these differences, even though theoreticians like Fischer-Lichte seem to incorporate parts of their difference as a dynamic force within the concept of ‘performance’ and ‘performativity’ itself.

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<sup>279</sup> Carlson 2004, p. ix.

Ordinarily, ‘to perform’ and ‘performance’ have a wide field of uses: “In business, sports, and sex, ‘to perform’ is to do something up to a standard – to succeed, to excel. In the arts, ‘to perform’ is to put on a show, a play, a dance, a concert. In everyday life, ‘to perform’ is to show off, to go to extremes, to underline an action for those who are watching. In the twenty-first century, people as never before live by means of performance.”<sup>280</sup>

Briefly, Schechner, defines to perform as “showing doing”: “pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing.”<sup>281</sup> This “showing” emphasizes a *reflective* quality characterizing performances. Marvin Carlson further explains this with reference to the ethnolinguist Richard Bauman:

According to Bauman, all performance involves a consciousness of doubleness, according to which the actual execution of an action is placed in mental comparison with a potential, an ideal, or a remembered original model of that action. Normally this comparison is made by an observer of the action – the theatre public, the school’s teacher, the scientist – but the double consciousness, not the external observation, is what is most central.<sup>282</sup>

Carlson emphasizes that ‘performance’ always is “performance *for* someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self.”<sup>283</sup>

This reflective quality of performing, its double consciousness including the doing (showing) *for* someone and incorporating some kind of standard, or model, “the elusive other that performance is not but which it constantly struggles in vain to embody”<sup>284</sup> is highlighted in the way we speak about performances of music, dance and theatre. Performances have an audience (if not actual, then at least an imagined one, or oneself as the *for* somebody), and something is performed. However, this relationship to the something performed has been questioned by the performance art which developed from the 1950s/1960s and onwards. We can use traditional theatre to illustrate this. The “other”, which Carlson denotes as that which “performance is not but which it constantly struggles in vain to embody” is in traditional theatre mostly regarded as a character in a presented play which an actor aims to embody and make present for the audience through his or her performance. In much performance art,

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<sup>280</sup> Schechner 2006, p.28.

<sup>281</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>282</sup> Carlson 2004, p. 5.

<sup>283</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>284</sup> Loc. cit.

though, focus is not directed there: “Its practitioners, almost by definition, do not base their work upon characters previously created by other artists, but upon their own bodies, their own autobiographies, their own specific experiences in a culture or in the world, made performative by their consciousness of them and the process of displaying them for audiences.”<sup>285</sup> The emphasis is put on the performance itself and “how the body or self is articulated through performance”.<sup>286</sup> The performer’s individual body is not here transformed to represent a character in a play but remains as the performer’s own body, own existence, at the centre of such presentations.<sup>287</sup>

However, the reflexivity referred to above is no less present in performance art, Carlson remarks. In fact performance art has become an art form which almost emblematically reflects a contemporary world that is “highly self-conscious, reflexive, obsessed with simulations and theatricalizations in every aspect of its social awareness.”<sup>288</sup>

Included in this aspect of reflexivity is the consciousness of the possible effects a performance can give rise to. An intentional dynamic is in operation equal to a kind of rhetorical gesture. We perform for somebody to achieve certain effects, for example to be respected, found interesting, experience a kind of community, convince somebody of a certain political view, and so on, though we could say that the consciousness of these potential effects also incorporates an awareness of vulnerability – a willingness to be exposed by these effects, or their failure.

It could be of interest to compare these characteristics of reflexivity with the connotations the *event* has with the unforeseen, not prepared, chance-driven and abrupt. As we know, these qualities are explicitly played with through Cage’s methods of chance operations, indeterminacy and simultaneity. In this respect it might be relevant to question the relationship between the definition of ‘performance’ as “showing doing” (as the (self-) conscious carrying out of intentional actions) and the concept’s association with the character of the *event*, where the quality of chance-driven and unpredictable elements are accentuated. Does Cage, for example, by his methods, try to override these reflexive qualities involved in

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<sup>285</sup> Carlson 2004, p. 5.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>287</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>288</sup> Loc. cit.

performing and draw attention to the character of event beyond performative “rhetoric”?

I especially have two questions in mind in this respect. The first one circles around the impact of those factors which break away from reflexive and intentional structures, bringing up questions about the significance of the non-conventional and unexpected in the definition of ‘performance’. The second question concerns the schism of man versus nature and asks whether the use of ‘performance’ as a prism for aesthetic reflection in any case inherits an anthropocentric orientation that Cage’s aesthetics problematizes with its pronounced non-dualism.

I emphasised in the previous chapter that ‘event’ besides being nailed in a general and indiscriminate sense to the dimension of time and reality, is often used to designate special and noteworthy happenings.<sup>289</sup> The concept, in this usage, is connected to *change* in a fundamental way; it is connected to the emergence of totally new situations. Considering the event of the happening, and specifically in the uncertainty in its state of becoming – how is this condition reflected in the concept of performance? Until now I have emphasised a reflexive structure. What about the intertwined factors beyond the control of the self-conscious action?

The concept of event covers phenomena beyond those structured by the reflexivity outlined above, and includes in its conception the interaction of factors far beyond the matrix of human agency and intentionality. We could argue that the concept of performance readily restricts the view of aesthetic events as structured by human intentionality.<sup>290</sup> Cage, however, draws attention to that which appears in the conjunction of many life lines, which is not limited to human agency alone, and he includes this broad scope of activity (organic and inorganic alike, intentional and non-intentional) as part of the interacting factors that create the event.<sup>291</sup> In this way he draws attention to the limitations of human intentionality. We are brought to the messy condition of reality.

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<sup>289</sup> See p. 89-90.

<sup>290</sup> Such understood, we might risk inheriting an anthropocentric orientation that splits man from nature and use the categorically difference to define the mode of event that we here speak about. We could therefore ask the question: In which degree (to which extent) does the concept of performance still reflect an anthropocentric orientation that Cage’s aesthetics problematizes? This question will continue to traverse my presentations and readings of the concept of performance and performativity throughout the thesis.

<sup>291</sup> E.g., see Hayle’s article: “Chance Operations: Cagean Paradox and Contemporary Science” (1994). Hayles interpretation of Cage’s methodological use of chance will be further presented in chapter six.

Gade and Jerslev write in the introduction to *Performative Realism*: “Most apparent is the reference in both concepts [performance and performativity] to real actions taking place between several persons.”<sup>292</sup> The reality of a performance – “real actions taking place” – links the performative to the dimension of reality in an immediate sense. The performed actions actually take place by physically transforming the situations of our embodied existence. But they do not do so alone. Gade and Jerslev point to the impact of a kind of community. Actions take place *between* people. They are in fact *interactions*. The actions appear in a milieu of many contributive factors. As actions, appearing as events, the mode of doing entails a whole string of encounters (from experiencing the pure qualities of physical substances to engaging with other peoples’ feedback and interaction) that by their concurrence brings about the event as it is, as it becomes. The presence of many factors, agencies and forces that we in sum could hardly hope to foresee opens up the performative to the unpredictable and indeterminate. Therefore, we can argue that a performance unavoidably operates in the gap between chance and known elements in its enactment. This condition is reflected in a variety of theory formulations that either give weight to the reflexive structure involved in performance, or the eventful character resulting from the interactive condition and the conglomeration of contributors.<sup>293</sup>

#### 4.2.3 ‘Performativity’

Performativity, linked to the philosopher Austin’s term ‘performative’ which he coined to elaborate his analysis of ordinary language, is a new concept. However, it has both exhibited a capacity to expand beyond its original territory and to inspire new ways of theorizing and new contexts within which to be employed, as in for example Judith Butler’s gender theory. Naturally due to the connotations of the term itself, the concept of performativity has become a prominent feature of performance studies, a young academic discipline growing out of theatre studies (at New York University) and oral interpretation (at Northwestern University) in the 1980s. However, as Loxley remarks, its use within the theoretical vocabulary of performance studies is not necessarily borrowed from Austin, or the intertwined traditions developed in response to Austin’s work. It can simply be used as an adjective denoting the

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<sup>292</sup> Gade and Jerslev 2005, p. 10.

<sup>293</sup> Carlson, for example, shows how ‘performance’ both has been used to illuminate conservative features of a society and the opposite, to theorize conditions that undermine the constraints of traditional conceptions. (See e.g. Carlson 2004, pp. 12-18.)

aspect of performance of any object or practice under consideration.<sup>294</sup>

Austin's term 'performative' was baptized within the field of the philosophy of language in an aim to scrutinize parts of ordinary language he found were inadequately handled by the tradition of logical positivism and analytic philosophy. He saw what he called a "descriptive fallacy" dominating the scene. Language at large was handled as a system of statements, which could be judged true or false, or possibly meaningless. The basic function of language was to report facts or states of affairs, e.g. "Christopher's car is blue", "the sun is shining", "the dog is in the kitchen", "Mars is the fourth planet from the Sun in the Solar System", and so on. Other usages (questions, orders and so on) could in principle be traced back to some kind of statement, or a definition whose consistency could be judged by conceptual analysis alone. This descriptive norm was contested by Austin in the series of lectures entitled "How to do things with words" given at Harvard University in 1955 and first published posthumously in 1962. Linguistic utterances could function as actions where their meaning was connected to the effect of being said and not to any correspondence to established facts or states of affairs. To denote this class of utterance, Austin derived the term 'performative' from the verb 'to perform' – to execute actions. The newly-coined term was used to differentiate between 'performative' and 'constative' utterances. 'Constative' utterances, which follow the structure of the statement presented above, can be judged true or false, whereas 'performative' utterances, Austin's topic in "How to do things with words", rather, *do* something. They function as *actions* within a certain *social* context and can be judged to be felicitous or not, but not true or false.<sup>295</sup>

Modes of action and a shift to the actional potential of language are thereby emphasized by Austin's concept of the performative. A telling example used by Austin is the act of saying "I do"<sup>296</sup> during a wedding ceremony. It is meaningless to judge such an utterance as true or false. Within the ceremony it does not operate as a description, a report, or more specifically as a 'constative'; it does not have any meaning according to such a function. Furthermore, if the conditions are sufficient, the uttering of "I do" takes part in actions that transform and

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<sup>294</sup> Loxley 2007, p. 140. My use of 'performative' in this thesis will reflect this varied use where it is not restricted to 'performativity' alone but is also used as an adjectival derivative of 'performance.'

<sup>295</sup> Towards the end of the lecture series called "How to do things with words". Austin moves in the direction of understanding all utterances as speech acts, and he abandons a clear division between the 'constative' and the 'performative.' Utterances can though as speech acts succeeds or fails, be true or false.

<sup>296</sup> Example presented and discussed by Austin in Lecture I, p. 1-11. (Austin 1962.)

constitute a new reality for the bride and the bridegroom. The couple does not really know what the future will bring, but they constitute a new reality for that coming future by the vow performed in the ceremony. In contrast, a ‘constative’ utterance functions as a statement that can be judged true or false by comparing the utterance to the issue to which it refers.

Fischer-Lichte in her reading of Austin’s concept of the ‘performative’ emphasizes these aspects of being *self-referential* and *reality-constitutive*. It is not through reference to something else – facts, states of affairs, and their like – that meaning resides, but through the effects of being done. These aspects are of utmost importance in the concept of performativity she adopts for her aesthetic theory of performativity.

Austin, however, elaborates the conditions for a ‘performative’ utterance to be successful or not. The significance of conventions is prominent here, and this aspect of the conventional points beyond what can be studied by linguistic analysis alone. One has to consider the social situation where the utterance is made. For example, to be successful, the “I do” said in a wedding ceremony has to be done in a certain way and in the right setting. A couple who say “I do” to each other at the top of a mountain without any witnesses, priest or ceremony master, are not really married. To be married they have to utter their confirmation in a social setting which fulfils certain conditions. Only within the right context can the performative speech act be sanctioned as valid and binding. The existence of adequate social codes and conventions is therefore a premise for the ‘performative’ to function in the sense of being effective and felicitous.

The contextual and conventional dependency revealed in ‘performative’ utterances, shows “conservative” traits in the concept of ‘performativity’. However, by denoting speech acts that actually function within social situations and are in this respect dependent upon conditional processes that are difficult to delimit, the linguistic analysis of performative utterances opens up a view of elements and dynamics that destabilize systems of meaning production based upon established conceptual schema of dichotomies. Fischer-Lichte finds here a reservoir for the concept’s usefulness in an aesthetic context that aims to answer challenges raised by artistic performances in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Austin emphasizes the mode of action in his conception, and a mode that cannot escape its context. This is also incorporated in the concept Judith Butler uses to theorize issues of

gender and identity. However, in being used to stress the constructed nature of identity and gender the concept is radicalized. It becomes a theoretical tool to reflect an alternative to expressive models of identity formation. Butler's aims here, and the transfer from the philosophy of language to cultural theory, add new connotations, especially in Butler's emphasis on the body – how we are embodied beings and how we become these through performative acts.

Briefly, Butler uses 'performativity' to stress the constructed character of our identity and gender. There is nothing really to express. No biological or ontological gender is given: "[G]ender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*."<sup>297</sup>

The concept of performativity is used by Butler to turn our perspective upside down. The issue is what is created through repetitive stylized acts and the repertoire we can choose from, not a biological or ontological given entity expressed by these actions. Superficially, this shift of perspective from expressions to performance has parallels in Cage's aesthetic rhetoric, in statements such as: "We are not, in these dances and music, saying something. [...] We are rather doing something."<sup>298</sup> But as we are going to see later, such a comparison can also be problematic.

Butler calls the stylized repeated acts referred to above 'performative', "where 'performative' itself carries the double-meaning of 'dramatic' and 'non-referential'."<sup>299</sup> The concept is used to describe bodily acts and is not limited to acts of speech. Performative acts as bodily actions are understood as non-referential insofar as they do not refer to anything predetermined, an inner core, a substance, or just an essence of some sort, of which the actions are expressions. There is no stable identity to express. The bodily actions, which are described as performative, do not bring any antecedent given identity to its manifestation. Identity, as the meaning of these actions, is for the first time brought forth through these same actions. Further, Butler says: "By dramatic I mean only that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities. One is not simply a body, but, in some

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<sup>297</sup> Butler 1988, p. 519.

<sup>298</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 94.

<sup>299</sup> Butler 1988, p.522.



very key sense, one does one's body."<sup>300</sup> This also means that the body in its special materiality has been what it is, and is what it is through the repetition of definite gestures and movements. It is through these actions that the body appears as a discrete, sexual, ethnically and culturally marked individual. Identity, as bodily and social reality, is therefore constituted through performative acts.

The performative generation of identity is understood as a process of *embodiment*. This process of embodiment is understood as "a manner of doing, dramatizing and *reproducing* a historical situation".<sup>301</sup> Through the styled re-enactment of performative actions, certain historical and cultural possibilities become embodied, and the body becomes historically and culturally marked as identity is expressed. Butler aligns the conditions for embodiment to those of a theatre performance. Within a theatre performance, actions are performed which clearly are not just the act of a lone individual. Such a performance is identified by shared experience and collective actions. The performative action of the individual is an action that in a certain sense has already begun before that individual agent appears on the scene. The individual re-enacts and re-experiences from a repertoire of meanings that already have been established socially.

#### **4.2.4 The significance of shared standards**

Butler compares the constitution of identity through embodiment to the process of staging a written play. In a dramatic performance the given text can be staged in different ways. An actor has a certain freedom within the frames given by the textual specifications. Thus, a character in a play, for example the well-known figure of Hamlet, can be realized in new and unexpected ways. But there are guidelines to be observed. Likewise, a person acts in a specific bodily space that appears possible and realizable through directions which in some way or other are drawn up by society.

The importance of conventions and possible repertoires is therefore an essential part of the concept of performativity both for Austin and Butler. We could ask if this weighting hinders consideration of the character of chance and new formations (as was brought up in connection with the event concept). Fischer-Lichte finds Austin and Butler's conception of performance too

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<sup>300</sup> Butler 1988, p. 521.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid. p. 521.

limited and not properly scrutinized. She refers to the German concept *Aufführung* (performance) outlined by Max Herrmann early in the 20th century in refining a definition. Herrmann, a Germanist, used this concept to argue for the establishment of theatre studies as a discrete discipline at university: The theatre had to be understood in terms of staging and performance. Fischer-Lichte reconstructs Herrmann's concept to clear the ground for her own concept of performativity. The notion she constructs is grounded in an understanding of the theatre as *social play* – “ein Spiel Aller für Alle”.<sup>302</sup> Like play, the theatre also has rules – like the rules of a game. The *social play* which takes place in the theatre is made possible by the *co-presence* of actors and viewers – by their *corporal co-presence*.<sup>303</sup> Herrmann redefines the relationship between actors and audience. Spectators are to be understood as active partakers, not just “passive” receivers who only take part in the unfolding of a dramatic production through empathy and interpretation. The relationship between actors and viewers is a relationship between co-subjects. The viewer is a participant, a co-player, and a performance unfolds (happens) through the participation of both actors and viewers – through their presence, their awareness, actions and reactions. The performance *emerges between* the actors and spectators. Together these two groups contribute to what happens.<sup>304</sup>

Fischer-Lichte by building her concept of performativity upon the conception of performance outlined by Herrmann, accentuates the dynamics that appear through co-presence and interplay. The “for somebody” – the recipients – become co-players and the performance emerges in an *interplay*, and thus cannot be fixed specifically as one or another thing. It is ephemeral and changeable; it is an aesthetic event.<sup>305</sup>

Both Austin's and Butler's concepts of performativity have the capacity to elucidate the aspect of action and thereby the interlinked character of *event*. Nevertheless, the aspect of action that is illuminated incorporates a reflexive structure which is directed both backwards and forwards – towards the aspect of standards, or norms (certain social conventions, or a behavioural repertoire), and the potential effects of the acts. We associate some kind of

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<sup>302</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 47. F.-L. quotes Herrmann.

<sup>303</sup> “Es ist die leibliche Ko-Präsenz von Akteuren und Zuschauern, welche die Aufführung allererst ermöglicht, welche die Aufführung konstituiert.” (Loc. cit.)

<sup>304</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>305</sup> Fischer-Lichte, therefore, emphasizes how Herrmann's concept of performance implicates a move from the ‘work’ to an aesthetic concept of event as the central aesthetic category for performances: “Der Aufführung kommt ihr Kunstcharakter - ihre *Ästhetizität* - nicht aufgrund eines Werkes zu, das sie schaffen würde, sondern aufgrund des Ereignisses, als das sie sich vollzieht.” (Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 53.)

intentionality with performed actions.

In contrast, I mentioned how ‘event’ conceptualizes aspects that go beyond the reflexive structure of performance, beyond the dynamics of intentionality, in for example the significance of coincidences, the unplanned and indeterminate. Things and events happen. We can deduce plausible reasons why they occurred as they did afterwards, or with the knowledge we have about regularities and how different factors operate, we make our predictions, but the exact concurrence of factors from an immense amount of possible routes and coincidences can not be fully forecasted and planned. We as human beings must nonetheless deal with such unplanned coincidences, fortunately or not.

We could say that what we here are pointing to are dynamics operating in the field between reflexive and non-reflexive processes where the event is seen as something emerging from this middle position. We are perhaps closer here to Fischer-Lichte’s position than was at first apparent. By accentuating Herrman’s conception of performance (*Aufführung*) she modifies the concepts of performativity derived from Austin and Butler. Contrary to the emphasis on conventions and segmented repertoire as conditions to empower a performance, Fischer-Lichte accentuates the *actual meeting* between people; how a performance is a social occasion dependant on the *co-presence* – real, alive and physical – of the participants. There is an emphasis on the *for*, as in *for* somebody, but this *for* becomes not a unidirectional *for*. The *for* incorporates already in its directionality a structural turn, a response, and by that it includes in its structure a *handing over* of intentionality, leaving its direction open, to be conditioned by other agents and factors. We have to do with an interplay – a *for* that is multidirectional and coil-like in its structure. Fischer-Lichte in this respect refers to *die autopoietische feedback-Schleife* (the auto-poietic feedback coil)<sup>306</sup> that emerges in such situations.

Not only is Austin and Butler’s concept of performance reworked through the notion of an auto-poietic feedback system, by working out this coil-like model of inter-affection Fischer-Lichte draws up an alternative understanding of what is going on during a performance to that outlined by the linear communication model of producer/sender (artist), work/message and recipient (audience). The accentuated interplay alters the roles of sender (creator) and

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<sup>306</sup> The English translation of *Ästhetik des Performativen* from 2008 has translated *Schleife* to ‘loop.’ I have though kept my own translation to ‘coil’ to emphasise the changes the alternations bring along.

recipient, not leaving the element of “message” (the work) untouched either.

#### 4.2.5 The reciprocal *for* and autopoiesis

Put briefly, the auto-poietic feedback coil (*die autopoietische feedback-Schleife*) describes the character of the relational dynamic that arises between actors and their audience. The audience reacts to what the actors do, who again react on the spectators’ behaviour and vice versa over and over again in coils of feedback. The performance emerges in this environment of alternating acting-reacting, and a performance’s medial character cannot be thought of as existing apart from this conditional dynamic created by the interplay between actors and spectators.

This coil-like model of initiation and effect in ever-changing loops of actualizations appears again and again in Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetic theory of performativity and runs like a thread through her theorizing. We can see it as a theorization of the internal processes involved in the turn of the *for*, presented under the last heading. The feedback coil is essentially used to think the medial situation of a performance, but not only that. All the aesthetic aspects are in fact affected by this condition of feedback, both the meaning production and the aspect of materiality, showing how this perspective makes it difficult to uphold clear distinctions between producers and receivers, originators and interpreters, handing us a conception of the product (the event) as fundamentally inseparable from its medium which implies its dependence on the interplay between actors and spectators and thereby the emergence of processes that take on an auto-poietic character.<sup>307</sup>

In pointing out these processes – the coils of feedback – we are guided to a reflective model that thinks the aesthetic cases from the point of view of involvement and conditional processes, questioning the principles of separation informing the work concept.<sup>308</sup> The view of a distinct and accomplished work positioned opposite our aesthetic capacities for contemplation is somehow lost. This “separated work” would in a performance become conditioned by the co-presence (live and embodied) of performers and audience, and intertwined with their common contributions. We

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<sup>307</sup> The role divisions associated with the work concept (presented in the former chapter) become in this conception fluctuating and alternating where one unique source is untraceable.

<sup>308</sup> For these principles of separation, see former chapter. The implied theoretical shift even questions Fischer-Lichte’s own presentation, which is well-structured and pedagogical in its systematized divisions (medial nature, materiality, semiotic and aesthetic character) with worked out categories placed within and under these headings, and makes this well-structured system for holding apart different phenomena constituting the issue under discussion ambiguous and at times on the edge of collapse, because the question of how we can actually operate with a division between medial character and materiality and even meaning arises.

are also moved from a primarily one-directional model – originator (source), product (work), and interpretation (reception) – to a situation of *all at once*. That is, the implementation of a source (the outcome or product of an idea, the intention, the element of a work) through specific action<sup>309</sup> is responded to (the moment of interpretation/reception in the one-directional model), and this response, which does not only purely represent interpretation but genuine and individual reaction (action), is in its implementation mixed with sources (one's own experiences, perceptions and so on) beyond the control of the performers. This response, in any case, contributes to what happens at the site of the performance, which the performers again respond to, and so on. The response does in this sense contribute directly to the “product aspect” (of the linear model) in a form of co-creation of the performance-event.<sup>310</sup> Fischer-Lichte refers to performances where this dynamic is explicitly magnified through different techniques of role alternation. For example, members of the audience can explicitly be invited to take over the actors’ role and decide (act out) what is going to happen next. Barney Childs’ percussion sculpture at the first *Musicircus* can be seen as an example of such an explicit invitation for role alternation.<sup>311</sup> The performance evolves thereby clearly through the shifting of roles.

Fischer-Lichte uses the prefix *auto* in combination with *poietische* (poietic) to describe the character that this relational dynamic acquires. The adjective *poietic* is an inflected form of *poiesis* – the Greek word meaning *creation*.<sup>312</sup> Combined with *auto*<sup>313</sup> we get an adjective that signals that the feedback to which we are referring is characterized by self-generation (*Selbsterzeugung*); when first initiated, it takes on auto-creative and auto-formative power.

A performance is dependent upon a form of response structure, and the auto-poietic potential resides precisely in this medial condition. The participants, actors and audience alike, take active part in bringing the performance forth without any of them having complete control over how the other participants and factors will react. By that, no one – no distinct author/artist, source or idea

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<sup>309</sup> By ‘action’ I also includes those actions that are characterised of conscious standstill and “doing nothing” – what we otherwise maybe would call conscious non-action.

<sup>310</sup> The course of the action-reaction is not as simplistically linear as it may seem by my sketch here. Reactions and new actions can emerge at the same time, or a reaction appears as a new action to react on, and the different participants, actors and members of the audience, contribute through different actions and reactions. The situation is characterised of a conglomeration of contributions – intertwined chains of causes and effects, initiations and responses.

<sup>311</sup> See p. 23 in this thesis.

<sup>312</sup> “poiesis.” *Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged.*

<sup>313</sup> “2 : automatic : self-acting : self-regulating.” (“aut-.” *Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged.*)

– can fully predict how the performance will proceed (unfold). We are presented with a situation where this co-presence initiates processes that go beyond the control of each participant individually, but includes him or her, anyway, as responsible for his/her contributions. We are confronted with a situation of overflow, of auto-poiesis, and constant transformation – not a circular structure that loops exactly in the same way over and over again, but coils of feedback that at each turn bring about something new. We never return to the exact same place. The reactions add something new to the situation that inspire and influence a new situation to appear and new action/reactions to emerge.

The coils of feedback do not only secure a situation in constant transformation. They also have the character of being *self-referential*. Like Austin’s example of the “I do” uttered in a wedding ceremony, the coil of feedback acquires its operative meaning and power by creating and transforming the performance’s (and the participants’) reality of its own volition – by what happens through the responding and “feeding” dynamic at a specific performance. It is through reference to its own dynamic and what happens through the working of this process that the performance’s reality and the possibility for transformation are created.

It is not difficult to see that the sketched mutual dependency and the overflow in the feedback system secure important aspects of openness and chance. Therefore, by theorizing the auto-poietic feedback coil, a conception is outlined that includes and stresses an inherent indeterminacy at play in performances. This is also stressed by the factor of *liveness*.<sup>314</sup>

Fischer-Lichte designates a performance, by definition, to be an event that happens in real time. This factor of liveness is a condition for performance as a medium, and consequently as a medium, a performance inherently involves the live situation’s unpredictability in its character of heading into an unknown future.

Because a performance happens in real time, is situated at a certain place and is conditioned by the *presence* of those involved (actors and spectators/listeners), in other words, because a performance after all, even though it may be planned and rehearsed, happens live, the unpredictable is always present. Liveness, therefore, as a medial factor of a performance, incorporates both indeterminate and unforeseen (unpredictable) possibilities. This is not least

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<sup>314</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, pp. 114-129.

connected to the open situation of a conglomeration of factors and actors that interact and by that consecutively shape the live situation. The auto-poietic feedback coil is, in this sense, intimately connected to a temporary mode of presence in a materialised form (bringing about concrete situations) that continuously head into new states.

The auto-poietic feedback coil (*autopoietische feedback-Schleife*) is present at any performance, even if this presence actualizes itself in barely noticeable processes. It is the embodied presence of actors and spectators that irrevocably starts this process. Whenever people meet they react with each other. We cannot restrain ourselves from this, even if our reactions cannot so obviously be seen or heard. There will in any case be some form of energy that arises and affects the situation.<sup>315</sup> However, through different strategies this dynamic can be magnified, explored in different ways, or its impact on for example the performed play, minimised – “silencing” the audience and putting them in the dark.

#### **4.2.6 Destabilization and liminality**

The corporal co-presence of actors and spectators (audience) inevitably implies the presence of auto-poietic feedback coils. These coils of feedback represent a mutual dependency that cannot be fully determined. The turn of the *for* implies a situation of overflow and a reservoir from which the event may take new directions. The handing over of directionality entails a structural openness in performative intentionality that we can regard as identifying a destabilizing potential within the intentional act itself.

Through the presentation of Austin and Butler’s concept of performativity, we were introduced to the question of the relationship between certain conventions and the individual performative act/utterance. These conventions represent a measure – a unifying aspect – according to which the individual act/utterance in its interplay with such norms acquires its performative definition. The relationship is not unproblematic however, as Fischer-Lichte shows in her adoption of the concept of performativity for aesthetic purposes. With respect to the conventional aspect, she stresses how performances since the 1960s do not follow the reciprocal logic that Austin and Butler draw up between performative acts and social directives. She emphasises the ambiguous quality of these performances, questioning, more

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<sup>315</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 67.

than settling matters. Her emphasis on destabilization, liminality and transformation represents an alternative weighting. By making it difficult to pin down the presented material according to established conventions, or in making these norms ambiguous, a performance can destabilize such conventions and introduce a liminal state. She refers here to ritual theories that operate with the concept *liminal*, derived from Latin *limen*, meaning threshold (*Schwelle*).<sup>316</sup> This concept is used to describe an unstable state introduced in many rituals where the participants experience being in a state of “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial”.<sup>317</sup>

The aesthetic experience, emphasised by the aesthetics of performativity, is based precisely in the aspect of destabilization that makes a liminal situation possible and thereby initiates an occasion where other kinds of experiences emerge than those upheld by a non-questioning application of agreed upon standards. Fischer-Lichte, therefore, emphasises the destabilizing potential of performative intentionality and uses this potential to define her concept of performativity. The fact that we are *embodied beings* must not be underplayed in this respect. We have to include the significance of our bodily presence in the aesthetic picture, not only our mental capacity. This implies sensitivity to physiological, energetic, affective and motor conditions as part of the aesthetic experience.<sup>318</sup>

By accentuating the aspects of destabilization and liminality, Fischer-Lichte connects the concept of performativity in its directionality and efficacy not to the enactments of established standards but to the initiation of possible transformative experiences that in their character and outcome are not fixed. The effect, we could say, that marks the significance of the performative, is in this case by definition not defined, but linked to the introduction of conditions that make change and alteration possible.

At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned that the *work* could represent a conception of continuity between different performances. The work represents then an overarching perspective through which different elements (performances) can be gathered together. The same could be said generally about standards and conventions. They exceed the individual action, secure a non-solipsistic position and link the individual intimately to a social and historical sphere. We could

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<sup>316</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 305.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid. pp. 305-306. Fischer-Lichte quotes Victor Turner.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid. pp. 309-310.



ask how this is conceived of when the conventional aspect is played down, accentuating the live situation of a meeting, stressing the dynamics of auto-poiesis, feedback and emergent qualities, and emphasising the significance of liminal states: How is the logic of the performative then thought?

As we have seen, Fischer-Lichte uses concepts developed within the studies of rituals to consider the performative aesthetic from a different angle than that which supposes convention-dependency to be a condition for performative success. That does not imply that conventions are not of relevance for the position she presents. We could use the same argument as Kallberg does for his understanding of genre within the frame of rhetoric:<sup>319</sup> Even if genre norms are not followed, that does not mean that a genre indication loses its function. It is within the play between what an indication implies with regard to expectations and what is fulfilled by the presented music – or not – that the rhetorical function of genre delineation resides. Likewise we could say that even if the conventional aspect as a measure for performative significance is diminished, that does not mean that the play with and against established schemas of expectation loses importance. In line with this understanding, we could also argue that it is because of this negotiation with conventional aspects (that cannot be avoided) that the performative in an aesthetic sense is intimately connected to social, political and ethical concerns. Still, Fischer-Lichte does not only point to the destabilizing potential of playing with expectations. She defines the performative according to a profound open-endedness in the performative power that has the capacity to unsettle established standards and alter the way we perceive the world.

The open-endedness is even more characteristic of an art situation than a ritual. Through a ritual an irreversible transformation is performed that is socially sanctioned and acknowledged and thereby established and sealed. We could say that the ritual takes the participants from one order, through a liminal state where the original order is nullified, and subsequently re-establishes a new order for the participants to enter. In contrast, the threshold-experiences initiated by art performances do not have a standardised outcome that is socially sanctioned. Art performances, compared to rituals, show an essential open-endedness in their result. They do not operate with prescribed routes out of their initiated liminal states; the participants are, so to speak, left with the *transformative experience*.

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<sup>319</sup> Kallberg 1988. See former presentation of his argument at p. 39 in this thesis.

We could therefore argue that Fischer-Lichte finds the significance of the aesthetic performative in its power to break conventions open. Would not this position, however, be in danger of ending in a kind of solipsism? I have previously indicated a play between overarching aspects – conventions or standards – and the individual action as the condition for performative efficacy (Austin and Butler’s concepts of performativity). However, through Fischer-Lichte’s revision of Austin’s and Butler’s concept of performance and her emphasis on unconventional productions, she points to the problem of thinking the impact of the non-standardized from this point of view. In contrast, Fischer-Lichte connects the productivity of the performative act to the point where conventions crack. However we could go on to ask what in these instances function as our shared ground (our measures, standards) according to which we can connect our individual experiences.

Against this we could argue that the outlined auto-poietic feedback coil and the emphasis on our *embodied* presence indicate a different way of thinking the common ground founded in a shared and sharing reality that, not insignificantly, has physical implications. We as embodied beings do not exist on isolated islands. We are in constant exchange, affecting and transforming each other’s actual reality by our presence and unavoidable states of co-action. We are not only united through semiotic systems but also joined by our reverberating bodies. Therefore we could argue that even if shared norms (standards/ conventions) are in modes of collapse, losing sense, this situation of meaninglessness does not take away the actuality of the situation and its impact on our existence.<sup>320</sup> Still, though, we could raise the question, placing the importance on the rupture of conventions: On which ground, in this ruined condition, do bridges prevail that can overarch the ongoing “isolated” moments of becoming and bring about a space for reflection? Even if this state would not alter the fact of our actual existence and the unquestionable actuality of the presence of a shared and alterable (vulnerable) reality, we could question the possibility of going beyond their singular and momentary quality.

This question is linked to a long tradition of epistemological discussions from Descartes’ rationalism and Kant’s inter-subjective categories, to Wittgenstein’s argument against the idea of a private language. The immediate fact of (belief in) our sense impressions and individual

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<sup>320</sup> We could even say that Fischer-Lichte tries to write her theory out of the tradition that has fostered the question of solipsism. That is, she criticise the mind/body divide and elaborates instead on the notion of ‘embodied mind.’

experiences is not enough to build a foundation for knowledge. We need inter-subjective faculties, or shared languages. According to Wittgenstein's 'private language argument' even the individual experience needs the tools of common notions to make sense for us as individuals.

I will here in fact introduce a detour from our presentation of the aesthetics of performativity and approach the question of conventions, their rupture, and the significance of the creative act from a slightly altered angle. At first, this may seem like an awkward step, because we are once more going back to the concept of an artwork and philosophers whose theories predate the aesthetics of performativity. I will however present a reading that places them within a theoretical framework of performativity.

### **4.3 A re-reading of the work concept**

The work-concept presented in the last chapter denotes so to speak an artistic work that has the aura of a metaphysical foundation. Its ontological base relies on a kind of idealism that is maintained by a two-world-perspective of spiritual meaning versus physical manifestation. The work of Martin Heidegger and later Hans-Georg Gadamer represents a bringing down of the work from this aura of metaphysics to a more earthly perspective. In a manner of speaking the performative dynamic is in this respect seen as operating in the work *as work* incorporating the performative initiative and response as part of what defines workhood. Though we can see here a work-concept determined by the performative quest (the movement *towards* something *for* someone) the work represents also a kind of transcendence from this quest's momentary and local quality. The work enables a gathering and unifying force. It is the dual determination of the work as creative intervention *and* visionary overview that characterizes its nature. We are presented with a conception where the performative initiative – the creative initiative – is correlated to an ability to go beyond the momentary and keep firm a vision through which the performative *for*-structure gets its force and becomes effective.

In fact, the re-reading of the work-concept that I will present, represents a conception that does not base the work in the ontology of a distinct thing with certain attributes. Instead it

sees the work – in its work character – as based in being eventful and effective.<sup>321</sup> The objectifying view is, though, not fully abandoned. A kind of fixing process is at work through which the artwork stands out and confronts the activity that creates it: The work incorporates the feature of ‘figuration’ (*Gestaltung*) that in fact sustains and enables its performative capacity. The work as event and figuration condition each other. Through considering this doubleness and how it is thought I hope to prepare an answer to the questions previously raised about the performative logic in a state of destabilisation.

The re-reading presented here will mainly use elements from Heidegger's philosophy of art and language, supplemented by Gadamer's understanding of art as play, symbol and festival.<sup>322</sup> I have already associated Heidegger's conception of the creative projection, which he presents as one of the basic structural elements of art,<sup>323</sup> to a concept of performativity even though Heidegger himself does not use this last notion. The reason is that I find a striking affinity between his focus on the gesture of intervention and initiation and the concept of performativity formerly presented. Therefore, the reading presented here will place Heidegger's and Gadamer's positions of philosophical hermeneutics within a conceptual frame of performativity.

#### **4.3.1 The Nature of Art: The setting-into-work of Truth**

The work concept, both within Fischer-Lichte's presentation and Goehr's analysis is associated with an objectifying move granting a persistent quality contrary to the ephemeral character of events. Heidegger's thinking represents a questioning of this objectified understanding of the work's ontological character. Workhood is re-thought by Heidegger and dissociated from the model of the substance with certain attributes, criticized by Heidegger as the dominant and misleading schema for understanding Being within Western thought. Even to approach the object character of art through the Aristotelian form-matter-unification guided by a purpose and

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<sup>321</sup> In this way, we could argue, that this conception deconstructs the opposition informing Fischer-Lichte's theory between the 'work' operating at the one side as an aesthetic category that represents an objectified view on aesthetic matters, and at the other side the concept of performativity as enabling an aesthetic reflection upon the eventful qualities of art situations.

<sup>322</sup> Heidegger 1971 and 1982, and Gadamer 1986. I have studied *The Origin of the Work of Art* in a Danish translation, Heidegger 1994. My main focus is in this respect Heidegger's theory of art, and important aspects of Gadamer's aesthetics, such as his notion of presentation (*Darstellung*) as an alternative to the Heideggerian 'figure' (*Gestalt*) and 'figuration', will not be discussed.

<sup>323</sup> Heidegger 1971, p. 73 ff. (Heidegger 1994, p. 83 ff).

emphatically exemplified by things made for use is left as unsatisfactory.<sup>324</sup> *Truth* happens in art based on the projective gesture of creation. From this point of view, Heidegger comes close to an aesthetic theory of performativity that bases the nature of art in the character of event, and not just any event, but the staged event. This happening though, according to Heidegger, needs also the aspect of figuration, of some kind of endurance of a mapped/mapping out condition. The artwork represents a double movement: The dynamic gesture of initiation and intervention, and the enduring 'figure' (*Gestalt*). It is the logic of this double movement that makes truth possible as the setting-into-work of Truth.

Heidegger makes the case in *The Origin of the Work of Art* against the concept of art based on beauty. As mentioned, he situates the nature of art in *truth* – the *happening* of truth. In that way, his aesthetics also become ontological and epistemological: “The nature of art, which both the art work and the artist depend, is the setting-itself-into-work of truth.”<sup>325</sup> The work becomes in this respect examined as a site where something happens, included the conditions for this happening to arise. Two main aspects are emphasized: A disclosing force – the ‘world’ – making clearings for the play of being to be revealed, against which ‘earth’ is the closing force, “that which shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up.”<sup>326</sup>

The concept of truth presented in this context represents a dynamic conception derived from an interpretation of the Greek word *alétheia*: “Truth means the nature of the true. We think this nature in recollecting the Greek word *aletheia*, the unconcealedness of beings.”<sup>327</sup> Contrary to a static notion based on judgments of accordance, *alétheia* means to discover and reveal. Activity and process are involved. It is through the interplay between an overarching activity (the ‘world’) – which gives way to an overview, a context and a whole – and reality’s closed and bounded nature (the ‘earth’) – which anchors Being and makes it specific – that the knowledge of Being is made possible.<sup>328</sup>

This dynamic conception of truth is further made possible by applying the logic of the

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<sup>324</sup> Heidegger 1971, pp. 22-28. (Heidegger 1994, pp. 27-33).

<sup>325</sup> Ibid. p. 72.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid. p. 47.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid. p. 51.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid. pp. 48-49 (Heidegger 1994, p. 56). The ‘world’ as the “self-disclosing openness” and ‘earth’ as the closing counterpart is a pair of concepts that denotes two different aspects, or forces, of the discovering dynamics of Being. They do not denote world and earth as such.

hermeneutic circle to the primordial condition of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). That is, even though we are presented with a conception that bears witness to relativism and no fixed position for the true, the hermeneutic principle of interdependence between whole-meanings and part-meanings makes it possible to arrive at stable positions, because the drive of the hermeneutic circle is to establish coherent (non-arbitrary) relationships between the understanding of a unity (a whole) and its details (parts).<sup>329</sup> Transferred to a prerequisite condition for ontology, the interdependence between overview ('world') and singularity ('earth') does not, therefore, bring about a situation of randomness but bound to the logic of interdependence settles matters and anchors the dynamic condition of truth.

In *Being and Time*<sup>330</sup> the hermeneutical method of interpretation<sup>331</sup> becomes the method of ontology.<sup>332</sup> It is by already being in the world, by already having a relationship to what *is*, that we human beings have access to Being in its most primordial ontological sense. The human being's manner of existing in the world – being-there-in-its-world – is presented as the founding phenomenon that makes knowledge possible. Humans respond actively to their own factual and limited existence by consciously relating themselves to non-settled possibilities of the future. The doubleness of being settled in a limited context and at the same time transcending the given by actively relating the continuance of our existence to the world of possibilities, constitutes the foundation for the hermeneutic circle's efficacy. The projective gesture of transcendence makes an overview possible according to which singular parts can be met as participants/constituents of a disclosed nexus that can be understood, accounted for and incorporated in our life projects. The process by which truth happens and is revealed is therefore not a neutral process. The truth as a category is brought about because *what is* (being) *concerns us*; it is linked to our wellbeing and possibility for continued existence.

In *The Origin of The Work of Art*, the work of art in itself, by its creation-being, makes a clearing for the hermeneutic<sup>333</sup> play of being to take place: "Thus in the work it is truth, not only something true, that is at work. [The works of art] do not just make manifest what this

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<sup>329</sup> An exemplary description of this logic is to be found in Gadamer 2003, pp. 33-44.

<sup>330</sup> Original title: *Sein und Zeit*, a major work by Heidegger published in 1927. English translation, 1962.

<sup>331</sup> I use hermeneutics here about the method of interpretation that Schleiermacher worked out and Dilthey developed further.

<sup>332</sup> Ontology means in this instance the study of Being in its most primordial meaning. That is, a study of the conditions for having a knowing relationship to existence at all.

<sup>333</sup> In my presentation of Heidegger's work concept I am going to use hermeneutics and the adjective 'hermeneutic' in reference to the primordial position given to the hermeneutic circle where the basic logic is created by the play between whole conceptions and part appearances.

isolated being as such is [...] rather, they make unconcealedness as such happen in regard to what is as a whole.”<sup>334</sup> The ontological preconditions are in *Being and Time* connected to the temporal-existential structure of *Dasein* where the anticipatory mode of this structure is organised by an intentional aim (*for-the-sake-of-which*) that points back to the *Dasein* as the self-referential explanatory life project. In his aesthetics this temporal-existential structure of being becomes connected to an aspect of production that produces something that is neither ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*) nor present-at-hand (*vorhanden*).<sup>335</sup> The artwork takes on its own reality in a public sphere beyond the initiating *Dasein*. However, in its manifestation the artwork plays up against this locality of being-here (*Dasein*) creating a scope for reflection in which the artwork itself appears as co-player. Through the interplay between *Dasein* and a productivity that is installed into and installs a shared world, the transcendence within the temporary-historic structure of *Dasein* is extended beyond the individual life and marks the workings within a sphere of shared perspectives, histories and communities.

I would like to use Gadamer to help in this respect in a further elaboration of the above presented reading. Art belongs, according to Gadamer, “in the realm of what Aristotle called *poietike episteme*, the knowledge and facility appropriate to production. [Reference to *Metaphysics* by Aristotle] What is common to the craftsman’s producing and the artist’s creating, and what distinguishes such knowing from theory or from practical knowing and deciding is that a work becomes separated from the activity.”<sup>336</sup> The work of art is here distinguished from its production; it stands out on its own accord and gets its own life. The aspect of an “own life” is emphasised by Gadamer by using the phenomenon of play to conceptualise art and its mode of operation.

Play represents a phenomenon of excess where movement for its own sake is put in motion: “Play appears as a self-movement that does not pursue any particular end or purpose so much as movement *as* movement, exhibiting so to speak a phenomenon of excess, of living self-representation.”<sup>337</sup> This self-movement that represents itself is further linked to a fundamental

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<sup>334</sup> Heidegger 1971, p. 56.

<sup>335</sup> Heidegger distinguishes between the mode of ready-to-hand “*zuhanden*” and present-at-hand “*vorhanden*” in *Being and Time*. ‘Present-at-hand’ denotes the mode of being things get when they are regarded independently of their initial context of serviceability, as ‘ready-to-hand.’ As ‘present-at-hand’ they get the status of objects that has become the hegemonic way to look at things in the West: A separated object, a distinct substance with certain attributes.

<sup>336</sup> Gadamer 1986, p.12.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

characteristic of living being with a reference to Aristotle: “This freedom of movement is such that it must have the form of self-movement. Expressing the thought of the Greeks in general, Aristotle had already described self-movement as the most fundamental characteristic of living beings.”<sup>338</sup>

With the perspective in mind of a work brought down to earth from the aura of a metaphysical foundation, we could read from what I have presented that the work can be understood as a kind of agent that in its own right organises a field of being for us, though not independently of our contributions. The work cannot be aligned a ‘self’ standing alone in solipsism. The work, as a site that takes on auto-poietic power, operates within a network of co-playing and feedback. Again Gadamer’s presentation of play as a describable phenomenon of art can be useful. Play represents also a phenomenon where the spectator is included as part of the play. The spectators *play along*: “Another important aspect of play as a communicative activity, so it seems to me, is that it does not really acknowledge the distance separating the one who plays and the one who watches the play. The spectator is manifestly more than just an observer who sees what is happening in front of him, but rather one who is a part of it insofar as he literally ‘takes part’.”<sup>339</sup> Art as play, therefore, in Gadamer’s context emphasises the spectator’s active role in constituting the art event, as Hermann does in his understanding of performance: The audience are co-players.

We can now transfer our reflections about art as play to the reading of Heidegger’s work conception. The work as a site for the hermeneutic play of ontology opens a ‘world’ for us and lets the ‘earth’ be seen by being an agentive arrangement that affect us, acts according to us and through this, in its invitation to be interacted with, shows us something.

How is the arising of this playful site for meetings thought in more specific terms according to Heidegger: How does the work of art set up a ‘world’ and let the ‘earth’ be seen, how does the work of art hold up and set forth the hermeneutic play of Being that we can be drawn into, and with which we play along and interact?

‘Earth’ and ‘world’ are in this respect presented as opposed dynamic aspects of the process that reveals and constitutes being. This is not a clear-cut opposition, however:

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<sup>338</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid. p. 24.



World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world. But the relation between world and earth does not wither away into empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends away to draw the world into itself and keep it there.<sup>340</sup>

The truth happens as strife between ‘world’ and ‘earth’ – between disclosing and closing, to uncover and cover, to display and refuse. The work of art sets up a world and lets the earth be seen by keeping up the tension between being, nonbeing and that which resists being revealed, holding this strife fast in the figure – a unifying scaffold that joins, keeps the elements together and settles them.<sup>341</sup> By this sustained tension the work of art creates an opportunity to experience truth as an event of unconcealedness in its mode of happening, where neither ‘world’ nor ‘earth’ is reduced to each other’s domain.<sup>342</sup>

The artwork as a figuration of being, gathers the phenomenon components of world and earth and holds them firm in their strife. In this sense the work cannot be thought apart from either the capacity for transcending, overarching the momentary, nor the harshness of the actual moment bringing rootedness to our lives. It *is* through the sustenance of this friction; it *is* through the sustenance of the creative potential in the intersection between unity and individual divergences. Therefore, we could say that truth as being set-into-work incorporates the movement of the moment in its sustenance, the doubleness of initiation and determination – sparking off unknown possibilities and settling matters – and the non-reduced presence of ‘world’ and ‘earth’ as structural counterparts. The logic in operation put the strife in the middle of its production – of the setting-into-work of truth. To get a better view of how this logic works, I would like to look at the significance of differentiation, of boundaries, borders and frames by examining the conception that the ‘rift’ represents.

### 4.3.2 The rift

The ‘rift’ marks a fundamental element of Heidegger’s epistemology and aesthetics. It illustrates the primordial role the act of differentiation has within his theory:

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<sup>340</sup> Heidegger 1971, pp. 48-49.

<sup>341</sup> Heidegger 1971, p. 64. (Heidegger 1994, p. 73).

<sup>342</sup> See former quote: “Thus in the work it is truth, not only something true, that is at work. [The works of art] do not just make manifest what this isolated being as such is [...] rather, they make unconcealedness as such happen in regard to what is as a whole.” (Heidegger 1971, p. 56.)

The conflict is not a rift (*Riss*) as a mere cleft is ripped open; rather, it is the intimacy with which opponents belong to each other. This rift carries the opponents into the source of their unity by virtue of their common ground. It is a basic design, an outline sketch, that draws the basic features of the rise of the lighting of beings. This rift does not let the opponents break apart; it brings the opposition of measure and boundary into their common outline.<sup>343</sup>

I will now present some images of possible meanings and functions of the 'rift' in the setting-into-work of truth. Hopefully this will be helpful in outlining how the character of event and figuration condition each other in the presented work concept:

- 1) The 'rift' refers to a fundamental mark, a fundamental contrast, which divides something from something else, makes them different and situates them with different belongings. It is only by going through a differentiating process that phenomena disclose themselves. This concept also includes the act of making differences – to draw up and outline the possibilities of what can be.
- 2) The 'rift' refers to a fracture zone with a lot of tension – a meeting line, line of friction and a dividing line – where the parts both are held together and kept apart. The 'rift' is right in the middle where the tension is highest in the strife between 'world' and 'earth'. Through the tension in the strife, the 'world' discloses horizons/contexts, the 'earth' juts up the specific in the world that is seen/understood by the horizon/context, and this play of opening up and closing is kept together not in an arbitrary fashion, but organized by the tension in the strife. We could perhaps use the construction of bridges, or a Gothic arch as an image of how this tensional force keeps a structure together and even makes it stronger.
- 3) The 'rift' is a sign of abyssal void – the breach that unveils the abyssal non-existence in the midst of existence.

Anxiety, in *Being and Time*, functions as a phenomenon that uncovers the real authentic existence of human beings.<sup>344</sup> Anxiety disrupts the ordinary way of interpreting oneself and shows how these ordinary characterisations – “31 years old, student, plays the violin ....” – do not cover what it really means to be a human being who lives exactly *this life which is mine*. What makes our life a unity, a totality according to which we act, is mostly

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<sup>343</sup> Heidegger 1971, p.63.

<sup>344</sup> Heidegger 1962, pp. 228-235.

covered up in everyday understanding. We try to forget our mortality and the finite nature of our lives. But confronted with anxiety, our authentic existence shows up; there are no positive characterisations that cover the essence of “who *I am*”. It is by the phenomenon of ‘death’ – the absolute otherness, the non-existence – that the unity of human existence is defined; it is the possibility of non-possibility that breaks the human existence apart from infinite interpretive possibilities and roots it in a life that is *mine* and *concerns me*. That which unifies my life and makes this life a horizon for *my* existence, is that I know it will end some day. The consciousness of death is the fundamental *rift* in life that maps it out.

‘Anxiety’ and ‘death’ are not mentioned in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, but the work of art reminds us of the way anxiety works; the art disrupts the ordinary and clears the ground for authentic understanding to arise: “In the midst of what is, art breaks open an open place, in whose openness everything is other than usual [...] everything ordinary and hitherto existing becomes an unbeing. This unbeing has lost the capacity to give and keep being as measure.”<sup>345</sup> Heidegger, like Fischer-Lichte, emphasises, through this, art’s capacity to question conventions and introduce new perspectives.

- 4) What happens if we see the ‘rift’ as a form of path or way – ways that make marks in the landscape, divide it up, but also become the routes for experiences? Heidegger writes in “The Nature of Language”: “Experience means, *eundo assequi*, to obtain something along the way, to attain something by going on a way.”<sup>346</sup>

The path lies in a landscape. Walking makes the path, or somebody has made the road for us. We can look at the way-making movement as a form of interpreting activity.<sup>347</sup> The landscape is a desert before someone has made ways, paths and roads by their activity of exploration. By walking alongside a road, or making our own path, we orient ourselves in the landscape, our world. The way is the dynamic mark that functions as a focus, a centre, for our movements and our view of the surroundings. Through this focus we meet others and interact with our environment. It is by this interpretative activity (primordially

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<sup>345</sup> Heidegger 1971, p. 72.

<sup>346</sup> Heidegger 1982, p. 66.

<sup>347</sup> “Interpreting activity” refers in this respect to a primordial hermeneutic situation where the circle dynamics of part and whole is in operation.

expressed in our involved and interactive mode of being in the world) that we live, take decisions, attain knowledge, do art, orient ourselves in our world; it is by walking on a way and making paths that what *is* concerns and confronts us.

The fundamental role that ‘the way’ and ‘to experience by going on a way’ have in Heidegger’s epistemology, is quite clearly expressed in “The Nature of Language”:

The *Tao* could be the way that gives all ways, the very source of our power to think what reason, mind, meaning, *logos* properly mean to say – properly, by their proper nature. [...] Perhaps the enigmatic power of today’s reign of method also [...] are after all merely the runoff of a great hidden stream which moves all things along and makes way for everything. All is way.<sup>348</sup>

The “fundamental mark”, the “fracture zone”, the “abyssal void” (the no-ground) and the “way” – can we put the different images of the ‘rift’ together? The “fundamental mark” refers to the differentiating process that operates in the setting-into-work of truth. This process is fuelled by the strife and tension in the “the fracture zone” that both keeps the elements together and apart. In the image of “the abyssal void”, we see how the presence of no-ground – un-being, the fundamental *other* – brings the *is* together, joins it and holds it up by being present in the strife. The “way” shows how this process is dynamic – historical – rooted in ‘the way’ that gives us a focus, “by going on a way”, for the hermeneutical views of the historical landscape.

The ‘rift’ shows a doubleness in Heidegger’s thinking. He tries to transcend a dualism of subject versus object, which he finds has dominated Western philosophy. Instead, he gives thinking another foundation and offspring where both subject and object are derivatives of a united phenomenon of being-in-the-world. At the same time he operates with a fundamental *difference* – an a priori *other*; *death* – that defines this being-in-the-world, the play of being and its scope. In this process, the being of things is valued differently according to its place, organized by the centre and the “routes”, borders and frames that the centre outlines. The Greek temple in *The Origin of the Work of Art* can function as a visualization of this and shows also how the figure, in the work of art, outlines different values for what is set forth:

A building, a Greek temple, portrays nothing. It simply stands there in the middle of the rock-cleft

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<sup>348</sup> Heidegger 1982, p. 92. My emphasis.

valley. The building encloses the figure of the god, and in this concealment lets it stand out into the holy precinct through the open portico. By means of the temple, the god is present in the temple. This presence of the god is in itself the extension and delimitation of the precinct as a holy precinct. The temple and its precinct, however, do not fade away into the indefinite. It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people.<sup>349</sup>

### 4.3.3 Art as event and figuration

In a basic manner Heidegger connects the nature of art to creation. I especially have in mind the *movement* of creation that combine projection with production. The creative projection is an intervention in the world that incorporates in its movement both the transcending move of pre-understanding, bringing about a vision of coherence and unity (a whole), and the aspect of production. Without the creative projection nothing could be revealed – nothing would be true. I will in this instance emphasise my performative reading of Heidegger. The creative projection, like the performative act, heads beyond its momentary constraints towards new states of reality – towards new visions of reality. The performative efficacy thereby created belongs in Heidegger's theory to the creativity involved in opening up a 'world' and letting the 'earth' be seen and not principally to the implementation of standards. This creativity is in a fundamental way the condition for humans' experience of their own existence and it grounds the condition for the self-aware being-there in a world of possibilities. This creative condition is further linked to the human ability of being ahead of itself coming back to its factual being-there. Or, we could put it the other way around: The condition of being ahead of itself is made possible because of the human capacity for being visionary and creative.

The creative projection though is not only a stretch of the mind. The creative projection is already ahead of itself coming back to itself through a *production*, by being involved in the world and producing something "out there". We could therefore in this instance emphasise the performative accentuating of *doing* that includes the significance of interaction within the realm of reality. But not only that, this doing makes something that stands out from the act that initiates it. A product/event is produced that takes on auto-poietic power. Gadamer's definition of the work as a kind of product could again be brought to mind, and elaborated by introducing his conception of art as symbol.

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<sup>349</sup> Heidegger 1971, pp. 41-42.

Gadamer presents an understanding of the symbol that stresses the aspect of actual presence of the concrete and physical as part of the symbol's self-representation: "In the case of the symbol [...] and for our experience of the symbolic in general, the particular represents itself as a fragment of being that promises to complete and make whole whatever corresponds to it."<sup>350</sup> This is elaborated by Gadamer's emphasis of the idealist aesthetics' weakness:

The weakness of idealist aesthetics lay in its failure to appreciate that we typically encounter art as a unique manifestation of truth whose particularity cannot be surpassed. The significance of the symbol and the symbolic lay in this paradoxical kind of reference that embodies and even vouchsafes its meaning.<sup>351</sup>

The meaning of the symbol cannot be wrested from its physical presence: "Thus the essence of the symbolic lies precisely in the fact that it is not related to an ultimate meaning that could be recuperated in intellectual terms. The symbol preserves its meaning within itself."<sup>352</sup> Gadamer speaks here about a reference that represents itself like someone who represents themselves in a court would do.<sup>353</sup> The symbol does not refer to anything other than itself; it is its own representative. However, it is directed beyond its own being to the being of something else. Gadamer refers to the Greek meaning of symbol that denoted a token for remembrance. The symbol was the half of an object that guests got from their hosts after the host, having broken an object in two, gave one part to his guest and kept the other for himself. When coming back the guest could bring with him this symbol as token of remembrance from last time, and again the two halves could be joined.<sup>354</sup> As a half, the symbol has a direction beyond its own existence to something to which it corresponds. We can here indirectly see the *for*-structure that I have emphasized in connection with the directionality of the performative urge.

There are especially three points that I want to emphasize in this reading of Gadamer's symbol:

- 1) The embodied meaning. The meaning of the symbol is incorporated in the symbol's physical presence and does not operate apart from this embodied condition.
- 2) The symbol maintains a remembrance and makes this memory present. We could transfer this to the temporal structure that keeps a horizon open by connecting future and past to the engaging now. The art work functions in this sense as a site that keeps a horizon open

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<sup>350</sup> Gadamer 1986, p. 32.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid, pp. 34-35.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

by its capacity to engage the environment of the present by embodied reverberations of past experiences, by keeping memories alive and installing discoveries into the future. As a token of remembrance, the symbol addresses its impact beyond its own configuration. Through this open invitation for being activated again, bringing about a presence of a memory that can be further elaborated in the new meeting, the different tenses are linked together and a horizon for relevance is created.

- 3) The meeting as the productive point that generates meanings. We could argue that Gadamer, in his reading of the symbolic, presents a dimension of meaning that does not arise by decoding, but by a form of coming together that makes a reverberation. The symbol has a directionality beyond itself, but not by representing something else than itself, but by seeking to be complemented, to be responded to. This points to the open area of feedback. Meanings arise from the fracture zones of interplay, from the productivity of the turn, of the feedback.

Now, if we go back to Heidegger's creative projection and understand it as a movement directed beyond, ahead of, but brought back by a production, this product (event) functions both as a gathering of the visionary view and confronts the vision in its difference (through its materialized condition). It takes on its own mode of being and becomes a symbol in Gadamer's sense through which we can meet ourselves (at a distance, in our difference). A product stands there beyond the initiating force though in the confirmation of shared reality and creates the condition for the double view of being inside of/outside, the alternation between being subject and object, ahead of/coming back, split off in individuality / united within a social sphere.

The creative projection makes a difference and creates a provisional whole (context) – a frame of reference – through its production of something that both organises a field of being, and keeps, sustains and holds firm the creative vision. In this way, the event of the creative projection, both in the sense of being historical (bound to a given place and time) and momentous<sup>355</sup> is correlated to the ability to make figurations. Read like this, the productivity of the creative projection, the products and events it creates, as something beyond the individual quest, becomes a prerequisite for the formation of a conscious encounter with our own existent being-there in the world: the primordial condition for ontology.

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<sup>355</sup> See my presentation of the event concept at p. 89-90.

#### 4.3.4 Summary, a re-read version of the work-concept

On one hand, the artwork appears to be a kind of delineation that organises a field of being and thereby provides us with an overview from which we can enter a territory in an informed manner. We are shown something, though not in a static way. We are provoked into a reflective encounter with what is presented – with what emerges from the reciprocal engagement. This reflective mode that creates the possibility for knowledge is founded in a circular logic – the hermeneutic circle. Being, in this sense, is revealed as meaningful. That which presents itself makes sense according to its world, and it is in this sense that it approaches us in its presence as something we are connected to and can actively relate ourselves to, and not least, are concerned about.

The artwork, though, stands in a special position. It does not only uncover something for us. It also confronts us with dimensions resisting our hermeneutic grasp – resisting making sense – by allowing us to be confronted and included in the conflict between ‘world’ and ‘earth’ where the ‘earth’ is not reduced to the purely serviceable (in the sense of a tool), dead material or hidden in the transcendence of the pure “worldly” statement.<sup>356</sup> The work of art therefore does not only make Being *present*, but also makes us aware of its shadows and our non-knowledge. We could say, that we are reminded of our limitedness – our physical, historic and situated being.

From this brief summary, we can go back to the questions I asked before presenting this re-read version of the work concept. I asked about the significance of conventions, or standards in the consideration of a definition of performative efficacy. Fischer-Lichte does not define the performative effect according to an implementation of conventions, or said differently, collectively shared scripts. The performative effect is connected to the experiential side of the capacity of the performative act to create a liminal state. However, when these conventions are shattered, would this effect not easily end up in a kind of solipsistic trap?

If we read Heidegger in a performative way as I have done, we could say that he, like Fischer-Lichte, connects performative efficacy to an intervention that can split open a closed world (ruled by habits and non-questioned conventions) resulting in new and unique experiences. It is not the implementation of shared standards that defines performative efficacy, but the

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<sup>356</sup> Briefly Heidegger sketches other modes in which truth disclosed itself and arranges a field of Being at p. 62 (1971). For example, the act that founds a political state, the nearness of “that which is not simply a being, but the being that is most of all,” the essential sacrifice and the thinker’s questioning. Science is understood to be a cultivation of a domain of truth already opened.



creative force behind the establishment of collectively shared references. This creativity is both the source of gestalt figuration, making standards possible, and the source of the possible rupture of their regime. However this cannot be thought without the correlated capacity for making figures (*Gestalt*) – for producing shared entities of reference. We can in this respect recall the image of the path. The path-making process of performative acts makes it possible to map a landscape that otherwise would be inaccessible – unknown – in its indifferent, non-differentiated state. We could interpret the establishment of conventional norms as being in continuance with this process of map-making. By citing this activity with the artwork, this path-making process, mapping out a territory, is released from individual domains and can be thought of as being shaped within public and social spheres. These roads and maps are not just for the individual traveller – they are maps for communities.<sup>357</sup>

From another point of view, drawing a parallel between the phenomenon of anxiety (presented in *Being and Time*) and the artwork's mode of presence (as I have done in one of my images of the 'rift'), we could also say that art strips conventions of their comfortable domestic qualities. Conventions are, so to speak, undressed as inadequate in accounting for the mode of being experienced in the presence of the artwork. Our interpretation could in this instance be twofold. On one side we encounter the "abyss" of our conventions. That is, the "no ground" – like the fact of my perishable state revealed by the phenomenon of anxiety – uncovers the historicity of conventions, and how the norms expressed by them do not have a firm ground beyond being what we could call historically and socially conditioned constructions. Though, as with the emphasis on our thrown mode of being in *Being and Time*, having to cope with the fact that we are born into a particular historical context, this "no ground" also provides an opportunity that we have to seize upon: Our world is historic and we have to act according to that; we have to make use of the conventions handed over to deal with the world in the middle of which we find ourselves.

On the other side, we could interpret the disruption of the conventional as not pointing to a

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<sup>357</sup> Heidegger formulates a theory of language that we could interpret to belong to the linguistic turn in the 20<sup>th</sup> century where our genuine access to knowledge goes through our linguistic abilities: "we may never say of the word that it is, but rather that it gives – not in the sense that words are given by 'it,' but that the word itself gives. The word itself is the giver. What does it give? [...] the word gives Being." (Heidegger 1982, p. 88.) But as my performative reading has accentuated, Heidegger's theory of art can also be seen as presenting a theory where the artwork presents a domain of knowledge constitution that vibrates at the threshold between the self-referential and reality-constitutive gesture of the performative act and the creation of semiotic referentiality.

“no ground” in a material sense, but in fact highlighting a “ground” – an earthly aspect – that grounds our existence though resists being arrested conceptually. Thereby the “no ground” of our conventions could acquire a kind of foundation beyond pure construction by being connected to the “ground” of the ‘earth’, to life lines that underpin our lives, though resisting being abstractedly arrested.<sup>358</sup>

Through the re-read version of the work concept I have tried to present an understanding that can explain the relationship between the individual performative act and conventional norms which also accounts for the significance of the unconventional and the ruined state of known notions. That is, in Heidegger’s aesthetics the performative act as a *creative intervention* is understood as a basic structural element and prerequisite for our capacity to orientate ourselves in the world, thereby being a prerequisite both for a reflection of truth that happens in art as well as in knowledge in a general sense. Nothing is revealed without the creative projection. This is the condition both for the establishment of conventional norms and for their rupture, putting the *directionality* of performative involvement in the middle of presence and meaning production. This directionality is further made possible by the capacity to transgress the singular moment of becoming – to have an active relationship both to the future and the past. This capacity, its temporal structure that joins future and past in the flowing moment of the now, is fundamental both for the individual performative act and the creation of overarching notions, and it is correlated to the ability for creating *figures (Gestalt)*, for making products. The ability to make differences and to create provisional frames of reference is of immense importance in this process. In fact, we could add one more image of the ‘rift’ to those we have already produced: The act of the creative projection itself. Through its intervention in the world, a rift is made with which the other presented images could be joined to fill its conceptual content: The creative intervention as the initiation of a “fundamental mark” that establishes a separation and thereby provokes a difference to occur and a process of differentiation to be fostered; as the act that opens an energetic “fracture zone” of co-production, interactive unsettlements and re-negotiations that both keeps the elements together and apart; the creativity as connected to the presence of death – “the abyssal void” – that makes the continuance of life so urgent, the need for new/renewed solutions imperative and brings about the perspective of provisional wholes – *my* life – that cannot be reduced nor transferred; and the creative mobility as a “way” that shows how this

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<sup>358</sup> This is a question we will come back to later in this chapter under the heading “The performative generation of materiality.”

inventive involvement is dynamic – historical – always on its way, always heading into unknown territories.

We could say that it is exactly the conception of the rift in combination with the provisional wholes that keeps the individual and the general unified, while not reducing them to identical positions. Through this “glued” situation a non-solipsistic conception is secured even though the performative effect is not defined in the light of standard implementation but basically founded in a creative intervention and response to a world situation.<sup>359</sup>

However, Cage problematizes this position of the rift, and I will now present a reflection upon Cage’s *Variations II* (1961) that will illustrate this. The focus will be upon the significance/non-significance of differentiations by looking especially at the function the act of drawing boundaries and of giving frames has in this piece. Hopefully this will bring us back to Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetic theory of performativity and her focus upon the phenomenon of emergence highlighted by many performances since the 1960. Because even though our re-read version of the ‘work’ can explain the efficacy of the performative initiative from the point of view of creative pioneering – clearing ground for new encounters and experiences without bringing the performative logic in solipsism – it does not take us far enough to account for the de-semantic qualities Fischer-Lichte observes in the performances she discusses, for example the untitled event at Black Mountain College. Cage’s *Variations II* (1961) can be illuminating in this respect. It problematizes the re-read version of the work concept just presented and questions in a radical way the hermeneutic situation.

#### **4.3.5 Cage’s challenge**

Cage, like Heidegger, situates art within “the happening of truth” – within an ontological-epistemological dimension. He uses art as an opportunity to “clear an open space” for the magnificent diversity of what *is* to be experienced and appreciated: “Our intention is to affirm this life, not to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply to wake up to the very life we’re living, which is so excellent once one gets one’s mind and

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<sup>359</sup> We could object to such a reading by accentuating that it is within the points of intersection between creative intervention and standard formation that art creates a space for an intimate encounter with the workings of Being.

one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord."<sup>360</sup> But where Heidegger sees the happening of truth as a struggle that wrestles the truth forth and is disclosed by being captured in the 'figure' (*Gestalt*) – a unified whole where the truth takes up its positions and attains constancy, it seems that Cage is trying to scatter the whole Heideggerian 'figure' with his compositional tools. That is, the non-arbitrary unification that the figure represents becomes perforated by Cage's use of chance operations, indeterminacy, open-ended pieces, and the simultaneous presentation of non-coordinated material. The roles of boundaries and frames are thereby also questioned, and I will argue that they acquire other functions and values than those found in Heidegger's conception of art.

However, that does not mean that the functioning of borders and frames in Cage's compositional strategies is not without problems; framing and delimiting aspects are certainly present, but do they function as givers of meaning and even presence as they do within Heidegger's system of thought?

#### 4.3.6 Variations II

The score of *Variations 2* consist of eleven transparent sheets, six having a single straight line and five having a point. Besides this, there is an instruction on how to use these transparent sheets. Which frames and borders does the score presuppose, and which frames and borders does it introduce? How do these borders and frames function?

Let us take a look at the information given in the score:

- 1) The work is "for any number of players and any sound producing means".<sup>361</sup> In other words, the work constitutes the production of an audible piece of art: This is also apparent in the definitions of the six lines: "1) frequency, 2) amplitude, 3) timbre, 4) duration, 5) point of occurrence in an established period of time, 6) structure of event (number of sounds making up an aggregate or constellation)".
- 2) How do we use these transparent sheets? According to Cage's instructions, "the sheets are to be superimposed partially or wholly separated on a suitable surface." The

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<sup>360</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 95.

<sup>361</sup> This quote and those that follow are all taken from the instruction to the score of *Variations II*.

instructions tell us to “drop perpendiculars from points to the lines [...]” to decide musical events, and to “measure the perpendiculars by means of any rule, obtaining readings thereby for 1) frequency, 2) amplitude, 3) timbre, 4) duration, 5) point of occurrence in an established period of time, 6) structure of event (number of sounds making up an aggregate or constellation).” The score does not tell us by which rules we should measure and read the dropped perpendiculars, but it says that some form of regulation should organize our reading. What does this tell us about borders and frames?

- 3) The score does not set a period for the duration of the piece: “Any number of readings may be used to provide a program of any length.”

The score sets a frame for the work’s material and medium. The medium is a sound producing source, and the focus is upon the audible aspects (both sounds and silences) this source produces. That does not mean that a realisation of the piece excludes for example a theatrical realisation, but decisions (made by chance operations) have to be carried out according to audible phenomena and not visual or dramatic ones.

The score does not set any outer limits for the piece’s length, how it should be organized in space, how many musicians there should be, what instruments or sound producing means should be used or how many readings of the score one can do, but it invokes disciplined actions in the realisation of the piece. Why this appeal for discipline? Is that not a way to introduce borders and frames?

The score can be described as a virtual musical space defined by the parameters given – frequency, amplitude, timbre, duration, point of occurrence in an established period of time and structure of the event – but this space does not have any fixed walls. Cage’s use of separate transparent sheets that can be put together in endlessly different ways shows this visually. The six lines – the tools that define musical occurrences in the event – do not make up a fixed “room”, the “walls” do not have a fastened position nor stand in a fixed relation to each other; in some way the score gives a visual view of an infinite musical space (the lines) with an infinity of possible musical occurrences (the points). Because of this – the infinity of possibilities and unfixed musical borders – the score shows only a view of a musical field where everything is undifferentiated and has the possibility to be voiced and nothing is

discriminated against from the beginning. We can draw a parallel to Heidegger's philosophy here and say that Cage with this score tries to make a tool, sketching a landscape, where Heidegger's "plough" has not made its "furrows". Heidegger presents a picture in "The Nature of Language" of the movement of thinking that cuts "furrows into the soil of Being."<sup>362</sup> To see, understand, orient yourself within a landscape, and to live, presupposes actions of "cutting furrows into the soil of Being". It is in and by this "cutting" that *that* which *is* concerns, confronts and faces us. Of course we can say that Cage, when he draws lines on transparent sheets, makes virtual "furrows" – he makes a difference, he makes a "rift" in the void blank sheet and gives a virtual framework for what can happen. But at the same time there is something about the unfixed character of the lines – the indeterminate way the lines can be used and related to each other – that gives another impression than that of "ploughed furrows in the soil of musical being". It is not a rooted and solid earth in slow motion that gets its marks, but free floating transparent sheets with endless possibilities of combinations.

I leave these thoughts now for a moment to look at other aspects of the score: The instruction for how to use the score to generate a musical event. As presented in the score, *Variations 2* is not a work where any sonic course is described/prescribed. The score, we could say, does not function as a musical text, but rather as a tool for making musical events, while not prescribing how these events should sound. The score, rather, presents an indeterminate and infinite musical landscape and provides a tool to actualize musical happenings from this undifferentiated field. Nevertheless, it requires a realisation involving rules and a disciplined approach, and in practice frames and borders must be introduced in order to perform it. Because of this, I would like to take a closer look at the process of realisation. What is presupposed in the process of realisation and what kinds of concerns are raised by the score? Such a perspective should give us the best approach by which to view the function of borders and frames in this piece.

The score can be seen as an attempt to provide an undifferentiated and infinite field of musical possibilities, and to be as democratic as possible with regard to which sounds – which musical events – can form a realisation of *Variations 2*. In this respect the score does not set any borders and frames for what can happen – what is allowed to sound during a performance and thereby be "voiced". Yet, to produce a musical event framing and limiting elements must

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<sup>362</sup> Heidegger 1982, p. 70. The theme of undergoing an experience with the nature of language is the context for the presented image.

be introduced.

Let us now imagine that we are musicians and shall produce a realisation of *Variations 2*. What must we do? *Variation 2* is “for any number of players and any sound producing means”. The score does not define the musical setting, which sound producing means we can use and so on. But if we are going to actualize *Variations 2* from this abstract “undifferentiated landscape” we also have to make decisions and limit the infinity of possibilities given in the score: We must treat the score as a tool to produce a concrete musical situation, and to do that we must in some way make the score realizable, transform its directives into something we can do in practice. For example, no matter what, it is impossible to use all possible sound producing means – we have to make some choices. Of course, we can use chance operations to help us, but in any case we would also need to make some intentional choices, and these choices would contribute to the framing of the realisation.

We begin now to use the score; we throw the transparent sheets on a table, let them superimpose each other, and let them form a mixture that is produced by chance. We decide which line is frequency, which is amplitude, duration and so on. Then we make perpendiculars from the points to the line. All of this is described in the instructions in the score. However, to translate the abstract points to descriptions of musical events, we have to make the rules that can function as means for translating the drawn perpendiculars into a description of what we are going to do to produce musical occurrences. The score does not tell us the rules. It just says “any rule”. We have to formulate them. And if the rules shall have a proper function, we must make them in such a way that the decisions can be carried out in practice. Therefore we will probably make them with consideration to what we have chosen as sound producing means together with other practical considerations.

But do these framing elements organize and “set-into-work” the aesthetic “truth” as an exposed field of being, through a certain configuration? Is it by these aspects of framing that the aesthetic meanings of the piece are produced? As we have seen, to do a realisation of *Variation 2* we have to make decisions that frame the realisation. Nevertheless, I will argue that to frame and make boundaries does not have that fundamental role in producing aesthetic significance in *Variation 2* as Heidegger describes these aspects in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. Why?

#### 4.3.7 The paradoxical role of borders and frames

To realize *Variations 2* means, in practice, to introduce borders and frames into the open undifferentiated “landscape” of the score. This is presupposed in order that the score can be performed. The score also introduces borders and frames by way of asking the performers to realise the piece using “any rule” in measuring the perpendiculars from points to lines. But these limiting aspects have a paradoxical effect. The performers are asked to use chance operations in deciding what to do within the chosen frames – to “measure the perpendiculars by any rule”. This confines personal freedom – the performers cannot choose just whatever they would like to pick from the open “landscape” drawn up in the score and thus form “tunes” reflecting their own personal taste. The score puts the performers in a situation where they must be open for unexpected choices made by chance. Thus the realisation will not be a musical event organized with the purpose of unfolding the musical ideas<sup>363</sup> of the performers.

In fact, the score restricts personal freedom by invoking the use of chance operations, while at the same time it “frees” the musical material from personal taste and allows it to be “heard” even if it is not comprised of preferred sounds and silences. The restrictions on personal taste and preferences enables all the possibilities of the musical material, within the chosen frame, the potential to be “voiced”. The restriction interrupts the function of the borders and frames for giving intentional meaning to the realised musical happening. Borders and frames become, seemingly, just practical tools for making something happen. Or we could say they become tools for a different voicing beyond the anthropocentric *for*-structure.

Let us now imagine that we are among a group of several performers who are embarking on a realisation of *Variations 2*. All get the score and are asked to “solve it” in their own way without an overall plan for how this should be done. The only things decided are the length of time for the realization, where it will take place, and that we will be slightly spread around during the performance. In the performance, everybody will perform their realisation at the same time in the same room. The result will be unpredictable; the multiple effects of several performers, who have “solved” the score in different ways, will make the event even more de-centred than if just one person performed the piece. The breaking up of a centralized perspective caused by both chance operations and the multiplying of these operations, makes

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<sup>363</sup> ‘Musical idea’ is here just an expression for a unifying vision of how the imagined musical piece should be - a vision that guides the working out of the musical unfolding and conceives of the music as a manifestation of that vision.



it difficult for frames and borders to function as organizing tools for the production of intentional meaning in the event.

Borders and frames play a paradoxical role. They have concrete and important functions, organizing the compositional process in a practical sense and restricting personal preferences. They discipline both the process of composing and performing and challenge the composer-performer to open his/her senses to other possibilities than he/she has considered. In this sense, borders and frames function as disciplinary aspects that instead of delimiting and founding interpretive possibilities, break through the interpretive way of listening, make interpretation senseless, and present an aesthetic meaning that has to be experienced in all its diversity and which goes beyond an anthropocentric being-in-the-world:

But this fearlessness only follows if, at the parting of the ways, where it is realized that sounds occur whether intended or not, one turns in the direction of those he does not intend. This turning is psychological and seems at first to be a giving up of everything that belongs to humanity – for a musician, the giving up of music. This psychological turning leads to the world of nature, where, gradually or suddenly, one sees that humanity and nature, not separate, are in this world together; that nothing was lost when everything was given away. In fact, everything is gained. In musical terms, any sounds may occur in any combination and in any continuity.<sup>364</sup>

#### **4.3.8 The 'rift' and the phenomenon of emergence**

Though Heidegger's philosophy exhibits non-dualistic ambitions and accentuates aspects of process, activity and conditionality, it does not banish the need for an *essential* difference – the a priori *other* – to establish the necessary horizon for a reflective encounter with Being. The scent of dualism thereby preserved is further elaborated by the logic of hermeneutics that saves us from an indifferent state of invisible meaning. Instead we make a difference in the world by our anticipatory creativity. Cage though uses this creative intervention in a counterproductive way by exploring and developing strategies that hinder the drive to figuration and a centralised perspective.

Cage challenges, thereby, Heidegger's ontological-aesthetic hermeneutics and the centrality given to the act of *making difference* correlated to the ability to create (establish) a point of view from which differentiations and distributions of values can be arrived at. To frame and limit contributes concretely to Cage's compositional strategies, but this activity does not

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<sup>364</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 8.

function as the provider of meaning. Instead borders and frames are introduced to transform and transcend our habit of dividing things, organizing them in different categories and favouring one thing by discriminating against something else. Boundaries as arbitrary “lines” in an infinite diversity are exaggerated until these limiting and framing elements are not even just ambiguous but become “senseless” in the meaning production of the musical event.

As mentioned, Fischer-Lichte emphasises how performances since the 1960s have staged theatrical elements differently than earlier and in doing so have also transferred attention from a coherent plot or character, to the emergent quality of a performance. The phenomenon of emergence (*das Phänomen der Emergenz*) is, through different techniques, highlighted and palpable. Methods are used that dissolve the temporal structures that would help the perceiver trace back appearing elements according to a chain of causes which appear to be logical and reasonable, and thereby meaningful in the light of the development of a plot or the psychology of a character. The “senseless” way borders and frames are set in a realisation of *Variations II* has a similar function: Instead of contributing to an organisation of the material according to a certain imagined totality (a musical plot (idea), characters (themes and motifs) and their course of logical development resulting in for example a coherent sonata form), the framing and limiting activity split up such intentional organisation. Boundaries become paradoxical. As definers of coherent meanings, they become somehow senseless, just set by chance. However, they function as useful tools to provoke alert listening for what actually appears *here* in all its diversity.

We could perhaps solve this paradox by introducing Gumbrecht’s differentiation between the ‘production of meaning’ and the ‘production of presence’. Gumbrecht, in *Production of Presence* (2004), separates on one hand meaning-effects and on the other presence-effects. Presence is in this respect understood not primarily as a temporal relationship, but “a spatial relationship to the world and its objects. Something that is ‘present’ is supposed to be tangible for human hands, which implies that, conversely, it can have an immediate impact on human bodies.”<sup>365</sup> This understanding of ‘presence’ is combined with a conception of production as “the act of ‘bringing forth’ an object in space.”<sup>366</sup> Therefore, by combining ‘presence’ and ‘production’, Gumbrecht points out that “all kinds of events and processes in which the

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<sup>365</sup> Gumbrecht 2004, p xiii.

<sup>366</sup> Loc. cit.

impact that ‘present’ objects have on human bodies is being initiated or intensified.”<sup>367</sup> In contrast, the ‘production of meaning’ is linked to a process that reduces the significance of physical immediacy in favour of the formation of abstract meaning – what Gumbrecht calls ‘metaphysics’: “If we attribute a meaning to a thing that is present, that is, if we form an idea of what this thing may be in relation to us, we seem to attenuate, inevitably, the impact that this thing can have on our bodies and our senses. It is in this sense, too, that the word ‘metaphysics’ is used here.”<sup>368</sup>

‘Presence’, therefore, in Gumbrecht’s sense, has a kind of physicality attached to its conception that is, not least, spatially defined, while the concept of ‘meaning’ is associated to an approach where the awareness of physical presence, in its *here-ness*, is reduced and interest is directed to what *this* – that which is present here and now – can mean in an abstract – “metaphysical” – sense.

With regard to meaning-production as it operates within a hermeneutic system, the chance-ridden borders and frames of *Variations II* make this system as a producer of meanings almost non-applicable and senseless. However, as producers of presence in Gumbrecht’s sense, these framing and limiting elements function efficiently both by concretely contributing to what happens and by bringing about an intensified awareness of what appears here and now in its diverse and perishable materiality.<sup>369</sup>

As we have seen, for both Heidegger and Gadamer, aesthetic meaning is not detachable from the physicality of the artwork as we stand in its presence. Meaning-production and the production of presence appear to overlap each other and in fact are founded upon the same phenomenon:<sup>370</sup> The work of art, as the setting-into-work-of-truth, works through a logic that generates the premises for the emergence of hermeneutic reflection. This reflection makes the presence of Being present both in relation to its material implications and its transcendence.

*Variations II*, though, we could argue, does not produce presence by enforcing the dynamics

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<sup>367</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid, xiv.

<sup>369</sup> Göran, 2009, illuminates this point eminently in her Cage study from 2009. Moments from her study are brought up and presented later in this thesis in chapter six and seven.

<sup>370</sup> We could in fact say that the capacity for creating a unified arena for the display of meaning-production and the production of presence marks the artwork’s peculiar mode of being.

of a hermeneutic circle and in that way establishing aesthetic meaning. On the contrary, a situation is sensitized by strategies that resist hermeneutic logic getting a foothold; the production of presence is achieved at the expense of what Gumbrecht identifies as the meaning-effects.<sup>371</sup> The quality of emergence accentuated by Fischer-Lichte is, so to speak, sensitized by the deprivation of the power of hermeneutic logic.

Are we then back again at the point we were before we did the re-reading of a work-concept? Is the presence-effect enforced by Cage's strategies achieved at the expense of what could save this presence from immediate isolation?

Through the re-read version I presented a reading of the performative initiative as genuinely connected to a creative involvement in the world. Performative efficacy was thereby not connected fundamentally to the implementation of standards but to the capability for opening a world-horizon, providing genuine meetings and creating a site for interplay. Such a reading does not only enable us to free performative efficacy from the totalitarian regime of norms, it also makes it possible to revise the reflexivity involved in the performative attitude. Cage's aesthetic project, as I mentioned in the section "Performance – event", questions an attitude of "showing doing" as defined by the (self-)conscious carrying out of intentional action.<sup>372</sup> Accordingly, we could question the relevance of the concept of performativity in this respect. Maybe we could have instead jumped directly towards the notion of the staged event and approached this phenomenon from the point of view of actions and events. However, by connecting the performative attitude to the creative intervention, the mode of *exploring* is accentuated. We could thereby revise the "showing doing" of performance to "explorative doing", and instead of giving the self-consciousness aspect priority, see the self-consciousness potential as an *end* of the creative explorations.<sup>373</sup> This would in fact be in line with the experimental aesthetics voiced by Cage.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> *Variations II*, therefore, could be an example where Gumbrecht's differentiation is helpful as a tool to analyse different processes that creates aesthetic significance. These do not, however, need to cancel each other out. According to Gumbrecht, the production of presence and meaning are probably best understood as processes of oscillation even if one of them can take precedence over the other. (See for example Gumbrecht, p. 107-108.)

<sup>372</sup> See pp. 102-103.

<sup>373</sup> I am going to present Thomas J. Csordas' 'paradigm of performativity' later in this chapter. If we use Csordas argument about the pre-objective, the notion of a self-performing and self-understanding agent does not need to be the first step. Instead the self-reflective consciousness can be the end result of the creative gesture.

<sup>374</sup> Cage's proclaimed project of ego-less art can be seen, not as an annihilation of self-consciousness, but an alteration of it. Through artistic activity the possibility of an altered self-understanding can be envisioned, for example, the "ego-less" self-consciousness of coexisting in a world, in a web of interactions with other beings.

I find these points of immense importance for the reading of the concept of performativity that I present in this thesis, and they inform the frame in which I have placed Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics. Cage problematizes in this respect not the feature of the Heideggerian artwork which opens up a field of Being for us but how this feature is conceived as anchored and maintained. The hermeneutic dialectic is questioned pointing to its need for privileged perspectives, unequal valuations and a sense-giving differentiating mark to make its logic function. Do we really need this kind of discrimination, or can we enter the state of co-presence alternatively tuned?<sup>375</sup> The question raised by *Variation II* is therefore: Though the re-read version of workhood can illuminate the performative gesture of opening a field for experience, how can this opening be retained without retaining the need for "a unifying scaffold that joins, keeps the elements together and settles them"?<sup>376</sup> We are in this respect moving from the theme of ruptured conventions as our guiding line in the study of performativity, to the impact of our embodied condition and the 'body' as a resource to think meaning formation and presence sustenance.

The theme of 'art as event' will in this respect be more thoroughly examined, and this time with the background of a semiotic position. Fischer-Lichte speaks about de-semanticization in reference to examples similar to *Variations II*, and as we have already seen in the example of the untitled event at Black Mountain College, this de-semanticized quality and the connected phenomenon of emergence form a phenomenal core that informs her theorizing. Therefore, to explore her theoretical position closer in this respect, I will outline a semiotic understanding of art as a background and counterpart for her aesthetics of performativity. We will thereby also prepare the ground for discussing the concept of performativity more profoundly according to the significance given to an embodied condition.

Though we mainly leave the Heideggerian work concept at this point, it is not entirely omitted from the discussion. It will continue to inform, inspire and provoke theoretical reflections throughout the thesis.

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<sup>375</sup> These questions will be more profoundly discussed from the point of view of Cage's aesthetics in chapter 6, but they are also to a certain extent relevant for Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics.

<sup>376</sup> See presentation at p. 125.

## 4.4 Art as sign, art as event

### 4.4.1 Semiotics and the need for an alternative theory

Fischer-Lichte notes that performances of the new art scene in the 1960s destabilised conventions by questioning the relationship between materiality, the signifier and the signified. Behind her observation lies a critique of theories that basically see the ontological status of art as based in the functions of signs. She has herself contributed to such theories with seminal works like *The Semiotics of Theatre (Semiotik des Theaters)*, published in German for the first time in 1983.<sup>377</sup> Let us briefly explore this criticized semiotic position, which presents the business of art in terms of the production and interpretation of signs.

In the introductory remarks of *The Semiotics of Theatre* we read: “Viewed from the standpoint of the cultural sciences, theatre appears initially to be one of many possible cultural systems. [...] Culture is understood here in quite a broad sense as something created by humans as opposed to nature [...]. Everything which humans produce is ‘significant’ for themselves and each other, because humans in principle live ‘in a signifying world’, that is, in a world where everything that is perceived is perceived as a signifier which must be judged to have a signified, i.e. a meaning.”<sup>378</sup> The relation between signifier and signified, though, becomes highly ambiguous when considering performances from the 1960s and 1970s. Put simplistically, the semiotic approach, consisting of revealing sign-structures, meets resistance because even the condition of sign-formation is evaded in these performances. To explain this point let me rudimentarily sketch the semiotic position indicated in the quote above.

Cultural phenomena are basically seen as founded in an ability to establish sign-systems that map out the world, function as the intermediate link between ourselves and the world, and unify humans in communicative communities. These systems of signs have a structure that organises their practical and individual use; a systemic logic is at work in any use of signs. Saussure, the pioneer of Structuralism, drew attention to the sign’s dual aspects: The *signifier*, which represents a codified image of material shaped in a distinct way (e.g. the sound-image of a word), and the *signified*, which represents the meaning/concept to which this shaped materiality is correlated. The relation between these two aspects is defined by conventions.

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<sup>377</sup> *Semiotik des Theaters*, published in German for the first time in 1983.

<sup>378</sup> Fischer-Lichte 1992, p. 1.

That is, there is no natural connection between the sounds that for example make up the word “musician” and the meaning of the word. The sign-system operates as an organising regime between the signifiers and the signified. In other words, the correlation between material shaped in a distinctive way and its meaning is arbitrary – defined by convention – whereas the system that organises the relationships between signifiers and signified does not work in an arbitrary way. It is systemic and codifies the elements by their interrelated position within the system. This system functions primarily by organising and defining its elements according to a binary opposition that creates a complex pattern of paired functional differences. Because internal relations define the logic of the system, these functional differences make up a coherent, interdependent and well balanced structure that operates in a self-defining and self-regulating way independent of the external world to which it refers and maps out. It is thereby possible to approach a sign-system as a complete system that in fact as a totality is at work in partial use. The essence is therefore not the individual sign per se, but the general structure of which this sign is a part; only through its function within a system made up of significant contrasts and binary oppositions does the individual sign acquire a definition.

Generally speaking, semiotic theories of art present the artwork as a kind of sign, or an aesthetic text composed of a constellation of different signs.<sup>379</sup> Mukařovský<sup>380</sup> in this respect adopts Saussure’s dual perspective of the sign and differentiates the artwork into principally two aspects: The artefact (the signifier) – the work of art in its concrete sensuous appearance; and the aesthetic object (the signified) that denotes the artefact’s meaning. The work of art as an aesthetic sign is, though, in many respects a complex and ambiguous one. Whereas the relationship between signifier and signified in the context of historic languages shows, to a great extent, stability, this is not the case with the aesthetic counterpart. To explain this character of complexity and ambiguity Fischer-Lichte’s semiotic theory elaborates Mukařovský’s two-dimensional determination of the artwork and applies, in line with Morris,<sup>381</sup> the three-dimensional determination of a sign formulated by Pierce<sup>382</sup> consisting of a syntactic dimension (the sign’s relation to other signs), a semantic dimension (the sign’s relation to the signified, meaning – an object/matter/reality that the sign refers to) and a pragmatic dimension (the sign’s relationship to the interpreter). The aesthetic sign differs

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<sup>379</sup> The semiotic position presented here relies mainly on Fischer-Lichte’s presented version in *Ästhetische Erfahrung* (2001), pp. 51-64.

<sup>380</sup> Jan Mukařovský (1891-1975). Czech literary and aesthetic theorist.

<sup>381</sup> Charles Morris (1901-1979). American semiotician and philosopher.

<sup>382</sup> Charles S. Pierce (1839-1914). American philosopher.

from the linguistic sign of ordinary language by not having its own semantic dimension. The semantic dimension of an aesthetic sign is constituted in a dialectical relationship between the syntactic and pragmatic dimensions. That means, the meaning of an artwork is constituted through a dialectical process arising between our own frames of reference (general knowledge, personal history, et cetera) and what we as interpreters can reconstruct (with the background of our own frames of references) of the author's intentions and relevant contexts (historic knowledge – aesthetic, political and social circumstances, artistic styles et cetera) from the recognised sign structure.

Even though Fischer-Lichte emphasises the non-settled character of the aesthetic sign (not having its own semantic dimension and being in a basic manner dependent upon the interpreter's knowledge and frame of reference), this productive mode of ambiguity is not enough to account for what happens in the performances' of the 1960s. Though she does not deny the semiotic potential of these performances, she abandons the approach to seeing them fundamentally in terms of signs or texts.

Fischer-Lichte arrives at the conclusion that the problem is not solved by further refinements of the semiotic approach. It is, so to speak, the semiotic logic in itself that is the problem. This logic presupposes that the elements of a performance are structured in a certain way that can be traced back to a recognizable and underpinning system consisting of significant contrasts and paired functional differences.<sup>383</sup>

I have pointed out how *Variations II* calls into question the circular logic of the hermeneutic circle by making demarcation lines arbitrary. The same could be said in considering the structure of paired functional differences. As in my presentation of the hermeneutic circle, semiotic logic presupposes a differentiating boundary – a dividing line. It is against its contrast that the settlement of meaning is arrived at and that identity (a domain of reality) gets its name. Therefore, *Variations II* does not only question the logic of the hermeneutic circle by its senseless borders, it questions also the functional difference at the core of semiotics.

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<sup>383</sup> I have emphasised that the aesthetic sign in Fischer-Lichte's semiotic theory lacks its own semantic dimension and thereby in its nature harbours a high potentiality for ambiguity. However, even if a corresponding semantic dimension is lacking, that does not mean that the logic of sign formation has no importance. I would remind the reader of the Saussurean system of paired functional differences. The semantic dimension Fischer-Lichte describes is dependent upon the recognition of some kind of sign system – of a syntactic dimension. It is by the dialectic that thereby arises between the recognised sign system and the interpreter's own frame of reference (pragmatic dimension) that the artwork acquires a meaning.



Fischer-Lichte, for her part, refers basically to two different strategies where sign formation is evaded:

- 1) Theatrical elements are handled as emergent phenomena freed from meanings and functions defined by an underpinning coherent structure – theatrical elements appear as though they do not refer to anything other than themselves. An example is found in the untitled event at Black Mountain College, already referred to. In these instances materiality, the signifier and the signified fall together with the result that any “decipherment” of the meanings falls short. There are no other references for what is presented than what takes place.<sup>384</sup>
- 2) A contrary strategy to letting materiality, the signifier and the signified fall together is to dissociate these aspects from each other. In these performances a signifier can be connected to the most divergent meanings.

Both of the strategies mentioned open up a plurality of possibilities of meanings and associations because of the loosened relation between the theatrical means and any given convention. Even though they denote two opposite directions according to the relations between materiality, the signifier and the signified, both have in common that neither generates meanings grounded in inter-subjective valid codes. There is a disentanglement of theatrical elements from given interpretational contexts.<sup>385</sup>

Understood as sign, it is by its sign-character that the artwork connects the aspect of an inner subjective space (site) of experience with the exterior of a shared world, both in a concrete sense of materiality (artefact/signifier) and in the sense of a shared communicative system (signified). Through its sign-character the artwork functions as an interface between subjectivity and objectivity, endless interpretative possibilities and facts. In this way the ontological status of the artwork points to a kind of duplication of reality in continuation with the historic view of art as mimesis: The sign as an artefact is produced and exists as a fact in a shared world – many can experience it through their own senses – but its mode of being (as a

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<sup>384</sup> The theatrical elements become thereby de-semanticized (*desemantisiert*); they are loosened from a syntactic structure that could have brought some codified distributions of meanings. In this sense, they become nonsensical – they do not function as signs. The aesthetic theory of performativity becomes thereby a revision of understanding theatre as a semiotic system, pointing to the semiotic positions' limitations.

<sup>385</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, pp. 243-250.

sign) is to *refer* to a reality beyond its own concrete figuration. The sign's ontological status is defined in mediating and communicating. Art as signs stands in an intermediary position between the flow of reality and our experiences of it. It is this ontological status as referent that is so to speak changed by the conception of art as an event in its own right.

Through the concept *event* the relationship between art and reality acquires a different footing. We do not have a conception of art as a mediation of the real world through its sign character. Art is factual events that happen and transform our existential condition as it is. It does not stand in an oppositional mode to the real, nor is a tool through which we approach the fact of existence. It is itself a mode of reality, created by modes of actions, interaction and incidents. Its ontological status is therefore not situated in the sign function, but in the actuality of fateful reality. We are here of course moving towards an embodied conception where things evolve as much by their physical implications as in the potential for interpretations, a view we are going to examine later under the heading "The paradigm of embodiment."

While the semiotic approach (art as sign) sees the relationship between art and reality as mediated through the concept of meaning with the help of physical tokens, the view of art as event sees art as part of reality itself. This mode of reality, though, is brought about by active intervention: It is staged (*mise en scène*). Fischer-Lichte therefore does not preach a naïve correlation between our experiences of what happens and objective reality as it is: Our being in the world, inclusive of how we experience this state, is dependent upon modes of intervention, upon the aspect of *mise en scène* (staging). We bring about situations and events more or less purposefully. We do not only interpret our life situation, we actively contribute to how it is constituted.<sup>386</sup> At the intermediary position between the flow of reality and our experiences of it stand more or less consciously performed interventions. The ontological status of performances is connected to such intervening activity, and it is through this intervention that a space for *transformative experience* is created.

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<sup>386</sup> Fischer-Lichte, in this respect, emphasises the performative mode of being self-referential and reality-constitutive that intervenes and transforms the reality we dwell within. Meaning production is somehow given a different footing, not based in any uncovering of meanings "behind" the presented material, but based in the significance of the reality constituted at the site and its possible effects.

#### 4.4.2 Collapsing dichotomies and perforated boundaries

As described, the semiotic system of paired functional differences implies that we organize and communicate our experiences with the help of schemes of oppositions. Such schemes though are questioned by the performances to which Fischer-Lichte refers. She mentions in this respect oppositions such as art vs. reality, subject vs. object, body vs. mind, animals vs. human beings, signifier vs. signified.<sup>387</sup>

A perspective of both/and, instead of either/or, is emphasized. This perspective is also articulated by the *autopoietischen feedback-Schleife* where participants contribute both as subjects and objects, actors and spectators, in a dynamic and alternating structure. Subject and object do not form a dichotomy, but gliding positions. We inhabit both states, though alternate in having them.

Performances that let established schemes of opposites (dichotomous pairs of concepts) fail, constituting a reality of instability, blurring, plurality of meanings and transitions. Such performances resist being understood through dichotomous descriptions leaving us in a condition of being betwixt and between.

As we have seen, Fischer-Lichte connects performative efficacy to a liminal state and the experience of *threshold* (*Swollen Erfahrung*). This experience is brought about through strategies of staging (*mise en scène*). Through staging, understood as strategies for creating a situation (more than strategies for representation), a specific *attention* is aimed at. This attention affects and shapes the aesthetic experience. Fischer-Lichte connects this attentive state to an experience of *presence*. This is not a passive reflection of being there in a contemporaneous mode. It draws attention to the presence and impact of the alternation between being touched and touch, between responding and acting. It brings attention to the experience of ourselves and others as *embodied minds*,<sup>388</sup> palpable in our mode of becoming (our presence), meaning that we interact and contribute to how events unfold (the presence production) and exist in relations of exchange to our surroundings. In this state the world appears as *re-enchanted*.

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<sup>387</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, pp. 294-304.

<sup>388</sup> The concept 'embodied mind' will be commented later. See p. 166 ff.

This is a threshold experience; to be in the midst of the events' developments, their transformation and constitution; to be in the midst of the evolvement of a shared reality on the verge of being; to be in the midst of a process in its moment of creation that has the double character of crystallization and throughput, being emergent and productive.

Art is, in this instance, connected to modes of experiencing reality in its ongoing moments of production. Seen in this way, the relationship between art and reality is neither described through a mimetic relationship nor through segregation (art seen as an autonomous domain). Art and reality do not make up a conceptual contrast (dichotomy); art is part of reality that through different techniques (strategies) of staging draws attention to this shared reality and how we contribute and are affected by its productivity:

In performance, both artists and spectators could experience the world as enchanted. As creatures in transition, they could apprehend themselves in the process of transformation. [...] the aesthetics of the performative marks the limits of the Enlightenment by undermining Enlightenment reliance on binary oppositions to describe the world, and by enabling people to appear as embodied minds. [...] It does not call upon all human beings to govern over nature – neither their own nor that surrounds them – but instead encourages them to enter into a new relationship with themselves and the world. This relationship is not determined by an “either/or” situation but by an “as well as.” The reenchantment of the world is inclusive rather than exclusive; it asks everyone to act in life as in performance.<sup>389</sup>

#### 4.4.3 The paradigm of embodiment

Fischer-Lichte's shift of emphasis from the sign function of art to its eventful character can be paralleled to a shift of methodology, from textuality to embodiment. Thomas J. Csordas outlines such a shift in the article “Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology” (1990). He does in this respect not disclaim the validity of semiotic approaches, but he presents the paradigm of embodiment<sup>390</sup> as a dialectical partner to textuality,<sup>391</sup> and the *body* as an alternative methodological figure to the *text*.

The ‘body’ however is “not an *object* to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the *subject* of culture, or in other words as the existential ground of culture.”<sup>392</sup> The body is in this instance rethought from the scheme of body versus mind. Instead we have

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<sup>389</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2008, p. 207.

<sup>390</sup> By paradigm Csordas understands a consistent methodological perspective, and as a paradigm of embodiment this perspective takes as its point of view our embodied condition. (Csordas 1990, p. 5.)

<sup>391</sup> Csordas 1994, p. 12.

<sup>392</sup> Csordas 1990, p. 5.

here an *I-body* that incorporates, in its embodied state, mental intentionality.<sup>393</sup> It is an *existential body* which actively *is-in-the-world*, localised in a substantive web of connections.<sup>394</sup>

I have mentioned that the sign can be understood as an interface between the individual and the social, the private interior experience and the act of externalization, the subjective and the objective, and that through this function as an interface it connects these different dimensions together and creates meaning as a category of shared values. We could argue that within the paradigm of embodiment the *body* itself takes on this function. The collective is, so to speak, inscribed in the individual body. The body vibrates in a field between the private and the public, between the localised singular and generalised ambitions. Such a notion could easily be associated to a representative entity engraved by cultural marks that in this sense exhibits textual qualities. Csordas however emphasises that it is not the representative body he has in mind.<sup>395</sup> It is the *living body* occupied by its projects; it is the body of our perceptions that Maurice Merleau-Ponty points to. Csordas invokes in this respect Merleau-Ponty's notion of the *preobjective*<sup>396</sup> and argues that a "fully phenomenological account would recognize that while we are capable of becoming objects to ourselves, in daily life this seldom occurs."<sup>397</sup> The body therefore has the possibility to become a representative body that is handled as an object amongst others in the world, but this is not its exclusive mode of being: "Our lives are not always lived in objectified bodies, for our bodies are not originally objects to us. They are instead the ground of perceptual processes that *end* in objectification."<sup>398</sup> As embodied we are

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<sup>393</sup> The conception of an 'incarnate subject' (*sujet incarné*), or 'body-subject,' engaged in its world is derived from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception. See for example, *Phenomenology of Perception* (2002), pp. 161-170.

<sup>394</sup> Csordas refers to Donna Haraway for the notion of being "localised in a substantive web of connections." See Haraway, 1988, who there outlines a conception of 'situated knowledge.' (Csordas 1994, p. 2.)

<sup>395</sup> By *embodiment* Csordas seeks a different understanding of the body than the representative body – the "analytic body", the "topical body" or the "multiple body" – that he sees has grown within the anthropology of the body at the time he was writing (1980s and early '90s). (Csordas, 1994 pp. 4-6.)

<sup>396</sup> Like Heidegger's notion of the 'ready-to-hand' (see former footnote at p. 123), Merleau-Ponty's notion of a pre-objective relation to the world, points to the primordial intimacy between the experiencer and the experienced where the "known" not primarily shows up as delimited entities (unambiguous, given and measurable) independent of us, but transient, open and ambiguous phenomena (appearances) that we in our bodily constitution interacts with. Further, the transition from the pre-objective to the objective corresponds to a changed form of consciousness, from pre-reflective to reflective consciousness. In the pre-reflective mode, the 'body-subject' experiences the pre-objective field of phenomena, when I begin to reflect, the pre-objective phenomena become objects. What I initially experienced in a pre-objective mode sort of congeals and becomes something limited, different, an object opposite me. (See the introduction to Merleau-Ponty 1994, written by Dag Østerberg.)

<sup>397</sup> Csordas 1990, p. 6.

<sup>398</sup> Csordas 1994, 7. Csordas points in this respect to the play between preobjective and objectified bodies and how issues of this dynamics in our own culture have been addressed by contemporaneous critiques of our

not a given entity. We have become those we are through the play between pre-objective involvement and objectifying reflections – between losing sight of ourselves in the act of pursuing a task and developing self-awareness through modes of objectifications that apply established conceptualisations and ideological knowledge.<sup>399</sup>

The ‘body’ therefore as a methodological interface presents different perspectives than the sign for the thinking about unity between the private and the collective, the internal and the external, and thereby meaning as a category at this point of intersection. Firstly, the ‘body’ enables us to think meaning formation and meaning distribution in the frame of self-referentiality and reality-constitutive/transformative power where the sense of meaning in this respect has an irreducible and non-transferable quality because it is linked to the existential condition of an individual. Meaning is here so to speak inscribed in the reality of existence itself, and in Heidegger’s words, is immediately recognised as the possibility of continued existence and wellbeing. As the site that gives rise to this possibility and that carries it out, the body is the epitome of the fact that we exist. Meaning becomes thereby associated to the urgency of existential situations, to the reality of live opportunities. These meanings, though, do not disappear as the situation changes. The body as a methodological figure represents an opportunity to think the segmentation of urgent presence as bodily dispositions, bodily configuration and distribution. Not only as memories and experiences do we incorporate a world that we carry with us, but also through skills, behavioural patterns and strategies for solutions are meanings kept and sustained.

But though the figure of the body has the ability to mediate the relation between the transitory moment and a lasting state, it also transforms the perspective in this respect. It is not through the grid of “paired function differences”, but by being included in life projects through embodiment that moments become sustained. We carry meaning with us and distribute and impart it through the way we socialize and face challenges.

It is tempting at this point to invoke Merleau-Ponty’s notion of *flesh* and its chiasmic structure that appears in his late and unfinished work *The visible and the invisible*.<sup>400</sup> We are here

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notions of body and gender. (Loc. cit.)

<sup>399</sup> In the article from 1990 Csordas connects in this respect Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the preobjective with Bourdieu’s concept of habitus.

<sup>400</sup> Posthumously published. Merleau-Ponty, 1968.

presented an ontological approach that finds Being in a fleshy condition of dimensionality and latency. This pregnant condition exhibits folds and crossings and through the productive activity of the formations of Being are dehiscences<sup>401</sup> created for existential awareness and influential power. Borders and boundaries become passages and zones of exchange within this theory. They are perforated and point to a gliding position between seeing and being seen, touching and being touched, the visible and the invisible, and they indicate a faith<sup>402</sup> in the *unique* meeting between co-parties where the other part implies a positive indeterminacy at the other side of perception and interaction that cannot simply be deduced but has to be listened to, experienced, explored, interacted with and counted on. We can transfer these comments to the body as the keeper and distributor of meaning. It holds meanings by circulating them in its environment – by being involved in the world, by being in a co-existent mode that necessarily entails exchange and reciprocity. Though the *I-body* can illustrate a centripetal force, that connects different experiences and thereby creates a junction of sense in the midst of an engaging world, it also exhibits a centrifugal force on its environment. Meanings are in this respect created at these converging lines of centripetal and centrifugal power, being both placed (incorporated in the bodily reservoir and repertoire) and displaced (passed on to a worldly situation of interactive adaptation and negotiation) in an ongoing process of bodily-worldly formulation. We could therefore argue that we are here presented a picture of meaning formation, maintenance and distribution that is not sustained by the inscribed difference – the pure opposition – but by the movement of crossings and returns at the intermediary zones between existential junctions. Instead of a sign stabilized by its place in a semiotic structure of paired functional differences, we have a body that holds and performs its impact through processes of exchange. It is an entity of both/and in this respect that enacts the duplicity of the semiotic duality in an alternating structure between touching and being touched, between having influential power and being influenced and points thereby to a spectrum of positivity and elasticity between the opposite parties of co-existence.

Though the ‘body’ in this respect points to a dimension of meaning that evades being fixed because of its agent’s mobile condition and the constant climate of negotiations at the

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<sup>401</sup> This metaphor from the field of botany visualizes both a gesture of opening, a certain discrepancy or slip of non-identity, and the efflorescent quality arising from this slip of non-identity, or excess, in the chiasmic structure of *flesh*, creating disseminating structures and pollinating exchanges.

<sup>402</sup> Merleau-Ponty stresses the grant of the ‘perceptual faith’, which belongs to our inheritance to the world, that the world exists to be experienced – that it exists independently of our ideas about it. ‘Perceptual faith’ is discussed by Merleau-Ponty in the first chapter of *The visible and the invisible* (1968).

intermediary zone of transmission, the body as figure has, as mentioned, also the capacity to illuminate 'meaning' as a category of unavoidable significance and with indisputable power of determination. We can associate the immediate impact of existential situations to their pure actuality – how our bodies bear the stamp of the life we have led and practically remind us of this in our corporeality. As embodied, we are already a meeting point in the flux of life between the histories of the past and present situations, lines of genus and coincidental happening, and by our inevitable readiness for prospective situations the future vibrates in our perceptive awareness. The 'text' and the 'body' illuminate in this respect different qualities of fixedness and flexibility. While a semiotic system upholds meanings by binding them to collectively shared structures that exist independently of the individual phenomena, embodied meanings are so to speak fixed and rooted in the condition of not being transferable to somebody else. This sense of meaning is irreducible in its character of having to be experienced in the first person.

The 'body' shows in this respect a certain inertia that the text does not share. From a semiotic point of view we can describe the same incident in different ways, through different sign constellations, and thereby evoke different perspectives on the very same subject, or a wide variety of interpretations can arise from a single text. Embodiment points to a different dimension of meaning formation directly connected to reality and reality as lived and felt by individuals. The body as an inertial system of presence maintenance can illustrate an actualisation of senses that harbour their impact by their singular positivity bound to a local site within an extended web of connections.<sup>403</sup> We have thereby the possibility to ground a meaning system in the plurality of many co-existent participants.

In *embodiment* we are presented with a conception where the immediate impact of existence exhibits its significance by concretely shaping our embodied condition. However, the process of embodiment also evades being fixed. As embodied, meanings are to a certain extent already in flux; they are already ready to be modified and adjusted to altered situations, and when segmented they have already been put on the stage for further re-workings. The body, as a store of meaning, is already on the move, modifying the storage device as new experiences are stored. We have a perspective that follows changes in its foundation, and a perspectival foundation that alters according to what is perceived. Like the openness of

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<sup>403</sup> That as local, this site will also take on the character of being *unique*.



performative directionality – that is, its responsive conditionality – embodied meaning cannot be totally private, cannot be totally secluded from its environment, but will necessarily be involved in interplay and feedback. We can highlight this last observation by drawing attention to the relationship between the process of embodiment as the localised sediment of meaning and the creation of a world horizon as a shared frame of experience and exchange. As embodied we are intimately of this world and an expression of it, but we also represent a ‘reply’. We do not simply inherit a world but create new dehiscences of significance.

We can now connect the body as a methodological figure to the definition of art as event. The ‘body’ makes it possible to think of *impact* and *sense* in frames of actuality and physicality that add to cultural systems of organisation. Aesthetic sensuousness is, in this respect, directly connected to an existential awareness.

The ‘body’ makes it thereby possible to think the significance of an aesthetic event not only through the formation and interpretation of signs but as sustained and continued through states of embodiment and interaction. The body, as a perceptive-interactive reservoir, acts as a point of inertia that accumulates the urgency of presence so it does not merely fly away but also becomes extended and swollen out in its actuality. The artistic event, in this respect, is however not only captured in individuated bodies. As an interface the ‘body’ points towards a shared environment. The body does not only embody an individual premise. It also incorporates a social world. There is an oscillating relationship between the generation of meaning in the sense of embodiment as the bodily-worldly site for *my* existence, and the generation of meaning (impact/significance) in the sense of creating/negotiating a shared world to experience.

As we have seen, Fischer-Lichte emphasises how the art event exhibits a conditional dynamic. The performance as medium is dependent upon the co-presence of actors and spectators and the dynamic that arises between them. A form of collaboration creates the event where the pulsation between acting and reacting, initiation and response is necessary. Transferred to a paradigm of embodiment, this accentuates the dependency between the individual quality of embodiment and the aim of creating a common sphere. Therefore, we could say that the immediacy of existential *impact* is not only expressed in processes of embodiment but also through the events that we initiate and co-create as a shared world and common point of experience. The shared topography of the specific event as communal and

the involved processes of embodiment that incarnate and comment on the faces of this shared landscape from a local perspective, create the possibility for thinking theoretically of the art event as a multifocal and multilayered structure that exhibits meaning formations both in different tempi and forms and includes the dynamics of auto-poietic feedback coils in its workings.

Csordas (1994) does not argue the methodology of semiotics should be disregarded. A methodology of *body* and *embodiment* can complement notions of ‘text’ and ‘textuality’.<sup>404</sup> I understand Fischer-Lichte to be in the same vein. The aesthetics of performativity does not per se exclude semiotic theories (positions). Though I have presented her theory as a move away from a semiotic position, her performative stance does not abandon the usefulness of textual approaches. In fact she voices a complementary relationship between semiotics and performative theories in her book *Ästhetische Erfahrung: Das Semiotische und das Performative* (2001). Each approach supports different perspectives which are not mutually exclusive but reflect different emphases. Read like this, Fischer-Lichte’s outlining of the performance as an *event* does not exclude the possibility of interpreting this event as a text – a constellation of signs. However, in the aesthetics of performativity (2004) we sense the primacy of the performative stance. Firstly, from the performative platform – that of being *done*, performed within a dynamic of co-presence and interplay – the condition for a textual character arises. The preferred focus, though, is to a certain extent related to an economy of attention.<sup>405</sup> Like the meditative practice that makes us conscious of the otherwise unnoticed act of breathing, performances can incite awareness to the automated processes that accompany our conscious life, or to fields of embodied knowledge that only find expression in practice through a reality-constitutive capacity. Or, like the heated political discussion that absorbs its participants and distracts them from being conscious of the exact pace of their breathing, their posture, or the act of scratching a head (although these factors in a live situation will probably colour the discussion’s milieu), a performance can enforce a textual reading by its applied means.

The link between ‘text’ and ‘body’ in this instance can be associated to a relationship of dimensionality that points to different regions of meaning formation. Though the whole scale

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<sup>404</sup> Csordas 1994, p. 12.

<sup>405</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, discusses the economy of attention at pp. 289-291, there though within a different context than the one sketched up by me here.

of this meaning formation can be at work in a performance, our economy of attention would focus on some parts and leave others as supporting automated processes. This economising, though, is not a static process and our focus can vary during a performance. What we apprehend automatically – take for granted – can draw our focus and what has attracted our attention can be included in supportive structures.<sup>406</sup> In contrast to my presentation of Gumbrecht's concept of meaning<sup>407</sup> I have discussed 'meaning' in a broad sense in the current context. It is associated here with a kind of sustenance of some states – with a kind of extension and continuity – and with a kind of patterning of the flux of life. 'Meaning' understood in this way is a highly relevant category to both embodiment and textuality, and it does not exclude being intimately linked to physical states.<sup>408</sup> This dimension of meaning however is illuminated differently, with alternative accentuations, by the figure of 'body' and 'text' pointing to the dynamic stretch between the individual and the local significance of non-escapable existence and the creation of shared maps of orientation.

The aesthetics of performativity move in this oscillating landscape between non-escapable existence and shared scripts, though with special attention to the modes of reality production created in the live situation of co-presence. This includes a special aesthetic attention to the minutely nuanced processes of existential immediacy<sup>409</sup> that evades semiotic introspection. Though the aesthetics of performativity displace the primacy of semiotic positions and instead approach art in the continuation of the performative gesture, and thereby indicate a different foundation for aesthetic reflection that points to a non-dualistic possibility for theorizing, this approach does not replace semiotic theories in the domain of sign analysis. To a certain extent the aesthetics of performativity add to semiotic stances in an attempt to elaborate a conceptual apparatus for those regions of aesthetic significance that the sign does not cover.

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<sup>406</sup> The experience of learning to play an instrument is in this respect an instructive example. From investing a lot of energy and focused attention to learn and adapt certain skills, these are at a later stage automatized and can support a focused attention about other issues. Further, we can go back to the automatized technique, consciously examine what we do, refine the technique, or perhaps unlearn some "bad" habits.

<sup>407</sup> See p. 142-143.

<sup>408</sup> 'Meaning,' presented here, does in this respect differ from Gumbrecht's definition.

<sup>409</sup> Immediacy is in this respect understood as a "temporally/historically" informed sensory presence and engagement; it is not unmediated in the sense of a precultural universalism but in the sense of the preobjective reservoir." (Csordas 1994, p. 10.)

## 4.5 Performative generation of materiality

Cage emphasises that sounds have their own intrinsic value (their own being) independently of the composer's intentions. The material, so to speak, has to be met as having its own life, its own motivations beyond our desires.

We could now think this intrinsic value according to Heidegger's notion of the 'earth' as that which "shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up".<sup>410</sup> That is, if the work is seen as setting up a world and letting the earth be seen, and the earth represents an aspect that withholds itself from being known, we could read the encounter with the artwork as also being an event for reflecting on what withholds our knowledge, but at the same time conditions it and contributes to our existence. If we turn this reflection into a Cagean kind of rhetoric, we could say that we should respect our non-knowledge by taking it into account when we meet people and things of the world, for example by approaching the musical material as having a life of its own that we cannot fully comprehend, but can leave space for and meet respectfully.

The position sketched over could, in fact, be problematic according to a performative turn of perspective, not least if such a turn was based on an extreme reading of Butler's upside-down perspective.<sup>411</sup> Even though the significance of physicality is emphasised in this perspective by its accentuation of our embodied being, this body as material acquires an identity firstly by being staged through performative acts. Identity and predispositions do not need to be equalised. However, the Butlanean perspective can give the impression that the material is empty of an "own life" – of material imprints for their own sake – and becomes just what it is as a result of constructions. This extreme reading calls attention to a potential lopsidedness of constructivism within available concepts of performativity that are problematized by Cage's aesthetics and practice. Because, although Cage can furnish us with excellent examples of how a performance can construct an identity that did not exist prior to presentation (for example with *4'33''* discussed in this context later) we could argue that in these constructions he primarily creates an awareness of life lines that exceed our constructive grasp.<sup>412</sup> With

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<sup>410</sup> Heidegger 1971, p. 47.

<sup>411</sup> See former presentation at p. 108-109.

<sup>412</sup> See Hayles 1994, which is presented in chapter six. She uses 'worldline' to denote a sequential path of connected events – chains of cause and effects –, and uses Cage's chance operation to illustrate the complexity that emerges in the interacting zone between lines that initially acted independently.

these comments in mind I will now look at the aspect of material and materiality from the point of view of a performative turn.

#### 4.5.1 Embodiment and construction

The Butlerian perspective, as sketched before turns the view upside down by rather than questioning *what* is expressed, focusing on *how* performances create a sense of identity and confirm it through repeated patterns of “doing your body”. Included in this shift in perspective is a certain attack on the dual construction of body and mind. Our identity and physical appearance cannot be detached from the embodying process that materialises possibilities given in social conventions and repertoire. That is, our materiality, our physicality, cannot be separated from our performances of identity, and our identity cannot be detached from the performance of our body. Can we transfer this understanding of our physicality to the aesthetic theme of materiality?

Fischer-Lichte discusses the aspect of a performance’s materiality under the heading “Zur performativen Hervorbringung von Materialität” – “Towards a performative generation of materiality” – in her *Ästhetik des Performativen*. This heading is a reminder of the upside down perspective of Butler’s concept of performativity, and triggered my interest when I was first introduced to her aesthetic theory of performativity. I was intrigued by her presentation whereby the material aspect is not understood as something having a pre-existing potential which can be given a specific shape, as clay which can be shaped into pots, or building bricks which can be put together in different forms. Instead the material – in its materiality, in its nature as material – first appears as such (as material at all) through performative acts. 4’33’’ by Cage can be an illuminating example. The sonic material of this piece is not a scale, harmonic progressions or a gamut of sounds. There is no given material that then is shaped and presented as a worked out piece of music. The piece consists only of worked out portions of notated *tacet*. The musical material of the piece – sounds that just appear without intention – is brought to attention by the acts performed by the performer live at the concert. For example, at its first performance the eminent pianist David Tudor entered the stage, sat down at the piano as expected, then shut the piano lid. After 33 seconds in concentrated silence he opened it in order thereafter to shut it again. This time he waited for two minutes and forty seconds before the lid was opened and the last movement was introduced as the former two by shutting the lid. This last part lasted for one minute and twenty seconds. Then the piece

was over and Tudor had not played a single tone. He had used the conventions of giving a classical concert, though not playing anything, but had performed being silent (as we might imagine a percussionist in a symphonic orchestra does when he/she has portions of *tacet* in their part).<sup>413</sup>

At a second working through of Fischer-Lichte's theory, I wondered if perhaps my first reading was too radical, or even wrong. The materiality discussed was perhaps not as general as I had read it in the first place. Perhaps a more correct understanding was to think of the project as a theorizing of the specific materiality of a performance. That is, a performance does not have at its disposal a fixable or tradable material artefact. It is transitory and elusive. It exhausts itself in its current (immediate) presence, that is, in the permanent process of becoming and ending, and in the autopoiesis of the feedback coil. This does not hinder the use of objects in a performance, but the performance in itself, in its totality, cannot be reduced to a collection of these objects. When a performance is documented, for example by being captured on film, the performance's materiality is transformed into a new type of materiality. Documentation can never function as a perfect double; the documentation transfers the performance into a new and other type of manifestation that has its own structure of medial character, materiality, semiotic quality and aesthetic being. From such a point of view, a performance cannot entirely be repeated. Essentially, both a performance's medial character and its materiality dwell in the performance's presence in real time.<sup>414</sup>

My two readings of Fischer-Lichte – or perhaps more correctly, my first more superficial reading and my second correction – do not need to annul each other. In fact, they can be seen as supplementary. Both 'material' read in a sequential way as denoting a state before the material's shaped out condition, and 'materiality' read synchronously as an aspect of the case under consideration, are affected by a performative turn. The transitory quality of performances is accentuated and the aspect of materiality is linked up to this temporal quality. Firstly through performative acts the material is actualised and provides the performance with its specific materiality that is brought forth, maintained and transformed through the course of the accomplishment of the performance.<sup>415</sup> Butler's shift of perspective is therefore easily

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<sup>413</sup> This example will be further discussed later in connection with the presentation of performative space at p. 169 ff. It will also appear clearer in that context how this piece stages non-intentional sounds.

<sup>414</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 127.

<sup>415</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 227.

brought to mind, but this turn also carries with it some difficulties such as the non-identity, so to speak, of the material (if we really extend Butler's shift of perspective) – its emptiness before realized through performative acts. These questions are quite interesting when considering Cage's aesthetics and his emphasis on the sounds' significance in themselves.

As we have seen, Butler uses the concept of performativity to re-think our gendered being as being generated and established through performative acts, through processes of embodiment. The performative acts as bodily actions are thought of as being non-referential insofar as they do not refer to something predetermined, an inner core, a substance, or just an essence of some sort of which the actions are expressions. Fischer-Lichte incorporates parts of Butler's theorizing about body and identity, and transfers the perspective of bodily actions as performative acts to the sphere of aesthetics. However, in transforming these ideas to the theatre, she emphasizes how the actor acts in a position of tension between his/her own embodied being-in-the-world (“leiblichen In-der-Welt-Sein des Schauspielers”) and the role of presenting/representing a (fictitious) character (“Darstellung einer Figur”). This tension bestows the conditions and the possibility for a performative generation of corporality presented on the stage and the manner in which the audience can perceive this embodied condition.<sup>416</sup>

To illuminate Fischer-Lichte's concept of embodiment, a brief summary of her historical outline is helpful.<sup>417</sup> She identifies two important directions developed within German theatre in the second half of the 18th century: The development of a literature-theatre (*Literaturtheater*) and the development of a new realistic-psychological art of acting.

A school developed where the aim of the art of acting was to express (manifest) the written play as closely to the written version as possible. The written text was the authority for what should be presented on the stage. The tension between the actor's own phenomenal body (the actor's actual corporeal presence) and the actor's role as representing a character in the play should be transcended in favour of the represented character. Embodiment (*Verkörperung*) in

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<sup>416</sup> Ibid, p. 130.

<sup>417</sup> Even if her presentation is done at the backdrop of the history of theatre, we can see clear parallels to Goehr's historic presentation and Goehr's explanation for the dominant position *Werktreue* has got within Western art music. In fact, the historic interpretation of 'embodiment' presented by Fischer-Lichte and the ideal of *Werktreue* has clear parallels that are affected by the re-interpretation done within the aesthetics of performativity.

this context was understood as a concept to designate the actor's transformation of his/her own phenomenal, perceivable body as much as possible to a *semiotic body* (*semiotischen Körper*). This semiotic body was at the drama's disposal to express the (linguistic) meanings written in the text. The audience should have the opportunity to find in the actor's corporeal presence a perceptible body of signs (*Zeichen-Körper*). The factor of bodily qualities that was not directly linked to the text's meanings should ideally be transcended and erased.<sup>418</sup>

Such a conception, Fischer-Lichte argues, is based in a concept of meaning that is in turn based in a two-world theory. Meanings are understood as entities of the mind that are expressed through physical signs – signs that make the meanings visible.<sup>419</sup>

Contrary to this concept of embodiment, where the actor's phenomenal body (corporeal presence) is conceived as being completely transformed into the character of the play, the concept Fischer-Lichte operates with aims to reflect the way the phenomenon of the body (the actor's material) is handled and explored in theatrical performances and performance art since the 1960s. The aim here is not to completely transform the actor's phenomenal body. The performances work from the doubleness of being a body (*Leib-Sein*) and having a body (*Körper-Haben*), from the phenomenal body (*phänomenalem Leib*) and the semiotic body (*semiotischem Körper*), and do not regard the body as something which can fully be controlled and transformed. The actor's use of his/her body is founded in an actual existence, the actor's own embodied being-in-the-world (*leiblichen In-der-Welt-Sein*). By this, Fischer-Lichte argues, the condition arises for a new and radical definition of the concept of *embodiment* (*Verkörperung*).<sup>420</sup> This redefinition accentuates the notion that the first condition for presenting the human body as an object, theme, source of symbol-building, material for generating signs, product of cultural inscriptions and so on, is the human being's embodied (corporeal) and existential being-in-the-world (*Leibliche In-der-Welt-Sein*).<sup>421</sup>

The constructed nature of materiality encountered with the Butlerian shift of perspective, is here somehow questioned. The material, the actor's own body, adds something to the picture of embodiment. We are here reminded of Heidegger's emphasis on the aspect of our "thrown"

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<sup>418</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, pp. 132-133.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid, p. 139.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid, p. 153.



factual existence.<sup>422</sup> The material has qualities that resist easy incorporation and add their own imprints.

We have seen how Heidegger deconstructs a work concept based on a thing-conception and instead brings to the fore the event which the work, by its being, initiates and upholds. A kind of performative generation of materiality is here in operation, because nothing can really be experienced without the projective movement, the creative intervention that the work, in its created being, represents. This movement is reflective and involved in its character, and it brings us to a *concerned* encounter with the materiality of things. However, within this view there is also something that eludes being captured by construction. The performative gesture meets resistance. We could say that the phenomenon of ‘earth’ represents a resistance that presents a quality of the material that resists being accounted for by the performative pursuit. The phenomenon of ‘earth’ resists being completely incorporated in the ‘world’s’ exposing movement and illustrates how the performative gesture resides in a meeting, even described in such strong terms as a struggle. In the light of Heidegger’s theory, therefore, embodiment could be seen as a kind of configuration emerging from the tensional meeting between inherent qualities of the material, hideous in its character with unknown qualities and histories to be met, and the performative drive to incorporate these in life projects that head towards the future.

## 4.5.2 Time and space

### 4.5.2.1 Presence

Fischer-Lichte does not problematize to the same extent the constructivist traits inherent in the Butlerian concept of embodiment as she draws attention to the concept’s capacity to reflect the process of becoming. Materially, the performer – the living unity of body and soul – is somehow not available; the performer *is* not, but *becomes*.<sup>423</sup> This phenomenon of presence (*Präsenz*) in an embodied condition of becoming shows a different dynamic between body and mind than the dichotomous view that has dominated Western traditions. When an actor presents his/her phenomenal body as vital and energetic and by that generates presence, he/she then reveals himself/herself as an *embodied mind*. That means, he/she is

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<sup>422</sup> See for example Heidegger 1962, p. 174.

<sup>423</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 158.

revealed as a being where body and mind cannot be separated. The one part gives the other.<sup>424</sup> Mind operates in the continuation of our embodied state, and the body exists in the continuation of our soulful character expressed in processes of embodiment that incorporate mental imaginativeness and intentionality as part of our bodily constitution.

Fischer-Lichte further connects this embodied presentness, which in fact is a state of becoming and draws attention to the multilayered presence of an *I-body*, to an aesthetic category of presence. Like Gumbrecht, she finds in this phenomenon a different tool to think aesthetic impact than through a model of interpretation. 'Presence' in this context is seen not as an expressive quality, but dealt with as a performative quality that is generated through specific processes of embodiment and masteries of space that bring about a heightened awareness of what is present in the moment in its full materiality. That is, she emphasises like Gumbrecht the ability to generate presence and sees this production in connection with performative abilities and techniques. In this respect she differentiates between a weak concept of presence and a strong one. The weak concept of presence refers just to the pure presentness of an actor's phenomenal body (*phänomenalen Leib*). The strong concept of presence designates a presence revealed through an intense experience and awareness of contemporaneity and present-ness. Such an impressive experience is described as being like a stream of magic, like a source of energy or an energy field, which reveals the ordinary in a striking way: The being of humans as embodied minds.<sup>425</sup> As a performative quality, therefore, we can use 'presence' as an aesthetic category to analyse strategies that initiate heightened awareness, and to use Gumbrecht's vocabulary, produce presence-effects.<sup>426</sup>

The concept of presence that Fischer-Lichte presents is associated to a striking physicality. But by being connected to the conspicuousness of an *I-body* that performs within the doubleness of being a body (*Leib*) and having a body (*Körper*), in the bodily stretch between the phenomenal *leib* and the *I-body's* capacity to produce a representation, between pre-objective involvement and objectifying reflection, this concept parallels Heidegger's conception where material presentness is unified with a transcending vision, though without reducing either aspect to the presence of the other. Nevertheless, like the *I-body* of Merleau-

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid. pp. 170-171.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid. p.165.

<sup>426</sup> I must remark in this respect that Fischer-Lichte differentiates between 'presence' and 'presence-effects', and she declares that the aesthetic theory of performativity is an aesthetics of presence but not an aesthetics of presence-effects. (Fischer-Lichte 2004, pp. 174-175.)

Ponty's philosophy that emphasises the bodily condition of a *Dasein* and thereby transfers weight within the internal structure of being-in-the-world to the fleshy condition of local exchange,<sup>427</sup> physicality is given a more prominent position in the conception Fischer-Lichte presents. 'Presence', as an aesthetic category, is associated to the immediacy<sup>428</sup> of bodily sensuousness that includes a readiness to respond. Processes and energies connected to our bodily presence are in this respect emphasised. Furthermore, with reference to our earlier presentation of the body as a methodological figure within a paradigm of embodiment, we could say that 'presence' is attached to the generation of sense connected to our embodiment that is self-referential and reality-constitutive. It is a present sense connected to the urgency of existence – a meaning we cannot flee or transfer to others, but must be experienced.

Fischer-Lichte, like Gumbrecht, focuses on the sensitizing processes involved in the phenomenon of presence and tones down the processes of conceptualisations. 'Presence' is associated to the vitality and energy that we, as living embodied beings, represent and how this energy can be built up and put into circulation. This energy moves us and makes us respond as a psychosomatic unity.

As we have seen, the phenomenon of presence is connected to the concept of embodiment; presence is a performative quality. Furthermore, a strong concept of presence is linked to the conception of an embodied mind. In fact, Fischer-Lichte reserves a different conception for the strong awareness of the being-there of things.<sup>429</sup> She develops a differentiated conceptual apparatus for the dimension of the liveness of aesthetic performances based in an analysis of the role of actors, objects and space as elements constituting the materiality of theatre.<sup>430</sup> Maybe such a distinction can be of analytical help in some instances, but I find this kind of differentiation unsatisfactory with regard to Cage's aesthetics. To reserve a different concept for the strong present-ness of people than for example animals or things indicates an anthropocentric approach that is questioned by Cage's aesthetics and artistic practice.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> This point will be further discussed in chapter six.

<sup>428</sup> See former remark to 'immediacy' in footnote at p. 159.

<sup>429</sup> The concept she uses in German is *Ekstase* (ecstasy). She writes: "Der Begriff der Ekstase meint also nicht ganz dasselbe wie der Begriff der Präsenz. [...] Während es sich bei Präsenz jedoch um energetische Vorgänge zwischen Menschen handelt, lässt sich den Dingen wohl nur bedingt eine in ihnen bzw. von ihnen erzeugte Energie zusprechen." (Fischer-Lichte 2004, pp. 202-203.)

<sup>430</sup> Fischer-Lichte operates with 'presence', the 'ecstasy of things' and the 'atmospheric space'.

<sup>431</sup> It must be mentioned that Fischer-Lichte introduce a anthropocentric criticism by theorizing the role animals have got in performances since the 1960s as equal co-performers that contribute to the auto-poietic feedback coil and bring about heightened awareness of the situation's presentness and emergent quality. E.g. Joseph Beuys' *I*

Besides, 'presence' becomes thereby split up into different sectors. The all-inclusive term is somehow lost. Fischer-Lichte's concept differs in this respect both from Gumbrecht's concept and Gadamer's presentation of the phenomenon that I will soon present. It has to be said in Fischer-Lichte's defence that she operates with an inclusive term, the concept of *reenchantment*,<sup>432</sup> which arguably covers the other forms of strong presentness and to a certain extent presents the all-embracing term that I seek. Still I find her approach in this respect problematic.

My discomfort is not only based in a kind of categorisation that upholds a form of anthropocentric approach, but also in losing the view of an inclusive phenomenon. That is, we could argue that from an experiential point of view the phenomenon of presence is characterised by being inclusive in its character. I would like to exemplify my point by again bringing Gadamer into the presentation, this time by presenting some of the ideas in his reflection upon art as festival.

By the term 'festival' Gadamer emphasises not only the communal and social character of art. 'Festival' also represents a temporal structure of *presence*: "The temporal character of the festive celebration that we enact lies in the fact that it does not dissolve into a series of separate moments."<sup>433</sup> 'Presence' is linked to a phenomenon of time that is defined by an inclusive and absorbing experience. Our time experience is often marked by the unfilled intervals indicated by the moves of clock hands. Time passes by, step by step; we run to be in time, or are bored by lapses where "nothing happens". Time is here seen as empty and a measure to be filled. It is not experienced in its own right, but approached as something that has to be "spent".<sup>434</sup> The temporal structure of presence represents a different experience; time is experienced as fulfilled and autonomous:

There is in addition, however, a totally different experience of time which I think is profoundly related to the kind of time characteristic of both the festival and the work of art. In contrast with the empty time that needs to be filled, I propose to call this "fulfilled" or "autonomous" time.<sup>435</sup>

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*like America and America likes me* (1974; René Block Galerie New York). (Fischer-Lichte 2004, pp. 176-186.)

<sup>432</sup> The concept of re-enchantment is an inclusive term that we could argue embraces the other phenomena of conspicuous presentness: When the performers appear as strikingly present, things become ecstatic in their appearance and the room emerges as atmospheric, the world turns up as a re-enchanted place to exist within. See former quote at p. 152.

<sup>433</sup> Gadamer 1986, p. 41.

<sup>434</sup> Gadamer 1986, p. 42.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.* p. 42.

I will just point out some of the aspects of this phenomenon of fulfilled time: Firstly, like the conception of space as performative, soon to be here discussed, fulfilled time is not separated from what happens. Time appears not as an empty measure; it is what we could call materialised time. In this way temporal, spatial and material qualities fall together and by their internal organisation define the resulting time structure. In other words, the time of the festival is not detached from its enactments. Secondly, I will refer again to the human mode of being presented in *Being and Time* (Heidegger), and the temporal structure thereby outlined. What I have in mind is the unified phenomenon of time where the present incorporates the horizons of past and future. We could perhaps read the festive character of art as an ecstatic presentation of this phenomenon. That is, by being absorbed in the festive moment, we do not speak about a temporal structure that temporalizes our experience as isolated “ecstatic” moments that appear one after the other with no memory or future. We speak about an experience where past and future is present in the moment as a “sounding board” for what happens *now* in its full materiality.

The inclusive quality of this time-experience is further accentuated by Gadamer’s emphasis of the communal character of festivals that unite everybody: “If there is one thing that pertains to all festive experiences, then it is surely the fact that they allow no separation between one person and another. A festival is an experience of community and represents community in its most perfect form.”<sup>436</sup> We could therefore ask if it really would be theoretically advantageous, even for merely analytic reasons, to split up this phenomenon into different categories according to what presents itself / is present.

#### 4.5.2.2 *Performative space*

Like Gadamer’s description of fulfilled time, the phenomenon of space can be approached as a materialized space that includes in its conception the use and experience of it; it can be understood as a performative space.<sup>437</sup> This is a space that is conditioned by what happens there; its appearance is intimately linked to the performance’s spatiality generated by performative acts. The spatial quality becomes in this respect a transformative and fleeting phenomenon. It does not exist before or after a performance, but is brought forth by and

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid. p. 39.

<sup>437</sup> The notion presented here of ‘performative space’ is a rendering of Fischer-Lichte’s concept basically outlined at pp. 187-200 (Fischer-Lichte, 2004).

through the performance.

When performative space is understood in this way geometrical descriptions do not need to be discarded but alternative perspectives are made available. The perspective of a performative space opens an understanding of the performance's spatiality as emerging in the interaction between the actual shape of a venue and the performed acts at the site, including the performance's generation of imagined, fictional spaces. That is, a performance's specific locality, conceived as a performative space, opens certain possibilities for how and which relations can be established between actors and audience, and it opens up certain possibilities for which movements and perceptions are likely to appear at that specific site. Therefore, through the specific qualities of that place, the space contributes to the organization of what happens there. At the same time, the specific production shapes how this locality appears and is experienced by the participants. The space is in a certain sense *mise en scène* (staged).

The category of space as performative denotes a continuously changing phenomenon. It is generated by interaction and co-determination where the spatial characteristics are not detached from the contributions of actors and spectators'/listeners' movements and perceptions; it is a space that cannot be thought of as independent of the workings of the auto-poietic feedback-coil. This spatiality includes the capacity to cross-fade between real and imagined localities, between fiction and what is actually present. Because of this cross-fading capacity, and by being at times in non-settled modes, the performative space takes on qualities of being in-between: It becomes a liminal place.<sup>438</sup>

The performative space therefore is not any given entity like a space geometrically viewed, and as performative, it cannot be aligned to an artefact that is designed by one creator (or a distinct group). The space instead acquires the character of the event. The sonic aspect of a performance and its intimate linkage to how space is articulated, articulates itself and is set into reverberation exemplifies this emphatically. Again *4'33''* by Cage is an illuminating example.

Fischer-Lichte uses *4'33''* as an example of how the performance site as an aural space (*Hör-Raum*) – a room for hearing – has been explored. *4'33''* broke with the paradigm of

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<sup>438</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 199.

performances. Since the 18th century the rule was that just the sounds made by actors, musicians and technicians – the intended sounds (or those which were so unavoidable (technical sounds) that they had to be accepted) – were understood as constituting a production's auditory character. Noise from the audience was disturbing.<sup>439</sup>

But what constitutes the content of a piece like 4'33''? What fills the silences? Who are "playing" when the pianist is asked to be silent (*tacet* – do not play)? Fischer-Lichte writes: "der Hör-Raum wurde überwiegend nicht vom Künstler hervorgebracht, sondern von den Geräuschen, die entweder von draussen in den Saal drangen oder vom Publikum erzeugt wurden."<sup>440</sup> The aural space was not created by artists but by the sounds and noises that either poured in from the outside or were made unintentionally by the audience. The orchestrated silence of 4'33'' was filled with sounds not intended for a piece of music, but sounds which by chance made up exactly this soundscape, this aural space (*Hör-Raum*).

The sounds that filled 4'33'' had not been planned, they were not predictable and they could not be traced back to one source or originator. Fischer-Lichte sees this as an example of the work of the auto-poietic feedback coil. That is, together, the activity of the audience, the performer and other coinciding factors generated the sounds that filled 4'33''. These sonic results were not planned or predictable: "Sie war zum einen der autopoietischen *feedback*-Schleife geschuldet, das heisst durch die Handlungen des Akteurs und der Zuschauer erzeugt, die überwiegend weder plan- noch vorhersehbar waren."<sup>441</sup>

Fischer-Lichte therefore argues that the phenomenon of a soundscape explored by 4'33'' evidently does not appropriate the character of a work, of a distinct artefact. We are speaking here again about the character of an event.<sup>442</sup> Furthermore, the *Hör-Raum* dissolves the boundaries of the performative space. The soundscape stretches itself beyond the limitations of a geometrical room where the performance takes place. Sounds from the outside permeate to the performance site and sounds from the performance leak to the outside. The performative space loses in this way its settled borders. The borders become permeable and

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<sup>439</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 214.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid. p. 215. "The aural space was not created intentionally by the artist but largely by accidental sounds from outside and from the audience itself." (The English translation, Fischer-Lichte 2008, p. 123.)

<sup>441</sup> Loc. cit. "It was the result of unforeseeable actions of actors and spectators that constituted the autopoietic feedback loop, and of external sounds beyond the realm of the theatre." (Loc. cit.)

<sup>442</sup> "Es ist evident, dass ihr kein Werk-, sondern ein Ereignischarakter eignet." (Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 216.)

open for surrounding areas. Everything that by chance can be heard becomes elements of the performance and by that has the capacity to change the performative space and extend it.<sup>443</sup>

The discussion ends by emphasizing how *4'33''*, by its exploration of chance and a soundscape's ephemeral and indeterminate aspects, emphatically exemplifies the character of *event* that belongs to the spatial character of aural spaces: "Die Zufälligkeit, das Flüchtige und Unverfügbare der Lautlichkeit, ihr Ereignischarakter trat so geradezu emphatisch hervor. Der performative Raum veränderte sich auch und gerade als Hör-Raum permanent, entgrenzte sich und dehnte sich weit über den geometrischen Raum aus, in dem die Aufführung stattfand."<sup>444</sup> Belonging to this eventful character is the way the performative space changes. Precisely like the aural space of *4'33''*, a performative space shifts permanently, breaking down pre-set limits and extending far beyond the architectural-geometric space in which the performance takes place.<sup>445</sup>

## 4.6 Staging, event, experience

### 4.6.1 The performance as event

Fischer-Lichte, as we have seen, grounds the performance in the ontology of an event, and not just any event, but the staged event. The act of staging, therefore, represents the performative quality that brings about exactly this kind of event. However, by emphasizing the contingent structures, the open-endedness of the performative gesture is accentuated. We could infer that Fischer-Lichte emphasises the nature of the event which depends on chance, indeterminacy, interplay and coincidences, and plays down the significance of given norms, repertoire and conventions. To a certain extent she connects the ontological status of performances as events to the disruption of conventions, and not their enactment. This is highlighted by her emphasis on three interlinked complexes she finds especially thematized in performances since the 1960s:

- 1) The autopoietic feedback coil and the phenomenon of emergence;
- 2) Destabilisation;
- 3) Liminality and transformation.

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<sup>443</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, pp. 216-217.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid. p. 219.

<sup>445</sup> This is a paraphrase of the English translation of the quote above: "Each performance emphasized the randomness, transience, and elusiveness of tonality and its overall nature as event. As aural space, the performative space shifted permanently, breaking down pre-set limits and extending far beyond the architectural-geometric space in which the performance took place." (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 125.)



The autopoietic feedback coil has been widely discussed already, but let me summarize some points. Firstly, the model of the autopoietic feedback coil points to *interactive dynamics* in operation as constitutive for the character of event. The event emerges and operates in the interplay *between* participants; between different factors; is fed, fuelled and brought into operation by the movements *to* the others and vice versa. It is this landscape of responses and reciprocity that defines the process character of the event that we consider here. We are not referring to a linear relationship where event A causes event B to happen. The autopoietic feedback coil reflects a responsive dynamic, coil like in its structure, where the event character resides in the movement of complementing actions-reactions where an action can both form the element of a new factor and at the same time be a reaction to something else. This situation creates an overflow. The action-reaction relationships produce something more than just the sum of the two factors, a time-space span taking on of its own accord auto-generative and auto-formative elements. This time-space span cannot be thought of as being apart from the contributive actions, but neither do these actions arise independently of the resultant time-space span – the created locality establishes a new situation according to which to act. The overflow therefore expressed by autopoiesis and emergence, represents not only the unforeseen, but also resistance against the constructive traits of performativity. The next complex – destabilization – expands on the dynamics that unsettle conventions, showing how established organising schema can be put out of balance by the aesthetic performative and bring the participants into a liminal state.

This liminal state is associated with an *experience of threshold* (*Schwellenerfahrung*) that brings awareness to phases of transformation – their open-endedness and irreducible character, their character of belonging to a shared nexus of interrelatedness and their quality of being non-transferable, defining *my* situation, *my* reality.<sup>446</sup> It brings us to performance as a place where meaning systems are questioned and reworked. The aesthetic experience is thereby intimately connected to a field of cultural labour that has the power to transform our self-understanding and the schemas through which we approach our surroundings. The emphasis of the performative quality per se in the performances that Fischer-Lichte uses as examples, places this experience of threshold within the immediacy of existence – within the

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<sup>446</sup>„Immer wieder hat sich gezeigt, dass die ästhetische Erfahrung, die Aufführungen ermöglichen, sich zuallererst als eine Schwellenerfahrung beschreiben lässt, die für den, der sie durchläuft, eine Transformation herbeizuführen vermag.“ (Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 305.)

reality of being embodied individuals tuned to act within social contexts:

The state of betwixt and between, the experience of a crisis, is primarily realized as a physical transformation, in other words a change to the physiological, energetic, affective, and motoric state. A liminal state or crisis may also be induced by the conscious realization of physical change. Strong emotions triggered in the perceiving subject when confronted with sudden appearances in the space, fall under this category.<sup>447</sup>

We can in this respect remind the reader of the creative intervention presented in connection with the Heideggerian work concept, or the solution oriented *I-body* that we find in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. The immediacy of the existential condition – its urgent presence and call to be acted upon – makes it possible to anchor the productivity of meaning formations within the reality of a situation – its eventful character – even though habitual codes of orientation have lost their footing and we are asked for new orientations, for creative responses.

The event character of 'performance' having the quality of being liminal and non-settled, conditioned by the contributions of many actors and factors, accentuates a critique of the autonomous work as the hallmark of art and the view that art results from the creative activity of one distinct and autonomous artist. The feedback dynamics stresses the interplay at work that also implicates the unforeseen. There will always emerge new and not planned elements that have to be integrated in the process.<sup>448</sup>

Which alternative conceptions does Fischer-Lichte outline by basing her aesthetics on the ontology of the staged event and not the artefact? I will emphasize three main points here:

- 1) A process perspective;
- 2) The perspective of participation – a social perspective;
- 3) To-be-in-the-middle-of-dealing-with-not-knowing-the-totality perspective as a situation of being-in-the-middle-of-presence-production.

Fischer-Lichte, by grounding her aesthetics in the event and elaborate conceptions in accordance with the coil like dynamics of interplay, provides theoretical tools to explore different process qualities. Our subject-field to study becomes initiated processes, and even if we do not have a delimited artefact with certain properties to be analyzed, interpreted and explained, it would be

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<sup>447</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2008, p. 177.

<sup>448</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 285.

possible to speak about factors, variables, guidelines, frames et cetera that modulate the initiated process. Fischer-Lichte's transfer from creation to staging as one of the constituent concepts in the tripod *staging-event-experience* reflects this. The element of staging and how an event is organized becomes here essential. That is, taken to extremes, from viewing the characteristics of an unchanging object (like its main theme, motifs, harmonic progression, rhythmic organization and so on), the theoretical gaze is directed to what initiates and modulates a certain process: Which factors, variables and parameters are enforced and illuminated? Incorporated in this view are social perspectives and sensitivity to the significance of interplay.

From the beginning on, Fischer-Lichte's aesthetic explorations lead into a complex feedback-structured model of a relational dynamic where importance is as much given to bodily presence and liveness as the involvement of mental capacities. This direction moves Fischer-Lichte's theorizing into modes where established schemes of opposites as navigating tools are questioned as are dialectical models based upon oppositional poles, such as the mind-body division. The outlined model of the autopoietic feedback coil undermines the well-structured appearance of phenomena held apart, and may, by doing so, point at what is really at stake – to think the case from another position, from being within the art event, as when you walk within a *Musicircus*, not knowing the totality, where it really begins or ends.<sup>449</sup>

#### **4.6.2 New analytical concepts**

The transfer of perspective from that of standing opposite a distinct, delimited object – assumed to have certain properties that characterise its artistic identity and aesthetic potential – to the inclusive and conditional character of the event perspective has analytical consequences. Within music, for example, we have a well stocked toolbox for describing musical works according to their specific properties: Their form, how the material has been shaped into motifs, themes, harmonic progressions and so on. We know, so to speak, how to handle music as a specific artefact with certain attributes. At least we have a refined conceptual apparatus to do so. Fischer-Lichte argues, though, that it is not the musical artefact that founds the discussed performances' specific materiality and aesthetic character, but rather the course of being brought forth, maintained, transformed and extinguished. When the given is not there, how do we approach the process?

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<sup>449</sup> We will come back to this within-not-knowing-the-totality perspective in the chapter six.

From my presentation of the auto-poietic feedback coil, the alternation structure between action and response (performers and audience), the gliding state between subject and object positions, the emergent and transitory quality of a performance's materiality, and the aesthetic character bound to experiences of presence and change (liminality), it may seem that we, by the transfer from object to process, have ended up with aesthetic issues that by their nature resist analysis. Different aspects, factors and contributors are so interwoven – conditioning and modulating each other's contribution – that to try to split them up would destroy the unique character that we are seeking to examine.

The aesthetics of performativity do not however negate the capacity for analytical encounters. Even though a category of properties to a certain extent has been rejected as an adequate description, we encounter events that are *initiated* and that through this initiation create specific *situations* and *attention* whereupon something *happens* – a *process* unfolds. Thus we deal with:

- 1) Strategies of staging (*mise en scène*): We can explore the production plan and the techniques of staging that are used. (These can be described quite specifically and concretely.)
- 2) Situation: The applied strategies contribute to create a specific situation (this situation can also be described in a quite literal sense), and a specific attention:
- 3) Mode of attention: How the applied strategies in interaction with the created situation (the situation that has emerged) invoke a certain awareness (focus and attention) in those who participate. This includes the awareness and focus on certain initiated dynamics, forces and factors that contribute to shape the process which takes place.
- 4) The modulation, restriction and concentration of the process through the chosen/used strategies: Which guidelines are imposed on the interplay between performers and audience and thereby how the auto-poietic feedback is controlled/focused; the strategies that are used to generate the performance's materiality and so on. We are concerned here with processes that to a certain extent are governed. Strategies can be detected (the aspect of intentionality) that aim to initiate and handle the processes that arise. But there is also the potentiality of "oversteering" (more or less aimed at), or a giving over of intentionality more or less intended where we move to the openness of intentionality and the auto-poietic character of the process. Included in this picture is the exploration of different dynamics of co-presence and interplay.

It is precisely these staging strategies that I will use in the next chapter to create a space for analytical reflection. In that context we will more specifically discuss the themes of time, space, auto-poietic feedback coil, the performative generation of materiality, and presence, presented in this chapter, and use concepts elaborated by the aesthetics of performativity to discuss *Musicircus* as a case for analysis.

## 5 MUSICIRCUS AS A STAGED EVENT

### 5.1 Introduction

If we shift our focus from the work of art to an understanding of *Musicircus* as a staged event, which perspectives are then opened up? Goehr's analysis of the concept of the musical work uncovers a conception in which music is understood as an objectified artistic expression manifested in specific sonic constellations, a definite object of art which has a permanent and autonomous existence through a hypostatization of its ideal form. This ideal functions as the interpretative norm of reference for performances of the piece (*Werktreue*). Therefore, the musical work can be aligned to a platonic idea, which in its hypostatized ideality functions both as the general form the individual performance (manifestation) has to reflect to constitute a performance of the work, and it operates as the ideal norm (giving the *telos* of the individual appearances) that a performance strives to represent. Opposed to this, the concept of event highlights the aspects of transition and change; it emphasises the temporal dimension, inclusive of an awareness of the non-repetitional, processual and unforeseen qualities of artistic productions.

The concept of event also highlights the situational character of an art production, including its place in history. An artistic event is not just aesthetic. It is also historical. Like a historical event, the artistic event is coloured and conditioned by its specific locality, its *when* and *who* and *what* contribute to *this* specific happening. Contrary to this, the work concept describes music as something that can be performed again and again, at various places and times, without this difference in location affecting the music essentially.

Simplified, we can say that the work concept provides us with a conception where the art object – the musical work – can be seen as a lasting entity that has certain characteristics independent of where and when it is performed. The concept *event*, though, emphasises the situational character of artistic productions. However, confronted with an artistic event like *Musicircus*, it is difficult to keep these two conceptions (the work and the event) so strictly apart. This event is not just a historical event; it has also the character of a work that can be re-performed at different places and times. At least it acquires this character through re-realizations of what we could call its design of staging. My collected list, that I presented in

the first chapter,<sup>450</sup> can be thought of as the score for these productions. This list could be different from one realisation to another depending on the resources available to those who stage the event and their priorities. However, understood as a design or an artistic idea, *Musicircus* has some general characteristics that can be detected and re-realised, or what we could call “eventualized” (made into a new and unique event) through new productions. In other words, it can be difficult to avoid some kind of fluctuation between the conceptions of a work and an event especially when one is confronted with the task of doing a *Musicircus*. This conceptual fluctuation could even be seen as a doubleness that is apparent particularly in the practical process of carrying out such a production. I am going to discuss these questions further in the chapter about the *Musicircus* we realised in Trondheim in 2006.

The aesthetic theory of performativity separates the artistic event from other occurrences by emphasising its aspect of being staged. The staged quality of artistic productions secure their status as art, even if the actions performed are as ordinary as drinking a glass of water when you write a letter. Cage did this during a performance of *0'00'' (4'33'' No. 2)* at Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, in 1965.<sup>451</sup> Based on the staged event, the aesthetic theory of performativity builds up an alternative analytical tripod to the interlinked concepts creator (artist/composer), work and reception, and instead emphasises the aspects of staging/production (*Inszenierung*), event (*Ereignis*) and aesthetic experience (*Ästhetische Erfahrung*) where the aesthetic experience is as much understood as a threshold experience as an interpretative activity.

## 5.2 The staged event

Compared to a conception in which a work is created detail by detail like a sculptor carves out his/her creation in stone, the conception of staging can represent a more open-ended task: No work is worked out but distinctive initiations are made to make something (more or less specific) happen. These staging strategies would not need to aim “like an omnipresent and

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<sup>450</sup> See p. 37.

<sup>451</sup> See Pritchett 1993, pp. 138-140. *0'00''* was composed in 1962, during his first tour in Japan. The first performance in Tokyo consisted in fact of Cage's amplified writing of the score he performed: “In a situation provided with maximum amplification (no feedback), perform a disciplined action.” Four other qualifications were later added to this basic instruction: “With any interruptions. Fulfilling in whole or part an obligation to others. No two performances to be of the same action, nor may that action be the performance of a ‘musical’ composition. No attention to be given the situation (electronic, musical, theatrical).” See also Fetterman 1996, pp. 84-90.

autonomous god”<sup>452</sup> to control every step that is going to take place. As we have seen, the aesthetic theory of performativity bases its conceptualisations upon performances that in different ways illuminate the *contingency* of a performance’s situation. The factor of staging in this respect initiates an event and provides it with certain arrangements, like the initiation of a game or an experiment, but does not outline how it should proceed or what the result should be. Nevertheless the element of staging would also represent some distinctive regulations of what could, or would likely, happen.

Transferred to the case of *Musicircus* performed in 1967, how was this event staged? Can its production tell us something about the aesthetic nature of this specific event and even *Musicircus* as a general concept?

*Musicircus* actualises a situation where a lot of different music is performed simultaneously. We are often confronted with such situations, unintentionally, in our daily life. For example when we walk down a street in a big city or move through a corridor flanked with rehearsal rooms each containing an eager musician. However, such a situation of simultaneity breaks with the way composed music ordinarily is presented. The musical content of the different pieces performed does not need in itself to challenge or break with established practises of interpretation, but the way a *Musicircus* puts the performances together destabilises these same interpretational practices.

Fischer-Lichte emphasises how performances since the 1960s and 1970s have staged situations, elements and aspects that are very difficult to understand in terms of hermeneutics or semiotics as for example when performances put the audience in a situation where interpretative norms become ambivalent. The non-coordination of simultaneously performed music is an example of this. The title of *Musicircus*, the chosen site and how the event was presented in 1967 can also be seen as examples provoking ambivalence – in the ambiguity between the interpretative norms of serious avant-garde art and the norms of popular entertainment like parties, carnivals, and circuses.<sup>453</sup> An opposition between high and low culture (serious as opposed to purely entertaining pastimes) is destabilised and nearly made

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<sup>452</sup> The artist as the God-like creator in the aesthetics of genius and masterworks, see Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 281.

<sup>453</sup> “A stand-up, eat-in, music-out, freak-down” is how John Cage describes the ‘Music Circus’ he will direct at 8 p.m. Friday in the Stock Pavillion.” (Converse 1967c.) See chapter two, p. 39 ff.



meaningless. There are also other frames of interpretation, more strictly connected to classical music that are challenged, for example the undisturbed performance of a piece of music and the quietness of the listeners.

We have seen how the aesthetic theory of performativity emphasises the active role of the audience as a counterpart and as “team-mates” to the performers. Performances since the 1960s and 1970s magnify this factor of role alternation and audience participation.<sup>454</sup> By different methods the audience is pulled to action. What about the circus event in 1967? We know that the composer Barney Childs had designed a percussion platform where the audience were invited to play and that there was a blackboard with special chalk where the audience could feel free to draw.<sup>455</sup> Another aspect of audience participation, which perhaps is not so obvious but significant for the spatial character of *Musicircus* and implied by its arrangements, was the freedom for the audience to walk around, come and go. By this freedom of movement the audience took part in a dynamic articulation of the room, and probably it reduced the distance between performers and audience, both conceptually and physically.

The model of the autopoietic feedback-coils including role alternating factors and unforeseen events make it difficult to sustain the artist’s position as autonomous and independent, creating, like a “God”, his/her art. The aesthetics of performativity arise, so to speak, from a conception of the creative community as the base for artistic events and not the autonomous artist, even in the instances where the community is established only for the duration of a performance.<sup>456</sup> From chapter two we know that Cage’s circus was staged as part of a centennial celebration at UIUC and intimately connected to the University’s creative circles. In fact Cage says to Charles in one of their conversations that he was just happy to come up with the idea and did not himself organise the event:

I had nothing to do with organizing the two American musicircuses – I was happy to just throw out an idea. But both times, in Illinois and in Minneapolis, someone was there to assume the role of a utility. Not someone who acted like a director, saying ‘Don’t do that’, but who acted in a way that facilitated the work of others.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> See Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 63-82.

<sup>455</sup> See p. 23, chapter two.

<sup>456</sup> See Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 82-100.

<sup>457</sup> Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, p.196.

The collaborative effort is also witnessed by Ronald Nameth in an interview I had with him in 2006. He coordinated the visual aspects of the first *Musicircus*, and he mentioned that the whole creative community of UIUC was involved in the event:

And he [Cage] invited the whole creative community to come to a meeting, and then we just all sat and discussed when he presented the idea. That's why there wasn't so much correspondence because we were all there physically. And, he was just like a magnet. He brought all these creative people, of course from music, but also, I was kind of involved, because I had been working a lot with projections and light shows with other musicians. So I was kind of involved with it on that side. And then eventually, I was asked to co-ordinate all the visual things for the *Musicircus*. And, [...] he had help from the music department. A man named Jack McKenzie who helped him find this place [Stock Pavilion].<sup>458</sup>

As regards the role of originator (composer), none of the previews site Cage as the composer of the event in 1967. In fact, a composer is not mentioned. What is presented is Cage as an avant-garde composer who *helps* to organise and facilitate the *Musicircus*. As we can see from Cage's conversation with Charles quoted over, Cage mentions the role of a utility; the organisation of a *Musicircus* should ideally function in the same manner as utilities – function as facilitation for activity, not its restriction:

John Cage: I know that it's difficult to draw a line between the activity of a well-contained utility and that of, say, a policeman. But I'm sure that the difference exists and that it can be sensed. It's really a question of recognizing how important the difference is and not letting it escape.

*Daniel Charles: Can you define it?*

J.C.: You need the same kind of organization for a musicircus as for a world's fair. Let's start from the beginning. When you go to the world's fair, you first enter an immense parking lot. Such a huge parking lot that it might be very difficult for you to find your car again when you're ready to leave. In Montreal, they solved that problem nicely. They labelled each section of the parking lot with the emblem of a different animal. It was easier to remember whether you belonged in the kangaroo, the snake, or the tortoise section. And they decided to use animals rather than words because people were coming from around the whole world and couldn't be expected to understand a given language.<sup>459</sup>

Cage, therefore, expresses ideas about how Cagean circuses should ideally be organised. This is exemplified by his satisfaction with the American *Musicircuses* at Urbana (1967) and Minneapolis (1970). Those who organised these circuses assumed the role of a utility and not the role of a director. Cage, though, was not as happy with the organisation of the *Musicircus* done in Paris in 1970:

Cage: In the United States, the first two musicircuses came off in an atmosphere I felt to be harmonious

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<sup>458</sup> Interview with Nameth, 2006.

<sup>459</sup> Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, pp.196-197.

with my ideas on world improvement. A lot of people working together without getting in each other's way. In France, the same idea fell prey to ... a sort of social constipation! How do you resolve this problem? Should I blame the Parisian public? Or myself? Is it that I know America, in the sense that I know *who* David Tudor is, while I don't know anything about France, or about what it's like to be French? I can't answer those questions. I would like to be able to say that all men, all over the earth, are but one and the same person.<sup>460</sup>

In this respect, Cage emphasises the importance of *space* and enough space connected to the planning of a *Musicircus*:

*D.C.: When you began planning Musicircus in June and July, 1970, you insisted on the need for providing everyone with a maximum amount of space. But none of the organizers thought the turn-out would be so large.*

*J.C.: And these works require more and more space ... an undivided space which truly allows artists and audience complete freedom of movement. Space must be just as free as time. Sound sources need an extremely wide spatial dispersion, especially if amplified sounds are involved along with ordinary unamplified sounds.*<sup>461</sup>

Literally speaking, how was the actual space organised in the first *Musicircus*? As we know, the site was a stock pavilion, a place that already had sawdust on the floor like at a circus.

Nameth gave me this description of the place in the interview I did in 2006:

[The Stock Auditorium] was like an oval with seats all around, and in the middle they have sawdust, and, you know, the cows could come in there. [...] There was a roof on it. It wasn't open to the sky. But it was very high and very big. So it was a very huge open expansive space. And there were no girders within the centring at all. [...] And [Cage] thought that the room was perfect because it was like a carnival in United States or a circus where you have sawdust.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, p.180.

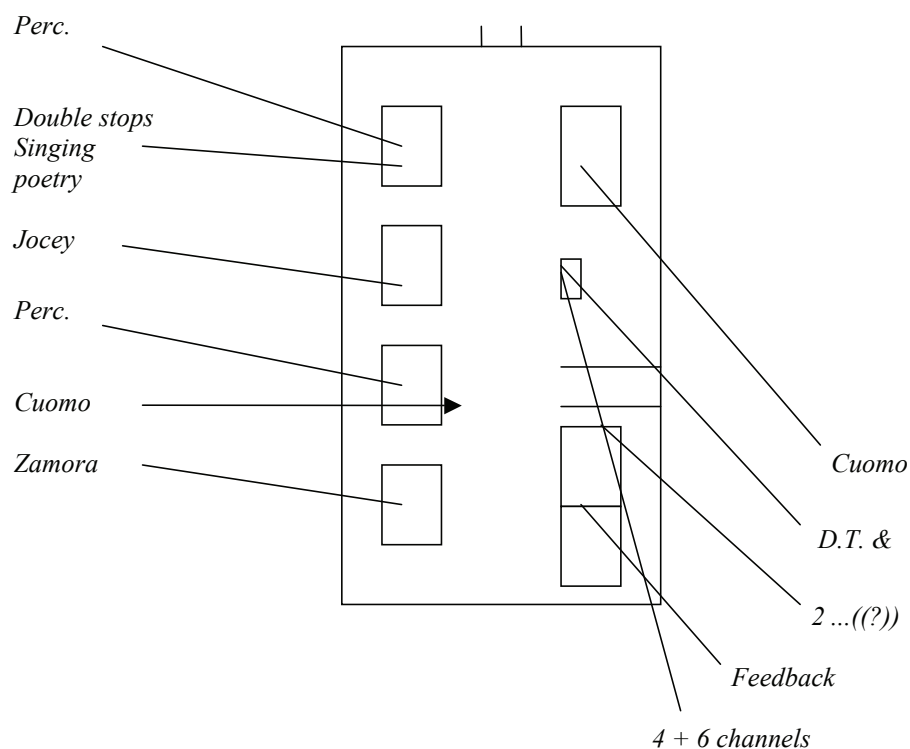
<sup>461</sup> *Ibid*, p. 130-131.

<sup>462</sup> Interview with Nameth, 2006.

There exists a rudimentary sketch where an organisation of this venue is indicated:

REALIZATION OF MUSICIRCUS (Folder JPB 95-3 Folder 344)

4th paper:



This sketch indicates the distribution of different platforms and performers. As mentioned in chapter two, spatial distribution is commented on in some previews and letters by Cage. There should be “plenty of space for the audience to walk around” and the audience should be in the round with “performers going in between them, around them, maybe even over them.”<sup>463</sup> We can probably deduce from the sketch over that the organisation of the space was done deliberately and not by chance operations. Of course, because the audience had the opportunity to walk around, this mobility created an aspect of fluidity and chance in the formation of the space. The basic organisation however was planned.

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<sup>463</sup> See p. 37 in this thesis.

What about the aspect of time? How was time organised? The advertisements of the event inform those interested that the event was to start at 8 p.m. and continue until 1 a.m. So the event had a start time and an end time, but what about the time span in-between? How was this time period organised?

As shown in chapter two, the previews connect the upcoming *Musicircus* to Cage's former experimentation with happenings, especially the happening done at Black Mountain College during the Summer of 1952.<sup>464</sup> There is no score for this happening, but we know that they used 'time brackets'.<sup>465</sup> The different performers had their own independent time schedule. The time brackets told the performers *when* they could perform, but not *what* should be performed. The performers could fill their brackets with a content of their own choice. One of these time schedules is archived in the music manuscript collection at the New York Public Library. It is the schedule for the projector. The information given is:<sup>466</sup>

Projector:

Begin at 16 min  
play freely until 23 min.

Begin again at 24:30  
play freely until 35:45

Begin at 38:20  
play freely until 44:25

Stephen Montague who has both performed in several *Musicircuses* organised by Cage, and himself organised a number of such events, has informed me that time brackets were also used in the circuses in which he performed.<sup>467</sup> Montague has also used chance-determined time brackets in those *Musicircuses* for which he was the curator. And there are sketches for *Musicircus for Children* (1984) in the John Cage Music Manuscript Collection at the New York Public Library that also indicate the use of time brackets.

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<sup>464</sup> See p. 43.

<sup>465</sup> Cage describes these 'time brackets' in an interview, 1965: "During periods that I called time brackets, the performers were free within limitations – I think you could call them compartments – compartments which they didn't have to fill, like a green light in traffic. Until this compartment began, they were not free to act, but once it had begun they could act as long as they wanted to during it." (Cage and Kirby and Schechner 1965, p. 52.)

<sup>466</sup> The document is at New York Public Library, call no: JPB 95-3, folder 197.

<sup>467</sup> Conversations with Montague in London, Spring 2005.

What about the first *Musicircus* in 1967? Did they use set time frames? I have not found information about the use of such schedules, either in the article by Husarik or the article by Rivest. Cage does not mention their use either.

I asked Ronald Nameth about this when I interviewed him in 2006, referring to the time brackets of the untitled piece – the happening at Black Mountain College – and the information given by Montague. He could not remember that there was any use of time frames at the first *Musicircus*. What organised the time span of the different performances, were practical concerns and the choices of the performers.<sup>468</sup>

Surely it is necessary to have organisers to realize a *Musicircus* – someone to prepare and coordinate the event. And even if this organisation remains neutral with regard to the aesthetic result, or perhaps we should rather say, totally open to whatever the aesthetic result would be, the organisation would have some form of impact on that aesthetic result. The organisation of the event in 1967 can briefly be summarised into these points:

- It was a collaborative effort – Cage brought up an idea and a creative community responded to that idea.
- An unorthodox site was chosen, the Stock Pavilion that was usually used to exhibit livestock. This venue, however, was spacious and could provide the possibility of intermingling sought by the circus idea. Further, the site in itself, reinforced by the title of the event, contributed to associations with circus, animals and public entertainment that could initiate other associations and means of approach than the classic concert hall.
- There existed a certain organisation of the space providing platforms for performers and free space to walk about for the audience. Further, the organisers provided stations where the audience were explicitly invited to perform and contribute to a mishmash of artistic visions.<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> “It was on a very practical level that these things happened. Some people were playing, you know, gonna play another music somewhere else and had to leave earlier. You know, it was all based on whatever the needs were of the people involved.” (Interview with Nameth, 2006.)

<sup>469</sup> See chapter two, p. 23.

- The event lasted longer than an ordinary concert - from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. The time between the appointed start time and ending was organised according to practical considerations. However, the organisers by their spatial organisation had provided for the possibility of a lot of different performances going on at the same time.

I asked above what the specific production of the event in 1967 could tell us about the aesthetic nature of this specific event and even *Musicircus* as a general concept. In the rest of this chapter we will discuss further some of the aspects that I have touched upon here in my presentation of the 1967 production: The factor of audience participation and role alternation, autopoietic processes, aesthetic versus social issues, and the generation of the event's aesthetic nature and materiality through certain organisational moves according to space, time and not least the initiation of inviting people to contribute.

## 5.3 The character of event and the autopoietic feedback coil

### 5.3.1 Autopoiesis and emergence

The eventful character of performances is emphasised in the aesthetic theory of performativity. This character is further described through the relational dynamic of the autopoietic feedback coil. Theoretical attention is directed towards processes that emerge between people, between people and the performance site, between people and animals, between people and things. It is a relational dynamic. Three interlinked complexes are in this respect stressed which can be directly connected to these performances' eventfulness (*Ereignishaftigkeit*), and which are doubtless significant for their aesthetic character (*Ästhetizität*):

- 1) The autopoietic feedback coil and the phenomenon of emergence;
- 2) Destabilisation;
- 3) Liminality and transformation.

In my analyses here, I want to dwell with the first complex denoted by Fischer-Lichte's compound concept of the autopoietic feedback coil (*die autopoietische feedback-Schleife*). I think her compound concept can be helpful to illuminate aspects of *Musicircus*. Some of these aspects quite obviously fall within the conception she outlines and highlight the work of

autopoietic feedback coils:

- A realised version of *Musicircus* does not have one originator, one source.
- *Musicircus* as an idea/concept can basically be understood as an open *invitation* to participate.
- There is no prescription for how the event should sound.
- The audience can walk freely around, come and go, and by that make their own sonic and visual course of experience.

Other aspects, in fact, resist to a certain degree falling easily into the outlined characterisation of the conception of an autopoietic feedback coil. This is especially the case with respect to the feedback element and the function of role alternation. I find this productive. There are nuances to detect through the prism of this compound conception. But first, let us inspect those aspects shown above which appear more obviously to represent autopoietic prospects. *Autopoiesis*, as we have seen, denotes self-creative and self-propelling processes of an artistic event. It denotes creative forces that emerge in the meeting between people, things and different factors; it denotes a force nobody has full control over, but which everybody contributes to and partakes in.

*Musicircus* brings many independent performers together. It can be understood as an open invitation to perform simultaneously. Total anarchy, though, it is not, even if the Cagean circus can be understood as a musical event that seeks to artistically realise a form of anarchic community or society.<sup>470</sup> For example, as we have seen, the spatial distribution of the performers seems to have been planned to a certain degree at the first *Musicircus*, and Cage emphasises that the performers and the audience have to be provided with enough space. However, the content of what the different performers did seems not to have been determined by a central organiser. When the performers performed, and for how long seems not to have been coordinated either. There was some organisation with respect to time, but this was, according to Nameth, done according to practical considerations.

Even if the different performers could plan what they themselves wanted to do, they could not control what the others wanted to do. The constellation, or what we could call the collage or

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<sup>470</sup> See for example quote at p. 43 from a preview of the event in 1967.



montage, resulted therefore with what we could call a self-creative, self-propelling process. That is, all the participants contributed to the formation of the event, what happened, how things sounded, the visions, movements and so on, but none had the full control or the entire overview of what happened. Autopoietic processes in this way saturate the aesthetic character of a *Musicircus*.

‘Musicircus’ can be understood as a technique of performance.<sup>471</sup> We can even call it a performative strategy. The basic elements of this strategy are simultaneity and abundance added to with space. That is, musicircus as performative technique is explicitly a spatial strategy.

Seen as a technique we can understand musicircus as a continuation of Cage’s compositional techniques of chance operations and indeterminacy. That is, they are techniques that deliberately invite autopoietic elements to take place and shape the resulting music. This is often done in a systematic way, as for example in Cage’s method of performing chance operations as composer. The systematisation even enforces the autopoietic aspects.

As a method of composition, chance operations become a way to explore self-propelling and self-creative potential in a material outlined by the composer. Through indeterminacy this exploration is shared with the performer.

Musicircus as a technique of performance can be understood to take this exploration of chance, indeterminacy, and by that, autopoietic aspects of music making, a step further to the live site of performance and include the audience in these processes. It is not just the composer who is confronted by autopoietic power through using chance operations, or the performer that is put in the composer’s situation using chance operations to realise indeterminate scores. The technique of musicircus makes the autopoietic dimensions also strikingly present for the audience, among other things in the way the audience can move freely around and make their own explorations.

To examine musicircus as a performative technique more thoroughly with an eye to the autopoietic feedback coil, I want to make a detour that will hopefully enlighten our case

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<sup>471</sup> See description in chapter two, pp. 26-28.

further. The detour is *HPSCHD*, the composition that was Cage's main project at UIUC. Unlike *Musicircus*, which appears to have been an event planned shortly before it was done, *HPSCHD* took two years to complete. Cage was not alone in this work. Lejaren Hiller became heavily involved and ended up being a co-composer of the work.

### 5.3.2 Musicircus, deconstruction and *HPSCHD*

#### 5.3.2.1 *HPSCHD, the work*

The work consists of seven solos for harpsichord and 52 computer-generated monaural tapes.<sup>472</sup> Beside this, an amazing amount of visuals were prepared and showed at the first performance. *HPSCHD* does not have an ordinary score. What we can call a score is a collection of instrumental parts, which together with the material of tapes and visuals (slides), can be rented but not bought. This rentable material consists of the seven solos, 3 sets of 36 of the 52 composed tapes and 73 boxes of slides.<sup>473</sup>

The only information that can function as a score for a whole event is written introductorily in each harpsichord part:

Twenty minute solos for 1-7 amplified harpsichords and tapes for 1-51 amplified monaural machines to be used in whole or in part in any combination with or without interruptions, etc. to make an indeterminate concert of any agreed upon length having 2-58 separate channels with loudspeakers around the audience.<sup>474</sup>

Otherwise, the work is just a collection of individual parts (the seven solos) – not coordinated – and other material (tapes and slides) that can be used in a performance. Score instructions are therefore scarce about how a performance of *HPSCHD* should be staged. For example,

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<sup>472</sup> Husarik 1983, Rivest 2003 (note to recording, see the next footnote) operates with 52 tapes, because each of the tapes had a specific scale and Cage/Hiller divided the octave from 5 to 56 divisions, which makes for 52. The program note to the first performance also refers to 52 tapes (see coming quote at p. 192). The information in the published instrumental parts, Yates's note to the recording in 1969 (see next footnote) and Hiller's article from 1970 however operates with 51 tapes.

<sup>473</sup> This presentation of *HPSCHD* rests mainly upon information given in Husarik's article "John Cage and LeJaren Hiller: *HPSCHD*, 1969" (1983) and studies of the rental material at C.F. Peters, New York. I was not able to listen to the tapes because of the lack of playback equipment. But recordings do exist: Nonesuch's recording from 1969, a 20 minutes realisation recorded before the first performance, consists of three of the solos "across a composite of the 51 tapes [electronic sound tapes]." (Cover, Nonesuch, 1969.) And Joel Chadabe (realization) and Robert Conant (harpsichord) have done a full-scale recorded realisation of the music (all harpsichord solos and tapes) at Electronic Music Foundation Inc, 2003. I must admit that I do not know what has happened to the tapes that are not in custody of Peters.

<sup>474</sup> Solo I–VII, *HPSCHD*.

nothing is said about the visual part though we know that the first performance appeared as a highly audiovisual event in 1969.

### 5.3.2.2 *The compositional process*

*HPSCHD* resulted from a meticulous compositional process that involved the use of computers, computer programming and procedures of numerous chance operations. Six 20 minute long solos for harpsichord were composed. Five of these used the *Musical Dice Game* attributed to W. A. Mozart (*Musikalisches Würfelspiel*, K. 294d) as their basic material, a form of chance composition that was quite popular throughout Western Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The piece used by Cage and Hiller contains 176 pre-composed measures that are arranged in two charts, one for an A section and one for a B section. By throwing dice measures are chosen and put together into a composition.<sup>475</sup> For *HPSCHD* a variant of this game was developed, adjusted for Cage's favoured tool for doing chance operations namely *I-Ching* and its 64 hexagrams. In the 1950s Cage threw coins to get his hexagrams. For *HPSCHD* a computer program was developed for this task – *ICHING*. Portions of one minute long segments containing 64 measures were composed with the help of these computer-derived hexagrams. This procedure had to be repeated 20 times to get a solo of 20 minutes. Additionally, procedures were developed to replace material from the original *Dice Game* with segments from other compositions by Mozart and by historic material representing the time-span from Mozart to Cage/Hiller. Chance operations were involved in all these procedures. In addition, 52 monaural tapes were composed, each lasting 20 minutes. These were generated by a computer in 3 minute long segments and spliced together. The idea for the tapes was to explore micro-tonality. An octave was divided in all ways from 5 to 56 pitches. In addition a field of sharpening and flattening possibilities for the pitches arrived at was given. Together the different ranges and the given possibilities for sharpening and flattening pitches gave *HPSCHD* a potential reservoir of approximately 885000 pitches.<sup>476</sup> Solo no.1 for cembalo is a transcription of one of the tape-parts for 12-tone gamut. The last solo consists of practising or performing any composition by Mozart.

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<sup>475</sup> Husarik informs us “The material is arranged in the charts in such a way that all compositional problems such as cadences are automatically adjusted and the compositional process is reduced to a game of throwing dice and matching measure numbers. By using repeat signs and a chart for the B material, a composition eighty measures in length is generated, having the form AABBaabbAB.” (Husarik, p. 7.)

<sup>476</sup> Husarik 1983, p. 10.

Because micro-tonality was explored by the parts of a tape-orchestra, Cage thought that the graphic material should be telescopic.<sup>477</sup> The responsibility for working out the visual part was given to Calvin Sumsion, a graduate student in the Illinois department of design, and Ronald Nameth, who I have already referred to in connection with the first *Musicircus*. The process behind the visual part was as meticulously based upon chance operations as the sonic part. The result was about 8400 slides containing technographic photographs from encyclopaedias manipulated through chance operations, slides obtained from NASA, the Mount Wilson Observatory, Palomar, and the Adler Planetarium, and about 1600 hand-painted slides that also were made by applying chance operations. A lot of films<sup>478</sup> were selected that reflected the theme of stars, planets, and travel through space both scientifically and metaphysically, such as films about Stonehenge and other ancient sites that showed mankind's long-standing concerns about the universe. Chance operations were also applied here: "Using the *ICHING*, films were placed in random relationships, and as one film was completed, another would replace it."<sup>479</sup>

### 5.3.2.3 *The first performance*

*HPSCHD* had its first performance the 16th of May 1969. It was a multimedia performance that was staged in the Assembly Hall of UIUC, a huge circular building constructed as a sports arena with radial aisles and concentric promenades that could seat 17000 people. The program note described the music this way:

Twenty-minute solos for one to seven amplified harpsichords and tapes for one to fifty-two amplified monaural machines to be used in whole or in part in any combination with or without interruptions, etc., to make an indeterminate concert of any agreed-upon length having two to fifty-nine channels with loud-speakers around the audience.

Solo I	Computer printout for 12-tone gamut [...]
Solo II	Mozart Dicegame [...]
Solo III	Dicegame with Mozart compositions used as replacements, tremble and bass linked [...]
Solo IV	Dicegame with Mozart compositions used as replacements, tremble and bass independent [...]
Solo V	Dicegame with historical sequence used as replacements, tremble and bass linked [...]
Solo VI	Dicegame with historical sequence used as replacements, tremble and bass linked [...]
Solo VII	Practice or performance of any Mozart compositions [...]

In addition to playing his own solo, each harpsichordist is free to play any of the others.

<sup>477</sup> Husarik 1983, p. 11. Husarik refers to his own interviews of Cage.

<sup>478</sup> Fetterman speaks about 40 films. (Fetterman 1996, p. 140.)

<sup>479</sup> Husarik 1983, p. 14. Husarik quote Ronald Nameth (letter, 1980).

Monaural tapes giving all division of the octave from five to fifty-six tones performed by [...] <sup>480</sup>

At the first performance all the seven solos were performed simultaneously. The 52 monaural tapes composed were all in use with the help of 52 tape recorders – each provided with four sets of a tape (together amounting to 208 tapes), and 52 speakers placed high up in the perimeter of the dome. The abundance of images was put into play by the help of 84 slide projectors and 12 movie projectors. 11 parallel screens made of transparent plastic hung in the middle of the hall so images could fade away step by step through this grid of screens. Surrounding them was a 340-foot circumference circular screen also of translucent plastic. <sup>481</sup> Further, images were projected at the bay windows of the Assembly Hall, “so that the slides would be visible over the Illinois prairie during the expected four-hour evening performance.” <sup>482</sup> Smocks that audience members could wear were printed in fluorescent-coloured inks: “Blacklight would pick out the audience members who wore them during the event, giving an added sense of involvement and participation”, <sup>483</sup> and there were banners with drawings by Ronald Resch, various ranks of coloured lights, a mirror ball – similar to those seen in discotheques – and more. The audience could, as in the *Musicircus*, walk around as they wished and the concert lasted longer than usual, from 7:30 p.m. to Midnight. About 7000 attended the performance.

The strategy of *HPSCHD*'s performance was quite similar to *Musicircus* even though the two events became distinctively different according to Husarik: “Whereas *MUSICIRCUS* could be labelled a grand experiment, *HPSCHD* was a demonstrated artistic affirmation.” <sup>484</sup> In contrast with the event in 1967, *HPSCHD* had thematically and materially a much more unified shape: The theme of microscopic exploration of sonic material (micro-cosmos), reflected in the exploring of micro-tonality in the created tapes, and telescopic themes (macro-cosmos) presented in the visual material. Further, the sonic world of the harpsichords was also adopted in the computer-generated tapes by using saw-tooth waveforms that came closest to their sound, and the material of Mozart's *Musical Dice Game* prevails within the harpsichord solos. The similarity between *HPSCHD* and *Musicircus* however consists in a shared strategy for their performances. The keywords are in this respect simultaneity, abundance and spatial

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<sup>480</sup> Program note for the first performance (*John Cage Collection*, Northwestern University, C41 A.2). As the reader can see, this description is nearly the same as that given in the instrumental part that can be rented at Peters, but with some slight differences.

<sup>481</sup> “The theme of these images was said to describe yet another program: the history of man from his primitive beginnings up to modern times. The idea ran parallel to the history of music sequence in the solo parts.” (Husarik 1983, p. 14.)

<sup>482</sup> Husarik 1983, p. 12.

<sup>483</sup> Loc. cit. Husarik refers to Calvin Sumsion: *The Integration of Visual Elements by I-Ching Philosophy and Gestalt Psychology*, p. 4.

<sup>484</sup> Husarik 1983, p. 19.

distribution that includes the space for the audience to walk freely around. Besides this, both performances lasted longer than usual concerts.

#### 5.3.2.4 *The technique of musicircus and deconstruction*

It is tempting to bring in the concept of deconstruction into the discussion of Cage's performative technique of simultaneity and abundance – the technique of musicircus. From the point of view of composition, 'musicircus' by analogy can be described as deconstructive.

What I have in mind is that *HPSCHD* as a performed musicircus, almost by the way it is presented (performed) deconstructs the composed aspects of the work and emphasises instead the aspects of autopoiesis and the phenomenon of emergence.

Cage and Hiller used, to a great extent, chance operations to compose *HPSCHD*, so already there, autopoietic processes were introduced. However, the results of these processes were written down in scores and captured on tapes. The fixity of these parts, the composed aspects of the work, become again loosened and permeated by autopoietic processes in the work's performance.

To clarify my point: Compositionally, *HPSCHD* consists of fixed parts that are composed out (pre-composed before performance). However, the composed parts of *HPSCHD* are not coordinated but function as material for a performance, and the score, which just consists of this collection of pre-composed material, does not have any further instruction about how to coordinate the parts than what is given in the general description in the introduction to each part. (See former quote). Besides, what we can call the score does not at all mention the visual aspects that were an important ingredient of the event in 1969.

The non-coordination of the different parts introduces again explicitly, when performed, processes of chance and indeterminacy as constitutive of what happens, of the emerging work. As more parts are used, the chance elements are multiplied and the autopoietic processes are strengthened. Therefore, the performative technique of non-coordinated simultaneity and abundance can be understood as a form of deconstruction that again tears open the fixed character of *HPSCHD*. It literally de-constructs by reducing the constructed quality of the work, making it again fluid and vulnerable.

To use the concept of *deconstruction* about musicircus as a performative technique may be a bit misleading because we cannot here adopt, unreservedly, a strategy for reading or

analysing. The concept is transferred from the field of literary reading to, in fact, that of musical doing.

We can see de-constructive aspects of Cage's practice already in his use of chance and indeterminacy as composer. The de-constructive approach starts with chance operations at the writing desk. Cage, situated within the practise of *writing* music, which to a great extent means to construct a piece of music by organising sounds in a specific way by the means writing gives, develops techniques which have counteractive properties. Through chance operations Cage develops systematic approaches to what we could call a double way of writing: to construct and de-construct. The intentional musical "building" he constructs – the work he composes – is at the same time de-constructed by chance and laid open to non-constructed elements that "just" emerge. In other words, the intentional construction is somehow de-constructed deliberately through the techniques he has invented for writing music.

Cage's chance operations are to a great extent performed at the "writing desk", or carried out as part of preparations, for example, for indeterminate compositions that demand preparatory execution of chance operations to be performable. The technique of simultaneous performances multiplied through abundance transfers a similar technique to the performance itself. The constructive and de-constructive aspects happen also here at the same time.

The concept of deconstruction, as I use it here, appears in a transferred form. That is, it is used through a form of analogy. No texts or work are seen through a deconstructive approach, but the deconstruction is enacted in the performance itself. *HPSCHD* as a written work of music – in its fixed, finished and completed quality<sup>485</sup> – is in a distinctive way decomposed by its own performance. Deconstruction in this context becomes part of the performance, in fact, part of the concept of performativity itself. The performance opens the finished for the unfinished, for the future, but also settles matters and grapples with the real. The performative therefore moves in opposing directions. That is, performative acts both have constructive power, in constituting and maintaining, but have also a deconstructive lopsidedness, always bringing along loose ends, evading being set, or brought back to an origin, haunted by the indeterminate and chance ridden. Deconstruction used as an analogy for what happens when *HPSCHD* is performed, appears as a movement where construction and deconstruction emerge at the same time.

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<sup>485</sup> As mentioned, also in its score form *HPSCHD* incorporates the unsolved, unfinished and open in being just a collection of material to be applied in a performance (instrumental parts, tapes, slides). That means that there is a master score that coordinates this material with a kind of fixed representation.

### 5.3.3 Feedback

*Musicircus*, unlike *HPSCHD*, does not have any pre-composed parts worked out by Cage. The performers are the originators of the material: They can bring with them any music they want, including their own “pre-composed” music. However, the same happens in the realisation of a *Musicircus* as in *HPSCHD*. The simultaneity of the performances, increased by the number of performers reinforces the autopoietic aspects of the event.

Even if the individual performer can control to a certain degree his/her own performance (what is performed, how it is done and so on), the performer cannot control what is played/performed next to him/her. The harmonies that emerge by chance, the resulting collage, the soundscape the performers participate to create, are indeterminate. Nobody controls what the co-existence of all the different performances creates. This is dependent on chance.

We have spoken about the deconstructive aspects of simultaneity and abundance and how these expose the work of autopoietic and contingent elements. However, with reference to the autopoietic feedback coil outlined by Fischer-Lichte it is also interesting to approach the Cagean circus from another point of view; the performative mode of the individual performer.

*Musicircus*, as we saw in the second chapter, does not have a published score. The nearest we come to a published score is the text in *Scenarios*, a highly descriptive text (describing the event in 1967) appearing ambiguously in the book’s context as an anthology of “scripts to perform”.<sup>486</sup> We can also consider oral scores, not published, not fixed in an authorized written form, but of which traces can be seen in letters, interviews, comments and reports about how things have been done. What prompts these remarks is that Cage expresses views about the mode of performing in a *Musicircus*, and this mode, independent of what is performed, has implications for how the coils of feedback are explored.

Cage, in the published text referred to above writes that “no directions were given anyone.” However, he has some preferences:

Let each thing that happens happen from its own centre, whether it is music or dance. Don’t go in the direction of one thing ‘using’ another. Then they will all go together beautifully (as birds, air planes, trucks, radios, etc. do).<sup>487</sup>

To not let one thing “use” another seems also to include a conversational mode of approach to the situation; to converse:

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<sup>486</sup> See p. 31 in this thesis.

<sup>487</sup> John Cage, letter dated February 17, 1979.



*D.C.: And in the musicircuses, do you find that the musicians have freed themselves from their habits - in particular, the habit of conversing?*

J.C.: In Paris, I noticed that some groups fell silent when they noticed that other groups were starting to play. That's in fact exactly what happens in jazz, except that in *Musicircus*, the effect was the opposite. However, in the two musicircuses which we produced in the United States, each group really worked in an independent manner. No one worried about his neighbour. The result was amazing. But if you stick to concentrated attention, or if you retain the principle of discourse, musicircuses may not be of any interest at all.<sup>488</sup>

The performative mode favoured here is that of independently performing your own material. Could that not be like promoting a sort of performative solipsism (conceptually contradictory according to our delimitations of performativity); a deprivation of our inclination to be part of a community by tuning ourselves to the communal situation, using the available vehicle of conversational codes, and feed back? I will leave this question for a while. However, the autopoietic feedback coils operating in the intimate dialogs between people seem not to be of any interest here in view of Cage's comments. From the point of view of feedback and autopoiesis, the interest is directed to the processes happening at a macro level: "No one worried about his neighbour. The result was amazing."

Cage's advice to not "converse", can be understood as a way to discipline an inclination to go into a role alternating situation. The performative strategy described could be seen as a way to break up an immediate inclination to "feed back" and thereby restrict the relational dynamic described by Fischer-Lichte. Disciplinary obstacles are put into the coils of actions and reactions. Which processes are we dealing with here? We have seen how Fischer-Lichte emphasises different strategies and methods that performance artists use to illuminate certain variables and parameters at work in the contingent situation of the art event, not least by isolating and magnifying certain elements and aspects. Cage's suggested performative approach could therefore be seen as such a delimitation that disciplines the actions involved to generate, magnify and explore certain qualities of the situation.

Therefore, on one hand the technique of simultaneous performances, through the preferred mode of approach, restricts and even breaks the performers' immediate inclination to give feedback. The autopoietic feedback coil is somehow constrained. On the other hand, we can see that the techniques Cage introduces can make us aware and open our ears and senses to other coils of feedback, not least the ones which transcend an anthropocentric view of the feedback situation. That is, by breaking habits, by putting the participants in an unsettled situation, experiences can appear and perspectives be revealed which are different, and possibly transformative, from those we are used to in our habitual way of behaving.

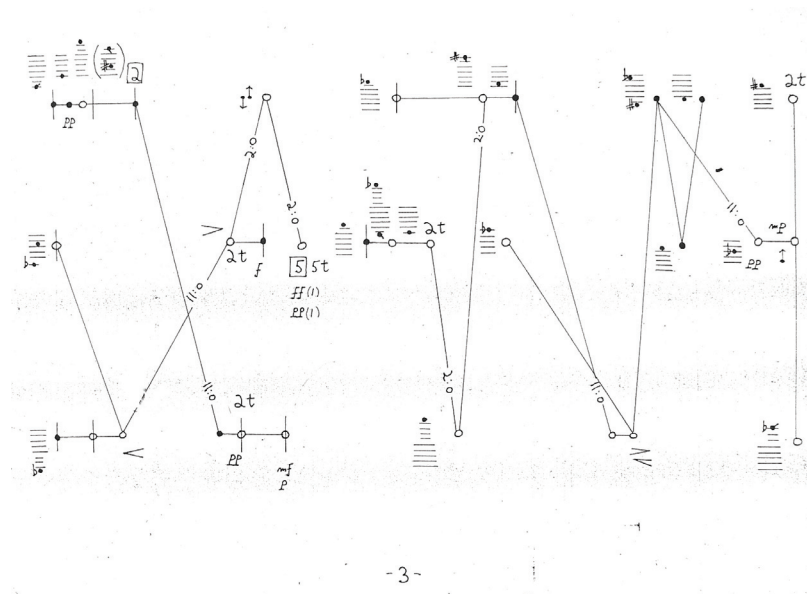
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<sup>488</sup> Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, p.172.

However, from where we are now in our discussion, let us go back to a consideration of the restriction of the feedback situation. It will be interesting here to compare Cage's performative strategies to *In between pieces for three players* (1963) composed by Christian Wolff. Wolff, a fellow composer and close friend of Cage, explores here the dynamics of autopoietic feedback coils quite differently than what is presumed by performing independently in a *Musicircus*.

Wolff's piece, like most of Cage's compositions since the 1950s, is open-ended and indeterminate with regard to how it would sound from one realisation to another. It is, as the title indicates, for three players, but which instruments, or to use a phrase from a score by Cage, which "sound producing means"<sup>489</sup> these players should use, are not indicated by the composer. That is one of the indeterminate aspects of the score. The piece's notation is a mix between traditional and graphical notation and equipped with instructions on how to read the notated signs. There are pitch indicating symbols made relative (indeterminate) according to the chosen instrument (sound producing means) – because no key is given – and there are signs indicating the performing (execution) of certain actions.

Example, page three of the score *In between pieces for three players* by Wolff:




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<sup>489</sup> *Variations II*.

The main impression is therefore of a score where the notational signs mainly function as indications of certain actions and not as symbols of the sounds to be produced. Therefore, like in many of the scores of Cage, the attention is turned to the execution itself. However, in Wolff's piece, these actions are required (by the instructions and the use of elaborate notational signs) to be minutely attuned to what the other performers do.<sup>490</sup>

We have here a piece which unfolds by the intimate action-reaction processes emerging *between* three players conditioned by how each of them perceives the situation and acts/reacts accordingly. We could even say that the piece is what emerges only because of their minutely tuned role alternation and interaction. This is also indicated by the title: *In between pieces for three players*. The title therefore signals a focus on the processes which happens *between* the players when they are highly attentive to what the others do and coordinate their behaviour (decisions and acts) accordingly. The performative mode asked for disciplines and focuses the executions of acts by outlining a situation where the performers have to listen to each other to decide what they will do next. This highly relational and interactive awareness is increased by the immediacy of the situation. The musical "game" (chamber situation) is framed in a manner giving a different task according to what your co-players do. Even if the performers rehearse the piece many times, slight differences of execution, or different choices made during the performance, combined by how these are perceived in real time will reveal new performative tasks to be resolved. The performers have to be on the alert all the time.

By making the realisation of the work so dependent upon what the musicians perceive in real time, in the actual and interactive performing situation, and leaving a lot of choices open to be decided by the performers, *In between pieces for three players* is an open-ended and indeterminate piece which fits Cage's definition of indeterminacy and thereby experimental music.<sup>491</sup>

The autopoietic processes explored by this piece are however quite different from *Musicircus* modulated by independently performed performances. Cage's works since the 1950s mainly stage disciplined action in one way or another, musical or more theatrical. Contingent processes are invoked through techniques of discipline. Wolff's piece also stages disciplined actions. Here it is a relational matrix that disciplines and focuses each player's performance. In *Musicircus* it is suggested, this should be anchored in another place:

Let each thing that happens happen from its own centre. [...] Don't go in the direction of one thing 'using' another.

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<sup>490</sup> For example: "Diagonal lines from one player's note to another's = second player plays immediately after the first stops." (Instruction, *In between pieces*.)

<sup>491</sup> See Cage's definition at p. 67 in this thesis.

Others are somehow involved here too, but we are not asked to act in relation to each other in the sense that the *relationship* defines our contribution. The guiding challenge is to allow and give space to all and everything. We are here moving in the direction of Cage's anarchism.

*In between pieces for three player* explores a social situation, the situation of chamber music, where musical awareness is directed to the finely tuned interactions between people in such situations and not so much guided by the idea of producing a specific prefigured sound object. However, here the emerging autopoietic feedback coils explored are those finely tuned interactive processes that are intimately part of communication. The autopoietic feedback coils explored by *Musicircus* are those arising as result of all the unforeseen encounters that happen when a multitude of beings are gathered, which are engaged by different interests and tasks, having their own unique points of departure and returning sites.

#### 5.3.4 nEw / foRms of living together

“Nowhere has Cage contrived a more experiential model of an amiable community than in the genre he invented called the Musicircus”<sup>492</sup> writes Charles Junkerman in the article “‘nEw / foRms of living together’: The Model of the Musicircus”. The aesthetic theory of performativity, as we have seen, emphasises how a performance from the beginning, in its medial condition of togetherness – of corporal co-presence – is social as well as aesthetic, and we could add, political.<sup>493</sup> This co-presence and the dynamic it sets to work, is approached by Wolff and Cage from quite different angles in *In between pieces* and Cage's circus. From our previous discussion, it could seem that the interest of a *Musicircus* is not at all in the social aspect, but either in the purely individual, or what emerges from a bird's-eye view. This however is not at all the conclusion Junkerman arrives at. *Musicircus* is discussed from the point of view of a social agenda expressed by Cage. We have seen this agenda not least spelled out in previews of the event in 1967.<sup>494</sup> Here Cage's anarchism plays an important role.

The aesthetic thinking Cage represents includes the belief in art's potential to change our minds, and thereby what we experience and do. Junkerman situates this belief within a “still-

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<sup>492</sup> Junkerman 1994, p. 40.

<sup>493</sup> See for example Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 68.

<sup>494</sup> See for example quote at p. 43.

influential Romantic paradigm<sup>495</sup> where artists “can break the mold of the present, by constructing aesthetic analogues of alternative futures”.<sup>496</sup> *Musicircus*’s way of breaking this mould of the present and of presenting an alternative model for the future is approached through the contours of Hegelian dialectics: Firstly the Cagean circus is seen as posing a *critical antithesis* that “subverts dominant aesthetic and social codes by subjecting them to oppositional and arbitrary rules”. Secondly it presents an *affirmative thesis* where life and the immanent world are celebrated and we are made aware of “the enjoyment of the senses and the pleasure of being”, and finally it exemplifies a *visionary synthesis* that poses a “utopian possibility for the human community, ‘new forms of living together’”.<sup>497</sup> The restriction on feedback discussed in the former paragraph can in this respect be seen as part of the critical antithesis that finally makes way for an altered understanding and a visionary synthesis.

Junkerman discusses Cage’s circus aesthetic with special reference to the one staged at Stanford University in January 1992 where Cage himself participated.<sup>498</sup> And he reads it in connection with another event held at Stanford at the same time, Cage’s delivery of the lecture “Overpopulation and Art”<sup>499</sup> and sees the Cagean circus as “an urban genre – crowded, noisy, and insubordinate”<sup>500</sup> that subverts the segregated structure of many cities to an envisioned non-segregated multitude of autonomous individuals. *Musicircus*, therefore, as a vision of a possible way to organise our lives of togetherness, does not escape the city as the overcrowded space where most of us have to live, but uses this condition of our time – our “overpopulation” – as a possibility where “the crowd functions as a kind of emancipatory solution, dissolving structures and organizations that immobilize people, restoring them to what Cage alternatively calls ‘process’, ‘openness’, ‘the circus situation’, or, most emphatically ‘being’”.<sup>501</sup>

How then does the crowd acquire an emancipatory function? Junkerman refers to the Cagean circus at Stanford and gives the example of musicians in a quartet who could not follow the habitual way of playing together:

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<sup>495</sup> Junkerman 1994, p. 39.

<sup>496</sup> Loc.cit.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>498</sup> The event happened only seven months before Cage died.

<sup>499</sup> This lecture is published in *John Cage: composed in America* (1994), ed. M. Perloff and C. Junkerman. The first part of Junkerman’s title – “nEw / foRms of living together” – is a quote from this lecture.

<sup>500</sup> Junkerman 1994, p. 40.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid. p. 47.

Players in a classical quartet had to deal with a similar dilemma: their ability to harmonize depends on each member of the quartet being able to hear the others, and *only* them. This is a music, Cage would say, of the old-fashioned fish tank, the product of an aesthetic ecology as undifferentiated as Simi Valley, in which consensus is achieved by isolation. In the noisome “dissensus” of the Musicircus, the players in the quartet could not hear each other, and could not help hearing their most proximate neighbors. How they resolved their dilemma is interesting: they had no choice, they reported afterwards, other than to play *alone*, i.e., as individuals in the crowd.<sup>502</sup>

The musicians had to play *alone* as *individuals in the crowd*. Probably, many would object that such a situation would not at all impart emancipation but rather represent an exposed position of loneliness and homelessness. Junkerman however accentuates how Cage “regards this result as healthy and liberating.”<sup>503</sup> The challenge brought about by the simultaneity of performances can free the musicians from “both the control of the group and the tyranny of the composition they are playing.”<sup>504</sup>

Two elements in Cage’s thinking are in this respect called attention to: The ideals of *self-creation* and *human solidarity*. According to the belief in self-creation the banner is kept high for an attitude of respectful *non-interference*<sup>505</sup>. “We need a society in which every man may live in a manner freely determined by him himself.”<sup>506</sup> This is done by leaving space around each person – by imposing nothing but live and let live, and permitting “each person, as well as each sound, to be the center of creation.”<sup>507</sup>

We can here see the contour of a very individualistically based society and might consider that the ideals of *self-creation* and *human solidarity* contradict each other. This though is not the case for Cage: “To Cage’s mind, there is no contradiction. The crowd is creative, engendering free individuals who exercise their freedom by identifying themselves with the whole.”<sup>508</sup> It is not enough to identify yourself with a limited (“segregated”) group like your family, an ethnic group, or a nation. Cage advocates a form of universalism that includes the whole of mankind: “The religious spirit must now become social so that all Mankind is seen

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<sup>502</sup> Junkerman 1994, p. 47.

<sup>503</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>504</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>505</sup> Junkerman delivers a clarifying reading of Cage in this respect. He refers to how social constructivists argue that our understanding of things is always already differential and textual – our understanding is always comparative. Cage, though, takes a contrary position. Relationships are “imposed” on entities by “minds seeking some sort of logical understandings. These impositions make mental “objects” out of beings and the consequence of such impositions is that we live in an insubstantial shadow world.” (Junkerman, p. 56.)

<sup>506</sup> Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, p. 99.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid. p. 100.

<sup>508</sup> Junkerman 1994, p. 59.

as Family, Earth as Home.”<sup>509</sup> Junkerman denotes Cage’s view in this respect as individualistic universalism.<sup>510</sup>

Cage’s individualistic universalism can shed light on Cage’s anarchism and *Musicircus* as reflecting a social agenda. ‘Non-interference’ is not only an important component of Cage’s thinking, as a political principle it has for a long time been a main ingredient of the anarchic disposition of Western liberalism. However, as Junkerman argues, in Cage’s thinking this goes further; ‘non-interference’ is elevated to an ontological principle, among other things by incorporating Buddhist influenced conceptions: “In Zen terms, Cage says that our being in the world should be both non-obstructive (respectful of the void, the space around things) and interpenetrating (available for encounter with all things).”<sup>511</sup> I will come back to this conception of ‘non-interference’, translated as being non-obstructive, that incorporates the seemingly paradoxical condition of interpenetration in the next chapter when we will discuss and question Cage’s non-dualistic aesthetics more profoundly. For the time being, let me refer to Junkerman’s reading. He compares Cage’s understanding to the seemingly paradoxical virtue *sophrosyne* (poise/balance) – an ancient Greek virtue that “was an entirely private disposition, but it could be achieved only in the push and shove of public life, in the crowded *agora*.”<sup>512</sup> The conception reflected in this virtue implies that one needs the others to become one’s best self. However, this does not mean that one is necessarily bound to others in solidarity or sympathy by this need. Paradoxically the crowded *agora* can liberate the individual from the others motivation, like the musicians of the quartet who had to find their own creative autonomy as a response to a situation where they could not use their habitual way of adjustment. It is, says Junkerman, “this condition of poised autonomy – interpenetrating and nonobstructing – that Cage calls ‘anarchy’.”<sup>513</sup>

## 5.4 Materiality

What is the musical material of *Musicircus*, and what about the materiality of the event?

*Musicircus* can be characterised as a performatively generated collage, spatial in its character,

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<sup>509</sup> Cage, *Empty Words : Writings '67-'72*, p. 181.

<sup>510</sup> Junkerman explains that this was a progressive position in the years immediately following World War II though being slightly anachronistic when he writes his article in the 1990s. (Junkerman, p. 60.)

<sup>511</sup> Junkerman 1994, p. 58.

<sup>512</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid. p, 58.

which is performatively brought about on the spot, conditioned by forms of autopoiesis (*Autopoiesis*) and emerging spontaneously (*Emergenz*).

Material, as I said in the former chapter, can be understood as not denoting some pre-existing potential, which is then given a specific shape, like clay which can be shaped into cups, or like building bricks put together into different constructions. Instead the material in its materiality – in its material quality – first appears as this material through the performative acts. *4'33''* by Cage, as we saw, functions as a telling example, because it is first through the performance of the piece that a focus is created, which transforms the sonic environment of the concert hall to musical material. Before this, there is no sonic material, but through the performative acts, the notated silences, or what we could call openness, are filled with Cage's material for the piece: unintended sounds.

The silence of *4'33''* turns out not to be silent at all when performed. The sonic material of *4'33''* is nothing else than what is thematized through the staging of the piece and the performative acts of the performer. Are there parallels here to be drawn to *Musicircus*?

We can extract some starting points for a realisation of a *Musicircus*:

- 1) An open invitation to participate in the production – *Musicircus* being, in fact, based upon this gesture;
- 2) The organisers have to provide certain facilities that make the realisation feasible;
- 3) What the different performers bring with them – what they have planned to do – can be unknown to the organisers. A realisation of *Musicircus* does not require that this is coordinated beforehand (the opposite seems to be more in the spirit of *Musicircus*'s anarchy);
- 4) The possibility for the audience to move freely around.

Therefore, if we look upon *Musicircus* as a kind of collage, the material of this collage is the performers who say yes to an invitation and who bring their own material – their own prepared performances. The material seen like this is therefore situational in its character. That is, it is conditioned by who says yes to the invitation to this specific realisation of a *Musicircus* and what they choose to bring with them. Seen like this, the material is also indeterminate from one realisation to another, because it only first achieves some form of



determination when the performers have said yes to participate and when they prepare themselves for their participation by making some decisions and preparations according to what they want to do – how they will contribute.

1), 2), 3) and 4) are the starting points for creating a collage. This is not just a sonic mixture or a visual montage. It is multi-medial, a mix which I will call a *live performed collage*; a collage the audience does not only have the possibility to look at, or listen to, but which they can move inside and explore.

If we were to understand the material of this collage, as denoting some pre-existing potential that is then given a specific shape as if using building bricks, the bricks would differ from one realisation to another. They would be dependent on the local situation and which possibilities were brought up there. Consequently, the material would even in this “non-performative” sense be dependent on the initiation of the *invitation*. The invitation would be the first step to getting any musical material.

How can we understand this invitation? I will here bring in Hans-Friedrich Bormann’s study of Cage’s silent piece (*4’33’’*)<sup>514</sup> because the structure of the promise, which he finds descriptive for Cage’s aesthetics and artistic work, can inform our analysis of *Musicircus*’s initiating invitation.

#### **5.4.1 To stage an event through the act of inviting**

If we look upon an invitational act as crucial to the staging of a *Musicircus*, what is then revealed? What is the logic of an invitation? How does an invitation function and operate? What are its conditions?

An invitation is a gesture directed *towards* somebody. The *other* is already, from the beginning, a condition for an invitation to appear. Already here, there is an aspect of alternation and circular structure. It is tempting to draw a parallel to the factor of role alternation in the autopoietic feedback coil emphasised by Fischer-Lichte. The invitation in its structure – in its invitational logic (to function and operate as an invitation) – reflects this role alternating structure. The inviter’s action, to invite, does not acquire meaning without a form of expected response from the one who is invited (*the other*) – an invitation is uttered to be answered. If we think of this structure through the perspective of subject /object positions, we could say that because an invitation is open-ended – the invited can say yes or no – the position of subject and object also alternate. The initiative as a subjective quality is alternated

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<sup>514</sup> Bormann 2005.

in the process; from belonging to the one who invites it is transferred to the one who gets the invitation.

Bormann, in his book *Verschwiegene Stille: John Cages performative Ästhetik*, starts his presentation with the utterance “Der Beginn ist ein Versprechen.”<sup>515</sup> The beginning is a promise. The promise Bormann refers to is Cage’s assurance that he will devote his life to music. The promise is given to Schönberg, who in return offers to teach him free of charge.

The story, told by Cage, goes like this:

When I asked Schoenberg to teach me, he said, ‘You probably can’t afford my price.’ I said, ‘Don’t mention it; I don’t have any money.’ He said, ‘Will you devote your life to music?’ This time I said ‘Yes’. He said he would teach me free of charge: I gave up painting and concentrated on music.<sup>516</sup>

This story, this anecdote, telling us about a cross holding promise, is a central moment of initiation and a reason for Cage’s compositional career. But not only that, argues Bormann, Cage’s promise to devote his life to music, differs fundamentally from a basic schema of communication which operates with a sender (the one who makes a promise), a recipient (the acceptor – the one who is promised something) and the content (what is promised). It is not just Cage who gives Schönberg his promise. Schönberg gives also a promise on the promise of Cage’s vow (to Schönberg). The structure becomes circular. Instead of an elementary exchange – to be taught in return for a fee – there is a reciprocal ceaseless inter-exchange: Each promise (vow) is mutually given to *the other*. As dedicated to, the other becomes also obliged. The promise reveals an aporetic structure. It becomes apparent that it is about a radical and immeasurable responsibility that cannot be fulfilled by its gift, the promised – by being given. The promise (the vow) addresses itself fundamentally to *the other*: in Cage’s lifetime, in the time of his works, in our time. In this way, the promise can be understood as an established anticipated belatedness (deferred action), requiring continuous (endless) supplements. The establishment appears like a not yet given gift, which opens itself like the open time to come.

Bormann uses the structure of the promise as a prism on Cage’s compositional career in general, and not only for his musical compositions, but also for the rest of his artistic output.<sup>517</sup> At certain points, the invitation can be aligned to the promise. The invitation is also directed to somebody. The *other/-s* forms a constituting, fundamental part of its structure, and certain expectations and responses have to come into operation for an invitation to be

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<sup>515</sup> Bormann 2005, p. 7.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid. p. 7. (From “An Autobiographical statement” (1989) in Cage and Kostelanetz 1993, p. 238.)

<sup>517</sup> Cage’s texts, lectures, interviews and so on. Bormann 2005, p. 8.

meaningful; an invitation initiates structures of responsibility. However, the initiation is somehow a promise that is not settled yet. The initiation of an invitation is even more open-ended than the establishment of a promise. (In fact, the promise “pretends” to be very certain.) In the invitation’s character of initiating, the mutual dependency is clearly present. It is an initiation dependent on the response. In this way we can explicitly see a reciprocal conditioning, a two-way directionality, and its mutual dependency.

An invitation’s initiation is conditioned by the response, but still the content would be indeterminate. That is, what the invitation would imply would to certain degrees not be actualised before the event happened which you had been invited to, had said yes to and contributed to by your participation. The “gift” of the invitation would first be delivered by the unfolding of the event, and this “gift” is not “pre-fixed” – the ones who are invited would contribute to “this gift” themselves.

Invitations are intimately linked to events. They are not linked to objects. We create objects, but invite to an event. Further, the gesture of invitation brings hospitality – you are invited to partake; you are invited to join. It opens doors. Included in its hospitable gesture is its freedom: You do not need to say yes. (Of course, this freedom is probably felt relatively, but I see it as a structural element of what we could call an “utterance” of invitation, otherwise we could instead speak about orders.) We are invited to partake in an event – in the unfolding of an event that is prepared (in a way, staged).

Evidently, a constitutional aspect of the invitation is anticipation. It is an event-*to-be* that is sketched out. That is, it is the *possibility* that is framed. And this possibility is framed quite openly, because we are asked if we want to be present and participate in this anticipated event. We could say that an invitation mainly is a gesture that by its anticipation helps to organize a meeting between people.

If we condense the form of an invitation, we could say that it basically sketches out the frame of a meeting between people (in real time). Because it is so open in its form, we could also say that an invitation reflects quite clearly the form of (auto-) poietic feedback. A parallel then can be drawn between Fischer-Lichte’s concept of *die autopoietische feedback-Schleife* and the structure of an invitation. An invitation indicates a situation, such as a performance, where people would meet and something would emerge, would be celebrated, by this meeting. The invitation indicates certain frames and plays on expectations that will contribute to modulate the event to come. In other words, to draw a parallel with the medial condition of a performance, certain frames are given and these frames imply certain expectations, which would contribute in the modulation of the autopoietic feedback coils.

From the general considerations of the character and structure of an invitation, let us transfer our gaze to *Musicircus*. There are especially three points I want to discuss:

- 1) The gesture directed to the *other*;
- 2) The indeterminacy of musical content;
- 3) The invitation as the “origin” (foundation/generator) of a performance (which is also the “work”) instead of the creation by an artist of a work which is then presented (performed) for the audience.

From the initiation of a realisation, through invitation, the *others* as co-players, co-creators, or co-actors are a constitutive part of the event. The contributions of others are presupposed; the event cannot be realized without their participation. Through this, a relational dynamic of reciprocity and mutual dependence is also outlined. We have seen how the advised performance attitude, of those participating in a *Musicircus*, in certain instances restricts the operation of role alternating processes. Here we see that in fact, in its genesis – to be actualized – *Musicircus* presupposes interactive structures of responsibility and role change from the outset. If we understand *Musicircus* as starting with the gesture of inviting, then the autopoietic feedback coil is already at work from the beginning. We could say that the materialising of the event starts already here, with the invitation. Role alternation and the dynamic of the autopoietic feedback coil are thereby at work already from the event’s initiation, contributing to the generation of the event’s materiality from the outset.

The gesture of invitation could be understood as the first performative step in a realisation of a *Musicircus*. Seen in this way, the performative generation of materiality starts already with this gesture, which in its logic depends on the acts of the others. The Cagean circus, therefore, breaks already here, in its initiation, with the aesthetic of the autonomous work, caricatured by the image of the autonomous creator (artist/“God”) who by his/her own intuition, imagination and creative power creates the independent work of art. The invitation – to stage through the act of inviting – explicitly undermines any accreditation of autonomy to the work or an author (composer). If however we should continue to speak in terms of an aesthetic of autonomy, we have to think about it differently – not in terms of a self-sufficient subject or a work.

#### **5.4.2 A performative generated multimedial collage**

I have already mentioned that *Musicircus* can be understood as a kind of collage, which emerges live as a result of the different performances that are performed simultaneously.

The materiality of *Musicircus* can therefore be seen as this live generated collage that emerges through the performative acts of the participants. No one has the full overview of this emerged and emerging collage, but all contribute to it. Autopoietic feedback coils are here at work.

*Musicircus*' character of collage can be approached from different angles, even a purely aesthetic one, although Cage says that no aesthetic bias is involved. Again it is interesting to bring in our former discussion about the preferred performative attitude and musicircus as a performative technique of uncoordinated simultaneous performances. Grove Music Online describes collage as: "A term borrowed from the visual arts, where it refers to the act of pasting diverse objects, fragments or clippings on to a background, or to the work of art that results. Musical collage is the juxtaposition of multiple quotations, styles or textures so that *each element maintains its individuality* and the elements are *perceived as excerpted from many sources* and arranged together, *rather than sharing common origins*."<sup>518</sup> Therefore, in applying this definition to *Musicircus*, executions of the different performances should occur with at least a minimal degree of independence (from what others do) to label the event a collage. Otherwise, we could imagine that the event from being a heterogeneous assembly of many different groups and individuals could develop into a well-integrated and homogenous *gesamtkunstwerk*. The supposed heterogenic quality of a *Musicircus* can therefore be analysed and discussed from quite different points of view, and all of them can be mutually compatible. I have here especially three points in mind:

- 1) Pure aesthetic considerations;
- 2) A social perspective – the aspects of visioned anarchy;
- 3) A perspective that transcends an anthropocentric viewpoint.

A fourth point, the aim to break habits as a method of opening the mind (and body) for threshold, and possible transformative experiences can be seen as "reasonable" with respect to all the three aforementioned points.

#### 5.4.2.1 *From a purely aesthetic perspective*

Cage, as we have seen, prefers a performative mode where the performers do what they do independently of what the others do. For example, that they do not retain a principle of "conversation". We have discussed this with reference to the autopoietic feedback coil. From an aesthetic perspective, even if what the performers play and present is indeterminate, not coordinated and not founded in any aesthetic bias (whereby any music is allowed) *how* the

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<sup>518</sup> Burkholder, "Collage" in *Grove Music Online*. My italics.

performances are done will be of extreme importance with respect to the aesthetic result of the event. From a purely aesthetic point of view, therefore, the *how* can be linked to the characteristics of a collage (especially when the content is indeterminate).

To exemplify my point I will here describe my own experience from a workshop in free improvisation.<sup>519</sup> We were a group of people with diverse musical and artistic backgrounds, from sound artists trained as visual artists and sculptors, amateurs like me, to professional jazz musicians. As a start, we were just asked to improvise without any further directions. What happened? A lot of interesting things occurred which were coloured by our different backgrounds. However, it was interesting to notice, that even if we had not formerly played together and our backgrounds were very diverse, there was a drive to attune our contributions (improvisations) to what the others did and move in the direction of becoming a unified ensemble that was creating a unified sound work. In other words, we tried to find a common musical/sonic/aesthetic world, almost like trying to improvise forth an organic unity (an organic work) by finding ones own place within it, for example by imitating what someone else had played a little bit altered, elaborating on it, making a second voice or a contra voice, filling out harmonies, continuing some rhythmic patterns someone else had introduced and so on.

After this “doing” of an introduction we were given the task to not imitate or snap up elements of the others. Instead we should try to improvise independently of what the others did, but at the same time, listen and register what they were doing. What happened? The task was not easy, almost a paradox. Regardless of the outcome, the task regulated our approach and the aesthetic result became different. Put simply, whereas, without any instruction we moved in the direction of common references and the development of a shared sonic world and of a coherent sonic object, the next challenge brought about an aesthetic result that was much more heterogeneous and extraordinary in its form.

The same could have happened with a realisation of *Musicircus*. We could also have imagined that the performers in such an event would have tried to attune to the other performances, and to try to contribute, like one of many voices, to the generation of a coherent art work (an improvised *gesamtkunstwerk*, if that could indeed be considered plausible). Therefore, the performative mode Cage advises can from a purely aesthetic point of view be desirable and seen as effective as regards the aim of securing a highly heterogeneous collage. Another method to secure this effect would be to use time brackets. A

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<sup>519</sup> Workshop with Johannes Bergmark, Trondheim 2005.

method extensively used by Cage, and as we have seen, a method that later has been applied in realisations of *Musicircus*.

#### 5.4.2.2 *A social perspective – the aspects of visioned anarchy*

From a social perspective, a highly heterogeneous collage can exemplify the possibility of co-existence – sharing the same time and place – not by adjusting individual differences, but by making such tolerant structures that these differences may operate side by side. The co-existence – the society – is not thought of as a unified organism, but as a broadened temporal-spatial meeting place for many different life lines, histories and motivations that do not have a common point of reference. We could say that in Cage’s thinking it is not the organism that is the “ideal” analogy for a society but rather the heterogeneous collage. *Musicircus* as an envisioned anarchy bequeaths the possibility of generating an arena where people from different musical and artistic practices and cultures can meet and do their own thing without being unified by a shared reference. They create a ‘global village’ like a collage where different elements still maintain their individuality and are perceived as excerpted from many sources rather than sharing common origins.

#### 5.4.2.3 *To exceed anthropocentrism*

As already mentioned, the suggested performative attitude can also be seen as evoking a different voicing of the feedback coils than those we mainly focus on in daily life. The perforations of feedback systems based on “for-the-sake-of-which” of human interests, accentuate an ecological situation of human intentionality – the human as just one “fold” of an extended web of interconnected agencies. Like the economy of attention that I brought up in the context of embodiment in chapter four,<sup>520</sup> the restriction on the habitual way of feeding back makes us aware of other constitutive dynamics in the situation of co-presence and interactivity. That does not mean that human intentionality is ruled out, or considered insignificant. We could argue that Cage’s strategies of staging direct the magnifying glass to those intersectional zones between different aims and causes and thereby emphasise the relative position of human directives, embedded in a world that includes the activity of a great variety of life forms. This ecological perspective and the former point will be elaborated in the next chapter.

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<sup>520</sup> See p. 158.

### 5.4.3 The performative space

Through the way *Musicircus* is organized spatially, providing simultaneous performances and free space for the audience to walk around – between and within the performances, in and out of the performance site – the musical work becomes something to walk within, its spatiality becomes something for the audience to aesthetically explore through physical movement. The real space converges with the spatiality of the work and becomes an essential part of the work’s artistic – musical, visual, theatrical, dance, pantomimic... – material. This convergence, this spatiality of the work, is created and thematized by the appearance and disappearance of the performances, their uncoordinated simultaneity, the emerging spatial collage which the audience can walk within adding their own performance, as though mixing their own soundtrack by their own physical movements, and perhaps becoming performers themselves, playing provided public instruments (Childs’s percussion sculptor), or becoming visual artists, dancers and more. The space becomes “eventualized” – something to experience as something which happens and reverberates.

Fischer-Lichte’s notion of performative space seems here very appropriate. As we have seen, when a performance is performed, the location where this performance takes place is affected. We have to take account of a *performative space*. The actual site with its geometrical attributes, atmospheric possibilities and the arrangement made specifically for an event, interact with the movements of people, objects, light, sounds and so on. This interaction generates a space in constant transformation. We refer to an unstable spatiality conditioned by the autopoietic feedback coil. The performative space, therefore, envisions space as an eventualized category.

The performative space is not just thought of as a result or product of a performance, but it opens and supports certain possibilities for how and which relations can be established between actors and audience, and which movements and perceptions are likely to occur. The spatial quality, therefore, contributes to what happens at the site through its specific spatiality which in its specificity opens certain performative and interactive possibilities, possibilities which pop up a new all the time.

What interests me especially here is how the spatial organisation of *Musicircus* invites us to listen in a physical way. I will therefore, for the sake of analysis, focus upon the audience as listeners, even though *Musicircus* so engagingly involves other senses. The main reason for my analytical choice of approach lies with the specification of the role of the listener within the practice of Western classical music – that is, seated, expected to keep quiet and to give



minimal bodily expression during the performance. According to this norm, the spatial arrangement of *Musicircus* is striking by providing the opportunity for the audience to freely walk around amongst the performers. This loosens any strict division between performers and audience, and activates the listening quite literally by making the role of listening into a physical activity. This physical listening becomes part of *Musicircus*' spatial materiality.

#### 5.4.3.1 *The embodied experience of listening*

*Musicircus*, through its spatial arrangement and its invitation to the audience to walk around, makes the act of listening into a physical exploration. This statement, one might say, is obvious and unremarkable. However, in the ordinary way of giving a concert, the listener's body is, so to speak, silenced. The audience is only expected to show how moved they are at the end of a presented work. The spatial organisation with a clear division between musicians and audience, and with the listeners fixed in one spatial position during the whole concert, encourages a mentally focused listening. Deep and concentrated listening becomes a mental activity. Besides the ability to hear, the significance of the listener's physical existence becomes, then and there, minimal. To hear properly what is presented, bodily movements must be cancelled out. They can disturb what is presented from the stage – they can disturb the proper, created sounds – and they can distract the listener from the proper object of concentration, the performed work.

Even if the norm at a classical concert is to be seated and listen quietly, at museums and galleries we are expected to walk around to look at the presented art works. Therefore, seen within an art context, we can imagine that *Musicircus* takes the habits from one field, the visual arts, and transfers them to a multimedia event. This transfer, however, has crucial implications for the experience of the act of listening. It is here interesting to speak about materiality. Because of the difference between the material quality of visual objects and sounds (and performances), the analogous mode of exhibition entails a new situation. We could, for example, speak about the simultaneous exhibition of different sound objects (musical works) as analogous to visual objects (paintings, sculptures and so on), which the visitors by their own choice can look at and contemplate. However, because of their sonic materiality, to keep the different sonic objects discretely apart as distinct independent works would be difficult. They would necessarily, to a certain extent, infiltrate each other and overlap. Further, as performances they would take a certain time span to be accomplished.

Therefore, even if the mode of walking around is not new, the situation of this merging between the spectators' mode of moving around in a gallery and the musical and

performative-exhibitive mode of *Musicircus* generates a new situation, not least for the way we are used to listen to music.<sup>521</sup>

I will here use my own experience at a *Musicircus* staged in Ludwigshafen am Rhein as an example and a case to reflect upon. This event, staged by Sigune von Osten and marking the start of a festival of dramatic art, began outdoors.<sup>522</sup> At 5 p.m. it started with church bells and filled the square in front of the theatre house with a mishmash of celebrative activities from performances by the fire brigade to stilt dancing, orchestrated cars, several bands, Tibetan horns and public transportation. The circus continued indoors and invited the audience to explore a house full of music, visuals, Cage quotes, sculptures, films, mingling the different spaces into a conglomerate of artistic activities, reflecting a huge variety of cultural practices, before we ended in the theatre hall where this variety of practices continued in a condensed collage of performances emerging from all sides.<sup>523</sup>

This was my first *Musicircus* experience, and I found most startling the mode of listening we were invited to perform. A form of exploration where we were allowed to move around, listening from positions we otherwise would not be permitted to listen from (like close behind a double bass). The listening became a physical as well as a mental act where I became very aware of my own moving body as an agent of my own spatial mix. The physicality of listening became very apparent, even more so when we ended up sitting in the theatre hall and were not able to move freely anymore. The experience of the emerging collage became very different there, even though the theatre hall with its architectonic signature somehow was deconstructed by what had happened before and by the spatial arrangement of the performances in the hall, having performing groups placed both on the stage, amongst the audience, behind and at the stage.

To use my own experience as an example, the exploration of my own physicality, my own moving body as part of and framing what I heard became an aesthetic experience in itself, and an aesthetic theme to explore of its own accord. The collage and fusing of different performances became intimately linked to my own exploration, and this interaction – what

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<sup>521</sup> Even though the spectators' movements are incorporated into the normal practice of looking at for example the paintings exhibited at a gallery that does not mean that we consciously connect our gaze to the movements of our bodies. It could be equally as prominent that we move our position to silently contemplate a new object, this contemplation experienced as "mental" in its character - as is the way we listen to music at a classical concert.

<sup>522</sup> This Cagean circus opened the first festival of Ludwigshafen (*Festspiele Ludwigshafen*) and had about 330 performers and over 30 different groups – orchestras, bands, diverse ensembles, theatre groups, choirs and others such as the fire brigade – engaging both local resources and musicians and artists across the country, making up an atmosphere of a 'global village' in action.

<sup>523</sup> Though this production both had entrance fee and seated the audience in the end, I found it impressive with regard to the destabilization of a consecrated space devoted to the "high" art of theatre and an invitation to audience and performers to explore and inhabit this space afresh.

happened if I moved close to something or away from it, rocked from side to side, turned my head, or moved into a listening position not usually available to a listener – became entrancing and fascinating. This physical, active listening became in its explorative mode as captivating as “just” listening to what emerged.

Such an experience, as the one I had in Ludwigshafen, is of course not really new. Most of us have danced and improvised movements to music, and put on music to enliven boring tasks such as cleaning the house or driving a car. Probably it is because of the other norm, the one where you sit still and listen, that the mode of listening at a *Musicircus* becomes revealing.<sup>524</sup>

If we now go back to the role where the body is silenced, the activity of listening in this mode with all its associative and interpretative activity does not need to be felt less intensively. However, in a *Musicircus* this role is activated in another way, and the activity of listening as a physical activity also has implications for how the spatial dimension is experienced and emerges.

We could say, to use Fischer-Lichte’s direction of thought, that the spatial arrangement of a *Musicircus* invites us to a change of focus from the role of listening as an act of interpretation and emphatic “reading” to being a performance of its own accord.

The sounds’ capacity to reflect, define and create space becomes more striking because we can change our spatial position at any time by our own movements. This revealed spatiality becomes intimately linked to our sensing bodies. The act of listening becomes an independent performance adding to the others. The event that emerges happens in these intersections, supporting coils of feedback.

The listener literally becomes a “doer” who creates his/her own “strip of experience”<sup>525</sup> and the listening act becomes a bodily experience felt in the pace of the walk, in the movement of the hips, in the turning of the head, in the near touchable zone of a musician. This experience is also spatial, where the body, so to speak, appears with permeable borders, linked to the extended dimensions of space and the extensive-radiating contributions of others.

From the point of view of the live emerging collage, *Musicircus*’ spatiality changes constantly by what at any given time is performed. Through the audience’s ability to move around, the

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<sup>524</sup> A vivid example of the issue of different modes of listening and clashes that can appear between different practices is discussed in Ola-Kai Ledang’s article “Open Form in African Tribal Music” (1983). The subject is there approached the other way around, from the established practice of dancing to music to the presentation of the norm of the silent audience.

<sup>525</sup> A term from Erving Goffman. See Carlson 2004, p. 46.

spatial quality of the event becomes even more noticeable, and this spatiality becomes emphatically connected to the listener's own listening performance as a bodily performance, not only a mental one. The experienced spatiality, therefore, quite explicitly emerges in the points of intersection between the emerging live collage and the performance of the listeners (as embodied minds, psychosomatic beings). We can thus speak about additive performances that intersect. *Musicircus* emerges through these additive performances overlapping and crossing each other.

## 5.5 Liveness and deferral

I have emphasised the liveness of *Musicircus* as a collage. The collage is generated live by simultaneous performances, and by not being based in coordinated simultaneity, this collage is not predicted in detail but reflects the intermingling result from many individual contributions that in sum represents a high potency of autopoietic dynamics. The Cagean circus can therefore be seen as a kind of production that emphatically draws the attention towards the factor of liveness and the impossibility of making a fair documentation of such an event. It evades commodification and needs to be experienced in its real time of execution. The circus productions initiate autopoietic, additive and interactive processes that intimately are connected to the generation of a performative spatial-temporal dimension that hardly can be detached from the situation, place and participants that contribute to what emerges: The art event – its meaning and aesthetic nature – represents an irreducible measure that has to be experienced live.

Bormann's reading represents here a complication, because Cage's aesthetics and artistic practice are not seen as ultimately residing in an aesthetic of the omnipresent though processual moment. I find in Bormann's study a potential critique of Fischer-Lichte's performative aesthetics. At least, he implements reflections upon other aspects triggered by the concept of performativity. Fischer-Lichte describes the unavailable and indeterminate quality of performances – their *Unverfügbarkeit* – according to a kind of immediacy and liveness defined by the unique (non-deferral) character of the moment, a character brought about not least because of the productivity of the exchange that arises between participants. Bormann, however, by using the example of the promise as a guideline draws attention to the structural deferral involved in performative acts. His analysis, therefore, by seeing Cage's aesthetics and artistic practice as analogous to the structure of a promise, opens other horizons for discussing presence, liveness and the *now* which appear so important within Cage's aesthetics. This important discussion that includes the themes of presence, immediacy, mediation, deferral, and dislocation, will be brought up again in the next chapter and confronted by a concrete example when our *Musicircus* done in 2006 is going to be discussed.

## 6 CAGE'S NON-DUALISTIC APPROACH TO AESTHETICS

[Suzuki] then spoke of two qualities: Unimpededness and interpenetration. Now this unimpededness is seeing that in all of space each thing and each human being is at the center and furthermore that each one being at the centre is the most honored one of all. Interpenetration means that each one of these most honored ones of all is moving out in all directions penetrating and being penetrated by every other one no matter what the time or what the space. So that when one says that there is no cause and effect, what is meant is that there are an incalculable infinity of causes and effects, that in fact each and every thing in all of time and space is related to each and every other thing in all of time and space.<sup>526</sup>

### 6.1 Preliminary summary

Through Goehr's historical-analytical analysis we are presented with a work concept in which music is regarded as constituted by lasting objects (products) existing independently of their time and place of performance, though representing the ideal to strive for in these very same performances. Goehr presents a non-essentialist approach to concepts. However, through her analysis, the revealed work-concept re-establishes an essentialist frame as the ontological horizon for how to speak about and practice music still today. I connected this frame to the hegemony of a two-world perspective where we, at one side of the spectrum, have the spiritual, ideal and exemplary, and at the other side, the physical, impure and imperfect. Cage, I argued, problematizes this perspective basically for what it excludes, or judges deficient. I introduced in this respect the conception of 'lack' and mentioned three points, all attacked in Cage's aesthetics: Firstly, what is present in its transformative quality cannot be accounted for as present in a fully ontological sense. As transformative it will necessarily exist in an insufficient mode. Secondly, the perspectival aspect of 'lack' means also that what is perceived has to be compared to an ideal, an abstract form that provides a standard according to which what is perceived can be apprehended ("read") as a certain (purposeful) materialisation. And not least, appearances and events that fall outside of our standards could be called a kind of *ontological noise*. This "noise" invokes questions about plurality, otherness, and what can be seen, heard and voiced by our approaches. Cage does not only preach the inclusion of sonic noise in the fabric of music. What is really at stake is to break ground for considering the "noisy" climate of existence as fully worthy in an ontological sense.

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<sup>526</sup> Cage, *Silence*, pp. 46-47.

In chapter four we partly left the work as our central category and took up the ‘event’ as the starting point for aesthetic reflections. Through Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetic theory of performativity we were presented concepts that aimed to treat the “work-critical” activity discussed in chapter three in positive terms – that is, theorizations that do not only intend to formulate what is attacked, but aspire to work out conceptions that reflect what these artistic events pose. However, the transfer of our attention from workhood to the character of event and the concept of performativity did not leave us without questions. I pointed to tensions within the concept of performativity itself, such as between the intentional and reflexive quality associated to performed actions and the chance-ridden and coincidental flavour associated to the concept of event. Further, even if we moved away from the work concept presented in chapter three, we did not leave behind questions about the meaning and function of conventional norms, standards, or what we could call “ideals”.

A new discussion of the work-concept was introduced. Through Heidegger and Gadamer’s theories of the artwork we were presented a re-formulated concept that incorporated the performative initiative and response through a theorizing of the artwork as an event. At the same time, this reformulated work-concept included a gathering and unifying aspect that managed to account for the work-event’s comprehensibility. Further, we could also argue that this reformulated work-concept managed to theorize the significance of materiality in its own terms and not only as a result of performative acts. However, I argued that this explanation presupposes a hierarchical perspective – a kind of centre/periphery thinking – that Cage problematizes. Cage does not only challenge a Platonic-Aristotelian world-view, also the Heideggerian presuppositions of hierarchic principles of structuration are attacked. I linked this attack to an altered direction of thought from dialectical models based upon the play between a defined/projected totality and parts that express/constitute this totality, to a situation of being-in-the-middle-of-something-not-knowing-the-totality where bodily processes as much as mental ones have importance for the aesthetic experience and its meaning. The analysis in chapter five elaborates on this situation by pointing to, for example, Cage’s questioning of the tendency for an anthropocentric focus and valuation. We are, in other words, confronted by a situation of being-in-the-middle-of-something-not-knowing-the-totality that challenges anthropocentrism and a chasm between human nature and the rest of the world.

In this chapter I want to go further into this sketched theoretical terrain by focusing upon Cage's questioning of dualism. To do this I will especially focus on the concepts of *interpenetration* and *non-obstruction (unimpededness)* that appear in his aesthetics from about 1950. These concepts, that I find are used to epitomize his non-dualistic approach, are also closely related to his exploration of simultaneity exemplified by *musicircus* as a performative technique (a technique of performance) of co-presence. Cage himself connects these concepts to the *Musicircus*. He says in a conversation with Daniel Charles in 1970:

Cage: [...] [*Musicircus*] is a principle of a flexible relationship, of a flexibility of relationships.  
Daniel Charles: What do you mean by that?  
Cage: Interpenetration must appear *through* non-obstruction.<sup>527</sup>

As mentioned, a central characteristic of *Musicircus* is the simultaneity of different artistic performances that take place, spread about, though "under the same roof". This simultaneity is almost the only characteristic that all realized *Musicircuses* have in common. My hypothesis is that an examination of *interpenetration* and *non-obstruction* can illuminate the specific simultaneous character spotlighted in these productions and further enlighten Cage's aesthetic project of non-dualism. Hopefully, this will bring us back to the more general theoretical question of thinking an aesthetic situation from being-in-the-middle-of-it-not-knowing-the-totality as being-in-the-middle-of-presence-production.

## 6.2 The Buddhist reservoir for aesthetic reformulations

### 6.2.1 Cage's Buddhist rhetoric

The quote introducing this chapter is one of many examples where Cage refers to Buddhism to elaborate his aesthetic views. What has Buddhism meant for Cage's aesthetics, or perhaps to ask more precisely: How has Cage's adoption of Buddhist concepts and ideas helped to address specific questions of Western art music? And correlated to this, what has this adoption meant in formulating alternative views to those that had dominated the artistic field he entered?

Low addresses similar questions in her thesis *Religion and the invention(s) of John Cage*.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, p. 52.

<sup>528</sup> Low 2007.

She even emphasises that Cage's appropriation of an Buddhist inspired rhetoric helped to (re-)invent a tradition for his music – a specific *American* tradition of experimental music – that distanced him from the “old world” of Europe. In this respect she is in line with Patterson who emphasises that “in appropriating terms and concepts from his [Cage's] sources, his borrowings were not so much faithful transcriptions of ideas as they were carefully constructed intellectual subversions.”<sup>529</sup> The invented Orient<sup>530</sup> functioned as an authorization for Cage's attitude to experimentation where the aim is not to express or create masterworks, but to erase ego-driven fetters and make the mind susceptible to divine influences.<sup>531</sup> Instead of the aesthetics of genius and masterworks so firmly planted in the old world's soil of Europe, the Orient envisioned the freedom of the self to transcend the limits of egoistic desires and be at one with the anonymous creativity of existence as a compassionate act.<sup>532</sup>

Anderson also stresses the significance of Cage's Buddhist influences, especially the Zen Buddhism presented by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki.<sup>533</sup> He does not so much explore subversive traits in Cage's appropriations as he sees the potential for an *affirmative* examination of Cage's creative project with Zen as common denominator. From a deconstructive point of view the apparent meaninglessness of Cage's works easily falls into nihilism. Within the context of the practice of Zen, Cage's compositional strategies point to experiences that exceed conceptualized knowledge – to the emergence of life before it is framed in known notions. Anderson points in this respect to a move from object to *process*, from meaning to *attitude*. Cage situates *processes* that aim to provide certain performative and attentive *attitudes* that have the capacity to bring about a certain type of experience that Anderson calls a *Cagean experience*, a kind of liminal experience at the boundary of what make sense: “I

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<sup>529</sup> Patterson 2002a, p. 43. Patterson further explains this point: “This is not to lend an insidious tone to Cage's attitude towards his material but more objectively refers to a particular type of appropriation whereby the basic elements and unifying structure of an idea are maintained, though the intended effect is first undercut and then reversed (i.e., subverted) by a motivation contrary to the idea's original purpose.” (Loc. cit.) Patterson especially shows Cage's appropriation of elements from Ananda Coomaraswamy's aesthetics in such a context. See also Patterson 2002/2009b.

<sup>530</sup> Low sees in fact Cage's evocation of the Orient as fostering alternatives to Western practices (especially in his rhetoric from the 1950s) to be a kind of ‘orientalising’ in line with Said's description as “a purposeful representation of the Other to the end of achieving a particular political or cultural goal.” Low 2008, footnote at p. 5. See for example Low 2008, pp. 155-157.

<sup>531</sup> “The purpose of music is to sober and quiet the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences.” (Cage: “An Autobiographical Statement” (1989) in Cage and Kostelanetz 1993, p. 239.) This phrase that Cage ascribes to Gira Sarabhai, an Indian singer and tabla player Cage met in 1946 and exchanged respective knowledge of Western and Indian music and aesthetics, recurs in Cage's explanations of his compositional activity and appears as a tenet of the aesthetics he develops from the 1940s. See also Kostelanetz 2003, pp. 43 and 45.

<sup>532</sup> Low 2008, Patterson 2002.

<sup>533</sup> Andersson 2009.



have called the intellect's attempt to grasp what is not possible to understand with Cage's work *to have a 'Cagean experience'*.<sup>534</sup> This non-matrixed experience – to “accept the uncertainty rather than trying to dissolve it”,<sup>535</sup> invests its attention in the *act* of experiencing itself, i.e. the activity of listening, performing, composing, which opens a horizon of enjoyment in the midst of the unresolved flux of the emergent situation.<sup>536</sup> In fact, Anderson sketches similar moves to those presented in the aesthetics of performativity where the significance of the event is in its effect – the transformative experience. However, he uses Cage's involvement with Zen as a clue to theorize these.<sup>537</sup>

My main issue in this chapter is neither historiographical, nor a detailed study of Cage's sources and their use, but a delimited reading of Cage, the thinker, who aimed to expound alternative objectives for the practice he joined. The air of Buddhism framing the sense and authority of concepts employed in this respect – such as Cage's use of 'interpenetration' and 'non-obstruction' – prevails in Cage's usage, and this estranged though known frame of reference is utilized to provide a different ground from which to think aesthetic questions and solutions. Therefore, though Cage's Buddhist references can be criticized as misplaced and misrepresented,<sup>538</sup> they occupy an important place in his aesthetic argumentation that helps to open new fields for discourse and practice.

Buddhism has a long and huge tradition, both historically and geographically, and it embraces a wide variety of philosophic schools and religious practices. This huge tradition has not remained unchanged by its introduction and inclusion in Western cultural and religious life. McMahan (2008) speaks about the making of Buddhist Modernism. The entry of Buddhism into Western life at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century happened in a climate of translation and transformation. McMahan emphasises, in this respect, processes of creolization and hybridization where Buddhist conceptions were re-formulated in fashions adaptable to established systems of thought in the West:

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<sup>534</sup> Andersson 2008, p. 8.

<sup>535</sup> Andersson 2008, p. 8. See also pp. 24-30.

<sup>536</sup> See also “Experiential openness” in this chapter and my presentation of Göran's Cage study.

<sup>537</sup> Andersson's study does not refer to theories of performativity, and he does not use the concept of liminality to denote the 'Cagean experience' as I have done here, but I find striking parallels between his reading of Cage and conceptualisations to be found within theories of performativity.

<sup>538</sup> See for example Low's argument that Cage was romancing the concept of 'emptiness' and appropriated an understanding that deviated from the normative Buddhist understanding. Low 2006 and 2007.

What many Americans and Europeans often understand by the term ‘Buddhism,’ however, is actually a modern hybrid tradition with roots in the European Enlightenment no less than the Buddha’s enlightenment, in Romanticism and transcendentalism as much as Pali canon, and in the clash of Asian cultures and colonial powers as much as in mindfulness and meditation.<sup>539</sup>

However, he does not abandon the term Buddhism in describing these new appropriations. Instead he shows how its presentation to a Western audience has transformed and added to the scope of Buddhism on a global plane. I find the Buddhist Modernism that McMahan outlines clarifying in circumscribing notions that Cage adopts. This term also provides a view for the soundboard that Cage’s Buddhist inspired notions could put in vibration. No doubt, the publication of *Silence* in 1961 hit upon something and became inspirational for a group of people far beyond those accustomed to contemporary issues of avant-garde music and art.<sup>540</sup> *Silence* is not a unified statement. It is a collection of different texts, written for different purposes, spanning in time from the end of the thirties to the early sixties, and exhibiting/exploring different styles of literary writing. However, Cage’s Buddhist rhetoric flavours many of the texts, not least seminal contributions like “Lecture for Nothing” (1949) and “Lecture for Something” (1950), and this rhetoric is used to support and envision a different subject field for music than the objectified version of the masterwork.<sup>541</sup>

In this respect it is worth referring to a point made by McMahan. Buddhism as introduced to the West addressed questions of modernity. The progress of science and its paradigm of verifiable empirical knowledge had shaken religious dogmas. However, the secularity thereby enforced was in danger of dis-enchanting the world. Early promoters of Buddhism managed to present Buddhist teachings as bridging this gap.<sup>542</sup> These teachings were, like the scientific paradigm of the modern world prescribed, based in “empirical” experiences, but did not thereby dis-enchant the world. Buddhism could therefore be approached as a “secular” religion – with no Gods, based in direct experience – that however managed to re-spiritualise the modern ruin of a disenchanted universe.

Cage’s appropriations of ‘interpenetration’ and ‘non-obstruction’ reflect this presentation of

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<sup>539</sup> McMahan 2008, p. 5.

<sup>540</sup> See Patterson 2002b.

<sup>541</sup> See discussions in chapter three.

<sup>542</sup> Examples are here the Japanese Zen Master Soyen Shaku (1860-1919) and Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) who both spoke at the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago, 1893 – an important event in the dissemination of Buddhism to the West, especially America. See McMahan 2004 and Snodgrass 2003.

Buddhism, bridging the gap in the modern world, and in Cage's case this is used to express a non-dualistic approach to music where matter and spirituality are not split up in a dual and contesting relationship: The *here* of the matter is also the place for spirituality, or to use a notion presented in chapter four, matter and transcendence act in embodied unity. With the help of Buddhist notions Cage envisions the possibility of basing music in an ontology of flux, with firm interpretative grounds afloat, though without losing sense for the real and its call for compassion.

### 6.2.2 Dependent co-arising

Today, McMahan argues, *interdependence* has become a tenet of modern Buddhism that has the capacity to resonate with the *inter* of a modern world:

Indeed, this age of internationalism and the internet might well be called the age of *inter*: there is nothing that is not interconnected, interdependent, interwoven, interlaced, interactive, or interfacing with something else to make it what it is. Thus, any religious tradition that can claim 'interdependence' as a central doctrine lays claim to timely cultural resonance and considerable cultural cachet.<sup>543</sup>

The Buddhist doctrine of interdependence – *dependent co-arising*, or *dependent origination* (*pratitya-samutpada*), of which Cage's adopted concept of interpenetration is a variant – can be found in early Buddhist literature. But while early sources mainly use it to describe the fetters of life, contemporary descriptions of *interdependence* often express “a sense of celebration of this interwoven world, of intimacy and oneness with the great, interconnected, living fabric of life, and an expansion of the sense of selfhood into it.”<sup>544</sup> McMahan points to different sources for this contemporary version. These include both elaborations on the long history of Buddhism in the Asian continent – such as Nagarjuna's elaboration of 'emptiness' (*sunyata*) where *nirvana* becomes basically not different from *samsara*, just perceived differently,<sup>545</sup> the metaphysics of interpenetration developed by the school of Hua-yen,<sup>546</sup> the conception of *buddhisatvas* in Mahayana Buddhism who are not only content with their own liberation but pursue enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings, and a more positive attitude to nature in the South-Asian subcontinent – and Western ideas of “an animate universe, of a

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<sup>543</sup> McMahan 2008, p. 149.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid. p. 151.

<sup>545</sup> Nagarjuna (about 2nd century CE) is regarded as the founder the Madhyamika (the middle way) school, an important tradition of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy. For Nagarjuna's philosophy, see Westerhoff 2009 and Garfield/Priest 2003.

<sup>546</sup> See description of Hua-yen at p. 228.

life-force flowing through all things and offering an inner access to the spiritual essence of the whole<sup>547</sup> to be found in German Romanticism and American Transcendentalism, added to by “popular accounts of modern scientific thought, systems theory, and recent ecological thought.”<sup>548</sup>

The contemporary concept combines empirical description, world-affirming wonder, and an ethical imperative. Empirically, it presents the world “as a vast, interconnected web of internally related beings – that is, whose identity is not a priori independent of the systems they are a part of but is inseparable from those systems”.<sup>549</sup> Ethically, this interwoven condition calls for care and consideration because the contemporary conception also “emphasize the fragility of the interconnected network of beings: because everything depends on everything else, altering the balance of the web of life can be – and has been – catastrophic.”<sup>550</sup>

These last descriptions are especially related to more recent developments of engaged Buddhism and Eco-Buddhism. But though some of the described flavours above are related to trends developed after Cage’s introduction to Buddhism, Cage’s appropriation clearly shares the world-affirming character and the compassionate invocation associated to this modernist version of ‘dependent co-arising’.

Not only Cage but also my reading of his Buddhist inspired notions is framed by a modernist understanding of Buddhism that is demythologized and addresses questions of the modern area. That is, Buddhism as a kind of process philosophy enabling us to envision the idea of ontological-epistemological and existential arguments as based in the flux of experience, a sense of Being as *becoming*, and not in the stability of the word – the linguistic sign. Further, the possibility of developing a philosophy of life on this condition, even though an ideal world collapses into a phenomenal world and *nirvana* becomes not basically different from *samsara* – the ontological view of “groundlessness” does not need to leave us in an epistemological, existential and ethical trap. There are also inspirations to be found for loosening up the notion of the taxonomic entity at the base of epistemological systems and see

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<sup>547</sup> McMahan 2008, p. 164.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid. p. 153.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid. p. 150.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid. pp. 151-152.

the particular unit as an association of driving forces, more or less tidily connected, as imparted by Rahula: “What we call a ‘being’, or an ‘individual’, or an ‘I’, according to Buddhist philosophy, is only a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces or energies, which may be divided into five groups or aggregates.”<sup>551</sup> Finally, we have the teaching of liberation that does not leave this groundless condition in “damnation”, but acts upon it as the ultimate opportunity for happiness. This opens an existential frame of interpretation. Without doubt the teaching of liberation is essential for Cage’s Buddhist rhetoric. Most often ontological arguments are supported by existential considerations, such as how we can come to terms with the lives we live in a fruitful way. With these remarks mentioned, let us proceed to Cage’s conceptions.

## 6.3 Cage’s concepts of interpenetration and non-obstruction

### 6.3.1 Co-presence as a philosophy of life

Cage’s concepts of interpenetration and non-obstruction and variants of non-obstruction like unimpededness and non-hindrance begin to emerge frequently in Cage’s texts and interviews from the early 1950s and continue to be part of Cage’s aesthetic vocabulary throughout his career. These concepts are both used to describe general conceptions of life and issues of specific musical and compositional character: “The sounds enter the time-space centred within themselves, *unimpeded* by service to any abstraction, their 360 degrees of circumference free for an infinite play of *interpenetration*.”<sup>552</sup>

Evidently there is a link between Cage’s study of East-Asian philosophy – of Zen Buddhism and Taoism – and his incorporation of ‘interpenetration’ and ‘non-obstruction’ (unimpededness/non-hindrance) in his aesthetics. But even though the concepts appear to be derived from East-Asian philosophies, they are mainly used to underpin aesthetic arguments that belong to discussions of topics within Western art music. In this respect, I would like to use one of Cage’s anecdotes as an example:<sup>553</sup>

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<sup>551</sup> Rahula, p. 20. McMahan mentions Rahula’s book *What the Buddha Taught* (first edition, 1959) amongst those that have contribution to the modernist understanding of Buddhism. My conception of Buddhism has also been shaped by this book.

<sup>552</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 59. My italics.

<sup>553</sup> The anecdote is one of the one-minute long stories that make up the corpus of *Indeterminacy* (1958/59), a piece that consists of 90 short stories. In *Silence* these stories are spread about and appear as small independent literary pieces.

The question of leading tones came up in the class in experimental composition that I give at the New School. I said, “You surely aren’t talking about ascending half-steps in diatonic music. Is it not true that anything leads to whatever follows?” But the situation is more complex, for things also lead backwards in time. This also does not give a picture that corresponds with reality. For, it is said, the Buddha’s enlightenment penetrated in every direction to every point in space and time.<sup>554</sup>

Cage performs a rhetorical move in this story that in a concise form shows a common feature of his application of the discussed concepts. That is, the notions of interpenetration and non-obstruction are used to comment on and critique musical and aesthetic questions. From this specificity we are moved to general reflections upon life that thereby give the reasons for his stand on specific musical matters.

What is it, then, that ‘interpenetration’ and ‘non-obstruction’ describe? Patterson writes that Cage “adopted the notion of *interpenetration* from both Buddhist and Taoist strains of thought to describe the dynamic element of *continuity*.”<sup>555</sup> I wrote in chapter two that Cage in the 1950s uses the notion of no-continuity to describe musical forms that break with the ordinary idea of coherence and unity.<sup>556</sup> The discontinuous character of pieces by Feldman, Wolff, Brown and Cage himself drew attention to other parameters like the minute physical character of the sonic material, the act of producing and experiencing it, and relations that did not follow the typical linear logic of element A followed by B making up a narrative structure with a distinct beginning and end. This no-continuity has according to Cage the capacity to exhibit the continuous quality of space-time in an expansive and inclusive manner. We speak in this respect about a notion of continuity that exceeds an intentionally shaped course of events that is assumed to have a unified frame of reference. Instead we are surrounded by lapses of events that emerge through the concurrence of many factors – many frames of references and reasons for acting – being multi-centred and multi-faceted, with no unifying story to be told.

It is this last notion of continuity that Patterson refers to when he says that ‘interpenetration’ describes the “dynamic element of *continuity*” and connects the notion of interpenetration to Cage’s experimentation with simultaneous performances:

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<sup>554</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 66.

<sup>555</sup> Patterson 1996, p. 166.

<sup>556</sup> See pp. 29-30 in this thesis.

Ultimately, the dual notion of continuity and interpenetration became a significant part of Cage's own developing fascination with creating 'multiple centers' of action in many of his works, such as the multi-media Black Mountain Piece (1952), which was conceived and premiered at Black Mountain College.<sup>557</sup>

I will now translate this term of continuity to the dynamics of co-presence, co-activity and interplay of entities (centres/junctions of being). We could consequently say that 'interpenetration' refers to how these entities interact and are co-present in the world. However, the concept is not restricted to the dynamics between existing things. It also describes their ontological foundation, because no thing, no entity is, according to this perspective, seen as having at its base an underlying substance.

In this respect it can be helpful to briefly outline the Buddhist teaching of no-self, because the doctrine of *anatman* (no-self) preaches the un-substantialized universe where no thing, no being, exists in an unconditional state, or has anything like that at its core; no real *substance* exists, everything becomes what it is by contingent processes. *Substance* is in this respect understood in an essentialist manner. It represents a constant in the fluid of experienced reality that has an eternal, unchangeable and unconditioned quality. Buddhism though argues that no such underlying constants (constant) are to be found, and that we are doomed to fail if we try to base our happiness on the assumption of such stable and fixed measures.

The concept of *sunyata* (emptiness) is part of this non-substantialized perspective: Every being is in essence emptied of any substantial character. They are basically the result of ongoing processes of becoming that connects all and everything in a nexus of interdependent and conditional states. *Interpenetration*, therefore, does not only describe a mode of interaction between things. It characterises the process of becoming in which these things only are arisen-arising knots; nothing substantially separates them from the invasion of mutual transformation. They have in this sense a non-obstructive quality that through and through is characterised by interpenetrations – that is, of mutual arising, mutual entering, mutual containment, mutual reflection and mutual sameness.<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>557</sup> Patterson 1996, pp. 166-167.

<sup>558</sup> This description alludes to the system of thought outlined by Hua-yen. See footnote at p. 228.

### 6.3.2 Non-dualism

Cage presents, in fact, respectively a definition for ‘unimpededness’ and ‘interpenetration’ in the quote that introduces this chapter (“[Suzuki] then spoke of two qualities: Unimpededness and interpenetration..”), and he refers to D.T. Suzuki as the source for these definitions. Suzuki discusses the doctrine of interpenetration in *Essays in Zen Buddhism (Third Series)*.<sup>559</sup> His presentation appears in the explanation of the Buddhist text *Gandavyuha*, a seminal Mahayana Sutra and part of the larger text *Avatamsaka Sutra*, which forms the doctrinal basis for Hua-yen’s worked out metaphysics of non-obstructed interpenetration, formative for many East-Asian Schools of Buddhism, including Zen. The essence of Hua-yen is that everything is connected in dependent co-origination, and every phenomenon reflects all other phenomena. Every living being is a Buddha, and the division between the ordinary world (*samsara*) and *nirvana* is illusory.<sup>560</sup> Suzuki presents in this instance ‘unimpededness’ and ‘interpenetration’ as characteristics of the world when enlightenment is achieved. The world is then no longer a place where individual things exist in separation opposed to each other. Instead, the world is perceived as unified, both abundant in its variety and united in co-existence and interplay. Suzuki illustrates this condition through an image given by a master of the Hua-yen School:

He had first a candle lighted, and then had mirrors placed encircling it on all sides. The central light reflected itself in every one of the mirrors, and every one of these reflected lights was reflected again in every mirror, so that there was a perfect interplay of lights, that is, of concrete-universals.<sup>561</sup>

The “perfect interplay of lights, that is, of concrete-universals” describes the principle of interpenetration: No thing, no being exists in a separate and isolated condition. They reflect each other from their respective individual positions; they are in a continuous exchange, and thereby mirror universal qualities in their individual appearance.<sup>562</sup> But even though Suzuki poses that everything infiltrates and is infiltrated, this reading does not reject the reality of individual existences:

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<sup>559</sup> Suzuki 1970. His aim in this series of essays is to trace the relationship between two chief Mahayana sutras, the *Gandavyuha* and *Prajñāparamita*, and Zen Buddhism.

<sup>560</sup> During the period of 559-900 masters of the Hua-yen school worked out a systematic metaphysics based upon the school’s interpretation of *Avatamsaka Sutra*’s doctrines of “non-obstruction, mutual arising, mutual entering, mutual containment, mutual reflection and mutual sameness” (Odin, p. 18), most exaltedly expressed in the concluding chapter, the *Gandavyuha Sutra*. The school is characterised by an adjustment of the Buddhist teachings to Chinese conceptions of the universe as harmonious and the nature of humans as innately good. The school was introduced to Japan in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and is there called *Kegon*.

<sup>561</sup> Suzuki 1970, p. 87 ff.

<sup>562</sup> Suzuki 1970, p. 87.



When we speak of identity, interpenetration, or unobstructedness as the fundamental philosophical conception of the Avatamsaka, we must not, however, forget that this conception by no means ignores the reality of individual existences. For unobstructedness is only possible when there are individual existences; for interpenetration is to be regarded as characteristic only of a world of particulars; for when there are no particulars, no individual existences, identity is an empty notion.<sup>563</sup>

Suzuki points to a non-dualistic experience through the concepts of interpenetration and non-obstruction that can be hard to come to terms with. The conception appears paradoxical by pointing to a kind of non-differentiated condition (not made different according to something else) though not erasing the unique qualities of the singular entities. This conception appears less mysterious by being contrasted to a perspective that approaches the world as consisting of separate things defined by their difference. Cage adopts this type of rhetoric:

From a non-dualistic point of view, each thing and each being is seen at the center, and these centers are in a state of interpenetration and non-obstruction. From a dualistic point of view, on the other hand, each thing and each being is not seen: relationships are seen and interference are seen. To avoid undesired interferences and to make one's intentions clear, a dualistic point of view requires a careful integration of the opposites.<sup>564</sup>

From chapter three to five – from the discussion of the work-concept to the staged event – we have been presented different shades of dualism attacked by Cage's aesthetics and practice:

- 1) The chasm between ideals and their implementation, or failure of implementation – the hegemonic split between soul and body, spiritual qualities and material qualities;
- 2) The semiotic position's emphasis on an operating binary and oppositional logic;
- 3) The significance given to the phenomenon of a total *otherness* and the act of differentiation in Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics;
- 4) A chasm between the nature of men and the rest of nature.

Cage's adopted concepts of interpenetration and non-obstruction pronounce an alternative to these shades of dualism, including theories that reject Platonic models and instead operate with systems of difference formation at the base for how we understand, approach and act in the world.

In this respect I will remark that Cage connects, in the quote above, a dualistic perspective to a focus on specific (restricted) relations as definitional. Lurking in this critique I find an

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<sup>563</sup> Suzuki 1970, p. 154.

<sup>564</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 38.

interesting question: What is the relationship between a relativistic view (which we could say Cage promotes with his non-essentialist worldview) and the critique stated above?<sup>565</sup>

Conversely to a perspective of definitional relationships, Cage associates the presented non-dualistic view to the apprehension of things as they are, acting from their respective centres. We need therefore to explore the notion of *centre* to account for his use of the other two concepts. This also readily leads us to questions about identity. Are we not, through this conceptual constellation of centre, interpenetration and non-obstruction, confronted with views that erode ordinary understandings of identity and identity formation?

### 6.3.3 'Centre' and identity

Let us once more go back to this chapter's introductory quote, "He [Suzuki] then spoke of two qualities..." and examine the presented notions as Cagean conceptions: 'Unimpededness' being to see "that in all of space each thing and each human being is at the center and furthermore that each one being at the centre is the most honored one of all"; 'interpenetration' meaning "that each one of these most honored ones of all is moving out in all directions penetrating and being penetrated by every other one no matter what the time or what the space."

First, let us focus on the use of 'centre' in these definitions, because we could imagine that 'centre' substitutes for what we could think of as being a distinct and delimited entity. The transfer from 'entity' to 'centre' however produces a difference; it creates different associations: 'Centre' points at a locality – the midpoint of an area – but does not, in a strict manner, outline the outer limits of its relevance. Like something that radiates, the centre's borders are arguable and permeable. Besides, 'centre' also gives rise to associations of a meeting point where different trails concur. We could therefore argue that Cage with an emphasis on 'centre' as the conceptualizing metaphor of a core of being makes an ontological transfer from a taxonomy of distinct and delimited objects to talking about *junctions of being* within an encompassing flood of becoming:<sup>566</sup> "So there is then an interpenetration of unlimited centers. This is a fundamental of Buddhism."<sup>567</sup>

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<sup>565</sup> This question will be discussed under the heading "Relation and relativity" at p. 234 ff.

<sup>566</sup> See for example my discussion of event and object concepts at pp. 90-94.

<sup>567</sup> Cage in interview, 1979, in Kostelanetz 2003, p. 44.

Cage further elaborates this conception of centre by connecting it to the Buddhist expression “most honored one of all.”<sup>568</sup> It is a short step to argue that Cage in this respect presents an ethical saying: Each and everyone should be approached, considered and behaved towards with the perspective of having their own junction of being that should be respected and venerated. That is, Cage links the concept of unimpededness not only to how the world is perceived, but also to ethical values of how we should approach it. This also includes an existential interpretation, because also included in this ethical stance is an approach to our own existence and potentiality: Our own being, existing amidst the interactive requests of life, is a place to venerate and is the place for our opportunity.

We could maybe restrict the concept of unimpededness to a perspectival quality – a quality of how we see and approach ourselves, others and rest of the world, for example, whether our view is obstructed by egoistic desires or not. Read like this ‘non-hindrance’ does not need to have any ontological consequences for the conception of interpenetration. We could imagine that unimpededness denotes the quality belonging to a certain perspective and that interpenetration is the feature the perceived reality shows when this non-obstructed perspective is applied. Cage however does not use unimpededness in this restricted way throughout his writings and utterances. Instead we are as often confronted with a concept that does not only describe a certain perspective, but also has ontological dimensions, as attested to, for example, in the quote at p. 229.<sup>569</sup>

Read as an ontological characterization, the concept becomes really challenging when it is paired with the next concept Cage defines: *Interpenetration*. ‘To impede’ is in Merriam-Webster’s dictionary explained by “to interfere or slow the progress of”<sup>570</sup> and the dictionary gives ‘hinder’ as a synonym for the verb. Unimpede means therefore the opposite: Not to hinder, not to interfere or slow the progress of. This could further be extended by reference to the verb ‘obstruct’ which in Merriam-Webster’s dictionary is explained by:

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<sup>568</sup> “The most honoured one” is often used to denote Buddha, and Cage’s alludes therefore to the Buddha nature in all beings, sentient and non-sentient alike: “Each thing whether sentient or non-sentient is at the center of the universe. Everything is the world honored one, in other words everything is the Buddha. So that means that no one of the Buddhas should look down on another Buddha.” (Cage in one of his last interviews. Kostelanetz 2003, pp. 274-275.)

<sup>569</sup> “From a non-dualistic point of view, each thing and each being is seen at the center, and *these centers are in a state of interpenetration and non-obstruction.*” (My italics.) See also quote at p. 243 (from *For the Birds*).

<sup>570</sup> “impede” in *Merriam-Webster.com*.

1 : to block or close up by an obstacle  
2 : to hinder from passage, action, or operation : [IMPEDE](#)  
3 : to cut off from sight <a wall obstructs the view>  
synonyms see [HINDER](#)

The opposite, non-obstruct, would therefore mean to not block, or hinder from passage, action, or operation. As mentioned before, ‘unimpededness’ and ‘non-obstruction’ appear as synonymous concepts in Cage’s aesthetic rhetoric, and according to the definitions Merriam-Webster gives of the verbs ‘impede’ and ‘obstruct’ it is interesting to look at Cage’s definition of ‘interpenetration’, because the state of unimpededness is correlated to being “penetrating and being penetrated by every other one no matter what the time and space”.

I have mentioned that we could read ‘centre’ as a significant substitute for ‘entity’ and thereby provide a different ontological framework where the anchors of being have become more open-ended. However, from the point of departure of ordinary use, the first association I detect is that the quality of interpenetration would threaten the quality of a non-obstructed state of any thing, any being. Straight away the pairing of ‘unimpededness’ and ‘interpenetration’ seems very paradoxical – how can something be in an unimpeded mode when it is infiltrated?

Several pre-understandings probably underlie this spontaneous reading, not least understandings of identity. That is, it is easy to associate an existential centre (a junction of being) to a kind of identity. From psychology, anthropology and sociology we have acquired theories of identity and identity-formation that have oozed into our daily language. We speak of crisis of identity, rootlessness, Norwegian identity and so on. However, the state of interpenetration outlined by Cage undermines these ordinary understandings of identity whether we are speaking here about a substantially based concept (identity as founded upon the membership of a distinct entity (like a group of people) assumed to have such and such characteristics), or identity as basically created through processes of differentiation (identities are created with a backdrop of what we do not identify with).<sup>571</sup> In the first instance we have to assume that there exists some or other constant in the transitory conditions whose qualities the identity is connected to. In the second, identity is created by going into a grid of oppositional terms – my identity is created (defined) in opposition to something/someone

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<sup>571</sup> See Nielsen 2000.

else.

The pairing of ‘unimpededness’ and ‘interpenetration’ both deconstructs the view of a constant entity whose properties define identity, and identity as created through processes of differentiation. Then, what kind of conception are we here presented with? To be at the centre of one’s existence in the mode of non-hindrance means neither to be uninfluenced or independent of others, nor to be in a mode of non-identification with anything. Cage speaks in fact about identification as central for a non-dualistic view. We can extend our starting excerpt as an example. Just before the given quotation Cage writes:

In the course of a lecture last winter at Columbia, Suzuki said that there was a difference between oriental thinking and European thinking, that in European thinking things are seen as causing one another and having effects, whereas in oriental thinking this seeing of cause and effect is not emphasized but instead *one makes an identification with what is here and now*.<sup>572</sup>

We could remark that it is not the complication of cause and effects that Cage accentuates here, but 1) the act of *identification*, and 2) the significance of the *here and now* in this act of identification. We are presented with an experience of presence that is defined by an inclusive and expansive capacity for identification. This capacity links Cage to a non-dualistic view where you do not “cautiously proceed in dualistic terms of success and failure or the beautiful and the ugly or good and evil but rather simply to walk on ‘not wondering,’ to quote Meister Eckhart, ‘am I right or doing something wrong.’”<sup>573</sup>

The image of a lot of centres that interpenetrate each other, though not, through this superimposed state, hindering the unique appearances of each, brings about a completely perforated notion of identity. Identity is completely conditional, relying in continuous processes of interdependent character. However, through the concept of centre, Cage accentuates a sense of locality in this flux of interconnectedness – like a node in an extensive nexus, a fold in a plane of Being.<sup>574</sup> This locality is placed within a positive framework, a connected horizon with no limit; the process of mutual arising, mutual entering, mutual reflection and mutual sameness has no real periphery: “One of the principles of Buddhist philosophy is that everything causes everything else, and that there is nothing that is not caused by everything else, and that each thing is at the center of the universe, and these

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<sup>572</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 46. My italics.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid. p. 47. This is written straight after the excerpt I have quoted in the beginning.

<sup>574</sup> These reflections will be further elaborated in the last part of this chapter.

centers are in interpenetration and non-obstruction.”<sup>575</sup>

#### 6.3.4 Relations and relativism

The potential interconnected non-dual experience of identity, expressed by not “cautiously proceed[ing] in dualistic terms,” brings us nevertheless to the question of *relations*. From one point of view, the conceptions outlined through the paired notions of ‘interpenetration’ and ‘non-obstruction’ add to the critique of essentialism put forward in relativistic theories. No thing exists unconditionally of anything else, everything infiltrates each other. However, we are at the same time presented a critique of seeing things in light of a relationally based matrix.<sup>576</sup>

We could ask what kind of relationships Cage refers to. Firstly, we could address Cage’s criticism to a dualistic perspective that operates with a kind of duplication between the ideal referent and the actual appearance. Such appearances are so to speak judged according to their relationship to an ideal form (a norm). This criticism was brought up in chapter three when we discussed the work-concept. Secondly, it is not only a Platonic world view that is attacked by Cage but also relativistic world views that, so to speak, have torn down Platonic ideals and substituted them with conventions. At the moment, it is not the conventional aspect per se that is of interest, but the presupposed logic of differentiation as founding these measures, and the need, so to speak, to violate conditions of indifference to bring about ruptures of sense. Although the created frames of reference are mobile, the need of dissection is not, and to catch the eye for what *is*, a purpose has to guide our view.<sup>577</sup> The equal subjecthood of agents, though potentially staged through competing accounts, is however like an unthinkable dream. The relational based classification means also the operation of relational structures of power – of the potency to define and the impotency of being defined.

Even though Cage criticizes a relationally based matrix of classification, he speaks about a perspective that demands all-embracing identification and empathy: We should approach all and everything as having its own centre. Would that not imply a kind of relativizing move in an extensive way? The aim would be to see anyone/anything as not defined in relation to our

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<sup>575</sup> Cage 1969, transcript of radio interview done by Richard Friedman.

<sup>576</sup> See former quote “From a non-dualistic point of view...” at p. 229.

<sup>577</sup> See for example my discussion of the Heideggerian ‘rift’ in chapter four.

own “purpose”, but seen as having their own existential hub. We could even argue that Cage advances a radical variant of relativism, asking us to relativize our own subjective view to those of other positions and in this sense be aware of our non-exclusive situation, though at the same time demanding an approach that does not define through relations, but sees all and everything in their unique, irreplaceable and unreduced being.

We could perhaps describe this move as a call to an extensive expansion of subjecthood, but if this should not imply giving credit for having an omnipotent potential of knowing the subjective positions and intentions of others, this would mean to take on a humble attitude of *non-knowledge* and relativize our own importance to the co-play of equally valued agents. In my introductory comments I recalled our discussion of ‘lack’ in chapter three. Cage, we could argue, presents a perspective that aims at avoiding a horizon of deficiency as the backdrop for experiences of presence – of what presents itself. This is exemplified in his argumentation against the positioning of value judgements at the heart of aesthetics:

Value judgments are not in the nature of this work as regards either composition, performance, or listening. The idea of a relation (the idea: 2) being absent, anything (the idea: 1) may happen. A “mistake” is beside the point, for once anything happens it authentically is.<sup>578</sup>

But are we thereby left with a visionless immediacy? The call for compassionate awareness of co-presence of subjectivity, relativizing one’s own position in the world to the extended condition of co-agency, points to different readings of Cage’s aesthetics of presence than that of the simple-minded *here and now* absorbed in the moment’s affirmative power. There is a need for the surveying sight, the double view of being located and compassionate beyond. Cage’s invocation of the empty reference of ‘no-self’ does not erase self-understanding but alters it.<sup>579</sup> The notion envisions a different scope; it opens horizons for re-understandings/re-experiences that modulate our active engagement with Being, our existence in the world<sup>580</sup>; it opens up the possibility to transcend the drive of egoistic desires and approach oneself as a node in a world of non-secluded ‘inter-being’.<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 59.

<sup>579</sup> The “empty” reference could even be thought as leaving space for a flexible notion, an identity in flow, situational adaptive and flexible. The apparatuses of projected visions, modified by the self-understanding of ‘no-self,’ opens a horizon of identity formation, not expecting to be confirmed through a settled category, but modified to be ready for the oscillating meeting, to situate the sense of identity and self-awareness in a position *flow*.

<sup>580</sup> See former presentation of Heidegger at p. 120 ff.

<sup>581</sup> ‘Interbeing’ is a term used by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. See McMahan 2008, pp. 150-151.

I want, in this respect, to anticipate an argument presented more fully in the last part of this chapter. Cage's aim to proceed non-dualistically can be approached in light of Merleau-Ponty's notion of a positive indeterminacy operating in the lengthening of the manifested. The sight's directionality is not guided by what is not there, but what can appear. In the awaiting gesture of the perceptive view, there is a readiness for the positive answer, the presence that still is not present: "a non-knowledge of something that had not yet happened."<sup>582</sup> Cage's prolonged identification could thereby be seen as tuned by a compassionate horizon of non-knowledge, an awareness of presence as positive indeterminacy. The "empty" identity, also invoked by Heidegger's notion of the *Dasein* of a historic world, is not resolved at the backdrop of the silence of death, but lived through a granting of affirmative meetings, the iterative oscillations of never-ending worldly formulations.

### 6.3.5 Experiential openness

We could argue that Cage's non-dualistic approach sites the domain of aesthetic meaning with the act of experience itself and the mode of presence that thereby can be explored.<sup>583</sup> Like Suzuki, he expresses suspicion of abstractions and emphasises the significance of direct experiences. Still, how can we through experience have access to that which falls between categories – how do we include the "noisy" climate of life in an epistemological sense?

Suzuki carries out a critique of theorizations that elevate linguistic logics to the heights of Truth. Through his Zen teachings, he points at dimensions of experiential possibilities beyond the confines of conceptual dualities. Based in this belief in experience, a personal arsenal of perceptive abilities is emphasised as the prosperous channel for an intimate knowledge of the founding structures of life. The immediate, personal experience therefore is the genuine source for knowledge in Suzuki's teaching. Suzuki himself draws a parallel between this view and the mystics' accentuation of personal experiences, represented for example by the Christian, Eckhart in the Middle Ages, and we could probably justify a reading of Suzuki's teaching of spontaneous awakening as a kind of mystic revelation, and further link Cage's aesthetics of presence to such views. This is, however, not what I intend to do. Instead I want

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<sup>582</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 39.

<sup>583</sup> The aesthetic meaning becomes connected to the opportunities of exploration, the possibilities of the experiment.



to emphasise the synaesthetic potential in the experiential view pronounced by Suzuki. That is, that we are not only knowingly linked to the world through our linguistic capacities. These capacities are bound to a whole aggregate of sensory apparatus that give access to multifaceted experiences of reality.

By synaesthesia I have partly in mind, here, the correlation between different experiential capabilities, such as the different sense impressions, that expand the view and make it richer, but not only that. As important is an accentuation of the flexibility involved in this multi-channelled system of experience where different capabilities not only add to each other but also act independently.<sup>584</sup> Like the difference between exploring the environment with eyes closed and surveying it with clogged ears, the diversity of our perceptive capacities shows so to speak a surplus potential; they add up and give us several “feet” to stand on. If we lose one, we have still others to rely on. I am thinking here about this surplus situation not only in a perceptive sense, but also in a creative, metaphorical sense: How the different apparatuses of perceptions leave spaces for different conceptualisations of the world and our existential situation.<sup>585</sup> We could for example imagine the difference it would have created to think ‘being-in-the-world’ from the act of listening instead of from the point of view of seeing.

Another aspect, illuminated by Merleau-Ponty and brought up in chapter four, is the *openness* in the perceptive readiness for the *meeting*, for what arises in the reciprocal structure of perception. The logic of awareness contains in this respect the element of expectation and responsiveness to the co-presence of agencies, of the conditionality of a formative reality.

The responsive and flexible condition of perception is further linked to an economy of attention. Lakoff emphasises that we are just conscious of a little portion of what informs us while orientating ourselves in the world. Many of those perceptive processes through which we experience are non-conscious and automatized.<sup>586</sup> However, even though the conscious

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<sup>584</sup> See for example chapter six, pp. 105-130, in Varela and Thompson and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind* (1991).

<sup>585</sup> Partly I have in mind here Lakoff’s theory of abstract concept as metaphorical, nurtured by embodied experience (see Lakoff 1999), and partly a remark by Bruce Johnson at the conference *Sonic Interventions: Pushing the Boundaries of Cultural Analysis* in Amsterdam, 2005. Johnston raised the question about the adequacy of theory according to the aurality of music. Theory, even the word – *theoria* inflected from seeing – is so modulated by the logics of sight. How then to theorize in line with an adequate logic of listening and sonic production? My aim is not to take up this question here, but just point at the creative potential at a conceptual level that the multiplicity of experiential abilities brings about.

<sup>586</sup> My point here is not to adequately outline a scientific theory of perception and cognition, but point at some markers of the flexibility that our embodied condition of experience represent.

agent is just the top of an iceberg of a network of interrelated apparatuses and systems, it is not a passive agent totally determined by automation. In this context I briefly want to present a reading elaborated by Göran in her study of Cage's creative practice from a performer's point of view.<sup>587</sup>

She emphasises the significance of destabilization that Cage's methods of rule-based procedures represents.<sup>588</sup> These procedures help to "reset" the performer's habitual views and draw attention to aesthetic fields formerly ignored. We also saw destabilisation as a point of reorientation in chapter four. What I want to accentuate at here is a notion of dissipative structures, of being in a mode of throughput, which Göran presents.<sup>589</sup> She explores a performative-attentive mode of being in the between and betwixt of liminality that is not coloured by the "abyss" of doubt, uncertainty and agonies of choice, but the affirmation of being in emergence. To do this, she presents Cage's works as designs of self-organising systems and couples this conception with the ideas of the "free" creative act in action painting and automatism in surrealism.<sup>590</sup> The automation provided by the procedures of disciplined action makes it possible to release the creative energy of the work as an autopoietic system, a collective of propelling contributions, "unhindered" by habitual censorship, and "free" the performers to stay within this intensified energy of appearance, being non-responsible for the result but responsive for what comes. The surrender to the work's autopoietic energy releases capacities of attention from control and judgement to be attentive to the energetic flow of becoming. The work as an experiment that the participants have the faith to join leaves capacities for an altered economy of attention to appear.

Cage's non-dualistic approach proclaims a non-reductionist view where co-partners are not reduced to objectives for one's purposes or desires but met as equal subjects. This, though, requires humility with regard to one's own agential potential and subjective position. One exists as a participant and not the sole actor. We saw also this relativization of the authorial role in the aesthetics of performativity where the alternations of roles points to the oscillation

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<sup>587</sup> Göran 2009.

<sup>588</sup> For an example of these rule-based procedures that discipline the act of composing, or performing, see also my analysis of *Variations II* in chapter four.

<sup>589</sup> Her thesis is written in Norwegian and the notion she uses is *gjennomstrømningsstruktur*. See Göran 2009, p. 4 and pp. 145-151.

<sup>590</sup> Both of these ideas searched to pave the way for altered experiences behind learned schemes of attention. Though the subconscious plays an important role in this respect for these artistic schools, Cage's acquisition does not pay much attention to the hidden sources of a self but directs it outwards, to the way we sense the world and find us selves within it. See Göran 2009, pp. 77-94.

between acting and reacting and subjectivity becomes a gliding state between positions of subject and object. The Cagean concept of interpenetration addresses in this respect similar issues as those raised by Fischer-Lichte's emphasis on the co-contributive character of performances. Cage, though, by his adoption of Buddhist phrases, seems to take this further – to a spiritual point of view where all and everything are seen as interconnected. Paired with his emphasis on the direct, first person experience, this could lead to a reading where the goal of his aesthetics is the mystic experience of unity with an inner and shared Being of things. Even if we did not fully pursue this path of mysticism, we could emphasise a holistic model of thought, in coming to grips with Cage's aesthetics, where all and everything are seen as neatly correlated to each other. I will however question such a reading. Instead I have found it more fruitful to think in web-based terms, allowing us to envision a looser conception of interconnectedness. My theoretical stance will in this respect be elaborated in the last part of this chapter, based in no small part on the continuation of our reading of Cagean concepts through a comparative analysis of some of his works.

## **6.4 Interpenetration and non-obstruction in Cage's artistic practice**

### **6.4.1 Musical notation**

Cage as an aesthetic thinker presents his reflections in texts and lectures that as much exhibit their meanings through literary forms and graphic design as report them in the ordinary genres of theoretical argumentation and criticism. We are dealing with a "philosopher" who performs his thinking in poetic turns that complicate the task of the conceptual detective. At the same time, it is exactly these literary qualities that make Cage's aesthetic rhetoric ravishing, striking and thought-provoking. Until now I have not taken so much notice of these performative features. I have presented readings, questions and reflections that basically are based upon what Cage has said. In what follows I want to direct attention to what he *does*. The guiding question is: How are Cage's concepts of interpenetration and non-obstruction visible in his artistic practice? And, in return, what do his practical explorations tell us about the scope of the presented theoretical conceptions?

I will in this respect analyse some notated compositions by Cage. These are works from the

series of *Variations*, written in the period from 1958 to 1978.<sup>591</sup> As mentioned in chapter two, Fetterman connects these pieces to the genre of *musicircus*,<sup>592</sup> and though *Musicircus* does not have a score, it is intertwined in Cage's practice of writing – a practice that explores new fields for music making through notational experimentations. The *Variations* are interesting in that respect. Pointedly, they explore notational possibilities that break with the linearity of ordinary notation and explore states of co-presence and simultaneity through techniques of writing.

I am not going to present all the pieces in the series, but will limit my survey to *No. II* (1961), *III* (1962-1963), *IV* (1963) and *V* (1965), with special attention to *No. IV*. Some of these have also been introduced earlier: *No. II* was discussed in chapter four, and I briefly presented *No. V* in chapter two.

As we have seen, *Variations II* is a highly open and indeterminate piece where performers are asked to use chance operations in the realisation of the work. However, even though the composition is very open-ended, it operates with specific musical (sonic) parameters: Frequency, amplitude, timbre, duration, point of occurrence in an established period of time and structure of event (number of sounds making up an aggregate or constellation). *Variations III*, on the other hand, does not mention sounds or music at all. *Actions* are here the main issue; the piece is for one or any number of people performing any actions. The character of these actions (musical, visual, or whatever) is not specified. *Variations IV* is again delimited to some form of musical composition (sound composition). The piece is for any number of players, any sounds or combinations of sounds produced by any means, with or without other activities. *Variations V* is a multimedia piece with an a posteriori score that refers to a performance already done.

All the scores, except *Variations V*, include the use of transparent sheets.<sup>593</sup> I find the translucent quality interesting. It alters the situation of writing: The transparent material can be superimposed, and even in this condition, notational signs written on different sheets can

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<sup>591</sup> The published version of *Variations VIII*, the last one in the series of *Variations*, is from 1978 but refers to a performance in 1967.

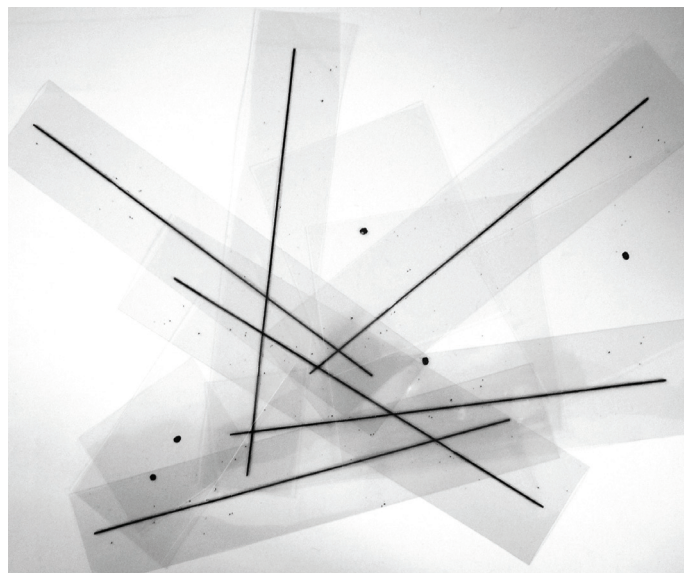
<sup>592</sup> "The musicircus genre begins within the series of eight *Variations* composed between 1958 and 1967." (Fetterman 1996, p. 125.)

<sup>593</sup> Cage began to use transparent sheets as material for scores in the late fifties. Examples are *Variations I* written for David Tudor's birthday in 1958, *Fontana Mix* (1958) and *Cartridge Music* (1960).

be seen. Visually, the transparency illustrates a condition of *non-obstruction*: It makes it possible for a set of notational signs to co-act in a multi-directional way beyond the linear logic of A causes B.

The score of *Variations II* is an eminent example. It has eleven transparent sheets: Six with a line and five with a point. To make a reading, the sheets have to be superimposed, preferably by chance. A constellation of points and lines appear that can be used to determine five sonic events. This type of notation – single notational signs on separate transparent sheets – opens a notational situation where any of the written symbols can interact with any of the others. This is not a system that is unidirectional and two-dimensional, read from left to right, top to bottom, but a notational universe of interacting possibilities that act in a multidirectional way and exhibit an equality in notational relevance (no possibility outlined by the score being really distant or irrelevant, but the sketched agents of possible conjunctions are equally present). Further, because of the translucent quality, signs can be superimposed without erasing the individual characteristics of the single elements. *Variations II*, therefore, provides us with an example where Cage creates a notational system, a form of writing, which reflects his concept of ‘interpenetration’ and ‘non-obstruction’ as characteristics of the indeterminate score.

Example: The score of *Variation II*, with the eleven transparent sheets randomly superimposing each other:



But what happens if we want to realize the piece? A performer of *Variations II* is almost obligated to make his/her own performance score if he/she wants to follow the score's instructions. Simply, this would mean to transform the visual quality of non-obstructive interpenetration to the traditional practice of unidirectional writing. Though the result would probably reflect Cage's expansive notion of continuity, presented previously in this chapter,<sup>594</sup> it would be the last notation that functioned as the score for the actual performance of *Variations II*.<sup>595</sup>

From this point of view, it is interesting to note some of the different approaches sketched in the instructions to *Variations III*:

Some or all of one's obligations may be performed through ambient circumstances (environmental changes) by simply noticing or responding to them.

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<sup>594</sup> See p. 226.

<sup>595</sup> The notation chosen would be dependent upon the performer's choice and could therefore be totally individual in its shape, nearly un-readably for somebody else. Pritchett has written an interesting article about David Tudor's realisation ("solution") of *Variations II* and how Tudor's choices of execution placed the realisation into a context of live electronics close to the compositional world he later explored as a composer. See Pritchett 2000.

Some factors though not all of a given interpenetration or succession of several may be planned in advance. But leave room for the use of unforeseen eventualities.

These guidelines reflect the condition of *interpenetration* as part of a performative attitude. The performer should be aware of ambient circumstances and environmental changes that take place in real time and adapt the performed actions and respond to these conditions. In other words, the planned actions should be open-ended enough to let the environment's own activity be included in the performance. This is emphatically expressed in the last comment:

Any other activities are going on at the same time.

The visual shape of the score of *Variations III* gives even further associations to a condition of non-obstructive interpenetration: The score consists of 42 equal circles on separate transparent sheets. By letting the circles fall on a horizontal plane, the circles can overlap each other in any combination. Cage, however, asks the performer to use a single maze of superimpositions as the base for a reading:

If a circle does not overlap at least one other circle, remove it. Remove also any smaller groups of circles that are separated from the largest group, so that a single maze of circles remains, no one of them isolated from at least one other.<sup>596</sup>

It is easy to associate this maze of circles with Cage's notion of a plurality of centres:

Therefore, there is a plurality of centers, a multiplicity of centers. And they are all interpenetrating and, as Zen would add, non-obstructing. Living for a thing is to be at the center. That entails interpenetration and non-obstruction.<sup>597</sup>

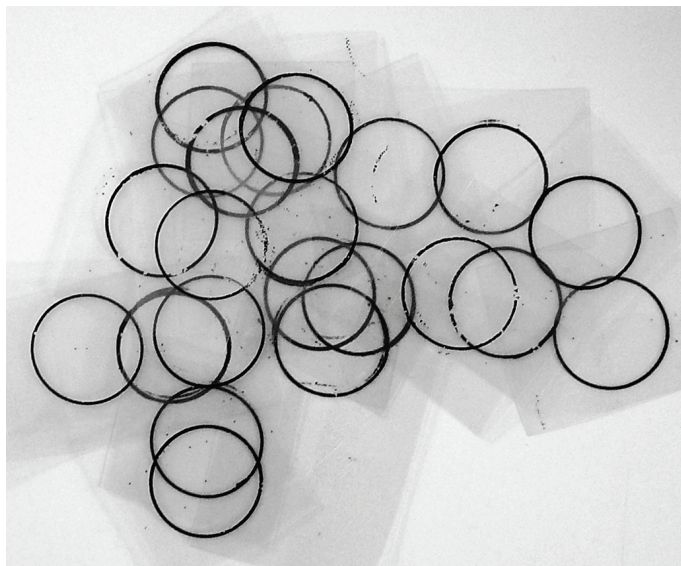
The score produces a condition of superimpositions without erasing the circles' circular character and their individual midpoint.

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<sup>596</sup> *Variations III*, score.

<sup>597</sup> Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, p. 91.

Example: The score of *Variation III*, with a single maze of overlapping circles:



*Variations III* focuses on actions. These are explored and handled as acts that fuse with others, both planned and unplanned. The situation created and investigated accentuates the intersections between acts and incidents: It explores the dynamics of interaction in a broad sense. The performer is in this respect asked to have an *open (non-obstructive)* attitude to these situations of concurrence. While *Variations II* reflects a situation of interpenetration in the compositional process and the process from score (concept/idea) to a worked-out performance (the process of realisation), *No. III* in addition explores this condition in the situation of performance itself.<sup>598</sup>

What about *Variations IV*? *Variations IV* also has single notational signs, each placed on a single transparent sheet of paper. There are seven with a point and two with small circles. Here the score is meant to interact with a map over the chosen performance site. The notational signs can be scattered, inside or outside of this mapped venue. Here the question is not of a single maze of overlapping circles, but the quality of diffusion of notational markers.

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<sup>598</sup> We could argue that *No. III* reflects the performative turn in the arts more distinctly than *Variations II*. *No. II* is a piece where many choices and decision-making processes are left to the performer. However, *Variations II* also, to a certain extent, asks the performer to take on the role of a traditional composer who writes his/her music before it is performed, resulting in a worked out composition. In contrast, the score of *No. III* emphasises the co-active dynamics at play in a performance. In this sense, it exemplifies the performative turn described by Fischer-Lichte more radically than *No. II*.



Space is the main theme, and Cage emphasises on several occasions the importance of space connected to a permeating dynamic of individual centres (particulars). One example is his accentuation of the need for enough space in a realisation of *Musicircus*, as we saw in a former chapter.<sup>599</sup> The link Cage makes between a condition of non-obstructed interpenetration of particulars and “enough space” is interesting, because lurking in the concepts of interpenetration and non-obstruction are also conceptions of general categories like space, time, identity and individuality. The metaphysics of Hua-yen Buddhism for example, where the concepts of interpenetration and non-obstruction have a prominent place, operates with a spatial unity where the distant is present in the near and the other way around. Such a spatial conception, where everything shares a spatial connectedness, implied in the notion of interpenetration, is also alluded to by Cage in a quotation previously referred to: “in fact each and every thing in all of time and space is related to each and every other thing in all of time and space.”<sup>600</sup>

As I have mentioned, Cage’s conception of *interpenetration* reflects a notion where a multitude of individual centres interact in a complex interplay that is too complex to be described in terms of linear causal relationships. This notion of a complex interacting dynamic has a spatial dimension. I want now to do a more minute analysis of *Variations IV*. The aim is, through an analysis of how space is handled in this piece, to reveal possible aspects of (or possible questions connected to) the understanding of extension implied in Cage’s notion of interpenetration and non-obstruction.

## 6.4.2 Space

### 6.4.2.1 Variations IV – a reading of the score

*Variations IV* is a piece for “any number of players, any sounds or combinations of sounds produced by any means, with or without other activities.”<sup>601</sup> In other words, it is mainly a piece where the material is sounds, but these sounds are not at all prescribed. Again we can compare with no. II. *Variations II* is also for “any numbers of players and any sound

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<sup>599</sup> See quote at p. 183.

<sup>600</sup> Cage, *Silence*, p. 46 ff.

<sup>601</sup> *Variations IV*, score.

producing means.”<sup>602</sup> However, no. *II* operates with sonic parameters that define the events of the piece: Frequency, amplitude, timbre, duration, point of occurrence in an established period of time, and structure of event. No. *IV* does not have any of these measures. The only parameter in operation is spatial distribution, including the possibility of using a public address system.

The score consists of an instruction and a transparent sheet with 7 points and two circles. This sheet should be cut up into nine pieces, seven with a point and two with a circle. Besides this, the instruction informs us that the score includes material not provided – a plan or map over the actual performance site. Thus:

- 1) “Material not provided: A plan or map of the area used for performance, and optionally a copy of it on transparent material”
- 2) “Material provided: Seven points and two circles on a transparent sheet. (Cut so that there are nine pieces, each with only 1 notation.)”

Further, the instruction informs us how to employ these points and circles:

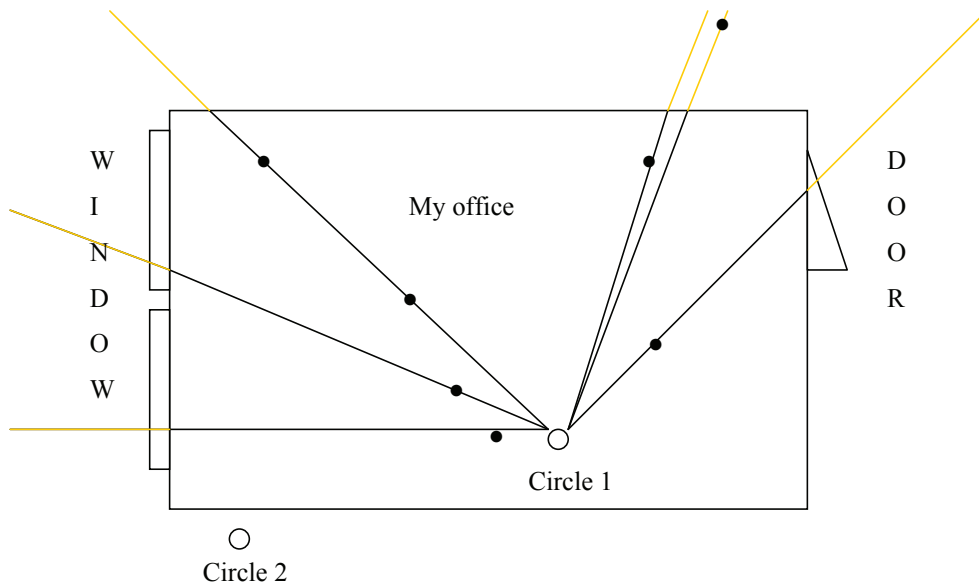
- 1) “Place one of the circles anywhere on the plan.”
- 2) “Let the other circle and the points fall on the plan or outside it.”
- 3) “Taking the placed circle as a centre, produce lines from it to each of the points. (Straight lines.)”
- 4) “The second circle is only operative when one of the lines so produced (one or more) intersects or is tangent to it.”
- 5) “Make as many readings of the material as desired (before or during the performance).”

By carrying out these operations a map will result where one circle is placed within the performance site. The second circle and the seven points will have fallen randomly on the same map, within or outside the mapped venue.

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<sup>602</sup> *Variations II*, score.

Here is an example. The performance site is my office:



The example above is the result of one reading of the score. What kind of information can we get from such a reading? The first action Cage asks us to do is to “place one of the circles”. Here Cage does not ask for an unintentional action, but an intended placement. However, action number two implies chance operations: “Let the other circle and the points *fall* on the plan or outside it.” The intentional placement of circle number one secures a certain control of how the unintentional spatial distribution, through action two, is organised. Circle number one establishes a spatial frame, not by outlining the outer borders, but by establishing a midpoint for spatial action (distribution).<sup>603</sup>

What do the circles, points and lines mean? How can this abstract notation be transformed into musical information? Some clues are given in the next paragraph of the instruction:

- 1) “Sound(s) to be produced at any point on the lines outside the theatre space (extend lines where necessary). Open door(s) pertaining to a given point. (Sound production may be understood as simply opening doors.)”

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<sup>603</sup> We can notice that this centre is asked to be placed on the map, not outside of it.

- 2) “Intersections of second circle = sound in total theatre space (public address system) or at any specific point on the produced line within the space.”
- 3) “Two or more points may be taken as a sound in movement. (Open pertinent doors.) Movement is also indicated by using transparent map in addition. A single notation will then give two points in space. Several of these may be associated with one sound.”

The straight lines from circle number one to the seven points indicate placement of sound sources (sound production means). In other words, placement is not primarily indicated by the points, but by the *lines*. These lines can be extended if necessary. Further, when circle number 2 is not operative (no lines intersect or are at a tangent to it) the sonic material has to emerge from the outside. Only when circle number 2 is in operation are sounds produced within the room. That means, figure 1 indicates no sonic production within the office, but the direction of attention to sonic events from outside. This could have been done, for example, by opening a window or the door. The lines connected to three points provide this interpretative possibility. The theme of a spatial inside and outside appears. This theme is not only articulated by the intentional placement of sound sources. The act of simply opening a door or window can direct attention to sounds that already exist in an environment. In the last case, the material in the example above would be the sonic events that by chance happened to occur from outside when we opened a window or the door.

What about the character of the actual performance sites? Does the score give any conditions for which venues suit or not? The instruction indicates different places for a performance: Theatre space (auditorium with doors) – 1) one floor, or 2) with balcony or balconies; building with one or more floors (when necessary open windows instead of doors); apartment or suite; closed space (cave); and outdoor space (any amount). These descriptions of possible sites are so varied that the resulting impression is that any place can be used.

The time span of a realisation is not outlined either: “Measurements of time and space are not required. When performed with another activity which has a given time-length (or on a program where a given amount of time is available) let the performance of this take a shorter amount.”<sup>604</sup> The second sentence leads to ambivalence. Should *Variations IV* take shorter

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<sup>604</sup> Loc. cit.

time than the other activity, or should the other activity take shorter time than *Variations IV*? This is just another example of the uncertainties that open Cage's instructive style to the co-creativity of the performers.<sup>605</sup>

Back to the first sentence: "Measurements of time and space are not required." As we have seen, the second sentence ("When performed with another activity...") can be understood to indicate that the total time span of a performance should be adjusted to the circumstances, for example, to how long another activity takes. But the score does not inform us how to measure, or how to define the durations of sound events within the total time span of the piece, nor is any tool given to obtain such measurements.

"Measurements of time and space are not required." Nearly a similar expression is used in *Variations III*:

Though no means are given for the measurement of time or space (beginning, ending or questions of continuity) [...] such measurement and determination means are not necessarily excluded from the 'interpenetrating variables'.<sup>606</sup>

Though rules for measurement can be used, they are not required. The piece is open to a form of *improvisation*, or perhaps we could say, *circumstantial-practical ways* of deciding time lengths.

What about space? The score says that measurements of space are not required. But the procedures of providing a map, letting chance choose places for sonic production/exploration, or the direction for the attentive act of listening, organise spatial-sonic activity that also temporalizes the room. The score provides a systematic approach to the dimension of space as dynamized by sonic activity and attention.

The score gives directions for the spatial distribution of sounds, or the distribution of spatial attention, and indicates that public address systems can be used, but a reading of the score does not tell us anything about the involved sounds' character, such as their frequency, amplitude, timbre and duration. The piece is mainly and broadly, almost in a general way, about the dimension of space as intimately part of musical production: Sounds as spatially

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<sup>605</sup> See for example the discussion of the text in *Scenarios* in chapter two.

<sup>606</sup> Score, *Variations III*.

defined, and the other way around; the space as defined (spatialized) by sonic activity.

The score, in this respect, operates with a generic notion of space. But in order to do a realisation, we would have to use the map of a specific location: From the generality of the score, the realisation draws attention to the co-dependent dimension of space and sound as only actual (existing/sounding/emerging) in the shape of a *specific* and *local* place – an embodied space-time emerging as a locality with sounding-resounding extensions. The outside is in this respect not an opposite, but an extension of the inside.

I have pointed out that circle number 1 is intentionally placed within the performance site (the map of the site). This placement secures a certain ramification of the piece's spatial radius of action. This ramification, though, is not defined by outer borders, but by a moveable centre of orientation with extendable horizons in all directions that have no limit, but fade away.

The score mentions the possibility of using a public address system, and we will now look at a realisation done by Cage and David Tudor that used radios, tape recordings, and sound sources recorded in and outside of the gallery where the performance took place. A recording exists, made of material from this realisation, and it is interesting to compare this recorded version with the reading just performed, not least because of the technology involved. Technologies of recording, amplification and broadcasting affect our conceptions of space and the relation between sonic reverberations and spatial topographies. Cage and Tudor's realisation indicates in this respect other generative factors and spatial reflections than those sketched in my reading of the score.

#### 6.4.2.2 *Realisation of Variations IV done by Cage and Tudor*

Cage and Tudor did *Variations IV* at the Feigen/Palmer Gallery in Los Angeles, August 1965. The live event lasted for six hours. The consequent recording, that I am going to refer to, consists of six sequences that last from 5'26'' (5 minutes and 26 seconds) to 15'28''. These sequences are excerpts from each of the hours that the live performance lasted.

A spoken introduction at the recording tells us that the live concert began with setting up the electronic equipment in two rooms that both became fully equipped with loudspeakers, radio tuners, tape recorders and a mixer. Cage and Tudor each controlled a mixer. Microphones

were placed at unusual places like out on the street, in front of the gallery's entrance, and on the bar counter. Sounds picked up by these microphones were used as sound sources together with radio broadcasts and tape recordings.

I have emphasised how *Variations IV* explores spatiality, spatial directionality, movements and points in space by interacting with the specific character of a venue. The rootedness in a distinct place is, though, not the impression I get from the recording. The stereophonic technology is used to present one collage at the right side and another at the left side. The result is a lively mixture with many different sonic fragments, but with little spatial exploration in an acoustical sense. It is like a flat one-dimensional soundscape.

The specific location does not colour the sonic result significantly either, even though we can hear conversations between gallery visitors, laughter and the noise of clattering glass and cutlery. The main impression therefore is not the sonic print of a specific place, but the global situation created by transmission and this topography's heterogeneous character through the presence of fragments picked from a diversity of soundtracks. We are brought into a world of *mediated sounds* – a collage where a diversity of sonic traditions collide and by their intersections create their own associative landscape (often funny and unpredictable). This diverse character is among other things created by having fragments that last so long that we can recognise genre, type of radio program, what is said (if we know the language), which language (different languages appear, even Swedish and Norwegian) and what it is that makes the sounds (cutlery, glass, et cetera). This includes the appearance of known musical works, real classics, and popular music that a lot of people have heard before and have a relationship with. In other words, the collage inspires to a play of associations, memories and additive meanings. My key-word for this experience is *broadcast*. It is interesting in this respect to compare this realisation with *Variations V* that also used technology extensively.

#### 6.4.2.3 *Variations V and technology*

As mentioned in chapter two, the first performance of *Variations V* was a multi-media event with dance, music and visual images. It was the result of a close collaboration between artists and engineers, and it had a setup that translated dance movements to governing signals within

the sound system.<sup>607</sup> The interaction between dance and sound produced a situation where contributive factors explicitly became mingled and created states that had no single cause but were the result of the co-activity of a diversity of interpenetrating factors and actions.<sup>608</sup>

The sound sources used in this interactive setup were mediated sounds: Signals received by short wave radios, sounds recorded on tape, small sounds sensed by contact microphones, transferred and amplified – the media itself and its own noisy materiality was the musical material. Cage’s remark in the score is an example of this: “Accept leakage, feedback, etc.”

The first performance used several systems – photoelectric cells, capacitive antennas, and contact microphones – to transform bodily movements to signals within the sound system. Because these systems were not synchronized, “miles of wires” caused delays in the systems,<sup>609</sup> and the dancers didn’t play the electronic devices as “sound instruments”, the technological systems explicitly acquired an independent role; they functioned as co-constituting participants of the event.

The music of *Variations V* is in fact what comes out after a complex journey within a non-synchronised distribution system, in addition to the sound of this distribution system itself. *No IV*, from 1965, and the multi-media event of *no V* enact a form of globalization locally that re-locates sonic activity and referential frames to new topographies of involvement, reaction and reprocessing (*no. IV*), exhibiting thereby new geographies of relational possibilities. The involved technologies in these processes are not passive devices of transmission but take on an agential role in the production of the sonic reality. These realisations reflect in this sense the sonic geography of a modern world that uses public address systems and music technology extensively.<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>607</sup> See description of the setup at p. 35 ff. Miller describes concisely how it functioned: “Whenever the dancers interrupted the light to the photocells or came within a four-foot radius of the antennas, they triggered switching circuitry in the mixer, which in turn fed six loudspeakers spread around the hall.” (L. Miller 2001, p. 545-546.)

<sup>608</sup> The work’s score is signed by Cage, even though the work resulted from a truly collaborative effort involving many different artists and engineers. See comment in chapter two, p. 36 ff.

<sup>609</sup> *A kind of anarchy: Merce Cunningham and music*, videotaped panel discussion. Merce Cunningham Dance Foundation Collection, New York Public Library.

<sup>610</sup> Kahn 1999 uses the invention of phonographic technology (patented 1877) to build up an argument about the new aurality and geography of sounds that thereby were created. The new technology captured the ephemeral sound for the first time. People could for the first time hear their own voice from a third person’s perspective, “un-boned” and unbound to their own bodily act of speaking. The phenomenon of sound could thereby enter into a totally new economy of distribution and representation.



As mentioned several times, Cage succinctly describes *Musircircus* in the foreword of *M* as:

Bringing together under one roof as much of the music of the surrounding community as one practicably can<sup>611</sup>

Cage and Tudor's realisation of *Variations IV* brings together many traces from different sonic worlds under the same roof. What does this tell us about space and locality? A collage is created that both mixes temporal traces and displaces spatial belongings to new areas of relevance and prolonging. Does this heterogeneous joining exemplify (bring about) a situation of connectedness that illustrates Cage's adopted conception of interpenetration?

#### 6.4.2.4 *Variations IV and space*

The score of *Variations IV* provides a tool to explore a sonic landscape as a spatial landscape and a spatial landscape as a sonic world. Our reading emphasised that this exploration lead us to the local site of the sonic-spatial enactment: The investigation/emergence of a specific location through sonic production and reverberations and their extendable horizons.

As we have seen, circle number 1 is placed on the map of the performance site. It outlines a certain spatial frame for the events, not by outlining the outer borders, but by providing a junction. Because the score can be read as many times as wished and circle number one does not have a fixed placed but can be placed anywhere on the plan, the orientational centre can be multiplied and we can arrive at a multifocal rendering. Cage's collaboration with the dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham is in this context worth mentioning.

Cage and Cunningham collaborated closely from the early 1940s to the end of Cage's life, and Cunningham says something very interesting about spatial orientations in the documentary *Cage/Cunningham*, a film from 1991. What he says, I think, can illuminate aspects of Cage's strategies in *Variations IV*. He recounts how he, as a dancer and choreographer, acquired a new way of understanding space. Through his education and early dance experiences he had learned to orient the body's movement according to a fixed space with a front, a back and two sides. The rule was that a dancer moved according to these

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<sup>611</sup> Cage, *M: writings, '67-'72*, p. xiii.

unchanging attributes of the stage – i.e. a settled space independent of the moving body.

Cunningham reports how his conception changed. Instead of operating with a front, back and sides as givens for orientation, he began to think of the dancers' positions, anywhere on the stage, as the orientational point from which to organise the dance.

I find Cunningham's new understanding of spatial orientation very interesting. He expresses a conditional understanding of space. For example: If there are eight dancers on the stage, they do not need to adjust their movements according to a general standard of front, back and sides. The dancers can employ different organisational schemes according to their own locality on the shared stage. In other words, the organisation of the space (or the use of the space) has eight different perspectives – perspectives that always move on and which are all as "close" as each other to their referential points. The space is not an external frame of reference, but a reference that the dancers carry with them. This point of departure – their own moveable centre – gives them multidirectional possibilities for their dance. Cunningham emphasises the feeling of freedom this conception created. It opened new possibilities of understanding directionality and spatial movements.

We could transfer this understanding to *Variations IV*. Circle number one situates a point of reference (a centre) for the sonic-spatial movements (directions). The space accordingly becomes organised from a point that radiates in all directions, and which does not have a fixed outer limit. Because the score can be read as many times as wished, a realisation can establish a plurality of centres, independent of each other, which all function as a reference for spatial distribution. In other words, a multiplied reading of the score can establish a multi-perspective rendering of a specific locality.

I will now introduce another perspective angle that brings to mind again arguments presented in chapter three: The romantic notion of the musical work implies that the work's character, identity and existence are *independent* (autonomous) of the different sites where it is performed. The work creates its own musical landscape with imaginary scenes, dramas and movements: It creates its own time and space. The aim of the concert hall is to enforce this musical-imaginative vision, not to intrude on or disturb it with its local attributes.

We could argue that *Variations IV*, quite contrary to the romantic work, has the local site as its main theme. This would follow a general turn of focus, emphasised by Fischer-Lichte, from the “eternal” aesthetics of the autonomous work to the conditional, ephemeral and concrete qualities accentuated by the performative turn in the arts. At the same time, we have seen how Cage and Tudor’s realisation is characterised by recorded and mediated sounds. Does this bring about an exploration of a spatial situation other than that of a “simple” turn of focus from the “eternal nature” of the autonomous work, to the ephemeral “here and now” of a given locality?

### 6.4.3 Co-agency

*Variations V* is not only an eminent example on the implementation of technology, but also of collaboration and a setup that fuses contributions. The technical devices have here a prominent position. The technological system becomes part of an interactive situation wherein this system functions both as actor and mediator. The performers are put into a situation where they have to relate themselves to a nest of intermingling factors that, to a great extent, act of their own accord. These factors and actions interpenetrate in ways that transcend simple linear relations where A causes B to happen. The event, or perhaps I should say events, are shaped by ongoing acts performed by co-existing independent participants (subjects). Within this mixture it is difficult to locate any fixed subject’s position. The individual’s intentions and actions emerge in a nexus intermingled with the actions of others, a network where the different materials themselves – radios, capacitive antennas, photoelectric cells, mixer – also actively take part. The subjects’ performative states interpenetrate each other, even though they act in an independent way. The technology involved, through its capacity to collect, translate and dislocate, explicitly mixes and emphasizes this fluid state of subjectivity – located and dislocated.

Quite obviously the composer of *Variations V* is just a participant together with many other contributors. What they are doing has consequences, but at the same time the events take their own directions, take their own shapes, beyond the control of the individual participants. Still, it is not a non-place that is revealed in this process, but a new performed locality where mediation, revitalization and accumulation of traces of time and space actively take part. It is a process of both relativity and independence, a process that shapes a concrete space-time by complex interactions between a plurality of agents, mediating technologies and anchoring free

floating “unboned”<sup>612</sup> traces of time and space. At the same time, the processes are already ahead into new situations, new realities with new possibilities. There is always an overflow – the embodied state is already in a state of distribution and new topological configurations.

#### **6.4.4 The aesthetics of interpenetration in compositional terms**

In the first part of my introduction to Cage’s conception of interpenetration and non-obstruction I pointed to a view of co-presence and an inclusive awareness to conditions of co-activity and dependence that exceed simple causal relations – A causes B – or the teleology of intentional acts. However, though this view is directed to a relational complexity, we are challenged not to reduce things to relative values, but approach them in their unique singularity. I rendered this as a call to extend the sense of subjecthood. The relativizing move is, so to speak, absolutized where no entity sustains the relation’s differentiating force, but not only that. No *aim* for differentiation sustains it either: ‘Interpenetration’ as pointing to an interrelated perspective on existence undermines the organising principle of *difference* that many theories of relativism rely on. Instead we could argue that Cage asserts a relativity that does not have difference as its pivot, but the conditional mode of co-presence expressed in the Buddhist term *dependent origination* and the epistemological dehiscence of *experiential openness*. Though, before we explore such a path of thinking closer, I would like to emphasise some points in a continuation of the comparative analysis just presented.

The techniques of writing developed by Cage that use transparent sheets break the drift to a linear and narrative logic of events. Instead we are presented with a universe of possibilities that exists “all at once” – non-discriminately. We could explain this co-present universe with Odin’s reading of the Hua-yen metaphysics of unhindered interpenetration. The doctrine of unhindered interpenetration implies a microcosmic-macrocosmic model of reality wherein each dharma or event becomes a living mirror of the totality, reflecting all other dharmas – past, present and future alike – from its own standpoint in nature. The one universe is multiplied ad infinitum in a panoramic and kaleidoscopic spectacle of simultaneous-mutual-reflections:<sup>613</sup>

Finally, Fa-tsang asserts that all particles of dust not only interpenetrate in the spatial sense whereby the

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<sup>612</sup> See footnote about Kahn 1999 at p. 252.

<sup>613</sup> Odin, p. 16.

ten cardinal directions are immanent in a single atom, but also in the much more radical sense of *temporal* interfusion such that hundreds of thousands of infinitely long periods are immanent in a single thought-instant, thereby establishing the strictly symmetrical structure of internal relations between all events.<sup>614</sup>

We are presented with a well-balanced universe where the singular fully reflects the universal. There is a perfect net of reflections. However, the envisioned “all at once” of the score is paralysed as long as it is not put to use. The direction to performance – to be *done* – does something with this envisioned all-embracing universe.

To be realised, to be put into operation, the score points towards the locality and situation of enactment. The creative energy thereby released points to processes of embodiment on a big scale, not as a confined singular organism but a “non-continuous”<sup>615</sup> surplus of heterogeneity that evades a unifying frame story. It is in continuation with these lines that I will transfer my theoretical frame of reference from Cage’s Buddhist inspired rhetoric to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of *flesh*, a view of the “here and now” as complex, and Karen Barad’s notions of *intra-activity* and *discursive-material practices* through her post-humanist concept of performativity.<sup>616</sup>

## 6.5 The hermeneutic situation radicalized – a displacement of pivot

### 6.5.1 Flesh

I mentioned in chapter four that the ‘body’ as a methodological figure represents an opportunity to think temporal conjunction and meaning formation differently from the sign’s manner of operation. But though the figure of the body has the capacity to mediate the relation between the transitory moment and a lasting state, it also transforms the perspective in this respect. It is not basically through the grid of “paired function differences”, but by being included in life projects through embodied states that moments become sustained. The body as an inertial system of presence maintenance can illustrate an actualisation of meanings

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<sup>614</sup> Odin, p. 22.

<sup>615</sup> See former presentation of ‘no-continuity’, p. 226 ff.

<sup>616</sup> Beside the sources that are presented in the next section, I will also mention Code’s (2006) presentation of ecological thinking, Landa’s geological metaphors applied within ontology and Berman’s (2004) comparative presentation of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and Nagarjuna’s teachings as formative for the reading and theoretic perspective outlined in the last part of this chapter.

that harbour their impact by their singular positivity bound to a local<sup>617</sup> site within an extended web of connections. The paradigm of embodiment opens in this respect a theoretical awareness for the multifocal qualities and horizontal structures involved in the production of meaning and actuality by in fact lending an ear to the physicality of our lives. In what follows I want to go further into this theoretical terrain with a reading of Merleau-Ponty's notion of *flesh* in a continuation of my Heidegger reading presented in chapter four. This will also extend the discussions introduced under the notions of embodiment and art as event, presented in the same chapter.

The phenomenon of being-in-the-world is for Merleau-Ponty like Heidegger the basic condition from which to think epistemological questions. The world is not a foreign place for us. We have a primordial relationship to our surrounding prior to objective knowledge. Before we have made any propositions, the world is exposed to us as our space for action and obstruction, potentiality and fate, co-existence and community, interplay and acknowledgement. We are born as reverberating, responsive structures that cannot evade being moved; that cannot evade being tuned to the environment's requirements. In this sense the world has an immediate and emergent sense that we cannot flee.<sup>618</sup>

Merleau-Ponty though scrutinizes this condition more concretely from the point of view of being/having a body than Heidegger's spatial-temporal notion of *Dasein* suggests.<sup>619</sup> Through Merleau-Ponty's focus on perception, *Dasein* becomes not a fleshless existential structure, but the phenomenon of "being-there" becomes inspected with a specific attention to the "fleshy" state of this condition. We are in the world as perceptive/thinking/aspirational *bodies*. *Dasein* becomes embodied, a body-subject that is "actively engaged with the environment in which [it] finds [itself], trying to solve problems in [its] existence and adapting [its] behaviour in the light of the solutions [it] finds to those problems."<sup>620</sup> The notion of *flesh* can be seen as a continuation of this turn to the bodily significance, and it does not only give *Dasein* a fleshy outfit, it also displaces the point of gravity within the Heideggerian structure of being-in-the-

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<sup>617</sup> That as local, this site will also take on the character of being *unique*.

<sup>618</sup> See my presentation in chapter four, p. 152 ff.

<sup>619</sup> We could argue that the bodily character of being in the world is implied in Heidegger's theory by emphasising a primary mode of doing where things in the world show up (get meaning) as 'ready to hand' beside operating with facticity as one of the existentials that structure *Dasein*. (Heidegger, *Being and Time*.) However, the bodily condition of *Dasein*, in its concrete fashion as a prerequisite for being in the world, is so to speak absent from the analyses performed in *Being and Time*. The phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty differs in this respect from Heidegger.

<sup>620</sup> Matthews, p. 85.

world. It can thereby give rise to a radicalisation of the hermeneutic situation that even transforms its operative logic.

Though Heidegger presents conceptions that surpass the subject-object polarity of epistemology, he operates with oppositional forces that through their oppositional drive open a field for a knowing relationship to Being. The ‘world’ is a disclosing force that clears glades for the play of being to be revealed, against which ‘earth’ is the closing force – “that which shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up.”<sup>621</sup> The ‘rift’ stands in the middle of this productivity, and through the metaphor of strife it becomes as a zone of high intensity that holds apart the opposing parties, though both are attracted to what is offered there at the front line, like two parties grabbing the same thing but pulling it in opposite directions. Easily, therefore, we get the picture of ‘earth’ and ‘world’ as contesting forth a space for reflection by pulling a current state in different directions. This is transformed by Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the chiasmic structure of the flesh. It is not by the dynamics of contestation, visualized as strife between two opposite forces – ‘world’ and ‘earth’ – which creates spans and tensions in the play of Being. The spans are created by the pulsating movement between sensing and being sensed, in excess of itself and coming back, perceiving and being perceived. This structure of reversibility has the germ of divergence, a dehiscence of exterior-interior that operates in the embodied constitution itself. As reinterpreted, the disclosing force (‘world’) and the closing force (‘earth’) become dynamics of the same dimensionality (*flesh*), though not understood as opposite forces, but exhibited through the dynamics of reversals.

The term *flesh* I understand as a notion whereby we can think the being-in-the-world from basically an embodied point of view where the significance of the physicality of both ourselves, others and the rest of the world is taken seriously though without reducing us to biological automata. The notion enables us to surpass the idea of spirit versus matter, consciousness versus object, intentionality versus mechanical-causal explanatory model, intellectualism versus empiricism. *Flesh* aspires in a sense to embrace both the concrete quality of materiality, its inertia, mass and experienced specificity, and the “spirit’s” evasive and immaterial character where neither matter nor spirit is reduced to each other’s by-products. The transcendence of spirit is immanent in the fluidity of materiality, and the

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<sup>621</sup> Heidegger 1971, p. 47.

processes of embodiment incorporate the movement of transcendence (spirituality) in its actuality. Mind is in the continuation of the body, and the body is in the continuation of mind in processes of continuous embodiments.

But though we arrive at a spiritualized body and an embodied mind, this unification does not present us a figure of pure identity between intentionality and actuality, aspirations and brute facts: We do not get a pure surface with no depths. The chiasmic structure of the flesh makes the *now* “thick”, the *here* “deep”. We are presented stretches and folds where the invisible haunts the visible in a structure of asymmetric reversibility where we never are able to have the total picture – the visible will always have a support of invisibility – and when we want to explore this hideous latency, the perspective and time will necessarily change producing new blind spots. We can never supply a view by an exact return; we can never come to a complete introspection of our own act of perception. To a certain degree our point of view will always evade us, and from the point of view of that other that we direct our perception at and become absorbed by, this exceeds our perception: There is always more to explore, more to envision. At both ends there is a *positive indeterminacy*.<sup>622</sup> The visibility of Being points to a field of latency and dimensionality that never stops to promise new configurations,<sup>623</sup> solutions and discoveries.

The notion of *flesh* has the capacity to create an idea of Being as extensive – a dimension with a multitude of bulges and folds that through these swellings adds a myriad of vertical structural possibilities to the founding horizontal plane. Instead of establishing a view for the play of Being through the settlement of provisional totalities, the ontology of flesh places this

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<sup>622</sup> Besides an asymmetric reversibility and the hideous supplement that this process presupposes, I also read the 'visible' and 'invisible' in line with the extendable lines to be found in the score of *Variations IV*. Though the formulation of visibility acquires its specific character by taking place in and shaping a locality, its pivot has endlessly extendable horizons in all directions, both discursive and material, that more fades away than breaks off in total silence. The 'invisible' operates not as the structural opposite to the visible, but as the promise of a presupposed lengthening that continuously grants the appearance of new visible formulations but never fulfills them in full exposure. This is inspired by my previous presentation of Cage's concept of interpenetration and an extensive call for empathy. I understand the notions of 'invisible' and 'visible' in this respect not necessarily following the axis of abstract concept contra present physicality, or universal notions contra specific manifestation. As the extensive call for identification includes in its view the indeterminacy and "invisibility" (from a individual position) that other localities represent in an extensive field of co-habitation, and enacts formulations of visibility with this acknowledged indeterminacy as a soundboard, we can also think about the visible and invisible in terms of apparatuses of general notions, creative abilities and visions that both are close at hand, distinctively present in the formation of visibilities, and further away, having endless horizons of "invisible" support – in terms of history, creativity, cultural and social resources, et cetera. This points to Barad's discursive-material practices soon to be presented.

<sup>623</sup> For my use of 'configuration,' see the coming reading of Barad.



opening for active engagement with the *is* at the coil of exchange, the responsive dynamics that emerge through the plurality of agential viewpoints<sup>624</sup> – through the plurality of dehiscences co-acting at a horizontal plane of becoming (Being). Through this pulsating activity visibility is created and acted upon, and its formulating activity is anchored in a local environment, a local region, within a dimensionality that in principle can be extended infinitely. This gives a view to a horizontal productivity of Being that is multifocal in its operation without a master's plan but having the germ to bring about self-formative structures that in their co-activity widen the one-dimensional view to a kaleidoscope of excavated worlds, a diversity of embodied widened-out histories, life-practices and referential frames. Interconnectedness can thereby be viewed as a heterogeneous affair although things are intimately connected.

### 6.5.2 Complex presence

The notion of *flesh* can help us to think the ontological condition as basically grounded in a horizontal plane of interconnected becoming. But as mentioned, this levelling down of ontology's centre of gravity does not imply that we are left with a pure surface, a deterministic one-way drive of behaviouristic instincts, or a blast of the surveying sight. *Flesh* has also the ability to envision inertia, depth and excess; how the fleshy condition of Being folds up the seemingly elusive surface of the moment to complex forms of presence.

I want in this respect to emphasise three points:

- 1) Self-formative dynamics;
- 2) Embodiment of tenses in different tempi and formula, building up layers of Being and creating different world-lines;
- 3) Plurality of world-lines, agential nodes and 'chance'.

Through the chiasmic structure of flesh we can envision a dynamic where agential nodes are created that exhibit autonomous impact on their surroundings though not, at the same time, being secluded from this environment. That is, the junction created by the folded movement

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<sup>624</sup> My reading is here inspired by Barad's agential realism that I am soon to present. 'Agential viewpoints' are in this respect not reserved for human agencies but characterize the whole spectrum of life forms and processes of materialization. Irrespective of being human or not, these life forms and processes contribute to distinguishing the specific discursive-material configurations of a topological site. See forthcoming presentation.

of the flesh, becomes not only a result that repeats, or simply reacts to a former situation, it halts the stream of becoming, whirling it up, and can redirect its direction. It genuinely contributes to what happens.<sup>625</sup> Though we can speak in this respect about autonomy in terms of genuine contributions, the result of a contribution will mingle with others, and we will get a situation with participants that through their interrelated offerings create a specific environment. In this sense, we also get self-formative potentials from which to think creative evolutions of a multitude of orientational visibilities/soundboards,<sup>626</sup> not from a master's plan, but through the bubbling energy – the surplus and uncertainty given by the oscillating/exchanging/feeding movement between co-contributors enacting at each point of the extensive space-time body.

Correlated to the outward engagement of flesh – its energetic stretches and restless condition – a returning movement folds moments upon each other, accumulates tenses and embodies spaces as a local thickening in a web of connections. Thinking upon these processes of “thickenings” as based in the seed of self-formative processes at a horizontal plane of interconnectedness, and not lined out by the prescription of a superior structure, opens for a non-linear, non-synchronized view of co-presence, a mix of agential centres that embody the flow of becoming in various tempi, excavate the world in different directions and creates/continues the drive of different world-lines. We get a heterogeneous universe with various solutions and resources, embodied as layers of Being, non-synchronous formula and dissimilar practices of life, which exist side by side.

From this sketched scenery of a bubbling universe that at each point contributes to an excavation of the moment to a plurality of referential frames, connectional links and layers of spatiotemporal stories, I would like to introduce the concept of ‘chance’ through a reading of Cage’s ‘chance operation’ done by Katherine Hayles (1994). She emphasises how randomness contributes to instruct the decisive character of events. Her reading uses definitions of chance and randomness elaborated within a scientific context, such as of nonequilibrium thermodynamics and information theory (mathematics).<sup>627</sup> The first definition

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<sup>625</sup> My reading is here based on Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the perceptive body where the involved, engaged, anticipative intentionality is part of our intimate relationship to the world as sensing beings. See Merleau-Ponty 1994.

<sup>626</sup> ‘Orientational visibility’ means in this context a ‘field of vision’ and ‘soundboard’ representing a ‘space for reverberation’.

<sup>627</sup> Hayle’s refers for example to Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers’ work on irreversibility and the

focuses upon the unpredictability that emerges when different world-lines (which in themselves can be described/prescribed according to a deterministic logic of cause and effect) merge or coincide. Like the calamitous situation of a car being hit by a rockslide where the driver is injured for the rest of his/her life, the probability of such an incident is minimal, but when it happens the collision of the driver's intentions (for example to attend a meeting) and the development of a fissure in the rock – two lines of reasons that have initially nothing to do with each other – creates an irreversible new situation. Or, like the more fortuitous example given by Hayles: The probability that exactly *I* should have been born is in fact very little. A multitude of circumstances have to fall together to create the condition for my birth.

Hayles presents, in this context, a concept of chance that defines randomness as concurrences between initially independent chains of cause and effect. That is, each of the chains can be viewed as strictly defined by causes, but because of unpredicted concurrences unforeseen situations emerge. In other words, 'chance' defined as an accidental connection could not have been predicted from the view of the individual chains involved.<sup>628</sup>

The second definition Hayles outlines focuses on chance's directional character, and how the quality of randomness informs the irreversible character of time. Time cannot be rewound because of the play of coincidences. 'Chance' expresses itself as a horizon of possibilities in a given situation, but from this ocean of opportunities one crystallises and becomes directive for what happens next. Hayles refers in this respect to Cage's operations. Before he has thrown his coins, a magnitude of options are present, but by the throw 'chance' chooses which of these shall be instructive for the result and the flow of the work's events.<sup>629</sup>

Because there exists a countless amount of alternatives at each point of real time, a gap emerges between past and future – there is a barrier of information. We can reconstruct events, but during their course in real time there would have been countless other possible directions that they could have taken. Because of this multitude of possible directions, the chance for an exact repetition of events is minimal. This barrier of information secures time's one-way direction, inevitably heading into an unknown future.<sup>630</sup>

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mathematician Gregory Chaitin's work on random numbers. See Hayles 1994, pp. 232 and 235.

<sup>628</sup> Hayles 1994, p. 227.

<sup>629</sup> Ibid. p. 231.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid. p. 232.

Hayles further links this informational barrier to a third definition of ‘chance’ developed within information technology. This definition is connected to the amount of information needed to represent a number. The asymmetry that randomness represents is not reducible to a formula based on regularity. The most economical way to represent randomness is to copy its asymmetry. Based on this argument, the amount of information augments when the level of randomness increases. However, this is not the conclusion of information scientists. Randomness increases the amount of information only to a certain point: “After that point, the quality of information decreases as randomness continues to increase. This construction allowed them to interpret information as an interplay between order and randomness, expectation and surprise.”<sup>631</sup>

Hayles connects the three above presented definitions: Accidental concurrences create temporal asymmetry. This asymmetric situation brings about an informational barrier that separates the past from the unknown future, and chance’s irreducible character leads to this maximum of information that creates this barrier.<sup>632</sup>

These definitions of chance can illuminate the energetic climate at the intersectional lines between different drives and intentions – between agential nodes in a web of possible interactions/concurrences – and not only that, but also how these zones of interactions and concurrences create decisive and irreversible states. We could now transfer these comments to Cage’s invocation of no-continuity through the use of chance operations. It is not the indifferent state of irresoluteness that is explored, but the meaning of the intersectional lines that traverse our life indiscriminately whether we are humans, animals, stones or bacteria.

Through the notion of *flesh* I have outlined a possible understanding of Cage’s ‘interpenetration’ that emphasises a heterogenic and instable condition. Though the notion of *flesh* allows us to envision an affinity between all forms of beings through their mutual belonging to the dimension of flesh, and in addition a non-dual conception of spirituality and matter through flesh’s chiasmic structure, the notion also outlines the possible alterity between life-forms because of their local formulation within an extensive plane of Being.

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<sup>631</sup> Hayles 1994, p. 237.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid. p. 238.

Further, the co-agency that thereby arises and operates, does not act in a sectorial manner. We get what I will call ecological situations. As mentioned before, Cage's use of chance can be seen as a critique of unquestioned anthropocentrism. He initiates situations that voice presence as not exclusively defined in human terms, but as part of a wider context. It is in this respect I will introduce Barad's *agential realism* and her notion of *post-humanist performativity*.

### 6.5.3 Post-humanist performativity

Barad writes in "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter" (2003) that "language has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every "thing"—even materiality—is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation."<sup>633</sup> We touched on this problem in chapter four, and I argued that though the concept of performativity builds its sense upon action and embodiment, this concept can also end in a kind of constructive trap where matter ceases to matter. What is done and embodied is simply read as the partial enactment of collectively shared scripts. Reasons beyond the domination of human conventions become invisible and intangible. Barad takes this question a step further and undertakes the task of elaborating a conception that manages to account for the significance of matter. Through a reading of Bohr's philosophy-physics that brought him to the quantum model of the atom, Barad envisions a seamless elaboration of 'embodiment' that includes all kinds of beings, humans and non-humans alike – animate or not. Materiality and discursivity are not placed opposite each other but shape joint practices of ongoing reconfigurations of the world. I think Barad's conceptual elaborations can help to illuminate how Cage's performative techniques matter in a materialistic sense though without losing the horizons of being staged (*mise en scène*), which include discursive and intentional elements.

Like the universe of dependent origination (Buddhism) and the fleshy condition of Being (Merleau-Ponty), Barad operates with a universe that has no prior independent entities beyond the conditional (re)figurations that appear and enact in the process of becoming themselves. And like the emphasis on process within process philosophies, she outlines a world that never

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<sup>633</sup> Barad 2003, p. 801.

stands still other than through the iterative movement of (re)actualisations. Culture and nature are in this respect reconciled. The paradigm of embodiment, described in chapter four, where the physical body has to be thought as a historical body that has incorporated social and historical conditions, is by Barad extended to the production of all phenomena. In this sense, she also places the human agency not opposite a passive nature, but intimately as part of an agential realism that includes the activity of nature. Culture is not immaterial, and nature is not ahistorical. It is in this sense I find Barad interesting for my project, because Cage's aesthetics of chance, indeterminacy, no-continuity, silence, performativity, insist so to speak on the co-activity of the material, of the produced/found sounds. The creativity explored happens in the meeting points between different agential forces, including the material's own drives, histories, causalities, and potentialities. Cage's techniques, which perforate human habitual intentionality, enforce these other agential factors and direct a magnifying glass towards these mingled processes, between human agencies, cultural forms, inanimate materials and lively situations, processes where the elements do not disappear in mingled diffusion, but affirm themselves as the creation of a concrete, specific (sonic) environment.

Barad presents an *agential realism* through which she bases her post-humanist concept of performativity. That is, she presents a performative account of the production of material bodies that is not limited to human activity but presented as a general ontology – a performative metaphysics.<sup>634</sup> This performative account relies on a relational ontology that advocates “a causal relationship between specific exclusionary practices embodied as specific material configurations of the world (i.e., discursive practices/(con)figurations rather than “words”) and specific material phenomena (i.e., relations rather than “things”).”<sup>635</sup> This causal relationship is called *agential intra-action*.<sup>636</sup> Causality is thereby also re-interpreted. We can pause the presentation of Barad's theory here for a moment and remind ourselves about the feedback structure presented in chapter four.<sup>637</sup> The autopoietic feedback coil

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<sup>634</sup> Barad, pp. 811-814. Barad comments on her use of metaphysics in this respect by referring to ‘experimental metaphysics’ that takes place in physics laboratories around the world “calling into question the common belief that there is an inherent boundary between the ‘physical’ and the ‘metaphysical’.” (Barad 2003, p. 812 and elaborated in Barad 2007, pp. 287-352).

<sup>635</sup> Barad 2003, p. 814.

<sup>636</sup> Loc. cit. The reason that Barad uses ‘intra-action’ instead of interaction is to emphasise that there exists no prior things apart from being constituted through the activity of ongoing (re)configuration, through iterative intra-activity. The primary ontological units within her performative metaphysics are therefore not “things” but phenomena – dynamic topological reconfigurations/entanglements/relationalities/(re)articulations –, and the primary semantic units are not words, but material-discursive practices. (Ibid. p. 815-818.)

<sup>637</sup> See p. 112 ff.

presented there, problematized a linear understanding of cause and effect, or intention/idea/aim and result. Instead we were presented with an oscillating structure of responses where an act's effects are dependent upon the reaction. Further, we pointed at the openness of the responsive structure in its passing of the initiative to the other part to be answered and returned. Barad points at similar dynamics. The potency of cause and effect relies in their intra-activity. That is, Barad accentuates the inseparability of "observed object" and "agencies of observation," of phenomena and apparatuses.<sup>638</sup> To use a vocabulary introduced in chapter four, an apparatus, or "agencies of observation," means a specific physical arrangement that implies an intervention in the world, a *mise en scene*, that initiates dynamics of feedback (*intra-action*) through which phenomena ("observed objects") arise.

In the context of agential realism Barad reworks the relation between discursivity and materiality. She emphasizes that matter does not only matter because it "support' particular discourses that are the actual generative factors in the formation of bodies."<sup>639</sup> Matter *intra-acts* with the physical arrangement of the discourse. 'Discourse' (not what is said, but that which constrains and enables what can be said) as a horizon of guiding lines, seen opportunities and a toolbox for perception and action, functions indefinitely as long as it is not put to use. Discursivity performs its significance through its application. Barad therefore outlines discursive practices as specific material (re)configurations through which "local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted."<sup>640</sup> This means also that it is firstly through their execution that discursive practices get their definition. They have to be used in a local situation, that is, as a topological (re-)configuration of the world which entails the initiation/invitation of specific intra-active dynamics to emerge.<sup>641</sup> Matter is not innocent in this respect. It is not "little bits of nature, or a blank slate, surface, or site passively awaiting signification,"<sup>642</sup> but already an ongoing historicity that acts through intra-activity: "Matter does not refer to a fixed substance; rather, matter is

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<sup>638</sup> Barad 2003, p. 814.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid. p. 823.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid. p. 821.

<sup>641</sup> Barad contrasts the concept of topology with that of geometry. While geometry is concerned with shapes and sizes, "topology investigates questions of connectivity and boundaries." (Barad 2003, p. 825.) This is further explained in Barad 2007: "Understanding the dynamics of this complex 'trans-action' – which involves not merely the transgression of spatial and other material-discursive boundaries but a re(con)figuration of the space-time-matter manifold itself – requires topological analysis. Questions of size and shape (geometrical concerns) must be supplemented by, and reevaluated in terms of, questions of boundary, connectivity, interiority, and exteriority (topological concerns)." (Barad 2007, p. 244.)

<sup>642</sup> Barad 2003, p. 821.

substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity.”<sup>643</sup> Materiality is discursive, just as discursive practices are always already material. That is, material phenomena “are inseparable from the apparatuses of bodily production: matter emerges out of and includes as part of its being the ongoing reconfiguring of boundaries,”<sup>644</sup> and discursive practices “are ongoing material (re)configurings of the world.”<sup>645</sup> Therefore, “the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity.”<sup>646</sup>

Barad’s reworkings of discursivity and materiality through the notion of agential realism aims to avoid both the distance of reality as only available through mediating tokens, or the transparent or immediate givenness given to it in the traditional empiricist assumption. The objective referent becomes, in Barad’s reworking, phenomena, (re)configurations that both define apparatuses and the measured, cause and effect.

Through Barad’s reworked version, all bodies, not merely human ones, “come to matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity—its performativity.”<sup>647</sup> In this sense, human “bodies are not inherently different from ‘nonhuman’ ones.”<sup>648</sup> What is at issue is “a material dynamics of intra-activity: material apparatuses produce material phenomena through specific causal intra-actions, where “material” is always already material-discursive—that is what it means to matter.”<sup>649</sup>

Barad proposes a post-humanist materialist account of performativity. This account challenges the positioning of materiality as either a given or a mere effect of human agency: “Materiality is an active factor in processes of materialization.”<sup>650</sup> It is not a fixed essence, but a “substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency.”<sup>651</sup> This modulates also the understanding of discursivity. Like the concept of performativity, it is not restricted to human abilities. Discursive practices are “not human-based activities but rather specific material (re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of

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<sup>643</sup> Ibid. p. 822.

<sup>644</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>645</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>646</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>647</sup> Barad 2003, p. 823.

<sup>648</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid. p. 824.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid. p. 827.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid. p. 828.



boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted.”<sup>652</sup> The concept of performativity is in this respect loosened from Butler’s convention-dependent concept and instead based upon the open though poietic character of the multidirectional *for* – the turn of the performative drive – presented as *die Auto-poietische feedback-Schleife* in chapter four: “Performativity is not understood as iterative citationality (Butler) but rather *iterative intra-activity*.”<sup>653</sup>

The intimacy between discursive processes and materialisation, between material phenomena and discursive practices, can illuminate the performative generation of materiality brought up in chapter four where material qualities neither become theoretically non-significant, nor simply an unshaped fact to be formulated (shaped to distinction). The aesthetic event, like Barad’s material phenomena, is due to the *intra-action* happening in the conjunction of discursive abilities and material configurations. Material qualities are here co-producers of the event. The significance of staging strategies occurs firstly when they meet the resistance (agency/dynamic actuality) of existing material figurations through which feedback structures arise that in the climate of intra-activity produce the discursive-material configurations of *this* specific event.

## 6.6 Heterogeneity in unity

Through *flesh* and Barad’s post-humanistic concept of performativity the concept of embodiment is extended from a human domain to the general character of Being: Being as a process of becoming is a process of embodiment. The human being is in this respect not different from other material phenomena. The question is not about categorical differences, but a spectrum of abundance of configurations that co-exists and interacts in all directions. Even aesthetics can be founded in this relativized position of existence. The conditionality of a performance is in this respect not only outlined in the dynamics between actors and spectators, but the whole environment put into play at the venue.

Through the notion of *flesh* I have outlined a theory of Being as an extended field of *intra-activity* where different material phenomena do not need to share the same discursive traits

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<sup>652</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>653</sup> Loc. cit.

but can represent different discursive-material practices. We get a heterogenic web of connections (a multitude of agential forces) as a model to think ontology and not the organic model of unity. This spread out condition of activated Being, the heterogeneous though seamless condition of embodiment with a multitude of swellings and folds that perform the confined situation of existence by different solutions, makes up a theoretic view where we do not need to share the same references to share an area of space-time. We do not need to create homogeneous cultures to have a view to co-existence and interdependence. The conception of an extensive field of discursive-material activity leaves an ontological space for Cage's notion of *anarchic harmony*.<sup>654</sup> Meaning and ethics become in this respect in the end connected to the specific locality and individuality of lives where senses hurt – to existence as embodied and lived locally within specific environments. I rely here on Haraway's notion of *situatedness*,<sup>655</sup> which emphasizes the irreducible character of a locality that cannot be relativized (reduced) to a no-where or everywhere. It is *unique*, not replaceable nor transferable; it is a particular location in the intricacies of world-lines and topographic configurations.

Introductory to this thesis I used Heidegger to sketch a main question for this dissertation. Even though Heidegger places the production of knowledge in the sphere of conditional conditions, and not essential qualities, he emphasises the need to *make* differences. The Heideggerian 'rift' indicates the basic need, in epistemological terms, for hierarchic principles of structuration.

Cage challenges these. There is a wish for equal value – a view that can encompass the “noise” of our lives that does not fit categorizations of this or that, either/or. Cage's aesthetics was linked in chapter three to a critique of the masterwork, a work-concept that I further connected to an essentialist approach to Being. The reasons behind Cage's criticism, I argued, were:

- 1) The principles of exclusion put in operation by this work concept;

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<sup>654</sup> “you could call iT / anarchic harmony / harmony that / doEs not exclude noise / no ideAs / noThing to say no feelings no taste / no vaRiations / no rEpetitions.” (Cage, *Mesosticha* (1990) in *Neue Zeitschrift Für Musik* 155, no. 5, 1994). ‘Anarchic harmony’ appears late in Cage's vocabulary, but it follows the same line of thought as expressed earlier by the inclusive view of a non-continuous continuity, a heterogeneous sphere of co-existence.

<sup>655</sup> Haraway 1988.

- 2) The evaluation of the perceptive and sensitive condition of our immediate and given existence as second-rated in comparison with an idealized sensibility cultivated through aestheticism.

Cage, by his criticism, points to the need for an alternative epistemology that takes the sensuousness and sensibility of ordinary life seriously, and bases ontology on the experiences of the transitoriness of life. We are led to the concept of performativity discussed in chapter four. Instead of an objectified expression as the point of departure, the aesthetics of performativity bring the conditional *event* to the centre. And instead of a message, we have a process that provokes transformative *experiences*.

The discussed concept of performativity in chapter four brought up the intimate relationship between sensitivity, experience and *embodied existence*. Through this accentuation we were also presented with the 'body' as a methodological figure that could depict the segmentation, sustenance and distribution of meaning differently from the 'sign'. Meaning as embodied became closely connected to the experience of and reaction to immediate presence – the urgent presence of existing. The concept of performativity, in this context, does something with the *difference* as an epistemological marker:

- 1) Perception and embodiment display boundaries as zones of transitions and exchange that do not stand still. They bring also awareness to the openness and activity at the intersectional lines of perception and interactivity. The difference thereby does not mark a brute binary divide, but a zone with shades, colours and elastic states.
- 2) The aspect of action and the connected conditional qualities accentuate the dynamics of *interplay*, of *interactivity*, what Barad calls *intra-action*. The performative *for*, discussed in chapter four, assumes already in its performative drive the *other* as *co-partner of the activity*. The *meeting* as the place where the performative effect is shaped is both characterised by the openness of the responsive structure and the settlement that the oscillating answers bring about. We have a meaning bound to the creation of existential conditions, which is also the creation of a common reality, that is shaped in the intersectional lines between a plurality of centrifugal and centripetal forces.

The framework that I have outlined in this chapter connects ontology to processes of embodiment, and through the notions of *flesh*, *discursive-material practices* and *iterative intra-activity* I have tried to present an idea of both interconnectedness and independence, where a notion of co-existence does not need to be bound to a shared frame of reference – a shared story – but an assembly of life-practices, a spacious temporality of parallel activities that, like a *Musicircus*, exhibits a diversity of histories, practices and individual solutions in a conglomerate of heterogeneous collaboration.

## 7 MUSICIRCUS, TRONDHEIM 2006

Then – in an instant the indoor street at Dragvoll vibrates with sound from all corners. The cacophony, the noise and the racket were palpable. And the experience of simultaneous sound-bombardment from all over the place and how that instantly opened up the room was one of the most spectacular events yours truly has ever partaken in.<sup>656</sup>

### 7.1 Introduction

This “simultaneous sound-bombardment” filling the hall at Dragvoll happened on Sunday the 23rd of April 2006, at five o’clock in the afternoon. The program note announced:

5 p.m.–7 p.m.  
The indoor street at Dragvoll  
Free entrance  
Artistic adviser and curator: Stephen Montague

“You don’t hear a thing, you hear everything”

In the anarchic spirit of the 1960s John Cage organised a Musicircus in 1967 – an artistic vision of a ‘global village’ where many independent participants perform at the same time unproblematically. The performers participated with a program of their own choice. Spread about in a big hall they performed their program simultaneously. The audience could wander around, come and go. No entrance fee. No honorarium, but opportunities to buy refreshments. Sunday the 23rd of April at 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. this concept will be realised at the indoor street at Dragvoll. Free entrance. One can come, go and wander around as you wish. Café-sito will be open. All are heartily welcome!

We were about 76 contributors, mainly musicians and dancers, but someone also contributed with a film and someone else set up a James Joyce installation. There were fiddle players performing Norwegian folk music, a male choir performing everything from boy band repertoire to national hymns, jazz groups, a DJ, organ music, African drums and much more. About 250 people visited the event.

The context and inspiration for doing a *Musicircus* today can be diverse. The *Musicircus* I attended in Ludwigshafen happened within the context of a theatrical festival and was, among other things, used as a way to invite and engage the local community to use a theatre hall that had become somewhat estranged from the people who lived there. Stephen Montague curated a circus in London in 2004 which had 341 performers and about 2000 visitors. This was done

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<sup>656</sup> Andersson, *Morgenbladet*, April 28 – May, 2006. Translated from Norwegian.

at the Barbican Hall as part of a festival devoted to Cage's music. Not surprisingly, early on I had the idea to initiate and organise a Cagean circus as part of my study. An opportunity arose when a group of PhD-scholars and musicians I had joined got the support of NTNU to do a seminar/workshop with the theme 'open form'. I contacted Montague, who I had already been in contact with and had interviewed in connection with the *Musicircus* realised at the Barbican in 2004, and asked if he could be interested in curating our Cagean circus in Trondheim. This set the ball rolling.

An invitation, as was asserted in chapter five, can be seen as the first step in generating any artistic material for a *Musicircus*. Within the invitational structure the dynamics of auto-poietic feedback coils would also be at work. Therefore, I argued, that the significance of these dynamics becomes noticeable already with the initiation of the event as an invitational gesture dependent upon others to be fulfilled and further framed.

For an audience the distance or difference between, for instance, an indeterminate score written by Cage and recorded realisations, can be quite unknown. The "doing" perspective (what we could call a performative perspective) – what a realisation of a Cage piece demands of the performers/organisers – is revealing here. This is not only an illuminating perspective for an audience unfamiliar with Cage's aesthetics and works, it is also a perspective that in a striking way can direct theoretical reflections to aspects otherwise easily missed.

Such a "doing" perspective, building upon the experiences of organizing an event in Trondheim, will guide our reflections in this chapter. Some of these reflections take as their basis very prosaic elements and processes that may, at first view, seem too ordinary to be regarded as profound and significant with regard to the specific aesthetic imprint of an event. I think though that these prosaic elements can expand and exemplify – and even raise questions about – topics formerly discussed, such as aesthetic autonomy, performative generation of materiality, the ideal of *Werktreue* and so on.

I argued, in chapter five, for seeing the staging strategies of a *Musicircus* as starting already in the invitation of people to perform in the event. However, when I think back on the process in Trondheim I find that it is also natural to divide the process of staging into two phases, the first one being the preparatory process leading up to the performance day, not least providing the event with contributors (artistic material). The second one consisted of the strategies

applied the day we performed, such as the use of *time brackets* and the curator's pep talk to the performers.

This division into two phases, or two kinds of applied staging strategies also indicates (and here perhaps we are speaking about a kind of oscillation) a certain split between the more prosaic processes leading up to the event and the event as standing out from the ordinary, being without doubt an artistic event that demarcated itself from what happened before and after. The concept of autonomy can in this respect be interesting to discuss. First, however, I would like to start with the preparatory process under the heading of *Staging, phase 1*.

## **7.2 Staging, phase 1 – the invitation**

### **7.2.1 The preparatory process**

The dynamics of the *invitation* were felt strongly in the preparatory process, not least because of the vulnerability I as the organiser felt being dependent upon those who agreed to participate. In this instance I experienced Cagean chance operating in the field of response, not least in the scope of the event depending on the number agreeing to participate and what they wanted to offer. The contingent structure of invitation became very palpable, and its significance for what we could call the artistic material became very obvious.

This needs to be made concrete, and I will now try to outline the process of preparation and invitation that took place in Trondheim. To do so, I have described the process in a slightly more clear-cut and schematic way than it really was. In fact it would be difficult to record all the minute coils of feedback and responses (or non-responses) taking place in such processes. The simplifications are not only a solution to this, but as simplifications, are already part of an analytical and reflective approach to these experiences.

#### **The initiative**

It would probably be correct to call myself the initiator of the event. However, the initiative did not arise from a "solipsistic agent". When more concrete action was taken, a network had already been created with other PhD scholars and musicians who were interested in related topics. I mention this mostly to stress that in such processes the aspects of seeking response – putting some form of role alternation and community building into action – play an important

and informative role from the beginning on as part of one's own decisional processes, for example, in ascertaining if you really should go further with your ideas and so on.

Besides this, the opportunities to be seized upon must be mentioned. For our network, the announcement of means to arrange a master class/workshop for PhD students was such an opportunity. Within the framework of a seminar/workshop set, work could progress towards trying to include more people in the project, a kind of community building work. It was here natural to think about the other employees and students of the Department of Music at NTNU. The project was presented at staff meetings where I also presented ideas for how the Department could be involved, resulting in the decision to arrange a course for undergraduate and post-graduate students in the spring of 2006 with the theme *Open form*, which was also the theme for the planned seminar. The ball was rolling.

### **Curator**

At the Barbican, London, a large scale *Musicircus* took place in 2004 with 341 performers and over 2000 visitors. This circus was part of the festival *John Cage UnCaged* arranged by the BBC Symphony Orchestra. The composer, conductor and pianist Stephen Montague<sup>657</sup> was artistic adviser for the festival and organized and curated the circus event. I did not attend the event, but in 2005 I interviewed Montague about the Barbican circus.

When our workshop/seminar was set, I contacted Montague and asked if he could curate our event in Trondheim. He was of course contacted because of his knowledge and experience with the work of Cage. He had curated several Cagean circuses, and he had performed in circuses organized by Cage. However, I did not consciously think about the moment of oral transmission when I asked Montague in 2005. Now I can see, referring to our discussion of a score in chapter two,<sup>658</sup> that Montague besides his experience in organising *Musicircuses* himself, also, by having taken part in *Musicircuses* Cage's organised, represented a form of "oral" link between our circus and circuses organized by Cage.

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<sup>657</sup> Stephen Montague: Composer, pianist and conductor (from 1975 based in London). His own compositions range from big multimedia events to compositions for established orchestras and ensembles, such as the London Symphony Orchestra and Hilliard Ensemble. As musician, Montague has worked internationally with composers like Cage, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, Conlon Nancarrow, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Xenakis, and he has among other things worked together with Merce Cunningham Dance Company.

<sup>658</sup> See p. 31 ff.



Briefly, what I have sketched here is a network of actors, the roles connected to them, forms of communities, but also occasions found possible to act upon. We could ask about these roles in regard to the ideal of the *Werktreue* that Goehr outlines (see chapter three). As mentioned in the presentation of *Musicircus* in 1967 (chapter two), Cage had expressed doubts that he should really be seen as the composer of the event: The event belongs much more to the performers.<sup>659</sup> Neither do previews of the event present a composer as such, even if Cage – as avant-garde composer and radical thinker – is given a lot of attention in these previews in preparing the audience for the coming event. Still, the *Musicircus* concept has become essentially linked to Cage as its originator and treated in that way.

This was also the case with our circus. In presenting the project to the Department, for other possible performers and milieus, the project was presented as a realisation of a Cage concept, and his position within the avant-garde of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was emphasised as a reason behind why the project was interesting. Therefore, we could say, that even though Cage had reservations about being described as the composer of the event the function he acquired in our presentation was similar to that of other composers. The difference lay in what was expected of those interested in participating in the event. That is, we did not have written out parts that the participants should rehearse and prepare before we met. The performers themselves had to choose what they would like to do and to prepare this material for the performance. However, the participants were expected to accept and take part in the realisation of a production idea/concept – simultaneous and non-coordinated performances – that was presented by referring to Cage as a kind of composer/originator. I will come back to these questions in connection with the formulation of the invitations. For the moment, I want to go back to the preparatory process and the setting of some frames and guidelines.

### **Planning the event – outlining some frames and guidelines**

Montague and I met in January 2006 to outline a further plan for the event. Montague brought his ideas for how to stage the event, and I had some of my own thoughts in addition to the knowledge I had about the place and what I thought was realistic in view of the local circumstances.

A certain strategy for staging was outlined. This was not rigid, but some working frames were

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<sup>659</sup> See p. 38.

suggested. These suggested frames were:

- An event lasting for two hours from perhaps 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Rehearsal and briefing the same day as the performance would take place.
- No admission fee and no honorarium to the performers.
- The use of time brackets. (The performers should have stop watches.)

Montague had also some ideas for the “content”; the material and “theme” for the event. As we know from sources formerly referred to, Cage does not specify what a *Musicircus* should consist of other than mentioning the music of the surrounding community.<sup>660</sup> Besides, he includes other forms of art without restrictions. Fetterman informs us however that the *Musicircuses* organised in the 1980s mainly became celebrations of Cage’s music and work: “During the 1980s the musicircus became not so much a festival of global music, but a playful retrospective of Cage’s own historical output in music composition.”<sup>661</sup> The *Musicircus* at Barbican was in line with the development sketched by Fetterman. Participants contributed with music by Cage, his friends, or something that could be associated to Cage’s work and preferences. Montague suggested a circus in that line also for our performance in Trondheim. That is, a circus where not only the idea, but also the “content” – the circus’ material – reflected Cage’s artistic output and his related artistic circles. This could be done in practice by formulating invitations that suggested what performers could do and in some instances being more specific about certain contributions.

Firstly, I tried to a certain degree to follow this direction when I asked people to participate, but quite quickly the invitation became so open as to include whatever participants would like to do. Therefore, the participants mainly came with their own material. This can be seen as an example of the responsive dynamics at play in the invitational structure that modulates the outcome of the invitational process.

### 7.2.2 Invitation

Some performers were already involved when Montague and I drew some further frames and guidelines for the event, and some were expected to participate, such as the participants in the

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<sup>660</sup> See p. 37.

<sup>661</sup> Fetterman 1996, p. 146.

course on open form already mentioned. However, from the beginning the idea was to involve more people than those mentioned here. The next step was therefore to ask people if they would like to take part in this event.

Often when reflections are made on the process of planning an event, this is done with the aim of evaluating how successful it had been with respect to achieving a certain intended and planned result. That is not what really interests me in the discussion I present here. My interest is with the “prosaic” elements, such as misunderstandings, practical circumstances and fortunate coincidences, that shape the preparatory process and thereby the coming event. These “prosaic” elements become part of *chance*. For example, at the time I was formulating invitations I was in the USA. Physically, therefore, I was far away from the place we were going to do the event, and the channel for communication and presentation was the e-mail. Because I was not physically present I could not turn up personally to present the project, for example, to students. E-mails were instead written, and this situation made it easier for misunderstandings to occur.

I would like to call the prosaic aspects mentioned over *situational*, *pragmatic* and *non-idealistic* and draw attention to them according to a broader Cagean context. For example, many of Cage’s works are composed so that it is possible either to use a lot of the composed material or just a single portion. *HPSCHD* is an example of this where a performance of the work can range from that of the expansive scope of the first performance to a realisation in chamber format.<sup>662</sup> These compositions are flexible in scope, adjustable to practical circumstances. They show a non-idealistic approach. The aim is not to realise or materialise an ideal form. Instead they explicitly accentuate the potential of pragmatic and situational considerations.

I mentioned in chapter five that even though an invitation is open-ended, giving the receiver the opportunity to refuse, some frames would be sketched. These would raise certain prospects and expectations, making the invitation attractive or not. Besides, some of these frames would be of the character that if the invitation was accepted, these frames would also have been taken for granted. The dynamics between setting frames and the open, contingent character of an invitation can therefore be interesting to look at.

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<sup>662</sup> See p. 190 ff.

Let us imagine a very open invitation, trying to set as few restricting frames as possible, and in that way, considering it to be truly anarchic. The organisers in such an instance might for example have made a site available and merely specified a time for the event to begin. Then they might have invited anyone interested to just show up – those wanting to perform, to bring their own material, and others just to come as they were. We could imagine that this invitation was distributed via posters, announcements at public internet sites, maybe e-mail and SMS. Then, it would be just to wait and see who turned up.

Such an invitation would be very open and free. Those taking part would do so merely by showing up, and the initiators could risk ending up alone at the site! An invitation formulated in such an open-ended and non-binding way would in its form be very insecure; few obligations would be made as part of the process leading up to the event. Another element, perhaps as interesting, is connected to what prompts us to respond positively to an invitation. Is it the most open and non-binding invitations that are most attractive? We can imagine that a very open-ended and indeterminate invitation easily provokes the response: “What is this?” followed up by our paying no further attention to it. There would be too few hints to catch our attention and interest. That is, most of us like to be aware of what we might gain from joining such a project. If we had no knowledge of *Musicircus* and an invitation to participate had as few restrictive stipulations as possible, it would probably be difficult to generate such prospects. The chosen media for distributing such an invitation would probably also make a difference. Personal e-mails and SMS would likely have a stronger impact - especially if those invited knew those doing the inviting - than just posters and announcements spread at easily available Internet sites and poster walls.

My point is that a very open-ended invitation would quickly be found to be too vague to provoke interest. Why? Of course, a lot of open invitations are made to us without obligation. Public concerts and open political meetings are examples of this. The audience in these instances has received an open invitation to come if they want. Subject to expected popularity, we either just show up for such an event or make a decision beforehand and make a kind of commitment by buying a ticket some time before the event has been scheduled. Seen like this, the audience of our *Musicircus* received also a very open invitation – no tickets were necessary and no request for turning up on time was made. An announcement of such events however would most often outline what is planned, so a potential audience can make

up their minds whether or not they thought it worth investigation. This was also the case in Trondheim. Posters and flyers were made with information, a preview appeared in the local newspaper and the performance was also presented in a national Internet-based magazine for music.<sup>663</sup>

The specification of an invitation – what it is about, what you are invited to – is therefore important in creating an image and raising expectations for what an event has to offer. If the specifications are too open or vague, then perhaps participants who do not know really what to expect of it, would find it not worth the risk, or too vague to provoke any interest at all.

Specifications, therefore, can help an invitation to be experienced or felt as an invitation: Something we can deliberately say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to contributing to. However, the specification also frames the mind and closes up some of the indeterminate aspects of an invitation, extended by strategies that are somehow aimed at anchoring the coming event, for example, by making different kinds of promises.

I accentuated in my analysis of the invitational structure that the one who invites initiates an event, though, by the act of inviting also gives the control away to those who are invited. The invitation reflects a role-alternating figure in its logic and is by this essentially open-ended. That does not exclude moves representing an attempt to direct and control the invitational process. The risk sketched above is often tried, controlled and eliminated one way or another, for instance, by going from the invitational character to the character of promise and commitment.

We can transfer some of these more general considerations to the formulations of my invitations in 2006. The following points can be emphasised:

- 1) I present my PhD project and myself.
- 2) There is a short presentation of the project and I express the hope that as many as possible from the Department of Music would like to participate.
- 3) I present an idea for what they could do.

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<sup>663</sup> See Andersen 2006, and Habbestad 2006.

- 4) The context – the simultaneity, aesthetically and musically – is sketched, so those asked can imagine how the project will be presented aesthetically.
- 5) I inform all that there will be no honorarium. (It is not about saying yes to a “job”.)
- 6) I include a general presentation of the project:
  - a. A historical outlining and presentation.
  - b. Certain aesthetic implications, derived from the historical presentation, that sketch an aesthetic and music-historical placement of the ‘open form’ that was the theme of our seminar.
  - c. A general description of what one could imagine this event to be like: A cacophony of simultaneous performances spread around and an audience that can walk about in this live generated soundscape.
- 7) Specific information about our project:
  - a. Time and place for the performance.
  - b. The name of the curator, and his background.
  - c. The expected scope of performers.
  - d. What those who want to participate are expected to prepare – what obligations are involved.
  - e. Rehearsal time – how much time must those who have responded affirmatively devote to this project by being present at a certain place and time.
- 8) Information about who to contact.

So, when I asked people to participate in the event I included quite a lot of information: Some suggestion of what they could do, a brief historic contextualisation, an outlining of what they aesthetically could expect to be confronted by and the concrete details of when and where the event was going to happen.

Except for the suggestion of what they could do, which was not anything binding, and which later was emphasised as being totally open, the frames given are mainly of a practical character: The date and the time scope of the rehearsal and performance. However, they are also asked to take on some obligations: To prepare performance material for about 20-30 minutes. That is, this was to be prepared.

In chapter three, discussing *Musicircus* according to the work concept, I emphasized that we probably would have used known conceptual frames when marketing the event and that these

probably would have been related to the work concept, for example, the emphasis on a composer, connected ideas and aesthetics, the emphasis of a work's specific character and so on. As seen in my formulation of invitations formerly discussed, this was not only the case for marketing the event, but also formed part of the invitational rhetoric. Allow me to carry out a kind of self-analysis in this respect:

The use of a work-related discourse was not only a rhetorical ploy. From the beginning on, the project was established as part of a seminar mainly devoted to experimental music of the 1950- and 1960s and in the context of my PhD-study on a prominent composer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – canonized as one of the most prominent representatives of the avant-garde music. The project was placed within a musical setting, historical contextualised according to a Western history of art music that focuses on extraordinary works and their composers. That is, we could have imagined that instead of focusing upon the musical-historical context we could have accentuated Cage's circus as a model for a social construction and presented the project as a social experiment, for instance, with reference to Cage's emphasis on anarchism and the adoption of McLuhan's vision of a 'global village' in the presentation of the first circus. However, perhaps this would not have been the wisest way of presenting the project to colleagues and students of the Music Department, where it was proposed that the project would take place, in the hope – conscious or unconscious – of getting many of them involved. The anarchic and social connotations are indicated, but the event is not presented primarily as a social experiment. It is the artistic and musical exploration that is emphasised.

### **7.2.3 Materiality – the specificity of *Musicircus***

I have several times contextualised *Musicircus* according to other works by Cage and techniques that recur in his artistic practice. Often I have done this by calling attention to similarities. It is interesting, though, to examine how different pieces and productions stage different aesthetic situations. In this respect we could again bring up the theme of identity. Are we not here referring to some kind of specific identity – an individual character – that a piece or a production idea represents?

We have seen how Cage challenges the notion of the work understood as a musical unity with its identity connected to the consistency of a specific sonic construction revived in different performances. However, even though Cage challenges this notion of consistency in the

representation of a work's identity, it is not far removed to consider distinct strategies of staging, or generating music, as in any case, regardless of how indeterminate the score or the production concept/idea is, framing the aesthetic results and giving it a certain character.

I want again to draw attention to the materiality of *Musicircus* by comparing it to *4'33''*. *4'33''*, by staging *silence* which turns out not to be silent at all, can be seen as an emphatic example of a performative generation of materiality,<sup>664</sup> and the materiality of *Musicircus* can in the first instance be claimed to be performatively generated through an invitational gesture. However, the examples of *4'33''* and *Musicircus* can show how these performatively generated materialities, through the strategies applied, bring about different results. Briefly, as mentioned in chapter four, *4'33''* focuses attention on the sounds that surround us and contribute to our sonic environment, but which we seldom listen carefully to. The human agents, the performer and the audience, are here somehow asked to be “quiet” and listen: The performer, literally by performing *tacet*, the audience by playing the established role of listeners at a classical concert. Contrary to this, the material of *Musicircus*, brought forward by the invitation, is the “sounds”<sup>665</sup> of a lot of human actors. From the silenced performer, *Musicircus* calls attention to the human contribution to a sonic landscape.

It struck me, when I attended the Cagean circus in Ludwigshafen, how living histories, traditions, and not least physicality left their mark on the event. Perhaps I was especially prepared for these reflections because of my reading of Kahn at that time.<sup>666</sup> Kahn criticises Cage's understanding of sounds. He finds Cage's conception problematic because of its lack of a social, cultural and political understanding of the nature of sounds. Sounds in themselves become purely a-referential – natural, universal and apolitical.

With Kahn's criticism kept in my mind, my experience in Ludwigshafen struck me as not at all an unbodied event. The event's worldly character of social embedment was very present.<sup>667</sup> What was remarkable was the plural quality in the character of this enactment, like an extended field of actual resources and bubbling energy. If we see the invitation as the

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<sup>664</sup> See presentation in chapter four, pp. 160-161 and 170-172.

<sup>665</sup> Of course, as a multimedial happening we do not basically speak only about sounds, but the whole vibrational field of multi-sensible quality put in operation by this human activity.

<sup>666</sup> Kahn 1999.

<sup>667</sup> The specific production plays of course an important role in this respect. See my presentation of the production in Ludwigshafen in chapter five, p. 214.



performative gesture that generates the material, it is the performers (embodied, alive) that are willing to perform something from their repertoire – from their culture, their tradition, their living practice – that constitutes this aspect.

In fact, we can speak about two phases in the performative generation of materiality: The first one brings people together; the second phase happens on the spot through the simultaneous performances. I will now call attention to this last stage, because in certain instances this second phase splits the event itself from the preparatory process and gives the performance a kind of independent character: It stands out from what happened before and after, marking a kind of autonomous time of the performance itself.

### 7.3 Staging, phase 2 – the performance day

Until now, the focus has been on the process leading up to the performance day – a process that brought together performers and contributions. Now I want to concentrate on what happened on the day, what we can call the second phase of the staging, representing a strategy applied on our material (the performers with their prepared contributions):

- 1) The organising of time:
  - a. The time scope of the event.
  - b. The use of *time brackets* and how they were worked out.
- 2) The organising of space
  - a. The spatial distribution of the performers.
- 3) Presence
  - a. The generation of focus, concentration and presence – the curator’s role here.

#### 7.3.1 Time

The first *Musicircus* had a time scope from eight o’clock in the afternoon to one o’clock at night.<sup>668</sup> We did not follow the model of the 1967-circus here. Montague suggested a

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<sup>668</sup> And as mentioned earlier, in some sources Cage says that such events should last longer than ordinary

performance that would last for at least two hours. Probably through his experience of organizing earlier circuses he knew that such a frame would be feasible whereas a longer event would have demanded more from its organizers, for example in getting enough performers and contributions to fill a longer time-span, or getting performers that would have the capacity to offer more time on the project than was necessary for the two-hour performance we sketched. Of course, if we had allocated a much longer time period, we would also have needed to adapt our preparation accordingly.

The use of time brackets, I have shown, are not obvious with respect to the Cagean circus.<sup>669</sup> Montague had used chance generated time brackets in the circuses he had previously organized. Such time brackets were also used in the circuses he joined that Cage organized. We have discussed in chapter five the preferred performative attitude sketched by Cage. Time brackets are helpful here. They represent a disciplinary interference, almost an obstacle; the performers cannot just go on playing but must accommodate their performance to the schema of brackets. They get a new task that restricts their freedom, but also gives them a tool with which to focus their performance, both by giving them a time-route to follow (they know what to do) and by challenging the performers to perform in a different way and in other circumstances than they are used to. The method of time brackets not only disciplines the performers, and thereby acts as a tool with which to hold on to their own performance and maintain the “fragmented” and non-resolved diverse character of the generated collage. The working out of time brackets also has an impact, in purely aesthetic terms, on the texture of the event, for example in the distribution between activated sounds and *tacet*, the possible time span of a single bracket and so on. For our event in Trondheim, I was put on the task of working out these time brackets with the help of chance operations.

Pritchett, in his doctoral theses of 1988,<sup>670</sup> shows the play between distinctive frames designed by the composer and the impact of chance in Cage’s compositions from the 1950s. He shows how important the designed aspects are for Cage’s compositions even though procedures are developed in an attempt to override the intentional aspects of these pieces. Cage’s chance operations are not at all just random. They are executed within well-defined

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concerts. (See p. 37 in this thesis.)

<sup>669</sup> See chapter five, pp. 185-186.

<sup>670</sup> Pritchett 1988: *The development of chance techniques in the music of John Cage, 1950-1956*.

frames.<sup>671</sup> The same could be said about the time schedules created for our performance in Trondheim. They were developed within the play between designed frames and the execution of chance operations.

#### *The working out of time brackets*

I decided not to throw coins and consult hexagrams, representing Cage's *I ching*-method. That seemed too laborious for the actual situation. I developed a method I thought was easier for me to realise. Nevertheless, it took a lot of time to develop a system and to carry out the chance operation. Briefly, my approach can be described as follows:

- 1) To design a system of procedures which were manageable.
- 2) To design procedures of chance operations.

The designed system became as follows:

- 1) I reserved a certain amount of time, about 50 minutes, to represent performance time. The rest, 1 hour and 10 minutes was reserved for pauses – *tacet*. Then I broke these time-spans into smaller units lasting from about 20 seconds to 3 minutes and 20 seconds. These smaller units were written on slips of paper and divided into a group for performance-time (group A, making up 50 minutes) and for rest-time (group B, 55 minutes – a 15 minute break was pre-distributed, see under).
- 2) A slip of paper from either group A or B was selected by throwing dice. I had made a rule for when the same group was chosen several times – that after three times the next slip of paper would be chosen from the other group.
- 3) Each schedule (part) had a 15 minute break which was fixed and appeared at different points of time during the two-hour performance, so that not everybody would have their long break at the same time. This rule was changed after consulting Montague and filled in with the help of chance operations following mainly the procedure described in point 1) and 2) above though with slight changes (see the next point).

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<sup>671</sup> These frames can though perform a paradoxical role, like shown in my analysis of *Variation II* in chapter four. To a certain extent they frame the possible scope of what can appear. At the same time, by disciplining the procedures, they also enforce the dynamics of chance and breaks open habitual preferences.

- 4) Montague found that my system, within which time brackets could be up to 10 minutes long, fostered brackets that were too long. However, due to the shortage of time,<sup>672</sup> the time parts were basically used as they were, though altering the longest brackets into smaller units through an ad hoc procedure in line with the chance operations I used, given above. The result was that I did not exactly know the performance time for each group. The 50 minutes could both have been extended and shortened.

The conscious, intentional choices were therefore:

- 1) Performance time – about 50 minutes, later extended or shortened by chance: The same amount of performance time for everybody who participated. I wanted to create a system that resulted in all the participants getting the same amount of time to perform. I did not want a situation to arise where some of the performers, by chance, should play nearly all the time and others scarcely got any time brackets to fill.
- 2) At first, I made a fifteen minute break so all the groups that participated would be able to walk around for a while like the audience. This was, as mentioned, later changed after consulting Montague.
- 3) I made the choices of possible time lengths not too short. My reason was that I thought a very fragmented time schedule would appear too complicated (impractical) to follow for performers not at all used to this type of performance instruction.<sup>673</sup>
- 4) I made a system that to certain degree would secure distribution of performance time throughout the span of the event.

To summarize, therefore, the working out of time brackets were framed by some conscious choices. These were:

- 1) Equal distribution of performance time. This was mainly done for democratic reasons: Even though we had decided to use chance derived time brackets, I did not want to make the system so potentially inconsiderate that some participants who had prepared

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<sup>672</sup> Montague's advice came only two days before the event, and beside the Cagean circus I had also other duties to follow up during our weekend devoted to "Open form", the title for our seminar.

<sup>673</sup> In my own experience of performing at the event, however, I was aware that what I had thought of as a short amount of time, even a single second, did not feel so short when concentrating on doing our performance.

themselves for the event and reserved a day for this project might end up being asked to be silent nearly all the time. A second reason was aesthetic: By securing an equal amount of performance time to all those who performed, the heterogeneous and varied aesthetic quality these performers represented would also be secured and have a greater imprint on the live generated collage than if the system did not guarantee a certain equal distribution of performance time.

- 2) Secure the distribution of performance time throughout the time-span of the event.
- 3) Practical considerations: Not making too complicated time schedules.
- 4) Formulate procedures that would not be too time-consuming to execute.

What, then, was actually generated by chance in the method sketched over? The general factors and frames within which to act were to a large extent set intentionally and were deliberately thought about. Chance, though, was put into operation in shaping how the time brackets occurred in detail – how short/long (within certain limits intentionally set) they were and when they appeared. Further, the time schedules (parts) were made independently of each other – I made them one at a time. These were not put together before the event, so we did not really know for example if there would be very little going on at certain points during the performance, or who would be performing at the same time. Besides, the time schedules were randomly distributed amongst the performers. I do not in fact have an overview of who had the different time parts, and some of the worked out schedules were not used, because some of the expected performers reported their absence only at the last minute.

Examples of the time schedules that we used:

**Time schedule no. 9**

Example: 03'45'' – 06'45''      09'45'' – 10'30'' means that you should play from 3 minutes and 45 seconds until 6 minutes and 45 seconds. Pause until 9 minutes and 45 seconds. Play again from 9 minutes and 45 seconds until 10 minutes and 30 seconds.

02'00''–05'40''		
19'30''–20'00''		
21'00''–24'00''	24'30''–26'45''	27'30''–29'30''
39'30''–40'00''	41'00''–44'00''	44'30''–46'45''
53'15''–56'45''		
05'35''–06'05''		
10'05''–12'05''		
15'50''–16'40''		
20'10''–22'30''		
26'00''–28'45''		
31'45''–34'45''		
38'15''–41'45''		
49'15''–50'25''		

**Time schedule no. 18**

[...]

02'15''–02'55''	09'00''–09'45''		
10'00''–11'00''	11'15''–11'45''	12'00''–13'30''	15'00''–17'00''
21'00''–22'10''			
32'20''–33'50''	34'20''–35'35''	36'05''–37'20''	
42'20''–43'50''	44'20''–45'35''	46'05''–47'20''	
52'15''–52'55''	58'15''–59'15''		
00'25''–03'15''	06'15''–06'30''	06'45''–07'15''	08'15''–11'45''
17'15''–18'30''	19'45''–21'05''		
22'20''–25'50''			
32'50''–33'50''	34'05''–34'30''	36'00''–37'00''	37'30''–38'00''
38'45''–39'30''			
40'30''–43'10''	46'40''–47'10''	48'10''–48'40''	49'10''–49'40''
49'55''–50'55''			
51'25''–51'55''	53'10''–55'20''		

**Time schedule no. 20**

[...]

00'00''–00'40''	02'10''–3'20''	09'25''–10'25''
11'25''–17'25''		
24'30''–27'00''	28'00''–33'10''	
37'10''–37'40''		
40'40''–47'30''	48'45''–50'05''	
54'35''–59'35''		
04'45''–08'15''		
11'25''–17'25''		
26'45''–31'15''		
36'30''–38'45''		
40'05''–45'05''	46'25''–47'40''	

I emphasised in chapter five that even though Cage describes *Musicircus* as having no aesthetic bias, we can approach the Cagean circus from a purely aesthetic point of view. That is, even though there is no theme, harmonic progression or rhythm that can be identified as characteristic of this work, we can identify a certain texture that can be associated with these kinds of events connected to the abundance of its contributions and the preferred performance attitude (performing material independently of others). In general terms, we are referring here to an abundant and heterogeneous collage. However, the specific character of this collage is formed in the staging of the *singular* performance. That is, the aesthetic features are dependent upon who agrees to participate, the venue chosen for the event, how the schedules (parts) for the time brackets are worked out if such are used, the distribution of the space et cetera. The aesthetic character of such an event is therefore intimately connected to its specific production. The time schedules (parts) worked out for our event illustrates this. If we had not used time brackets at all we might have arrived at a situation where performers either performed all the time, or perhaps, when somebody nearby played kept silent, or even became so frustrated by the simultaneity of activity that they gave up performing and began walking around instead. Of course, we cannot know this, and it would be dependent upon a lot of factors. However, we can imagine that such a staging strategy would probably have resulted in a more homogenous sonic-spatial texture than our *Musicircus*. That is, it would produce the same amount of sonic activity all the time, all over the place. The time schedules (parts) for our performance however were framed by the decision to have nearly the same amount of “performance time” (activated sound) and *tacet* (“silence”) at their disposal. During the performance, therefore, the sonic activity and volume varied from one place to another, modulating the performance site in a way whereby the audience could be drawn to different parts of the site by the sudden sound-breaking activity beginning there.

For pragmatic reasons, I chose to not make the length of the possible time brackets too short. Probably, if the frames had been designed differently, the chance generated time brackets could also have become much shorter, and time schedules with, for example, shorter time brackets and rests, would also have resulted in a more fragmented collage.

### **7.3.2 Spatial organisation**

We could have used chance operations to distribute the performers throughout the performance site so that the spatial organisation of performances was carried out through

chance. *Variations IV*, discussed in the former chapter, provides an example in that respect. It stages a performance site as a room of sonic activity through chance operations designed according to spatial characteristics. Of course, even if chance is not used concretely in the spatial organisation of performances, the way the space functions as a performative space will also be dependent upon how time is organised. The use of time brackets affects in this respect the performative space as it emerges spatially/temporally through the activity that takes place and which interacts with the geometrical attributes of that space. However, it is possible to explicitly use chance as a method to organise the spatial distribution of performances. The Cagean circus at Stanford seems to have done that: “All spaces were appropriated indiscriminately for musical performance and social interaction. Musicians were assigned performance spaces, but without consideration for what kind of music they were playing, so that a classical trio performed adjacent to an Indian tabla player, madrigal and torch singers shared a common space, and a man playing water music set up shoulder-to-shoulder with a saxophone sextet.”<sup>674</sup> In Trondheim we did not use chance operations in that respect. Performers were deliberately placed by Montague according to the sparse information I had about what they were going to do, which was not at all detailed but very general, giving descriptions such as: Electro-acoustic music; jazz songs and improvisations; own-composed material; African drums, and so on. And of course practical considerations were taken into account, such as where necessary instruments and equipment could be positioned. Besides those groups that were placed, there were performers that followed their own “staging of space”. There was a group who did *Variations IV* by Cage and moved around by using Cage’s score.<sup>675</sup> Another performer became part of this moving around because of a shared piano. Then there were the dancers, who not at all were restricted in spatial or temporal terms by the organisers.

### 7.3.3 Presence

Some of the performers knew of Cage’s work and aesthetics, but many of them did not. However, everybody performed with a high degree of concentration and presence. Fischer-Lichte, as we saw in chapter four, denotes ‘presence’ as describing a *performative quality*.<sup>676</sup> As a performative quality, we could ask which strategies were used to enforce presence as an

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<sup>674</sup> Junkerman 1994, p. 44.

<sup>675</sup> Neither did this group use a schedule – part – of worked out time brackets.

<sup>676</sup> See presentation and discussion under the heading “Presence” in chapter four.



aesthetic category in Trondheim. For example, through the years a lot of objections have been raised viewing Cage's aesthetics as promoting an attitude of indifference.<sup>677</sup> We could counter this criticism by referring to performative techniques, and emphasise that even when the content is indeterminate a difference can be made by the attitude in which the material and the situation is approached.

Fischer-Lichte denotes *presence* as a quality the actor evokes where he/she appears in a strong presentness as *embodied mind*. For my topic, Cage's *Musicircus*, I found Fischer-Lichte's three-partition of presentness according to actor, things and space awkward and I presented Gadamer's notion of fulfilled time as an alternative.<sup>678</sup> Nevertheless, both Fischer-Lichte's and Gadamer's notions share the view of an intensified attention to the ongoing event as a united phenomenon of matter and intentionality. We are in this respect reminded of the notion of *flesh* presented in chapter 6 where this unification does not mean a static identity, but a different conception of both measures. *Fleshy* being exhibits stretches of hard facts and aspirations where the physically bounded are in a state of destabilisation that actively displaces as it incorporates. *Presence* therefore, in the present context, describes a performative quality that invokes a special attention to a mode of the ongoing production of reality that sensitizes to a high degree the physical-aspiring *hereness* of a situation.

I will in this respect invoke the definition of Cage's works that Göran presents in her study from 2009,<sup>679</sup> referred to in chapter six.<sup>680</sup> She understands them as systems to be put in operation. The meaning of these works does not rely in a repeatable and recognizable identity. Quite the opposite, these systems have the capacity to free performers from pre-established schemes of identity formation, to evoke liminality, and nonetheless, still give the performers something to hold on to. It is these moments of having something to rely on that I will emphasise here. That is, presence as a performative quality of our presentation was dependent on the letting go of the actional potential within *Musicircus* as a system. This implied the willingness of the participants to devote their performances to the auto-poietic energy released by the event's "starting gunshot", like players of a game that devote their performances to the dynamic of that game.

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<sup>677</sup> An eminent example is Boulez' criticism put forward in the article "Alea" (1957), English translation, 1964.

<sup>678</sup> See pp. 168-169.

<sup>679</sup> Göran 2009: *Sansningens poetikk. John Cages estetiske praksis – "a non-knowledge of something that had not yet happened"*.

<sup>680</sup> See p. 238.

*Musicircus 2006* as a system was the result of the whole process that led up to the performance: The idea (suggestion, invitation, or challenge) put forward in 1967, a tradition of re-productions, my and Montague's response to this complex, consideration of the practical circumstances, responses to invitations, et cetera. On the day, this responsively structured process had collected the "material" – those who were willing to perform and their prepared material – some rules to follow, and a distinctive venue. Then, like a sports event this system was put in operation at 5 p.m. exactly.

Göran describes Cage's systems as having the capacity to "free" a mode of action through procedures of automation and bring the performers into a performative-attentive state of flow. They dwell in a structure of throughput as nodes in a circulating field of increased energy. Göran's notion of the work as a system overlaps Fischer-Lichte's *mise en scène* (staging) but also extends it. Göran gives these systems self-organising potential. I would like to use this extension in a reflection upon 'presence' as it appeared in Trondheim.

Based on Göran's analysis, the performative quality of presence exhibited in Cage's works relies on:

- 1) A worked out system (certain material and rules/procedures for action) that has self-organising potential;
- 2) An increased level of energy to put into the system (accumulated through preparations);
- 3) The released energy has the ability to flow unhindered within the limitation of the system;
- 4) This creates a circuit of auto-poietic energy within a delimited situation that both performers and audience can give themselves over to and follow up as co-players, as nodes in a circuit of heightened awareness to this condition's dynamic productivity.

To get this increased flow of actional energy that spreads throughout a situation and continuously enacts a spatial-temporal topology of discursive-material configurations, the production (*mise en scène*) is dependent upon participants that are willing to be part of the play and invest their performative interest to the logic of the game. Without this willingness to co-play, the system's level of auto-poietic creativity would be obstructed, and what could

have arisen as an opportunity to explore the emergent state of playing and co-acting would lose its energetic power.

According to Göran's analysis, a kind of *Werktreue* is necessary to evoke the level of auto-generative flow that is needed to raise the performative-attentive quality of presence – alert to the emergence of the situation, open to its conditional creativity. The outlining of a system, the preparation of an event, accumulates so to speak an actional energy that is set free and unhindered streams as an increased level of agential force into the system's auto-generative procedures. The presence thereby created is directed to what emerges, to what happens. Göran shows how Cage re-directs the identity formation of music from the repetition of established forms to the emergent quality of the unknown. To do so, his poetics do not investigate the freedom of performers to do whatever they want. His anarchy is not a permission of unrestricted desires, but a call to discipline that has the capacity to transform a perspective and provoke a transforming experience.

Cage's system designs have therefore contra-productive dynamics. They establish obstacles for habitual confirmation, but provide at the same time the performer with rules to hold on to, so the performer can invest his/her performative attention and energy to a creative process in flow that appears in the real time of becoming, uncensored by the responsibility of confirming an established identity. The non-responsibility for reinvesting a norm of identification leaves capacities to dwell in an energetic state of emergence sustained by the system's auto-generative forces.

Now, transferred to our production, which mechanisms were used to enforce a performative quality of presence? As mentioned, to get people interested I placed the project within a discourse – the avant-garde of Western art music – that I thought was known and of interest to those invited. The work tradition, in this respect, took part in those frames that situated the performance, collected energy forces, and gave confidence to the performers to dedicate their performances to the self-organising collage of *Musicircus*. But though the work-concept provided a soundboard for authorisation, the creative productivity of the designed system functioned in a counter-productive way against the identity generating factors of the work as an established institution. The simultaneity of performances and the use of time brackets provided this subversive direction.

To acquire this function, though, of cleaning the slate and to reset an attitude of openness and acceptance, the performers needed to have a degree of faith. They had to be ready to take on the disciplining factors of the system and give themselves over to what thereby emerged. The curator's role was in this respect important. He took part in the authorisation of the production, validated it, not least by his former involvement with organising and doing Cagean circuses. Further, he inspired the performers, helped to focus their attention and make them aware of their tasks. These tasks helped to sustain the performative focus when other habitual schemes were destabilized and to maintain high amplitude of the auto-poietic energy that the live generated collage brought forth.<sup>681</sup> Within this creative field the audience could wander about and, like my experience in Ludwigshafen, perform their own act of listening as an embodied act of exploration. Therefore, besides being involved in the development of *Musicircus* as a system, the curator had an important functioned as a "team leader" that collected the forces, helped to accumulate energy and bring about a performative focus that could be released when the "starting gunshot" went off.

## 7.4 The emerging event

### 7.4.1 No aesthetic bias?

We have several times touched on the theme of *Musicircus* having "no aesthetic bias". How was this found in our realisation in Trondheim? Or, would it be correct to speak about "no aesthetic bias" with respect to our performance. Firstly, I would underscore that without doubt the event we staged mainly appeared as an aesthetic event that explored, or generated, a certain situation by artistic means. I have already mentioned that the invitational rhetoric for our project emphasised much more the artistic and aesthetic context than, for example, presenting it as a social project that would explore a social organisation by artistic means. Junkerman for example emphasises this last aspect in his reflection on the circus at Stanford. The Cagean circus becomes an artistic exemplification of a utopian non-segregated urban togetherness that tolerates the magnitude of individual appearances though also represents an identification with all and everything, a kind of universalism. Everyone is part of the same

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<sup>681</sup> We could raise questions in this respect about the balance between reasonable challenge and feasibility. Because we could argue that the flow of the self-organising system would be dependent upon the participants' willingness to take on the challenges (even if unfeasible). The important thing here is the *attitude*, not the right answer, or the right execution. If the performers chose to resign from these tasks, the generative force of the system would break down.

family independent of ethnicity and religion; we all have the earth as our ‘global village’.

Even though we could question how accurate a description like “no aesthetic bias” would be of our circus, I would still underscore that we did not carry out any kind of aesthetic censorship. That is, as mentioned earlier, the invitations gave some suggestions of what participants could do but these suggestions ended up being very open, and in fact, the performers brought with them the program that suited them. As organisers we did not “control” these programs beforehand.

The liberation, therefore, of “no aesthetic bias” happened mainly by creating a highly tolerant performative space for musical-artistic expressions.<sup>682</sup> This liberation was found to be experimental, and members of the audience expressed it as a new experience, though Cagean circuses have been done since 1967.<sup>683</sup>

Andersson published an essay called “The Provocation is dead!” just some days after our event.<sup>684</sup> There he discusses in general terms the difficulty to affect anybody by contemporary music and art. Artistic challenges make no impression in our time; we just shrug them off and continue where we were. The production in Trondheim does not figure in the essay, but a picture from our event is used as illustration, accompanied by the following observation: “Folk music, rock, classical music, dance and happening were performed simultaneously in imperfect (?) union. But was it provocative?”<sup>685</sup>

We could reply to this observation that though Husarik informs us that the first *Musicircus* could be labelled a grand experiment that was a “challenging and provocative brand of the ‘musical happening’”,<sup>686</sup> it seems that the event was as much coloured by celebration and fun as provocation. Maybe the subversive logic of carnivals is a better comparison, which uses the feast’s suspension of the social world’s ordinary norms as an explorative ground for re-orientations.<sup>687</sup> Andersson however points to an important question: If we should keep the

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<sup>682</sup> My mother though that has little experience with avant-garde music found the event as creating an atmosphere of liberation that could inspire to create similar occasions where everybody are artists. I thought that to be in line with Cage’s anarchic philosophy.

<sup>683</sup> I think though that our *Musicircus* was the first in Norway.

<sup>684</sup> Andersson, *Musikk•Kultur*, 27<sup>th</sup> of May, 2006. Translated from Norwegian.

<sup>685</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>686</sup> Husarik 1983, pp. 5 and 19.

<sup>687</sup> See for example Attali 1985.

radical spirit of *Musicircus* and its groundbreaking ability, what would that require of a production today? Or is our time too numb after decades of artistic attacks and interrogations pushed to the extreme?

#### 7.4.2 Autonomy

In the discussion of the process of invitation both in chapter five and this chapter, it is indicated that the aesthetic event cannot be detached from the reciprocal structure of a request that includes many prosaic elements. However, *Musicircus* undoubtedly stood out as an individual, so to speak, autonomous, event when it started at 5 o'clock on that Sunday afternoon in Trondheim. The starting time staged the difference: For sure we entered an artistic performance. The prosaic process of preparation was left behind. Now it was the aesthetic presence of the performance that counted. We were not anymore just within what we could call the spans of everyday temporal-spatial routines and unpredictability. We could, using Gadamer's terminology, say that we entered festival time. I have indicated this difference by dividing the staging into phases one and two. Simply and concretely the performance was separated from the preparatory process by:

- 1) The indication of when it started and ended signalled in announcements and program note. The start time was also used as the beginning of the time parts – the time schedules with brackets to fill with artistic activity – used by the performers. In that way most of the groups had a kind of “individual part” – a kind of notation – that they followed during the performance.
- 2) The expectations invoked by announcements and program note.<sup>688</sup>
- 3) The generation of a heightened aesthetic awareness – *presence* – by the performers' focused performance.

We could argue that Gadamer's notion of art as festival and his connected concept of presence, presents an aesthetic notion of autonomy that is not coupled to an object, but to an *event* that *stands out* and breaks the ordinary routines. Like one of the definitions of ‘event’ presented in chapter three, this conception signals the exceptionally new, irreducible and non-

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<sup>688</sup> Since the performance happened at the indoors street, a place for transit, there was also possible to just enter the performance without knowing anything about it beforehand.

transferable.<sup>689</sup>

This concept of autonomy is not only linked to a concept of event, through Gadamer's notion of art as festival supported by his conception of play,<sup>690</sup> the participants are also dragged into the enactment of the festival's autonomous time as co-players and contributors. The event does not stand out as an object to contemplate. It is its special *presence* and what is created/invoked in this attentive state that makes it stand out.

This special experience stands out because it is transforming and life-changing for those involved. The autonomous time is, with respect to Gadamer, an embodied time; it is time as materialized and spacious, and space as temporal sites. Transferred to the presented notion of flesh in chapter six, it is a "thick" presence and a spacious "now" with past and future folded up in the enacting moment. It is a concept of autonomy that is not connected to the autonomous object but a time fulfilled as spatial-temporal enactment. We could in this respect transfer this notion of independence, and the opening for the exceptionally new, to Barad's notion of *intra-action* and the openness that relies on the figure of answers.

The event is in this respect not repeatable, but the iterations of similar strategies for enactment – of invoking similar presences – can be staged. Gadamer emphasises the point that "a certain kind of recurrence belongs to the festival."<sup>691</sup> The presence of festival time arises only through the iteration of the festival itself.<sup>692</sup> We could read this within a frame of performativity, and argue that Gadamer expresses here a point close to Barad: Presence as embodied meaning – as discursive-material configurations of the world – are kept and passed on by iterative movements, by iterative enactments/re-formulations/intra-actions.

Even though the embodied time of festivals appears as autonomous and it singles out an event by intense awareness and irreducible presence, it is not secluded from the before or after. The experience does not leave us. The mode of reality/existence that has been explored and acted upon leaves traces. In chapter four I presented Gadamer's notion of 'symbol' as a token for remembrance and initiation for a renewed engaged meeting. Outlined staging strategies can

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<sup>689</sup> See pp. 89-90.

<sup>690</sup> See presentation in chapter four pp. 123-124.

<sup>691</sup> Gadamer 1986, p. 41

<sup>692</sup> Loc. cit.

be understood in a similar vein. They can be understood as an *invitation* for renewed gatherings, a place both for enlivened remembrance and actual re-formulations of a state. The *meeting place* appears in this respect as the laboratory of “thick” presence and “deep” now, the site for *flesh’s* opening and closure. Autonomy is in this respect not aligned to the surviving object, but the non-determinism of creative acts – the ability to act upon one’s life and iterate it in a re-orientated way.

### **7.4.3 The factor of liveness**

The performance in Trondheim was videotaped and I have enclosed with this document an edited version. Still though, as probably many have felt when confronted by such a recording, it is difficult to document the aesthetic quality of walking in the middle of such a circus. The experience of being there cannot be compared with the “flat screen” view of a videotaped version. To document a *Musicircus* and do justice to its multi-sensorial quality is very difficult. We could find this difficulty to be a testimony to the value of *liveness* and the irreducible aesthetic quality of presence in the Cagean circus.

In Chapter Three I presented Goehr’s reading of the work-concept as an objectification of music into an autonomous and lasting entity. Contrary to this, the Cagean circus accentuates the qualities of processes that evade objectifications, the significance of conditional processes, the situation dependent and non-repeatable. We could say that the Cagean circus generates an artistic situation where it is difficult to separate out a product from the process that creates it; the artistic product we could say cannot be separated from the creative activity itself that is further linked to the intermingled contributions of members of a community. That is, we have an artistic situation intimately connected to a collective effort and linked to the immediate result of creative activity.

This brought us to a performative turn of approach where the character of event is highlighted and attempted to be captured by other theoretic tools than those framed by a work-concept such as the one Goehr presents. The concept of ‘performance’ and the interconnected ‘performativity’ is in this instance used by theoreticians like Fischer-Lichte to theorize an altered entry to the field of aesthetics where the quality of process and the non-ability to separate out a product is emphasised. The factor of liveness is here important.



Aesthetic character is in this respect connected to moments of execution; aesthetic significance is so to speak linked to a heightened awareness of the present tense of doing that includes the openness of play – that is, the responsive structure between participants and the auto-creative energy that thereby arises. However, though we in this respect are drawn to the experiential openness of the unknown future and the *intra-active*<sup>693</sup> dynamics in the folds of co-agencies, this is not a secluded moment with no reasons and no consequences. The intensified factor of liveness, however, magnifies the precarious “slip” in the movement of enacting; it magnifies the double move of ‘agential cut’<sup>694</sup> that encloses some possibilities and opens others, and the turn of iteration that inherits the parallel moves of conditionality and independence.

How important was the factor of liveness for our realisation? It is in fact difficult to think about the aesthetic quality of a *Musicircus* apart from the dynamics that emerge in the real time of its being done. As the enclosed documentation shows, the magic of being at the spot, having the ability to walk around, be surprised, entranced, and enclosed by aesthetic presence – like an ocean to swim within – is lost in the recorded version. It is like those photographs taken on holidays that remind us of having been there, but cannot replace the wish to go on a journey.

So what is it, aesthetically, that makes it so difficult to split the aesthetic character of *Musicircus* from the real time of performing? We have already touched these points, but let me summarize some in connection with our realisation in Trondheim. I have already emphasised how the staging strategies pull the attention to what emerges and so to speak invest our aesthetic sensitivity to the poesis in the slippery holds of wordly formulations – on the edge of being and becoming, knowing and not knowing, faith and handing over. Though, this is a state we hardly ever can refrain from as long as we live, the performance as an artistic medium that can stage the real time of enactment has the ability to address this point in a condensed fashion and interrogate its conditions by delimiting an experimental ground. We could therefore argue that the aesthetic significance of *Musicircus* is not only its collage, but

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<sup>693</sup> *Intra-action* is presented in chapter six, pp. 266-268.

<sup>694</sup> See my presentation of Barad’ agential realism in chapter six. Barad describes in this respect ‘agential cut’ as a “specific intra-action (involving a specific material configuration of the ‘apparatus of observation’) enacts an *agential cut* (in contrast to the Cartesian cut—an inherent distinction—between subject and object) effecting a separation between ‘subject’ and ‘object.’ That is, the agential cut enacts a *local* resolution *within* the phenomenon of the inherent ontological indeterminacy. In other words, *relata* do not preexist relations; rather, *relata-within-phenomena* emerge through specific *intra-actions*.” (Barad 2003, p. 815.)

that it is generated *live*.

Of course, from an experiential point of view this is also accentuated by the richness of sensuous opportunities that a live performance gives and which *Musicircus* allows with its spacious organisation: As listeners we use the whole body in the act of listening.<sup>695</sup> The Cagian circus as a performative technique stages a *spatio-temporal* event, and the creation and enactment of a performative space is intimately part of what aesthetically matters. The sensation of moving around, the surplus situation of simultaneous performances, the sense of space and presence – the richness of the experience – is lost in the documentation.

The *Musicircus* staged in Trondheim relied in this respect on the intensified factor of liveness as essential for the aesthetic value of the realisation. Through the precarious quality of real time, the audience was surrounded by an experiential richness and openness that encouraged an explorative attitude to the unknown of the aesthetic situation.

The aspects that I have pointed to above are intimately connected to the uncertainty that the future represents. But the impact of the live situation is not only impressive because of that. The discursive traits of historical practices, material configurations passed on to new situations, *Musicircus* as a live generated collage does not act in a cultural or historical vacuum. We could even argue that the invitation to a community to participate and offer of their own resources is like an initiative to exhibit in a condensed fashion the multiplicities of life practices, histories, traditions, that exist in an environment. The discursive aspects do not lose meanings but their meanings rely so to speak in their iteration in the climate of live enactment; the plurality collected under one roof enacts in a condensed fashion the co-presence of active and engaging worldlines: It is *history* pluralised, it is *history* relativized, but *present* to be and being acted upon. We are not presented the history of museums, but the living history of humans as a bubbling field of active embodiment in continued processes of distribution and reformulation. The factor of liveness does in this respect accentuate the contemporaneous quality of history, traditions and evolved practices, through the open moment of iteration that both can stabilize a solution-giving formula and turn it to other actional potentialities.

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<sup>695</sup> See for example my analysis of the act of listening in chapter five, pp. 213-216.

Fischer-Lichte accentuates the function of staged performances as a laboratory for cultural (re-)orientations. I am here in line with her thinking. My reading of the Cagean *Musicircus* has moved in the direction of not cutting Cage's presence aesthetics from history, nor culture or discursivity. Instead the destabilizing techniques of Cage's performative strategies have been seen as opening perspectives and the actional potential of reorientations. The continuous enactments of discursive-material practices have their open horizons, their positive indeterminacy.

### 7.5 *Musicircus* re-done

I presented in chapter three *Musicircus* as an "anti-work" that radically works with the frames and self-understanding of Western art music. Cage wraps off the objectifying move of revisitable sound structures, and leaves us with the playful event that emerges, is evasive and highly transformative. He points to a subject field of staged processes, and art not as a sign, but a mode of reality to be explored and experienced.

But what happens when the "anti-work" is re-done? Can we easily wrap it again in the conception of the hypostatized work? An imagined scenario was outlined where the marketing of a *Musicircus* would follow the template shaped by the established work concept and not be presented like a public arrangement at the mall.<sup>696</sup>

The work-based rhetoric, as we have seen, coloured also our production. It was used in the presentation to attract and inform potential participants, and it was used to market the event.<sup>697</sup> This is the norm. For example, in doing a Cage inspired production it would be regarded as disrespectful to not mention his name. As a canonized composer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a huge production of published scores, established work and composer focused discourses lend themselves as appropriate.

This discourse also gives us the ideal of *Werktreue* that can be mobilised as a force generating interest, curiosity and commitment. I mentioned in chapter three that in accordance with this

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<sup>696</sup> See p. 76.

<sup>697</sup> Some children dressed as princesses came to our *Musicircus*. I must admit that I do not actually know the reason for this, but perhaps some thought that the event was meant for children. If so they got something other than expected, though it seemed that they found the event amusing.

ideal it was quite plausible that we also would have some sense of obligation. Montague expressed an interest, aesthetically, to carry out the project in line with those he had joined which had been organized by Cage. In that way, our production took part in a kind of oral transmission.

Montague therefore as curator and artistic adviser implemented experiences from earlier circuses and tried to evoke a Cagean spirit associated to these circuses. A kind of *Werktreue* was therefore guiding our production. Our loyalty was in this respect mostly related to aesthetic and artistic matters, such as the arrangement for the emergence of a heterogeneous and varied collage. Conversely, if we had connected the ideal of *Werktreue* mainly to *Musicircus* as a kind of work where its work-character – its concept – is associated with a radical social questioning, then we would have emphasised other aspects to which we would have been obliged than those which actually were accentuated.

I mentioned also in chapter three that the performers probably felt that they were contributing to the realisation of a performance concept – a kind of work. To realise and experience this concept could be part of the motivation to respond positively to a *Musicircus*-invitation. *Werktreue* therefore functions as a tool to create a certain explorative situation. Still, the question remains: What kind of ideal are we speaking of here and how does it function?

This is also a question about the work. From chapter three to four, we went from music as objectified through a work-concept to the accentuation of the *event as staged*. The surviving moment was in this respect not a hypostasized entity to be “re-installed” in material garment, but resources for staging, the iterate-transformative ability of embodied states and the aftermath of experiences. Göran, as we have seen, looks upon Cage’s works as systems that do not have a teleological norm, but act as a generative motor. This approach helps to illuminate the aesthetic character of Cage’s poetics and an aesthetic category of presence. Still, as I have already demonstrated, the system of *Musicircus* is not developed before we have entered into a creative process of response and new initiatives. The historical idea of the Cagean circus operates as the thrown out suggestion that a creative community responded to in 1967. In this respect we could argue that according to an ideal of *Werktreue* we do not here have a supposed ideal, not even a text, but an open invitation, a challenge – a projective gesture open for responses. How do we handle this invitation?

Even though we might wish to handle the original idea as respectfully as possible, and make a production which was as authentic as possible, the deferral of the invitation structure asks for a *creative* response. Any realisation would add something and give the original initiation a distinct resistance. *Werktreue* is in this respect not only about understanding the invitation, but also about the answer and its attitude – what do we aim at by taking up the gauntlet? Our responsibilities are as much directed to the contemporary situation and ourselves as creative citizens of the world as to the past and an originator: What can *we* offer, what do *we* find appropriate? The open-endedness of the invitational structure shows the agential (re-orientating) potential of *intra-action*.

What is of interest is the potential in the oscillating dynamics between initiative and response. A production is not a simple repetition and *Werktreue* has not a unique ideal for which to strive. A work cannot be found to provide a model but we can find the initiative of an invitation. We could argue that to fulfil the ideal of *Werktreue* in this situation we have to take an active attitude to history. It is not about a condition that can only be transferred and re-installed, but a state that is created again and again through renewed enactments and (re-)formulations.

Andersson, as mentioned, questions the ability of contemporary music and art to really move, transform, and provoke us. Correlated to this, I asked: If we should keep the radical spirit of *Musicircus* and its groundbreaking ability, what would that ask of a production today?

We could, however, put the question a little differently. For example, we could imagine that *musicircus* had become a common strategy for organising events. Would that fact have levelled down the artistic potential of *Musicircus*? Three answers could be sketched: 1) *Musicircus* without its initial radical capacity seems irrelevant because it has outrun its function of breaking new ground. Partly this answer would have as its premise that a new production simply would be a re-installation of a prescribed design (a view that has been contested several times in this thesis). 2) Though the technique of *musicircus* has become more commonplace, its usefulness is not lost. Like those established practices to transport us to another state of mind,<sup>698</sup> *musicircus* could be seen as effective in evoking certain states and playful situations longed for. 3) The third answer would take as its premise that *Musicircus* is

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<sup>698</sup> We could mention here everything from meditation to the arrangement of sports events and carnivals.

like an open invitation, or challenge, that we respond to when we decide to do a Cagean circus. The question of artistic potential would thereby be as much a question about the creative response as the original invitation.

Even though ‘musicircus’ is not in danger of becoming an ordinary performance concept and the setup of simultaneous performances still appears as refreshing, the last answer points to the inevitable aspect of an active appropriation, of a creative response to an initiative. The question is not only if *Musicircus* has outrun its function, but what *we* find of interest and relevance by taking up the *invitation*. The Cagean circus as an event is not only the result of a sketchy formula. It happens because of a responsive structure of initiatives and creative replies. The artistic potential is as much decided by us as an original idea.

Available sources indicate that the first *Musicircus* was designed as a single event brought about due to local circumstances. It was not planned far in advance, but rapidly organised, and it came about as a result of local issues and resources.<sup>699</sup> From this singular arrangement, a performance design has arisen that takes on the character of a work, despite the ambiguities of the “missing” score and Cage’s restriction of his role as composer. The historical production could thereby be claimed to have gone from being an experimental event, re-organising the norms of performance, to existing within the work category as a specific design culturally acknowledged as a repeatable structure.

Nevertheless, even if we could argue that a history of re-productions has consolidated *Musicircus*, to do it we are confronted by a design concept with many open spaces, which we will need to fill. As a model, *Musicircus* has no specified authoritative text and its material leads us to the responsive structure of invitations, and if we try to comply with Cage’s aesthetic thinking and performative challenge we are as much guided to the unsettlement of experiential openness as the confirmation of an established identity.

I have shown how our production in Trondheim was partly guided by a *Werktreue* and performed within a work discourse, but also how the event was explicitly dependent upon an invitational structure that transformed Cagean chance operations into a question of response. Who would agree to participate? What would they offer? *Werktreue* as pre-interpretations

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<sup>699</sup> See chapter two.

performed by we the organisers became thereby modulated by the openness of conditional processes. These processes were decisive for the artistic content, and we could argue that the event, as festival time, was to let these processes take place in a condensed fashion. The activation of a mode of play without a teleological norm, but with rules for actions and an inspired awareness of tasks, brought about a concentration of the enacting moment as a spatial-temporal resonance and configuration in the intersectional zones of co-agencies that had its aesthetic excitement connected to the emergence of becoming, to a shared but not defined topography of interconnected, though independent *being* – a productivity of presence that created a surplus situation which was most effectively conveyed by the live production of the performance. The factor of liveness emphasising the event’s embodied-embodiment-dispersive character, the aesthetic category of presence, and the experiential openness of an explorative attitude were therefore important to contribute aesthetic value to the event.

These aesthetic values, accentuated by a transfer from work to *performance* as the pivot of attention, were in fact enforced by the production’s closeness to a work discourse and a canonized history of music. Still, we could ask: Could we have approached the challenge differently? What is needed to be done today? Our production was put into a context that explored ‘open form’ as a possibility for music and a “tradition” within the avant-garde of that art form. I have indicated that a production could have been made that reflected an interest in the social experiment of simultaneous performances. Junkerman’s analysis of the circus at Stanford emphasises these aspects.<sup>700</sup> We could have imagined a re-production that not only tried to test and provide a utopian experience of a non-segregated urban liveliness, but also questioned the Cagean perspective on heterogeneous simultaneity and individual autonomy. I showed in chapter five that it was preferred that auto-poietic drives in the fields of communication be restricted, in deference to a different voicing, like the ecological situation for human intentionality or the unforeseen chance in the unpredicted encounter.<sup>701</sup> In contrast I used *In between pieces for three players* by Wolff as an example of a piece that explores the dynamics of auto-poietic feedback coils in the intimate situation of communication. Could we have imagined a production that mixed these modes of exploration?

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<sup>700</sup> See former presentation of Junkerman’s analysis under the heading “nEw / foRms of living together” in chapter five.

<sup>701</sup> See pp. 196-197, 199-200 and 209-211.

The Cagean circus can be seen as an eminent example of the post-modern condition of fluid identities, fragmented stories, highly transmissive and dispersive, and furnishing the possibility to “shop” for our references and develop our own unique history in the intersectional culture of a multi-focal world. In that respect it has not lost relevance in a time that has increased the speed of global communication making it possible to be online day and night.

Though we are presented with musicircus-like phenomena on a daily basis, Cage’s approach to the post-modern is remarkable and rare. I remember the thought, years ago during a trail of commercials on the television: The seemingly Cagean exhibition of non-coordinated stories exhibited on closer inspection a quite contrary strategy. Each bubble of a fragment tried to evoke the illusion of a unified and non-contested universe that could bring about stable signifiers for the details of life in which, of course, the sales product was an important part. The aestheticism of our post-modern world reflects as much a creativity of textuality where matter is inscribed by signs as stressing the conjoint productivity of embodiment. The striking performativity is of the Butlrean type where identity is performed by iterative citation, by incorporating cultural scripts in the individual’s performing repertory and searching thereby to express visions of his/her own essence. We could even argue that the work category has found a place in the beauty industry, in plastic surgery and in working out at the gym.

In the displaced, prolonged dynamics of technologies of communication and transmission, *Musicircus* can reflect the post-modern flux of present opportunities, its interconnected complexity, the sense of an extended presence to be logged on at any time, yet still not cover up the “fleshy condition” of this state but accentuate the earthly qualities of mediated presence as being part of the ongoing process of (re-)configuration of individual lives.



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## **9 APPENDIX**

**DVD: *Musicircus* in Trondheim, 2006.**