

Negotiating Music and Politics: John Cage's
United States Bicentennial Compositions
"Lecture on the Weather" and "Renga with Apartment House 1776"

by:

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ABSTRACT

In 1975 the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) invited John Cage to write a composition for the bicentennial birthday of the United States. The result was *Lecture on the Weather*, a multi-media work for twelve expatriate vocalists and/or players with independent sound systems, magnetic tape, and film. Cage used texts by Henry David Thoreau, recordings of environmental sounds made by American composer Maryanne Amacher and a nature-inspired film by Chilean visual artist Luis Frangella. The composition opens with a spoken Preface and is arguably one of Cage's most overtly political pieces. A year later the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) and six major United States orchestras commissioned Cage to compose another work commemorating the United States bicentennial of the American Revolution. In response, he created *Renga with Apartment House 1776*, which follows his concept of a "music circus," or simply, a musical composition with a multiplicity of events occurring simultaneously. Scored for voices, instrumental soloists and quartets, *Renga with Apartment House* is a multi-faceted work marked by layers of American hymns and folk tunes.

Cage's United States Bicentennial compositions – and his other pieces created in the 1970s and 1980s – have received little attention from music scholars. Unique and provocative works within his oeuvre, these compositions raise many questions. Why was Cage commissioned to write these works? How did Cage pay tribute to this celebratory event in American history? What socio-political meanings are implied in these pieces? In this thesis I will provide political, cultural, and biographical contexts of these works. I will further examine their genesis, analyze their scores and selected performances, reflect

on their meaning and critical implications and consider the reception of these works. My research draws on unpublished documents housed in the CBC's archives at McGill University, the archives of C. F. Peters, the New York Public Library and it builds on research of such scholars as David W. Bernstein, William Brooks, Benjamin Piekut, and Christopher Shultis. This thesis offers new information and perspectives on Cage's creative work in the 1970s and aims at filling a significant gap in Cage scholarship.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The late 1960s and early 1970s were a very prolific time for the American experimental composer, writer and visual artist John Cage. He composed important works such as *Rozart Mix* (1965) for four performers using at least twelve tape recorders and eighty-eight magnetic tape loops and, together with Lejaren Hiller, he created *HPsCHD* (1967–69) – which is a substantial multimedia composition. He also conceived *MusiCircus* (1967) for any number of performers who are willing to perform in the same place and time, which is a concept that remained important throughout the rest of Cage’s compositional career. In 1969 he composed *Cheap Imitation* for piano based on Erik Satie’s *Socrate*. In 1970 he completed the large-scale work *Song Books* inspired by Satie and Henry David Thoreau. In 1974, Cage conceived the virtuosic piano work *Etudes Australes* using star charts and, in the same category, the *Freeman Etudes* for violin (1977–1980). In 1974 Cage also composed *Score (40 Drawings by Thoreau) and 23 Parts* for any combination of instruments based on drawings of Thoreau. In 1975 he wrote the politically oriented work *Lecture on the Weather* for narrators, tape recordings and film, a tribute to America’s bicentennial celebrations in 1976. Furthermore, he created *Child of Tree* for a solo percussionist using amplified plant materials which is among a series of nature-inspired works. In the following year, he created the large-scale and multifaceted *Renga with Apartment House 1776* for voices and instruments, his second work honoring the bicentennial of the United States.

During this period Cage also edited a compilation of scores from 274 different composers called *Notations* (1969) and authored several important books: *A Year from Monday* (1967), the sequel to his seminal *Silence: Lectures and Writings* of 1961, *M’*

Writings '67-'72 (1973), as well as *Empty Words: Writings '73-'78* (1979). Many of these works display an interdisciplinary character as he was influenced by and sometimes collaborated with architects, visual artists, poets, and dancers. Cage also became more than ever interested in politics. He followed the controversies surrounding the Vietnam War and flirted with Maoism. He witnessed the Civil Rights movement and developed a strong interest in environmentalism. These events also shaped Cage's compositions and artistic thought in the 1960s and 1970s. While much has been written on Cage's earlier years and works, little attention has been paid to this later period and oeuvre. My thesis sheds light on this neglected topic and fills this lacuna in Cage scholarship by specifically focusing on two compositions written on the occasion of the bicentennial of the United States: *Lecture on the Weather* (1975) and *Renga with Apartment House 1776* (1976) and presenting these works in the larger socio-political environment of the time as well as in the context of Cage's career.

The neglect of this topic might be the result of a longstanding and one-sided focus on certain Cageian works and ideas among performers, concert organizers, critics, scholars, and teachers. Cage's early innovative compositions for all-percussion and prepared piano have been immensely popular in the concert arena and as a subject of study and have thus overshadowed many of his later works. Musicians, critics, and academics alike have been fascinated by Cage's famous and highly controversial "silent" composition *4'33"*.¹

¹ Many Music History textbooks include Cage but the coverage does not include much information on his works created after the 1960s. In most cases Cage's prepared piano works and chance-based and indeterminate pieces including *4'33"* are discussed, but Cage's later compositions are not considered at all. See Marie K. Stolba, *The*

Cage also aroused much controversy and fascination with his pioneering use of chance operations and indeterminacy. Most of his experimentation with these techniques happened during the 1950s and 1960s and thus musicians and scholars have examined the works of these decades, leaving the compositions of the late 1960s and after widely unstudied. During the late 1960s, Cage became quite engaged with politics and embraced New Left ideals, including Civil Rights and environmentalism. Scholars may have shunned the exploration of Cage's sometimes-provocative political views or blatant criticism of United States politics and skipped coverage of this period in his career. For example, Kenneth Silverman's impressive 483-page biography gives little attention to the study of Cage's engagement with radical political thought during these years.² Cage's works of this period show more subjectivity than the compositions of the previous two decades and undermine his rhetoric of the 1950s and 1960s, which suggests that his use of chance operations would eliminate subjectivity in his art. In the late 1960s and 1970s, Cage curiously instills his music with more expressivity and political meaning and at the same time uses chance and indeterminacy, aspects typical of his works from the previous

Development of Western Music: A History (Dubuque, IA: Brown and Benchmark Press, 1994), 672–674; Mark Evan Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 574–576; and Craig Wright and Bryan Simms, *Music in Western Civilization* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Schirmer, 2006), 744–745. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca in their *A History of Western Music* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 930–934 dedicate about five pages to Cage, but mention his late compositions only in two paragraphs; Kyle Gann dedicates an entire book investigating many facets of *4'33"* Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010). Richard Taruskin and Christopher H. Gibbs also focus on Cage's prepared piano, early electronic music, chance and indeterminate compositions including *4'33"*, see *The Oxford History of Western Music: College Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1021–1028.

² Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2010), 267–274.

two decades. This may have puzzled scholars convinced by Cage's claim of eliminating his likes and dislikes in compositional frameworks via chance and indeterminacy. Such issues and contradictions show that there is a need for more scholarship on Cage's later compositions and artistic thought.

I. Significance of Study and Literature Review

While a substantial amount has been written on Cage's music and thought from the 1930s through the 1960s, little has been published on his oeuvre of the 1970s and its relationship to politics. General biographical information for my topic, however, can be found in David Revill's biography *The Roaring Silence: John Cage: A Life* (1993), David Nicholls's monograph *John Cage* (2007), Kenneth Silverman's comprehensive biographical study *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage* (2010), and Rob Haskins's book *John Cage* (2012). Three other books that detail Cage's techniques and works that need to be mentioned are James Pritchett's *The Music of John Cage: Music in the Twentieth Century* (1996), David Nicholls's *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage* (2002), and Kay Larson's *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists* (2012).³

There are a few publications that examine *Lecture on the Weather* and *Renga with Apartment House 1776*, which are the focus of this thesis. Important interviews and

³ David Revill, *The Roaring Silence: John Cage: A Life* (New York: Arcade, 1992); David Nicholls, *John Cage* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage* (New York: Knopf, 2010); James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); David Nicholls, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Rob Haskins, *John Cage* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012); and Kay Larson, *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

literature that discuss *Lecture on the Weather* include Walter Zimmermann's interview with Cage, Paul Griffith's small monograph *Cage* (1981), Majorie Perloff's book *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (1981), and Richard Fleming's and William Duckworth's collection of essays *John Cage at Seventy-Five* (1989).⁴ Writings that specifically investigate *Renga with Apartment House 1776* include David Cope's 1980 interview with Cage, Tracy Caras's and Cole Gagne's interview with Cage (1982), reprinted in *Conversing with Cage* (1988) edited by Richard Kostelanetz, Peter Dickinson's *Cage Talk: Dialogues with and about John Cage* (2006), and Marc Thorman's dissertation "Speech and Text in Composition by John Cage, 1950–1992."⁵

General information regarding music and politics of this era is provided, in writings including Hans- Werner Henze's *Music and Politics* (1982), Howard Pollack's *Harvard Composers* (1992), John Wall's *Music, Metamorphosis and Capitalism: Self Poetics and* (2007), and Lydia Goehr's *The Quest for Voice: On Music, Politics, and the Limits of Philosophy* (1998).⁶

⁴ Walter Zimmermann, *Desert Plants: Conversations with 23 American Musicians* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Aesthetic Research Centre of Canada, 1976); Paul Griffiths, *Cage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981); and Majorie Perloff, *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Richard Fleming and William Duckworth, eds., *John Cage at Seventy-Five* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1989).

⁵ David H. Cope, "An Interview with John Cage," *The Composer* 10–11, no. 1 (1980): 6–22; Tracy Caras and Cole Gagne, *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1982); Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *Conversing with Cage* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Peter Dickinson *Cage Talk: Dialogues with and about John Cage* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006); and Marc Thorman, "Speech and Text in Compositions by John Cage, 1950–1992" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2002).

Publications examining Cage and politics are very few. Cornelius Cardew's essay collection *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* (1974), David Bernstein's 2001 essay "John Cage and the Aesthetic of Indifference," David Patterson's essay "'Political or Social': John Cage and the Remolding of Mao Tse-Tung," Frederic Rzewski's *Nonsequiturs* (2006) and Philip Gentry's 2008 dissertation "The Age of Anxiety: Music, Politics, and McCarthyism, 1948-1954" all provide vital information about various composers and their relationship to music and politics. But these publications do not examine Cage's works of the 1970s. Two interviews that explicitly examine Cage's politics are a conversation between Cage and Morton Feldman, published as *Radio Happenings I-V* (1966-1967) and another interview by Geoffrey Barnard, *Conversation without Feldman, A Talk Between John Cage and Geoffrey Barnard* (1980).⁷

There are several significant publications that examine Cage and Thoreau. These include William Brooks's noteworthy essays "About Cage About Thoreau" (1989) and

⁶ Hans-Werner Henze, *Music and Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982); Howard Pollack, *Harvard Composers: Walter Piston and His Students, from Elliott Carter to Frederic Rzewski* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992); John Wall, ed., *Music, Metamorphosis, and Capitalism* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007); and Lydia Goehr, *The Quest for Voice: On Music, Politics, and the Limits of Philosophy* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 2008).

⁷ Cornelius Cardew, ed., *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism: and Other Articles* (Essex, UK: Anchor, 1974); Steven Johnson, ed., *The New York Schools of Music and the Visual Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 113-134; David Patterson, "Political or Social," in *Cage and Consequences*, eds. Julia H. Schröder and Volker Straebel (Hofheim am Taunus, Germany: Wolke Verlag, 2012); Frederic Rzewski, *Nonsequiturs: Writings & Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation*, ed. Gisela Gronemeyer and Reinhard Oehlschlägel (Cologne, Germany: MusikTexte, 2007); and Philip M. Gentry, "The Age of Anxiety: Music, Politics, and McCarthyism, 1948-1954" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2008); John Cage and Morton Feldman, *Radio Happenings I-V*, trans. into German by Gisela Gronemeyer (Cologne, Germany: MusikTexte, 1993); and Geoffrey Barnard, *Conversation without Feldman, A Talk Between John Cage and Geoffrey Barnard* (Santa Monica, CA: Black Ram Books, 1980).

“Music II: From the Late 1960s” (2002), Daniel Charles’s interviews with Cage in *For the Birds* (1981), Daniel Herwitz’s essay “John Cage’s Approach to the Global” (1994), and Jackson Mac Low’s article “Cage’s Writings up to the Late 1980s” (2001). These sources all discuss the writings of Cage and Thoreau, but do not provide an in-depth analysis of Cage’s Thoreau-based *Lecture on the Weather* and *Renga with Apartment House 1776*.⁸ Christopher Shultis’s *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition* (1998) is the most significant book that examines the Cage-Thoreau relationship (as well as Cage’s views on Ives and Emerson), but it does not focus on the works that are at the center of my study. The perhaps most substantial book on Cage and Thoreau is Jannika Bock’s *Concord in Massachusetts, Discord in the World: The Writings of Henry David Thoreau and John Cage* (2008), but it only concentrates on Thoreau’s influence on Cage’s texts.⁹

⁸ William Duckworth and Richard Fleming, eds., “John Cage at Seventy-Five,” in *Bucknell Review* 32, no. 2 (1989), 59–73; William Brooks, “Music II: From the late 1960’s,” *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 128–150; *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 113–134; John Cage, *For the Birds. Conversations with Daniel Charles* (Salem, NH: Marion Boyars, 1981); Marjorie Perloff and Charles Junkerman, eds., *John Cage: Composed in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 188–205; and David Bernstein and Christopher Hatch, eds., *Writings Through John Cage’s Music, Poetry, and Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 210–233. .

⁹ Christopher Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998); and Jannika Bock, *Concord in Massachusetts, Discord in the World: The Writings of Henry David Thoreau and John Cage* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang, 2008).

II. Methodologies

This study uses several methods to better illuminate Cage's compositions and concepts. At the center of my thesis are two works *Lecture on the Weather* (1975) and *Renga with Apartment House 1776* (1976), each of which has political implications. For this reason I take an interdisciplinary approach to the study of this music, exploring political, historical, and literary contexts of these compositions. I first discuss politics during the 1960s and 1970s, using primary and secondary literature and examining Cage's socio-political environment, which was marked by Cold War politics, Maoism, the Vietnam War, the New Left Movements, and environmentalism. I also take biographical contexts into consideration, surveying Cage's most important professional and private occupations in the 1960s and 1970s.

Then I undertake case studies of *Lecture on the Weather* and *Renga with Apartment House 1776*. I use published and unpublished sources (facsimiles of scores and Cage's personal writings) located at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, at Mills College in Oakland, California, in the archives of the C. F. Peters publishing company in New York and the Canadian Broadcast Corporation. I analyze Cage's compositions, their genesis and their compositional techniques. I also examine and compare selected performances of these works because these scores do not reflect sonic results in conventional ways. Further, in my close reading of these scores, I assess them within Cage's biography and larger historical and cultural contexts. Lastly, I investigate these works' reception history, inquiring how musicians, audiences and critics responded to these compositions.

III. Chapter Outline

My thesis is divided into six chapters. In the second chapter, I will address the historical and political environment of the late 1960s and 1970s, topics such as Cold War politics, the Vietnam War, Maoism, the New Left Movements, and environmentalism and how these contexts influenced American and European artists, including Cage. The third chapter provides an overview of Cage's responses to these events and his creative development during these years. Chapter three will examine Cage's career from then 1960s through the 1970s. – including his new compositional aesthetic, discuss new philosophies he adds to his schema and politics such as Maoism and the Vietnam War – which in turn, had a huge impact on Cage.

Chapters four and five focus on Cage's U.S. bicentennial works through analysis and close reading. In chapter four *Lecture on the Weather* commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Company will be discussed. This composition offers a scathing critique of United States politics and alludes to the New Left politics and environmentalism. In chapter five *Renga with Apartment House 1776* commissioned by six United States orchestras and the National Endowment for the Arts are explored. Like the previous work, *Renga with Apartment House 1776* critiques United States politics but in much more subtle ways. The conclusion addresses similarities and differences of the two works.

Through my detailed treatment of these two works and close look at Cage's creativity in the late 1960s and 1970s, I hope to make a substantial contribution to this heretofore-neglected subject in Cage scholarship.

CHAPTER 2: SETTING THE STAGE: POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS OF CAGE'S WORK DURING THE 1960S AND 1970S

In the 1960s and 1970s, Cage was one of the most visible, most connected and most prolific artists in the United States. He had a thriving career and a large international following. He received numerous commissions from high-profile institutions and artists abroad and in his own country. These included two commissions of works celebrating the United States bicentennial from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and several American symphony orchestras. But during this period Cage also experienced major challenges and his political and cultural environments were marked by instability. The enormous political, social and technological changes that occurred during this time had a significant impact on the art scenes in the United States and Europe as well as on Cage's artistic thought and oeuvre. In this chapter some of these changes and their influences on the arts will be traced to set the stage for a detailed discussion of Cage's two U.S. bicentennial works, *Lecture on the Weather* and *Renga with Apartment House 1776* in chapters four and five of this thesis.

I. Politics and Technology

On February 1, 1960, with the Civil Rights Movement underway, four young African Americans sat down at a whites-only lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina and inspired many such "sit-ins" in cities throughout the American south. On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King gave his iconic "I have a Dream" speech at the famous Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. and attracted thousands of people. Manifold political disasters and successes unfolded. President Lyndon B. Johnson shook

hands with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. officially passing the “Civil Rights Act” which banned discrimination based on race, gender, religion or national origin and encouraged desegregation.

On February 9, 1965, the U.S. deployed its first combat troops to South Vietnam, significantly escalating its role in the war against the Viet Cong. By the early 1970s, the U.S. had caused much chaos, genocide and environmental destruction in that part of the world. In 1973 the energy crisis and oil embargo against the U.S. emerged in part due to the Yom Kippur War when the U.S. supported Israel in their dispute over land, opposing an Arab alliance. The Flower Power and hippie counter culture movement of the 1970s, whose followers often indulged in sex, drugs and rock and roll and exposed post-World War II environmental degradation, reached a peak and led to the establishment of important environmental policies and the initiation of Earth Day. They specifically critiqued that:

Americans were slurping leaded gas through massive V8 sedans. Industry belched out smoke and sludge with little fear of legal consequences or bad press. Air pollution was commonly accepted as the smell of prosperity. “Environment” was a word that appeared more often in spelling bees than on the evening news. Although mainstream America remained oblivious to environmental concerns, the stage had been set for change by the publication of Rachel Carson’s *New York Times* bestseller *Silent Spring* in 1962. The book represented a watershed moment for the modern environmental movement, selling more than 500,000 copies in 24 countries and, up until that moment, more than any other person, Ms. Carson raised public awareness and concern for living organisms, the environment and public health.¹⁰

¹⁰ “Earth Day: The History of a Movement,” accessed May 1, 2015, <http://www.earthday.org/earth-day-history-movement>.

The so-called New Left emerged as an overarching movement with roots in the Civil War. It embraced the fight for Civil Rights, women's rights, and sexual liberation. It vigorously demonstrated against the Vietnam War and took issue with Lyndon B. Johnson. He had been Vice President and succeeded President John F. Kennedy after his assassination in 1963, but lost popularity among the left-wing of the Democratic Party when he "supported" the war in Vietnam.¹¹ His successor, President Richard Nixon, helped escalate the war and became the enemy of the New Left:

The New Left's high tide corresponded with Nixon's presidency. He was its worst adversary, and activists of all stripes were united by their opposition to him and to the war he insisted on prolonging. For a few years, roughly 1969 to 1971, a host of new movements surged forward, inspired by the third world. It seemed as if the United States might be on the verge of revolution. All the "invisible" people, African Americans, Chicanos, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, Asian Americans, gay liberationists, and radical and lesbian feminists demanded power.¹²

Indeed, revolution became a popular slogan and goal among leftists who dreamed of a societal and governmental reorganization, a reform of government policies in favor of the people. Politicians and many artists, including Cage, began to toy with concepts of revolution and some of their ideas of revolution are traced in this chapter.

¹¹ Johnson inherited the war from President John F. Kennedy although he did not wholeheartedly endorse it. He passed many laws that benefited the welfare of the poor public, for example Medicaid was established during his administration.

¹² Van Gosse, *The Movements of the New Left 1950–1975: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford and St. Martin Publishers, 2004), 23–24.

The New Left movements “took inspiration from the ideals of freedom and justice that had unified and motivated the allied forces in their defeat of fascism during the Second World War and later became hallmarks of the American Message during the Cold War.”¹³ The New Left arguably motivated much rethinking and many fights for change. Some of their ideas, however, were based on ideological notions of pro-American democracy and freedom (the United States and their allies had taken a position of political and moral superiority) and above all, aimed to contrast the principles of Communist superpower countries (especially the Soviet Union) which were perceived as totalitarian, restrictive and oppressive regimes driven by ideological propaganda. On the other hand, some leftists in the U.S., a diverse group of mostly young activists, endorsed (for a short period of time) Maoism as a new kind of communism that would lead to social revolution.

Partly due to the Cold War, the 1960s and 1970s saw great technological changes. In 1957 the world witnessed the launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik I which shot across the skies and initiated the space age. This technological innovation:

...caught the world’s attention and the American people off-guard ... the public feared that the Soviets’ ability to launch satellites also translated into the capability to launch ballistic missiles that could carry nuclear weapons from Europe to the U.S. Then the Soviets struck again; on November 3 [a month after the Sputnik I launch], Sputnik II was launched, carrying a much heavier payload, including a dog named Laika.¹⁴

¹³ Kathryn Boyer, “Robert Rauschenberg and the American Postwar Political and Social Scene,” *Konsthistorisk tidskrift, revy för konst och konstforskning* 76, nos. 1–2 (2007): 92–98.

¹⁴ Steve Garber, web curator, “Sputnik and the Dawn of the Space Age,” last modified October 10, 2007, accessed July 1, 2015, <http://history.nasa.gov/sputnik>.

The first presidential election debate (with Nixon and Kennedy) was televised on September 26, 1960, and turned Kennedy into a media star who was elected president of the U.S. later that year. On February 9, 1963, the first Boeing 727 took off and opened the door to domestic and international travel for millions of Americans and people from abroad. American Astronaut “Buzz” Aldrin Jr. saluted the U.S. flag on the lunar surface on July 20, 1969. Aldrin and Neil Armstrong became the first humans to walk on the moon. Their success was considered an American victory during the Cold War in the space race that began in the late 1950s and fulfilled President Kennedy’s goal of “landing a man on the moon and returning him safely” before the end of the 1960s.

II. Artistic Responses to Sociopolitical Events and Technological Progress

The political and social turmoil and the enormous technological changes did not go unnoticed among Western artists who became acutely aware of the charged atmosphere and the sociopolitical movements throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Vivid responses to these turbulent times can be seen, for instance, in the provocative poetry of the iconic American poet Allen Ginsburg, the confrontational multimedia works of Korean-American Fluxus artist Nam June Paik, the politically stimulating paintings of American visual artist Robert Rauschenberg and in the works of numerous leftist and politically engaged musicians in both the United States and Europe including Frederic Rzewski, Christian Wolff, Luigi Nono, Hans-Werner Henze, and Cornelius Cardew. Several examples of these artists’ reactions to the politics and technological innovations and their stance toward Cage’s work at that time will now be examined.

II a. Activist Poets and Visual Artists

Allan Ginsberg (June 3, 1926–April 5, 1997) stands out as one of the most socially and politically controversial American poets in the twentieth century. During the Democratic National Convention of 1968 held in Chicago, Illinois, the Youth International Party (Yippies) amongst other organizations; Ginsberg decided to demonstrate against police brutality with the ten thousand protesters. When they were met with a force of 11,900 Chicago police, 7500 Army troops, 7500 Illinois National Guardsmen and 1000, secret service agents, Ginsberg led “om” chanting to allegedly calm the heightened tensions between police and protesters. When asked to testify at the Chicago Seven trial about the violence during the 1968 presidential campaign and the nomination of the pig “pigesus” for president, Ginsberg recited part of his famous long poem *Howl*:¹⁵

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness,
starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking
for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly
connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night,
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking
in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating
across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,
who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw
Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs
illuminated,
who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes
hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the
scholars of war,
who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing

¹⁵ The Yippies said that they felt that “their candidate [pigesus] has more going for him than any of the other candidates” and thought “If we can’t have him in the White House, we can have him for breakfast.” See “Chicago Cops Squelch Piggy Nominations,” in *The Montreal Gazette*, August 23, 1968, accessed April 28, 2015, <https://news.google.com/newspapers>.

obscene odes on the windows of the skull,
who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their
money in wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through
the wall,
who got busted in their pubic beards returning through Laredo
with a belt of marijuana for New York,
who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise
Alley, death, or purgatory their torsos night after night
with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and
cock and endless balls.¹⁶

By the end “the judge leaped upright in his chair, put his hand to his head and turned a look of mixed horror and astonishment on Mr. Ginsberg.”¹⁷ Many other famous artists were put on trial including the novelist, playwright, filmmaker, and actor Norman Mailer.¹⁸ At one point, defense attorney and Civil Rights activist William Kunstler asked

¹⁶ Allen Ginsberg and William Carlos Williams, *Howl* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 1959), 9–10.

¹⁷ J. Anthony Lukas, “‘Om’, Ginsberg’s Hindu Chant Fails to Charm a Judge in Chicago,” in *The New York Times*, December 13, 1969.

¹⁸ Norman Mailer dedicated his 1966 collection of poems and critiques of the political climate of the sixties, *Cannibals and Christians*, to President Lyndon Johnson “whose name inspired young men to cheer for me [Mailer] in public.” The book includes a photograph of Mailer’s futuristic Lego city that served as a proposal for dealing with the crisis of suburban sprawl. As Mailer explained, “This photograph is of a construction seven feet tall, built of twenty thousand pieces, on a scale of one inch to forty feet (the U.N. Secretariat Building at the lower left is to the same scale), all representing a possible vertical city of the future more than a half mile high, near to three-quarters of a mile in length, with 15,000 apartments for 50,000 people. It was constructed over a fair period by the writer and Eldred Mowery, Jr., with the assistance of Charlie Brown of ‘Charlie Brown’s Generation’.” Further, in this volume Mailer challenges ideas of American capitalism: “And they poison the wells and get away free, some of them—they get away free if there is a devil and he has power, and that is something else we do not know. But the plague remains, that mysterious force which erects huge, ugly, and aesthetically emaciated buildings as the world ostensibly grows richer, and proliferates new diseases as medicine presumably grows wiser, nonspecific diseases, families of viruses, with new names and no particular location. And products deteriorate in workmanship as corporations improve their advertising, wars shift from carnage and patriotism to carnage

the socially engaged American singer Judy Collins to sing “Where have all the Flowers Gone” from the witness stand while he placed “a Viet Cong flag on the defense table wearing a black armband to commemorate the war dead.”¹⁹

During this time, Ginsberg wrote his infamous Pulitzer Prize winning poetry collection *The Fall of America: Poems of These States*. Although in its preface, Ginsberg recognizes the positive aspirations of the U.S., he stated in the volume’s dedication, “I look for the counterbalance and offset of our materialistic and vulgar American democracy ... I say democracy infers such loving comradeship, as its most inevitable twin or counterpart, without which it will be incomplete, in vain, and incapable of perpetuating itself.”²⁰ Some of the poems in this collection include “Kiss Ass,” “War Profit Litany,” “Elegy Che Guevara,” and “Hum Bom.”

Cage and Ginsberg knew each other. Ginsberg, however, did not particularly enjoy Cage’s work. Cage liked Ginsberg personally, but thought his poetry was too ego-driven. Ginsberg attended Cage’s performance of his expansive text piece *Empty Words* at Naropa College on August 4, 1974. After about twenty minutes into Cage’s performance:

members of the audience began throwing things. Some came up onstage to perform. Others filled in his silences with guitar playing, bird whistles, and

and surrealism, sex shifts from whiskey to drugs. And all the food is poisoned. And the waters of the sea we are told. And there is always the sound of some electric motor in the ear.” Norman Mailer, *Cannibals and Christians* (New York: Dial Press, 1966), i–5.

¹⁹ Ted Tobias, *In Tribute: Eulogies of Famous People* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 84.

²⁰ Allen Ginsberg, *The Fall of America: Poems of These States* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 1973), see his dedication to Walt Whitman.

screams. “They went into a state of disenchantment,” he [Cage] recalled, “complete disenchantment.” The uproar was so intense and violent that he thought his sonic lecture might be not only useless but also destructive. “I was destroying something for them, and they were destroying something for me.”²¹

A group of people, including Ginsberg, circled Cage during the performance for protection.

Nam June Paik (1936–2006), a Korean-born American multimedia artist with university degrees in music and musicology, is another example of an artist who was strongly influenced by the political, cultural and technological changes in the 1960s and 1970s. He became a prominent representative of the subversive Fluxus art movement.²²

²¹ One of the more infamous performances of Cage’s *Empty Words* took place in Milan, Italy at the Teatro Lirico (December 2, 1977) and was described as follows: “Sitting at a small table he read the wordless third lecture softly and very slowly from 9:30 p.m. until midnight. The Milan press devoted major stories to the affair. ‘Pubblico in tumulto per l’intero concerto del santone dell’avanguardia,’ ran a headline in *Il Giorno*: Audience in tumult for entire concert of the oracle of the avant-garde. According to local newspaper accounts, Cage no sooner began reading than members of the audience began coughing, singing, hissing, whistling, telling jokes, clapping rhythmically, singing from the liturgy, throwing firecrackers, shouting ‘Bourgeois!’ ‘Assassino!’ ‘Viva Verdi!’ Someone called him ‘the fake Cage’ and demanded that the real one be brought out. After about an hour and a half, some audience members invaded the stage, took his water, switched off his reading lamp, and removed his glasses. Cage had his supporters too, and stayed impassive throughout. ‘At the end I went to the front of the stage and showed no anger,’ he recalled, ‘but I made a kind of embracing gesture with the arms out, and up. And then there was a kind of wild applause.’” Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage* (New York City: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 265–267.

²² The Lithuanian-born graphic designer George Maciunas was perhaps the most important founding member and impresario of the interdisciplinary Fluxus movement (he is said to have coined the term Fluxus). Fluxus has ties to the early twentieth-century Dada movement (Maciunas saw Fluxus as a reemergence of Dada, as “neo-dadaism”), but took on a more anti-establishment / anti-authoritarian direction in line with the rebellious atmosphere in the 1960s. Cage influenced many of these artists when he was a teacher at the New School for Social Research in New York. His students included George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Toshi Ichiyanagi, and La Monte Young, all representatives

Paik created sexually provocative works, including the *Young Penis Symphony* (1962), the first “symphonic” work in his oeuvre. Another work referencing the sexual liberation movement of the time is his *Opera Sextronique* (1967) at whose premiere avant-garde cellist Charlotte Moorman performed in the nude and was arrested and found guilty of exposure. Another work of Paik created for a Fluxus Champion Contest (February 3, 1963) presents a critique of nationalism: “Performers gather around a large tub or bucket on stage. At [sic] each pisses, he sings the national anthem. When any contestant stops pissing, he stops singing. The last performer left singing is the champion.”²³

The relationship between Paik and Cage was fraught with tension and “Cage, acted at that time [the 1960s] as a release mechanism for Paik.”²⁴ In one of Paik’s first meetings with Cage in 1960, Paik shocked him, as Cage biographer Kenneth Silverman explains:

Cage was sitting in the front row with [David] Tudor and Karlheinz Stockhausen. Small and reportedly timid, Paik broke off playing some Chopin and picked up a pair of scissors. He had believed that Cage would be in formal dress and had planned to cut off his swallowtail. Instead he went for what was available – Cage’s dark suit and tie. Paik “suddenly approached me,” Cage recalled, “cut off

of Fluxus. Although Paik (like Yoko Ono, another important Fluxus artist) was not a student of Cage, he became one of the most dominating figures of the Fluxus movement. Paik studied at the University of Tokyo, graduating in 1956 with a degree in aesthetics based on a thesis on Arnold Schoenberg.

²³ The American Frank Trowbridge won this contest. Susanne Rennert, “‘We Have Time’, Music, Fluxus, Video: Paik’s Time in Düsseldorf, in the Rhineland,” in *Nam June Paik*, edited by Sook-Kyung Lee and Susanne Rennert (London: Tate Publishing, 2010), 65.

²⁴ John G. Handhart, *Exhibitions at Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Apr. 30–June 27, 1982* (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1982), 82.

my tie and began to shred my clothes, as if to rip them off of me.” By one account, after the shredding, Paik poured over Cage’s and Tudor’s heads a bottle of shampoo, then left the crowded atelier. Cage and others stayed, Cage sat, “dazed, immobile, and terrified for some time.”²⁵

It may seem that Paik did not have much respect for Cage, but he held him in high regard.²⁶

In the 30-minute video *Global Groove* (1973) which was broadcast on WNET, Paik expresses political criticism but also includes contributions by artists with a lighter touch, such as Cage telling stories, Ginsberg’s “om” chanting, Moorman playing the video cello and the music of German avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen. *Global Groove* specifically presents a distorted face of Nixon with Cage recounting anecdotes combined with images of a Pepsi bottle and Pepsi advertisement from Japanese

²⁵ Silverman, 198.

²⁶ Paik would further say, “‘Cage means ‘bird cage’ in English,’ Paik said, ‘but he didn’t lock me up; he liberated me.’ He saw Cage as a uniquely intellectual composer, a founder of conceptual art: ‘no one knows the real meaning of your invention,’ he wrote to Cage, ‘perhaps inventor [sic] himself including’.” Silverman, 198. Kyle Gann explains the importance of *Vexations* for piano, “Cage discovered the little piece (which had been known to only a few) in 1949, arranged for its publication in the magazine *Counterpoints*, and organized a performance at the Pocket Theater in New York on September 9, 1963, at which a team of twelve pianists (including David Tudor and composers Christian Wolff, James Tenney, Philip Corner, David Del Tredici, and John Cale) took turns playing through the 840 suggested repetitions, a feat which took eighteen hours and forty minutes. Called ‘a poor man’s *Ring of the Nibelungs*’ by composer Gavin Bryars, *Vexations* has since become a recurring ritual of the avant-garde: performances are surprisingly frequent (I have participated in three, in Austin, Chicago, and New York). Richard Cameron-Wolfe, James Cuomo, and a few others have even succeeded in performing the piece without assistance.” Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage’s 4’33”* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 77.

television, symbolizing American Cold War propaganda.²⁷ Cage may have not wholeheartedly endorsed the use of him and his art in this context. In 1973 Paik also finished his hour-long *A Tribute to John Cage*, which is:

an engrossing study of the strongest single influence on Paik and a true homage to Cage's unique genius. Included in the tape is a wonderful monologue about Cage by David Tudor (explaining how Cage taught him to use his stutter as a sound no better or worse than any other), a series of anecdotes by Cage (some of which had been included in *Global Groove*, of course) taken primarily from Cage's compilation *Silence*, and a performance of *4'33"* staged for the camera by Cage in Harvard Square.²⁸

Although Cage and Paik's relationship was ambiguous, to say the least, Cage learned more about Paik's work throughout the 1960s and thought it was "very interesting." As he put it, Paik's "work, conversation, performances, daily-doings never cease by turn to amaze, delight, shock, and sometimes terrify me."²⁹

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) was an important and provocative visual artist closely associated with painters dedicated to Abstract Expressionism, the iconic American art movement that flourished after World War II. Like the artists mentioned above, he was strongly affected by progressive movements of change in postwar America. In the 1960s Rauschenberg experimented with art in which everyone could

²⁷ Silverman, 287–288. There is a famous picture of Nikita Khrushchev and Richard Nixon drinking Pepsi from 1958.

²⁸ Handhart, 108.

²⁹ Cage cited in Silverman, 198.

participate (Cage did this in some of his works as well). One of the most striking examples of this approach is his work *Black Market* (1961) where a:

suitcase contained four objects as well as four rubber stamps and an ink pad. On the Combine-painting hung four clipboards furnished with paper. As Rauschenberg envisioned the work, viewers would select an object from the suitcase, draw a picture of the said object on a clipboard, and take the object. The viewer would then replace this object with one of his or her own, stamping it with the numbered stamps provided

thus expanding the parameters of Art.³⁰ Rauschenberg also used superimposed American images into his art, for instance, American military helicopters, bald eagles, a beautiful white woman looking in the mirror and chose the colors red, white and blue in *Tracer* (1963). This and other works arguably reflected on current sociopolitical issues.

It is well known that American intelligence agencies (especially the Central Intelligence Agency) attempted to promote “American” art throughout postwar Western Europe to fight Soviet propaganda which had cultivated the notion of the United States as a cultural wasteland. During the Venice Biennale of 1964 at which many artists from around the world presented their works, Rauschenberg was the first American to win. The response from Europe was not positive. Art scholar Kathryn Boyer described the reactions as follows:

Vehement criticism came from both the French and Italian press, but most critics focused on issues of imperialism and capitalism rather than Cold War symbolism,

³⁰ Boyer, 93.

accusing the United States of, at the very least, playing dirty pool (exhibiting in more space than allotted), and, at the most, bribing the jury.³¹

As will be explained later, among European composers like Stockhausen and Luigi Nono, Cage's work was just as controversial and divisive as Rauschenberg's in European art circles.

Cage and Rauschenberg had been friends and artistic collaborators going back to the summer of 1948 when they were both at Black Mountain College. In the late 1940s Cage and Rauschenberg both frequented the Artists Club in New York City, which, in Rauschenberg's words, was "the primary arbiter of what would be called abstract expressionism."³² Rauschenberg's all "white" paintings influenced Cage's famous silent piece *4'33"*. Cage recognized that he and Rauschenberg differed in many ways, but that they shared aesthetic ideas. "I had the feeling that it was hardly necessary for us to talk," Cage said, "we had so many points in common." Both Cage and Rauschenberg shared similar artistic thought. For example they both experimented with the unconventional artistic aspects and further averted overtly subjective expressions of ideas.³³ They arguably also shared similar progressive political views.

³¹ Ibid., 100–101.

³² Cited in David Revoll, *The Roaring Silence: John Cage: A Life* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1992), 96. Also cited in David Nicholls, "Towards Infinity: Cage in the 1950s and 1960s," *Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 103.

³³ Silverman, 142–143.

II. b. Politically Engaged Avant-Garde Musicians in the United States

Musicians in the United States were no less engaged than the poets, multimedia artists, and painters mentioned above. Frederic Rzewski (b. 1938), a composer from Westfield, Massachusetts and self-proclaimed Marxist who has spent much of his career in Europe, has explored political themes in many of his works. He has written politically inspired music since the 1960s. One of his most controversial works is *Coming Together* (1972) for recitation and piano. It uses the letters of Sam Melville (1934–1971), a critic of the Vietnam War and American imperialism. In 1969 Melville bombed eight government and commercial offices in New York City. The chosen Melville letters from around 1971 reflect the time he spent in the Attica State Prison in New York where he suffered from terrible conditions. Melville was shot and killed during the Attica Prison riots (1971) after New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered the State Police to take back control of the facility. Rzewski wrote that his setting of the Melvin letters in *Coming Together* “reproduce[s] personal documents [by the prisoner] ... and attempt[s] to heighten the feelings expressed in [him] by underscoring [the text] with music.”³⁴

³⁴ Frederic Rzewski, Liner notes to the LP *Attica / Coming Together / Les Moutons de Panurge*, Performed by Karl Berger, Alvin Curran, Jon Gibson, Steve Ben Israel, Joan Kallish, Eddie Korvin, Garrett List, and Frederic Rzewski (Greenville, ME: Opus One Records, 1973). The text of this work is “I think the combination of age and a greater coming together.” It “is responsible for the speed of the passing time. It’s six months now, and I can tell you truthfully few periods in my life have passed so quickly. I am in excellent physical and emotional health. There are doubtless subtle surprises ahead, but I feel secure and ready. As lovers will contrast their emotions in times of crisis, so am I dealing with my environment. In the indifferent brutality, the incessant noise, the experimental chemistry of food, the ravings of lost hysterical men, I can act with clarity and meaning. I am deliberate, sometimes even calculating, seldom employing histrionics except as a test of the reactions of others. I read much, exercise, talk to guards and inmates, feeling for the inevitable direction of my life.”

Although there is little information about the relationship between Rzewski and Cage, Rzewski has had much to say about Cage. In 1973, when Rzewski lived in New York City and was poor, attempting to support his family, he approached Cage:

I called Cage and told him I was confused and needed some friendly advice. He said, "Come right down." He listened to my story and said (I paraphrase): You have an abrasive personality. Your problem is that you waste your energy fighting against the things you don't like in the world. You should find some organization whose function is to fight the things you don't like in the world, and direct your energy positively toward that organization.³⁵

Rzewski did not enjoy this advice, as he explained: "What I didn't like about the world was precisely its organization, and its organizations."³⁶ But Rzewski lauded Cage after his death in 1992:

If he had not been there it would have been necessary to invent him. His mind, unique as it was, was a part of a collective Utopian vision that inspired masses of people in the second half of this century. But this vision seems to be dissipating. Experimentation in art can no longer claim to have the same necessity that it had fifty years ago. The idea of a new civilization built upon the ruins of the old has become a precarious one, shaken by ghosts of the past that stir beneath the surface. The hope that art might lead to a better way of perceiving (and transforming) the world has vanished, and with it the leaders who gave this hope expression. We are left on our own, and a frightening mess it is that we have to deal with.³⁷

³⁵ Frederic Rzewski, *Nonsequiturs: Writings & Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Cologne, Germany: MusikTexte, 2007), 426.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

It seems that Rzewski and Cage had respect for each other despite starkly differing political and aesthetic views.

Christian Wolff (b. 1934), a student, colleague, and friend of Cage and a close friend of Rzewski, is another important composer indebted to radical leftist ideals during the 1960s and 1970s. Originally influenced by Cageian experimentalism in the 1950s, Wolff became soon thereafter interested in Marxist–Leninist ideas and later in Maoism.³⁸ He instilled politics in many of his works. An avowed Maoist in the 1970s, Wolff was worried by Cage’s relative non–involvement in the politics of the time. Thus he found that he had to choose between the two friends / mentors.³⁹ Wolff scholars Michael Hicks and Christian Asplund found that Wolff:

agreed that music should be for the people, but cited Rzewski that “music for the people is music in which the people participate.” If the title, text or context held political messages, the music could only be accompaniment: he [Wolff] couldn’t imagine what “revolutionary character” music could have outside of that ... Cage disappointed him, he said by attacking capitalism’s brutality in his prose while downplaying potentially political aspects of music in favor of the merely social.⁴⁰

Some of the works Wolff composed provoked controversy. His composition *Burdocks* (1970–71) for one or more groups of five or more players respectively is a good example.

³⁸ Wolff’s earliest works use very limited material. For example his Duo for Violins (1950) use only three notes within the interval of a major second. Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music and After: Directions Since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 94–96.

³⁹ Michael Hicks and Christian Asplund, *Christian Wolff* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 49.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

This work redefines the conservative idea of orchestra music and its authoritarian qualities and has ten distinct sections using different experimental techniques, including improvisation. When the subversive British Scratch Orchestra (under the direction of Cornelius Cardew discussed later in this chapter) played it in 1972, some of the group's Maoist members refused to perform it because of its alleged lack of political relevance.⁴¹ For them it did not seem to be radical enough.

In 1972, Wolff was commissioned to write a work for Rzewski. The result was *Accompaniments*, a setting of ancient Chinese texts intended to communicate leftist ideas more clearly to audience members. Wolff explained:

This piece marks a break from what preceded, due partly to a growing impatience with what seemed to me the overly introverted feeling in much of my earlier music, with a sense of contradiction between the situation of its players social, cooperative as well as calling on great individual alertness—and the way the resulting music seemed to affect its audience—as something remote, abstract, and “pure.” At the same time my interest in social and political questions had intensified and taken a more specific direction, and so I decided to attempt to make a more explicit connection between it and my music.

ACCOMPANIMENTS began that attempt, including a political text and using musical material of a more direct character. The text is from Jan Myrdal and Gun Kessle's book *China: The Revolution Continued*. It is part of an account of a veterinarian and a midwife, in their own words, of their experiences in a village in the area of Yen-an during and after the Cultural Revolution. It was chosen both for its concreteness and for its illustration of the principle of applying a revolutionary political orientation to immediate and practical problems, indicating that these can only be understood and dealt with within such a political framework.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid., 50–51.

⁴² Christian Wolff, Liner Notes to the LP *Accompaniments* (New York: CRI, 1976), n.p.

Wolff wrote many overtly political pieces critiquing social injustice, capitalism, and war, including *Wobbly Music* (1978), *Bread and Roses* (1976–83), and his series of peace marches.⁴³

He also had ongoing debates about politics and the role of politically engaged music with Cage. Wolff made Cage realize that without using sounds in an overtly political fashion one could not change society. Wolff may have arguably made Cage think about how musicians could revolutionize the world.⁴⁴

Besides Rzewski and Wolff, there were many other American musicians who wrote music that displayed leftist politics in various ways. *Source Magazine*'s sixth issue of July 1969 featured interviews in which composers were asked about whether and how they took a stance toward political problems in their music. When asked “[h]ave you, or has anyone, ever used your music for political or social ends?” Morton Feldman replied that his music was not consciously political but that he wrote music for an anti–Vietnam War protest movie called *Time of the Locust* by Peter Gessner (the music was performed by percussionist Max Neuhaus). Harold Budd stated: “I don’t think that artists can stand around and scratch their nuts while people are being shot by police.” Robert Ashley said, “[S]ince I started working with the ONCE Group ... every piece of mine has been either political or social or both. I decided some time ago ... that I was not in accord with the idea that music should be abstract.” Robert Moran, whose anti–Vietnam orchestral work was broadcast across the U.S. two days before the Democratic National Convention in

⁴³ See Sabine Feisst “Christian George Wolff,” *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, second edition, ed. Charles Hiroshi Garrett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), accessed July 8, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu>.

⁴⁴ Hicks and Asplund, 59.

1968, said perhaps misleadingly: “I tried to stay clear of deliberate anti-war statements because I wanted that to be up to the viewer ... I deliberately stayed clear of attaching symbols.” Daniel Lentz’s response was “Yes, I have. I’ve done some anti-war pieces. The most recent is called *Hydro-Geneva, Emergency Piece No. 3*. It’s kind of an allegory on napalm gases. It came out of the whole Berkeley and Vietnam thing. Another piece called *Rice, Wax and Narrative* is a very large-scale allegory on the Oriental and Occidental methods of using rice, using wax, and of course, using speech ... it’s politically oriented. It also has some relationship to napalm and similar atrocities.” David Behrman also saw his music as politically motivated, “In 1959 we gave a little concert sponsored by the Communist Party ... There was the ‘Artists Against the War in Vietnam’ festival in New York. I had a piece in that.” Behrman’s piece, *A New Team Takes Over*, is undoubtedly political as he explained: “It’s supposed to be about the absurdity of politicians ... I made it out of election campaign material, only using speeches by people I don’t like. I have to do it over again this year, because it dated so quickly. So this year I’m using Nixon’s material. I have a new title for it, *A New Team Takes Over*.” James Tenney replied: “I can think of two compositions where there were political connotations ... One called *Viet Flakes* to go with a film, the other *Fabric for Che*.”⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See Larry Austin and Douglas Kahn, eds., *Source Music of the Avant-garde, 1966–1973* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 211–219.

II. c. Politically Engaged Avant-Garde Musicians in Europe

In Europe some of the artists, specifically musicians, were arguably even more outspoken than their American peers and some of them challenged Cage and his colleagues in the United States in major ways. Luigi Nono (1926–1990), an Italian composer of serial music and self-proclaimed Marxist is a good example. He strongly believed in the transformation of society by writing politically engaged music.⁴⁶ In 1960 Nono completed his first opera in one act (dedicated to his father-in-law Arnold Schoenberg), *Intolleranza* (Intolerance), which displays Nono's anti-fascist views. It concerns a migrant traveling through South Italy and witnessing protests, torture, and arrests. The world premiere of this work in Venice was, however, met with a riot by Italian neo-Marxists who shouted "Viva la polizia" during the torture scene.⁴⁷ Through technology, this work attempts to incorporate the audience into the drama. At its Boston premiere "[t]he camera filming the audience scanned the auditorium while the words

⁴⁶ As early as 1950 Nono wrote music that was starkly political. In 1956 he composed the "anti-fascist" work *Il Canto Sospeso* (*The Suspended Song*, 1956) for voices and orchestra. It is a highly regarded serial composition. Through text it reflects the thoughts of people facing execution during the Second World War. The title *Il Canto Sospeso* is derived from a poem that Ethel Rosenberg wrote on January 24, 1953 before she and her husband were executed later that year due to espionage against the United States and for allegedly giving the Soviets secret information so that they could further their atomic program. This event enraged Europe and inspired Nono to write this composition as an allegory for people facing execution after the Second World War. Nono also gave a notorious statement in 1959 when he was in Darmstadt. He criticized composers that used indeterminacy and "aleatoric" music, attacking "Cage head-on, as well as what he saw as dangerous misinterpretations of indeterminacy and chance operations by certain European composers." See Amy Beal, "David Tudor in Darmstadt," *Contemporary Music Review* 26, no 1. (2007): 83.

⁴⁷ Richard Toop, "Expanding the Horizons: The International Avant-garde," *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Music to Opera*, eds. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 472.

directed to the audience (‘And you? Are you blind like a herd of cattle?’) appeared on one of the screens. The TV cameras projected the faces of the spectators on the onstage screens in intrusive close-ups.” There were also cameras placed on the street which showed the opera goers the anti-communist protests happening outside of the theatre during the opera’s performance.⁴⁸

In 1964 Nono took a more pronounced Marxist point of view in his composition *La Fabbrica Illuminata* (*The Illuminated Factory*, 1964) for tape with electronic sounds, recorded factory noises, and chorus. British Nono protégé Michael Parsons observed:

The subject of this piece is the working conditions in a steel factory. Testimonies directly received from workers in the Italsider factory of Genoa are presented on tape in a sort of montage describing the dehumanizing brutality of the work (“noxious fumes . . . masses of molten steel . . . a factory like a concentration camp . . .”). But beyond this, there is the moment of conscious awareness (“out of 8 hours work, the worker pockets only two . . . personnel management to accelerate production time.”).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Claudia Vincis, “‘To Nono: a No’: Luigi Nono and his *Intolleranza 1965* in the U.S.,” in *Crosscurrents American and European Music In Interaction, 1900–2000*, eds. Felix Meyer, Carol Oja, Wolfgang Rathert, and Anne C. Shreffler (Basel: Paul Sacher Foundation, 2014), 451–463.

⁴⁹ In the same review, Parsons (a cofounder of the infamous Scratch Orchestra) challenged Cage stating, “Nono attacks what he feels is the irresponsibility of musicians who see music as existing in a vacuum, as an end in itself, without reference to historical context and wider meaning. This aestheticism is characteristic of composers who are interested only in ‘objective’ sound patterns, and reaches an extreme form in the work of John Cage: sound for sound’s sake. Cage’s view reflects a subjectivity which can see no order or meaning in the world, and seems to deny the use of purposeful action, in music and outside it. Nono strongly condemns this as ‘spiritual suicide’, and asserts the power of music as human expression and action. This is symbolized in his music by the use of the human voice: Nono’s work always contains an optimistic vision, and expresses a conviction that tyranny and injustice can be conquered by collective effort.” It is, however, interesting to note that even as late as 1968, Parsons only seemed to know very little about Cage’s music, only what he had learned about it from Nono. Michael Parsons,

Nono also composed a couple of other remarkable explicitly political works during the late sixties and seventies. They include *A floresta é jovem e cheia de vida* (The Forest is Young and Full of Life, 1966) which expresses his opposition to American imperialism and the Vietnam war and the opera *Al gran sole carico d'amore* (In the Bright Sunshine Heavy with Love, 1975) based on texts by Bertolt Brecht, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Marx, and Lenin.

Due to his anti-American views, the CIA denied Nono several visas when he attempted to travel to the U.S. Nono tried to get a visa for the U.S. in 1956 to wed Schoenberg's daughter but was denied.⁵⁰ He saw this act as an "old discriminating and racist McCarthy-ist law against 'communists'."⁵¹

Nono disapproved of Cage and his work (as he rejected the music of many other American composers) even though his late father-in-law had taught Cage in the 1930s. Nono deemed Cage's chance-based and indeterminate work abstract and apolitical. In his article "The Historical Reality of Music Today" (1960), Nono condemned the irresponsibility of musicians who believed that music can exist in a vacuum, as an end in itself, without reference to historical context and wider meaning. With this critique he targeted Cage in whose music he saw "objective" sound patterns. To Nono, the work of

"Luigi Nono," *New Left Review*, 1 no. 32 (July–August 1965): 86. Also see Michael Parsons, "John Cage," *New Left Review*, 1 no. 23 (January 1964): 83–86.

⁵⁰ In February of 1965, Nono was granted a visa so he could attend the United States premiere premiere of his opera *Intolleranza* in Boston. But it took some effort. Composer Richard Teitelbaum wrote to Senator Robert Kennedy and composer Gordon Mumma approached Congressman Wes Vivian and Senator Philip Hart to obtain a visa for Nono. See Vincis, "'To Nono: a No'," 451–463.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Cage represented a perfect case of sound for sound's sake. Parsons opined that for Nono Cage's work and thought reflected a subjectivity that ignored order or meaning in the world, and rejected music's role of inspiring "purposeful action."⁵² Nono strongly condemned this position as "spiritual suicide." He believed that the power of music lies in human expression and action, symbolized by the use of the human voice. Further he believed that tyranny and injustice can be conquered through artistic and collective efforts. "For me music is the expression and the testimony of a musician and a man caught in actual reality. What is more, everyone—and this is true in music too—helps to determine the reality of life."⁵³

Another politically astute composer in Europe was Hans-Werner Henze (1926–2012). He was born in Germany, but for political reasons he chose to move to Italy. During the late 1960s, he gravitated toward New Left politics. Henze's reasoning for this shift was influenced by the suppression of African Americans in the United States and by the National Liberation Front in Vietnam. As a gay man, he also felt that the anti-Gay atmosphere in his home country and in many other places was stifling.⁵⁴ One of his most influential left-wing political works is the oratorio *Das Floss der Medusa* (The Raft of

⁵² Parsons, "Luigi Nono," 23.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁴ Hans-Werner Henze, *Music and Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 167. The National Liberation Front (NLF) in Vietnam (formed in 1960) also refers to the Vietcong or a group formed in North Vietnam whose goals were to overthrow the South Vietnamese Government and reunify the North with the South under communist rule. The NLF saw the South as being ruled by an imperialist American State and wanted the U.S. influence removed from the region.

Medusa, 1968).⁵⁵ As the genre suggests, this work is for orchestra and voices, but it can be considered a requiem for the Argentine revolutionary and Marxist Che Guevara who played an important role in the Cuban revolution. Ernst Schnabel wrote the libretto. The premiere in Hamburg produced quite a scandal, as Henze recalled:

At the start of the concert at the Hamburg Radio there was a “go-in” with slogans against consumer culture; the audience was bombarded with thousands of leaflets. All this was organized by three different groups: the Berlin SDS (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund), “Culture and Revolution” team, members of the Hamburg College of Music, and of the Hamburg SDS. Then there was the poster of Che Guevara which had been attached to the podium, and which the programme director of the radio tore up out of hand. Thus the real protagonist was this enraged radio station boss who, although he knew that the work had been written in honour of Che, was unable to tolerate his picture hanging there. Students had put the poster up ... Then other comrades put up a red flag instead of the Che poster. I was now called upon by the Radio’s legal adviser to have the flag removed, or else be responsible for the consequences. Thereupon I said I couldn’t care less about the consequences, because I was not prepared to submit to such blackmail ... part of the choir refused to sing in the presence of a red flag (!) and walked off ... heavily armed riot police came in and began to beat up and arrest students as well as Ernst Schnabel the librettist of *Medusa* (once head of the Hamburg Radio), making the concert physically and morally impossible.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Other well-known oratorios include Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio*, Handel’s *Messiah*, and Haydn’s *The Creation*. This genre typically features religious topics and was common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It originated in seventeenth-century Italy, his chosen country of exile after 1953, which might be the reason why Henze used this genre.

⁵⁶ Henze, 167–168.

During the performance people chanted “Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh,” a rallying call of the late sixties and early seventies, representing Ho Chi Minh’s struggle against American imperialism.⁵⁷

Henze, who preferred to use conventional expressivity and tonal idioms in many of his works, did not care for Cage’s musical aesthetics and works. In his writings about music and politics, Henze called Cage anti-historical, comparing him with the French drama theorist and philosopher Antonin Artaud, and thought that he tried to completely eliminate historical thinking which, in his eyes, was un-Marxist.

British composer Cornelius Cardew (1936–1981) is another interesting case of a European composer with radically leftist views. He was initially influenced by Cage’s indeterminate works and wrote many indeterminate scores himself. In 1972, however, Cardew released a scathing critique against Cage in an essay included in his book: *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*. The essay’s title, “John Cage: Ghost or Monster?,” refers to Mao’s Yan’an Forum Talks.⁵⁸ He accused Cage’s music of being “art for art’s

⁵⁷ Ho Chi Minh oversaw the formation of the NLF in 1960 and promoted a reunification of North Vietnam and South Vietnam under communist rule. The last U.S. troops left Vietnam in March 1973, and in April 1975 Communist forces seized control of Saigon, renaming it Ho Chi Minh City.

⁵⁸ Yan’an refers to the city in which Mao gave his famous talks (eventually translated into English) and deals with the function of art and literature in Communist China. His talks specifically focused on the idea that all art should be political and that art should reflect the life of the working class and their tastes. The “Ghost or Monsters” title probably refers to Mao’s speech about propaganda which he gave at the Chinese Communist Party’s National Conference. Mao stated, “all poisonous weeds, ghosts or monsters, must be subjected to criticism.” “In our country bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology, anti-Marxist ideology will continue to exist for a long time. Basically, the socialist system has been established in our country. We have won the basic victory in transforming the ownership of the means of production, but we have not yet won complete victory on the political and ideological fronts. In the ideological field, the

sake” and bourgeois. In the same book, pianist John Tilbury (born in 1936) attacked Cage in several ways. He argued that compositions which utilize forms to “elucidate” abstract ideas (like in the very indeterminate work *MusiCircus*, 1967), we “misapprehend [its] true nature, purpose [and] value.”⁵⁹ Tilbury most likely came to this conclusion because of the difficulty that works incorporating large amounts of indeterminacy or performance freedoms can pose for musicians, as for instance in *MusiCircus*. This work does not articulate a clear message and avoids straightforward expression of political ideas in music. Tilbury also opined that Cage’s compositional methods are anti-revolutionary and self-contradictory. He equates the use of chance operations to a loss of control or in political terms, to a capitalist system that makes decisions for the individual, which in turn dictates “war, mass hunger, pollution and neurosis.”⁶⁰ Tilbury concludes that Cage “ignores the revolutionary aspect of change” by accepting chance as a primary compositional method and that his reliance on chance “reveals a deep rooted pie-in-the-

question of who will win in the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie has not been really settled yet. We still have to wage a protracted struggle against bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideology. It is wrong not to understand this and to give up ideological struggle. All erroneous ideas, all poisonous weeds, all ghosts and monsters, must be subjected to criticism; in no circumstance should they be allowed to spread unchecked. However, the criticism should be fully reasoned, analytical and convincing, and not rough, bureaucratic, metaphysical or dogmatic.” Philip Short, *Mao: A Life* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2001), 457.

⁵⁹ Cornelius Cardew, *Stockhausen Severs Imperialism and Other Articles* (London: Latimer New Dimensions, 1974), 40–41. *MusiCircus* (1967) is one of Cage’s most indeterminate and anarchic works that questions hierarchies among musicians, authorship, and control. The composition is scored for any number of performers who are willing to perform in the same place and time. A conductor is not required. This will be discussed in the proceeding chapter.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

sky liberalism.”⁶¹ Cage, who advocated revolution and social change and was even fascinated with Maoism, probably did not favor this interpretation.

Although one can look at Cage’s compositional practice in Cardew’s and Tilbury’s perspective, many of Cage’s detractors do not acknowledge the implicit anti-authoritarian politics of Cage’s orchestra works which do not use a conductor in a traditional sense. They do not recognize the democratic potential of Cage’s indeterminate pieces which often give performers more freedom than conventionally composed scores.

In his early career Cardew followed Cagean aesthetics and formed the experimental Scratch Orchestra (1969–74) which built on Cagean ideas. This group included what he called “musical innocents,” or people that did not have a thorough education in classical music and could “respond to his [Cardew’s] ideas without preconceptions.”⁶² In 1971, however, Cardew tried to politicize the group and organized workshops so that he and members of the Scratch Orchestra could study Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao’s writings. But Cardew lacked the training of a political scientist and appropriated ideas in naïve ways, as Parsons noted:

In the series of essays which Cardew collected and published under the title *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*, much of the writing reflects a reductive form of socio-economic determinism and reveals little awareness of crucial dialectical aspects of the relation between culture and society. In his enthusiasm for revolutionary change, he ignored the significance of Western Marxist theory in the domain of culture and politics, in the writings of Gramsci, Lukács, Adorno,

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Michael Parsons, *Cornelius Cardew: A Reader*, ed. Edwin Prévost (Harlow, Essex, UK: Copula Publishing, 2006), 130. Also see John Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew (1936–81): A Life Unfinished* (Harlow, Essex, UK: Copula Publishing, 2008).

Marcuse and others. Much of this he would probably have denounced as “revisionism” or “armchair Marxism.” His refusal to take account of theoretical work of this kind suggests that he chose to regard Marxism as a fixed and self-justifying doctrine, rather than as a developing tradition of argument and analysis, subject like any other to critical examination and renewal.⁶³

Regardless of Cardew’s limited understanding of Communist thought, most of his artistic thought post-1971 was based on Marxist–Leninist–Maoism. One of his most important works of this period is *The Great Learning* (1969–71). Although not as radically leftist as his later pieces, it is a composition that uses text from the canonical books of Confucianism. The work comprises seven paragraphs, each of which strives towards a moral principle and uses different sounds. For example, the first uses drones and whistles. Probably one of the most infamous performances of *The Great Learning* was performed in 1971 at a Promenade Concert at Royal Albert Hall. For this occasion, however, Cardew edited and politicized the work which was written before his conversion to Maoism. He adapted it to his new political aims that reflected Maoist principles. Cardew remembered that for that performance he used “banners bearing four slogans which expressed our feelings about revolution and *The Great Learning*... These banners were prohibited from the performance by the BBC who also censored the programme note to remove all political statements except such as were smuggled into the [new] translation.”⁶⁴ The slogans used during the concert read “Make the past serve the present,” “Revolution is The Great Learning of the present”; A revolution is not a dinner

⁶³ Ibid, xiv.

⁶⁴ Parsons, *Cornelius Cardew*, 208.

party, it is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another”; and “Apply Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung Thought in a living way to the problems of the present.”⁶⁵

Given these turbulent times and challenging contexts, Cage received many new stimuli and had to come to terms with severe criticisms of his art in view of his elevated role as artist and as a promoter of abstract works that aimed at reducing self-expression and subjectivity. As was shown above, some of Cage’s performances were met with hostile reactions from leftist audiences. He was also attacked by several of his acquaintances and was challenged by some of his closest artist friends for his reluctance to take a political stance in his music.

Rob Haskins observed that “the changing political landscape in the late 1960s and ‘70s played a role in Cage’s darker mood” at that time.⁶⁶ Indeed, in this period Cage created works displaying “darker” and more subjective tones. How did Cage’s career evolve in these years? What were his political and philosophical views? What works did he write and why? What were the major performances during this period? Who were his associates and friends? These and other questions are pursued in the next chapter.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Rob Haskins, *John Cage* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 103.

CHAPTER 3: A TIME OF CHANGE: CAGE'S CAREER IN THE 1960s AND 1970s

In the 1960s and 1970s Cage's career underwent many changes. A keen observer of his environment, he began to rethink his compositional approaches and aesthetics, as I would argue, in response to the sociopolitical upheavals of the era and also in reaction to the criticism he received from some of his fellow artists and friends. He experienced both critiques of his work and successes. He became an internationally famous and sought-after composer, performer, writer and painter with a busy touring schedule and received more and more well-paid commissions for small and very large ensembles. His music began to be recorded and captured on film and it was featured in the national and international press. Cage had a strong influence on artists in the classical and popular arenas around the globe.

Curiously, this intensely creative, innovative, prolific and important period in Cage's career has received little scrutiny from Cage scholars and the works composed in this era have been underappreciated. Richard Taruskin, a highly influential musicologist (although hardly an authority on Cage's music) wrote, "The second half of Cage's career was no match for the first, and [David] Revill does not flinch from saying so (attributing the decline not to imaginative fatigue but to the distractions of fame)."⁶⁷ Taruskin perpetuated a view advanced by the young British percussionist David Revill who authored one of the first comprehensive biographies on Cage. This view has also been

⁶⁷ Richard Taruskin, "No Ear for Music: The Scary Purity of John Cage," *The Danger of Music and other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 272. First published in the *New Republic*, 15 March 1993.

adapted by Cage scholar William Brooks who pointed out that Cage's compositions from the late 1960s may be perceived as quite conservative compared to Cage's previous groundbreaking works:

[I]t can be argued that Cage's recent compositions manifest the same neo-conservatism that has come to characterize America's political life. Staff lines have reappeared, sometimes even with meter signatures and notes of fixed durations. Instrumentation is often conventional, unaffected by electronics. Unpredictability has been reduced; in contrast, say, to the scores for the *Variations* (from the mid-sixties), that for *Apartment House 1776* (1976) gives a fairly clear picture of the sounds that will be heard. Critics who once complained about the noisy confusion now grouse about the tedium of so much C major. Something, clearly, has changed; but what, and how much, and how is it to be interpreted?⁶⁸

Brooks poses interesting questions. How can we look at Cage's works after the mid-1960s? Are they truly conservative or are they examples of stylistic innovation reflecting new ideas and the cultural events of a new era? This chapter offers answers to some of these questions and suggests that Cage's later career deserves more scholarly and critical attention. His oeuvre from this period is arguably as important, if not more important, and interesting than that of his early career.

I. Touring the Globe

The late 1960s and the 1970s saw Cage travelling around the world. In 1964 he went on a six-month world tour with fellow artists and friends, including pianist-

⁶⁸ William Brooks, "Choice and Change Cage's Recent Music," in *A John Cage Reader in Celebration of His 70th Birthday*, ed. Peter Gena, Jonathan Brent, and Don Gillespie (New York: C. F. Peters, 1982), 83.

composer David Tudor, painter Robert Rauschenberg and dancer–choreographer Merce Cunningham and his dance company. The group gave about seventy performances, in cities such as London, Copenhagen, Warsaw, Osaka, Bombay, and Bangkok. On this tour, Cage met Nobel Laureate and Mexican poet, Octavio Paz in New Delhi (who severely disagreed with Cage and his strict use of chance and who suggested a correction of the results of chance procedures). On this tour Cage also reunited with some of his earliest and most important influences. In Ahmadabad, India he met musician Gita Sarabhai and while in Japan, Cage rekindled his former friendship with Zen teacher Daisetz T. Suzuki. These tours surely expanded Cage’s insight into cultures and politics around the world and widened his artistic influence as he told C. F. Peters “he hoped to solve the problem of distributing his music behind the Iron Curtain” and “The people in Czechoslovakia & Poland are starved for it.”⁶⁹

In 1966 Cage performed with David Tudor in Canada and made appearances with the Cunningham Company in Germany, Sweden, France, Portugal, and England. In 1968 Cage was in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela. From 1970 through 1976 he performed in such countries as France, Holland, Germany, Belgium, England, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Yugoslavia, Poland, Iran, Canada, Mexico, Japan, and Australia with and without the Cunningham Company. Some of these places experienced economic, cultural and political turmoil, such as Iran which was just a few years away from the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Cage must have been struck by the economic, social and political instability in some of these countries. In between these international concert

⁶⁹ Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again: John Cage* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 205.

travels, Cage gave countless performances and presentations throughout the United States in large and small venues. He also enjoyed numerous residencies as guest composer and performer at American universities and colleges. From 1972 on he had an agent, Mimi Johnson, who helped him with his busy schedules.⁷⁰

II. Commissions and Other Gestures of Recognition

Cage was honored with important performances, all-Cage concerts and festivals and retrospectives on the occasion of his 60th birthday (in 1972) and commissions throughout the 1960s and 70s. In 1961 he was commissioned by the Montreal Festival Society to compose a major orchestra work, *Atlas Eclipticalis* that was premiered August 3, 1961. On February 6, 1964 American conductor-composer Leonard Bernstein led the New York Philharmonic in a well known but disastrous performance of this work:

In presenting *Atlas*, to recall, the musicians in effect perform as soloists, for a length of time determined beforehand. The seventy or so Philharmonic instrumentalists, their contact microphones attached to a bank of amplifiers, were supposed to play through Cage's piece for eight minutes. Instead, many of them improvised freely, ran through scales, quoted other works, talked, fooled with the electronic devices, or simply sat on the stage without playing. 'They acted criminally,' Cage said, 'some even stomping on the microphones.' Christian Wolff was present and thought the musicians 'shocking, really, really awful.'⁷¹

⁷⁰ Mimi Johnson is the founder of the New York-based record label Lovely Music (1972).

⁷¹ Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again. John Cage: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 202. Benjamin Piekut explores this topic in his book *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

About one third of the audience walked out and one critic called some of the sounds produced “unbearable noise.”⁷²

Cage’s *Variations V* for any number of performers using photo-electric cells and twenty-four amplified tape recorders and radios triggered by twelve capacitance antennas (1965), an interactive work using Theremin-like antennas, was commissioned by the French–American Festival and performed by the Cunningham Dance Company at Lincoln Center in New York in 1965.⁷³ While in residency at the University of Illinois in 1968 and 1969, Cage premiered two important works. The first work, *MusiCircus* (1967), was performed in 1968. Haskins noted that:

The musicians participating in this event could perform any music they wished – any style, for any instrumentation and at any volume. So long as many musicians were involved, and so long as they remained in one large space, Cage felt that the sound they produced would be so complex and heterogeneous that it could in effect erase the sense of any single personality, even if a musician chose to act as comically as some did in the *Concert [for Piano and Orchestra]* and *Atlas [Eclipticalis]*.⁷⁴

His other major work commissioned by harpsichordist Antoinette Vischer was *HPSCHD* (1967–1969) for any combination of one to seven amplified harpsichords and one to

⁷² Benjamin Piekut, “Testing, Testing...: New York Experimentalism 1964” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2008), 57.

⁷³ David Revill, *The Roaring Silence. John Cage: A Life* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1992), 212.

⁷⁴ Rob Haskins, *John Cage* (London: Reaktion, 2012), 97.

fifty-one magnetic tapes.⁷⁵ Cage worked closely with composer Lejaren Hiller. It was one of the largest productions of his entire career.⁷⁶

Besides these large-scale performances, famous conductors such as Pierre Boulez, Dennis Russell Davies, Michael Gielen, and Seiji Ozawa directed performances of his works and renowned pianists including David Tudor, Grete Sultan, Claude Helffer, and Joseph Kubera presented his piano music.

In the 1960s Cage received grants from ASCAP and the Koussevitzky Music Foundation. In 1968 he won the Phebe Ketchum Thorne Fellowship receiving \$10,000 and in 1976 he was honored with the National Music Award in Chicago. Also, he was offered an honorary doctorate from the University of York, but refused to accept it.

In the 1960s and 1970s apart from reviews of performances, Cage received much attention in the press. As Kenneth Silverman noted, “*The New Yorker* published a monograph-length ‘Profile’ of him, occupying thirty-eight columns. *The Herald Tribune*

⁷⁵ Cage actually hated the sound of the harpsichord. “By the time Cage was in Illinois she [Vischer] had over forty pieces, from composers as diverse as Berio, Brown and Duke Ellington. For some time she had been badgering Cage for a piece. He was slow to respond; he had already declined a similar request from Sylvia Marlowe. “I’ve always hated the harpsichord,” Cage explained. “It reminds me of a sewing machine.” Revill, 225.

⁷⁶ Revill noted that “In *HPSCHD* Hiller’s use of mathematical probability and Cage’s religious use of chance could meet. Hiller worked so hard and contributed so much to the project – including, for instance, the KNOBS program which accompanied the commercial recording, consisting of chance-derived directions for tone and volume settings for the listener’s stereo – that he came to be credited as co-composer, making it the most extensive collaboration by Cage up to that time (even the collaboration on *Double Music*, a much shorter piece, had been by mail and long-distance telephone). ‘We worked very easily together,’ Cage remembered. ‘I’d always been interested in his work because he has such an unpredictable mind.’ Around the time of the premiere, Hiller noted, ‘Every single note was a mutual decision. It was a rather unique instance that two composers’ endeavors were so intertwined that you can’t tell them apart.’ Ibid., 226.

crossword puzzle featured him as an Across: ‘83. John ___, composer’.⁷⁷ He was interviewed by musicians (Roger Reynolds and Walter Zimmermann, for instance), journalists and musicologists (Monika Fürst-Heidtmann, Rita Mead, William Weber and others) around the globe. In 1972 he was the focus of the documentary film *Bird Cage* directed by Hans G. Helms. By the time Cage was writing his bicentennial compositions in the mid-1970s he was so incredibly busy with commissions, performances, presentations and other duties that he had to leave the Cunningham Dance Company for an entire year to tackle the heavy workload.⁷⁸

III. New Influences and Changes in Cage’s Artistic Thought – New Works

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Cage observed and recognized important political events, movements and cultural developments which changed the way he thought and composed. For example he became interested in environmentalism. In the face of wars, specifically the Vietnam War, and social injustice and unrest in many parts of the world, he contemplated concepts of social change, revolution, anarchy and even Maoism.

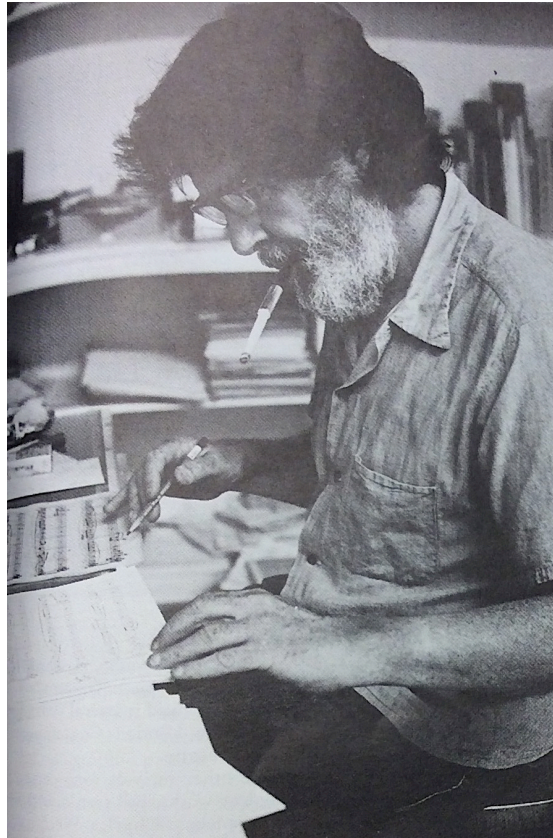
He changed his lifestyle and appearance too, suggesting now the image of a hippie (Figure 1).⁷⁹ He grew a beard and he had long hair, he wore blue jeans and denim shirts and jackets, as if showing an affinity with the working class. In 1977 he began a macrobiotic diet.

⁷⁷ Silverman, 190.

⁷⁸ Revill, 252.

⁷⁹ Theodore Price, “John Cage, Composer of the Month,” *High Fidelity/Musical America* 22, no. 11 (November, 1972): MA-4 –MA-5.

Figure 1. John Cage featured in *High Fidelity/Musical America* (1972) Working on the Orchestration of his Composition *Cheap Imitation*



III. a. Environmentalism and Thoreau

The new environmental movement, which gained steam in the early 1960s thanks to Rachel Carson's bestselling book *Silent Spring*, an examination of the deadly effects of pesticides on birds, had a major influence on Cage's life and career. Cage cared about the environment, co-founded the New York Mycological Society in 1962, produced with Lois Long and Alexander H. Smith the *Mushroom Book* (1972), was a long-term

member of the Audubon Society, became a life member of the Thoreau Society in 1968 and fought for New York City community gardens. He read about environmental degradation and became absorbed with Charles Reich's 1970 book *The Greening of America*.

He was most fascinated with the famous American nature writer and social critic Henry David Thoreau. According to Lawrence Buell, Thoreau became a popular figure in the American twentieth-century environmental movement:

During one ten-year span from the mid-sixties through the mid-seventies ... Thoreau was acclaimed as the first hippie by a nudist magazine, recommended as a model for disturbed teenagers, cited by the Viet Cong in broadcasts urging American GI's to desert, celebrated by environmental activists as "one of our first preservationists," and embraced by a contributor to the [extreme right-wing] John Birch Society magazine as "our greatest reactionary."⁸⁰

It is not surprising that Cage embraced Thoreau in this period although Cage had first encountered his writings when he was in school. When he met the American poet Wendell Berry in 1967 at the University of Cincinnati, Berry read Thoreau to Cage whereupon he rediscovered this nineteenth-century visionary.

One of the earliest works Cage wrote in homage to Thoreau was *Mureau* (1970), a poem based on Thoreau's *Journal*. Cage created it by using I-Ching-based chance procedures to determine the placement of words in an attempt to free the English language from syntax.⁸¹ Other important Thoreau-inspired works from this period are the

⁸⁰ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 57.

⁸¹ Cage soon began calling some of his prose "demilitarized language."

large-scale *Song Books* (1970), *Score (40 Drawings by Thoreau)* and *23 Parts* (1974), *Empty Words* (1974), *Lecture on the Weather* (1975), and *Renga* (1976). These works can be seen as political, as Cage articulates political ideas through the lens of selected Thoreau texts including his “Essay on the Duty of Civil Disobedience” and *Journals*.

In the 1970s Cage paid tribute to birds, as for instance in his tape composition *Bird Cage* (1972), which contains bird sounds he recorded at the Aviary in Pittsburgh and at the Bombay Hook Wildlife Refuge in Delaware. In 1980 he wrote *Litany for the Whale*, a meditative vocal work, which was one of many pieces that sought to save the humpback whale from extinction.

In the mid-1970s, he explored the concept of ecology in such works as *Child of Tree* (1975), *Branches* (1976), and *Inlets* (1977), all written for percussionists using found natural instruments including plants, specifically cacti, pod rattles, burning pine cones, and conch shells. *Inlets*, for instance, is for three performers each using four amplified, water-filled conch shells, one performer uses a blown conch shell, and the sound of pine cones burning.⁸² He said:

nature is not a separation of water from air, or of the sky from the earth, etc. but a “working together,” or a “playing together” of those elements. That is what we call ecology. Music, as I conceive it, is ecological. You could go further and say that it IS ecology.⁸³

⁸² Cage also used natural materials in his visual art from the late 1970s when he worked at Crown Point Press in Oakland.

⁸³ John Cage, *For the Birds: John Cage in Conversation with Daniel Charles* (1976) (London: Boyars, 1981), 229.

Cage's new awareness of the environment led to a series of political compositions: environmentally engaged works that implied a critique of environmental unawareness and destruction in the United States and elsewhere.

III. b. United States Politics and Maoism

Prior to the late 1960s Cage had composed works that questioned authoritarian concepts, musical hierarchies and power and control by writing ensemble works without a conductor; pieces that granted performers certain types of freedoms and compositions that avoided tonal hierarchies and embraced "anarchic harmony." He had been skeptical about music that explicitly endorsed political causes and power struggles.

Strictly distinguishing between social and political ideas and not recognizing the interrelatedness of these concepts, he stated in 1969:

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 both in single individuals and large numbers or medium numbers or any kinds of numbers of individuals. In other words, I am interested in society, not for purposes of power, but for purposes of cooperation and enjoyment.⁸⁴

Cage could be quite ambiguous about his politics and how he viewed world and American politics. Aside from his gentle environmental activism he often tried to portray

⁸⁴ John Cage, "Political/Social Ends," in *John Cage Writer*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 115. See also David Patterson, "'Political' or 'Social'? John Cage and the Remolding of Mao Tse-Tung," in *Cage and Consequences*, ed. Julia Schröder and Volker Straebel (Hofheim: Wolke, 2012), 51–65.

himself as an apolitical person who was suspicious of the concept of power, dreamed of an “absence of government” and avoided straightforward political engagement.⁸⁵

Curiously, in the late 1960s – much like his composer–friend Christian Wolff and many others – he became fascinated with Chinese communist leader Mao Tse–tung whom he considered as an interesting social reformer (Patterson claims this short–lived fad of Maoism in the United States was partially because of Nixon’s visit to China in 1972). Cage elaborated on Mao as follows:

I know little about China because we have been very badly informed, but what is evident is that there was some decades ago this serious problem, and that Mao found a solution, so that the people are not divided as they formerly were, between the rich and the poor; but they are working together to solve the problems, as they see them. Mao thought of the peasant in China as being the basis of the society rather than the factory workers. Each person is able to do all the things that any human being can do, but through circumstances and so forth, we had often become specialists rather than whole people. Well, one of the things that Mao had insisted upon for the Chinese is that if there is an army, that everyone is in it; if there is agriculture to do, everyone should be able to do it; if the land is to be changed so that it will not be flooded periodically, everyone in the community goes to work to bring about this change – even those who are old, even those who are young. From a capitalistic point of view, Mao appears to be a dictator and a slave leader, but from another point of view he is the bringing-together of the family.⁸⁶

Like Norman O. Brown and many others, Cage read E. L. Wheelwright and Bruce McFarlane’s book *The Chinese Road to Socialism* and, as Wolff suggested, essays

⁸⁵ Ibid., 65.

⁸⁶ John Cage, “Interview with Hans G. Helms and Heinz-Klaus Metzger,” LP Liner Notes (Germany: EMI, 1972), n.p.

written by Mao, which had a poetic quality that Cage would have liked.⁸⁷ Through the mid-1970s Cage referenced Mao in a number of his writings, including his 1972 *Mushroom Book* and his book *M: Writings '67-'72*, but he did not compose music that pays tribute to Mao.⁸⁸ In his contribution to *The Mushroom Book* (1972), he isolated the United States and wrote critical aphoristic statements about the country (see Figure 2): “Looked up invention in telephone book: Inventapprises Inc, Inventive Design Inc, Inventive Music Ltd and Invento Prods Corp.” This is a clear sign that Cage was not happy with American politics, especially not with the corporate state that has helped run the country.⁸⁹ Troubled by rampant social injustice, Cage strove for social change and at one point, he quoted Fuller, “Don’t change Man; change his environment,” then juxtaposed it with a statement from Mao, “remold people to their very souls: revolutionize their thinking.” After Cage’s quotation of these influential people he wrote “(Find common denominator.)”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Quoted in David Patterson, “‘Political’ or ‘Social’,” 54.

⁸⁸ Some of the exquisite visual representations of mushrooms in *The Mushroom Book* were drawn by artist Lois Long and the scientific information was provided by mycologist Alexander K Smith.

⁸⁹ Cage also cites Thoreau, P’ei Hsiu, and Norman O. Brown’s quoting of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Cage’s *Mushroom Book*. John Cage, Lois Long and Alexander H. Smith, *Mushroom Book* (New York: Hollanders Workshop, 1972). Patterson argues, “however brief Cage’s active engagement with this Maoist material may have been, then, it also constituted perhaps the most audacious treatment to which any of his rhetorical sources were ever subjected.” As will be examined in the next chapter, Preface to the *Lecture on the Weather* includes daringly provocative statements. Patterson, 59.

Cage's flirtation with Mao lasted for only a brief period (1967–1974). After 1974 when the bitter truth about the Chinese Cultural Revolution became better known, Cage distanced himself from Mao's ideas.

III. c. The Vietnam War

Because of Cage's ambiguity toward outright political activism, it is difficult to pin point his ideas regarding major issues like the crisis in Indochina that was perpetuated by the United States. The Vietnam War proved to be one of the biggest diplomatic, economic and ecological disasters after World War II and it is surprising that Cage rarely said much about it. Insight into Cage's thoughts can be gained through his reaction to composer Philip Corner's "critical action," his composition *Demonstration of the Sounds of the Environment* (1971). Cage's conversations with Morton Feldman also yield important information in this regard.

In January 1967 twenty-three artists associated with Cage – including Malcolm Goldstein, Philip Corner and poet Jackson Mac Low – were arrested after holding up large photographs of a napalmed child juxtaposed with images that read "Thou shalt not Kill" at a public sermon held by the pro-Vietnam War Catholic Cardinal Francis Spellman.⁹² When Corner asked Cage if he would join in another public protest, Cage responded by:

I discovered early in the thirties, in New York City and in Carmel California [,] that radical social action had no use for my services, that to be of use I'd best stick

⁹² Patterson, "'Political' or 'Social'?" 51.

to my guns, not theirs. [...] I also believe that these protests simply accumulate virtue for those who engage in them. And virtue in whose eyes? [...] An act such as yours in St. Pat's was in my opinion not positive for it had no way of knowing the minds of the people there and they were there for reasons you have no way of knowing. Therefore it was a critical action no less obstructive than that of the policemen ... I refuse to be drawn in to these uninventive, uncreative actions ... Or, if you insist on critical action, for heavens sake, employ mental attitudes formed by comedy rather than tragedy. This whole miserable unendurable power world is a game. If you're not anything but a critic, then at least introduce humor into your attacks⁹³

Considering that Cage criticized critical actions, it is surprising that in 1971 he composed a little known work called *Demonstration of the Sounds of the Environment* where three hundred people silently followed a chance-determined path through the campus of the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. Perhaps this was in response to the violent campus incident that happened at that time. On August 24, 1970 the nation was shocked when four young people bombed the army research center in Sterling Hall of the University of Wisconsin, resulting in the death of one researcher and injuring three others. The four young people were protesting the Vietnam War and the Universities' funding of the United States industrial military complex.

This was preceded by the infamous Kent State shootings (May 4, 1970) where Ohio national guardsmen shot and killed four unarmed students and injured nine others when students were peacefully protesting the war on their campus. American universities were torn apart before Cage's eyes and he may have expected a revolution through the

⁹³ Quoted in Patterson, 51.

student proletariat. He may have deemed it necessary to write a piece against the violence.⁹⁴

Cage would have never supported the violence in Vietnam, but one must question Cage's response in 1967 when he was in conversation with Feldman. Cage opposed the idea of signing petitions and writing op-eds in the *New York Times* considering them useless in terms of ending the war or other global conflicts. Here is part of the Cage-Felman conversation:

JC: What do you think one should do now, with reference to the war in Vietnam? Do you think, for instance, that parading with posters and so forth or adding your name to an advertisement in *The New York Times*, or a letter in *The New York Times*, is an action that will accomplish the desire, which is to stop that war?

MF: I see so many names I know on European protests. I see practically no names I know on American protests. I was very impressed with an advertisement in the *Times*, put out by a peace group from America, getting names of prominent artists and composers in Europe, to see, for example, Stockhausen's name, Benjamin Britten's name, and then Boulez's name, and position was used very tellingly in the Algerian crisis.⁹⁵

Cage asked if signing petitions helped to quell conflicts. Feldman responded that it did help the crisis by bringing attention to the political problems in the world. When Feldman

⁹⁴ This was not the first time violence had broken out between university students and the state. In 1969, then Governor of California Ronald Reagan ordered a military helicopter to gas several thousand students at the University of California at Berkeley, who were paying homage to a student, James Rector, an innocent onlooker during the Peoples' Park Protest, who was killed by police.

⁹⁵ John Cage and Morton Feldman, *Radio Happenings (I-V)*, ed. Gisela Gronemeyer (Cologne, Germany: MusikTexte, 1993), 153.

asked again if actions such as peaceful protests helped, Cage deflected the question by citing Fuller:

I concur with Buckminster Fuller's view that, rather than objecting to war, we should apply ourselves to tripling the world's resources and their effective usefulness—and that means distribution and so forth—so that the world will not be divided, as it is now, between those who have and those who do not have. He believes that when that design problem is solved, that then, if war takes place, our objections will be rational and effective, as our objections now to slavery are, because, through the invention of machines, we no longer have need of the muscles of slaves. But, if we simply object to war, without removing the cause for it, we can expect it to pop up, first here, then there, then in other places. I think, in fact, that engaging in critical action accumulates virtue for those who object and somehow relieves them of any sense of their having to do something compositional. What's going to happen, for instance, when the next presidential election comes along? Talk with anyone you know about it. No one expects that a president will be suggested, whom we will truly want or whom we would think would produce a relation between the United States and the world that we would be agreeing with. Should we say immediately that we don't agree and that we will not agree ever? I've thought of a number of things. I've thought of renouncing citizenship as a gesture. Immediately someone says, "Well, you'll be more effective if you stay in this bad situation." But I truly don't see any effective meaning in critical action.⁹⁶

Although this interview happened before Cage wrote his silent walk for the Milwaukee Campus, it is curious that he became much more vocal – especially in the late 1960s. Did Cage attempt to find a more pronounced political identity that publicly reflected his ideas on social change? He surely offered a few straightforward political activist works: *Lecture on the Weather* and *Renga with Apartment House 1776*. How did this choice affect the musical techniques used in these works?

⁹⁶ Ibid., 155.

IV. Creative Occupations and Innovations

In the 1960s and 1970s Cage broadened his creative palette in several ways. He created numerous visual art works including plexigrams and lithographs (*Not Wanting to Say Anything About Marcel*, 1969) and during his residencies at Crown Point Press (1977–1982) he created art using a variety of etching and engraving techniques and chance operations. Cage also wrote a substantial amount of poetry or text compositions. While he had taken narrative and linear approaches to writing in the 1950s and 1960s he explored non–narrative and non–syntactic prose from the 1970s on. Cage often used existing texts by other authors including Thoreau and “wrote through” them, fragmenting these sources, the texts’ sentences, phrase structure, words and syllables, through choice and chance operations. This technique points to poems by Stéphane Mallarmé, Kurt Schwitters, E. E. Cummings and the concrete and optical poetry of lettrists. Crucially, in the 1970s he developed the poetic form of mesostic with vertically and horizontally organized words. Cage viewed these texts as musical pieces and often performed by chanting them. For the expression of political meaning, however, Cage limited the degree of fragmentation of the texts’ syntax.

In his musical works, he continued to use techniques he pioneered in the 1950s and 1960s – chance operations – to determine aspects of a musical composition and indeterminacy, along with various dimensions of performance freedom inscribed in a score through unconventional forms of notation. But he also came up with new methods and a new aesthetic which entailed the recycling of tonal works of the past. Often he combined older with newer techniques.

Examples of existing works using conventional harmony arranged by Cage include *Cheap Imitation* (1969) and *Apartment House 1776* (1976). They are based on Satie's *Socrate* and American music from the eighteenth century respectively. These arrangements use conventional notation and scores. In *Cheap Imitation* based on *Socrate* (1919–20), Cage substituted notes of the melodies via chance operations to circumvent copyright issues he had encountered with Satie's publisher. Cage used a similar substitution technique in *Apartment House 1776*.⁹⁷ This and other works sound more conventional than compositions from the previous decades, although Cage undermined traditional voice leading through a chance-based elimination of pitches from the original work's tonal fabric. He reduced the degree of abstraction in some of his music, making it more predictable and linear and sometimes subtly narrative.

In the 1960s and 1970s, many leftist composers, including Rzewski, Wolff, Henze and Cardew, adhered to conventional musical idioms to convey their pieces' political message more straightforwardly. Indeed, Cage's bicentennial works – arguably his most political compositions – seem to fall in this category. They are more narrative and *Renga* with *Apartment House 1776* alludes to conventional harmony.

In this regard Cage appears to have been going against the grain of high modernism and the musical avant-garde of the 1950s which, in David W. Bernstein

⁹⁷ *Cheap Imitation* was originally composed for the Cunningham Dance Company. Having run into copyright problems, Cage changed the score by replacing originally composed notes and retitled the piece *Cheap Imitation*. Cunningham decided that his dance would be titled most appropriately *Second Hand* alluding to Cage's new title.

words, had been “technocratic, positivistic ... and above all, de-politicized.”⁹⁸ Although there is no entirely depoliticized artistic act or musical work, the question arises what the catalyst for Cage’s overt political engagement in the 1960s and 1970s was. Frederic Rzewski suggests that:

The nineteen–sixties saw a gradual, if ever so slight, opening of American cultural institutions to ideas which in the fifties were considered subversive, such as those of John Cage and his friends and colleagues; and a gradual retreat, on the part of some artists like Cage, from positions which today would be regarded as political “fence-sitting,” towards more open and explicit expression of ideological viewpoints. (An example of this process would be Cage’s open avowal of anarchist positions, in his books and in a recent appearance on nationwide television.) But it has remained for the seventies to produce a movement of artists en masse that may reflect and give artistic expression to the new political movement which has already gained significant momentum among the masses of the American people. The recent formation of collaborative organizations among larger groups of artists undeniably mark a new departure from the atmosphere in avant-garde music of the fifties and sixties, an atmosphere characterized by individualism and competition.⁹⁹

In the 1960s “Cage decided that painters, musicians, and drama producers having successfully opened people’s eyes and ears, art’s work was done. ‘We must turn our attention now I think to other things ... and those things are social’.”¹⁰⁰ A close look at a

⁹⁸ David W. Bernstein, “Cage and High Modernism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. David Nicholls (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 210.

⁹⁹ Frederic Rzewski, *Nonsequiturs: Writings & Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation*, ed. Gisela Gronemeyer and Reinhard Oehlschlägel (Cologne, Germany: MusikTexte, 2007), 234.

¹⁰⁰ Silverman, 211.

comment by Cage on an orchestral performance of *Cheap Imitation* reveals that social ideas occupied his mind:

When I arrived ... I discovered that not only was the orchestra's final rehearsal their first but that many of the musicians had not bothered to look at the music ... After hearing a few miserable attempts to play the first phrases, I spoke to the musicians about the deplorable state of society (not only of musical society), and I withdrew the piece from the evening's program. By having written *Cheap Imitation*, I've provided, I think, a means for opening the ears of orchestral musicians and enabling them to make music instead of, as now, only money to pay their bills. I am convinced that they play other music just as badly as they play mine. However, in the case of *Cheap Imitation*, there are no climaxes, no harmonies, no counterpoints in which to hide one's lack of devotion. This lack of devotion is not to be blamed on particular individuals ... it is to be blamed on the present organization of society; it is the *raison d'être* for revolution.¹⁰¹

His *MusiCircus*, which can involve many existing types of music performed simultaneously, embodies more than *Cheap Imitation*'s, manifold sociopolitical ideas. It is in Brooks's words "probably the most striking model of anarchy," "a work so anti-authoritarian that Cage never even wrote a score for it." He explains that the performers have to deal with "the absence of authority: no one will tell them they are too loud or soft, too responsive or inflexible. They are entirely on their own, without guidance or regulation, and they must confront the necessity of determining rules for governing their own behaviors."¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 223.

¹⁰² William Brooks, "Music and Society," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. David Nicholls (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 221.

David Patterson also finds that Cage modified his aesthetic of the 1950s and early 1960s: “Cage’s self-professed aversion to all things political is well known, a position thrown into starkest relief during the late 1960s and early 70s, when social relevance became of paramount concern to many experimental artists.”¹⁰³ Cage found ways to write political works without labeling them as such. Openly critical of the government and society, Cage classified his musical politics as social engagement.

In 1968, Cage was invited to write the essay “These Days,” to contribute to a symposium “Alternatives to Violence” (1968).¹⁰⁴ In this Essay, Cage discussed how to solve world problems, but as usual he hid himself through the voice of others:

But it could be accomplished (Buckminster Fuller) by means of unemotional (cf. zazen, yoga) problem solving (comprehensive design science), relating world resources to human needs, so that, A.D. 2000, 100 per cent of humanity will be “haves.” Nations (i.e., ego) removed, regenerative—constantly accomplishing more with less—fluency of man and world as a university from which no one

¹⁰³ David Patterson, “‘Political’ or ‘Social?’” 51–52. This was not the only time that Cage wrote works articulating harsh criticism against the sociopolitical policies of a government. During the Banana Wars (1898–1937), the United States conducted a series of controversial occupations and military interventions in Central America and in the Caribbean. In 1927 Cage gave a speech representing his high school at the Hollywood Bowl. It was titled, “What Other People Think” and it was a scathing critique of the relations between the United States and Latin America. During the Second World War and in light of Pearl Harbor, Cage had composed his *Credo In US* (1942), a satirical work that uses a prepared piano and a phonograph and preferably classical music records, as well as muted gongs, tin cans, an electric buzzer, and tom-toms played by two percussionists. *Credo* critiques populist ideals of such composers as Roger Sessions.

¹⁰⁴ The editor, a neurologist Larry Ng, rejected John Cage’s Essay “These Days.” Other people who contributed to this essay collection include the well known Anthropologist Edmund Carpenter, Henry Ford’s grandson Henry Ford II, social psychologist Erich Fromm, the Hungarian-British author Arthur Koestler, Kennedy’s and Johnson’s secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and C. H. Waddington, a biologist who edited the 1974 collection of essays *Biology and the History of the Future*.

graduates. Organization not for control of others, but for implementation of fullest life for others (e.g., air travel, telephone, water that's not polluted, air that's fit to breathe, clothing that suits whatever climate, absence of hunger)—Fuller: “As long as one human being is hungry, the entire human race is hungry,” the home (currently being Russia–U.S.A. designed as space-ship, wireless, and free of utility pipes) placed wherever one wishes to live or move, population stabilized (birth and death rates changingly balanced) and upgraded (eugenics), use instead of ownership, property globalized through electronics (there is only one Person, the One we are), etc.¹⁰⁵

In the late 1960s and 1970s Cage undoubtedly changed in response to his tumultuous environment. He changed his appearance, he changed his political and aesthetic views, he changed his rhetoric and he changed his approach to composition. The next chapter examines in detail one composition by Cage that reflects these changes: *Lecture on the Weather*.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *John Cage: An Anthology* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), 179.

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY 1: *LECTURE ON THE WEATHER*

Many composers no longer make musical structures. Instead they set processes going. A structure is like a piece of furniture, whereas a process is like the weather. In the case of a table, the beginning and end of the whole and each of its parts are known. In the case of weather, though we notice changes in it, we have no clear knowledge of its beginning or ending. At a given moment, we are when we are. The nowmoment.

–John Cage, “The Future of Music” (1974)¹⁰⁶

The United States bicentennial in 1976 was an occasion that inspired manifold celebrations in America and abroad. Countries such as Great Britain, Japan, France, and Canada paid tribute to this event. The National Film Board of Canada produced the 1976 book *Between Friends/Entre Amis* featuring photographs of the Canadian–American border lands and gave copies to American Public Libraries.¹⁰⁷ But was this a time for celebration? It was the time when Cage wrote his most ardently critical work: *A Lecture on the Weather*, commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in 1975 on the occasion of the United States bicentennial. This composition raises many questions. Why was he commissioned by a Canadian music institution to write a bicentennial composition for the United States? How did Cage pay tribute to this celebratory event? What socio–political meanings are implied in this work? In this chapter I first trace the genesis and background of this work, examine its structure,

¹⁰⁶ John Cage, “The Future of Music,” in *Empty Words: Writings '73–'78* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 178.

¹⁰⁷ Lorraine Monk, *Between Friends/Entre Amis* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Press, 1976).

consider its collaborative aspects and present an analysis of three significant performances. Finally, I will show how *Lecture* reflects Cage's critique of the United States in the 1960s and 1970s.

I. Backstory and Genesis of the Work

On the occasion of the United States bicentennial the CBC decided to commission and premiere a work by an American composer. When Richard Coulter, a music producer for the CBC, contemplated this project, his original idea was to ask Aaron Copland for a musical work.¹⁰⁸ Already overbooked with other commissions, Copland, however, was unable to fulfill this request. Inspired by his colleague David Jaeger, an American-born experimental composer and radio music producer with a strong interest in Cage, Coulter decided to approach Cage who in fact accepted this commission.¹⁰⁹ Cage liked the idea because “the invitation came from outside the United States.”¹¹⁰

Although Cage accepted this commission, many ideas by the CBC were discussed before asking him. Norman Newton, then producer for the CBC, made it clear that topics for the United States bicentennial should be “very well planned to get away from the ‘official’ and stereotyped image of U.S. culture.”¹¹¹ Some of the possibilities for this

¹⁰⁸ William Schuman was also considered as a potential composer that could write a work for the CBC. I would like to thank McGill University, especially the Marvin Duchow Library, for providing access to the Richard Coulter files from which I have gathered much information about the beginnings of this commission.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Coulter to the author, e-mail from August 8, 2013.

¹¹⁰ John Cage, *Empty Words*, 3.

¹¹¹ Richard Coulter Archives, Marvin Duchow Library, McGill University.

occasion included commissions for a composition by an American composer, a Tuesday–night program on Woody Guthrie, a portrait of the African American Tenor Roland Hayes, a two–hour documentary dedicated to the development of themes about the American “West” featuring Canadian–United States border towns, North American Indian music and culture, and a documentary on Charles Ives made by Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer. One of the longer proposals suggested a Pete Seeger celebration because of his large influence on folk music.¹¹² Furthermore, Coulter thought

¹¹² The Seeger proposal contained the following ideas: “Probably the only significant achievement in the history of the American Communist Party is its contribution to the revival of American folk music. Roughly the radical left in the United States as well as in Canada was mainly emigrant in composition, Germans, Poles, Finns, Jews and the Ukrainians being the main component parts – corresponding to the struggles to build the union movement in the late 1930s. The Communist Party used the fact that old hymns and folk tunes were being used with new words that reflected the rise of Unionism especially in the South to bridge the language gap between the emigrant organization and the American worker. They took on this task seriously – they were never able to significantly talk to the American worker – but attracted – especially with the start of the war in Spain – a group of middle–class intellectual, liberal academic, dedicated, starry–eyed, tight–assed, English speaking, young artistic people that picked up on the music, used it in the mission, developed it and contributed a whole new set of words to it. Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston, Lee Hays, Ronnie Gilbert, Fred Hellerman, Guy Carawan, Bess Hawes, Burl Ives and Pete Seeger were at the center of it with the Lomax’s, Leadbelly, Josh White and others at the periphery. This group of people between 1936 and 1946 laid the basis for the folk revival in the late fifties [and] early sixties. It died with McCarthyism and revived significantly with Civil Rights. The 1959 Newport Folk Festival[,] which attracted thousands and the ABC Hootenanny show of 1964[,] just showed the tip of the iceberg. Hundreds of thousands of people started playing singing; and probably the most academic work of collecting was done in the sixties – it died again in the late sixties with acid rock and Vietnam but the core that created that period is doing fine in the 1970s.

One of the most significant of that group of originals is still alive, still singing, Pete Seeger – he probably has made the single largest contribution to folk music of anybody. He stretches the whole time gap – he goes from unsung to superstar – more people play banjo like Seeger than Earl Scruggs.

The show would be a talking and singing biography of Seeger – with the historical being a solid background – Youth, depression, pain, World War II, C.I.O.

seriously about organizing a concert of early operas that might have been performed in the original thirteen colonies around 1776. For example *Thomas and Sally* (first performed in Philadelphia 1776) and *Love in a Village* (first performed in Charleston 1776), both works were written by British composer Thomas Augustine Arne.¹¹³

Cage was pleased about this invitation from Canada. Since 1969, he had been interested in creating a “Thunder Piece” or “Atlas Borealis and the Ten Thunderclaps,” and thought that this commission would lead to a realization of this project. His idea developed during his residency at the University of Illinois where he “envisioned the performance as ‘a tempest’ and ‘the transformation of a live orchestra and chorus into a genuine hurricane.’”¹¹⁴ He also had been inspired to create a “Thunder Piece” by Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan’s “interpretation of Joyce’s ten thunderclaps in *Finnegans Wake* as metaphors for revolutions in technology.” Cage stated, “since the Thunderclaps of *Finnegans Wake* describe the various stages of the

McCarthyism, Dog Days and Wavers, Civil Rights, Vietnam, Watergate.” Richard Coulter Archives, Marvin Duchow Library, McGill University.

¹¹³ The idea of using an opera that was premiered in the United States from around 1776 was dropped. In an undated letter to Harvey Sachs, a writer who specializes on musical topics, Coulter wrote: “I have got some lousy news for you. I received it last week at a meeting called to finalize programme plans for our celebration of the U.S. Bicentennial. The upshot is that instead of going all out for a full year, they are going all in for one day – July 4th, 1976. So no love for the village. I am still determined that we will find something for you to conduct around here so please drop in the next time you are in these parts if you have a moment to chat.” Richard Coulter Archives, Marvin Duchow Library, McGill University.

¹¹⁴ Marc Thorman, “Speech and Text in Compositions by John Cage, 1950–1992” (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2002), 157. See also David Revill, *The Roaring Silence. John Cage: A Life* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1993), 224.

history of human civilization, and in particular, of technology, the last Thunderclap will represent the electronic technology of our era.”¹¹⁵ Further, Cage wanted to:

make as realistically as possible a thunderstorm. To take an actual thunderstorm and to measure it and then to use the ten thunderclaps in *Finnegans Wake* and have them actually sung. To have components, electronic components, made so that what the singers sing is transformed to fill up the envelopes of the actual thunderclaps is the idea. And to have the string pizzicato, which will make raindrops and the rain falling on different materials because the thunderclaps in *Finnegans Wake* are a history of civilization’s technology.¹¹⁶

I. a. Cage’s Canadian Connections

Cage may have received the United States bicentennial commission because he was not an obscure figure in the Canadian new music scene. Prior to this opportunity, he had received important performances of his music thanks to his good connections with Canadian musicians. One of the earliest performances of Cage’s music in Canada was on December 2, 1955 at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Cage and pianist-composer David Tudor performed *Music for Piano 4–19* and *Music for Piano 21–36/37–52*. On August 12, 1960 at the Stratford Festival International Conference of Composers in Stratford, Ontario. Cage participated in a program of electronic music with vocalist-composer Cathy Berberian, performing his *Aria* with *Fontana Mix*.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Cited in Thorman, 157–158. Originally in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *Conversing with Cage* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1988), 203.

In 1961 Cage received his first commission from a Canadian musical institution. Composer Pierre Mercure invited him to write *Atlas Eclipticalis* for eighty–six instrumentalists, also involving the Merce Cunningham Dance Company for an event of the Montreal Festivals Society. This important and large–scale work received its world premiere and the first Canadian premiere of one of his works in Montreal on August 3, 1961. On February 16, 1962, at the University of British Columbia, Cage performed with Tudor and the Cunningham Dance Company *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* combined with *Antic Meet*, and also *Winter Music* (for piano and electronics) mixed with *Aeon*. In August of 1965, he directed an artist camp at Emma Lake in the province Saskatchewan.¹¹⁷ On February 8, 1966 at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver and on the following day at the University of British Columbia’s Festival of the Contemporary Arts, Cage, Tudor and the Cunningham Dance Company performed *Variations V*. For the latter concert he, Tudor and the Cunningham Dance Company performed *Music for Piano, Suite for Five* and *How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run*. On May 13, 1966 at the Art Gallery of Toronto, Cage performed his *Variations VI* with Tudor. Featured on the same program was music by two American electroacoustic and multimedia composers, Lowell Cross and Anthony Gnazzo.

¹¹⁷ At Emma Lake, Cage apparently got lost on one of his mushroom hunts and hundreds of people, including the Royal Canadian Mountain Police, searched for him. After spending an entire night in a tree, Cage was found. In his journal he wrote, “Found a large stand of *Hydnum repandum*. When others left for a nearby lake, refused to leave,” and “Arranged to meet on road at 4:00[pm]. 3:30 started back. 4:00 hurried. 6:30 lost. Yelling, startled moose. 8:00 darkness, soaked sneakers; settled for the night on squirrel’s midden. (Family of birds; wind in the trees, tree against tree; woodpecker).” John Cage, “Diary: Emma Lake,” in *A Year from Monday* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 23.

In 1966 Cage appeared on the CBC arts talk show television series *The Umbrella*, where he gave an interview. To the interviewer's surprise, the interview itself turned out to be a performance. Cage wore electrodes so that his musical collaborator Tudor could alter his voice. Jaeger stated that Cage's "voice became so thick with feedback that you couldn't understand him at all."¹¹⁸

At the Isaacs Gallery in Toronto, April 15–16, 1967, Estonian-born Canadian composer Udo Kasemets organized a series of mixed media concerts. Tudor, assisted by Cross, performed Cage's *Solo for Voice 2* with *Fontana Mix* (realization for piano and electronic circuits). On the program was also music by Argentinian-German composer Mauricio Kagel and American composer–accordionist Pauline Oliveros. On March 5, 1968, Cage performed his collaborative composition *Reunion* with visual artist Marcel Duchamp, Duchamp's wife Alexina, David Behrman, Gordon Mumma, and Tudor at the Ryerson Theatre in Toronto. He used a modified chessboard as the basis for this work's score.¹¹⁹ Kasemets had organized this event for the University of Toronto's Festival of Art and Technology.¹²⁰

From February 15–16, 1973, the University of Montreal presented a festival "2 Days with John Cage" directed by Robert Léonard. Among the pieces performed were

¹¹⁸ "John Cage's Canadian Connections: A Timeline," Canadian Broadcasting Company, accessed August 26, 2013, <http://music.cbc.ca/#/blogs/2012/3/John-Cages-Canadian-connections-A-timeline>.

¹¹⁹ Duchamp was a professional chess player and beat Cage. Lowell Cross, "Reunion: John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, Electronic Music and Chess," *Leonardo Music Journal* 9 (January 1999): 32.

¹²⁰ "John Cage's Canadian Connections: A Timeline."

Cage's *Amores*, *She Is Asleep*, *Suite for Toy Piano*, *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs*, and *Mureau*. There was also a public question–and–answer session during the festival. From the early 1960s throughout the 1980s, Cage was very active in various forums in Canada, in part thanks to friendships with Canadian musicians and with such American composers as Richard Teitelbaum who resided in Canada at that time.¹²¹

Cage apparently liked to visit Canada. Composer David Rosenboom noted that Cage was fascinated by the Canadian “landscape because it was vast and flat, like looking on a white canvas—this very open plain on which you could imagine things.”¹²² While at Emma Lake, Cage observed that Canada was “no tundra,” but that it offered “a northern sense of heightened well–being.”¹²³

II. Ideas and Influences for the Texts of *Lecture*

For his bicentennial work Cage wanted to use a text; Coulter suggested that Cage use Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Published annually from 1732–1758, this almanac features Franklin's ideas through anecdotes, astrology, proverbs and other writings.¹²⁴ It appears that Franklin's works would have resonated with Cage's ideas

¹²¹ In the 1980s, Andrew Culver, a Canadian composer and “technophile,” became one of Cage's most important assistants and helped design the 1983 IBM PC and a computer–based version of the I–Ching. Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 355.

¹²² Crystal Chan, “John Cage's America,” *Maison Neuve*, October 9, 2013, accessed August 26, 2013, <http://maisonneuve.org/article/2012/10/9/john-cages-canada/>.

¹²³ Cage, “Emma Lake Diary,” 23.

¹²⁴ Benjamin Franklin, *Franklin: Writings*, edited by J. A. Leo Lemay (New York City: Library of America, 1987).

about the environment and public education. But after examining this source, he decided that Thoreau's writings provided a better foundation for this composition.¹²⁵ Cage explained: "I tried to take myself for this occasion away from Thoreau. And I bought several anthologies of American writing. But I found that I can't take myself away from Thoreau. I'm still too fascinated."¹²⁶ He raved:

No greater American has lived than Thoreau. Emerson called him a speaker and actor of the truth. Other great men have vision. Thoreau had none. Every day his eyes and ears were open and empty to see and hear. The world he lived in. Music, he said, is continuous; only listening is intermittent.¹²⁷

As mentioned before, Cage had been interested in Thoreau's works since 1967.¹²⁸ This was at a time when Cage increasingly experimented with text and dedicated himself

¹²⁵ Franklin fought for broad access to education and a cleaner and healthier environment in America. He is sometimes seen as one of the environmental pioneers along with Thoreau. This might have been the reason why Coulter suggested Franklin's writings to Cage. Carla Mulford, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Franklin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 68 and 80.

¹²⁶ Walter Zimmermann, *Desert Plants* (Vancouver, BC, Canada: Aesthetic Research Center Publications, 1976), 63. See also Marjorie Perloff, *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 22.

¹²⁷ John Cage, "Program Note to *Lecture on the Weather*," in *Empty Words: Writings '73-'78* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 1979), 3.

¹²⁸ Interestingly in his essay "Say Nothing," the Cage scholar Christopher Shultis argues that without the influence of Thoreau's writings, Cage might have fallen into obscurity: "Had Cage never read Thoreau, he might have remained a musical outsider, relegated to an important position in the midst of a group of other distinguished outsiders known under the aegis of the American Experimental Tradition." Christopher Shultis, "Say

to recitations of such works as *Mureau* (1970) which consists of syllables, words, phrases and sentences from Thoreau's *Journal*. Thoreau had become widely popular in an era marked by social dissent and heightened environmental awareness. Cage's fascination with Thoreau inspired many of his works from the 1970s, including *Mureau* (1970), *Song Books* (1970), *Score (40 Drawings by Thoreau)* and *23 Parts for Instruments and/or Voices* (1972), and *Empty Words* (1974).

II. a. Structure of the Work

Lecture on the Weather is a work consisting of three specific sections and three distinct components: narration, recorded sounds, and visuals.¹²⁹ The narration involves Cage reading his preface to *Lecture* and twelve speakers (preferably twelve Canadians who are United States expatriates) who read Thoreau texts and whose voices are amplified at an equal volume. The performers recite selections from Thoreau's *Walden*, *Journal*, and "Essay on the Duty of Civil Disobedience." They can omit a limited number of Thoreau excerpts in their parts at their discretion.¹³⁰ The recorded materials consist of

Nothing: John Cage and Henry David Thoreau's Aesthetics of Co-existence," in *Tijdschrift voor Muziektheorie* 3 (December 1, 1998), 169.

¹²⁹ Cage's autobiographical statement provides insight to his transition towards process music or music that is through composed rather than composed music entirely based on form. "In the early fifties with David Tudor and Louis and Bebe Barron, I made several works on magnetic tape [one example is *William's Mix*], works by Christian Wolff, Morton Feldman, Earle Brown, and myself ... Not immediately, but a few years later, I was to move from structure to process, from music as an object having parts, to music without beginning, middle, or end, music as weather." See *John Cage Writer*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 243.

¹³⁰ More specifically, the number of texts to be omitted during a performance are listed below. "A" represents the reader of the text:

AI: a series of twelve texts by Thoreau, any four of which to be omitted.

II: a series of six texts by Thoreau, any two omitted during performance.

environmental sounds and were compiled by American composer Maryanne Amacher. The visual component features some of Thoreau's drawings projected on film conceived by the Argentinian visual artist Luis Frangella.

For *Lecture*, Cage chose Thoreau's "Essay on the Duty of Civil Disobedience" (1849), perhaps because of all of Thoreau's writings it was the most popular one in the 1960s and 1970s. It was translated into many languages and widely disseminated. Cage read it when he was a student. It is a concise and provocative text advocating non-violent resistance against overreaching and abusive governments. Thoreau's "Essay" must have strongly resonated with Cage's concerns about United States politics. Indeed, in his preface to *Lecture*, Cage reflected on his political views of the past and present:

When I was twelve, I wrote a speech called "Other People Think" which proposed silence on the part of the U.S.A. as preliminary to the solution of its Latin American problems. Even when our industrialists thought of themselves as the owners of the world, of all of it, not just the part between Mexico and Canada. Now our government thinks of us also as the policemen of the world, no longer rich policemen, just poor ones, but nonetheless on the side of the good and acting as though possessed of the power.¹³¹

AIII: a series of fourteen texts by Thoreau, four of which are to be omitted during performance.

AIV: a series of eleven texts, three omitted.

AV: a series to ten texts, four omitted.

AVI: a series of four texts, no omissions.

AVII: a series of twelve texts, four omitted.

AVIII: a series of fifteen texts, five omitted.

AIX: a series of ten texts, four omitted.

AX: a series of four texts, any one is to be omitted.

AXI: a series of six texts, any omitted.

AXII: a series of three texts, any omitted.

¹³¹ John Cage, *Lecture on the Weather* (New York: C. F. Peters, 1975), preface. As Cage indicated he previously made very politicized statements. He wrote one of them when he was fifteen years old and read it at the Hollywood Bowl, "When Washington was

Walden (1854) is a book-length personal diary documenting Thoreau's experiences in the midst of nature when he lived in a small cabin at Walden Pond in Massachusetts for more than two years. Cage may have been drawn to the following passage from *Walden*: "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however, measured or far away."¹³² He also used *Walden* as a source for his Harvard Charles Eliot Norton Lecture *I-IV* (1988).

Journal (1837–61) is one of Thoreau's lesser-known works perhaps due to its posthumous release in 1906 or its length, comprising circa two million words. Cage loved this work for its sketches of natural phenomena (which he used as the foundation for some of his graphic scores). The *Journal* highlights Thoreau's daily activities and thoughts, specifically his ideas about nature, in beautiful prose. The American poet Wendell Berry first introduced Cage to Thoreau's *Journal* in 1967, and by 1970 Cage had composed *Mureau* and *Song Books* incorporating text from the *Journal*. Cage was

proclaimed President of the United States, our country possessed most of the territory between the Atlantic and the Mississippi River. After the Mexican War, the Stars and Stripes were flown from ocean to ocean, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes. Today the United States is a world power. In the New World, she calls Alaska, Porto Rico, and the Virgin Islands territories. She exerts a strong influence over Haiti, Nicaragua, Panama, and the Dominican Republic. She has circulated her dollar throughout the Latin American countries until she is spoken of as the 'Giant of the North' and thought of as the 'Ruler of the American Continent' ... Is Latin America correct in calling our altruism masked imperialism? Should we continue to intervene in Latin America? What would the great men of our history do in this dilemma? Would not Lincoln champion the cause of the weak? But would not Roosevelt justify American Intervention ...?" See John Cage, "Other People Think," in *John Cage: An Anthology*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Praeger, 1970), 45.

¹³² Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, annotated and edited by Jeffrey S. Cramer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 354.

not the only composer who set Thoreau's texts to music in the 1960s and 1970s. At this time many other artists – including Henry Brant, Brian Fennelly, and Ben Johnston – used Thoreau's writings in their music as well.¹³³

II. b. Inspiration for and Development of the Preface

It is no coincidence that a large portion of sound in *Lecture* consists of narrated text, and perhaps this was the reason why Cage included the word “Lecture” in the title of this piece. From the late 1950s on Cage increasingly explored language and text in the context of musical works. He also created prose and poetry, including such poetic forms as the mesostic. Sometimes he blurred the lines between informational text, poetry and music. This is the case in *Lecture*.

The first important element in the narrative portion of *Lecture* is the Preface which opens the piece. At the world premiere, Cage read the Preface. He might have wanted to remind the audience of Thoreau reading his essays at the Concord Lyceum. Consisting of eleven paragraphs, the Preface contains informational text. It is arguably Cage's most frank political statement within a musical work. The opening reads:

¹³³ Commissioned by the Westminster College Choir in Princeton N.J. for the United States bicentennial in 1976, Brant's choral composition *American Weather* uses quotes from Thoreau and William Penn. Premiered in 1976 by the Tri-city symphony in Davenport Iowa, Fennelly's work *In Wilderness is the Preservation of the World: Thoreau Fantasy No. 1* is a dodecaphonic orchestral work reflective of Thoreau. Ben Johnston's *Five Fragments* for voice and three instruments (1960) draws on passages from *Walden*. Although not drawing on Thoreau, Ingram Marshall wrote music for a theater work by performance artist Grace Ferguson *Don't Sue the Weather Man* (1979) which is based on a text from a Danish radio broadcast.

The first thing I thought of doing in relation to this work was to find an anthology of American aspirational thought and subject it to chance operations. I thought the resultant complex would help to change our present intellectual climate.¹³⁴

Cage felt that aspirational thought might help solve problems in society. However, he found that anthologies on aspirational thought “for children are written by adults” and that such books, especially Henry Steele Commager’s 1938 *Documents of American History*, were “Legal Judgments, Presidential Reports [and] Congressional speeches.” As Cage observed:

Of all professions the law is the least concerned with aspiration. It is concerned with precedent, not with discovery, with what was witnessed at one time in one place, and not with vision and intuition. When the law is corrupt, it is corrupt because it concentrates its energy on protecting the rich from the poor. Justice is out of the question. That is why not only aspiration but intelligence (as in the work of Buckminster Fuller) and conscience (as in the thought of Thoreau) are missing in our leadership.

In *Lecture’s* Preface Cage also addresses the energy crisis, environmental degradation and the exploitation of the individual. Then he shifts from current political concerns to Thoreau and elaborates on the influence of Thoreau’s writings. He cites Ralph Waldo Emerson who argued, “No truer American existed than Thoreau” and emphasizes the influence of “Essay on the Duty of Civil Disobedience” on Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

¹³⁴ John Cage, *Lecture on the Weather* (New York: C. F. Peters, 1975). See also *Empty Words*, 3.

Cage invested much thought into the Preface. His many sketches for the Preface shed a light onto what ideas shaped this composition. In one of his steno notebooks for *Lecture* he quoted from Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1958 book *Strive Towards Freedom*. King also referenced Thoreau as inspiration during the Civil Rights Movement:

As I thought further I came to see that what we were really doing was withdrawing our cooperation from an evil system, rather than merely withdrawing our economic support from the bus company. The bus company, being an external expression of the system, would naturally suffer, but the basic aim was to refuse to cooperate with evil. At this point I began to think about Thoreau's Essay on Civil Disobedience. I remembered how, as a college student, I had been moved when I first read this work. I became convinced that what we were preparing to do in Montgomery was related to what Thoreau had expressed. We were simply saying to the white community, 'We can no longer lend our cooperation to an evil system.'¹³⁵

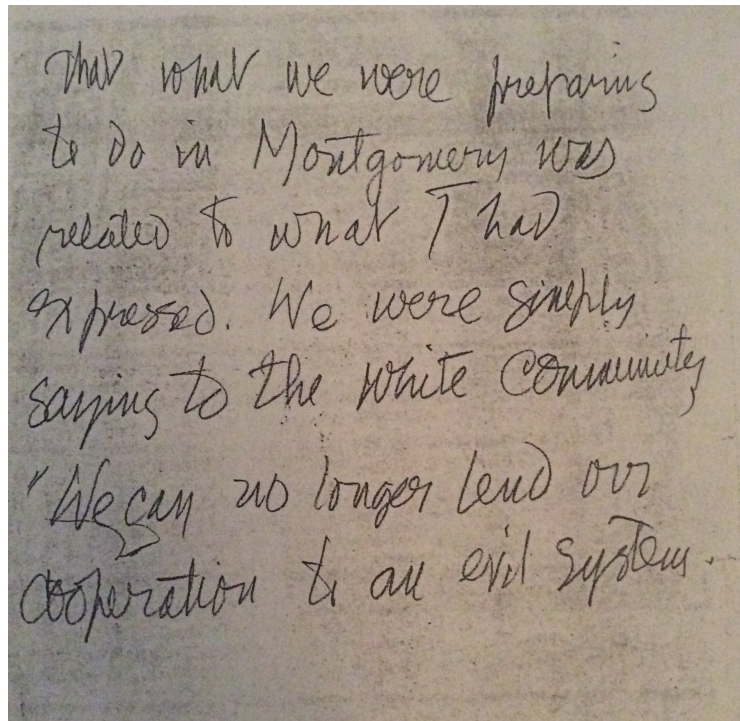
Cage wrote the last two sentences in large lettering (see Figure 3).¹³⁶ On another page of his notebook, Cage seems to have planned to dedicate *Lecture* to "Mete, M. Mead and Thoreau." (see Figure 4).¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Cage drew this quote from King's essay *Stride Towards Freedom* (1958). King's text is a memoir of the Montgomery bus boycott. It is interesting to note that King wrote in his preface, "While the nature of this account causes me to make frequent use of the pronoun "I," in every important part of the story it should be "we." Cage ended his Preface with "I dedicate this work to the U.S.A., that it become just another part of the world, no more, no less."

¹³⁶ The steno notepad examples are used with kind permission of Dr. Laura Kuhn, director of the John Cage Trust. John Cage Collection, New York Public Library.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

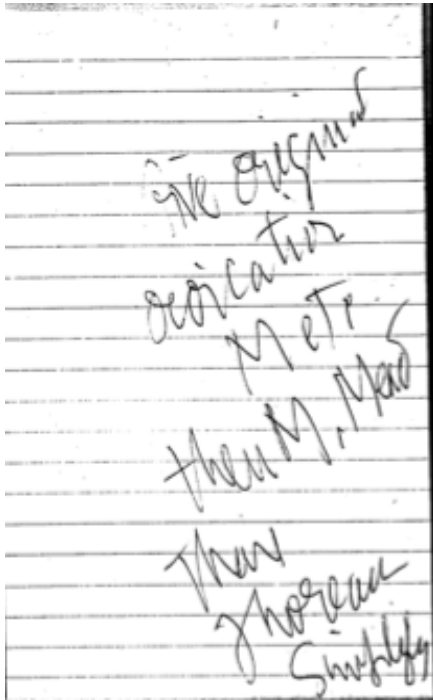
Figure 3. John Cage's Steno Notepad with Martin Luther King's Statement.



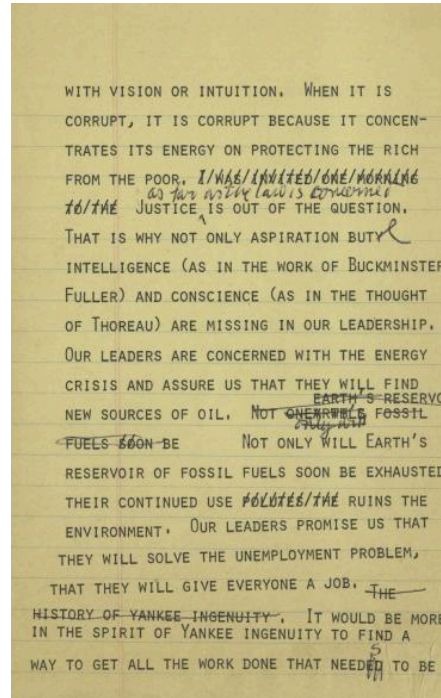
That what we were preparing
to do in Montgomery was
related to what I had
expressed. We were simply
saying to the white community,
"We can no longer lend our
cooperation to an evil system."

Figure 4 a. John Cage's Steno Notepad with an Original Dedication for *Lecture on the Weather* and b. Another more Formal Draft of the Preface for John Cage's *Lecture on the Weather*.

a.



b.



The dedication shows that although Cage was interested in Thoreau, he also contemplated ideas from the well-known American cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead. From January 1 to 8, 1969, Cage was in Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico, sat on a UNESCO panel with biologists and social scientists and made the following point: “In my music I want space for surprise. I want us not to be inhabitants, but tourists, meeting new experiences.” Mead challenged him: “You dislike formal governments; but we have

got to survive. We can't have everybody [be] tourists."¹³⁸ This critique of Cage's statement might have influenced his later compositional philosophy, as he embraced more subjectivity in his compositional processes.¹³⁹ As musicologist David W. Bernstein noted, "He [Cage] liked to quote Margaret Mead, who said, 'Since we live longer, we can change what we do. We can stop whatever it was we promised we'd always do and do something else'."¹⁴⁰ Composer-scholar William Brooks also noted that Cage's work since 1970 was a "summary" of earlier ideas and a revival of previously abandoned

¹³⁸ C. H. Waddington, ed., *Biology and the History of the Future* (Edinburg, Scotland: Edinburg University Press, 1972), 45–46.

¹³⁹ Other Mead references by Cage include, "Margaret Mead's ideas are metropolitan transportation (Duchamp had same idea in twenties): private cars parked at city limits; city cars used as one uses carts in super-markets and airports, abandoned at one's destination. Police busy returning cars to parking lots, getting them serviced or repaired whenever necessary," "Mead's mind is large and open, like Buckminster Fuller's. She found thoughts dull that suggest that men are superior to animals or plants. Creations' and societies' differences engage her attention. They suggest the next things useful to be done," "Margaret Mead mentioned TV, (Possibility of seeing what's happening before historians touch it up)," "Margaret Mead mentioned hair: whether it grows shoulder-length or longer as with Caucasians, up and out as Blacks, it has proved a source of profound irritation to the old generation. She said old people can't know what being young now is like and that young people can learn nothing from the old," "Martino told me reason his lamb chops are better than Ottomanelli's was his business's smaller. Margaret Mead too, insisted on importance of less numbers (if one's a futurist)" and "Everett Reimer's 'Essay on Alternative in Education' begins with a quotation from Margaret Mead: 'My grandmother wanted me to have an education, so she kept me out of school.' Reimer works with [Ivan] Illich in Cuernavaca." See John Cage, *A Year From Monday: New Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 58; and John Cage, *M: Writings '67-'72* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 96, 103, 105, 122, and 145.

¹⁴⁰ David W. Bernstein and Christopher Hatch, eds., *Writing Through John Cage's Music, Poetry and Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 241–242. Originally in John Cage, "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) and continued in 1969 (Part V)," in *M: Writings '67-'72* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 69.

methods, such as conventional staff notation and “procedure[s] that would allow character to emerge” more apparently in the process of composition.¹⁴¹

In the last part of his Preface, Cage urges the United States “to give up the notion that we alone can keep the world in line, that only we can solve its problems.” Instead he advocates for a communion with all and for communion as a global initiative. Citing Thoreau, he wrote, “The best communion men have is through silence.”¹⁴² In the last paragraph he stated:

Our political structures no longer fit the circumstances of our lives. Outside the bankrupt cities we live in Megalopolis which has no geographical limits. Wilderness is global park. I dedicate this work to the U.S.A., that it becomes just another part of the world, no more, no less.

The Preface is self-referential in that in this text Cage discloses some of *Lecture*'s compositional processes and structural aspects. He informs the audience that *Lecture* is based on 4'33" where the title of the work indicates the length of the work. But unlike 4'33", *Lecture*'s duration is not completely fixed. Cage states that the time proportion of this work should be between 22'45" (5 x 4'33") and 36'24" (8 x 4'33") and agreed upon before the commencement of *Lecture*. He also explained why he decided to refer to

¹⁴¹ William Brooks, “Choice and Change in Cage’s Recent Music,” in *A John Cage Reader: In Celebration of his 70th Birthday*, ed. Peter Gena, Jonathan Brent, and Don Gillespie (New York: C. F. Peters, 1982), 94–95. Rebecca Y. Kim assumes that Cage embraced “personal taste.” See Kim, “In No Uncertain Musical Terms: The Cultural Politics of John Cage’s Indeterminacy” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2008), accessed May 23, 2012, <http://search.proquest. om.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu>, 382.

¹⁴² John Cage, *Lecture*, preface.

himself in this composition: “Since the bicentennial is an occasional piece in referring to the past, I thought besides referring to the past of the United States, I would refer to my own past too, which is basically my silent piece 4’33”.”¹⁴³ Cage discloses his use of chance operations and notes that he chose the Thoreau texts via chance operations to avoid “stress[ing] any particular points.” This is further examined later in this chapter.¹⁴⁴

II. c. Cage’s use of Thoreau’s Texts for the Twelve Speakers

Cage had been writing texts for many years, but as Richard Kostelanetz observed, it was not until the 1970s that these texts began to take on the character of poetry instead of narrative essays.¹⁴⁵ An early form of poetry that he began to develop (at least by the late 1960s) was called a mesostic, similar to an acrostic, except the main word runs down in the middle. Figure 5, originally published in his *M: Writings ’67–’72*, shows part of the word *Polyporus frondosus* (a type of mushroom), which “tells of Cage’s difficulty in finding mushrooms while at the University of Illinois, until he met two men who took

¹⁴³ Thorman also observes that “The expansion of 4’33” that occurs in *Lecture on the Weather* is analogous to expanding this personal experience to a social level. Anarchy, rather than the control and *force* of government, is necessary to fulfill Cage’s dedication in *M*: “To us and all those who hate us, that the U.S.A. may become just another part of the world, no more, no less.” Thorman, 156. See also Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 81; and Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, “An Interview with John Cage [1975],” *New York Arts Journal* 1, no. 1 (May 1976), 5–7.

¹⁴⁴ Cage, *Empty Words*, 3.

¹⁴⁵ Kostelanetz notes that Cage gravitated towards poetry beginning with his “Three Diaries” (1965–67) published in *A Year from Monday* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967). Richard Kostelanetz, *John Cage (Ex)plain(ed)* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996), 115.

him to where he found plenty.”¹⁴⁶ This also reflects his interest in mycology (discussed in the previous chapter in the context of his contribution to the *Mushroom Book*, 1972).

Figure 5. An early Example of John Cage’s Mesostic.

Finally, bill and joe
took me Reluctantly
tO a farm
west
of
champaign.
they tolD me that
if I tOld
anyone elSe
aboUt the place
they
would cut
my ballS off.

Throughout the 1970s Cage continued to experiment with poetry. According to Sabine Feisst, in the 1970s Cage “musicalized” language through “non-syntactic prose ‘written through’ other artists’ texts.”¹⁴⁷ Cage’s *Mureau* (1971) exemplifies his poetic

¹⁴⁶ The rest of the mesostic describes how Cage was able to find enough mushrooms to feed one-hundred people after which they returned their gratitude with a denim jacket, an icon of his clothing apparel during the 1970s. Originally in Cage, *M: Writings '67-'72*, 156–157. See also Silverman, 259.

¹⁴⁷ Sabine Feisst, “John Cage and Improvisation – An Unresolved Relationship,” in *Music Improvisation: Art, Education, and Society*, edited by Gabriel Solis and Bruno Nettl (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 46.

experimentation with text from Thoreau's *Journal* and use of non-syntactic prose.

According to Rebecca Kim, pieces like:

Re Morris Graves (1973) which consists of narrative stories in alternation with rhythmicized Indian chant and *Lecture on the Weather* [which] is comprised of narrative texts by Thoreau interspersed with free vocalise—expanded and transformed the general aims of his text compositions collectively.¹⁴⁸

Compared to the distinctive tone of *Lecture*'s Preface, the twelve parts are in a different type of prose.

Cage's *Empty Words* (1973–74), another experimental text featuring fragmented prose whose performance lasts over ten hours, might be considered as a source of germination for *Lecture*. This work for amplified voice utilizes specifically arranged text from Thoreau's *Journal* and optional slides with drawings by Thoreau made by French-American filmmaker Babette Mangolte. These slides could be projected while taped sounds compiled by Maryanne Amacher are played. Yet there is a difference between *Empty Words* and *Lecture* involving the use of text. Cage explained that with *Empty Words*, he aimed at a “demilitarization of language”:

Empty Words begins by omitting sentences, has only phrases, words, syllables, and letters. The second part omits the phrases, has only words, syllables, and letters. The third part omits the words, has only syllables and letters. And the last part has nothing but letters and sounds.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Kim, 386.

¹⁴⁹ On August 8, 1974 Cage gave an interview before he performed part IV of *Empty Words* stating “I let it be known to my friends, and even strangers, as I was wandering around the country, that what was interesting to me was making English less

In *Lecture*, Cage processed the above-mentioned three Thoreau texts through chance operations. He used the I-Ching in order to select text excerpts from Thoreau and created what he called “collage texts” for the twelve speakers. However, unlike in *Empty Words*, in *Lecture* he refrained from fragmenting the paragraphs, the syntax of sentences or individual words to preserve the meaning of the chosen excerpts. It is also interesting to note that he never “returned to such large units in text composition.”¹⁵⁰ Below is a chart that shows the sources of the components of the speaker parts AI, through XII and the Thoreau text that makes up these specific parts.¹⁵¹

understandable. Because when it’s understandable, well, people control one another, and poetry disappears – and as I was talking with my friend Norman O. Brown, he said, “Syntax [which is what makes things understandable] is the army, is the arrangement of the army. So what we’re doing when we make language un-understandable is we’re demilitarizing it, so that we can do our living. It’s a transition from language to music certainly. It’s bewildering at first, but it’s extremely pleasurable as time goes on. And that’s what I’m up to.” Laura Kuhn, “John Cage’s *Empty Words*” (Bard College, Spiegeltent, June 30 and July 1, 2012), accessed September 23, 2013, <http://johncagetrust.blogspot.com/2013/07/afterglow.html>.

¹⁵⁰ Thorman, 159.

¹⁵¹ The * denotes journal entries that Thoreau later turned into significant essays. Thoreau originally wanted to publish “The Service” in the *Dial* (1840), but it was rejected and posthumously published. F. B. Sanborn, ed., *The Service* (Boston: Charles E. Goodspeed, 1902). “Walking” was an essay that Thoreau continued to edit throughout his life. It was originally presented at the Concord Lyceum in 1851, but was posthumously published in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Henry David Thoreau, “Walking,” in *The Atlantic*, accessed October 5, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1862/06/walking/304674/>. Also, Thoreau’s popular essay “The Natural History of Massachusetts” began in his *Journal*.

Table 1. John Cage: “Lecture on the Weather,” Speaker Parts AI–AXII: Analysis of the Text Collages and Their Sources

		Performer AI	Performer AII	Performer AIII
Name of Thoreau Texts	1.	<i>Walden</i> : “Higher Laws”	“Civil Disobedience”	<i>Walden</i> : “Higher Laws”
	2.	<i>Walden</i> : “Spring”	<i>Journal</i> 1858	<i>Walden</i> : “The Ponds”
	3.	<i>Walden</i> : “Economy”	<i>Journal</i> 1845	<i>Walden</i> : “Economy”
	4.	* <i>Journal</i> : “Natural History of Massachusetts”	<i>Walden</i> : “Brute Neighbors”	<i>Walden</i> : “The Ponds”
	5.	* <i>Journal</i> “The Service”	<i>Journal</i> 1854	“Civil Disobedience”
	6.	<i>Walden</i> : “Conclusion”	<i>Walden</i> : “Winter Animals”	<i>Journal</i> 1858
	7.	<i>Walden</i> : “Solitude”		<i>Walden</i> : “Economy”
	8.	“Civil Disobedience”		<i>Walden</i> : “Higher Laws”
	9.	<i>Journal</i> 1854		<i>Walden</i> : “Economy”
	10	<i>Journal</i> 1852		<i>Walden</i> : “Baker Farm”
	11	“Civil Disobedience”		<i>Walden</i> : “House Warming”
	12	<i>Walden</i> : “The Ponds”		<i>Journal</i> 1852
	13			<i>Journal</i> 1851
	14			<i>Journal</i> 1852
			<i>Journal</i> 1860	

Table 1. Cont...

Performer AIV Performer AV Performer AVI				
Name of Thoreau Texts	1.	<i>Journal</i> 1854	“Civil Disobedience”	<i>Journal</i> 1856
	2.	<i>Walden</i> : “Economy”	<i>Walden</i> : “Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors”	<i>Journal</i> 1853
	3.	<i>Journal</i> 1859	<i>Walden</i> : “Spring”	<i>Walden</i> : “Solitude”
	4.	<i>Journal</i> 1859	* <i>Journal</i> : “Natural History of Massachusetts”	<i>Walden</i> : “Economy”
	5.	“Civil Disobedience”	“Civil Disobedience”	
	6.	<i>Walden</i> : “Economy”	<i>Walden</i> : “Conclusion”	
	7.	<i>Journal</i> 1856	<i>Walden</i> : “Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors”	
	8.	“Civil Disobedience”	<i>Journal</i> 1857	
	9.	“Civil Disobedience”	<i>Journal</i> 1852	
	10	<i>Walden</i> : “Economy”	<i>Journal</i> 1857	
	11	<i>Journal</i> 1860		

Table 1. Cont...

		Performer AVII	Performer AVIII	Performer AIX
Name of Thoreau Texts	1.	<i>Walden</i> : "Economy"	<i>Walden</i> : "Reading"	<i>Journal</i> 1850
	2.	<i>Walden</i> : "House Warming"	<i>Walden</i> : "Economy"	<i>Walden</i> : "House Warming"
	3.	<i>Walden</i> : "Winter Animals"	"Civil Disobedience"	<i>Journal</i> 1851
	4.	<i>Walden</i> : "Spring"	<i>Walden</i> : "Winter Animals"	<i>Walden</i> : "The Ponds"
	5.	<i>Walden</i> : "Sounds"	<i>Walden</i> : "Brute Neighbors"	<i>Journal</i> 1854
	6.	<i>Journal</i> 1859	<i>Walden</i> : "Economy"	<i>Walden</i> : "Solitude"
	7.	<i>Walden</i> : "Where I lived, and What I Lived For"	<i>Walden</i> : "Solitude"	<i>Journal</i> 1854
	8.	<i>Journal</i> 1850	<i>Walden</i> : "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors"	<i>Journal</i> 1842
	9.	<i>Walden</i> : "Brute Neighbors"	"Civil Disobedience"	<i>Walden</i> : "Spring"
	10	<i>Walden</i> : "Higher Laws"	<i>Walden</i> : "The Ponds"	<i>Journal</i> 1858
	11	<i>Walden</i> : "Economy"	<i>Journal</i> 1853	
	12		<i>Walden</i> : "The Ponds in the Winter"	
	13		<i>Walden</i> : "Economy"	
	14		<i>Walden</i> : "Economy"	
	15		<i>Journal</i> 1856	

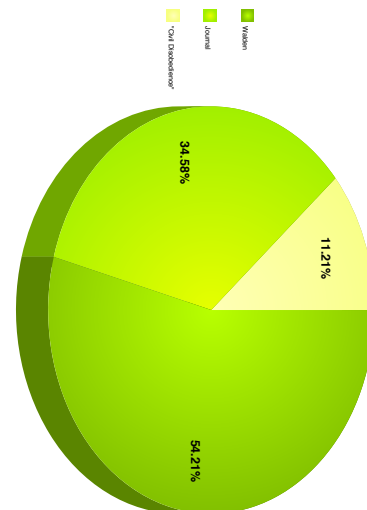
Table 1. Cont...

		Performer AX	Performer AXI	Performer AXII
Name of Thoreau Texts	1.	<i>Walden</i> : “Economy”	<i>Journal</i> 1859	<i>Walden</i> : “Brute Neighbors”
	2.	<i>Journal</i> 1842	<i>Journal</i> 1861	<i>Walden</i> : “Conclusion”
	3.	<i>Walden</i> : “The Ponds in the Winter”	<i>Walden</i> : “Where I lived, and What I Lived For”	“Civil Disobedience”
	4.	<i>Walden</i> : “The Bean Field”	<i>Walden</i> : “Sounds”	
	5.		<i>Walden</i> : “Spring”	
	6.		<i>Journal</i> 1856	

Table 2. Breakdown of the Amount of Text from Each of the Four Thoreau Sources Used in the Speaker Parts AI through AXII of John Cage’s “Lecture on the Weather,” a Visual Analysis of the Texts’ Frequency.

	Names of Thoreau Texts	Frequency
1.	<i>Walden</i>	58
2.	<i>Journal</i>	37
3.	“Civil Disobedience”	12

Total Texts	107
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Comparing the one hundred and seven texts used in the twelve speaker parts, it is interesting to observe that texts from the relatively short *Walden* book occur more frequently than texts from the 1962 fourteen-volume Dover edition of the *Journal* that Cage consulted. Excerpts from the even shorter “Essay on the Duty of Civil Disobedience” are represented twelve different times in the entire score. One wonders how Cage availed himself of both choice and chance to arrive at these results, which will be contemplated later in this chapter.¹⁵² It is also interesting to note that Cage refrained from fragmenting the chosen paragraphs. However, Cage sometimes used different sections of a specific idea. For example, in the third section of the speaker part AIX he incorporated an excerpt from Thoreau’s *Journal* dated August 1851 which reads: “That certainly is the best government where the inhabitants are least often reminded of the government. Where it is the most natural thing in the world for a government that does not understand you, to let you alone.”¹⁵³ Yet Cage surprisingly omitted the middle section of this paragraph: “(Where a man cannot be a poet even without danger of being made poet-laureate! Where he cannot be healthily neglected, and grow up a man, and not an Englishman merely!).”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² I would like to thank Gene Caprioglio from C. F. Peters, New York and the librarians at the New York Public Library for kindly granting me access to the twelve speaker parts from *Lecture on the Weather*.

¹⁵³ The Walden Woods Project, The Thoreau Institute, accessed December, 13, 2013, https://www.walden.org/library/the_writings_of_henry_david_thoreau:_the_digital_collection/journal.

¹⁵⁴ Cage, *Lecture on the Weather*, speaker part AIX, 5.

David Patterson offers a unique perspective in regards to Cage and his use of text that can be applied here. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Cage briefly flirted with Maoism and used Mao's texts as material for some of his text pieces. In his 1971–1972 *Diary: How to Improve the World* installment, Patterson found that Cage was “censoring” texts, stating that Cage’s “excised passages seem to be of roughly the same nature, either smacking of a discrete political ideology or party (already anathema to Cage), or touting conformity with the masses – no doubt a particularly distasteful notion to any member of the Avant–garde.” Patterson points out that:

Cage’s reworking: “Mao: Our point of departure is to serve the people wholeheartedly, to proceed in all cases from the interests of the people and not from one’s self–interest or from the interests of a small group.
Original Mao Text [Cage’s excisions in italics]: “Our point of departure is to serve the people wholeheartedly *and never for a moment divorce ourselves from the masses*, to proceed in all cases from the interests of the people and not from one's self–interest or from the interests of a small group, *and to identify our responsibility to the people with our responsibility to the leading organs of the Party.*”¹⁵⁵

Cage omitted or edited much of the Thoreau texts for *Lecture* and, as mentioned above, one can see that he would avoid the promotion of the idea of conformity with the masses.

When comparing the layout of Thoreau’s *Journal* and Cage’s speaker parts, one can observe visual similarities between the two works. Just as Thoreau added drawings of his natural environment to his text (Figure 6), Cage placed drawings, such as wobbly

¹⁵⁵ David Patterson, “‘Political’ or ‘Social’: John Cage and the Remolding of Mao Tse–Tung,” in *Cage and Consequences*, ed. Julia H. Schröder and Volker Straebel (Hofheim am Taunus, Germany: Wolke, 2012), 59.

lines, in the texts of the speaker parts (Figure 7).¹⁵⁶ He used chance operations to determine the placement of these lines and they serve, according to Cage, as “suggestions for vocalise (or sound production by some other means) not requiring a second breath (or bow, for instance) but using a single one (whether deep or shallow) completely.”¹⁵⁷ He wanted the complete breath to represent the 1970s United States intellectual and political climate, “exhausting.”¹⁵⁸ Cage also colored the vocalise lines purple, perhaps to inspire performers and to heighten the possibilities for the indeterminate parts of the composition.¹⁵⁹

Figure 6. Excerpts from David Henry Thoreau’s texts: a. “Civil Disobedience” from *Lecture on the Weather*’s speaker part AI text; b. *Journal*, December 1859 from *Lecture on the Weather*’s speaker part AIV text.

a.



horizon. The hill and opposite woods are dark with fine effect. The little peepers have much the greatest



apparatus for peeping of any frogs that I know. Frogs are the birds of the night.

b.

I see that acorns — white oak, etc. — have fallen after the rain and wind, just as leaves and fruit have.

I see, just up, the large light-orange toad-stools with white spots, — at first:  then: 

¹⁵⁶ Cage, *Lecture on the Weather*, score.

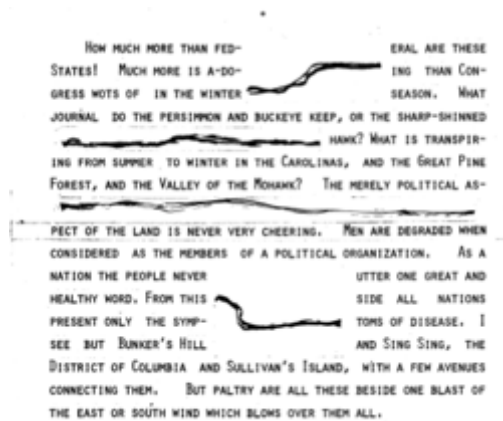
¹⁵⁷ Cage, *Lecture on the Weather*, score instructions for speaker part AI, 1.

¹⁵⁸ Zimmermann, *Desert Plants*, 63.

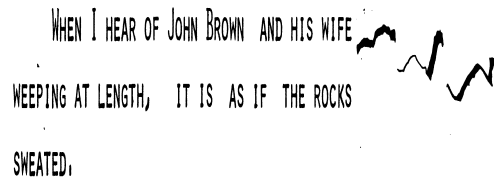
¹⁵⁹ The examples of sketches for *Lecture on the Weather* are used with kind permission of Dr. Laura Kuhn, director of the John Cage Trust. John Cage Collection, New York Public Library.

Figure 7. Excerpt from Henry David Thoreau a. “Essay on the Duty of Civil Disobedience” from *Lecture on the Weather*’s speaker part AI and b. *Journal*, December 1859 from *Lecture on the Weather*’s AIV text.

a.



b.



III. Multi-Media Components

As mentioned before, Cage invited Maryanne Amacher to create a tape with environmental sounds for *Lecture*. He had a history of creating musique concrète pieces and tapes with sound as components of works involving acoustic instruments. Cage used a variety of environmental, musical and electronic sounds in these works. In 1952 he created the tape work *Williams Mix*.¹⁶⁰ This piece features six sonic categories: “city

¹⁶⁰ In the early 1950s, Cage was excited about the tape as a new musical medium. In a letter to Pierre Boulez, he stated, “All my interest is in this new field [tape music], and I doubt I’ll be writing anymore ‘concert music’.” Silverman, *Begin Again*, 110–111.

sounds, country sounds, electronic sounds, manually produced sounds, wind-produced sounds and vocal music, and small sounds requiring amplification.”¹⁶¹ Similarly Cage’s *Fontana Mix* (1958) for magnetic tape includes city, country, human, and synthetic sounds.¹⁶²

Perhaps inspired by the emergence of the field of acoustic ecology and soundscape composition in the 1970s, Cage became interested in using recorded environmental sounds in his works. He stated in 1974, “the sounds of the environment constitute a music which is more interesting than the music [people] would hear if they went into a concert hall.”¹⁶³ In *Bird Cage* (1972), Cage uses twelve tapes with sounds from birds in the Aviary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and in the Bombay Hook Wildlife Refuge near Dover, Delaware. In *Etcetera* (1973) for orchestra, he uses three conductors and a magnetic tape of the environment composed by his composer-friend David Behrman. In *Score (40 drawings by Thoreau) and 23 Parts: 12 Haiku* (1974), he employs taped nature sounds also mixed by Behrman.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ David W. Bernstein, “Cage and High Modernism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. David Nicholls (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 209.

¹⁶² Cage also created such other tape-based works as *Imaginary Landscape No. 5* for forty-two phonograph records to be recorded on eight magnetic tapes and then mixed on tape or disc (1952), *Music for the “Marrying Maiden”* (1960), *Rozart Mix* (1965) for at least four performers using at least twelve tape machines and at least eighty-eight magnetic tape loops, *Assemblage* (1968) for magnetic tape, as well as *HPSCHD* (1967–69) for one to fifty-one harpsichord(s) and one to fifty-one magnetic tapes.

¹⁶³ Cited by David Nicholls, “Towards Infinity: Cage in the 1950s and 1960s,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. David Nicholls (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 105.

¹⁶⁴ Pritchett argues that in *Empty Words* and in *Score (40 drawings by Thoreau) and 23 Parts: 12 Haiku* (1974), Cage invited the outside world into his compositional

Cage initially sought Behrman's collaboration for his Canadian commission because he was much more experienced with advanced sound recording technology and Cage enjoyed their artistic collaborations. For *Lecture*, Cage decided to invite Behrman again to create a tape with wind, rain, and thunder sounds. He wrote him a letter because at that time Behrman was at York University in Toronto. Unfortunately, the letter was lost and Behrman could not accept Cage's invitation, as he was already busy with other commissions. It was Behrman who then suggested that Cage should approach Amacher, as she was known to create the best recordings of environmental ambient music. Cage was already familiar with her compositions and described them as being very beautiful.¹⁶⁵

frameworks. "Cage's combination of ambient sounds and the text and pictures from Thoreau's writings is not arbitrary. In both of these Cage pieces, after hearing fragments of Thoreau's accounts of his perception of the natural world we might get ready to go out and experience it for ourselves. Via tape recording Cage opens the windows of the concert hall and gives the natural environment a new voice. Why describe the thing when you can have it whole right here and now?" James Pritchett, "Something like a Hidden Glimmering': John Cage and Recorded Sound," *Contemporary Music Review* 15, nos. 1–2 (January 1996), 104. In an interview with Walter Zimmerman, Cage stated, "the tape recorder and everything that gave us the opportunity to record natural events and which focuses our attention back, away from theories of music to actual experience of hearing wherever we happen to be. And when I was asked, I forget now when it was, but in the early, in the late sixties or early seventies, to write a column on electronic music, I, it was then that I wrote MUREAU. I subjected THOREAU to chance operations, because I noticed that THOREAU LISTENED the way electronic composers now listen. The electronics have brought our attention back to nature ... With electronics you can't stay with twelve tones, unless you're PIERRE SCHAEFFER. Then of course you make a machine that makes the trains and the thunder and so forth correspond to the twelve tones of the musical octave. Otherwise, you go, as I think most people do, with tape recorders into the whole world of sound rather than the theoretical musical world of sound. Zimmerman, *Desert Plants*, 56–57.

¹⁶⁵ Kostelanetz, *John Cage (Ex)plain(ed)*, 131.

III. a. Maryanne Amacher's Field Recordings

Maryanne Amacher (1938–2009) was an American composer who specialized in multimedia art, studied composition with George Rochberg and Karlheinz Stockhausen in the early 1960s, before she began to gain public attention with her multimedia installation series *City Links* of which she completed eleven between 1967 and 1975. In these works, she recorded environmental sounds in cities such as Buffalo, Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis, and New York and mixed them to present them live or in the form of broadcasts. She created *City Links #9 (No More Miles – an Acoustic Twin, 1974)* with artist Luis Frangella, Cage's other collaborator on *Lecture*. In *City Links #9* Amacher streamed live sounds of footsteps and voices recorded in a Budget–Rent–a–Car store and in an arcade in Dayton, Ohio and matched these sounds with the ones heard in the gallery where she presented them. This created a “phantom presence.” For *City Links #9* Frangella added a “3–side mirror window enclosure with a drawing of Man Ray's image “The Driver...” A TV screen with light and no image (part of the installation) was reflected in the mirror, framing the image of the Driver; an apparent TV image was visible, as though the Driver was projected in open space, in front of the TV screen.”¹⁶⁶

For *Lecture*, Amacher used the sounds of wind, rain, and thunder and recycled some of her recorded wind sounds from *City Links #4* “Tone and Place, work I recorded on November 1973–May 1976, Pier 6, Boston Harbor.”¹⁶⁷ Her contribution to *Lecture* has a

¹⁶⁶ Program for the exhibition “Maryanne Amacher: *City–Links*” at Ludlow 38, New York (October 20–November 28, 2010), curated by Tobi Maier, Micah Silver, Robert The, and Axel Wieder, accessed October 27, 2013, www.ludlow38.org.

¹⁶⁷ Amacher recycled sounds from *City–Links #4* in her own works including, *City–inks #7 (Everything–In–Air, 1974)*, *City–Links #10 (Everything–In–Air, 1974)*, *City–Links*

tripartite structure. Cage's instructions for the use of Amacher's recorded sounds in

Lecture are:

BI: A recording of breeze to be faded in at the beginning, out at the end of the performance ... BII: A recording of rain, to be faded in after 11 to 12 % of the total agreed-upon performance time-length has elapsed ... BIII: A recording of thunder, to enter abruptly after 62 to 70% of the total agreed-upon performance time-length has eclipsed. Let BIII stop before BI and II fade out, but do not let this stop interrupt a thunderclap.¹⁶⁸

In an interview with Kostelanetz, Cage elaborated on Amacher's work:

She [Amacher] is gathering sounds at Walden Pond and will mix them, superimposing several recordings. She's most sensitive to this kind of thing, and she uses the recordings of environmental sounds as instruments. She orchestrates them on a most intuitive level. She doesn't make a recording and then just listen to it. She makes a recording and plays it like a musical instrument. She makes it sing. What she does is hard for me to understand, because I don't work the way she does. She's a troubadour. Her music cannot be separated from her. Whereas I hope not only physically but in every other way too, if possible, to separate my music from me.¹⁶⁹

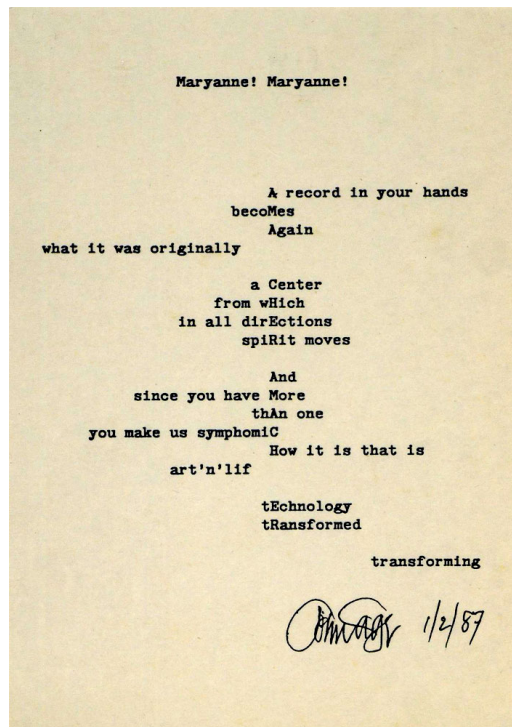
#13 (Incoming Night, Blum at Pier 6), and in the commissions she received from the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, *Labyrinth Gives Way to Skin* (1975), *Remainder* (1976), and *Torse* (1976).

¹⁶⁸ Cage, *Lecture*, score.

¹⁶⁹ Richard Kostelanetz, *The Old Poetries and the New* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1981), 269.

After Amacher's collaboration with Cage on *Lecture*, she continued to work with him. For the John Cage–Festival at the Bonn Tage Neuer Musik (July 6–10, 1979), she contributed to his large–scale ten–hour realization of *Empty Words* for which she mixed sounds of wind, rain, and thunder from Walden Pond.¹⁷⁰ In 1987 Cage honored Amacher for her contributions with a mesostic (see Figure 8).¹⁷¹

Figure 8. John Cage: Letter of recommendation for Maryanne Amacher in the form of a mesostic.



¹⁷⁰ Cage also performed this work with Amacher on September 25–26, 1981 where it was broadcast through NPR and *Empty Words* Part IV on July 12, 1984 for a Thoreau birthday celebration.

¹⁷¹ Holly Jarvis, *Ekho: Women in Sonic Art*, accessed May 14, 2013, <http://ekhofemalesound.wordpress.com>.

III. b. Luis Frangella's Film

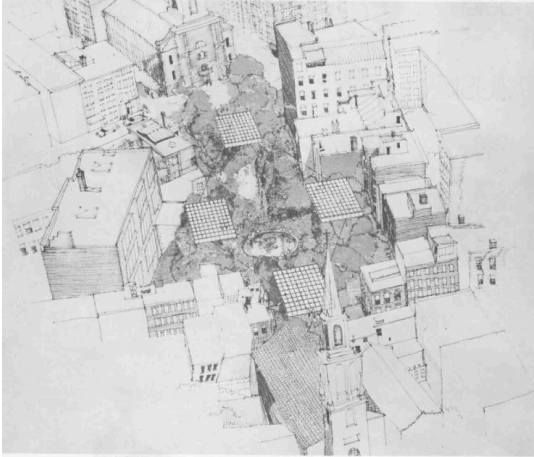
Luis Frangella (1944–1990) was a Chilean painter and sculptor who created the visual component for *Lecture*. During the mid–1970s, he held a research fellowship for advanced visual studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and by 1976 he was active as a painter and sculptor in New York City. He even created large sound sculptures which can be seen in Figure 9.¹⁷² By the early 1980s, he helped organize some of the earliest exhibitions at Limbo, an artists' after hours club known for its art shows and film screenings. Frangella who was married to Amacher, may have recommended him to Cage for the *Lecture* collaboration.¹⁷³

¹⁷² In a review of September 13, 1976 in the *Village Voice*, Tom Johnson reports that Frangella built a “Sound Sculpture.” “Even in New York it is difficult to experience much sound sculpture firsthand, but I am discovering that there is a lot of it around ... Luis Frangella carried his latter principle a bit further in his ‘Rain Music’ series. This Argentine artist, who has been working at MIT’s center of Advanced Visual Studies, allows rain to fall on large assemblages of tuned drums. Wind and rain also stimulate moving elements, which can slap onto the drums like flexible sticks. Frangella’s installations create solid roofs, so that the listeners can remain dry underneath.” Tom Johnson, *The Voice of New Music. New York City 1972–1982. A Collection of Articles Originally Published in the Village Voice* (Eindhoven, NL: Het Apollohuis, 1989), 140. Figures 9. a. and 9. b. shows Frangella’s “: A Large Environmental Sound Sculpture,” in John Grayson ed., *Sound Sculpture: A Collection of Essays by Artists Surveying the Techniques, Applications and Future Direction of Sound Sculptures* (Vancouver, BC Canada: A.R.C. Publications, 1975), 193–195.

¹⁷³ The marriage of Amacher and Frangella may have been a marriage of convenience. Frangella was a gay man who at the time of his marriage to Amacher needed a visa to continue his work in the United States.

Figure 9. Luis Frangella, Large-Scale Environmental Sound Sculpture *Rain Music* (1973): a. A proposed Installation. Each Large Square is a Roof-Like Canopy with 110 Modules and b. Luis Frangella with a Subsection of.

a.



b.



For *Lecture*, Frangella used drawings from Thoreau and created transparencies that were projected on a large wall. The slide changes were intended to represent the lightning, which accompanied Amacher's recorded thunder at the end of the composition. Cage's performance instructions for the visuals are: "C: In a theatrical situation gradually lower the lights so that when BIII enters the house is utterly dark except for the music-stands. A little later the film is to be projected."¹⁷⁴ It is known that Frangella also used chance operations when creating some of his other works. When examining a draft for his *Lecture* visuals, see Figure 10, one might observe that he was probably using a method to generate the placement of Thoreau's drawings.

¹⁷⁴ Cage, *Lecture*, score.

demonstrates how Frangella uses distinct color contrasts, white against black.¹⁷⁵ Cage once commented on Frangella's contribution to his *Lecture*: "It turned out that Luis Frangella had never made a film before in his life. I had assumed that he was a filmmaker. He accepted to make a film, even though he had never made one, and the film he made is absolutely beautiful."¹⁷⁶

Figure 11. Two Succeeding Images from a Performance of John Cage's *Lecture on the Weather* a. Luis Frangella's Transparency with the First Flash Representing Lightening and b. an Example of Frangella's Copy of a Thoreau Sketch fully Projected onto the Wall.

a.



b.



¹⁷⁵ A short clip of this performance can be found on Vimeo, accessed November 25, 2013, <http://vimeo.com/8925682>. The images in Figures 11. A. and 11. b. are taken from this film clip.

¹⁷⁶ *The Old Poetics and the New*, 269.

IV. A Comparative Performance Analysis

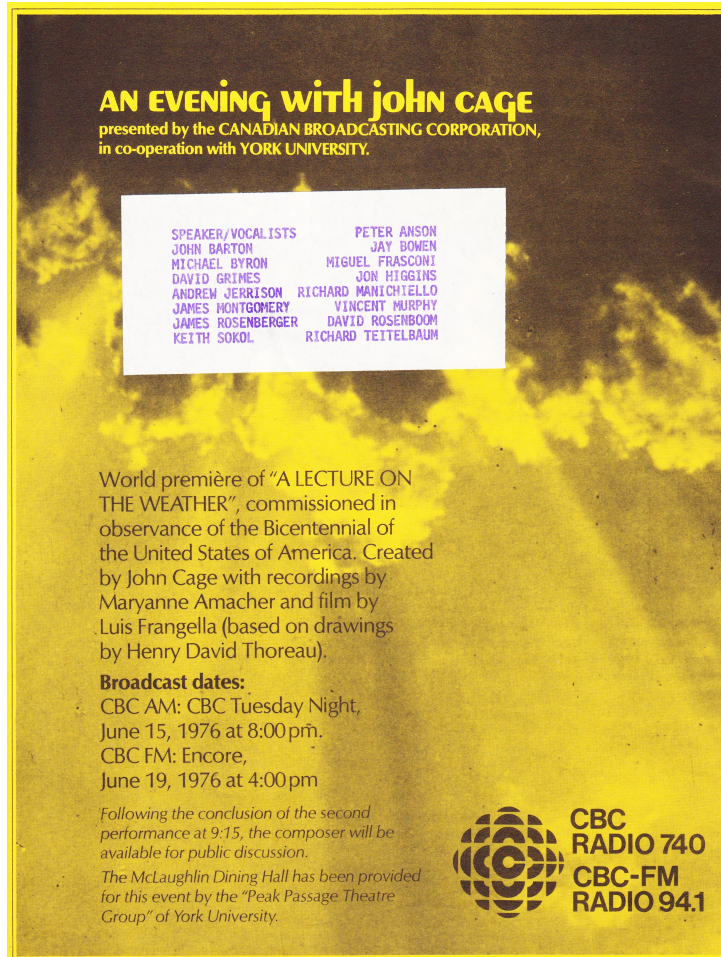
Performances of *Lecture* can differ widely. A comparison of three recorded performances will now serve as the basis of a close examination.

Also, to better illustrate the complexities of the parts, the indeterminacy involved in the score and the work's general realization potential, three graphs were conceived (see Graphs 3, 4 and 5) to juxtapose the three performances and to discuss their similarities and differences. Before an analysis of each work is presented, two performance practice issues of concern should be addressed. First, the score calls for twelve American men but recent performances including one that took place at Bard College involve females. Second, Cage preferred that the performers be American men who had become Canadian citizens, which although it was a political statement of the era, would drastically limit the number of qualified performers. The chosen performances I analyze largely ignore these restrictions.

The first analytical graph (Graph 3) focuses on the world premiere of *Lecture* at York University on February 26, 1976. The participants were all male and include John Barton, Michael Byron, David Grimes, Andrew Jerrison, James Montgomery, James Rosenberger, Keith Sokol, Peter Anson, Jay Bowen, Miguel Frasoni, Jon Higgins, Richard Manichiello, Vincent Murphy, David Rosenboom, and Richard Teitelbaum. Some of them, Byron, Rosenboom and Teitelbaum, for instance, were indeed Americans living in Canada. According to Jaeger, the program excluded a few names by mistake so Cage provided an update for every poster shown below in Figure 12.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ I would like to thank David Jaeger for his generosity and giving me this image.

Figure 12. The Poster for the World Premiere of John Cage's *Lecture on the Weather*.



The second analytical graph (Graph 4) captures one of the first commercial recordings of *Lecture* which was released on January 1, 2000 by the Southwest Chamber Ensemble. Among its performers are Don Ambrosio, Jay Belloli, Heinz Blankenburg, Tom Coston, Jim Foschia, Stuart Fox, Joel Glassman, Michael Ingham, John Schneider, Carel Selkin, Tom Peters, and Jeff von der Schmidt.

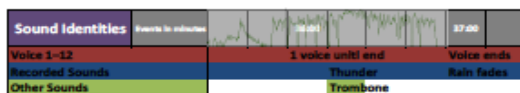
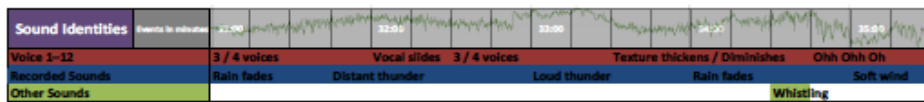
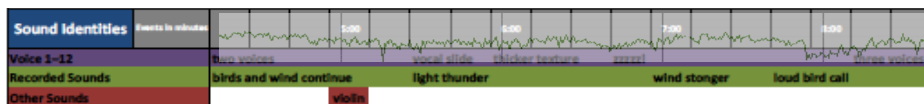
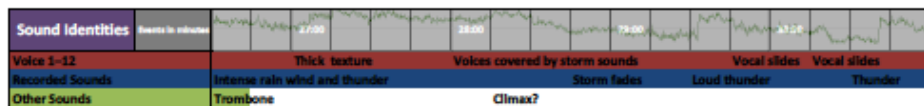
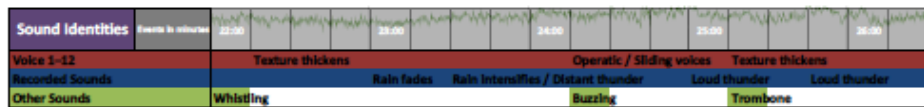
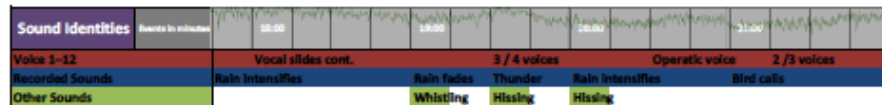
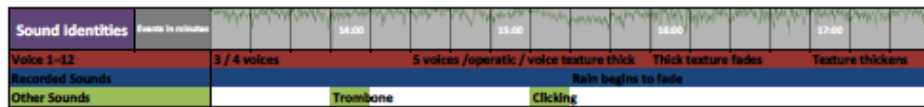
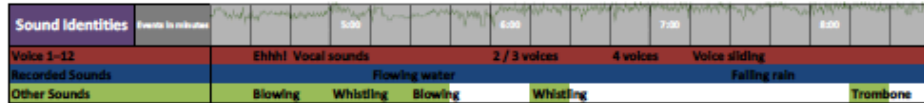
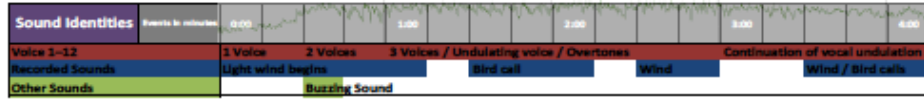
The third analytical graph (Graph 5) reflects a recording that was made at Bard College on September 27, 2007 and includes many renowned participants, including two female performers: poet John Ashbery, Ralph Benko, conductor and president of Bard College Leon Botstein, dancer and art patroness Sage Cowles, dancer–choreographer Merce Cunningham, visual artist Jasper Johns, John Kelly, percussionist Garry Kvistad, poet Joan Retallack, composer Mikel Rouse, John Ralston Saul, composer Richard Teitelbaum, and students from Bard College.¹⁷⁸

The graphs show similarities and differences between these three performances. Each graph represents time horizontally with grey boxes, standing for fifteen–second intervals. The graphs also feature one–minute markers. Each graph contains a layer for the narrated portion of the twelve voices (red), a layer for Amacher’s recorded sounds (blue) and a layer for other sounds: buzzing, blowing, whistling, and hissing sounds for instance (green). The grey layer contains a frequency curve that further details the sonic events and the dynamic range of the overall ensemble.¹⁷⁹ Through the combination of the graphs’ red, blue and green layers, one can observe each performance’s changing sonic textures or textural density, rests, and various cues.

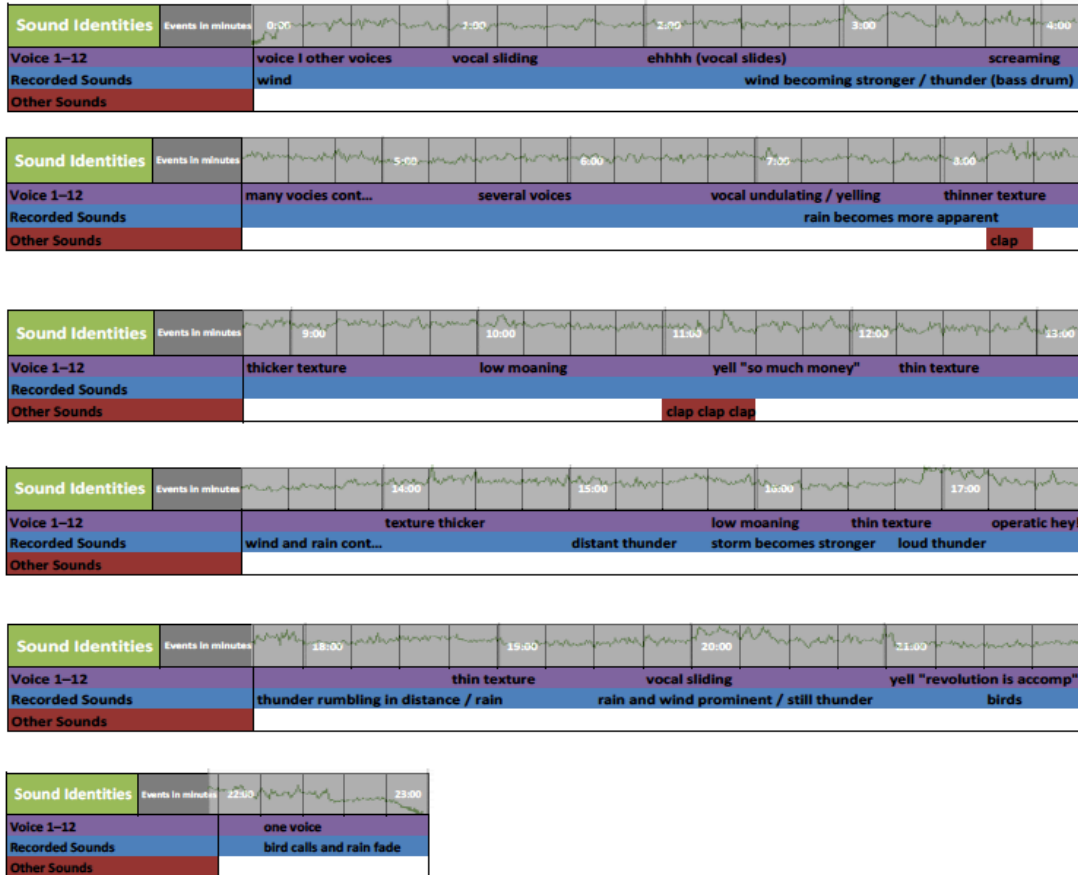
¹⁷⁸ I would also like to thank Dr. Laura Kuhn for providing me access to the Bard College recording of *Lecture*.

¹⁷⁹ The frequency curve was created with a sonic visualizer developed by Chris Cannam at Queen Mary College at the University of London, 2005–2012. I used this program to realize the medium of frequencies in each recording. However, one needs to take into consideration that the first analysis captures a non–commercial recording of the world premiere in 1976. The second performance with Chamber Ensemble is a professionally recorded example from 2000 and the third example is once again a non–commercial recording of a performance at Bard College in 2007.

Graph 1. Sonic Analysis of the Original Performance of John Cage's *Lecture on the Weather* in 1976.



Graph 2. Sonic Analysis of the Southwest Chamber Ensemble's Commercially Recorded Performance of John Cage's *Lecture on the Weather* in 2001.



Graph 3. Performance of John Cage's *Lecture on the Weather* at Bard College in 2007.



Although there are fixed aspects of *Lecture*, each performance and recording thereof has a unique identity due to Cage's allowance for a limited degree of performance freedoms.

In the work's world premiere and Bard performance, the voices are clear, articulate and the speakers' parts are read slowly, although one of the two females in the Bard recording cuts through most of the male voices. In the Bard performance, only one very low voice remains unaffected by the dominant female voice perhaps because the parts are presented in a very slow tempo. In contrast, the Southwest Chamber Ensemble performance is marked by voices that gravitate toward the musically abstract and the meaning of the texts is mostly imperceptible.

When comparing the overall time lengths of the three performances (not including the Preface to *Lecture*), the world premiere and Bard performance last between thirty–six and thirty–seven minutes and the Southwest Chamber Ensemble recording is significantly shorter, lasting around twenty–three minutes. All three performances follow Cage's prescribed duration possibilities.

The density of sonic events also presents points of contrast. When examining all the graphs, one can see how the frequency lines become erratic, as for instance in Figure 13. a. Here only a few voices or recorded sounds are happening simultaneously. In comparison Figure 13. b. displays many voices and sounds happening at once, thus creating a very homogenous texture.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Contrary to my findings, William Brooks curiously claims that one cannot hear the individual voices. "Is it possible for us to hear each voice distinctly? No." William Brooks, "Protest, Progress and (Im)possible Music," *Contemporary Music Review* 29, no. 4 (2010), 409.

When studying all three graphs it becomes apparent that the piece's world premiere and Bard performance are the most varied in regards to the density of the sonic events while the Southwest Chamber Ensemble recording has the thickest sound textures, rarely allowing room for diversity of sound. The graphs also point to the large difference of the vocal and gender makeup of each group. The recording of the work's world premiere and Southwest Chamber Ensemble performance feature an all-male cast and only the Bard College performance includes two women. Correspondingly, the overall tessitura in the first two performances is low. Also, the instrumental vocalise interpretations are different. The original performance uses a trombone; the Southwest Chamber Ensemble performance has no instrumentalists but includes a few handclaps while the Bard performance utilizes an oboe.

The pre-recorded sounds contribute to the overall sonic textures. While it is difficult to identify every sound that happens during the performance, the graphs show when a majority of the pre-recorded events occur. Because the thunder usually is very loud, the frequency line on the graphs (the middle line of the recorded sounds indicates thunder), the line becomes more compact or homogeneous, as can be seen in Figure 13.

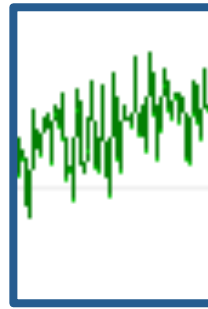
b. Comparing the three performances with regard to the representation of pre-recorded sounds, in the Southwest Chamber Ensemble interpretation one can hear these sounds but it is extremely difficult to identify the bird calls, wind, rain and thunder sounds because the human voices drown them out. Both the premiere and the Bard performances are more transparent and allow the many non-human sounds to come to the fore.

Furthermore in both of these performances, one can hear a clear progression toward a storm, beginning with the birds, then the wind and rain and finally the tumultuous thunder.

Figure 13. a. John Cage, *Lecture on the Weather*. A Few Events Occurring Simultaneously (Bard Recording Beginning 5 Seconds).



13. b. John Cage, *Lecture on the Weather Homogenized* Sound (Bard Recording at 45 Seconds Many Events Occurring Simultaneously).



Assessing all three performances, the most Cagean renditions would probably be the premiere and Bard realizations of the work. Cage enjoyed variations of sounds and their clarity and he also liked the obscurity of the text meaning, although in the case of *Lecture on the Weather* he worked hard to excavate text meaning. The idea of “music as weather,” music that constantly changes, is present in both of these performances. The Southwest Chamber Ensemble performance, released at the turn of the century, has a

gripping ending. The last statement heard is: “Revolution is accomplished.” The Bard recording ends also in this way and it is Merce Cunningham who articulates this sentence.

V. On the Reception of *Lecture*’s First Performance

The press reviews for the *Lecture* premiere were mixed, but mostly positive. William Littler from *The Toronto Star*, who had deemed Cage’s 1968 composition *Reunion* boring, praised *Lecture*. Titling his review “John Cage a musical H. D. Thoreau,” he found the work very political, “attacking the condition of contemporary America.” He treasured the performance as “a remarkable experience” being “caught up in the midst of this juxtaposition of man and nature, words as sounds and sounds as words.” He felt that “Cage had forged a forty–minute organic union of man and his environment.”¹⁸¹ In a letter to Richard Coulter of June 16, 1976, Paul Buckley said “Well man, congratulations to you and thanks to you for an extraordinary moment, radio moment, monaural radio moment with that freest of all spirits: John Cage.” He went on:

Haven’t heard any good radio until now. What a program, what an opening, an enlivening, a moving lecture on the weather. Ah old battler, you’ve done it, and on Tuesday night too! You ’n Reed and Sora, and Cage. Maybe even old Norma, though to me she sounded much too serious for the ever elusive Cage. What a strange name for the most uncaged bird ever to whistle, believing in silence like the birds. And the interviewer was the foil. I shall never forget Cage trying to support Indeterminacy by saying to him that Nature’s Indeterminate, look around you, look at the leaves!

The density of sound was unbelievable to the mind but a liberating wash to the ears: and my ears won out over the literal abcde mind; just goes to prove what one can do with a single channel, lots more to do as Lecaine believes.

¹⁸¹ William Littler, “John Cage a musical H.D. Thoreau,” in *The Toronto Star*, 1975. The Richard Coulter Files.

Somehow, the sound density, its inner layering creates the illusion of space separation, perhaps an inner space is being set up to fold all that wash up and keep track of its layers; it was kept track of.

So Thoreau's voice appeared, then faded into and out of itself, and its multiplied images until the density took on the textures of noise/then that noise texture subtly transformed to Natural noise, then storms etc really are, providing new information, as well as acoustic.

It is a good principle of Cybernetics that the only source of new information is noise! The noise, now providing sources of meaning, suggested America's verbal agony of alternatives and insoluble problems, then out of it all, in a way that was never clichéd, Thoreau steps. Yes I loved it.

It must have been fun to make, to do, to unfreeze the utterly motivated patterns of Lyons radio: as the Cage said: to achieve awareness, one must eliminate purpose! Isn't that always the battleground for Radio Arts: Radio Affairs needs purpose. But whos[?]

Even from this now psychic distance I feel the tides; all I can say man is go on, continue ... and let's have a beer next week in To.¹⁸²

Coulter also discussed his experience about this collaboration with Cage. "As I suggested to you John Cage is not merely a composer, he's a way of life!" I suppose that that appellation has now become something of a cliché but those of us who knew and worked with him would likely still agree." Coulter stressed that working with Cage was a highlight of his life.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Coulter's humorous answer to Buckley was: "Your wonderful letter cheered me up no end and I have decided to postpone suicide for at least another month. Have only returned to the office yesterday after another Celtic holiday on the island of Lewis, so obviously missed beering it up with you in Toronto. Raincheck?" Coulter told me in an email on January 31, 2015 that Buckley was "a producer in the daily programme, 'Ideas' which [can be heard today on] the CBC Radio Network Drama and Humanities Department."

¹⁸³ In the same e-mail from January 2015 Coulter wrote, "The last time I saw Cage was when he phoned to say that he and Merce Cunningham would be appearing at Toronto's Royal Alexander Theatre and would leave tickets at the box office. So I was able to go backstage following the performance for greetings and warm hugs. In those days I also kept bees and was able to give a jar of unpasteurized honey both John and Merce as they were 'into' natural food products.

Composer Michael Byron – who performed as a speaker in the Canadian premiere as well as subsequent performances – stated that:

Amusingly, Cage had “auditions” before we began rehearsing the piece. This was very casual, and I think, actually served for him to meet the speakers, and nothing more. We all met at different times, and recited part of the text. We also chose, and then sang one of the vocalize. I had one nearly hysterical moment. After singing, I asked John if my voice was good enough! He smiled, as he nearly always did. He looked miffed, but said, “Michael, you are the only person with your voice in the world.” That is an exact quote, which I will never forget. I had already met Cage, and spent a morning with him in New York, at his apartment, sipping coffee and talking. He was always very open. Lots of people new John, because he was interested in everyone. His charm was irresistible.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ In Byron’s generous email dated September 15, 2013 he remarked, “A year or so after the Toronto premier, I moved to New York permanently. Cage and I became friends, seeing each other occasionally, either at his apartment, at concerts, or by chance on the street. His generosity was unequalled. He had recommended me for grants and fellowships a number of times. And I was, among many who received his unwavering support. That was who John Cage was. It should not come as a surprise, that even though my music is very different from his, he influenced my attitude towards life. What greater compliment could I pay?”

Also, I asked Byron about the other performers he was with. “Richard Teitelbaum, who I knew from my student days at the California Institute of the Arts. I initially went to Toronto Specifically to study with him, although I stayed much longer. Richard remains a deeply cherished friends. David Rosenboom, who I both shared a house with, and performed with regularly. We also remain very close, and again, his friendship is cherished. Keith (Casey) Sokol, a wonderful pianist who I had known since my student days at the California Institute of the Arts. The late John Higgins, my South Indian Singing teacher, with whom I also privately studied with. We were exploring together, the history of oral tradition (especially as it applied to Homer). He was again, a very close friend who I saw often, and whose death left us much the poorer. Miguel Frasconi, a composer who was a student at York University, and who now live in New York. I see him only occasionally, but it is always a sheer delight.

Lastly and in regards to Amacher and Frangella, Byron wrote, “I knew the late Maryanne Amacher extremely well. We were friends, and I admired her work enormously. We first met in Boston, where she was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Visual Arts, at MIT. We immediately hit it off. Maryanne was the one, and only sound artist there. Luis Frangella was also at the Center for Advanced Visual Arts at that time, and in my view, a visionary artist. Maryanne had prerecorded the tapes used in the piece. She mixed them live during the concert, which she would change from performance-to-performance. Cage worked with her very often. She had a brilliant sense of room acoustics (perhaps intuitive,

Just as Coulter and Jaeger had remembered this performance as a highlight of their lives, Byron mentioned that *Lecture* “is a magnificent work, and the premier was of the highest caliber.”

VI. Reactions to Other Performances

The American premiere of *Lecture* happened on October 18, 1976 in Buffalo, New York and little information is unfortunately available.¹⁸⁵ Michael Byron mentioned it briefly in his e-mail arguing “[He] was involved in a second performance at the Albright Knox Gallery in Buffalo, which was also excellent, but didn’t quite have the same “shimmer [as the premiere].” For the United States premiere *Lecture* was on the program with music by composers Betsy Jolas (*États, for Six Percussionists and Violin*) and Arnold Schoenberg (*Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte*, a polemic against Hitler and totalitarian rule). Several of the original *Lecture* performers including David Rosenboom, Casey Sokol, and James Tenney participated in this premiere. Amacher, Cage, and

or perhaps through study). I remember that she loved hiding speakers in closets, or in areas outside of the concert hall. She did NOT do this exclusively; it was to meet the aesthetic requirement of a piece (either hers, or in this case, Cage’s). Think of it: All of these dramatically recorded sounds, with many VERY loud. And one never saw the sound source! It was ideal for *Lecture*... give its constant rain, and huge thunderclaps.

¹⁸⁵ In his online *Cage Compendium* Paul van Emmerick suggests that the American premiere happened at Harvard University at the Sanders Theatre (presented by the Department of Music and the Fromm Music Foundation) November 29, 1976. A Concert in Two Parts: participants in the *Lecture* performance were Lyle Davidson, Andrew Jerrison, Joel Kabakov, Peter Kelsey, Philipp Kelsey, Adam Kremen, David Lyttle, William McLelland, Lycurgus Mitchell, David Patterson, Michael Secter, Marc Wartenberg, speakers/vocalists; Maryanne Amacher, and Ivan Tcherepnin, mixing and equalization; Richard Leacock and Terry Lockhart projection. See *Cage Compendium*, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://cagecomp.home.xs4all.nl/> According to Renée Packer, it was premiered a month earlier in Buffalo, October 17, 1976. See John Dwyer, “‘Lecture on the Weather’ is Fit for all Seasons,” *Buffalo Evening News*, October 18, 1976.

Frangella took part in it as well. John Dwyer from the *Buffalo Evening News* called *Lecture on the Weather* “an astounding work . . . a high point in their [Buffalo’s] 13 seasons of the Evenings for New Music series,” while Morton Feldman viewed this concert a “political trip.”¹⁸⁶

In general, subsequent performances elicited mostly unique responses. A concert review in the *Los Angeles Times* of 14 March 1982 titled “Modern Music Alive at Cal–Arts” provides information about a festival with music by Cornelius Cardew, James Tenney, the Ornette Coleman Quartet, Morton Subotnick, and Cage – who was in attendance. Cage’s *Lecture* was featured and described in the article as “flamboyant, and accessible.” Curiously, the reviewer thought that the work ended with the words, “the evolution is accomplished”! Joan Retallack, who attended a *Lecture* performance at the Cage–Fest in Rockville, Maryland on 5 May 1989, noted that the:

doors were open to the outside where a storm began to be audible and visible (thunder and lightening and then torrential rain) at about the same time as the storm was beginning inside in John Cage’s *Lecture on the Weather*. This had the interesting effect of eradicating the distinction between “inside” and “outside” –the meteorological display over Strathmore Hall was continuous with that going on in the room where Cage’s more gentle storm included the weather of predetermined and coincidental conjunctions of sound and voice variables; words, ideas, and silences that form, among other things, the complex systems of political climates.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Renée Levine Packer, *This Life of Sounds: Evenings for New Music in Buffalo*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 157.

¹⁸⁷ Christopher Shultis made a few remarks about Retallack’s and Majorie Perloff’s experience in his essay “Cage and Chaos,” *American Studies* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 91–100.

Lecture was also performed on 19 January 1990 in Los Angeles' Bing Theatre where Cage, who was in New York City at the time, read the Preface through the telephone. This performance apparently did not resonate with the two reviewers from the *Los Angeles Times*. The first wrote, "Consider, then, John Cage on weather, a piece composed for the U.S. Bicentennial. It runs nearly an hour, and finally gets around to talking about the weather somewhere near the end."¹⁸⁸ The second reviewer stated, "with the exception of Cage's introductory remarks, the presentation proved routine and lackluster inciting several walkouts and only a polite ovation."¹⁸⁹ Mark Swed, another *Los Angeles Times* critic, reviewed two *Lecture* performances, one that was given at the 2007 Ear to the Earth Festival and the above-mentioned 2008 Bard College performance. Swed had a positive listening experience and noted that *Lecture* was a strikingly timely work, "in which past American thought provides acute insight into our country's present situation, weather is the central dramatic device."¹⁹⁰ He advocated for the Bard College performance and its all-star cast. Another reviewer of the Bard performance wrote:

[*Lecture*] addresses issues of the Vietnam War and American imperialism in a way which is absolutely vital today, more than ever, in fact. *Lecture's* dedication was read for the audience from a recording of Cage reading the text. Thereafter, the 12 "speaker-vocalists" and instrumentalists began to overlay additional recitations and interject sounds in staggered but increasingly stretto entries alongside Maryanne

¹⁸⁸ Alan Rich, "Chaos for the Eyes but, a Joy for the Ears," *The Daily News of Los Angeles*, Friday January 19, 1990.

¹⁸⁹ Greg Wager, "Theater Piece Mixes Works by Kagel, Rzewski," *The Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 1990.

¹⁹⁰ Mark Swed, "Words From the Past, Insights For Today," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 2008.

Amacher's sound recording of wind, rain, and thunder. Very quickly, an unruly texture of sound emerged and the voices issuing from the stage became an undifferentiated murmur. Most of us in the audience felt that Amacher's taped sounds had grown too loud too quickly, in spite of its magnificent resonance in the acoustical space. After some time, however, amid the explosive thunderclaps, a kind of aural awareness took over and I thought back to the story of Thoreau in Cage's 1974 essay. Climbing atop the highest rock on Fair Haven Cliff after the fire had swept across the forest floor out of control, Thoreau stood at its peak to find "a glorious spectacle and he was the only one there to see it." The tremendous soundscape of *Lecture* created a similar sense of being closer to the firmament of listening, at a vantage point rarely experienced. It was a way of listening to the world, proximate to human activity but still at a distance aurally.¹⁹¹

One of the more recent performances (dated January 22–February 14, 2010) was took place at Buffalo's Penney Arts Center; it was repeated four times. One reviewer from the *Buffalo News* argued that this work "was – for me – one of the most powerful and astonishing moments I have ever had in any Buffalo arts venue."¹⁹²

VII. Social Betterment Through Revolution and Technology

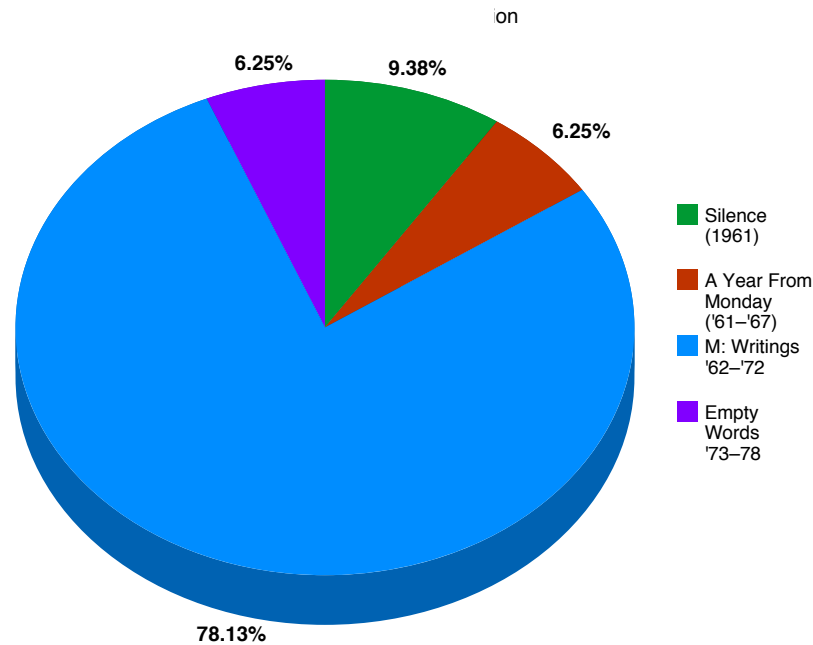
Cage's *Lecture* addresses the concept of revolution on different levels and there is no question that during the 1960s and 1970s many ideas of revolution were in the air. Cage embraced the possibility of social revolution at that time and used the United States bicentennial commission to point to similarities in the struggle for freedom in 1776 and the socio-political situation of the 1960s and 1970s. Examining Cage's writings from this period provides insight into Cage's political thought. Graph 6 shows how many times Cage mentions the word "revolution" in his major writings. Appendix A. shows the name

¹⁹¹ Michael Miller, "John Cage Tribute Concert at Bard; *Lecture on the Weather*," *The Berkshire Review for the Arts*, October, 2 2007, accessed December 2013, <http://www.berkshirereview.net/music/cage.html>.

¹⁹² Colin Dabkowski, "Tell Me / A little Q & A," *The Buffalo News*, January 25, 2010.

of the text and the statement from that particular book while Graph 6 is a further breakdown of these writings.

Graph 4. John Cage’s use of the word “revolution” in his writings.



This graph and the one in Appendix A. show that the word “revolution” in Cage’s writings occurs often between 1962–72, most often from the late 1960s through the mid–1970s. This is important because he intensely contemplated revolution when he worked on the bicentennial commissions, specifically *Lecture*. During these years he was particularly influenced by such thinkers as Norman O. Brown, Buckminster Fuller, Marshall McLuhan, and Thoreau. Their writings address the idea of revolution for social betterment.

VII. a. Norman O. Brown: Boundaries as Revolution

Norman O. Brown was a social philosopher and professor at Wesleyan University where he and Cage met and developed a friendship despite occasional debates around differing aesthetic views. Cage was fascinated by Brown's highly influential book *Love's Body* (1966), which considers all politics as simply a "reorganization of theatre, of the stage for human action" and that – no matter what – "the subject stays the same."¹⁹³ In *Love's Body* Brown also asserts that "schizophrenics might be saner than those without the disease," thus taking a completely different view of society itself.¹⁹⁴ Cage may have deemed these viewpoints revolutionary. Cage often credits Brown as a strong influence on his thought and in one instance Brown mentions Cage in *Love's Body*. When asked by French philosopher Daniel Charles to name his top ten most important books, Cage answered as follows: "I especially love *Love's Body* ... Without even the slightest hesitation. I consider *Love's Body* a great book."¹⁹⁵ In many ways, this book can be seen as a source of ideas for *Lecture* and an influence on Cage's idea of revolution. In *Love's Body* Brown states:

Contrary to what is taken for granted in the lunatic state called normalcy or common sense, the distinction between self and external world is not an immutable fact, but an artificial construction. It is a boundary line; like all boundaries not natural but conventional; like all boundaries, based on love and

¹⁹³ Norman O. Brown, *Love's Body* (New York: Random House, 1966), 142.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁹⁵ Daniel Charles, *For the Birds: John Cage in Conversations With Daniel Charles*, (London: Marion Boyars, 1981), 112.

hate.¹⁹⁶

In his famous book *Silence*, published shortly after *Love's Body*, Cage says:

Syntax, according to Norman O. Brown, is the arrangement of the army. As we move away from it, we demilitarize language. This demilitarization of language is conducted in many ways: a single language is pulverized; the boundaries between two or more languages are crossed; elements not strictly linguistic (graphic, musical) are introduced; etc. Translation becomes, if not impossible, unnecessary. We begin to actually live together, and the thought of separating doesn't enter our minds.¹⁹⁷

Examining the role of the speakers in *Lecture*, one can see that they evoke revolution in two separate ways. With the voices articulating disparate aspirations – that is until the climax of the composition is reached – could represent individual struggle. A second meaning becomes clear when all of the voices are speaking –that is collective struggle – when the storm is at its climax. William Brooks argues that *Lecture* is about the struggle of individuals: “We understand that the words being uttered are by Thoreau, and that they express individual aspirations, not collective struggle. We understand that each of the twelve voices speaks alone, in a sense.”¹⁹⁸ Brooks asserts that the collage of voices does not represent a collective struggle because the aspirations are articulated through the voice of one individual, Thoreau. Although Brooks viewpoint is interesting, one must carefully consider all three Thoreau texts, Cage's voice and the voices of the

¹⁹⁶ Brown, *Love's Body*, 142.

¹⁹⁷ Foreword to *M: Writings '62-'72*, x.

¹⁹⁸ Brooks, “Protest, Progress and Impossible Music,” 409.

performers. The texts represent a spectrum of thought, ranging from man's relationship to nature to civil disobedience. Further, assigning excerpts of Thoreau's texts amongst twelve speakers, the many different aspirations become individualized and attain new facets of emphasis and meaning and thus no longer represent the voice and ambitions of merely one individual. In my view, the twelve speakers act as a collective and break their individual boundaries. They become one while articulating many notions of social betterment for a global community.

VII. b. Ideas of Marshall McLuhan and James Joyce in *Lecture*

Marshall McLuhan's writing had an equally strong impact on Cage when he wrote *Lecture*. McLuhan and Cage were friends and they shared a fascination with the writings of James Joyce. Through McLuhan, Cage became more aware of the term "Agenbite," used by Joyce in *Ulysses* and it is relevant for Cage's *Lecture*. Agenbite literally means remorse of conscience. In an interview with Daniel Charles, Cage elaborated on writings by McLuhan that had special significance for him. He said:

There is an article that I rank above all his books. Its title, "The Agenbite of Outwit," is a paraphrase of James Joyce, and it was published in the first issue of a magazine called *Location*. In it McLuhan develops an idea which is perhaps essential to all his work: whatever happens surges forth everywhere at once. You can't live in just a partial way, but totally. You must rid yourself of all specialization. Art, for example, is everywhere, so you don't have to get rid of it. This text by McLuhan seems truly significant to me. It must be added to my list.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ John Cage, *For the Birds: John Cage in Conversation with Daniel Charles* (New York: Marion Boyars, 2000), 225.

In “The Agenbite of Outwit” McLuhan discusses a transition from the beginnings of human society, one example is the wheel which functioned as an outside extension of humans. McLuhan argues that in our current state we similarly use technology to travel or communicate our inner ideas. He described technology as an equivalent to the central nervous system (CNS) which consists of the brain and the spinal chord and is primarily responsible for integrating sensory information and responding accordingly. In a new era, we use technology to communicate our ideas outside of our bodies more than ever and therefore, just like the wheel’s role as an outward extension of our anatomy, technology has become a vehicle for our ideas. The CNS now exists outside of ourselves. In McLuhan’s philosophy this new technology can be used to improve society. He explained, “The new media, too, are not toys; they should not be in the hands of Mother Goose and Peter Pan executives. They can be entrusted only to new artists.”²⁰⁰

Technology plays a crucial role in *Lecture*. The speaker parts are amplified and the work also uses tape and video. It can also be considered a radio work. Cage was aware of the benefits of using technology in the arts.²⁰¹ He foresaw the future uses of technology in 1970. Kenneth Silverman described this as follows:

²⁰⁰ Michael A. Moos ed., *Marshall McLuhan Essays: Media Research: Technology Art Communication* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1997), 121–125.

²⁰¹ In an in interview with Walter Zimmerman, Cage argued for positive nature–technology relationship, “There’s no real opposition then we can say, as Fuller would say, between technology and nature ... However, I see many oppositions between technology and nature, but no, there needn’t be those oppositions.” Zimmerman, *Desert Plants*, 56–57.

Cage held out the promise of many other human advantages through technology. He described videophones delivering paintings, books, or music; a combined credit card/passport, its validity tested by voice identification; passengers blown through tunnels from Boston to New York at ultrafast speeds of 750 mph. He also proposed a televised lecture series on war. It would be transmitted throughout the global village by some Telstarlike facility, the hearing sets around the world equipped with a translation device. The lecturers would be heads of state: President Lyndon Johnson, Ho Chi Minh, Charles de Gaulle, “some African Bushman.” Knowing they spoke to people everywhere on the map, they would not be able to promote national objectives. If the lectures could not be arranged, Cage suggested TV/satellite transmission of summit meetings: “One way or another, that is, let the game be shown for what it is.”²⁰²

As mentioned before, *Lecture* grew out of Cage’s plan to create a “Thunder Piece” inspired by McLuhan’s interpretation of Joyce’s ten thunderclaps in *Finnegans Wake* as metaphors for revolutions in technology. One revolution in technology of the twentieth century was the radio which Cage used as a medium to get his message across Canada. The radio broadcaster Norma Beechcroft (whose voice could be heard in the original radio broadcast of *Lecture*) noticed that the work was effective as both broadcast and live versions.²⁰³

The son of Marshall McLuhan, Eric McLuhan pointed out an interesting connection between Joyce’s tenth and last thunderclap: “Ullhodturdenweirmudgaardgringnirurdrmolnirfenrirlukkilokkibaugimandodrrerinsurtkri nmgernrackinarockar” and Cage’s work, specifically *Lecture*. In the *Finnegans Wake*,

²⁰² Silverman, 219.

²⁰³ See Richard Coulter’s communication with Norma Beechcroft and the CBC premiere performance recordings (located at the CBC radio archives). Thanks to the Arizona State University’s Music History Department for providing funds to obtain these recordings. Also see Paul Buckley’s review of *Lecture* for his response to the radio broadcast cited earlier in this chapter.

Joyce includes ten thunderclaps suggesting a transformation of society. Each thunderclap contains words that mean ‘thunder’ and words that mean ‘door.’ Joyce’s thunder can be read as the sound of a cultural metamorphosis with the last thunderclap arguably being the most important one. McLuhan divides the tenth thunderclap into several sections. For example, according to him, “ei” after the first twelve letters of the last thunderclap relates to the sound of the words “egg” or “Humpty Dumpty” and thus signifies the fall of man.²⁰⁴ The fragment “eir” can also, as McLuhan suggests, point to the word “ear,” as a non–visual concept or dialogue television. Television or telecommunication was a revolutionary tool for mass communication during Joyce’s time. Another fragment from the last thunderclap is “gaar.” In McLuhan’s view it suggests the French word “guerre” or war through which Joyce may have used to point to the Crimean War in the 1800s. McLuhan explains: “The major image, used throughout the *Wake*, draws, as did the theme of Buckley and the Russian General, on an event from the Crimean War, and is taken from Tennyson’s ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’: basically, suicide.”²⁰⁵ “Humpty Dumpty” refers to the fall of man and to “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” or as McLuhan had put it, to “suicide” for mankind.

The implications of Joyce’s last thunderclap, as seen through the lens of Eric McLuhan and Marshall McLuhan’s ideas about technology used in positive (mass communication) and negative ways (environmental degradation), resonate strongly in Cage’s *Lecture*. One could speculate that in *Lecture* the relationship between humans and

²⁰⁴ Eric McLuhan, *The Role of Thunder in Finnegans Wake* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 225.

²⁰⁵ Eric McLuhan, 215.

technology can take two directions. When the thunder becomes so loud that it consumes the entire ensemble and obscures everyone's ideas, articulated through Thoreau, everybody's aspirations are swallowed. The thunderclap can be seen as a metaphor for technology that destroys Thoreau's aspirations or society, but might perhaps be followed by new beginnings, like in Joyce's *Wake*. Thoreau's ideas mediated through new technology can also send a didactic message (The Preface) via radio broadcast throughout Canada.

As has been shown, Cage was aware of and engaged with many social, environmental and technological issues of his time and his creative ideas were shaped through the writings of Brown, Joyce, Martin Luther King, McLuhan, Mead, Thoreau, and many others. It appears that in *Lecture* he sought to challenge and change society in manifold ways. He undoubtedly advocated for political awareness and the abandonment of human destructiveness. He used weather as a metaphor for a political climate: "In the case of weather, though we notice changes in it, we have no clear knowledge of its beginning or ending. At a given moment, we are when we are. The nowmoment."²⁰⁶ Cage's *Lecture on the Weather* stands as one of his most politically overt works and, as we shall see in the next chapter, Cage explored political engagement again and very differently in another commission for the United States bicentennial: *Renga with Apartment House 1776*.

²⁰⁶ John Cage, "The Future of Music," in *Empty Words: Writings '73-'78*, 178.

CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY 2: *RENGA WITH APARTMENT HOUSE 1776*

In 1974, Cage was commissioned by the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) and six major United States orchestras to compose a work commemorating the United States bicentennial of the American Revolution. In response, he created *Renga with Apartment House 1776*, which follows his concept of a “music circus,” or simply, a musical composition with a multiplicity of events occurring simultaneously. Scored for voices, instrumental soloists and quartets, *Renga with Apartment House* is a multi-faceted work marked by layers of American hymns and folk tunes. It also sonically evokes drawings from Henry David Thoreau’s *Journal*. In this chapter I will examine the genesis of this work, its compositional processes, influences, contexts and consider its philosophical, ecological and political implications. I will also posit whether *Renga with Apartment House* can be understood as a patriotic composition and trace aspects of its reception history.

I. Genesis of the Work

Aaron Copland and his publisher Stuart Pope of Boosey and Hawkes originally suggested the idea for a bicentennial commission of a series of musical works. Several orchestras had approached him for a composition in commemoration of the United States bicentennial. In 1974, with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, the “big six” American orchestras including Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and New York (also dubbed “Les Six”) decided to commission a fifteen to thirty-minute symphonic work from six composers, each of them was assigned to a specific orchestra – Copland to Philadelphia, Gunther Schuller to Boston, George Crumb

to Chicago, Jacob Druckman to Cleveland, Morton Subotnick to Los Angeles, and Elliott Carter to New York.²⁰⁷ Despite this plan, ironically, Copland decided not to compose a work for Philadelphia and was replaced by Leslie Bassett. Cage filled in for Gunther Schuller in Boston and David Del Tredici for Crumb who had also rejected the invitation.²⁰⁸ Each orchestra would premiere a certain composer's work and thereafter also perform the other five pieces. As a result, following his first United States bicentennial composition *Lecture on the Weather*, Cage conceived his second bicentennial work *Renga with Apartment House* for the Boston Symphony, which premiered it under Seiji Ozawa on September 30, 1976. Cage received a commission fee of 7,500 dollars from the NEA and 3,500 dollars from the Boston Symphony for this work.²⁰⁹ According to a letter from Thomas Perry, the managing director of the Boston

²⁰⁷ This was one of the most significant orchestral projects in the past several decades for the NEA. But the NEA was not the only organization commissioning bicentennial works. The National Symphony Orchestra commissioned compositions honoring this event. Some of the composers that received commissions include Stephen Burton, Luigi Dallapiccola, Robert Evett, Gene Gutchë, Ulysses Kay, Benjamin Lee, Frank Martin, Juan Orrego-Salas, Robert Russell Bennett, Gunther Schuller, and William Schuman. Karen T. LeFrak, "Forty Years of Commissioning by the New York Philharmonic, 1945–1985" (M.A. thesis, Hunter College of the City University of New York, 1986), 57.

²⁰⁸ In addition to Cage's work, this commission resulted in Bassett's *Echoes from an Invisible World* (premiered by the Philadelphia Orchestra on February 27, 1976), Subotnick's *Before the Butterfly* (premiered by the Los Angeles Philharmonic in April 1976), Del Tredici's *Final Alice* (premiered by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on October 7, 1976), Carter's *A Symphony for Three Orchestras* (premiered by the New York Philharmonic on February 17, 1977), and Druckman's *Chiaroscuro* (premiered by the Cleveland Orchestra on April 14, 1977). Carter disappointed the New York Philharmonic by failing to complete his composition in early 1976. He finished it in January of 1977.

²⁰⁹ Cage received this commission on June 11, 1974. In his letter to Cage of that date, Thomas Perry, BSO managing director, details the stipulations of the commission, including the instrumentation, suggesting the use of a "normal symphonic instrumental

Symphony Orchestra, Cage who at the time of the commission was on a tour with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and “out of this world,” originally envisioned this composition as a work of about

20 minutes for orchestra and a few voices, possibly spoken, on a text of Thoreau. The voices would be grouped, in this plan, requiring miking for each group – perhaps four – and might require a separate conductor for each group from time to time, à la Ives 4th [Symphony], the work beings in Cage’s words, “a complexity of simple parts.”²¹⁰

force without soloists, chorus or other assisting artists” unless special permission is granted. He also discussed the rights and performance fees, and the fee of \$7,500 (ca. \$30,000 in 2012) that the composer would receive for the composition. In response to this offer, Stephen Fisher, president of Cage’s publisher C. F. Peters, however, deplored the commission’s short notice and small fee which he deemed incommensurate with the time (around six to seven months) and effort needed to write this piece. He asserted that it was insufficient considering that at least \$2,000 was needed for the extraction of parts by a professional copyist, for five full-score photostat copies at around \$40.00 each (one for each orchestra) and photostat copies of all of the parts, leaving only circa \$4,360 (circa 17,345 in 2012). Fisher stated that the New York Arts Council usually allocates up to \$10,000 for their commissions and provides the funds for the extraction of parts. Fisher lamented: “the composer is not even supposed to get his share of performance and royalty fees for a 24-month period when NO other orchestras except these ‘Jewels’ can have a chance to ‘butcher’ his piece!” Stephen Fisher to Thomas Perry, letter of 1974 C. F. Peters New York Archives. Fisher may have alluded to the New York Philharmonic’s shameful performance of *Atlas Eclipticalis* under Leonard Bernstein in 1964. The final contract sent on August 26, 1975 included many corrections to the original offer made on June 11, 1974 and added that the Boston Symphony Orchestra would give an additional \$3,500 to subsidize the cost for the extraction of parts and other fees. Cage’s expenses for this project exceeded the allocated \$3,500 by \$686.75, which was paid by Peters and deducted from royalties Cage would receive for this work. See unpublished correspondence between Thomas Perry and Stephen Fisher in the archives of C. F. Peters New York. I am indebted to Gene Caprioglio, director of rights clearance at C. F. Peters, for granting me access to these documents.

²¹⁰ Quoted by Thomas Perry in LeFrak, 57.

Cage's willingness to write a work for the Boston Symphony had much to do with the fact that he trusted Ozawa, a proponent of new music and music director of this orchestra from 1973–2002. As conductor of the San Francisco Symphony in the early 1970s, Ozawa had invited Cage to compose a work, but due to "other commitments," Cage had to turn down that opportunity.²¹¹ Cage had had disappointing experiences with such symphony orchestras as the New York Philharmonic, which under Leonard Bernstein, had sabotaged a performance of *Atlas Eclipticalis* in 1964 and whose members he once described as a shameless "group of gangsters."²¹² Cage did not have a good relationship with Pierre Boulez, the New York Philharmonic's conductor at that time (more about that later). *Renga with Apartment House* was Cage's first composition specifically written for the Boston Symphony.²¹³ In the process of composing this work, Cage closely collaborated with Ozawa who advised him to "Make it easy!" and explained to him "Our institutions, not just the musical ones, are incapable of hard work."²¹⁴ Cage's composition of *Renga with Apartment House* would lead to another collaboration with Ozawa and his orchestra. In 1988 the Boston Symphony (and the Fromm Foundation at

²¹¹ Ibid., 168.

²¹² Sabine Feisst, "John Cage and Improvisation – An Unresolved Relationship," in *Music Improvisation: Art, Education, and Society*, edited by Gabriel Solis and Bruno Nettle (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 43.

²¹³ Before *Renga with Apartment House*, Cage wrote such orchestra pieces as *Score (40 Drawings by Thoreau)* and *23 Parts* for the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra under Dennis Russell Davies. After *Renga with Apartment House*, he composed the very important orchestral work *Thirty Pieces for Five Orchestras* for Rencontres internationales de musique contemporaine.

²¹⁴ Quoted in Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 299.

Harvard University) commissioned Cage to compose the orchestra work *101* for one hundred and one musicians which received its premiere under Ozawa in 1989.

II. Compositional Process and Structural Features of *Renga* and *Apartment House 1776*

Renga and *Apartment House 1776* are in fact two autonomous works that can be performed separately or together. The former work's title, *Renga*, denotes Japanese collaborative poetry and the unpredictable character of events.²¹⁵ The title *Apartment House* may symbolize American society and its different peoples and *1776* denotes a date or simply a house number. Like *Lecture on the Weather*, *Renga with Apartment House 1776* was specifically written for the United States bicentennial.

According to Cage, *Renga*, however, can also be performed on other occasions, including the birth or death of a musically productive person, the birthday of a nation concerned with an aspect of environmental sounds (birds, marine animals, plants, weather changes, or earthquakes) or the centennial of the Audubon Society, an environmental organization dedicated to ornithology of which Cage was a member.²¹⁶ *Renga* consists of seventy-eight parts for non-specific instruments and/or voices and has a graphic score based on 361 drawings from Thoreau's *Journal*, in which each instrument gets a specific portion of the drawing to realize in sound.²¹⁷ As discussed in the previous chapters, at this

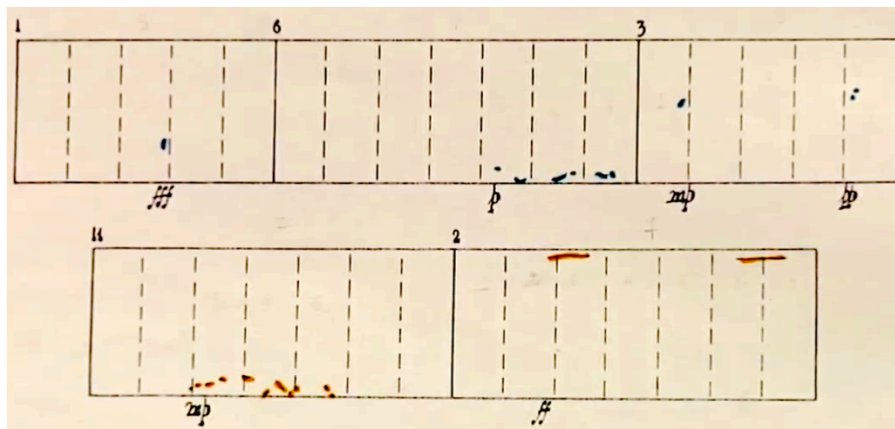
²¹⁵ Cage may have chosen this Japanese poetic genre, at least in part, as a tribute to Ozawa's cultural background.

²¹⁶ John Cage, Foreword to *Renga* (New York: Henmar Press, 1976).

²¹⁷ In October 1837, Thoreau was encouraged by Ralph Waldo Emerson to keep a journal. This *Journal* provided inspiration for many of Thoreau's works. It was posthumously released as a twenty-volume edition in 1906 by Houghton Mifflin and is considered the standard text of Thoreau's writings. Robert Sattelmeyer, "Thoreau and

time Cage was deeply immersed in the writings of Thoreau. Cage used chance operations to extract certain parts of the drawings for each player to realize and gave the parts color for further possibilities of differentiation in the performance (see Figure 14).²¹⁸ The score's horizontal lines correspond to a non-specific time duration and the symbols within the vertical dimension suggest pitch ranges, allocating limited performance freedoms with each part (see Figure 15)²¹⁹.

Figure 14. John Cage: Excerpt of an Individual Colored Part from the Score for *Renga*.

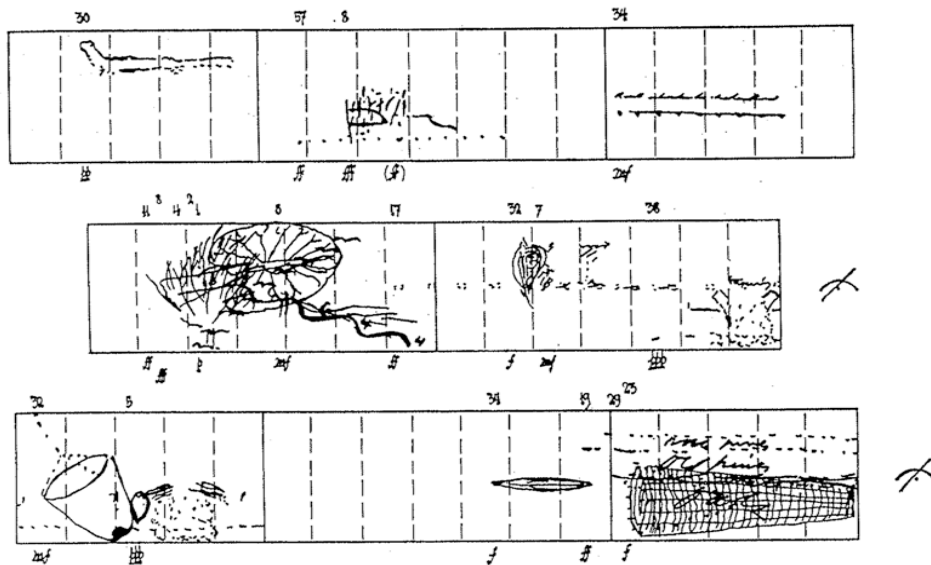


Emerson,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Joel Myerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 25.

²¹⁸ John Cage, “Michael Tilson Thomas on a performance of Cage’s *Aria* with *Renga*,” *YouTube* video, 3:55, accessed March 24, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DM8dkb4FAGk>.

²¹⁹ Cage, *Renga*, 2.

Figure 15. John Cage: Page Two from John Cage's Score for *Renga*.



The score also pays tribute to a *renga*'s poetic form which contains 36 iterations of a 5:7:5:7:7 syllable pattern. This pattern is mirrored in the structural layout of the score and seems to be related to the macro–microcosmic structures Cage used in his works for percussion and prepared piano in the 1930s and 1940s, where the structure of small time units is reflected in the large–scale form of the composition.²²⁰ Cage had been interested in Japanese poetry since the 1950s. This interest is reflected in such pieces as *Haiku* for piano (1950–51), *Seven Haiku* for piano (1951–52), and *Haiku* for any number of performers (1958). In July and August 1974, Cage composed *Score (40 drawings by*

²²⁰ A good example of Cage's use of a micro–macrocosmic structure is his all–percussion piece *First Construction (In Metal)* (1939), although it is not the first piece with such a structure. Cage uses the proportions 4–3–2–3–4 for the micro structure, dividing a 16–measure unit into groups of 4, 3, 2, 3, and 4 measures. For the macro structure, he divided the whole work into 4, 3, 2, 3, and 4 sections each comprising 16 measures.

Thoreau) for twenty–three performers using any instruments or voices or combination thereof and magnetic tape. In this piece Cage employed Thoreau drawings and a Haiku–based form with the structure 5:7:5 which marks the entire piece. In the 1950s Cage stated that, “Haiku require of us that our soul should find its own infinity within the limits of some finite thing.”²²¹

The collaborative nature of a renga poem, where several artists can contribute a line to a poem, is reflected in the fact that the composition is conceived for seventy–eight musicians and that *Renga* can be presented simultaneously with *Apartment House* or other works. Cage’s use of indeterminacy with regard to the instrumentation, pitch and duration allows *Renga* to have many diverse realizations.

Cage’s sketches for *Renga* also reveal his preoccupation with aspirational thought as found in children’s literature edited by adults. He regretted that “not only aspiration but intelligence (as in the work of Buckminster Fuller) and conscience (as in the thought of Thoreau) are missing in our leadership.”²²² At one point Cage even declared that the “educational system in America is beyond repair.”²²³ He studied children’s literature and learning materials and used them in his sketches. As can be seen in Figures 16. a., 16. b. and 17, in his early sketches for *Renga* which feature I Ching–based chance operations Thoreau’s drawings in the score and a renga’s 5:7:5:7:7 structure

²²¹ David W. Patterson, “Cage and Asia: History and Sources,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 52.

²²² John Cage, Foreword to *Lecture on the Weather* (New York: Henmar Press, 1975).

²²³ Cage quoted in Silverman, 217.

from the boxes of the I Ching hexagrams, Cage availed himself of writing paper that children use for the practice of their handwriting

Figure 16. a.

John Cage: Sketch for *Renga* with I-Ching Hexagrams for the Placement of Thoreau Drawings.

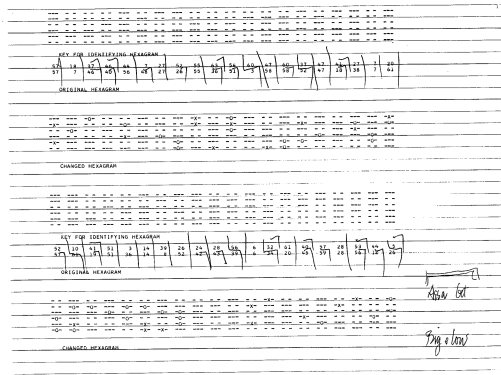


Figure 16 .b.

John Cage: Sketch with Boxes for the *Renga* Structure.

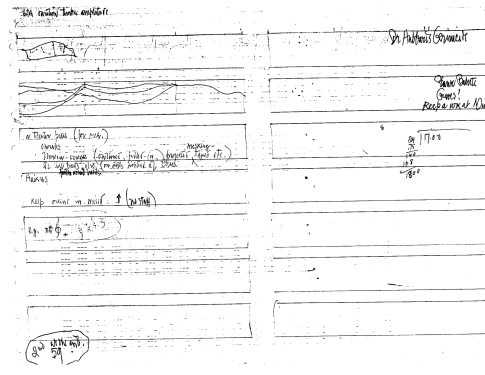


Figure 17. Children's Writing Paper.

My bed is like a little boat;
 Nurse helps me in when I
 embark.
 She girds me in my sailor's
 coat;
 And starts me in the dark

In comparison to *Renga*, *Apartment House* is scored for twenty-four musicians: four quartets, four instrumental soloists (drummer, string player, fife or flute player, and keyboardist), and four solo vocalists. The vocalists are representative of people living in America two hundred years ago, including Sephardic Jews, Black slaves, Protestants, and Native Americans. Cage drew on eighteenth-century American music and Ozawa apparently inspired him to do so.²²⁴ Cage reported that “Ozawa, who commissioned the piece, wants to know what I have to say about all of that old music.”²²⁵ With the help of Yale-based musicologist Vivian Perlis, Cage “indexed 885 anthems and tunes written by composers who were at least 20 years old in 1776,”²²⁶ and used chance operations choosing sixty-four of these pieces. Cage included forty-four hymn tunes from such tunesmiths as William Billings, Andrew Law, Jacob French, and James Lyon.²²⁷ He

²²⁴ In regards to the quartets, Cage originally wanted to use them without any alteration, or in a way they were used two hundred years ago. Ozawa may have convinced Cage to modify the original scores. LeFrak, 174.

²²⁵ Larry A. Fader, *120'00'': A Conversation with John Cage* (Bridgton, ME: Ninepoint Publishing, 2012), 24.

²²⁶ Vivian Perlis, “Cage’s ‘Renga’: Freedom for Bicentennial,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 9, 1977.

²²⁷ William Billings (1746–1800) was most noted for his four-part choral settings of sacred hymns and hymn tune collections *The New England Psalm Singer* (1770), *Music in Miniature* (1779), and *The Continental Harmony* (1794). Andrew Law (1749–1821) wrote and arranged hymn tunes published in *Select Harmony* (1778), one of the most popular tune books of its day, and in a *Collection of Best Tunes and Anthems* (1779). He was also one of the first American composers to write about music. Jacob French (1754–1817) wrote important tunes collected in *The New American Melody* (1789) and *The Harmony of Harmony* (1802). James Lyon (1735–1794) was the first American composer whose music appeared in print. He edited a psalm tune book called *Urania* (1761). Historian Vivian Perlis founded the Oral History of American Music project at Yale University. This is an archive of recorded interviews with leading figures in American music.

arranged the hymns for four unspecified instrumental quartets, using a chance-based compositional method called “subtraction” to invite silence into these settings and to drastically alter their harmonic logic while to a certain degree preserving their structure, pitch content and rhythm (see Figures 18. a. and b.).²²⁸ Cage said that he wanted “to do something with early American music that would let it keep its flavor at the same time that it would lose what was so obnoxious to me: its harmonic tonality.”²²⁹ Cage also gave another reason for the use of this method:

The way harmony is creeping into my present work is that it's a bicentennial piece, and I encountered problems, as I have before, in my use of earlier music. Much music of the eighteenth century is now copyrighted because publishers see an opportunity to take advantage of 1776 financially. Also Moravian church music is protected. I am not permitted to use any of their music because they think my intentions are sacrilegious. Beyond that, there's the idea that an artist has something to say ... The result is that I will imitate that old music rather than copy it.²³⁰

²²⁸ William Brooks “Music and Society,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 137. Around 1969 Cage began using older works from various composers as a basis for some of his compositions. To avoid copyright issues, Cage developed methods he called “substitution” and “subtraction.” *Apartment House 1776* is the first work in which Cage used the subtraction method.

²²⁹ David H. Cope, “An Interview with John Cage,” *The Composer* 10–11, no. 1 (1980): 8.

²³⁰ Fader, *120'00''*, 26.

Figures 18. a. and 18. b. show Cage’s use of subtraction in a comparison of Billings’s *Mansfield* (1779) and Cage’s arrangement of this piece.²³¹

Figure 18. a. John Cage:
Arrangement of Billings’s
Mansfield (1975) from “Forty-
Four Harmonies.”

Figure 18. b. William Billings:
Mansfield (1779).



In addition to the “Forty–Four Harmonies” for instrumental quartet (see Table 7), Cage also arranged fourteen tunes based on eighteenth–century dance or military music for solo instruments (see Table 8), four marches for drum solo, drawing on Benjamin

²³¹ The document in Figure 18. a. is located in the John Cage Collection of the New York Public Library and is used with permission from the John Cage Trust, courtesy Dr. Laura Kuhn. For Figure 18. b. see William Billings, *Music in Miniature* (Boston: Printed at the composers house, 1779), 30, accessed May 8, 2013, http://petrucci.mus.auth.gr/imglnks/usimg/b/be/IMSLP96962-PMLP199323-Billings_Music_in_Miniature.pdf, accessed March 12, 2012.

Clarke's *Drum Book* from 1797 (see Table 9), and two imitations of Moravian church music for solo cello and clarinet (see Table 10). Cage combined these arrangements with American folk songs chosen and performed by four vocalists whose tunes reflect their cultural background. For example, the premiere's Native American singer Swift Eagle chose eight songs, one of which was "a Navajo 'Laughing Song' where the realistic and robust laughter is at first startling to the performers and audience."²³² Individual performers or groups can choose the order and length of their cues and generate different sonic simultaneities in a performance; and, as mentioned before, the four vocalists are free to choose their songs. Thus *Apartment House*, like *Renga*, involves indeterminacy, although it is of a different nature.

²³² Perlis.

Table 7. John Cage: of Fourteen Tunes.

Tune Number	Tune Name
Tune I	Upon a Summers Day
Tune II	The Beggar Boy
Tune III	La Belle Catherine
Tune IV	Lovely Nancy
Tune V	Young Widow
Tune IV	Over the River to Charley
Tune VII	Barrel of Sugar
Tune VIII	Saraband
Tune IX	Singlings of Johnson's Troop
Tune X	Successful Campaign
Tune XI	New New Nothing
Tune XII	Stone Grinds All
Tune XIII	The White Cockade
Tune XIV	Rural Felicity

Table 9. John Cage: Arrangement of marches from Benjamin Clarke's *Drum Book* (1797).

March Number	March Name
March I	On the Roads to Boston
March II	Mount Vernon
March III	Happy Lover
March IV	The Woodcutter

Table 10. John Cage: Arrangement of two Moravian Songs.

Imitation Number	Imitation Name	Composer
Imitation I	Siehe meine Knechte (See my Servants)	Simon Peter
Imitation II	Die mit Tränen sän (He Who Soweth Weeping)	J.F. Peter

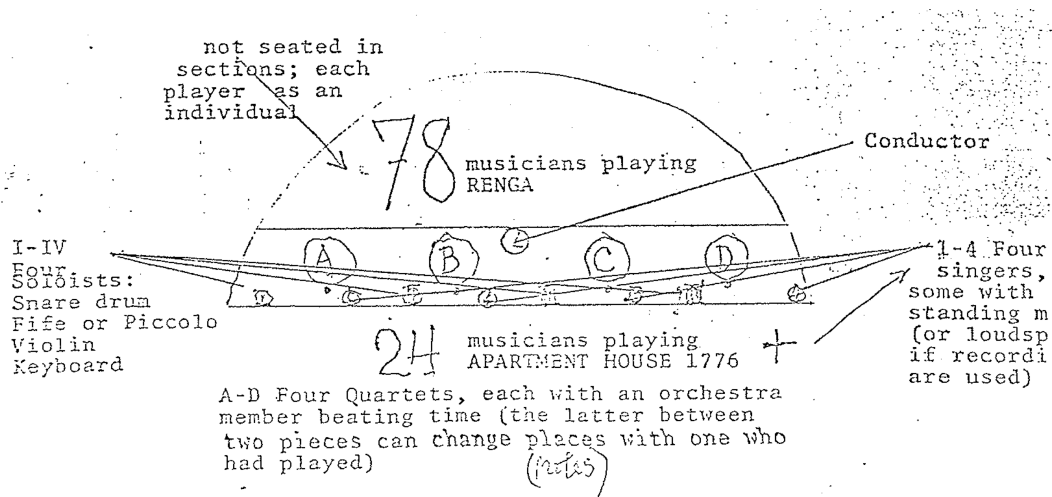
Table 8. John Cage: Arrangements of "Forty-Four Harmonies."

Harmony Number	Harmony Name	Composer
Harmony I	Cookfield	James Lyon
Harmony II	Mansfield	William Billings
Harmony III	Funeral Anthem	William Billings
Harmony IV	Lift up your Heads, O Ye Gates	Jacob French
Harmony V	The Lord Descended	William Billings
Harmony VI	Psalm 17	James Lyon
Harmony VII	Larr's Lane	Andrew Law
Harmony VIII	Tyndale	Andrew Law
Harmony IX	Dover	Andrew Law
Harmony X	Is there not an Appointed Time?	James Lyon
Harmony XI	Wheeler's Point	William Billings
Harmony XII	Littleton	Andrew Law
Harmony XIII	Worcester	William Billings
Harmony XIV	Brunswick	James Lyon
Harmony XV	Bellingham	William Billings
Harmony XVI	Detroit	Andrew Law
Harmony XVII	Association	Jacob French
Harmony XVIII	Old North or Morning Hymn	William Billings
Harmony XIX	New York	Andrew Law
Harmony XX	O Give Thanks	James Lyon
Harmony XXI	Heath	
Harmony XXII	Wisdom	Jacob French
Harmony XXIII	St. Helens	William Billings
Harmony XXIV	St. Thomas	William Billings
Harmony XXV	Rapture	Supply Belcher
Harmony XXVI	Judea	William Billings
Harmony XXVII	Reflection	Supply Belcher
Harmony XXVIII	Greenwich	Andrew Law
Harmony XXIX	Trumpet	Andrew Law
Harmony XXXI	New Windsor	Andrew Law
Harmony XXXII	Litchfield	Andrew Law
Harmony XXXIII	Newburn	William Billings
Harmony XXXIV	St. Peters	James Lyon
Harmony XXXV	Framingham	William Billings
Harmony XXXVI	57 th Psalm Tune	James Lyon
Harmony XXXVII	Coelestis	Jacob French
Harmony XXXVIII	The Lord Is Risen	William Billings
Harmony XXXIX	Weymouth	William Billings
Harmony XL	The New 50 th Psalm Tune	James Lyon
Harmony XLI	Standish Tune	James Lyon
Harmony XLII	Rapture	Supply Belcher
Harmony XLIII	Castle St.	Andrew Law
Harmony XLIV	Bloomfield	Andrew Law

III. A Closer Look at the Combined Version

A combined performance of *Renga* and *Apartment House* increases the level of indeterminacy already implied in each of the two works and creates a greater sonic complexity. In this case, the role of the conductor is unusual as s/he must simultaneously facilitate both works. First, the time length of the works, which is unspecified, must be determined (however, the NEA had required the first performance to be between fifteen and thirty minutes). The conductor must also decide which of the two works begins and/or ends first and establish a means to indicate the beginning and ending of the performance. Then s/he will be able to suggest to the musicians of *Apartment House* how long their individually prepared musical contributions could be. Figure 19 shows how Cage envisioned the seating of the two ensembles for a combined realization.²³³

Figure 19. John Cage: The Arrangement of Musicians for *Renga with Apartment House* 1776.



²³³ Included in Cage's performance notes. Archives of C. F. Peters New York.

IV. A Comparative Performance Analysis of the Combined Version

As realizations of *Renga with Apartment House 1776* can differ widely, a comparison of three notable recorded performances will now serve as the basis of a close examination: 1) the commercially unavailable premiere and 2) the repeat performance of the work by the Boston Symphony under Ozawa with singers Nico Castel (Sephardic Jew), Helen Schneyer (Protestant), Jeanne Lee (African American), and Chief Swift Eagle (Pueblo Native American), and 3) the commercially released performance of the work with the Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra under Hans Zender, with singers Castel, Schneyer, Lee, Matoaka Little Eagle and Powhatan Swift Eagle (the latter two are both Pueblo Native Americans).²³⁴ Each performance lasts around thirty minutes and features at most, nine sonic layers in changing combinations including the entire *Renga* ensemble, the “Forty–Four Harmonies” quartets,²³⁵ and the smallest forces: solo singers and solo instrumentalists.

To better understand the complexities of the scores, their indeterminacy and realization potential, three graphs were conceived (see Graphs 11, 12 and 13) for a

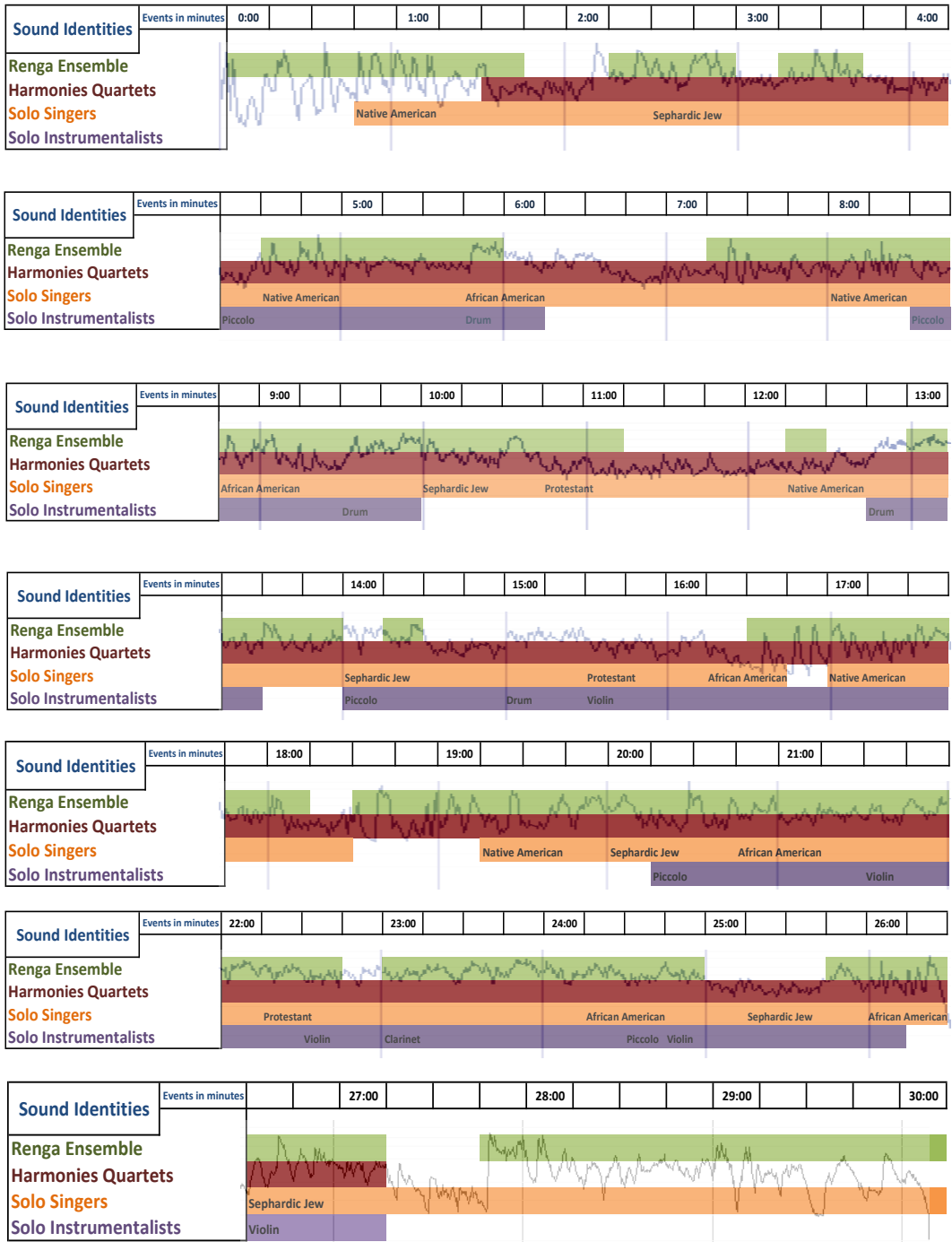
²³⁴ In the Boston performance of 30 September 1976, a tape recording of Castel’s voice replaces his live performance. Cage allowed the use of a tape in case a singer was unable to be at the concert (thus entitling the performer to royalties even in his or her absence). Hans Zender, conductor, and the Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra, Dresdner Tage der Zeitgenössischen Musik, September 2, 1992, Compact Disc. The performances of the Boston Symphony Orchestra are recordings of a broadcast of the premiere and subsequent performance of *Renga with Apartment House 1776* which were made available to me by Brian Brandt, director of Mode Records. I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Brandt for his generosity.

²³⁵ In the premiere and second Boston performance, the instrumentation of the quartets were: violin, horn, bassoon, and contrabassoon for Quartet I; viola, double bass, horn and oboe for Quartet II; violin, cello, double bass and clarinet for Quartet III; and clarinet, bass trombone, flute and cello for Quartet IV.

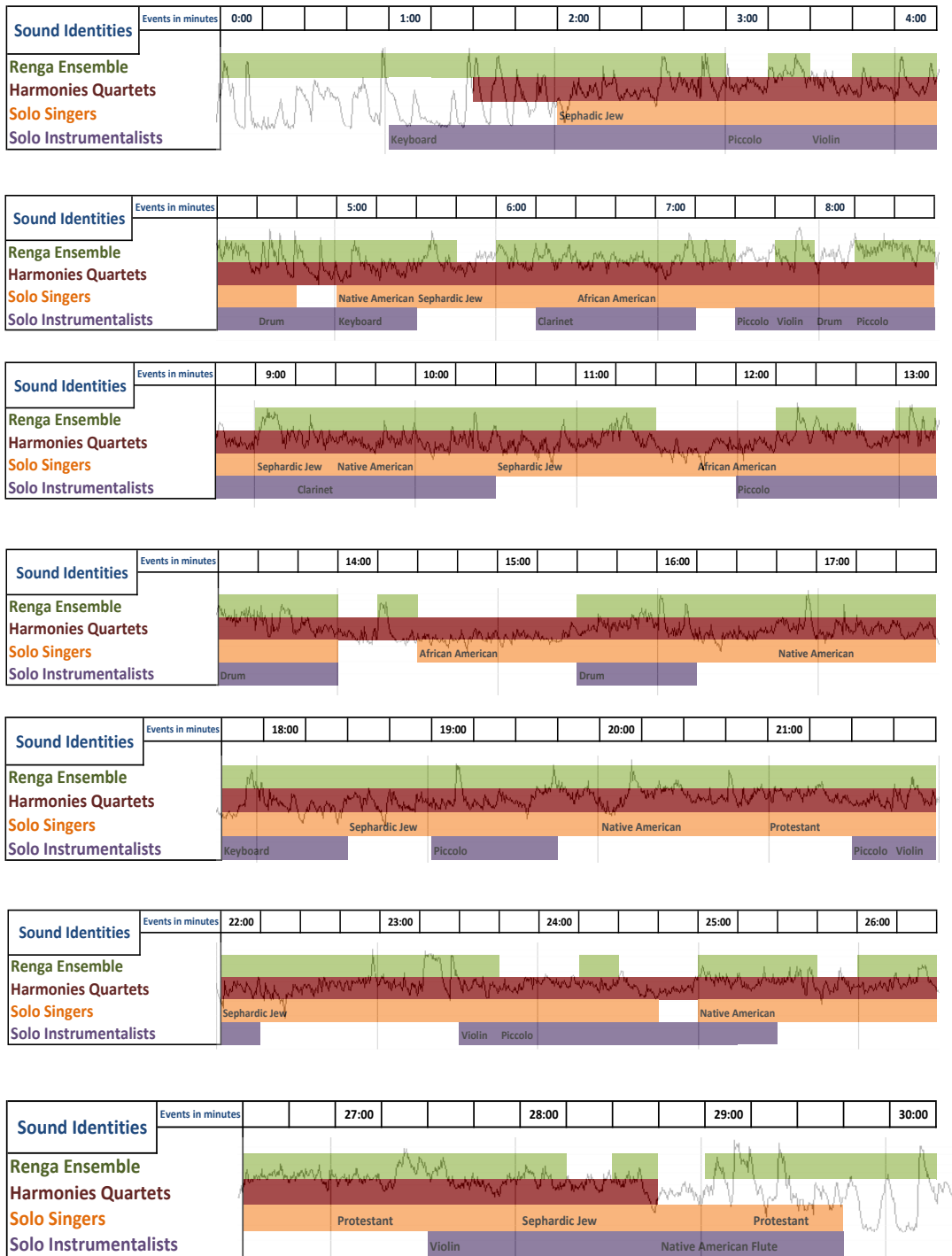
comparative analysis of the three above-mentioned performances. The graphs consist of a horizontally extending time scale divided into boxes, each representing fifteen-second intervals, and one-minute markers. Vertically, the changing textures and density, the rests, cues and the layering of the instruments and voices for a specific realization of *Renga with Apartment House* can be seen. The participants' sound identities are differentiated through color-coding: the large *Renga* ensemble is presented in green, the "Harmonies" quartets in maroon, the solo singers in orange and the solo instrumentalists in purple. Additionally, the entries of the various soloists, the Native American, African American, Sephardic Jew and Protestant singers are indicated within the orange layer and the entries of the solo instrumentalists, the flutist, clarinet, violinist, keyboardist and drummer are specified within the purple layer. Finally a frequency curve showing the mean of the frequencies of all the simultaneous sounds and the dynamic changes of the combined ensembles throughout each performance is contained in the graph as well.²³⁶

²³⁶ The frequency curve was created with a sonic visualizer developed by 2005–2012 Chris Cannam at Queen Mary, University of London, 2005–2012. I used this program to realize the medium of frequencies in each recording. However, one needs to take into consideration that the first two analyses capture the Boston premiere and second Boston performance, which were recorded live in 1976, and the third analysis examines the I which is a professional studio recording from 1992.

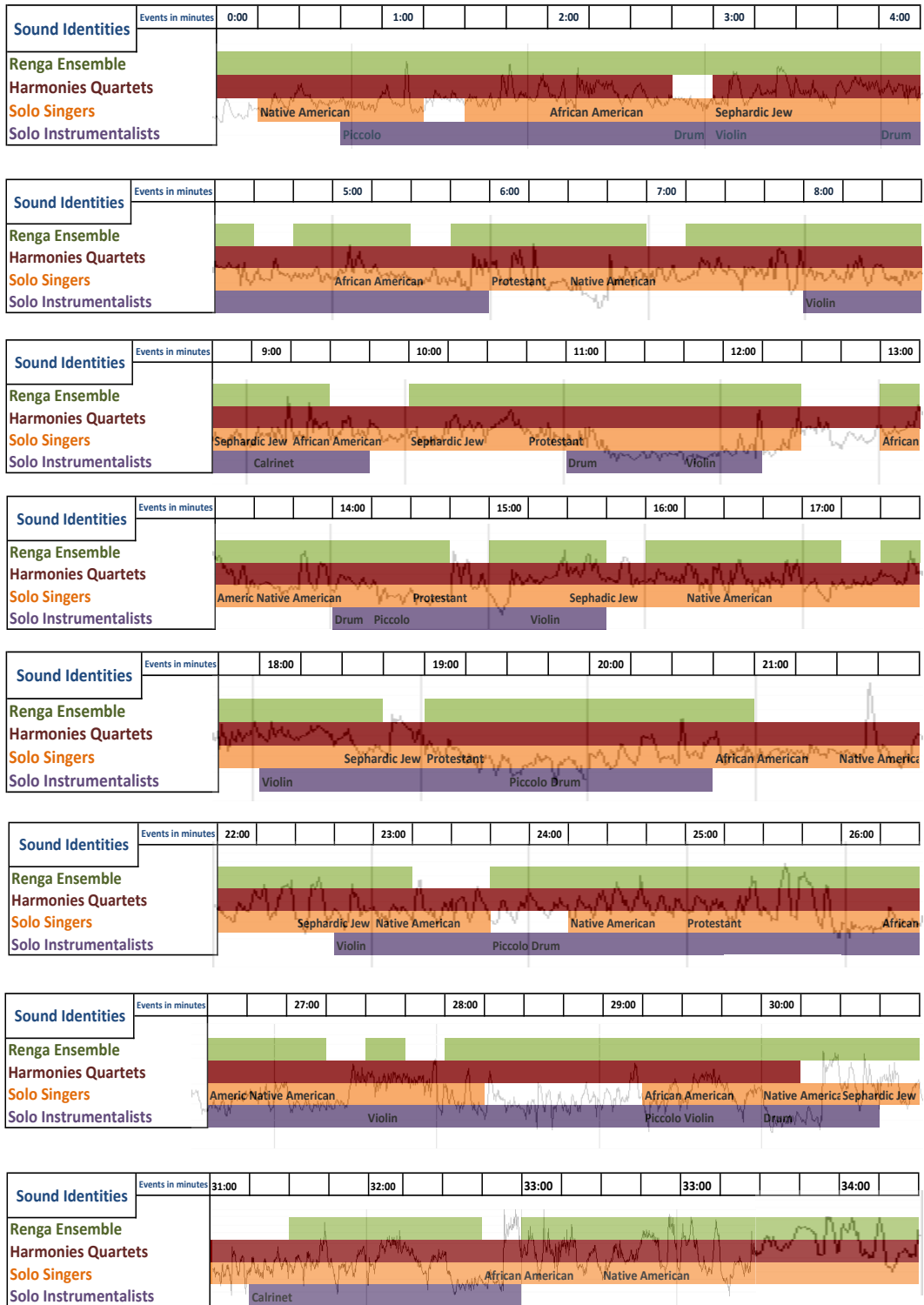
Graph 5. Boston Symphony Orchestra Premiere of John Cage's *Renga with Apartment House 1776*. Analytical Graph of Performance I.



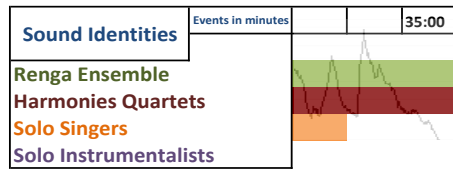
Graph 6. Boston Symphony Orchestra Second Performance of John Cage's *Renga with Apartment House 1776*. Analytical Graph of Performance II.



Graph 7. Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra Performance of John Cage's *Renga with Apartment House 1776*. Analytical Graph of Performance III.



Graph 7. Cont...



A comparison of the three realizations, as represented in these graphs, reveals several interesting aspects regarding the sonic texture. The *Renga* ensembles, the largest groups, are the most dominant forces in all three realizations. The frequency curve shows that usually the highest points occur in the *Renga* ensemble's green layer. This ensemble begins and ends each performance. In the two Boston performances, the *Renga* ensemble opens the composition energetically, but without any accompaniment. The *Renga* ensemble is more boisterous and louder in the two Boston performances than in the Saarbrücken realization, as can be seen in the frequency curves' wide range of highs and lows. In the Saarbrücken performance, the *Renga* ensemble and the "Harmonies" quartets open the piece simultaneously. Further, Saarbrücken's *Renga* ensemble is timbrally more homogeneous and dynamically more restrained than Boston's *Renga* group, as illustrated by the frequency curves. In the Boston performances, the *Renga* players sustain their opening cues for almost a minute before they are joined by other performers. In the Saarbrücken realization, by the forty-five second mark, the *Renga* ensemble and "Harmonies" quartets are joined by the Native American solo vocalist and the solo piccolo flutist, which produces a much thicker, although more differentiated texture, than in the Boston performances.

A comparison of the use of silences in the three realizations shows that the Boston performers placed longer silences between *Renga*'s different poetic 5–7–5–7–7 lines than the Saarbrücken musicians who produced a more continuous flow of sound.

The “Harmonies” quartets permeate each of the three performances almost uninterruptedly. They are not always heard due to the strong presence of the *Renga* ensemble, which sometimes dominates the texture in all three, but especially in the Boston performances. Yet in the Boston realizations, the “Harmonies” quartets come to the fore when their *Renga* ensemble engages in extended moments of silence. The “Harmonies” quartet in the Saarbrücken realization is more audible throughout due to the homogeneity and restraint of its *Renga* ensemble.

The solo singers add another attractive quality to the work. In all of the renditions, the two most prominent voices are the Native American singer, Swift Eagle, and the Sephardic vocalist, Nico Castel. The Protestant and African American singers, Helen Schneyer and Jeannie Lee respectively, are often overshadowed by other musicians. It is interesting to observe that Swift Eagle is the most dominant voice in this group, which may be due to his previous employment. Cage speculated about Swift Eagle's loud voice in an interview: “Swift Eagle, the Indian, ... talked all the time and wouldn't give me a chance to speak. The reason he talked all the time was because he worked every day at a tourist trap between Albany and Montreal at an imitation Indian village and he was always explaining everything to the tourists.”²³⁷

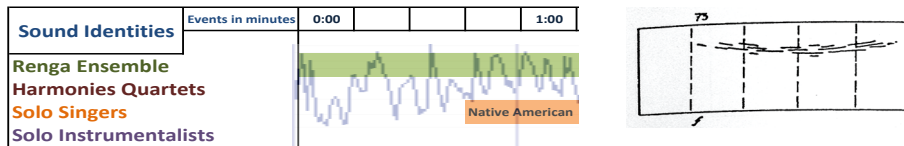
The instrumentation presents another degree of complexity in each performance. The *Renga* ensemble uses seventy–eight indeterminate instruments making each

²³⁷ LeFrak, 173.

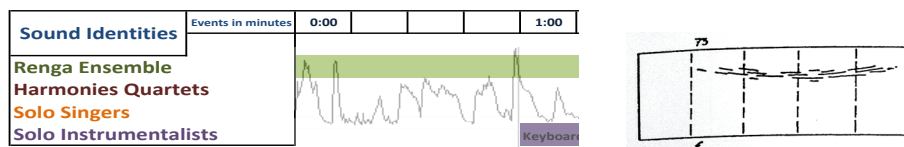
realization different. In a comparison of the frequency medium of the three performances, the Boston renditions show a very dynamic and heterogeneous quality of the *Renga* ensemble while the *Renga* group of the Saarbrücken performance is more homogeneous (see Graph 14). Beside each of these samples, I placed the first ‘measure’ from the score (the first five units of the 5–7–5–7–7 pattern) with the number on top of the second bar to indicate how many instruments are playing (in this case it is seventy–three); this shows the differences between each interpretation.

Graph 14. Comparison of the Beginning of the Boston and Saarbrücken Performances of John Cage's *Renga with Apartment House 1776* and an excerpt from the *Renga* Score.

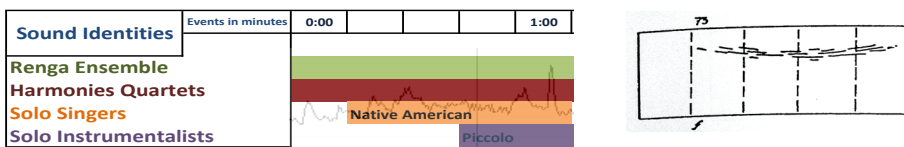
Boston I Performance



Boston II Performance



Saarbrücken Performance



The question arises: which of the three performances might come closest to the ideal of Cage's vision of a performance of *Renga with Apartment House*. The second Boston performance certainly presents many qualities that the composer would have liked. Cage might have enjoyed its spontaneity. Its *Renga* ensemble sounds free and uninhibited and does not overshadow the other performers – one can hear all of the

soloists. Swift Eagle plays on a Native American flute which adds an interesting touch to the overall sonic texture and is not present in the other two performances. The Saarbrücken performance is perhaps the most transparent one, and, thanks to its homogeneous sounding *Renga* ensemble, the keyboard part is more apparent than in the other performances.

As the comparative performance analysis above has shown, the realizations of *Renga with Apartment House* suggest an egalitarian collaboration of multicultural musicians as well as a tranquil coexistence of heterogeneous sonorities rather than sonic arbitrariness and chaos. Despite the considerable degree of indeterminacy involved in both pieces, each of the works maintains its own distinct sonic identity.

Of the two works, *Apartment House* is much more recognizable and has a more pronounced identity than *Renga*. Although lacking a full score and prescribed course of sonic events, *Apartment House* always uses eight soloists and four quartets performing various types of American folk music. The extraordinary performance freedoms inherent in *Renga* make its realizations more idiosyncratic than those of *Apartment House* regardless of the score's straightforward lay out of symbols and succession of sounds and silences. The addition of *Renga* to *Apartment House* certainly thickens the overall sonic texture and increases the unpredictability of sonic events.

V. Political Considerations: Environmentalism and Egalitarianism

Renga, Apartment House and the combination of the two works have intriguing philosophical, ecological, and political implications as Cage conceived them during a time when he became increasingly more concerned about his country's international and

domestic politics. As mentioned earlier, in the late 1960s he developed a strong interest in environmentalism, followed political scandals and crises in Washington D.C. and around the world and was troubled by controversies surrounding the Vietnam War. He even flirted with Maoism. At that time Cage soberly concluded about America, “we have nothing in this country that we can be unashamed of.”²³⁸ As a result, he decided to create works that could be “useful as an instance of society.”²³⁹ *Renga with Apartment House* reflects this activist attitude.

As Cage became increasingly concerned with “poisoned food,” “air and water pollution,” “killing of birds and cattle,” the “elimination of forests” and the “impoverishment and erosion of the earth,”²⁴⁰ he joined the Audubon Society and immersed himself in Charles Reich’s 1970 book *The Greening of America*. In 1970 Reich published an article in the *New Yorker* “Reflections: The Greening of America,” which grabbed the American public’s attention for its predictions and stinging critique of American law, capitalism and politics:

There is a revolution under way – not like revolutions of the past. This is the revolution of the new generation. It has originated with the individual and with culture, and if it succeeds it will change the political structure only as its final act. It will not require violence to succeed and it cannot be successfully resisted by violence. It is now spreading rapidly, and already our laws, institutions, and social structure are changing in consequence. Its ultimate creation could be a higher reason, a more human community, and a new and liberated individual. It is a transformation that seems both necessary and inevitable, and in time it may turn

²³⁸ Cage quoted in Silverman, 268.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 269.

²⁴⁰ Cage quoted in Silverman, 219.

out to include not only youth but the entire American people. The logic of the new generation's rebellion must be understood in light of the rise of the corporate state under which we live and the way in which the state dominates, exploits, and ultimately destroys both nature and man. Americans have lost control of the machinery of their society, and only new values and a new culture can restore control. At the heart of everything is what must be called a change of consciousness. This means a new way of living – almost a new man. This is what the new generation has been searching for, and what it has started to achieve. Industrialism produced a new man, too – one adapted to the demands of the machine. In contrast, today's emerging consciousness seeks a new knowledge of what it means to be human, in order that the machine, having been built, may now be turned to human ends.²⁴¹

Another important source of inspiration for *Renga with Apartment House* was Buckminster Fuller's philosophy, his view of Eastern and Western cultures as opposites and his belief in a nature–human or nature–culture dichotomy. In 1984 Cage explained:

[T]he commissioned work has an oriental title “Renga” – which is a long form of poetry. The reason I wanted to use Japanese poetry in the composition is that the Orient, as opposed to the Occident, includes nature in its notion of creation. The three concerns are oneself, society and nature. What distinguishes European and Western thought is that they have an anthropocentric character. In fact, they have been opposed to nature all along. This was the very subject of a very early lecture by Buckminster Fuller that I heard at Black Mountain College. He explained that the people left the Middle East at the beginning of civilization and went towards the West; toward Europe. They had to go against the wind. So they developed ideas in opposition to nature in order to assert themselves. Whereas if they went towards the East, all they had to do was put up a sail because the wind current goes from West to East.²⁴²

Indeed, *Renga with Apartment House* reveals a dichotomy. *Renga* represents forceful and unpredictable non–human nature with its large ensemble and high degree of

²⁴¹ Charles A. Reich, “Reflections: The Greening of America,” *The New Yorker*, September 26, 1970, 42.

²⁴² LeFrak, 164–165.

indeterminacy. *Apartment House* symbolizes human and Western cultures with traditionally notated and more determined scores and quotations of religious and military music. Performances of *Renga with Apartment House* variously point to a more balanced (Saarbrücken) or unbalanced (Boston) relationship between nature and Western culture.

As mentioned before, Cage emphatically embraced the writings of Thoreau and stated that in Thoreau's *Journal* he "discovered any idea I've ever had worth its salt."²⁴³ Cage must have been drawn to Thoreau's contemplations about music, humans and nature. Thoreau noted that we should "ask ourselves what music is—if we ponder this question it is soon changed to 'what are we?'" Jannika Bock observed that "[i]n Thoreau's understanding, music triggers this inquiry *and* it provides the means to answer it. Whoever pays attention to nature's music, will be 'enable[d] to see all things' ... to see life as it really is. Music metaphorically becomes 'the light which colors all landscape.' Thus in Thoreau's writings ... the ear is an organ with which an understanding of the world and one's place in it becomes possible."²⁴⁴

When conceiving his second United States bicentennial composition, Cage felt compelled to once again pay tribute to Thoreau, although he admitted: "Thoreau isn't bicentennial." Yet he emphasized that he "is the part of America that I love most."²⁴⁵ He reflected Thoreau's ecological understanding of biophonic, geophonic and anthrophonic

²⁴³ John Cage, *Empty Words '73–'78* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 4.

²⁴⁴ Jannika Bock, *Concord in Massachusetts, Discord in the World: The Writings of Henry David Thoreau and John Cage* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang, 2008), 119.

²⁴⁵ Cage quoted in Silverman, 296.

sounds in the score for *Renga*.²⁴⁶ Using Thoreau's nature drawings as musical notation, Cage drew attention to nature through the filter of Thoreau and to Thoreau's idea that human music echoes the sounds of nature.²⁴⁷

Both Thoreau and Cage considered silence as a powerful metaphor for nature. Cage loved to quote Thoreau saying that, "the best communion men have is in silence."²⁴⁸ For Cage, silence was a way to let unpredictable environmental sounds enter a musical work to "uncover a structural connection between the making of music and the natural world"²⁴⁹ and to make the listeners more aware of an inclusive sonic environment. *Renga* and *Apartment House* embrace many silences. In *Renga*'s score, the x's at the end of the last two lines on each page signify pauses. In *Apartment House*'s "Harmonies," Cage inserted silences through subtraction and they may point to his search for a sonic ecology.

²⁴⁶ The terms "biophonic" (sounds by non-human animals), "geophonic" (non-biological earth-related sounds), and "anthrophonic" (sounds by humans) were coined by acoustic ecologist Bernard Krause. See Bernard Krause. *Wild Soundscapes: Discovering the Voice of the Natural World: A Book and CD Recording* (Berkeley: Wilderness Press, 2002).

²⁴⁷ Cage states that he decided to use Thoreau's drawings because he could not think of anybody else having done drawings about nature. He also said that he could have used drawings of Benjamin Franklin's inventions, but "Thoreau made a study of this at the time." LeFrak, 166.

²⁴⁸ Daniel Herwitz, "'John Cage's Approach to the Global,'" in *John Cage: Composed in America*, ed. Charles Junkerman and Marjorie Perloff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 191. Although cited by many scholars, this is actually a misquote of Thoreau. Cage edited the original text that stated "The best intercourse and communion they [men] have is in silence above and behind their speech."

²⁴⁹ Christopher Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998): 87.

In *Renga with Apartment House* Cage also evoked Thoreauvian egalitarianism, individualism, and multiculturalism. Skeptical about authoritarianism and government, Cage was inspired by Thoreau's 1849 "Essay on the Duty of Civil Disobedience" and its opening: "That government is best which governs not at all."²⁵⁰ He proclaimed: "Musicians can do without government," and suggested that without rules of order "things get along perfectly well."²⁵¹ The work may suggest the Maoist idea that a nation itself could be a family and Mao stated that he was "interested in society, not for purposes of power, but for purposes of cooperation and enjoyment."²⁵² But it should be noted that Cage's fascination with Maoism had already started to fade in 1974 and he distanced himself from Mao thereafter.²⁵³

Cage further paid tribute to political ideas through the incorporation of chance operations, the subtraction method, indeterminacy, silence and the limitation of the role of the conductor. He had used these devices in many works since the 1950s, to reduce his composer ego and to provide a more egalitarian performance situation. However, from the late 1960s on, these aspects took on a much more pronounced socio-political meaning. Cage now emphasized: "We need first of all a music in which not only are sounds just sounds but in which people are just people, not subject, that is to laws

²⁵⁰ Thoreau quoted in Herwitz, "John Cage's Approach to the Global," 191.

²⁵¹ Cage quoted in Silverman, 271.

²⁵² John Cage, *Empty Words*, 115–116. Also cited in Bock, 140.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 269.

established by anyone of them even if he is ‘the composer’ or ‘the conductor.’”²⁵⁴

Cage’s concern with equality and egalitarianism manifests itself in his use of the “subtraction” method that he applied to American hymns. Through this method with which he removes pitches by chance, he undermines the controlling power of the tonic, the hierarchical harmonic logic of Western music, in his view, a metaphor for hierarchy in Western society. Cage also suggests equality and egalitarianism through juxtaposition of multiple largely uncoordinated simultaneous sonic events, or what he called the “music circus” concept. He wanted “sounds free of fixed relations between two or more of them [sounds].” Thus Cage created a musical parallel to the ideas of limited “government” which he sometimes described as “anarchic music” or “anarchic harmony.”²⁵⁵

Reflections of Thoreau’s individualism can be found in both *Renga* and *Apartment House*. In *Renga*, Cage allows seventy–eight musicians to sit in any order, to play any instrument from any culture and to determine many musical details. In *Apartment House* he lets musicians select musical materials and freely choose their entrances. In *Renga* Cage suggests egalitarianism in that ideally none of the participating musicians, including the conductor, is prioritized. *Apartment House* with its musical representations of diverse ethnic and religious groups in America 200 years ago underscores Cage’s hope for freedom and equal rights “for all

²⁵⁴ John Cage, Foreword, *M: Writings '62–'72* (New York: Henmar Press, 1972).

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, xiii.

people and for a peaceful multicultural cohabitation of all Americans in the present and future.”²⁵⁶

Recently, however, Cage scholar Benjamin Piekut has argued that Cage’s indeterminate music is far from reflecting freedom or anarchism. On the contrary, he believes it echoes the liberally tinged hegemonic thinking of many white people in the United States, especially that of European modernists.²⁵⁷ He suggests that Cage, in fact, controlled many aspects of his compositions and thus greatly limited the interpretative freedoms. Piekut denounced Cage’s work as “a mock–up of utopian anarchism and a register of hegemonic liberalism.”²⁵⁸ Although Piekut argues that Cage failed in his attempt to create works that reflected his personal philosophy, Cage’s ideas and intentions do not entirely control the performance of his work. The various types of indeterminacy in his works grant performers a considerable degree of freedom. Cage’s

²⁵⁶ Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: the New York Avant–Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 25. When Piekut taught a class on John Cage at the University of Berkeley California (which I was able to attend during my research trip to Mills College), he made an interesting observation. Cage’s choice of Jeanne Lee for the African American part was probably not the best representation for the work. Lee was an experimental performer and composer trained in a European tradition and associated with Avant–garde circles. Cage’s pick of Swift Eagle for the Native American part was much more appropriate as he was more closely affiliated with his tradition. Thus it is surprising that he could not find an African American singer that knew more about spirituals or work songs. Rebecca Kim also discusses Cage and his relationship to African Americans in her article “John Cage in Separate Togetherness with Jazz,” *New Music Review* 31, no 1 (August, 2012): 63–89, accessed January, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2012.712284>.

²⁵⁷ Benjamin Piekut, “Sound’s Modest Witness: Notes on Cage and Modernism,” *Contemporary Music Review* 31, no 1 (February, 2012): 6.

²⁵⁸ Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 25.

performers, however, are expected to behave musically and socially responsible within the framework of a performance of his music. Although Cage sometimes seemed pessimistic with regard to Western society and politics, his works show idealism.²⁵⁹ They can be viewed as models for how people may act in socially and environmentally responsible ways and may point to a better society.

Cage not only paid tribute to such ethnic minorities as Native Americans and African Americans and made them visible and audible in *Apartment House*, but he also lived his commitment to such ideals. He, for instance, supported numerous financially struggling musicians including Native American singer Swift Eagle, who sang in several *Apartment House* performances and whom he affectionately called “Swiftly.” When Swiftly was burdened with high medical bills, Cage paid his entire healthcare costs. In turn, Swiftly thanked Cage “for all the good you have blessed us with.”²⁶⁰ Cage inspired African American singer Jeanne Lee, another vocalist in *Renga With Apartment House*, to focus more on composition. Composer of the ten-act jazz oratorio *Prayer for Our Time*, she stated:

I had never experienced the juxtaposition of freedom and organization, or diversity within unity that Cage achieved in this composition [*Renga with Apartment House*]. Since I had long been interested in combining improvised and

²⁵⁹ Cage was distressed about such violent incidents as the September 1974 Evel Knievel event where a crowd of about twelve thousand people “beat up reporters, had public sex, trampled restraining fences and stole four thousand cans of beer.” Silverman, 274.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 301.

composed music, poetry and dance into a unified whole, I was inspired by this experience to begin composing extended works.²⁶¹

Besides Native Americans and African Americans, Cage also features another racially challenged minority present in the United States two hundred years ago: Sephardic Jews. In his opinion, they were in part responsible for the success of the American Revolution. He believed that German Jews wanted to support Sephardic Jews in and therefore helped finance the American Revolution.²⁶² Although Cage strongly felt that he should include the Jews in this composition, during the first Los Angeles performance of *Renga with Apartment House*, one Jewish man walked out, possibly feeling that the involvement of a Sephardic Jew, a cantor, in this composition was sacrilegious. Cage recalled:

there was an amusing thing that happened in Los Angeles in the course of the performance. A man who was obviously Jewish got up and as he was walking out, he was complaining about the cantor being included in such a piece. Someone called from the audience and said, “Would you rather have had the Jews left out?”²⁶³

²⁶¹ New Music Box Staff. “Jeanne Lee, Jazz Singer Who Embraced Avant–Garde, Dies at 61,” *New Music Box*, accessed July 13, 2013, <http://www.newmusicbox.org/Jeanne-Lee-Jazz-Singer-Who-Embraced-AvantGarde-Dies-at-61>.

²⁶² LeFrak, 165.

²⁶³ As a critical talking point, this statement may be an example of Cage’s failure to understand his “inclusive” idealism. It is no question that some Native Americans would feel used by Cage’s work – a liberal unilaterally, Cage included this ethnic group in celebration of a revolutionary group, (Europeans) that all but exterminated them. *Ibid.*, 172.

In *Apartment House* Cage curiously chose to represent the Protestants in America, not the Catholics. In his view the Catholics were more rooted in European institutionalism than the Protestants. Unlike the Catholics, the Protestants “were rebels at the time when there was a combination of church and state” in Europe and “they needed this country.” Crucially, Cage did not want the ethnic and religious representatives to sing separately; rather he wanted them to perform together to suggest equality and cohabitation instead of hierarchy.²⁶⁴

V. a. Patriotism

Considering the political implications of *Renga with Apartment House* and its function as a United States bicentennial work, the question arises whether and how it can be understood as a patriotic work. Patriotism is a complex phenomenon. The interpretive spectrum of patriotism ranges from very conservative stances, encapsulating the view “our country, right or wrong” to tempered patriotism, reflecting gratitude to one’s country for certain benefits as an acknowledgement of complex ethical issues, involving critiques of a nation’s actions and a desire for constructive change.²⁶⁵ Critical of his country’s aggressive involvement in world politics and concerned about its domestic achievements with regard to humanity and the non-human environment, Cage seemed to reflect the latter type in *Renga with Apartment House* and in his other bicentennial piece, the CBC commission *Lecture on the Weather*, discussed in the previous chapter.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 166.

²⁶⁵ Igor Primoratz, “Patriotism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer, 2009), no pagination, accessed January 14, 2013, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/patriotism>.

Cage's criticism of the United States was influenced by Thoreau. He speculated: "Thoreau's writing determined the actions of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi."²⁶⁶ In 1975 he wrote: "The desire for the best and the most effective in connection with the highest profits and the greatest power led to the fall of nations before us: Rome, Britain, Hitler's Germany. Those were not chance operations. We would do well to give up the notion that we alone can keep the world in line, that only we can solve its problems."²⁶⁷ *Renga with Apartment House* can thus be seen as both a non-patriotic work failing to celebrate American power and pride and a patriotic piece expressing a desire for positive change. Cage felt that the work was a positive expression of patriotism because of his emphasis on nature through *Renga*. He "wanted it [*Renga with Apartment House*] to represent nature more than anything to do with men or society."²⁶⁸ Although this view prioritizes America's non-human nature over her people, the combination of *Renga* centering on nature and *Apartment House* focusing on the peaceful togetherness of ethnically and religiously diverse people in the form of a musicircus, nevertheless points to an ecologically more balanced coexistence of non-human nature and humans.

Ultimately, the performers and listeners of Cage's composition, whose interpretation is "individual and personal" may assess its patriotic value on their own terms. Guy Harries observed that the "subjective construction of meaning is inextricably

²⁶⁶ *Empty Words*, 187.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁶⁸ LeFrak, 165.

a communal process of sharing.”²⁶⁹ Out of the six United States bicentennial works commissioned by the NEA, *Renga with Apartment House* was the only one overtly concerned with America’s history, politics, and environment.

VI. On the Reception of the Work

Renga and Apartment House have received numerous performances with positive and negative reviews. Of the five orchestras who ended up performing this work, Cage responded most favorably to the performances of the Boston Symphony under Seiji Ozawa and of the Cleveland Orchestra conducted by Matthias Barnert. He singled them out as the two “professional” performances of the work at the time.²⁷⁰

The work’s reception in Boston was the most positive. Conservative *New York Times* critic Donal Henahan reported that the Boston “audience was never bored: Mr. Cage’s new work has a juice of life in it, as the works of his contemporaries do not.”²⁷¹ Richard Dryer from the *Boston Evening Globe* admitted that his ““old-fashioned-ears” enjoyed the individual bits of traditional musical continuity – on the articulate fife playing of Lois Schaefer, on the drum bits drilled out by Arthur Press, particularly the caramel-toned laments of Jeanne Lee and the corrugated fervency in the voice of Helen

²⁶⁹ Guy Harries, ““The Open Work’: Ecologies of Participation,” *Organized Sound* 18, no. 1 (March 2013), 12.

²⁷⁰ LeFrak, 169.

²⁷¹ Donal Henahan, “Music: Cage’s ‘Renga’ Gives lift to Festival of Modern Works,” *New York Times*, October 29, 1976.

Schneyer.”²⁷² *Village Voice* critic Tom Johnson, an experimental composer and new music enthusiast, described the work as “a vivid image of melting pot culture or, rather, of what our melting–pot culture ought to be” and raved: “It’s been quite a while since I’ve listened to a piece of music with chills running up and down my spine almost the entire time.”²⁷³ The responses to the Cleveland performance were mixed. An attendee of that Cage performance exclaimed: “Let’s fervently pray it will be the last that it is suffered anywhere.”²⁷⁴ Another Cleveland patron grumbled that, “Severance Hall, that temple of art, was desecrated by a performance of John Cage’s *Renga with Apartment House 1776*.” But the Cleveland Orchestra conductor, Matthias Barnert, fought back, stating that “Cage’s *Renga with Apartment House 1776* is an attempt by one of America’s most respected and one of the world’s most influential composers to stimulate, interest, and provoke our audiences with new musical thoughts.” He also revealed that he “object[ed] to those horrible new arrangements of traditional Christmas carols that our friend Robert Conrad plays... to me they are bad taste; they are trash.”²⁷⁵

If Cage enjoyed the Boston and Cleveland renditions, he severely disliked the New York Philharmonic performance directed by Pierre Boulez. He did not trust the

²⁷² Richard Dryer, “Seiji Ozawa Conducts Boston Symphony Orchestra at Season’s Opening,” *Boston Evening Globe*, October 1, 1976.

²⁷³ Tom Johnson, “John Cage Goes to Boston: A Bicentennial Premiere,” *Village Voice*, October 11, 1976.

²⁷⁴ Ewelyn Gawiser, “Holding Their Ears, Letter Writers Complain About Cage,” *The Sunday Plain Dealer*, December 25, 1977.

²⁷⁵ Matthias Barnert, “Conductor Takes on the Critics,” *Cleveland Press*, December 27, 1977.

Philharmonic. His once close friendship with Boulez had ended over irreconcilable disagreements concerning the use of chance and freedom in music. Boulez more or less approved of the traditionally notated *Apartment House* score, but disliked its performance freedoms. He entirely disapproved of *Renga*'s score for which Cage used graph notation. He specifically detested Cage's abundant use of sliding tones. As a result, he refused to rehearse *Renga* (leaving that up to the New York Philharmonic's assistant conductor) and asked the orchestra to replace the glissandos with arpeggios. To Cage "[t]hat, of course, ruined the music and took the whole feeling of nature out of it."²⁷⁶ The New York performance generated positive and negative reactions. Although a headline in the *New York Times* read "Hundreds Walk Out of Premiere of John Cage Work at Fisher Hall" the reviewer wrote, "the great majority of the audience stayed to the end of the work, which lasts more than half an hour, and, at the end, cheered or booed enthusiastically."²⁷⁷ Another critic from the *New York Post* offered a similar assessment, "the applause and boos at the end, incidentally, were almost evenly divided, with the ayes having an edge Cage was brave enough to appear on stage and share in the reception, if one could call it that. But there were many angered. And the bar did a brisk business during the performance."²⁷⁸ Because of the disruptive audience, several artists including Allison Knowles, Jackson Mac Low, and Dick Higgins "stood up and silently held hands as a

²⁷⁶ One might question Cage's idea of the relationship between sliding tones and nature. LeFrak, 168–169.

²⁷⁷ Allen Hughes, "Hundreds Walk Out of Premiere of John Cage Work at Fisher Hall," *New York Times*, November 5, 1976.

²⁷⁸ Robert Kimball, "Cage's *Renga* Raises Ruckus," *New York Post*, November 5, 1976.

demonstration of support and solidarity with Cage's work."²⁷⁹ *New Yorker* critic Andrew Porter deemed the piece's character, "a colorful pageant of bits and pieces from the past heard against a background of bright, fragmentary noises from the main 'Renga' orchestra piece," enjoyable, but found it too long.²⁸⁰

The performance of the Los Angeles Philharmonic under the direction of Zubin Mehta generated the most controversial reactions. Cage disliked the performance, but had not set his hopes very high. He did not trust the orchestra whose members he likened to children.²⁸¹ Many members of the Philharmonic had negative feelings toward Cage's work. One critic observed that "The players didn't seem to take Cage seriously. They smirked and giggled and exchanged apparently amusing comments throughout the performance."²⁸² One orchestra member called Cage's piece "*Renga with Saw and Coyote*." Another one, however, thought that the piece was a "ball!" and "also a significant musical event." One of the oboists deemed the work "touching."²⁸³ But that may have been an exception. With their inappropriate behavior, the Philharmonic "all but invited the subscribers to follow suit."²⁸⁴

²⁷⁹ William Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 145.

²⁸⁰ Andrew Porter, "Musical Events: Piling it On," *The New Yorker*, November 26, 1976.

²⁸¹ LeFrak, 170.

²⁸² Quoted in Martin Bernheimer, "Cage Shakes Up the Pavilion," *Los Angeles Times*, January 23, 1977.

²⁸³ William Kraft, "Correspondence: Reactions to *Renga*," *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1977.

The Los Angeles critics were clearly not impressed. One of them asserted, “John Cage Still Leaves Everything to Chance,”²⁸⁵ while another one exclaimed, “Cage Shakes Up the Pavilion.”²⁸⁶ At the end of the 1977 performance season, *Los Angeles Times* critic Martin Bernheimer mockingly gave Cage the “Cultural Redneck Award,” for *Renga with Apartment House* because it outraged the “normally sedate Philharmonic subscribers” who “disrupted the performance with boos, catcalls, [and] noisy exits.”²⁸⁷ One of the patrons approved the raucous audience behavior, pointing out that, like at the world premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps*: “the public played the role that it had to play.”²⁸⁸ Perhaps such reactions could have been minimized or avoided if the Los Angeles Philharmonic had taken a different approach to programming, as one reviewer explained:

In Boston, Ozawa played Cage as part of an expansive modern–music festival. In New York, Boulez placed Cage in company with Martinu and Ravel. In Los Angeles, Cage served as a strange bill fellow, with a curtain raiser for piano concertos of Mozart and Beethoven. Really.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁴ Quoted in Martin Bernheimer, “Cage Shakes Up the Pavilion.”

²⁸⁵ Donna Perlmutter, “John Cage Still Leaves Everything to Chance,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1977.

²⁸⁶ Bernheimer, “Cage Shakes Up the Pavilion.”

²⁸⁷ Martin Bernheimer, “The Beckmesser Awards of 1777,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 25, 1977.

²⁸⁸ Quoted in Martin Bernheimer, “On Chaos, Cacophony and Cage,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 23, 1977.

²⁸⁹ Bernheimer, “On Chaos.”

It seems that most of the critics and possibly many other attendees of the *Renga with Apartment House* premieres have missed the work's remarkable musical features and ecological and political subtexts.

Considering its scope as well as its rich musical and political implications, *Renga with Apartment House* arguably stands as the most unique and controversial result of NEA's six bicentennial commissions and as one of Cage's most fascinating works from the 1970s. It evokes America's natural environment, Thoreau's provocative philosophy, music from the American Revolutionary era and from different ethnic, racial and religious groups that lived in America in the 1770s. Promoting liberalism, egalitarianism, intercultural collaboration, and environmental awareness, *Renga with Apartment House* has united musicians from various cultural minorities on the concert stage and thus challenged America's problems of the past and present. Although *Renga with Apartment House 1776* provoked controversial responses at its premiere, it is now considered a "major classic of American music" and has inspired many performers and listeners.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ Silverman, 300.

CHAPTER 6: EPILOGUE

With *Lecture on the Weather* and *Renga with Apartment House 1776*, John Cage created unique, provocative and memorable tributes to the United States bicentennial in 1976. The works unquestionably show a new trend in Cage's creativity: overt political engagement, increase of subjective expression, use of existing tonal music and revival of traditional notation.

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, these compositions reveal how strongly Cage was affected by the political events in his own country and around the globe during the 1960s and 70s. He came to terms with the critiques of his politically outspoken composer colleagues and friends as well as with severe reactions from audiences in the United States and Europe. Indeed both works express Cage's concerns with the controversial role of the United States in world politics. The Canadian commission was in Cage's words his "dark" bicentennial work while the American commission seems to be a gentler critique of the United States, reminding the country of its ethnic and cultural diversity. The compositions specifically point to his engagement with environmental thought, and especially Thoreau. They also document Cage's ongoing preoccupation with Norman O. Brown, questioning existing boundaries and with Marshall McLuhan's ideas about technology, the global village, and the spirit of the Cold War era.

The bicentennial works are great examples of Cage's compositional style in the late 1960s and 1970s, which is markedly different from that prior mid-1960s. During this period, he instilled his works with more subjectivity and narrative elements. He reduced his musical works' degree of abstraction and even reconsidered conventional tonality.

But particularly for this reason, many Cage commentators have deemed these compositions as retrogressive and arguably unworthy of scrutiny. Cage scholars and critics have paid relatively little attention to these compositions and this thesis fills this lacuna.

Both *Lecture on the Weather* and *Renga with Apartment House 1776* have not received as many performances as some of Cage's earlier works. This might be due to the technological setup required for *Lecture* and the large forces necessary for *Renga with Apartment House 1776*. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, commercial recordings of *Lecture* and *Renga with Apartment House* exist. But while *Apartment House 1776* is available on CD as an individual work, *Renga* as a separate work has not been recorded yet. The lack of performances and recordings and of scholarly recognition and assessment of these works has surely contributed to their relative obscurity within Cage's oeuvre.

Lecture and *Renga with Apartment House 1776* stand as large pillars not only within Cage's later oeuvre, but also within his entire work catalog and should be recognized as such. It is hoped that in the near future Cage scholars and the larger public will be able to fully grasp and treasure the sonic beauty and cultural significance of Cage's later works and in particular, his two captivating United States bicentennial compositions, *Lecture on the Weather* and *Renga with Apartment House 1776*.

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APPENDIX A

JOHN CAGE AND THE USE OF THE TERM REVOLUTION

IN HIS MAJOR WRITTINGS FROM THE 1960S–1970S

Name of Cage Text	Page Number	Statements about Revolution
Silence (1961)	Four Statements on Dance / 87	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.
Silence (1961)	Four Statements on Dance / 87	At the present stage of revolution, a healthy lawlessness is warranted.
Silence (1961)	Four Statements on Dance / 87	The conscientious objectors to modern music will, of course, attempt everything in the way of counterrevolution. Musicians will not admit that we are making music; they will say that we are interested in superficial effects, or, at most, are imitating Oriental or primitive music. New and original sounds will be labeled as “noise.” But our common answer to every criticism must be to continue working and listening, making music with its materials, sound and rhythm, disregarding the cumbersome, top-heavy structure of musical prohibitions.
A Year From Monday	Foreword / ix	Our proper work now if we love mankind and the world we live in is revolution.
A Year From Monday	Afterword / 166 (1967)	At any point in time, there is a tendency when one “thinks” about world society to “think” that things are fixed, cannot change. This non-changeability is imaginary, invented by “thought” to simplify the process of “thinking.” But thinking is nowadays complex: it assumes, to begin with, the work of Einstein. Our minds are changing from the use of simple, critical faculties to the use of design, problem-solving, creative faculties, from an unrealistic concern with a non-existent status quo to a courageous seeing of things in movement, life as revolution. History is one revolution after another. “That government is best which governs not at all, and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have.” If we ‘think’ in a fixed, unmoving way about “when men are prepared for it,” that “when” will seem unattainably in the future. But we live from day to day: revolution is going on this moment.
M: Writings '62-'72	Foreword / xi	I knew it would be necessary to concentrate my attention on world improvement, to eliminate from my mind all thoughts about art. Contemporary Chinese arts are timely advertisements for the revolution, not significant expressions of it.
M: Writings '62-'72	Foreword / xii	Though the history of the Chinese Revolution is a history of violence, it includes the Long March, a grand retreat that reminds me of the Thoreau influenced social actions of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and the Danes in their response to Hitler’s invasion.
M:	Foreword / xii	I felt very close to Mao when I read in his biography that

Writings '62-'72		as a young man he had studied with great interest the texts of anarchism. And his admonitions to the people during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, including the very young, admonitions to revolt against authority, including his own authority, were ones with which I wholeheartedly concur. "It is right to rebel." "Bombard the headquarters."
M: Writings '62-'72	Foreword / xii	The largest number of Chinese people were peasants and the largest number of peasants were poor. The revolution in China was therefore to begin with them and in relation to their needs.
M: Writings '62-'72	Foreword / xii	The World Revolution to come ("the greatest of them all"), apolitical, nonviolent, Intelligent because comprehensively and regeneratively problem solving (cf. Mao: We must learn to look at problems all-sidedly, seeing the reverse as well as the obverse side of things) is a "Student Revolution."
M: Writings '62-'72	Foreword / xv	(Mao Tse-tung: "What should our policy be towards non-Marxist ideas? As far as unmistakable counter-revolutionaries and saboteurs of the socialist cause are concerned, the matter is easy: we simply deprive them of their freedom of speech.")
M: Writings '62-'72	Foreword / xii	For instance, Fuller's advice, "Don't change man; change environment" and Mao's directive: "Remold people to their very souls; revolutionize their thinking."
M: Writings '62-'72	Foreword / xv	I am convinced that they [a particular ensemble] play other music just as badly as they play mine. However, in the case of Cheap Imitation, there are no climaxes, no harmonies, no counterpoints in which to hide one's lack of devotion. This lack of devotion is not to be blamed on particular individuals (whether they are musicians who don't listen or vacationists who leave garbage beside waterfalls); it is to be blamed on the present organization of society; it is the raison d'être for revolution.
M: Writings '62-'72	Foreword / xv	What can I as a composer do to bring about the revolution? Shall I give up working with trained musicians and go on from what I learned at Kalamazoo? Or shall I continue my efforts to make the symphony orchestra an instance of an improved society, and forget about those two hundred people in Michigan who don't know how to sing anyway? I can do both. I can work in the society as it intolerably structured is, and I can also work in it as hopefully unstructured it will in the future be.
M: Writings '62-'72	Diary: How to Improve the World Continued, 1969 (revised) / 8	Revolution
M: Writings '62-'72	Diary: How to Improve the World Continued, 1969 (revised) / 12	If revolution's colored, include white. White and black look well together.
M: Writings '62-'72	Diary: How to Improve the World Continued, 1969 (revised) / 20	Tenney wrote to say: "What's required ... is ... radical eclecticism (Ives) ... 'every composer's duty.' ...More power to Fuller ... to revolutionary guerrillas ... to Christian pacifists ... to flower children ... to hippies ...

		acidheads ... beatniks, diggers and provos ... to the militant blacks ... to those who keep asking questions.”
M: Writings '62-'72	Diary: How to Improve the World Continued, 1969 / 60	Advice to Brazilian anarchists: Improve telephone system. Without telephone, merely starting revolution'll be impossible.
M: Writings '62-'72	Diary: How to Improve the World Continued, 1970-71 / 99-101	We're cheered by Berkeley, Amsterdam (fact their city councils include revolutionary leaders). Nevertheless we know the best government's no government at all. We bow not with a sense of duty, just to save our skins. We renounce privileges of democracy. We dream of the day when no one knows who's President because no one bothered to vote.
M: Writings '62-'72	Diary: How to Improve the World Continued, 1970-71 / 107	As population goes up, average age of people living goes down, Teen-agers become the majority, Students of the World, Unite! The revolution will be simple, like rolling off a log.
M: Writings '62-'72	Diary: How to Improve the World Continued, 1970-71 / 115	Susan spent three years in Europe, then was obliged to return to the US. She told me she was surprised to find things were going on more or less as usual. She had expected to find herself in the midst of violence, destruction, revolution.
M: Writings '62-'72	Mushroom Book (1972) / 147	Fuller: Don't change Man; change his environment. Mao: Remold people to their very souls; revolutionize their thinking. (Find common denominator.)
M: Writings '62-'72	Mushroom Book (1972) / 183	... and struggle of the Cultural Revolution. Today, the elitist concept is dead. Education in China is no longer competitive and is no longer a road to personal advancement and status. Work in factories or in the fields has become an accepted part of every child's educational experience.
M: Writings '62-'72	Diary: How to Improve the World Continued, 1971-72 / 201	Revolution in China implemented in part by Big Character Posters. People, walking in the streets, receive instructions. In industrialized West, people sit at home glued to the TV, or drive around listening to car radios. Instead of commercials, broadcast suggestions for useful activity on the part of every man, woman, and child. Repeat every fifteen minutes.
M: Writings '62-'72	Diary: How to Improve the World Continued, 1971-72 / 204	In what does the old ideology of the exploiting classes lie? It lies essentially in self-interest-the natural soil for the growing of capitalism. That is why, in the course of revolution, Mao tells us, "we must fight self." That's why the Golden Rule (Do unto others as you would be done by) turned green in the USA. It took self-interest for granted. Devalue
M: Writings '62-'72	Diary: How to Improve the World Continued, 1971-72 / 207	The decisive moment in human evolution is perpetual. That is why the revolutionary spiritual movements that declare all former things worthless are in the right, for nothing has yet happened.
M: Writings '62-'72	Diary: How to Improve the World Continued, 1971-72 / 207	Hassan's book, The Dismemberment of Orpheus, begins with a statement by Franz Kafka: "The decisive moment in human evolution is perpetual. That is why the revolutionary spiritual movements that declare all former things worthless are in the right, for nothing has yet

		happened.”
M: Writings '62-'72	Diary: How to Improve the World Continued, 1971-72 / 207	“Mao: Destruction means criticism and repudiation; it means revolution. It involves reasoning things out, which is construction. Put destruction first, and in the process you have construction.”
M: Writings '62-'72	Diary: How to Improve the World Continued, 1971-72 / 210	Best things in life are free; American industry thinks we can't afford them. If we could change our language, that's to say the way we think, we'd probably be able to swing the revolution.
Empty Words '73-'78	Preface to Lecture on the Weather (1974) / 3	He [Thoreau] wrote many books including a Journal of fourteen volumes (two million words). His Essay on Civil Disobedience inspired Gandhi in his work of changing India, and Martin Luther King, Jr., in his use of nonviolence as a means of revolution. No greater American has lived than Thoreau.
Empty Words '73-'78	Preface to Lecture on the Weather (1974) / 4	Thoreau lived not two hundred years ago but for forty-four years only beginning one hundred and fifty-nine years ago. In 1968 I wrote as follows: “Reading Thoreau's Journal I discover any idea I've ever had worth its salt.” In 1862 Emerson wrote: “No truer American existed than Thoreau. If he brought you yesterday a new proposition, he would bring you today another not less revolutionary.”
Empty Words '73-'78	Preface to Lecture on the Weather (1974) / 5	It may seem to some that through the use of chance operations I run counter to the spirit of Thoreau (and '76, and revolution for that matter).
Empty Words '73-'78	The Future of Music (1974) / 182	Revolution remains our proper concern. But instead of planning it, or stopping what we're doing in order to do it, it may be that we are at all times in it.
Empty Words '73-'78	The Future of Music (1974) / 182	I quote from M. C. Richards' book, The Crossing Point: “Instead of revolution being considered exclusively as an attack from outside upon an established form, it is being considered as a potential resource—an art of transformation voluntarily undertaken from within.
Empty Words '73-'78	The Future of Music (1974) / 182	Revolution arm in arm with evolution, creating a balance which is neither rigid nor explosive. Perhaps we will learn to relinquish voluntarily our patterns of power and subservience, and work together for organic change.”

APPENDIX B
IRB CERTIFICATION



BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joseph Finkel completed the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Music History with a minor in Psychology at Youngstown State University in Ohio in 2010. Before he enrolled in Arizona State University's Master of Art program, he worked as a teacher in the public city schools of Columbus, Ohio. At Arizona State University he focused on twentieth- and twenty-first century music, specifically experimental works. In the last three years, he gave musicological papers on compositions by John Luther Adams, John Cage, and Alvin Curran at regional meetings of the American Musicological Society (2012, 2013 and 2014) as well as at international conferences including Ecomusicologies 2012 and Balance-UnBalance 2015 and at the annual meetings of the Society for American Music (2013, 2014, and 2015). He received numerous awards and grants for conference travel and research trips from the Society for American Music, the ASU Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, School of Music and the ASU Graduate and Professional Student Association. In 2014 he won the Joan Frazer Memorial Award to conduct research on Alvin Curran at Mills College in California. He received a Special Talent Award in 2011-2012 and teaching assistantships in music history for two years (2011-13) from the ASU School of Music. He engaged in professional service as a member of the Balance-Unbalance 2015 conference program committee, as leader of the Balance-Unbalance 2015 registration team, as a student representative for the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the American Musicological Society, and as a member of ASU's School of Music Committee for Financial Appropriations. He also worked for the Graduate Professional Student Association at ASU. Joseph has also been active as a performer and participated in a John Cage "Happening" at the EYEBEAM Art and Technology Center in New York City (2012), in the Arizona premiere of Curran's *Maritime Rites* on Tempe Town Lake and in a perambulatory performance of Garth Paine's *Oscillations* (both in 2015).