

munication. I observed that all of the composers were writing differently. If art was communication, we were using different languages. We were, therefore, in a Tower of Babel situation where no one understood anyone else.

So I determined either to find another reason or give up the whole business. Lou Harrison and other composers joined with me in this quest. At the same moment, a musician came from India alarmed over the influence that Western music was having on Indian traditions. She studied in a concentrated fashion with a number of teachers of Western music over a six-month period. I was with her nearly every day.

Before she returned to India, I learned from her the traditional reason for making a piece of music in India: "to quiet the mind thus making it susceptible to divine influences."

Lou Harrison, meanwhile, was reading in an old English text, I think as old as the sixteenth century, and he found this reason given for writing a piece of music: "to quiet the mind thus making it susceptible to divine influences."

Now the question arises: What is a quiet mind? Then the second question arises: What are divine influences? One of the things that is happening to society now is that the East and the West no longer are separated. We are, as Fuller and McLuhan point out continually, living in a global village.

Formerly, we thought that the Orient had nothing to do with us; that we had no access to it. We know better now. We learned from Oriental thought that those divine influences are, in fact, the environment in which we are. A sober and quiet mind is one in which the ego does not obstruct the fluency of the things that come in through our senses and up through our dreams. Our business in living is to become fluent with the life we are living, and art can help this.

Defense of Satie *John Cage*

The following previously unpublished text was the sole long lecture that Cage delivered during the Black Mountain College Satie Festival, held in the summer of 1948. The audience there consisted largely of German refugees needing persuasion to "oblige them," as Cage later put it, "to listen to twenty-five concerts of Satie's music."

By permission of John Cage.

A most salient feature of contemporary art is the fact that each artist works as he sees fit, and not in accordance with widely agreed-upon procedures. Whether this state of affairs pleases or displeases us is not exactly clear from a consideration of modern clichés of thought.

On the one hand, we lament what we call the gulf between artist and society, between artist and artist, and we praise (very much like children who can only window shop for candy they cannot buy) the unanimity of opinion out of which arose a Gothic cathedral, an opera by Mozart, a Balinese combination of music and dance. We lament the absence among us of such generally convincing works, and we say it must be because we have no traditional ways of making things. We admire from a lonely distance that art which is not private in character but is characteristic of a group of people and the fact that they were in agreement.

On the other hand, we admire an artist for his originality and independence of thought, and we are displeased when he is too obviously imitative of another artist's work. In admiring originality, we feel quite at home. It is the one quality of art we feel fairly capable of obtaining. Therefore we say such things as: Everyone not only has but should have his own way of doing things. Art is an individual matter. We go so far as to give some credence to the opinion that a special kind of art arises from a special neurosis pattern of a particular artist. At this point we grow slightly pale and stagger out of our studios to knock at the door of some neighborhood psychoanalyst. Or—we stay at home, cherish our differences, and increase our sense of loneliness and dissatisfaction with contemporary art. In the field of music, we express this dissatisfaction variously: We say: The music is interesting, but I don't understand it. Somehow it is not "fulfilled." It doesn't have "the long line." We then go our separate paths: Some of us back to work to write music that few find any use for, and others to spend their lives with the music of another time, which, putting it bluntly and chronologically, does not belong to them.

Now I would like to ask and answer the questions: What kinds of things in art (music in particular) can be agreed upon? and What kinds of things can be not agreed upon? For I suspect that our admiring two opposite positions, that of the traditional artist and that of the individualist, indicates a basic need in us for this pair of opposites. We need, I imagine, an art that is paradoxical in that it reflects both unanimity of thought and originality of thought.

Music is a continuity of sound. In order that it may be distin-

guishable from nonbeing, it must have a structure; that is, it must have parts that are clearly separate but that interact in such a way as to make a whole. In order that this whole may have a quality of being alive, it must be given form. Form in music is the morphological line of the sound-continuity. To illustrate this differentiation between structure and form, which may seem at first only an arbitrary set of definitions, let me point out that many poets make use of a sonnet structure to make word-continuities; each sonnet, however, has its own life and death line, that is, its own form, which is characteristic of it. Or to give another illustration, we all have in common the fact of our structure as human beings, but the way in which we live, that is, the form of our life, is individual. The continuity of actions for each one of us is different.

Besides having structure and form, a piece of music must have method; that is, a continuity producing means. In poetry this is syntax; in life it is that observance of an orderly way of living that makes one to some extent dependable. On a primary level, method in life is simply sleeping, eating, and working at particular times rather than just at any. Method in life is being systematic.

A piece of music has not only structure, form, and method, but it has also material, its own sounds. In poetry, to continue the analogy, this is language. There are material differences of language between a Hopkins and a Shakespeare, even though they both wrote English. The material difference between French and English or other languages is obvious. In life, we have different physical differences and we wear different clothes.

Now, from my point of view, I would say that in life we would not be pleased if all of us dressed alike. Even a single individual enjoys dressing differently from one day to another. Likewise in poetry, differences of language are not only admirable but refreshing. We feel imposed upon by G.I. clothing, Baltimore housing, and we would not like poetry in standard English or Esperanto. In the area of material, we need and are enlivened by differentiation. I would say, therefore, we cannot and ought not agree on matters of material.

Proceeding, let us ask whether agreement is natural and desirable in the field of method. In poetry, there is known to be difference in syntax from one language to another; within a given language, less lack of agreement exists. However, the advent in our time of a Joyce, of a Stein, of a Cummings, of a Hopkins is possible only because of a variation in the normal syntax. In life, a Buckminster Fuller proposes a new method of living. Anthro-

pologists reveal to us the fact that there are many ways of living, that agreement in this field is not supported by history. People live and have lived in different ways, and that is one of the interesting things about them.

We come now to the question of form, the life-line of a poem or an individual. This arises in both cases so obviously from feeling and that area known as the heart, speaking both vaguely, romantically, and physically, medically, that no illustrations need be given to make clear the necessity in the field of form for individuality rather than adherence to tradition. Copying as exactly as possible somebody else's life-line in all its emotional details is clearly not possible. The thought is maddening, but fortunately we need not think of it.

We are left with the question of structure, and here it is equally absurd to imagine a human being who does not have the structure of a human being, or a sonnet that does not have the relationship of parts that constitutes a sonnet. There may, of course, in life be dogs rather than human beings—that is, other structures—just as in poetry there may be odes rather than sonnets. There must, however, as a *sine qua non* in all fields of life and art, be some kind of structure—otherwise chaos. And the point here to be made is that it is in this aspect of being that it is desirable to have sameness and agreed-upon-ness. It is quite fine that there are human beings and that they all have a sameness of structure. Sameness in this field is reassuring. We call whatever diverges from sameness of structure monstrous.

In these terms, let us now examine contemporary music. We know, to begin with, that contemporary music is characterized by the fact that each composer works as an individual and nine times out of ten does not agree with any other one. What kinds of ideas have developed in twentieth-century music? Are there any that could and ought to be agreed upon?

New materials have been proposed: quarter tones by Alois Hába, forty-third tones by Harry Partch, electronic instruments by Edgard Varèse, screws, bolts, and bits of rubber by myself, dissonances by all and sundry. Our answer to all this is: fine, the more different costumes, the better. Variety is the spice of life. However, we need not take innovations of this kind too seriously, unless somebody tells us to.

New methods have been proposed: outstanding among these are continuity by means of continuous invention, by means of the twelve-tone-row, and by means of secunda intervallic control. As we accept differences in syntax from one language to another, or

differing habits in people, so we can accept these differing methods of composing.

As for form, it is in its nature that there should be many varieties of it. We may recognize what may be called perhaps a new contemporary awareness of form: It is static, rather than progressive, in character. But this is a matter of individual feeling. What is unnatural about a great deal of contemporary music, neo-classicism in particular, is that it is not itself; it is not direct and instantaneously felt in form, but is derivative from whatever models of the past its particular composer chooses.

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

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

Now on what basis can I pronounce such a heresy?

It is very simple. If you consider that sound is characterized by its pitch, its loudness, its timbre, and its duration, and that silence, which is the opposite and, therefore, the necessary partner of sound, is characterized only by its duration, you will be drawn to the conclusion that of the four characteristics of the material of music, duration, that is, time length, is the most fundamental. Silence cannot be heard in terms of pitch or harmony: It is heard in terms of time length. It took a Satie and a Webern to rediscover this musical truth, which, by means of musicology, we learn was evident to some musicians in our Middle Ages, and to all musicians at all times (except those whom we are currently in the process of spoiling) in the Orient.

Beethoven represents the most intense lurching of the boat away from its natural even keel. The derivation of musical thought from his procedures has served not only to put us at the mercy of the waves, but to practically shipwreck the art on an island of decadence. Last night, in a discussion, I was willing to grant that there may be different physical evidences of structural principles. Today I will not be so pacific. There can be no right making of music that does not structure itself from the very roots of sound and

silence—lengths of time. In India, rhythmic structure is called Tala. With us, unfortunately, it is called a new idea.

How did Webern and Satie come by it is our next question.

Tonality essential to the artificial harmonic structure of Beethoven disintegrated within fifty to seventy-five years, to bring into being the concept of atonality. This, by its denial of the meaning of harmony, required a new structural means or, let us say, the true structural means. Schoenberg provided no structural means, only a method—the twelve-tone system—the nonstructural character of which forces its composer and his followers continually to make negative steps: He has always to avoid those combinations of sound that would refer too banally to harmony and tonality. Satie and Webern went deeper and realized the exact nature of the problem of atonality, which is: How can music be given structure if not through its tonal relations? Their answer: by means of time lengths.

Today we hear two sets of pieces, one by Webern for cello and piano and one by Satie for violin and piano, both written in 1914, one in Vienna, the other in Paris. After hearing my argument that they exhibit the same structural principle, you will be surprised to find them so different in sound. The Webern pieces are extremely short, similar in extent to the chorales of Satie.

Brevity is a characteristic essential to the establishing of a principle. The seed has not the extent of the mature organism.

On this point, let me quote Paul Klee:

It is a great difficulty and a great necessity to have to start with the smallest. I want to be as though new-born, knowing nothing, absolutely nothing, about Europe; ignoring poets and fashions, to be almost primitive. Then I want to do something very modest; to work out by myself a tiny formal motive, one that my pencil will be able to hold without technique. One favorable moment is enough. The little thing is easily and concisely set down. It's already done! It was a tiny, but real, affair, and someday, through the repetition of such small, but original, deeds, there will come one work upon which I can really build.

Beyond the brevity and unpretentiousness of expression that Webern and Satie have in common (just as Schoenberg and Stravinsky, the composers of our period ordinarily given the laurels I now wish to bestow elsewhere, have length and impressiveness in common), and, beyond their common structural means, there is little to connect them.

Webern's sounds are multicolored. His form is static and fragmentary. His method is one of continuous invention. Satie's sounds

are, more often than not, relatively banal. His form, like Webern's, is static, but he is not unwilling to let it be extramusical in its implications. Just as Klee was willing to draw people and plants and animals, so into Satie's continuity come folk tunes, musical clichés, and absurdities of all kinds; he is not ashamed to welcome them in the house he builds: Its structure is strong. His method varies from one period to another, sometimes from one piece to another. And it was in search of method that he studied counterpoint, just as later on Webern adopted Schoenberg's twelve-tone syntax. There was no school that could have taught either of them what each already knew: the structure of music.

Before Beethoven wrote a composition, he planned its movement from one key to another—that is, he planned its harmonic structure. Before Satie wrote a piece, he planned the lengths of its phrases. This evening we hear first Satie's *Things Seen on the Right and on the Left*. It contains a Hypocritical Choral, A Fugue Which is Feeling its Way Along, and a Muscular Fantasy. The Choral has a structure of 5 successive 2-measure phrases. The fugue's rhythmic structure is as follows: a subject and answer of 8 measures each, an episode of 9 measures (1 more than 8), a reappearance of the subject (8 measures), an episode of 10 measures (1 more than 9, which was 1 more than 8), a third appearance of the subject (8 measures) an episode of 14 measures (which is 3 measures more than the expected 11) the subject again (8 measures) an episode of 3 measures (the number indicated by the difference between 14 and 11), a stretto at the measure, which makes this canonic appearance of the subject 9 rather than 8, and a coda of the 3 measures, which, now due to the stretto of 9, has the meaning of resolving in two ways the numerical relation between the numbers characteristic of the subject (8, now 9) and the numbers characteristic of the episodes: 9, 10, 11, 14, and 14-11 equaling 3 (1st: 3 is a simple part of 9; and 2nd: 9 [which 8 has become] is 9). The Muscular Fantasy has a structure that is a play on the numbers 4, 2, and 3 in the following way: three 4's are followed by one 2, four 4's are followed by two 3's; a humorous cadenza is followed by one 4 and one 1, and one 3, followed also by one 1, serves to end the piece.

To conclude: My answers to the questions asked at the beginning (What kinds of things can and ought to be agreed upon? and What kinds of things can and ought not to be agreed upon?) are: Structure can and ought to be agreed upon, and the underlying necessary structure of music is rhythmic. Form cannot and ought not be agreed upon: It is purely a matter of the heart. In the

Orient, it was always arrived at by means of improvisation within the law-giving rhythmic structure. Method and materials may or may not be agreed upon, and it is a matter of indifference whether they are or not.

The function of a piece of music and, in fact, the final meaning of music may now be suggested: it is to bring into co-being elements paradoxical by nature, to bring into one situation elements that can be and ought to be agreed upon—that is, Law elements—together with elements that cannot and ought not to be agreed upon—that is, Freedom elements—these two ornamented by other elements, which may lend support to one or the other of the two fundamental and opposed elements, the whole forming thereby an organic entity.

Music then is a problem parallel to that of the integration of the personality: which in terms of modern psychology is the co-being of the conscious and the unconscious mind, Law and Freedom, in a random world situation. Good music can act as a guide to good living. It is interesting to note that harmonic structure in music arises as Western materialism arises, disintegrates at the time that materialism comes to be questioned, and that the solution of rhythmic structure, traditional to the Orient, is arrived at with us just at the time that we profoundly sense our need for that other tradition of the Orient: peace of mind, self-knowledge.

[Cage's Studio-Home]

This morsel of gossip appeared in Junior Harper's Bazaar (June, 1946); its point, in this context, is that a truly original imagination lets nothing escape its creativity.

John Cage is a revolutionary young composer from California. He's been acclaimed for his percussion music and his compositions for "prepared" pianos—he specially arranges them by tempering their strings with all sorts of objects: nails, screws, rubber bands, paper clips, clothespins. Results: curiously archaic music, like ghost harpsichords playing or mice dancing upon piano keys. Forced from his Manhattan studio because the house in which it was located was to be converted, John Cage decided that he would have to find a new studio even better than the old. It would have to be inexpensive, large, light, in Manhattan, and a suitable place in

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