

## Uncaged: John Cage and Conceptual Approaches to Participatory Music-making

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### *Abstract*

*This paper will explore conceptual approaches to participatory music-making, with a focus on the work of John Cage. Cage relied primarily on a performer-audience model of music-making; which seems paradoxical, as a non-hierarchical participatory model seems more in line with his philosophy. While his compositional methods appeared to indicate a desire for self-effacement and collaboration, the resultant works were often quite far from models of non-hierarchical co-creation. However, Cage was a composer who concerned himself primarily with illuminating concepts and demonstrating processes, rather than producing beautiful 'objects' and musical commodities. Embracing a community-based experimental model of participation involves departing from traditional Western art music paradigms that regard 'sound' primarily as a consumable 'product' and the individual composer as all-knowing, all-powerful and central to any experience of music. This movement from self-aggrandisement to self-effacement; from hierarchy to acceptance of difference; from occupation of territory to nomadic adventure; from clichés and 'norms' to the 'novel' and 'unprecedented', challenges the stature of the 'professional', within the tripartite musical system of composer, performer and listener. Rather than the solitary composer focusing on the creation of a 'fixed' text containing written instructions for its sonic actualisation, musical composition can be centred around the designing of events that encourage social cooperation. These events would be, ideally, non-hierarchical and participant-self-determining but most importantly, always in motion and a state of flux.*

### Uncaged: John Cage and participatory music-making

Experimental music can be difficult to listen to. Auditory pleasure in its usual guise is often perceived as absent. The music of John Cage is, for many listeners, no exception. However, it is worth noting that his primary concern was the exploration of concepts and the demonstration of processes, rather than the manufacture of beautiful, 'listenable' musical commodities (Cage, 1963). This approach to music-making is not 'market-driven', and is, understandably, often perceived as annoyingly pretentious. According to the experimental composer Cornelius Cardew (1973), it could also be viewed as elitist. Cardew implies that experimental music appeals to the select few who have access to the concepts explored in the works. It is their privileged education that enables them to appreciate and enjoy it. However, in terms of Cage's work, a

‘conventional’ musical education can also, paradoxically, serve as an impediment to an appreciation of his music. His work demands a ‘letting go’ of preconceived notions about what music ‘should be’ and a ‘forgetting’, in relation to what it traditionally ‘has been’.

Is an experimental music that arouses the listener’s curiosity and interest conceivable? Is it plausible that, perhaps, this tentative apprehension could develop into a pleasurable encounter? What adaptations are necessary to facilitate this? Brian Eno (as cited in Nyman, 1999), pointed out that what needs to change is not the music but instead our perception of it.<sup>1</sup> The importance of ‘self-alteration’ to facilitate changes in sound perception, enabling the listener to embrace ‘unintended’ sounds as ‘music’, was discussed at length by Cage (1961), many times and many years previously (p.8).<sup>2</sup> However, I think it is essential to go further, and propose that holistic participation, in the creation and performance of music, may be the most important ingredient, in terms of enabling a more profound and ‘comprehensively-human’ engagement.

### **John Cage: The Dissolution of the Tripartite Musical System.**

John Cage said the following, in a 1972 interview, with Hans Helms:

I like . . . music by many, many people. And here, more and more in my performances, I try to bring about a situation in which there is no difference between the audience and the performers. And I’m not speaking of audience participation in something designed by the composer, but rather I’m speaking of the music which arises through the activity of both performers and so-called audience. This is a difficult thing to bring about, and I’ve made only a few attempts so far and with mixed results, you might say.

The other kind of music that interests me is one which has been traditionally interesting and enjoyable down through the ages, and that’s music which one makes oneself without constraining others. If you can do it by yourself you’re not in a situation of telling someone else what to do. But I find the conventional musical situation of a composer telling others what to do, I find that something which I now don’t myself instigate. If someone plays my earlier music in which that situation takes place, then I don’t make objections, but I myself would not have organized the concert. (pp.82-83)

Cage appears to be advocating a movement towards a community-based experimental model of participatory music. This involves, in a conceptual sense, a movement from self-aggrandisement to self-effacement; from hierarchy to acceptance of difference; from the occupation of territory to nomadic adventure; from clichés and ‘norms’ to the ‘novel’ and ‘unprecedented’. A music that is created by ‘many people’ has the potential to challenge the stature of the ‘professional’ composer and performer. It is quite a departure from traditional practices of Western art music, where the composer is commonly viewed as all-knowing, all-powerful and central to any experience of music. In contemporary Western art music there is, more often than not, a division

between the performer and the audience; a hierarchical and static relationship that is characterised by separation, with the silent and 'inactive' audience subjugated to the 'master narrative' of the performer or composer. A score, according to experimental composer, Cardew, is "something beyond you, some authority which you are trying to fulfil" (Nyman, 1999, p.127). Useful metaphors, in terms of understanding these different styles of music-making, are those of the 'rhizomatic', and the 'arborescent'.<sup>3</sup> The arborescent is concerned with having a privileged viewpoint: Developing a master narrative. It is a hierarchical, 'centre-periphery' type model; in contrast to the rhizomatic model, which has no privileged viewpoint and does not subject other regimes to itself. The rhizomatic model is a useful metaphor for participatory performance, whereas the arborescent model more aptly describes traditional hierarchical performance styles.

According to Helms (1972), Cage's interest in incidentally arising sounds and noises led ultimately to the desire to include the public in musical praxis. In this interview with Helms, he appears to embrace the idea of the dissolution of the tripartite system of composer, performer, and audience. This was not a new idea for Cage. He had made several attempts, primarily in the late sixties and early seventies, to audition participatory designs. Most notably, with compositions such as *Newport Mix* (1967), *33 1/3* (1969), and *Demonstration of The Sounds of the Environment* – an early 'sound-walk' (1971). The piece for which he is perhaps most notorious, *4'33"* (1952), I would not include in this category. As Lydia Goehr (1992) suggests, in terms of *4'33"*, Cage has not gone as far as "undermining the force of the work-concept *within* the musical institution" (p.264). There is still a separation of the composer, performer, and audience, both physically and conceptually. Ideally a participatory work would involve considerable interpenetration between these separate roles, or perhaps even dissolve the boundaries between them entirely.

According to David Revill (1992), Cage's interest during the time in question, was "not simply audience participation, which maintained the dichotomies ... but a music by everyone" (p.243). Cage declared, "the sooner I get on unemployment compensation the better off I am" (Revill, p.243). He had already asserted, in *A Year from Monday*, in 1967:

The reason I am less and less interested in music is not only that I find environmental sounds and noises more useful aesthetically than the sounds produced by the world's musical cultures, but that, when you get right down to it, a composer is simply someone who tells other people what to do. I find this an unattractive way of getting things done (Cage, as cited in Revill, p.243).

### **What Cage Did Next: A Paradoxical Trajectory**

Revill (1992) points out that, "scarcely had Cage said 'I am less and less interested in music', than he was writing more and more music, for more conventional instrumentation, [&] using more conservative notation." (p.245) It seems that, despite the views that he purported to hold, with respect to audience involvement, he continued to function, primarily, as a composer who told others what to do. There were only a few more isolated attempts to specifically test the composer/performer/audience

boundaries,<sup>4</sup> before Cage ‘moved on’ to other projects. Fortunately, Cage was a man who embraced his contradictions and welcomed change. As Warren Burt (2013) has pointed out, Cage was not concerned with “constructing a coherent philosophy of life, music or art - he was applying ideas to the situations he found himself in” (personal communication, August 26).

If Cage had pursued his interest in creating ‘a music by everyone’ to its penultimate destination, it may have led to a form of redundancy: The end of his career as he understood it. Or would it? Was he primarily concerned with maintaining his career as a composer? Goehr argues that this may have been partially true, in order to honour a promise once made to Schoenberg (p.264). Although, I am not sure that a promise to Schoenberg can be drawn on as a tenable explanation, for what seems to be a disjunction between his conceptual stance at the time and his ongoing creative practice. Burt suggests Cage may have simply become interested in other things:

The main reason for the efflorescence of scores after the early 70s was simply that people were asking him for scores, and as a very polite member of the elegant Protestant American middle class of that period, he felt that it would be rude to refuse their requests. Answering people’s requests was a way he felt he could be useful. And when the request comes from a virtuoso, then the problems become very fascinating indeed (ibid.).

It appears that in the final years of his life Cage was no longer particularly concerned with the dissolution of the tripartite musical paradigm. If he did still harbour the view that the ‘composer’ was, in effect, ‘dead’, any evidence of this conceptual stance in his creative work, had long since vanished. Could it be that Cage’s idealism had been tempered by a necessary pragmatism, when confronted with the crushing reality of Western art music concert hall conventions? Goehr questions whether Cage came to “the compositional decisions that he did, out of recognition that people will only listen to sounds around them if they are forced to do so under traditional formal constraints” (p.264). He may have come to the decision that the public was not ready for the sort of anarchic freedom he was interested in facilitating. Cage often drew on Henry David Thoreau’s statement from his 1849 essay, *Civil Disobedience*, that maintained, “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” (1966, p.224). According to the composer and theorist, Stephen Miles (2010), this sentence sums up perfectly Cage’s politics and aesthetics: “the first clause suggests a desire for unbridled freedom, but the second makes that same freedom conditional on [personal] discipline” (p.127).

Cage resolved, after his unfortunate experience with *Atlas Eclipticalis* and the New York Philharmonic in 1964, to “find a way to give people freedom without encouraging them to be irresponsible” (Burt, 2013). He insisted that:

If freedom is given to people who are not disciplined ... who are not, in other words, changed individuals but who remain people with particular likes and dislikes, then, of course, the giving of freedom is of no interest whatsoever. But when it is given to disciplined people, then you see-as we have seen, I believe, in our performances

with David Berhrman, Gordon Mumma, David Tudor, Alvin Lucier, and Lowell Cross ... together with Marcel and Teeny Duchamp and myself in Toronto ... in that case you give an instance of a society which has changed? Not an individual who has changed but a group of individuals, and you show, as I've wanted to do, the practicality of anarchy. A group of people acting without anyone of them telling all of them what to do (Cage, 1972, p.81).

Cage was discussing the performance of a piece called *Reunion*, in 1968. He regarded this particular group of performers, as 'disciplined' individuals, who were able to act 'responsibly', and in doing so, put their freedom to good use. Their performance offered a model of a Utopian anarchy that appeared to embody collaborative creativity at its finest. More recently, it has been compellingly suggested, that collaborative creativity works best with a diverse mix of human beings, coming from a variety of backgrounds and with an assortment of experiences (Leadbeater, 2008; Ricchiuto, 1996, p.45). Cage's 'anarchic' ensemble, however, appears to be made up of individuals who hold similar views to his own; individuals drawn from his own intimate social circle of creative artists, musicians, dancers, and intellectuals. David Tudor in particular, had worked closely with Cage for many years and was a performer whom Cage trusted implicitly. He could, apparently, be relied upon to deliver what Cage regarded as "the 'correct' and 'proper' interpretation" of his pieces (Piekut, 2011, p.58). Cage's preferencing of one interpretation of his work over another, and his veneration of certain behaviours and attitudes, seems to indicate remnants of an elitist and hierarchical ideology. This way of thinking reinforces the belief that the majority of people, need a 'higher authority', to demonstrate to them how to behave 'appropriately'. Cage suggests, that if left to their own devices, at least in relation to music, they would not be capable of much more than, "stringing together arbitrarily their own learned stupidities, the threadbare cliches of their thinking" (Cage, 1972, p.80).

Regardless, it is important to remember that Cage discusses 'discipline', as a conscious practice of moving beyond the ego, with its likes and dislikes. This was a practice he personally embodied, in terms of his own "grueling compositional processes" (Piekut, p.53). The pre-eminent 'responsibility' he had in mind was, perhaps, the act of working together selflessly, and collaboratively, to challenge the "old-guard cultural institution" (Piekut, p.40). However, people habituated to playing out the role of onlookers may not be accustomed to receiving invitations to action, particularly action that emanates out of their own volition. When this action involves a profound shift away from familiar paradigms and collective behavioural 'norms', there may be initial difficulties, as personal power is reclaimed. Cage's experience with the New York Philharmonic is a case in point. The disempowered musicians, trapped within the hierarchical power structure of the orchestra, were also ill-prepared, and negatively primed by Bernstein, who "had little artistic or philosophical sympathy for Cage and his associates" (Piekut, p.21). Their hostility towards Cage, and resistance to performing his music, is understandable within this context.

Cage advocated the giving up of narrow perceptions in relation to music. This has, at times, been interpreted as amounting to the giving up of music itself (Cage, 1961, p.8). However, Cage's idea was that of enabling the listener to break through the

confines of the ego, with its likes and dislikes; opening consciousness to the vastness and complexity of the sounds around us, and hence facilitating a more comprehensive appreciation of the world that enters through the senses. In a similar act of self-effacement, I wonder what would happen if the idea of the ‘composer-as-expert’, was put aside. This would enable a more comprehensive exploration of what human beings are capable of, individually and collectively, when they are liberated from their role as specialists. In any case, it does not appear to serve any useful purpose to continue to assume that contemporary audiences are not ready to take on the responsibility of functioning as intelligent and creative music makers. As Cage (1961) pointed out, changes of this magnitude can make one feel like everything is lost, when in fact there is everything to be gained (p.8).

Considering the accelerating, environmental issues we are faced with on a global scale, it may also be time to re-examine the usefulness of narrowly and rigidly compartmentalised disciplines, beyond the field of music. A comprehensive ‘unpacking’ of redundant models, that serve to limit the collective potential of human beings and encourage competition, seems long overdue. It is a matter of urgency that we learn to work creatively together, as Buckminster Fuller pointed out more than 40 years ago, for the good of all humanity (Fuller, 1969).

### **Backed into a Conceptual Corner: The ‘Death’ of the Composer**

The ideas discussed above, in terms of redefining and redesigning the idea of the composer, have flowed into my doctoral research project, in a thoroughly comprehensive manner. Rather than exploring the more traditional role of the solitary composer working alone, the focus of my research has become the exploration of ‘musical composition’ as a ‘community event’. This involves designing sound installations that enable inclusive, creative collaboration and participatory music-making. Nevertheless, I also enjoy solitary experimentation with sound, and particularly with rhythm. I consider this a valid and personally therapeutic form of ‘composing’; a word which simply means to ‘put things together’.<sup>5</sup> I can do this for myself (thanks to modern recording software), for my own pleasure, without the need to constrain others. However, if I were to notate musical instructions, and ask another person to carry them out, the issues become more complex and problematic. It is important to remember that instructions of this nature, generally do not relate to life and death matters. They are not instructions for building a levy to hold back a flood, and they are not about finding a way to halt the progress of climate change. What I cannot quite come to terms with, is the idea that embedded in this request—that of asking another to carry out my instructions—is the belief that my ideas are important enough to ask others to dedicate a considerable amount of time to them. In this hypothetical scenario, if my work was ‘experimental’ in the ‘Cagean’ sense of the word, the performance outcome could be unpredictable, and the performer(s) may have to endure public humiliation and ridicule. Nevertheless, musicians sometimes dedicate their professional lives to mastering a set of skills, so they can perform the repertoire of a particular composer. Having said that, if a performer is simply playing my score and carrying out my instructions, with little creative input of their own, what have I made of them? It seems to me that I have, even inadvertently,

classified them, constricted them, and literally imprisoned them in their discipline. I regard most human beings as potentially holistically talented and capable of their own limitless creativity. In which case, why is what I have to say more important than what they could possibly come up with, alone, or together with others as a group, where creativity through diversity could flourish? There is much to consider here, even without venturing into a discussion of the problematic passive role of the audience, in the ‘composer-performer-listener’ triplicity.

At this point, it seems important to acknowledge that not everyone thinks in the way that I do. Perhaps this is my path alone: One among a diverse multitude of paths. Many people enjoy having others tell them what to do, and many enjoying telling others what to do. The English composer Roger Smalley, for example, enjoys playing the work of Beethoven. He observed, “personally, one of my life’s great pleasures is to do what Beethoven tells me to do via the notes of his piano sonatas. I don’t feel coerced either” (Revill, p.244). There will always be a place for musical listening in its many guises, and indeed for a wide variety of musical ‘happenings’, and there is no reason why this cannot continue. What I am proposing is an expansion rather than a contraction of potential experiences. The shaking up, or even the complete dissolution of the disciplinary boundaries of composer, performer, and audience, may result in new trans-disciplinary fields that more closely resemble the sort of Utopian anarchism Cage was interested in. Something we desperately need on a global scale, is to enable the potential for interpenetrative, efferent and afferent experiences, that lead not to a contraction but to an expansion of the human being; of both their ‘personality’ and their capacity for ‘expansive’ action.<sup>6</sup>

### **Compositional Redundancy: Potential Solutions**

My current ‘compositional’ creative practice involves the exploration of sound installation designs that encourage participatory music-making, through creating movement and interpenetration within the tripartite musical system. Why not define composition as the act of providing a space that enables collaborative musical experimentation? ‘Composing’, could involve preparing and furnishing an environment and supplying musical ‘toys’. In terms of my own Ph.D. project, this will involve ‘hanging’ one hundred ‘refurbished’ drums (with mallets attached), in a public space. These are the ‘toys’ which the participants will be given permission to play with, ‘as they wish’. The type of play I am suggesting, is creative free-play. This is the type of play a young child engages in while learning about the world and social relationships. Children do not need to be told how to play with their toys. This would take away the pleasure and remove the therapeutical benefit. Collaborative ‘in the moment’ musical composition is primarily a type of play, and does not require instructions from an external higher authority.

Compositional designs can be viewed as ‘models’ or ‘maps’ for the facilitation of social cooperation. The social model I am leaning towards would be ideally, non-hierarchical and participant-self-determining, but most importantly, always in motion and a state of flux. Cardew pointed out when discussing the concept of ‘accompaniment’, that “if you get a lot of people engaging in activities in the same space

... then these activities will accommodate themselves to each other” (Cardew, 1975). This is a similar social phenomenon to the ‘entrainment’ commonly observed within ‘drumming circles’. It refers to moments where there is a shift out of a hierarchical model and into a self-regulatory synchronisation of rhythm (Hull, 1998). Although in some, it may lie dormant, we none-the-less have this collective ability to co-ordinate our actions; without having someone, in a position of authority, telling us what to do. This somewhat mysterious ability, and its implications beyond the field of music, can, I think, inspire optimism. Given a conducive environment, and the right tools, humans can create together, in ways that we could never have individually imagined. As individuals we do not need to have the answer. It may be enough to simply pose the question and allow cooperative creative intelligence to unfold.

When an audience is transformed into participants, aesthetic considerations that are often hinged upon economic realities, upon the act of performing to a paying public, are removed, and there is more freedom to experiment; to learn, and practice ways of relating to and communicating with each other musically, in the moment. It can be an inclusive process, which celebrates diversity. This is important, because different people have different needs, for different kinds of music. Within a participatory model, attachment to any particular musical outcome is not required. It no longer matters whether, or not, the sounds produced are skillful, complex, beautiful, or in any way interesting. No one dies if the pulsation shifts, or if we sing out of pitch. We are not talking life and death matters. It is not a field of experience that derives any benefit from competition, with its winners and losers. Experimentation with new musical models, may be a safe way of constructively working on some of the “self-inflicted problems of our species”, and this could be considered optimistically Utopian in the best sense of the word (Retallack, 1996, p.xxxii).

### **Deleuze, Cage, Buckminster Fuller: Conceptual Approaches to Research and Creative Practice**

I will, for a moment, veer towards a discussion of the French post-structuralist philosopher Gilles Deleuze; as the theoretical component of my Ph.D. research is focused on the creation of what could be termed a conceptual ‘assemblage’. It involves a synthesis of ideas, channeled through the thinking of not only John Cage, but also Deleuze. It incorporates, primarily, my ‘reading’ and synthesis of the two and a consideration of what this can offer my compositional/practical work. In the process, in a sense, we will become ‘many’, as this process of relationship building will be characterised by complexity, encompassing a multiplicity of ways of connecting and interacting. Though placed as we were and are, at different geographical locations around the globe, in our ‘multiplicity’ we will produce, in a synergistic fashion, ideas and actions that may be universally-humanly relevant, applicable and useful. There may be applications within, and also beyond, trans-disciplinary creative practice.

Of all those regarded as ‘post-structural’ theorists, Deleuze can be one of the more difficult to grasp. Jon Roffe cautions with respect to second hand interpretations of Deleuze’s work, suggesting that an “orthodoxy seems to have installed itself”, within the field of Deleuzian studies (Jones & Roffe, 2009, p.1). Secondary sources are

sometimes guilty of misinterpreting his ideas, or ‘dumbing down’ his concepts in ways that belie the complexity and creativity of the original texts. Roffe points out that:

Deleuze’s thought is one which unfolds internal to an examination of the thought of others ...

Deleuze’s method is primarily a method of Reading ... [his] strategy is more geared towards conceptual and functional differentiation, exploring the horizons of ideas ... and bringing forth the ‘machinic’ and operative features of the philosophies with which he engages ... there is no way to grasp the philosophy of Deleuze in itself. It must be approached through the many doorways and intersecting paths provided by the multitude of others with whom Deleuze’s work engages (2009, p.1).

The philosophy of Deleuze emphasises the connections or relationships between things. As Claire Colebrook explains, in a Deleuzian conception “to think is not to represent life but to transform and act upon life” (2002, p.24). Rather than a philosophical system concerned with ‘meaning’, Deleuze offers imaginative (though still rigorous) ways of thinking that can move one out of conventionality, and for this reason perhaps, his ideas can be (and have been) co-opted when attempting to conceptualise creative practice.<sup>7</sup> Of particular relevance to my project are the two texts he co-authored with the psychotherapist, activist and philosopher Félix Guattari.<sup>8</sup> Deleuze and Guattari were aware of Cage’s existence, as they mention aspects of his work several times in their co-authored texts.<sup>9</sup> Up to this point, I have found no direct references to Deleuze in Cage’s work. Their work was, however, taking place in a co-existence of seemingly disparate elements, that if brought together, could produce interesting ‘accidents’ and unimagined moments of intersection. Although the two men have obviously emerged from different traditions, there appears to be, even at first glance, an organic and harmonious relationship between their philosophies.

Another influence on my work, particularly the practical aspects, has been the ‘Comprehensive Anticipatory Design Science’ of Buckminster Fuller. An idea that I seem to perpetually return to, is Fuller’s suggestion that the way to bring about far-reaching change, is to work on changing a person’s environment, rather than trying to change the person (Fuller, 1979). Cage was profoundly influenced by Fuller, whom he described as “an ‘apolitical’ problem-solver of the highest order” (Cage, as cited in Piekut, 2011, p.24). The conceptual ‘leaping off’ point for my ‘compositional’ work is in line with Fuller’s thinking. Namely, that we can take as an ‘a-priori’, a collection of well defined preferred states for planet earth and its multi-various inhabitants, and assume certain ‘givens’ (Fuller, 1969). In the case of my project these ‘givens’, are philosophical concepts that attempt to articulate the potential for satisfying and holistic human expression and action. I am also drawing on Deleuze (amongst others), in viewing the human being, not as a static subject, but instead, as an assemblage of forces and movements in constant flux (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). These conceptual ‘starting points’ or ‘preferred state ideas’ can be summarised as follows:

1. The importance of participation - humans benefit and derive pleasure from what I will call, for the moment, 'music', and, even more so, from active involvement in music. The neuroscientist Daniel Levitin (2006), claims that the fundamental importance of music within all cultures is related primarily to deeply ingrained neural circuitry of the brain, specifically dedicated to music (p.260). Michael Taut (2008), also claims that participation in the arts is a necessity for healthy brain function. He points out that:

The brain needs to engage in combining forms of lines and colours, creating vertical and horizontal layers of sounds of different timbres, building physical shapes and movements of the human body in dance, in order to build, sharpen, maintain, and create order in its perceptual machinery as an essential aspect of brain function. (p.25)

2. The synergy of creative collaboration - Charles Leadbeater (2008) claims the idea that creativity always comes from a single person with a brilliant insight is a myth. He suggests that most creative ideas come from people blending and mixing things. He suggests that one of the key ingredients for stimulating creativity through collaborative action is diversity. Participants need to think differently and have different knowledge.
3. The importance of sustainable activity - human behaviour as inextricably connected to the human's environment. In terms of my project, I am also using the word 'sustainable' in reference to an approach to composition. This is an approach concerned with the initiation of processes, rather than pertaining to the continuing production and consumption of musical 'products'.

Technological development and the trend towards unification on a global scale has initiated massive changes in the ways that music is created, thought about and listened to. This is a situation which, according to Hulse and Nesbitt (2010), "puts into question notions of closed cultural contexts or self-contained musical systems and their theoretical models" (p.1). Postmodernist thought embraces trans-disciplinary approaches: 'holistic' or 'open' approaches which echo rhizomatic ways of thinking; where everything is moving and able to connect with anything else; where boundaries can shift and dissolve. David Bennett (2008), also maintains that postmodernism offers a new paradigm that embraces "pluralism and eclecticism" (p.73). As Cage (1979) observed more than 30 years ago, "the fences [are coming] down and the labels are being removed. An up-to-date aquarium has all the fish swimming together in one huge tank" (p.179). The trajectory of Cage's life encompassed a multiplicity of, at times seemingly contradictory, ideas. The field around him is demonstrable of rhizomatic growth; not only the field of multiplicities that has emerged from the dissemination of his ideas and actions, but also the field that encompasses his many and diverse influences. His lifetime of collaboration, including many trans-disciplinary projects, and his highly conceptual work in the area of experimental music, exemplifies the many ways in which personal research can feed into creative practice and how this creative work can then flow back into the theoretical.

There are connections between the concept of the 'rhizome' and Smith and Dean's (2009) model for research and practice. They suggest that the relationship between research and creative work is "multidimensional, reciprocal and iterative." (p.10). The conceptual and the practical are not necessarily aligned, correspondent, or connected in any simple fashion. Both fields could be considered capable of promulgating unique, although interpenetrative 'events', in their own right. The conceptual, or virtual 'event' does not require a direct realisation in the 'actual' world in a linear or causal fashion (Shaviro, 2007, p.9). Whereas, it could be suggested that although what appear to be 'discreet' events are not necessarily 'separate'; in the sense that 'everything' is interconnected and interpenetrative to varying degrees, a virtual event does not require actualisation, but is rather an event in itself, and equally 'real', for want of a better word. Although the idea of the 'event' appears to be a pre-occupation of Deleuze, Alfred North Whitehead also suggests that the world "is made of events, and nothing but events: Happenings rather than things, verbs rather than nouns, processes rather than substances. Becoming is the deepest dimension of Being. Even a seemingly solid and permanent object is an event; or, better, a multiplicity and a series of events" (Shaviro, p.1). Shaviro maintains that for Whitehead, "there is ... no stable and essential distinction ... between mind and matter, or between subject and object ... the experimenter cannot be separated from the experiment, because they are both present in the world in the same manner" (pp.1, 9).

## **Conclusion**

The arbitrary distinctions that we draw between 'this and that' conceptual field, as we identify patterns and assign categories, while attempting to 'organise' ourselves conceptually, have become redundant. A musicology that shields itself from creative action is in many ways restrained. Similarly, a creative practice that does not involve at least some form of reflective contemplation, is also limited in scope. It is possible that the blending of theoretical and practical approaches may enable the researcher-practitioner to traverse new terrain. The usefulness of continuing to imagine a distinct separation between these different research categories, between various art forms and disciplines, and indeed, as has been discussed, between composer, performer and audience, is questionable.

The dissolution of the professional discipline of musical composition, as an elite area of specialisation, could be perceived as a threat to the livelihood of professional composers. The 'zenith' as far as Cage was concerned may seem to be simply an appreciation of sounds without any specific work being done to order them, but he pointed out that coming to an "acceptance of how things are does not necessarily lead to 'non-action'" (Cage, 1963). He suggested, that, "theatre takes place all the time, wherever one is, and art simply facilitates persuading one this is the case" (1963). Attempts to understand why Cage abandoned his ideas around audience involvement, will probably always remain largely speculative and inconclusive. Over the course of his life, he relied primarily on a performer-audience model of music-making; although, at times, a model of non-hierarchical participation seems more in line with his changing philosophy (Kostelanetz, 1987). His methods appear to indicate a desire

for self-effacement; however, his work often seems quite far removed from such an intention. This remains something of a paradox.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> “So if this was ‘experimental music’, what was the experiment? Perhaps it was the continual re-asking of the question ‘what also could music be?’, the attempt to discover what makes us able to experience something as music. And from it, we concluded that music didn’t have to have rhythms, melodies, harmonies, structures, even notes, that it didn’t have to involve instruments, musicians and special venues. It was accepted that music was not something intrinsic to certain arrangements of things—to certain ways of organising sounds—but was actually a process of apprehending that we, as listeners, could choose to conduct. It moved the site of music from ‘out there’ to ‘in here’. If there is a lasting message from experimental music, it’s this: music is something your mind does.” See Brian Eno, “Foreword”, in Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 1999, p.xii.
- <sup>2</sup> This is beautifully articulated by Cage (with respect to turning towards ‘unintended’ sounds) as follows: “This turning is psychological and seems at first to be a giving up of everything that belongs to humanity—for a musician, the giving up of music. This psychological turning leads to the world of nature, where, gradually or suddenly, one sees that humanity and nature, not separate, are in this world together; that nothing was lost when everything was given away. In fact everything is gained. In musical terms, any sounds may occur in any combination and in any continuity.” See John Cage, *Silence*, 1961, p.8.
- <sup>3</sup> The metaphor of the ‘rhizome’ is used extensively by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. See “Introduction: Rhizome” in *Thousand Plateaus*, 1987, p.3.
- <sup>4</sup> For example, works such as *Concerto Grosso* (1979), *A House Full of Music* (1982), and also *Music Circus for Children* (1984).
- <sup>5</sup> Susan McClary suggests that the word ‘composition’ “summons up the figure of a semi-divine being, struck by holy inspiration, and delivering forth ineffable delphic utterances”, but is quick to remind us that the literal meaning of the word compose is simply ‘to put together’. See Susan McClary, “Afterword,” in Attali, *Noise*, 1985, p.156.
- <sup>6</sup> Bergson suggested “that which is usually held to be a greater complexity of the psychical state appears to us, from our point of view, to be a greater dilatation of the whole personality, which, normally narrowed down by action, expands with the unscrewing of the vice in which it has allowed itself to be squeezed, and, always whole and undivided, spreads itself over a wider and wider surface.” See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 1912, pp.14–15.
- <sup>7</sup> “Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) and his work with Félix Guattari (1930–1992) have had a significant and wide-ranging impact on disciplines as diverse as mathematics, architecture, law, science, education, economics, music and the arts.” See Sally Macarthur, *Towards a Twenty-First-Century Feminist Politics of Music*. 2010, 1.
- <sup>8</sup> See Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 1984; Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987.
- <sup>9</sup> See Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 267, 269, 344, 545 and *Anti-Oedipus*, 371.

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**Biography**

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