

**Rob Haskins**

Associate Professor and Graduate Program Coordinator in the Department of Music at the University of New Hampshire. He holds a D.M.A. in harpsichord performance and literature and a Ph.D. in Musicology at the Eastman School of Music.

<http://robhaskins.net>

## John Cage and Anarchism

### *Notes on Sources and Musical Evocations*

As John Cage rose to increasing prominence throughout the long 1960s, his interests widened to include social questions that had been raised by his employment of indeterminacy in composition and performance. Probably the best-known example of this concern appears in an account of the musicians who performed any sounds they wished during early performances of his *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1958): "I must find a way to let people be free without their becoming foolish. So that their freedom will make them noble.... My problems have become social rather than musical."<sup>1</sup>

From this point forward, Cage sought to consider the problems of power with its potential negative effects and the responsibilities of human beings living and working together. Significantly, he found a way to approach both concerns through his understanding of anarchistic thought in both Europe and America. Overt references to anarchism appeared in his writings as early as 1965 and continued throughout his lifetime. Indeed, some statements closely echo classic writers on anarchism. In a symposium on experimental cinema, for instance, a questioner contrasted Cage's activities with the revolutionary spirit of contemporary youth reflected in the work of Jonas Mekas, asking if it is truly possible to create non-intentional art. Cage's response addressed revolution, not intention:

"The change, the revolution that we want will not deprive us of our individuality. This must be increased and intensified. What we want is a change in the means by which we live. At present the controls are coercive, controls having to do with politics and economics, and not at all to do with this intense personalism and individuality which we know we need... the hope is that the present coercive and bureaucratic powers of our society will dwindle, wither, and fall away."<sup>2</sup>

The quotation resonates with one by Errico Malatesta, part of the source material for Cage's long mesostic poem *Anarchy* (1988):

"Revolution is the destruction of all coercive ties; it is the autonomy of groups, of communes, of regions; revolution is the free federation brought about by a desire for brotherhood, by individual and collective interests, by the needs of production and defense; revolution is the constitution of innumerable free groupings based on ideas, wishes and tastes of all-kinds that exist among the people."<sup>3</sup>

Both men referred to freedom from coercive forces that should disappear in favor of autonomy. Malatesta framed his ideals more explicitly with respect to various groups of people, while Cage stressed individuality; nevertheless, he identified individuality as a shared need that formed an important component of community.

It is a commonplace to describe Cage's music as anarchistic. However, some writers have not fully

traced the sources for his conception of anarchism; in his recent biography, for instance, Kenneth Silverman strongly implies that Cage's ideas derive principally from Henry David Thoreau.<sup>4</sup> Others have oversimplified the anarchistic component of his music by equating anarchism with a dangerous state of chaos and lawlessness, and thereby misconstrued how concepts of anarchism inform the compositions. Arnold Whittall calls attention to what he senses as a paradoxical co-existence of freedom and control in Cage's music: he claims, for instance, that the qualifications to Cage's *0'00"* (1962) prevent the work from evoking anarchism as successfully as possible — for example, that the disciplined action chosen by the performer cannot be the performance of a musical work.<sup>5</sup> Richard Kostelanetz, who has claimed that Cage's anarchism is more important to the composer than his oft-cited Zen Buddhism, identifies six elements that make his work specifically anarchistic: (1) the presence of all participants as equals; (2) the absence of a person in charge, such as a conductor; (3) the formal expression of chaos; (4) a tendency toward levity; (5) the acknowledgment that any performance venue is as legitimate as another; and (6) the desire not to hold the audience prisoner, but to give them the opportunity to leave whenever they wish.<sup>6</sup> Kostelanetz cites the ambitious and cacophonous *HPSCHD* (1969) as the best exemplar of anarchism in his work, introducing definitions that can thus apply only to a handful of Cage's works.<sup>7</sup>

Matters become complicated, however, when one examines a number of other Cage pieces that the composer thought exemplary of anarchism, pieces which resemble *HPSCHD* not at all. For example, Cage described *Fourteen* (1990), a concerto for bowed piano and ensemble, as a specific example of an anarchistic society. The work does not accord with the first, fourth, and sixth of Kostelanetz's criteria.<sup>8</sup> I propose that such works can be understood as evocations of anarchism after becoming familiar with the anarchistic writings that Cage himself knew and also recognizing the anarchistic roots of ideas in the vast network of thought that he appropriated from various sources. This mode of anarchism embraces a number of possible identities and contingent configurations — it even allows for the sort of discipline that Whittall and other critics claim to contradict the anarchistic spirit of Cage's politics and aesthetics.

## Definitions

To begin, I should acknowledge that anarchism is not so much a doctrine as an ensemble of contingent beliefs; it lacks a strong theoretical base, lacks even consensus regarding many of its defining characteristics. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, for instance, the citation for the word "anarchy" embraces a variety of definitions. The first includes the familiar senses of political disorder and absence of government; the second summarizes the sense in which I will explore it here: "A theoretical social state in which there is no governing person or body of persons, but each individual has absolute liberty (without implication of disorder)."<sup>9</sup> The earliest advocates of classical anarchism generally disallowed violence, particularly within the fully realized anarchic community. According to Peter Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist who authored a widely-acclaimed article for the eleventh edition of *Encyclopædia Britannica*, anarchism involved "a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government," where harmony arises through "free agreements concluded between the various groups."<sup>10</sup>

The anarchists advocated the rejection of politics because their underlying principles of property ownership, profit, and competition allow a small minority of people to control and exploit the majority. Instead, they proposed the creation of small communities who came together as the result of mutually held beliefs and interests, who voluntarily pooled their resources. Any other kind of system ultimately operated in a coercive manner; as formulated by Victor S. Yarros, a writer of Ukrainian descent associated with the American anarchists, all such systems ultimately aim to enforce their own concept of what is right, removing the individual's right to determine that for herself.<sup>11</sup> Once the individual's right to make such decisions is curtailed, a governmental system eventually creates a new elite and a new disenfranchised majority.

Another important aspect of anarchism concerns the tension between the individual and the group, which underpins its various developmental lines in Europe and in the United States. Specifically, American anarchism tended toward individualism more than did the European model, which stressed collective action; Cage knew about this distinction through his acquaintance with James Martin's *Men Against the State*, a history of American anarchism published in 1953.<sup>12</sup>

The order of an anarchistic community embodies considerably greater differentiation and flexibility than that of present traditional configurations of society. Kropotkin describes this situation in terms that strongly evoke Cage's aesthetic: as "an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees." The society would never be fixed in any way, but its harmony would "result from an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment" of equilibrium between multitudinous forces and influences.<sup>13</sup>

## Sources

We know very little about Cage's political upbringing and the formation of his political beliefs. Given his parents' activities and intelligence, and the artists and intellectuals with whom the composer socialized, it may be reasonable to assume that he belonged to a group similar to the one described by David A. Hollinger: a collection of intellectuals including both white Anglo-Saxon Protestants and Jews who shared a liberal sensibility and a faith in a cosmopolitan identity resulting from the fusion of individual cultural backgrounds.<sup>14</sup>

Modest events in Cage's childhood and early maturity give an indication of his future development. In "Other People Think", a prize-winning entry in a high school oration contest, he criticized American "capitalists" who exploited the Latino countries in which they had invested, hoping that the two cultures could come to understand and value their differences.<sup>15</sup> Other early sources offer further suggestions of this development — for instance, his senior high school yearbook, which noted his tendency for being radical.<sup>16</sup> During Cage's tenure at Seattle's Cornish School, he closely associated with a number of leftist individuals including Bonnie Bird's husband Ralph Gundlach (who made available the test-tone recordings that he used in *Imaginary Landscape No. 1*) and Melvin Rader; both men, who taught at the University of Washington, were questioned by Washington State's Committee on Un-American Activities, and Gundlach eventually lost his tenured position there. Indeed, Leta E. Miller — who has thoroughly documented such interactions during Cage's Seattle years — observes that the tone of his writings from this time resonate with his friends' political concerns, as in the remark "Percussion music is revolution."<sup>17</sup>

His later years coincided with a renewed interest in anarchism that began to appear particularly during the 1960s, aided by the counterculture movements of that era. George Woodcock, who wrote one of the most important early histories of anarchism in English, reviewed the development of the movement in a short article from 1968. To his surprise, he found anarchistic ideas alive and well, particularly among middle-class youth and intellectuals. Although the movement had gained strength as a result of countercultural ideas, it was by no means restricted to them. By and large, these "new radicals" (Woodcock's term) were more inclined to read a recent author such as Paul Goodman than any of the canonical anarchists, although they understood and applied the movement's foundational principles.<sup>18</sup> Marshall Shatz, the editor of a volume of anarchist writings known to Cage, reiterated Woodcock's findings, admitting that this newer brand of anarchism naturally allied itself to a more ecologically-minded group of people including intellectuals, students, hippies, and similar groups.<sup>19</sup>

Cage cited a number of authors as a part of his work. Many of these writers — including Shatz, Martin, and Goodman — were specifically associated with the history or dissemination of anarchism in the United States; still others, including Emma Goldman and Thoreau, counted among either the group of famous nineteenth-century anarchists or those closely related to the movement's spirit. Example 1 shows selected primary and secondary sources for anarchism that Cage cited. It is not easy to establish a chronology for his reading of these works. He himself said that he did not become aware of Thoreau until 1967, but references to other anarchistic texts

began to appear around 1965.

During this resurgence of anarchism, many of its tenets concomitantly appeared in other utopian constructs such as Marshall McLuhan's global village and Buckminster Fuller's view of a decentralized world community in which all humanity had its survival needs met. In the formulations of both Kostelanetz and Cage, technology proved indispensable to this new way of living. Significantly, in an essay dedicated to and known by Cage, Kostelanetz coined the term "technoanarchism" to describe a use of technology that widely advances anarchistic ideals.<sup>20</sup>

Any discussion of Cage's specific involvement with anarchism, one difficulty concerns the fluid nature of his views on social matters. The composer familiarized himself with a variety of writings by authors who unanimously emphasized the need to improve the world and its caretaking but differed regarding particulars. Because Cage appropriated ideas from many other sources, it is not always easy to separate what he appropriated specifically from, say, McLuhan or Fuller alone, and what of those writers he might have recognized as a reinforcement of specifically anarchistic ideas. Indeed, one can easily find evidence of Cage's kind of political thinking in the Taoist writers that he read in the late 1940s: One passage in Book XI of Zhuangzi's writings (Cage's Kwang-tse) characterizes government as a meddling force that cannot make men good.<sup>21</sup> One can also see how certain ideas of Fuller accord with anarchistic principles that I have previously identified. For one, his notion of flexible space that can be used in many different ways mirrors the flexibility of an anarchistic community, whose aims and constitution undergo constant negotiation and transformation. Fuller remained adamant that politicians were totally unnecessary, that their work offered no effective solutions to world problems. Even so, his orientation was not primarily an anarchistic one but, rather, one that merged technology with a utopian worldview.<sup>22</sup>

*Example 1.* Sources for anarchism mentioned by Cage in writings or interviews.

Avrich, Paul. *Anarchist Portraits*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Berman, Paul, comp. *Quotations from the Anarchists*. New York: Praeger, 1972.

Comte, Auguste. *Système de politique positive; ou, Traité de sociologie instituant la religion de l'humanité*. 4 vols. Paris: Carilian-Goeury, 1851-1854.

Goldman, Emma. *Living My Life*. 2 vols. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1931.

———. *Anarchism and Other Essays*. With a new introduction by Richard Drinnon. New York: Dover, 1969.

Goodman, Paul. *Drawing the Line*. New York: Random House, 1962.

Martin, James J. *Men Against the State: The Expositors of Individualist Anarchism in America, 1827-1908*. With a foreword by Harry Elmer Barnes. De Kalb, IL: Adrian Allen Associates, 1953. Reprint, Colorado Springs, CO: Ralph Myles Publisher, Inc., 1970.

Shatz, Marshall S., ed. *The Essential Works of Anarchism*. New York and Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden and Civil Disobedience*. Edited by Sherman Paul. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960.[\*]

Torrey, Bradford, and Francis H. Allen, eds. *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau*. With a foreword by Walter Harding. 14 vols. New York: Dover, 1962.

## Anarchistic ideas in Cage's writings

Example 2 lists selected references to anarchistic writers to be found within a number of Cage publications. His most explicit remarks on anarchism occur in the eight published installments of his "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)", which appeared between 1965 and 1982. Occasionally, he included direct quotations in the Diary, almost always from Thoreau: "Government is a tree. Its fruit are people (*Essay on Civil Disobedience*)."<sup>23</sup> The only definition of anarchism in these pages, however, invites an alliance with aesthetics: the absence of laws or conventions and the individualization of society.<sup>24</sup> But a need for change persists as a characteristic call. In his formulation, change assumes more of a revivifying quality than a destructive one.<sup>25</sup>

Cage also believed that the increasing role of intelligence as a global resource would facilitate the disappearance of political organizations. This image constitutes a reconfiguration or updating of intelligence itself; for instance, in one passage he equated "divisive intelligence" with politics and economics.<sup>26</sup> Such intelligence depends upon the pooling of resources and, in the spirit of Fuller and McLuhan, the recognition of a global community that must unite to solve its problems. These resources include not only the common needs argued for by the anarchists, but also others that derive from the specifically technological orientation of Cage's thought:

"The question is: what are the things everyone needs regardless of likes and dislikes? Beginning of answer: water, food, shelter, clothing, electricity, audio-visual communication, transportation. Form of answer: global utilities network."<sup>27</sup>

Such statements connect nicely with Kostelanetz's idea of technoanarchism — that is, the use of technology as a means of multiplying possibilities tailored to individual needs, and its potential to create the leisure time necessary for people to devote themselves to artistic pursuits.<sup>28</sup>

Cage maintained a commitment to anarchistic ideas even in his final years. He often took great pains to name himself an anarchist and to invoke anarchistic principles to explain his actions, especially in his refusals to those who would enlist him for help to advance their own causes. Responding to a request for support of the Project Gita-Govinda, a multimedia consortium designed to acquaint Western audiences with the fundamental concepts of Indian music, dance, and art, he wrote:

"We cannot help you either materially or spiritually. We do not want the future of music and dance, though holistic, to be directed by Indian culture any more than we want it to be directed by Islamic culture or, say, Chinese culture. We want it to be global, not yet known or suitable for study but something to be discovered and brought into use for all."<sup>29</sup>

This letter shows Cage deeply skeptical of any ideology, even one with a noble purpose. Such skepticism constitutes what might be considered the bedrock of anarchistic thought: any ideology, however noble, leads inexorably to coercion.

Example 2. Selected Cage citations of anarchistic writers.

Author	Title of Work	Where Cited
James J. Martin	<i>Men Against the State</i>	"Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1966" in <i>A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writings</i> (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 59.
Auguste Comte	<i>Système de politique positive</i>	"Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1967" in <i>A Year from Monday</i> , 152–53.
Paul Goodman	<i>Drawing the Line</i>	"Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1968 (revised)" in <i>M: Writings, '67–'72</i> (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 10.
Henry David Thoreau	<i>Essay on the Duty of Civil Disobedience</i>	"Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1973–1982," in <i>X: Writings, '79–'82</i> (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 155.
Emma Goldman	<i>Living My Life and Anarchism and Other Essays</i>	<i>John Cage at Seventy-Five</i> , ed. Richard Fleming and William Duckworth (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1987), 122, 125, 126, 127.
Paul Berman	<i>Quotations from the Anarchists</i>	<i>John Cage at Seventy-Five</i> , 123, 127.
Marshall S. Shatz	<i>The Essential Works of Anarchism</i>	<i>John Cage at Seventy-Five</i> , 123.
Paul Avrich	<i>Portraits from the Anarchists</i>	<i>I–VI</i> (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 408.

### Statements from Cage's circle

In addition, writings from individuals close to the composer help to amplify his priorities and thoughts on these matters. The most important document is a letter from Esther Ferrer in answer to his question, "Does anarchy have a future?"; Cage used excerpts of the letter in his own mesostic "Overpopulation and Art" (1990).<sup>30</sup> Ferrer clearly understands anarchism's endemic principles of noncoercion and anti-hierarchical organization. However, as an artist herself, she primarily associates the term with a particular kind of creativity—not the creativity of art for its own sake, but a celebrative, holistic creativity occurring when people take responsibility for their actions.

Significantly, Ferrer desires anarchism in contrast to every other ideology because it promises nothing; therefore, it is a process, not a means to an end. Particularly striking is her hope that anarchism will ultimately generate a "fraternity and a solidarity," but one that has productive conflicts—anarchy, she remarks, "does not fear contradictions, she is submerged in them."<sup>31</sup> To accept contradiction guarantees the perpetual contingency of the anarchist project; freed from a unified goal, members of a community concentrate on the present, constantly evaluating and responding to the changing conditions that arise.

### Evocations of Anarchism in Cage's Compositions

In the final section of this essay, I want to discuss some of Cage's compositions with respect to anarchism. The chaotic model of anarchism chiefly represented by Cage's works from the 1960s — among them *Variations III* (1963), *Musicircus* (1968), and of course *HPSCHD* — persists throughout the composer's career: *Song Books* refines the stylistic plurality of *Musicircus* through its wide variety of stylistic options and indeterminate design, as well as the possibility of including other indeterminate Cage compositions as part of a performance. Indeed, the ambiguous, overarching theme of the work — "We connect Satie with Thoreau" — intimates that Cage's project was at once political and aesthetic: not simply a work that metaphorically suggested anarchism, but an actual model for a practice itself. The first part of *Europeras 3 & 4* (1990) furnishes a late example; in *Europera 3*, six singers perform arias or aria-fragments of their choice, two pianists play as many as seventy chance-determined excerpts from the Liszt opera paraphrases and transcriptions, and six performers operate Victrolas to play fragments of old opera recordings); from time to time, the audience also hears what Cage dubbed the *Truckera*, a tape containing a hundred opera excerpts superimposed upon one another.

As I wrote above, other late works do not demonstrate the wide-ranging freedom which writers have assumed would define an anarchistic approach: Cage himself called many of his late Number Pieces examples of anarchic communities, a claim not as straightforward as it outwardly appears. After all, most of these works closely resemble conventional musical objects with fixed durations and stable pitch material. All performers have separate parts divided into measures called time brackets, bounded on the upper right- and left-hand sides by two sets of times that indicate a variable range of start- and end-times, respectively. Thus Cage fixes the general duration of a work and the general sequence of events, but the actual specific interaction of various parts remains unfixed as a result of the performers' individual choices. The Number Pieces, then, are highly ordered and centralized. The frequently soft dynamic levels in these works also seem directly to contradict an understanding of them as anarchistic. And finally many of the works are for solo performers, apparently rejecting the communal quality of anarchism so necessary for its successful realization. Once these works are viewed through the lens of classic anarchism, however, Cage's conception of them becomes clearer.

The specified lengths of many Number Pieces bring these works closer to the status of objects than to that of processes. Aside from the significance this fact has for Cage's aesthetic in general, it also provides a compelling metaphor for a certain observable stability. A community must have a tangible quality to its members and to outside observers before it can appear as a community. The specified durations of many Number Pieces engender a similar tangibility. Nevertheless, the flexibility of Cage's time-bracket notation allows for different events to occur at somewhat different times and in markedly different ways—for instance, the performers' choice to play short, loud sounds or long, quiet ones. Such small variations never seriously alter the overall impression of one of the compositions and hence never disturb its inherent identity. Likewise, in an anarchic community, individuals can express themselves in a variety of ways without fear of reprisal — but their actions do not destroy the overriding harmony of the community.

In the Number Pieces, the reduced quantity of pitches and other restrictions seem to contradict Cage's famous preference for a chaotic density (or what he would probably call multiplicity or abundance). But the transparency of the Number Pieces echoes the important anarchistic idea advocating no ownership of property. Indeed, the restricted pitch material suggests the virtue of poverty, something Cage implied when he wrote, "The law instead of protecting the rich from the poor should change so that poverty is agreeable, as it was for Thoreau."<sup>32</sup> If poverty is agreeable, wealth can no longer grant those who have it the power to coerce others. In hindsight, one might view the occasional quiet works produced during the 1970s — for example, *Empty Words* (1974-75) — as manifestations of Cage's valorization of poverty as well as of the process-oriented model of anarchism described by Esther Ferrer.

Furthermore, through his rejection of an opulent musical surface in such works, he also created a music that remains largely without rhetoric or gesture. In *Two<sub>5</sub>* (1991), for instance, Cage specifically asked the pianist to play without regularity or presence, and in his letter to Ellsworth

Snyder about *One*<sub>5</sub> (1990) he proposed a hermetic performance style in which the actual sounds remain barely audible.<sup>33</sup> In both these cases and others, Cage seems to argue against any sort of drama or narrative that might move listeners in conventional ways, and in that respect coerce them into feeling a way that might not otherwise occur to them. This rejection of coercion in all its forms stands as one element of anarchism acknowledged by all of its adherents.

The relationship of players in the ensemble pieces suggests that most of these works also exemplify anarchistic practice in that no one player or group of players is more important than another; all musicians perform nearly identical music, and have no precise temporal connection to each other. They all emerge as equally important. In *Four*<sub>4</sub> (1992), for example, all four percussionists can perform their music at any dynamic they wish, but Cage specifically asked them to listen to each other, gauging their volume accordingly so that no sound would be obscured.

One of the paradoxes of anarchism concerns the relation of the individual to the group; even though one strives to maintain individualism (because it helps to ensure taking responsibility for one's own actions), the importance of anarchism resides in the formation of communities united by common concerns and interests. How, then, to explain the eleven Number Pieces composed for a single performer, pieces which have no possibility for a collective experience whatsoever?<sup>34</sup> First, the presence of single-performer Number Pieces recalls the importance of the individual and of individual expression within the anarchist perspective. Moreover, the single performer heightens attention to the unintended sounds that occur in the space where the performance takes place and that suggest a community of equally important sounds. Finally, Joan Retallack's claim that the audience ideally plays an active role during a Cage performance offers a powerful metaphor for anarchistic community. Audience members bring their experiences and attention to the totality of action as it occurs, responding not only to the performance itself but also to its contingent circumstances.<sup>35</sup> A performance gives everyone the responsibility for making of the piece what they will, and it also focuses attention on that contribution because they are observing the events that occur in addition to the music.

Critics have frequently raised an objection to Cage's continuing role in organizing and bringing these events into existence. For instance, Charles Junkerman discusses a musiccircus-like event at Stanford in 1992, noting the irony in "the subjection of our behavior to frankly artificial rules."<sup>36</sup>

But classic anarchistic thought describes the important distinction between living within discipline and living under discipline. In the former, people agree upon the terms of the discipline and act in accord with it, just as they do in the musiccircus. In the latter, participants have little to no agency in the exact nature of the disciplinary system under which they abide; they are coerced to comply through the threat of surveillance and punishment.<sup>37</sup>

In Cage's Number Pieces, then, the composer fashions the outlines of a system that operates with limited intervention from him, because chance selects the number and type of time brackets, pitches, and so on. For their part, the performers voluntarily accept the contract that Cage facilitates. Their realization of this contract is carried out not by any pre-existing plan by him but, rather, by themselves alone. Agreeing to perform, then, represents not so much a decision to accept the limitations of the composer's design but, rather, a decision to allow their own liberation through the vision of society that he offers them. In Cage's words, society solves its problems not from faith in government or in God or religion, but rather through a "multiplicity of individuals who have the habit of respecting one another."<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

To be sure, anarchism is not to be identified unequivocally. And yet it is precisely this flexibility, this lack of consensus, which makes it amenable to Cage. In particular, anarchistic principles have gained a new lease on life principally in the realm of art, which welcomes its flexibility and its ability to be adapted to varying creative purposes.<sup>39</sup>



In sum, Cage's own evocations of anarchism might best be viewed as akin to what David Patterson calls an appropriation of Eastern ideas primarily meant to contribute to Cage's evolving aesthetic, rather than representing a wholesale embrace of the foundational spiritual ideas from the sources themselves. Continued scrutiny might reveal that they have the same problematical relation with their sources that Edward James Crook identifies in relation to Cage's engagement with Eastern sources, especially the writings of Ananda Coomaraswamy.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, the principles discovered therein need not serve only the modes of art and need not be taken as an unproblematic blueprint for action. As Cage tried to demonstrate time and again, they could also function metaphorically, as examples for application to social systems and to the development of technologies needed to improve the world generally. Only when the historical context of Cage's metaphors is widely understood, however, can it be possible for others to employ these principles more broadly in social contexts.

## Notes

Much of this essay comes from *Anarchic Societies of Sounds: The Number Pieces of John Cage* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009). I thank Jürgen Thym, Robert D. Morris, Brent Reidy, and David Feldman for their comments on previous drafts.

---

[\*] Cage never cited a specific edition of the *Essay*.

- 
1. John Cage, "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run," in *A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writings* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 136.
  2. *Cinema Now: Stan Brakhage, John Cage, Jonas Mekas, Stan VanDerbeek*, ed. Hector Currie and Michael Porte (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati, 1968), 20.
  3. John Cage, "Anarchy," in *John Cage at Seventy-Five*, ed. Richard Fleming and William Duckworth (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1987), 123. The original citation appears in *Quotations from the Anarchists*, ed. Paul Berman (New York: Praeger, 1972), 102.
  4. Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 271-2.
  5. *Innovation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 109.
  6. Richard Kostelanetz, "Anarchist Art," in *Political Essays from 1959-1998*, 159-60 (the original essay appeared in *Fiction International* in 1995); idem., "The Anarchist Art of John Cage," *Anarchist Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 47-48.
  7. See "Anarchism: General and Personal," in Richard Kostelanetz, *Political Essays from 1959-1998*, ed. Doug Puchowski (New York: Autonomedia, 1999), 50. The original essay was published in *Cherry Pie* (1976).
  8. Cage initially generated time brackets for each member of the ensemble—demonstrating, perhaps, his commitment to the idea that each musician was equally important—and thereafter deleted a number of them for all the instruments except the bowed piano in order to ensure it had greater prominence. See Haskins, *Anarchic Societies of Sounds*, 94-96.
  9. "anarchy, n.," *OED Online*, September 2012 (Oxford: Oxford University Press), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/7118?redirectedFrom=anarchy> (accessed October 03, 2012). For more comprehensive surveys of anarchism and its development, see George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1962) and Peter Martin, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010). For a discussion of anarchism in America with occasional references to England and continental Europe, see James J. Martin, *Men Against the State: The Expositors of Individualist Anarchism in America, 1827-1908*, with a foreword by Harry Elmer Barnes (De Kalb, IL: Adrian Allen Associates, 1953; reprint, Colorado Springs, CO: Ralph Myles Publisher, Inc., 1970).
  10. Peter Kropotkin, "'Anarchism,'" from *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, in *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings*, ed. Marshall Shatz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 233.
  11. *Ibid.*, 236-37.
  12. Martin, *Men Against the State*, ix. Martin was Cage's neighbor at the Stony Point community.
  13. Kropotkin, "'Anarchism,'" 233-34.
  14. See David A. Hollinger, "Ethnic Diversity, Cosmopolitanism, and the Emergence of the Liberal American Intelligentsia," in *In the American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ideas* (Bloomington: Indiana

- University Press, 1985), 56-74. Hollinger's discussion centers generally on the East Coast, but Cage's connections with Jewish intellectuals and the time he spent in New York might have shaped his own development along similar lines.
15. See "Other People Think," in *John Cage: An Anthology*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Da Capo, 1991), 45-49; Rob Haskins, *John Cage* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 20-21.
  16. Thomas S. Hines, "'Then Not Yet 'Cage'': The Los Angeles Years," in *John Cage: Composed in America*, ed. Marjorie Perloff and Charles Junkerman (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 78.
  17. Leta E. Miller, "Cultural Intersections: John Cage in Seattle (1938-1940)," in *John Cage: Music, Philosophy, and Intention, 1933-1950*, ed. David Patterson (New York: Routledge, 2000), 56-58; Cage, "Goal: New Music, New Dance," *Dance Observer* 6, no. 10 (December 1939): 296-97, reprinted in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 87.
  18. George Woodcock, "Anarchism Revisited," *Commentary* 68 (August 1968): 56-59.
  19. See Marshall S. Shatz, "Introduction," in *The Essential Works of Anarchism*, ed. Marshall S. Shatz (New York and Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), xxiv-xxvi.
  20. Richard Kostelanetz, "Technoanarchism," in *Political Essays*, 256-64. The essay originally appeared in *Shore Review* (1968). For his part, Cage repeatedly linked technology and anarchism in his *Diary*, as I will discuss below.
  21. *The Texts of Taoism*, trans. James Legge (New York: Julian Press, 1959), 342-43. It is probable that Cage knew this translation; he extensively quotes the story of Yun Kiang and Hung Mung in his "Composition as Process: Communication" (*Silence*, 54-56), following this translation exactly. (Indeed, the story also appears in Book XI, at pp. 348-50 of Legge's translation).
  22. For a discussion of Cage and Fuller, see Laura D. Kuhn, "John Cage's *Européras 1 & 2*: The Musical Means of Revolution" (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1992), 196-245.
  23. Cage, "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1973-1982," in *X: Writings, '79-'82* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 155.
  24. "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1967," in *A Year from Monday*, 161.
  25. "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1966," in *A Year from Monday*, 69: "Change society so differences are refreshing, nothing to do with possessions/power."
  26. "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) 1965," in *A Year from Monday*, 13, 17.
  27. *Ibid.*, 15.
  28. See Richard Kostelanetz, "Technoanarchism," in *Political Essays from 1959-1998*, 259. Cage acknowledged his awareness of the idea in his "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1970-71," in *M: Writings, '67-'72* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 113.
  29. John Cage to Ranjit Makkuni, 12 November 1991 (C470.30), John Cage Collection, Northwestern University Library. For more information, see *Gita Govinda—Multimedia Project* [online], 1999, <<http://www.ignca.nic.in/gita.htm>> (accessed 3 October 2012).
  30. Esther Ferrer, "Does Anarchy Have a Future? A Letter Esther Ferrer Wrote to John Cage in Response to His Query," *Musicworks* 62 (spring 1995): 22-23.
  31. Ferrer, 23.
  32. *Conversing with Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1987), 272. The original was published as Jonathan Brent, "Letters," *TriQuarterly Review* 52 (fall 1981): 279. Compare this remark with Cage's description of *101* cited in n. 1.
  33. John Cage to Ellsworth Snyder, 29 April 1991 (C463.114), John Cage Collection, Northwestern University Library
  34. I omit the film *One<sub>12</sub>* (1992) because it was created collaboratively and because it can be performed with *108* (1992).
  35. See, for example, Retallack, "Conversations in Retrospect," in John Cage and Joan Retallack, *Musicage: Cage Muses on Words, Art, Music; John Cage in Conversation with Joan Retallack*, ed. Joan Retallack (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England [Wesleyan University Press], 1996), xxix.
  36. Charles Junkerman, "'nEw / foRms of living together': The Model of the Musicircus," in *John Cage: Composed in America*, 42. Actually, the Stanford event was not a true musicircus in which all the participants and audience acted in one large room. Rather, different classrooms, rehearsal spaces, and concert halls within the music building were populated by various ensembles or soloists, while Cage performed his text composition *Muoyce* (1980) in a separate, quiet room set up according to his specifications. The presence of different spaces made the Stanford event what he called a House Full of Music.
  37. See, for instance, Martin, 95-96. For an alternate view proposing the audience's lack of agency in Cage performances, see Richard Taruskin, *Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5:71. I consider Taruskin's claim in *John Cage*, 150-51.
  38. Cage and Retallack, 292-93.
  39. For recent studies of anarchism in this context, see David Weir, *Anarchy & Culture* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); Lewis Call, *Postmodern Anarchism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), 117-39; and Rainer Barbey and Heribert Tommek, *Literatur und Anarchie: Das Streben nach Herrschaftsfreiheit in der europäischen Literatur vom 19. bis ins 21. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg: Synchron, 2012).
  40. David Patterson, "The Picture That Is Not in the Colors: Cage, Coomaraswamy, and the Impact of India," in *John Cage: Music, Philosophy, and Intention*, 177-216; Edward James Crooks, "John Cage's Entanglement with the Ideas of Coomaraswamy" (Ph.D. diss., University of York, 2011), 245-85.