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(PER)CHANCE: JOYCE AND CAGE

The encounter of avant-garde literature with avant-garde music is always a momentous event. It proved doubly so when the author was James Joyce and the composer John Cage.

The catalyst happened to be the noted mezzo-soprano, Janet Fairbank, who in 1942 requested Cage to set a text by Joyce to music. Cage accepted the commission, adopted and adapted a passage from page 556 of *Finnegans Wake*, and called it *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs*. The title came from a phrase on that page, though it was not included in the excerpt itself. The selected words of the composition are as follows:

night by silentsailing night Isobel wildwood's eyes and primarose
hair, quietly, all the woods so wild, in mauves of moss and
daphnedews, how all so still she lay, neath of the whitethorn, child
of tree, like some losthappy leaf, like blowing flower stilled, as fain
would she anon, for soon again 'twill be, win me, woo me, wed me,
ah weary me! deeply, now even calm lay sleeping; night, Isobel,
sister Isobel, Saintette Isabelle, Madame Isa Veuve La Belle (Joyce
556)

Here, as so often elsewhere in *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce's prose is poetically dense and musically rich. To increase the musical quality of the passage, Cage has rearranged and condensed Joyce's text.

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The first line (“night by silentsailing night Isobel”) is so short because Cage has cut out the second half of the original, allowing only the name of Isobel to stay. He has kept the Joycean sequence of words from “wildwood’s eyes” to “lay sleeping,” repeated “night” from the first line (or took it over from the thirteenth), and created a stylistic coda by the culminating and caressing repetitions of petting, elevating and sanctifying versions of Isobel’s name collected and grouped from lines 1, 5, 7, 9, 10 and 16.

Thus abbreviated and reordered, the text suggests a quiet, calm and pure image, which emphasizes beauty by ending on “Belle.”

The words are also characterized by auditory awareness. It becomes evident in a number of ways.

1. Long-sounding, sonorous, slow and soft words are repeated. “Night” occurs in this short passage three times, the first echo coming very soon (“*night* by silentsailing *night*”). Its effect is semantically and musically increased by “even~~calm~~.” The phrase “wildwood’s eyes” is soon reinforced by the group “all the woods so wild.” The personal pronoun “me” is heard four times. “Belle” resounds the last syllable of “*Isabelle*.” Reverberations of words culminate in the final addresses to “Isobel, sister Isobel, Saintette Isabelle, Madame Isa Veuve la Belle.”

2. The lyric saturation of the text is also revealed by the poetic-musical effect of occasional rhymes (“night,” “wild,” “child” and even the first syllable of the compound “whitethorn” as well as “be” and “me”).

3. The functional quality of the auditory plane is quite obvious in the great number of overt and covert, initial or internal alliterations. They are so significant that they sometimes generate unusual, indeed new words and phrases, subordinating ordinary meaning and syntax to the epiphany of euphony: “silentsailing,” “wildwood’s,” “woods so wild,” *mauves of moss*,” “*daphnedews*” (alluding to the mythical story of Apollo and Daphne), “so still,” “losthappy leaf,” “’twill be,” “win me,” “woo me,” “wed me,” “weary me,” “sister Isobel” and “Saintette Isabelle (recalling, implying and intoning King Mark’s and Tristram’s passion for Iseult, evoking Iseult’s love for Tristram, and hinting at HCE’s ambiguous emotions for his daughter).

4. Auditory awareness is also apparent in rocking, lulling parallel phrases like “by silentsailing night,” “all the woods so wild,” “how all

so still she lay,” “like some losthappy leaf,” “like blowing flower stilled,” “as fain would she anon,” “for soon again ‘twill be,” “sister Isobel,” or “Saintette Isabelle.”

The text is not simply “written,” it is indeed “composed.”

It was John Cage’s ingenious recognition that it could, in fact, be composed in a strictly musical sense: that it could be set to music. Cage focuses the same values as Joyce does.

Cage’s music sounds like the natural and sensitive elongation of Joyce’s text. The quality of the voice part can be analysed in terms of Joyce’s words.

1. The repetition of sustained, sonorous, slow and soft words is present both in the text and in the voice. The singing part even enhances these characteristics. The sound B representing “night” (bar 1) is a half note. When “night” returns in the text, B recurs in the voice (bar 2). Naturally long because of its diphthong, “night” appears to be even longer by dint of the linguistic pause following it. In a comparable way, being a half-note, the musical sound rendering “night” is long by its nature when it is first heard, and it is even longer when it comes back in bar 2, since it is dotted and tied to another B, in fact, another half note in bar 3. The latter is also tied to a B, and the rest of the bar is filled with rests. Even bar 4 begins with a quarter rest.

As a tune sung, Joyce’s text sounds increasingly sonorous, especially when it is performed by such rich (recorded) voices as those of Arlene Carmen, contralto, Cathy Berberian, contralto, Mutsumi Masuda, soprano, or Rosalind Rees, alto.

Expressing the mood of night and dreamy, indeed dreaming desire, the Joycean words follow each other slowly. The tempo of Cage’s music is also very slow with metronome marking 58 quarter notes to the minute. The time signature is 4/4 to the bar. Rests and tied notes are frequent. The calm of the night and the disposition of longing contemplation are also brought home by the expressive monotony of the tempo. As far as bar 20, no change of speed is marked. While to express the musical equivalent of growing emotional tension in “win me, woo me, wed me, ah” (in Cage’s spelling “AH!”) *poco stringendo* is prescribed in bars 20–22; to render the ultimate relaxation of tension by the end of the phrase “weary me! deeply” *ritartando* is required in bars 22 and 23, and a *fermata* is used at the end of bar 23.

In a similar fashion, whereas the enthusiastic, enchanted and enraptured apostrophizing of “sister Isobel, Saintette Isabelle”—with Cage ISOBEL—, and “Madame Isa Veuve La Bel—” is supposed to be sung *poco accelerando* in bars 28–31, the last syllable of the name (“-le”) is requested to be conveyed by the singer with a whispering slide from A to B *ritardando molto* in the last two bars (32–33).

Singing slow is also singing low. The overall mood of Joyce’s passage is that of a silent night-piece charged with quiet desire. Cage’s music is also soft in tone. Its average volume is *piano* with gently breathing *crescendos* and *decrescendos*, tracing the emotional course of yearning pulse. A *crescendo* never rises beyond the level of *mezzo-forte* (as in bar 6 to depict Isobel’s “*primarose* hair,” in bar 22 to suggest, with short, wishful imperatives, the swelling of desire in “win me, woo me, wed me, *ah weary me!*” or in bar 30 to highlight “Isa” and “Veuve”). A *decrescendo* may soften the tone into *pianissimo* (as in bars 2–3) where “night” is qualified “silentsailing,” or in bar 26 where “night” appears after “now even calm lay sleeping” and two quarter rests).

2. What one might consider the musical approximation of Joyce’s occasional rhymes is the rising return of the note B at the end of a motif constituting a musical cell. This happens—among other cases—in bar 2 setting the word “night,” in bar 8 setting “wild,” in bar 13 rendering “child,” as well as in bars 20–22 setting “*twill be,*” “*win me,*” “*woo me,*” and “*wed me.*”

3. Since in the latter set two short words are aurally linked, the recurring initial *w-* in the first word is given auditory emphasis, the reiterated imperatives add grammatical importance, the semantic energy of the repeated request provides additional weight, and each of these words are set to music by the note A, therefore the *w-s* in “*twill,*” “*win,*” and “*wed*” sound as potential musical parallels of a linguistic alliteration. In another instance, textual alliteration (“*mauves of moss*”) is musically rendered by two identical notes (B-s) *and* an accent mark on the first B (bars 9–10).

4. One of the most remarkable features of Joyce’s beautifying and beatifying nocturne is the repeated return of certain groups of words characterized by sonorous numerosity. It is typical of Cage’s lyrical empathy and musical sensibility that he has captured all these parallel

phrases, related them to each other, found their musical equivalents, and, in fact, based his setting on them.

He has set the phrase “by silentsailing night” using five eighth notes and a dotted half note (bars 1–2) following closely the rhythmic pattern of Joyce’s syllables. The first and last notes of the motif are B-s, just as the first and last notes of the whole song are B-s. They make it clear that the lack of any key signature does not indicate the tonality of C major or A minor. Nor do the B-s represent B major or B minor. They are just the notes around which the E (four steps up) and the A (one step down) turn. The miniature motif may remind one of an Oriental segment, a pentatonic fragment (violinist Zsolt Sokoray’s conjecture). The motif creates a hovering and gently undulating effect, which is stepped up by dreamlike repetition, rhythmic variation and the changing order of the same notes.

The quiet floating of co-ordinated musical motifs corresponds to the silent streaming of co-ordinated linguistic phrases listed in an Impressionist-Surrealist nominal manner. Within the first twenty-seven words not a single verb appears, no predicate occurs. “Lay” is a static verb. It is only in the second part of the song that the insistent urge of dreamy desire generates a set of verbs welling up in the imperative form (“win me, woo me, wed me, ah weary me!”). They may be triggered off by a possibly Viconian impulse of cyclic recurrence implied in “as fain would she anon, for soon again ‘twill be.” This may be the reason why “win me” sounds a rhyming answer to the call of “‘twill be,” and why the music in this phase becomes more animated.

In assessing the importance of all such procedures of change and variation, one must bear in mind that the elements to be changed and varied are very limited in scope. Besides B, E and A, no other notes are heard in the entire composition. The melodic range of Cage’s song is deliberately small. Its voluntary minimalism perfectly fits the calm of the night, the mood of the dream, the mind of the dreamer, the shape of the girl, and the gentleness of desire.

Disregarding the key structure of the major—minor system goes hand in hand with overstepping the time signature of 4/4: the six notes of the musical motif spread over two bars and relativize the very first bar line. This is not an isolated case (cf. bars 4–5, 8–9, 9–10, 12–13,

13–14, 17–18, etc.). Tonal and rhythmic ambiguities once again perfectly suit the nature of the dream and the quality of the text, which, with its lyric density, approaches *free* verse.

If Joyce repeats his *leitmotiv*-like phrase (“How all so still she lay,”) Cage also renews his *ostinato*-like motif (the six notes of B, B, E, B, A, and B in bar 12).

When Joyce reduces his phrase into five syllables (“all the woods so wild,”) Cage follows suit (the five notes of B, B, B, A and B in bar 8).

With his musical means the composer can even do what the author can only suggest: that there is an inner connection between Isobel and the usual six syllables of the recurring motif. Joyce can lay a linguistic stress on the first syllable of Isobel’s name, but Cage in bar 4 can and does set her name by a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth and a quarter note (B, A, B). The name’s total time value then amounts to the length of six eighth notes: the duration of the six notes in bars 18 and 19 setting “as fain would she anon” (E, B, B, B, A and B). This may exemplify the way in which setting words to music can make explicit what is implicitly included in the text. The emphasis on Isobel’s name is effectively expressed by its laudatory versions, repetitive incantations, melismatic forms and augmented appearances at the end of Cage’s song.

The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs has been composed for voice and piano. A piano accompaniment may provide chordal support to the singing voice, but Cage’s piano does not. The piano may play a figurative pattern to give harmonic underpinning to the voice, but Cage’s does not. The piano may take over a part or the whole of the melody and may then complement the voice, but Cage’s does not. The piano part may constitute a counterpoint, but Cage’s does not.

What does Cage’s piano do then? The unsuspecting pianist (let us suppose he is a traditionally educated, pinch-hitting male turning over the first two stuck pages of the score quickly and nervously to sight-read his part in a hurry) might wish to solve the riddle in an empirical manner and play the notes as he normally would. After all, under the stave of the voice, he can see the customary two staves for the piano. Before the singer’s part the word VOICE clearly indicates what the composer wishes the singer to sing. Before the other two staves the word PIANO can be read. The voice and the piano parts are co-

ordinated: the time signatures (4/4) are clearly written out at the fronts of all three staves. The singer has already started with a beautiful motif. She has sung her two unaccompanied bars. The pianist is required to enter in bar 3. If he does not, he is sure to lose his contact with the singer and may even lose his contract with his employer. An accompanist cannot run that risk. Somewhat tense, he will keep his mind on the job at hand, he will use his two silent bars for preparing to start in the third at the right moment, all the more so since after his entry he will have to play three quick quintuplets and one triplet. The first notes of the first and second quintuplets are accented, but that of the third one is not. Rendering the triplet, both the first and the third notes must be accented. The pianist must not get it wrong. So he makes his entry dead on time, playing a bass A with his left hand and four treble A-s with his right hand. The first quintuplet is over.

The effect is disastrous. The A-s are out of tune with the B of the voice. To make things worse, this happens when the tender lyricism of “silentsailing *night*” is set, and continues to occur all the way through the song at the most unexpected and inappropriate places. In bar 4 the bass C of the left hand is out of tune with the B of the voice petting the name of “*Isobel*.” The simultaneous A played by the right hand in the treble register also sounds false. In bar 28 the bass G played by the left hand is a discordant note to accompany the A of the voice at the end of the passionate address to “sister *Isobel*.” The same is true of the bass G starting a quintuplet and accompanying a soft and tied A of the voice celebrating “*Isa Veuve La Belle*,” to mention only a few examples. Chaos incarnate. The concert has proved a total failure. This is the end.

The disconcerted pianist may at this point turn to the beginning once again. A Viconian move. To his surprise, he will find that while the voice part is introduced by a treble clef, no clefs guide the two staves of the piano. There is no treble clef for the right hand and no bass clef for the left one. Is the note in the first (bottom) space of the third stave something different from a bass A? Is the note in the second space something other than a bass C? Is the note in the third space not a bass E? Does the note in the fourth space not denote a bass G? Perchance. What are they then?

At the start of the first bar of the piano part, one can admittedly read, in very small writing, the word "CLOSED." What does that mean? Following the large letters of the title page, and preceding the actual parts for the voice and the piano, on page 2 of the work, which the pianist may at first easily overlook but will now certainly look over, he can find a corroboration of the initial instruction in bar 1 of the piano part: the grand piano is supposed to be completely closed. Both the keyboard-lid and the strings-cover must be closed.

Can one play a closed piano? Perchance he can if he hits it. In some compositions the keys are pressed not so much for pitch but more for beat, not so much for melody but much rather for rhythm. Cage's intention, however, is different. Totally disregarding the pitches of the strings, he uses the closed piano as a percussion instrument. A man of exact notation, he clearly specifies what his notes mean and what the pianist should do. If the pianist sees notes on the first (bottom) space of the stave, he is required to hit the under part of the piano. If he perceives notes on the second space, he is supposed to drum on the front part of the keyboard-lid. When he senses notes on the third space, he must touch the back and higher part of the lid. When he takes note of notes on the fourth space, he should hit the top of the piano.

Not to leave the pianist at a loss, Cage gives him instructions as to the manner of hitting as well. Regular notes mean that the pianist should drum with his fingers. Notes with x-s as heads indicate that he must use the knuckles of his closed hands. The lower staff is reserved for the left hand, and the upper stave for the right hand, without any reference to bass or treble.

Can such a piano accompaniment be effective? Is the use of the piano as a mere percussion instrument compatible with the calm of the night? Can it express tender yearning? Don't drum-rolls disturb the gentle mood of Joyce's piece? Don't they disrupt the peace of the passage? Doesn't hitting a musical instrument with knuckles involve violence?

These questions cannot be answered theoretically. If one listens to Cage's song, one finds that the accompaniment is quite appropriate. It adds sophisticated rhythmic variety to the dreamy and repetitive singing of the voice. Its subdued volume does not destroy the calm of the text. By often being even softer and lower than the voice, it does

not suppress the voice. A measure of violence is even implied in Joyce's allusions to the Mark—Tristram—Iseult relationship and their contemporary correlatives. Soft noises may even increase silence. The quasi-drum-rolls lend a mysterious dimension to the dreaming shifts of Joyce's piece.

If, however, Cage uses the piano as a percussion instrument, then "Why use a piano?"—as Richard Barnes, associate professor of English at Pomona College, aptly asks in his witty paper "Our Distinguished Dropout." (Barnes—Kostelanetz, *JCA* 50) Even if part of the explanation might be, as Barnes also suggests, Cage's inclination for theatricality and the audience's knowledge that the instrument being struck is a piano, and even if drumming on the piano is not inconsistent with Joyce's text, the element of arbitrariness in drumming on the piano rather than on a drum (or a percussion quartet) is certainly there. In one of the recordings of *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs* the piano is, in fact, replaced by a percussion instrument (Kostelanetz, *JCA* 231). Cage's famous prepared piano in *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946–8) with screws, nuts, bolts, rubber, erasers and plastic mutes between the strings removing "pitch characteristic of scales and modes ... is a percussion ensemble under the control of a single player." (Cage—Kostelanetz, *JCA* 76)

The range of voice in *The Wonderful Widow* is also surrounded by accidental circumstances. Although in the voice part, Cage has unambiguously indicated pitches by regular musical notes, in his note for the singer he remarks, "Make any transposition necessary in order to employ a low and comfortable range." (Cage, *WWES* 2) In some recordings the singer is female (Mutsumi Masuda), in another case he is male (Robert Wyatt). Sometimes the kind of voice is described (Cathy Berberian, contralto), at other times it is not, and is just referred to in unspecified generality after the name (Joan La Barbara, voice). Chance is looming large in Cage's principle of indeterminacy, not unrelated even at this early stage to later Postmodern positions.

Can composition by chance be more pervasive? Perchance it can. So Cage's subsequent works suggest, and so his later treatments of *Finnegans Wake* seem to prove (*Writing through Finnegans Wake* 1977, *Writing for the Second Time through Finnegans Wake* 1977, *Writings through Finnegans Wake* 1978, *Roaratorio, an Irish Circus*

on *Finnegans Wake* 1979, *Third, Fourth Writings through Finnegans Wake* 1980, *Fifth Writing through Finnegans Wake* 1980). Cage's interest in Joyce is also evident in his comparative paper "James Joyce, Marcel Duchamp, Eric Satie: An Alphabet" (1981), an essay of "both re-inscription and deconstruction." (Perloff—Perloff and Junkerman, *JCCIA* 118) Cage has even claimed that "living in this century, we live, in a very deep sense, in the time of *Finnegans Wake*" (Cage and Kostelanetz—Gena, Brent and Gillespie, *JCR* 146).

Dissatisfied with limiting his attention to just a few lines of *Finnegans Wake* as he did in setting *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs*, in his later obsessive Joycean ventures, Cage enlarged his focus and extended the scope and variety of his chance operations.

1. Mesostics. While in an acrostic in verse or prose, "usually the initial letters of each line can be read down the page to spell either an alphabet, a name (often that of the author, a patron, or a loved one), or some other concealed message," (Baldick 2) in a mesostic, as Cage uses the term, the same procedure is adopted within the words. A mesostic is an internal acrostic. In Cage's words, an acrostic is "the name down the edge. A mesostic is a name down the middle." (Cage and Kostelanetz—Gena, Brent and Gillespie, *JCR* 143) Some authors, including Baldick, consider the Cagean mesostic a variant of acrostic. Some of Cage's "mesostics" are, in fact, acrostics.

Cage must have supposed that nothing could possibly be more Joycean in *Finnegans Wake* than Joyce's name, so he has chosen words and phrases from *Finnegans Wake* that included, somewhere in the middle, the letters J-A-M-E-S J-O-Y-C-E. As a means of convenience, he has capitalized the appropriate letters. Accordingly, the first mesostic is: "wroth with twone nathandJoe," "A," "Malt," "JhEm," "Shen," "pftJschute," "Of Finnegan," "that the humptYhillhead of humself," "is at the knoCk out," and "in thE park." (Joyce 3)

Cage was especially proud of the last mesostic of *Writing through Finnegans Wake*. It comes from the last but one page of Joyce's work and certainly sounds evocative:

Just a whisk
Of
pitY
a Cloud
in pEace and silence
(Joyce 627)

2. Accidental punctuation. In his 1978 interview with Richard Kostelanetz, John Cage referred to another chance procedure he was going to adopt in redoing the *Wake*: “Then what I’m going to do, Richard, is distribute the punctuation by chance operations on the page like an explosion. Read just the text and you’ll see the punctuation omitted. You can imagine it where you like. You can replace it where you wish.” (Cage and Kostelanetz—Gena, Brent and Gillespie, *JCR* 145)

3. Orienting punctuation according to the twelve parts of the clock. Since the night hours are significant in Joyce’s dream myth, on page 1 of Cage’s version of the *Wake* “the exclamation point ... is tilted slightly like the tower of Pisa.” (Cage and Kostelanetz—Gena, Brent and Gillespie, *JCR* 145)

4. Keeping an index. To cut down the enormous size of his *Writing through Finnegan’s Wake*, and to maintain the importance of chance, for the purposes of *Writing for the Second Time through Finnegan’s Wake*, Cage kept a card index of mesostic syllables already used and thereby discarded unnecessary repetitions. In this manner, he reduced 125 pages to 39.

5. *I Ching*. One of Cage’s favourite methods in deciding what musical notes to put down, or what phrases, words, syllables and letters to use and how to combine them in composing or recomposing a text was tossing up three coins six times or throwing up marked sticks – as it is described in minute detail in the ancient Chinese book of oracles, *I Ching*. Tom Stoppard caricatured the procedure at the witty start of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Marcel Duchamp played with the idea of composing chance music by numbering the keys of the piano and pulling out numbers at random from a hat (*Musical Erratum*) or – in another version – from a vase (*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even. Musical Erratum*).

Stoppard in his turn travestied the method in his *Travesties* showing Tristan Tzara drawing out in Dadaist fashion the cut-up words of Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 from Joyce's hat (Stoppard, *T* 54-5). Cage, however, was overjoyed by the accidental potential of *I Ching* chance operations and proudly told Kostelanetz that in rewriting *Finnegans Wake* he did not have to toss the actual coins any longer, but could now rely on a coded printout simulating the tossing of three coins six times. (Cage and Kostelanetz—Gena, Brent and Gillespie, *JCR* 148-9) Chance programmed and modernized – yet patently guaranteed. The printout was devised by a young man called Ed Kobrin at the University of Illinois in 1967-9 for *HPSCHD*, Cage's composition subtitled solos for one to seven amplified harpsichords and tapes for one to fifty-one amplified monaural machines.

Joyce's works are certainly not devoid of chance either. The accidental turns of the short stories in *Dubliners*, the free associations of the stream of consciousness, the technique of the interior monologue in *Ulysses* and the dream-like shifts of people and places in *Finnegans Wake* bear ample witness to Joyce's interest in chance.

Yet Joyce the master builder has created the enormous pattern of Homeric parallels in *Ulysses* and of Viconian cycles and mythical structures in *Finnegans Wake*. (Cf. among others Beckett 3-22; Wilson 243-71; Ellmann 565, 575, 706; Campbell and Robinson 3-27; Gilbert 38; Senn 1-8; Boyle 247-54; Hart-Staley 135-65; Fáj 65-80; Bíró 5-26) *Mutatis mutandis*, these constructions, I think, correspond to the dodecaphonic serialism of Schoenberg's music.

A one-time student of Schoenberg and a professed anarchist (Kostelanetz, *JCA* 7-8), Cage has learnt all he could from Schoenberg, but decided he would take the opposite course. With Schoenberg, everything is system. With Cage, all is chance. (Boyden 408-19, 524-7; Chase 587-94) With his aleatory operations, Cage has methodically knocked out the system from his master's and predecessor's music. Cage was striving for "heightened incoherence," "an ordered disorder." (Kostelanetz, *JCA* 196) In his redoing *Finnegans Wake*, he has deliberately destroyed Joyce's structures and replaced them by clearly calculated accidental techniques.

Under "normal" conditions, human life evolves in trends, which are neither all necessity nor mere contingency. This is the precondition of

plot in narrative art and melody, harmony and tonality in music. When the experience of *any* imposed order, totalitarianism and the mass destruction of world wars make necessity a hostile force and generality an external power, then the artist will experiment with creating counter-worlds. One manifestation of this effort is the extreme patterning of experience in High Modernism. Another expression of this predicament appears at the other pole of moulding the material: doubting the validity of absolute principles, value judgements, feasible aims, viable routes, centres of gravity and directions of movement. This is the plight of Postmodernism.

Despite Joyce's constant ironization of the patterns he uses, *Ulysses* and even *Finnegans Wake* still represent significant aspects of High Modernism (as well as incipient traits of Postmodernism). The border between the two is never a fixed line, it is always a moving belt.

In spite of Cage's occasional performance of making judgements of value and taste, and despite the poetic and musical beauty and excellence of his setting *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs* from *Finnegans Wake*, his later rewritings of Joyce's work are model examples of Postmodernism.

What happens to the constructs of Constructivism if its squares and rectangles are cleared away? What happens to the patterns of Cubism if its cubes are removed? They will certainly collapse with the tremendous noise of Cage's *Roaratorio* and will ultimately sink to the silence left behind by Cage's last and soft mesostic in *Writing through Finnegans Wake*. The same polar dichotomy appears in the roaring noise of Cage's *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951) for twelve radios of chance effects of volume and station selection and in his 4' 33'' (1952), a composition of complete silence with the pianist playing nothing and the audience hearing nothing but accidental noises. Annihilating musical sounds as such, the two poles of noise and silence are the ultimate consequences of Cage's idea that "value judgments are destructive" (Kostelanetz, *JCA* 196), and can be taken as negative proofs of the positive claim that a work of art is a specific crystallization of a sensuous value judgement. Cage's observation to the effect that "Given four film phonographs, we can compose and perform a quartet for explosive motor, wind, heart beat, and landslide" (Cage—Kostelanetz, *JCA* 55) expresses something more or less than a

musical ambition. Bartók's integrated model is a far cry from this polarization.

The difference between the Modern and the Postmodern is also conspicuous in Cage's life-long bent on, and application of, universal caricature. Already in Britten's *Purcell Variations* (*The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra: Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Purcell*, first performed in 1946) caricature is not a mere occasional prick or a trend-like thrust, but the means of universal irony. Yet Purcell's ironic presence is obvious in all the variations – as is Homer's in *Ulysses* or Vico's in *Finnegans Wake*. Britten bore no personal grudge against Purcell: he admired, played, conducted and edited his great predecessor's music, and all his irony expressed was his historical distance from Baroque grandeur, sublimity and passion. *Ulysses* can also be viewed as a set of ironic variations on a Homeric theme, and *Finnegans Wake* can also be considered as a cyclic series of ironic variations on a Viconian subject. Purcell's hornpipe (Rondeau) from *Abdelazer*, even in its utterly ironized transformation by the percussion section of Britten's orchestra, remains the organizing principle and structural pattern of Britten's Modernist variations, just as Homer's *Odyssey* and Vico's *Principles of a New Science of Nations*—even in their most double-edged, multiple-layered and twisted transmutations—provide a firm framework for *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Britten's set of witty variations start in D minor and end in a clear and bright D major.

In Cage's *Credo in Us* (1942), however, a composition for percussion quartet, tin cans, piano, radio and phonograph/record-player, the situation is quite different. In the first part, the choice of theme is left to chance: it can be the work of any "traditional" composer from Beethoven to Dvořák, Sibelius or Shostakovich, whom Cage held in low esteem. In its first, highly acclaimed Hungarian performance at the Hungarian Academy of Music on 30 December, 1999, by Zoltán Kocsis and the Amadinda percussion ensemble, the opening theme was "The Waltz of Flowers" in D major from Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*. In the sarcastic middle part, the percussion group and the piano (here also used as a percussion instrument) beat and break the theme into splinters with extraordinary energy and rhythmic variety. The actual target of irony is once again

accidental: it changes with the theme chosen. The general target is, of course, musical tradition as such. In the third part, the original theme returns—"The Waltz of Flowers," to avoid even the semblance of firm tonality, is accidentally transposed to C-sharp major—, but now it is completely ironized and annihilated (just as the slightly modified representation of the initial breakfast theme at the end of Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* represents the customary reliability of traditional reality as highly questionable because of the irrational eruption of volcano violence in the middle part of the play). Being accidental and unforeseen, the traditional melody does not and cannot organize the structure of the middle section. It does not and cannot even provide an ironic *pattern*. All it offers is an ironic *relationship*. Cage's universal caricature is Postmodern already at this early stage (even if it precedes Britten's *Purcell Variations* by a few years), and reaches its disruptive peak when Cage later substitutes accidental noise or accidental silence for actual music. In the presence of a particular audience, however, the absence of music—with occasional coughs from people in the concert hall or with incidental segments of sentences from the radio or even from the corridor—can be interpreted, in fact, "sold" as a performance of music only once.

Experimenting with non-traditional media, Cage has also hit upon the idea that "When a fly buzzes past me now I have, from an artistic point of view, a frightful problem. But it's quite reasonable to imagine that we will have a loudspeaker that will be able to fly through space." (Barnes—Kostelanetz, *JCA* 49) In his tape collage *Rozart Mix* (1965) for thirteen tape machines and six live performers, the sounds on 88 loops have been divided into categories A, B, C, D, E, F representing "country sounds, electronic or synthetic sounds, city sounds, wind-produced sounds, and sounds so small they required amplification." (Kostelanetz, *JCA* 19) In 1970–71 Cage wrote in his "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)" that "paper should be edible, nutritious," (Hailes—Perloff and Junkerman, *JCCIA* 229) and he, in fact, collected field grass and created edible papers. With all these experiments, Cage has paved the way for Stoppard's playfully ironic play *Artist Descending a Staircase* (Stoppard, *ADS* 111, 119, 120, 126–7).

What is the rigidity of rule from one point of view is the caprice of chance from another aspect. Let this duality be exemplified by a witty story from Cage's "Indeterminacy" in his volume *Silence*. The anecdote is perchance a clearer Postmodern *ars poetica* than are all his pronouncements about the impossibility of all traditional means of music, the alleged error of Beethoven (Cage—Kostelanetz, *JCA* 81–3), and the need for rewriting experience in terms of mesostics or *I Ching* chance operations.

The story concerns a conductress who discovered that there was a surplus passenger on the crowded Manchester—Stockport bus. She asked who the last passenger was. Nobody answered. She gained the assistance of the driver and later of an inspector, yet all passengers kept quiet. After some time of general silence, the conductress, the driver and the inspector got off the bus to find a policeman. In their absence, a little man arrived asking whether that was the bus to Stockport. The passengers told him it was, so he got on the bus. The conductress, the driver and the inspector came back with a policeman, who, with the rigour of law and the righteousness of rule, asked in an officious and official tone who the last passenger on was.

The little man said, "I was." The policeman said, "All right, get off." All the people on the bus burst into laughter. The conductress, thinking they were laughing at her, burst into tears and said she refused to make the trip to Stockport. The inspector then arranged for another conductress to take over. She, seeing the little man standing at the bus stop, said, "What are you doing there?" He said, "I'm waiting to go to Stockport." She said, "Well, this is the bus to Stockport. Are you getting on or not?" (Cage, *S* 271; cf. Hayles—Perloff and Junkerman, *JCCIA* 226–41)

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THE WONDERFUL WIDOW OF EIGHTEEN SPRINGS

John Cage

JOHN CAGE

VOICE

PIANO

1. NIGHT BY THE SEA IN THE NIGHT

2. SLEEPER

3. WHO KNOWS AND WHO KNOWS

4. ALL THE MIND TO KNOW

5. IN MASTERS OF MIND AND WITH THE DEWS

6. MAY ALL SO SPIRIT LAY

7. STATE OF THE MIND OF TREE

8. ARE SOME NOT HARRY LAY

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17 18 19 20

THE BROTHER FLOW- ER STILLED AS FAIR WIND SWEE- A- BLE FOR SOUL AS GARD- EN TREES

2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Poco STRU-TO

22 23 24 25

WE TRU- ME- TROD ME AP- PARENT ME DEEPLY NOW E- VEN CA- RE- LESS SLEEP- ING

2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

RIT. E DIM. TEMPO (J. 58)

26 27 28 29

STAND I- SO PER- SE- CUTE GO- BEL- SWIFTE- L- SO- BEL- NA- TIVE

2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Poco Accel.

29 crie poco

30 31 32 33

VEU- VE- LA BEL- QUIET

2 3 4 1 2 3 4

RITARDANDO MOLTO