

MUAGE



According to Cage

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2012



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Symbol on cover and title page:

Whole rest fermata = silence as long as desirable.

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Concept

The 'language compositions' of John Cage¹ are simultaneously the most hermetic and the most intriguing he created. In these 'later' pieces silence and background noise became more and more important in Cage's work and were actually included in his music.

Mureau and *Empty words* are compositions which include citations from the works of Henry David Thoreau², a 19th century American philosopher who promoted - far ahead of his time - ecological and anarchistic ideas. He inspired many thinkers like Ghandi, Frederik van Eeden³ and John Cage.

Cage divided citations about sound, silence and music of Thoreau into phrases, words, syllables and letters which were ordered by I Ching⁴ chance operations and lost their 'obvious' meaning in the process. The resulting series of neutral, but also 'meaningless' syllables are language and music at the same time. The title *Mureau* is a combination of the word MUsic and the name thoREAU. Cage read/sang these pieces himself with a low and quiet voice in long and controversial performances⁵.

This project is a tribute to John Cage and an acknowledgment of the process involved in his language compositions, in the opposite order however: in this case the different letters, syllables, words, phrases and sentences are ordered alphabetically and gradually build up to 10 citations of ... John Cage. The title is the combination of the word MUsic and the name cAGE.

All five parts of the piece are equal in length, leaving space for silence (or sounds accepted as silence). Each part is about 3 minutes long (at a tempo of 100 beats per minute). Between the (many) different syllables there are eights rests ($\frac{1}{2}$ second), between the different letters and 10 citations 4 bars (16 seconds) of silence.

The vertical position of the letters indicate the (average natural) pitch of the vowels and consonants⁶. Reading aloud doesn't require any effort to 'follow' the vertical movement; the position of the letters is just an indication of the natural melody of language ... according to Cage ... also a form of music.

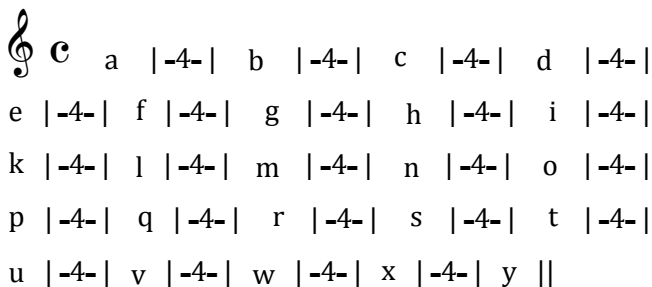
In many ways John Cage liberated and enriched music: the unpredictable percussion of the 'prepared piano', the silence of *4:33*, live electronics of


Imaginary landscapes, the free and beautiful music notation of *Aria*⁷. This last piece is the source of inspiration for *According to Cage*⁸, the interactive part this publication.


The application is part of the *Jazzperiments*⁹ project.


Antwerp, July 2012

According to Cage

 **C** a | -4- | b | -4- | c | -4- | d | -4- |
e | -4- | f | -4- | g | -4- | h | -4- | i | -4- |
k | -4- | l | -4- | m | -4- | n | -4- | o | -4- |
p | -4- | q | -4- | r | -4- | s | -4- | t | -4- |
u | -4- | v | -4- | w | -4- | x | -4- | y ||

 a , ac , al , all , am , an , and , are , as ,
ask , be , bo , can , cel , ces , cho , choi , con ,
dea , dif , don't , dy , e , ence , ex , fe , fer , fic ,
from , hap , have , he , heard , I , if , in , ing ,
is , it , it's , keep , lence , lent , lis , love , ly ,
make , makes , me , most , my , need , no ,
not , now , o , of , once , one , or , pe , pen ,
po , pre , ques , re , rea , real , rent , ri , rup ,
ry , say , see , si , sist , some , sound , sounds ,
starts , such , talk , ten , ter , that , the , them ,
ther , there , thers , thing , ti , ting , tions , to ,
traf , try , ty , ve , vi , want , ways , what ,
whe , which , world , you ||

 a } above } activity } all } almost }
already } always } am } an } and } are } as }
ask } be } can } choices } consist } different }
don't } echo } every } everywhere } excellent }
experience } from } happening } have } he }
heard } I } idea } if } in } interrupting } is } it }
it's } keep } listen } listening } love } make }
makes } me } my } need } no } not } nothing }
now } of } once } one } or } others } poetry }
prefer } questions } really } say } saying } see }
silence } something } sound } sounds } starts }
such } talk } that } the } them } there } thing }
to } traffic } want } what } whether } which }
world } you ||

 all of them are excellent - almost everywhere in the world - an echo of nothing - and - every something - I am saying it - I don't need sound to talk to me - I have nothing to say - I love - I want to keep from - if you listen to traffic - interrupting the silence which is already there - is - my choices consist of - no one can have an idea - now is traffic - once he really starts listening - silence - something is always happening - that is poetry - that makes a sound - the activity of sound - the experience of silence - the sound experience I prefer above all others - there are always sounds to be heard - there is no such thing as silence - what questions to ask - whether I make them or not - you see it's always different ||



Every something is an echo of nothing. | -4- | I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry. | -4- | I love the activity of sound. I don't need sound to talk to me. | -4- | I want to keep from interrupting the silence which is already there. | -4- | My choices consist of what questions to ask. | -4- | No one can have an idea once he really starts listening. | -4- | Silence almost everywhere in the world now is traffic ... and if you listen to traffic you see it's always different. | -4- | The sound experience I prefer above all others is the experience of silence. | -4- | There is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound. | -4- | Whether I make them or not, there are always sounds to be heard and all of them are excellent. ||

Notes

1

John Milton Cage

° Los Angeles, 5 September 1912, – † New York, 12 August 1992

John Cage had a strict and traditional childhood, although his father was an excentric inventor. John Milton Sr. taught his son that "if someone says 'can't' that shows you what to do." This marks at least one piece of fatherly advice he decided to follow throughout his life.

He studied with Henry Cowell and Arnold Schönberg, but always made his own alternative choices, being free and having a great sense of humor. John Cage became a vegetarian, romantic partner of Merce Cunningham, Zen Boeddhist, inventor of the 'prepared piano' ... and of course a groundbreaking composer. His best known works include: *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946-48), *Imaginary Landscapes 1-5* (1939-1952), *4'33"* (1952) and *Aria* (1958).

2

Henry David Thoreau

° Concord, 12 July 1817 – † Concord, 6 Mai 1862

Henry David Thoreau was an American philosopher, writer and inventor. In his twenties he lived alone for two years in a cabin near Walden Pond in Massachusetts and described nature and his own experience in a very detailed and inspired way in a diary which was published under the title *Walden*. Later in his extensive *Journal* he founded the concept of 'civil disobedience', motivating his decision not to pay taxes as a protest against the Mexican War, a refusal for which he willingly served a jail sentence.

3

Frederik van Eeden

° Haarlem, 3 April 1860 – † Bussum, 16 June 1932

Frederik van Eeden was well to do writer, socialist and idealist. His best known literary works are *De kleine Johannes* and *Van de koele meren des doods*. From 1898 to 1907 he led the 'colony' (commune) *Walden* in Bussum near Amsterdam in the spirit of Thoreau.

Another famous Dutch author Nescio described Frederik van Eeden in one of his short stories: "And then we met a gentleman in a farmer's smock

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and expensive yellow shoes eating little vanilla cakes from a paper bag ... his beard full of crumbs."

4

I Ching

The *Book of Changes* (*I Ching* or *Yijing* or *I Tjing*) is a classical Chinese text which is, according to tradition, partly written by Confucius himself. Tossing 3 coins 6 times, you can form 64 different hexagrams, each with a prophetic meaning. Cage used the principle to make neutral choices.

Even in this context, he chose the free alternative: he didn't wish a prediction, but wanted to accept pure coincidence. His thoughts on the matter: "When we use chance operations we give up the idea of limiting things to the best. We take everything."

5

Cage on stage

Performances of *Mureau* and *Empty Words* (also derived from texts of Thoreau) were long and monotonous and sometimes resulted in the audience revolting. An infamous performance of *Empty Words* in the Teatro Lyrico di Milano on 2 December 1977 led to hours of fighting and uproar in the theatre.

6

Letters and voices

All letters can be associated with a voice by their phonological features and 'expected' pitch (frequency) and moved vertically accordingly (just like notes in music notation):

- voiced consonants \approx bass
1 pt down: b d h j l m n v w z
- back vowels \approx tenor
0,5 pt down: a o u
- front vowels \approx alto
0 pt up or down: e i y
- voiceless consonants \approx soprano
0,5 pt up: c f g k p q r s t x

To keep this symbolic representation on the pitch of letters relatively simple, the difference between 'open' and 'closed' vowels is ignored.

Example:

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w z y x

7

Aria

During a visit to Milan in 1958 John Cage wrote *Aria* for the mezzo-soprano Cathy Berberian. The music notation he used for this piece consists of lines showing the melody, colors indicating the type of voice and a little black block which

represented percussion-like sounds. The text is a mix of many languages without a specific meaning. The natural notation of the piece is easy to interpret and a singer who performs *Aria* can at the same time follow the described melody and improvise freely. It soon became one of the most frequently performed pieces of John Cage and still is today.

8

According to Cage

Aria was the source of inspiration for installations in the Opera de Lille (France) and the MuHKA (museum for contemporary art) in Antwerp (Belgium) and an interactive online computer program (www.jazzperiments.com/cage), all titled *According to Cage*.

The voice of the user/singer is projected on a screen in the intriguing notation of *Aria*. And at the same time samples of his or her voice are marked in colors, recorded and played back according to the input ... but transposed as a bass (red), alto (yellow) or soprano voice (blue). Non-tonal 'percussion' sounds are shown as little blocks, just like in the score of Cage.

Jazzperiments is a continuous project for the development of interactive music applications. The main objective is to produce automatic and interesting musical responses on musical input, creating environments which are fun to play in. The applications are developed in open source Java and are available for anyone via the internet. Website and working Java application:
www.jazzperiments.com.

Colophon

Muage is printed in 600 copies as nr. 139 in the *Slibreeks* by the Centrum Beeldende Kunst Zeeland, Middelburg, The Netherlands.

This English text was edited by Aileen Doyle.

The software was produced by the author.

More information, interactive software and translations of the 'score' in other languages:

<http://www.jazzperiments.com/cage>