GETTING OFF THE GROUND:
WASSILY KANDINSKY, JOHN CAGE, AND
THE OTHERWORLDLY QUALITIES OF
THE EVERYDAY WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Many early twentieth-century artists considered music a paradigm for their own attempts to create non-objective painting. Artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and others saw music as a means of expression which could communicate without imitation and, as such, a model for their own abstract paintings. One of Kandinsky's primary goals was to create art which transmits emotion. He therefore sought the most efficient means of that transmission, a way of using form in such a manner that it reveals content clearly. His works, ideally, allow the viewer to perceive the extra-aesthetic world differently. Likewise, John Cage repeatedly emphasized the usefulness of music and art and predicated this usefulness on the active but receptive role of the viewer and listener. By making it impossible to perceive art in the traditional manner, Cage's music made it impossible to interpret it (and the world) traditionally. In effect, the manner in which Cage framed and presented the world in his works highlights the usually hidden aspects of things, allowing his audience to see and hear them with inexperienced eyes and ears.

In addition to dealing with both artists' relationship to Arnold Schoenberg, Nikolai Kulbin, and Modest Musorgsky, this thesis deals chiefly with Kandinsky's theoretical writings, paintings, poetry, and stage compositions; and with Cage's theoretical writings, music, prints, and multi-media works. By exploring these two artists' individual conceptions of synthesis, structure, experience, revelation, and usefulness, this work demonstrates how Cage, using
many of the same or similar methods Kandinsky used, in addition to those which are uniquely his own, continued and developed some of Kandinsky's most fundamental ideas and approaches to art and its function in everyday life. Upon reaching the essential, Kandinsky also reached the universal and the same may be said of Cage who, in framing the commonplace, extended his frame around the universe.
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INTRODUCTION

The orator puts off his individuality and is then most eloquent, when most silent. He listens while he speaks and is a hearer along with his audience.¹

Henry David Thoreau

Kandinsky outlines his conceptions of the basic components of art in several works written between 1910 and 1912, including Content and Form and On the Spiritual in Art. These conceptions apply to the visual arts as well as music, poetry, and other modes of creative expression. Kandinsky wrote abundantly on his art and on the topic of art in general, but none of his writings can be considered a manifesto. He found the proliferation of aesthetic laws in the arts tiresome, and his written works reflect a desire not to set forth a method by which the artist must create art, but rather to make his own intentions as clear as possible. To comprehend Kandinsky's coalescence of music and art, it is necessary first to understand his approach to the creative process.

When John Cage asked Arnold Schoenberg to be his teacher in 1934, Schoenberg required no fee of his new student, only a promise: that Cage dedicate his life to music. Cage had studied architecture for only six months in Paris and painted for a brief period shortly thereafter. The visual arts were a small sacrifice which Cage made readily for the

opportunity to study with the most important and innovative composer of his day. In 1969, thirty-five years later and more than a decade after Schoenberg's death, he broke his promise to create a graphic work entitled *Not Wanting to Say Anything About Marcel*, in memory of his friend Marcel Duchamp. Nearly a decade after that, he began making prints every year until he died. The only explanation for Cage's plunge into printmaking in the late 1970's is provided in a typically frank comment from Cage himself: he was invited to do so. He tells a story about an invitation to go to the Himalayas that he regretted not accepting and sincerely claims that, dreading the return of this same kind of regret, he accepted the invitation to make prints at Crown Point Press in Oakland, California in 1978. In 1990, Cage accepted another invitation, this one from the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (MOCA), to create "a large scale project" which has been described as "music for museums." This project, entitled *Rolywholyover A Circus*, dissolved the boundary between art objects and commonplace objects through chance methods used by Cage throughout his career in music, prints, and other works.

In 1934, when he was in his early twenties, Cage became acquainted with Emmy "Galka" Scheyer, who collected and sold works of the Blaue Reiter artists in California. He first asked for her opinion on his paintings, but she was much more interested the following year in his *Quartet* for percussion. Seeing immediately that his talent for musical composition far outstripped his sensitivity to the medium of painting, Scheyer introduced Cage to Oskar Fischinger as a possible composer of music to accompany one of his abstract films. Though it

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is unclear whether or not Cage ever produced a soundtrack for any of Fischinger's films, he
was commissioned to do so. But Fischinger insisted that Cage first become his assistant and
the composer spent some time "moving bits of colored cardboard hung on wires" while
Fischinger shot the frames. During Cage's apprenticeship, Fischinger once told him that,
"everything in the world has its own spirit, and this spirit becomes audible by setting it into
vibration." This statement appears, almost verbatim, in Kandinsky's essay "On the Question
of Form," printed in *The Blaue Reiter Almanac* in 1912. Cage recalls that, at that time, "I was
not inclined towards spiritualism. But I began to tap everything I saw."*

Although this initial inspiration to seek the spirituality of the commonplace came from
Fischinger, what Cage did with that inspiration more closely approximates and seems to
expand upon the career of Kandinsky. The latter's own ideas about spirituality and the
purposeful creation of art which could be useful stems from his and others' philosophies
associated with the Inkhuk schools in the newly-formed Soviet Union and the Bauhaus,
particularly during its early Weimar years. The similarities and differences in the approaches
to synthesis of Kandinsky and Cage may be symptomatic of the relationship between the
teaching philosophies of the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College, where Kandinsky and Cage
taught, respectively. A more in-depth look at the artistic production of the faculties and
students of these two institutions would be necessary, however, to establish such a
conclusion. Instead, by exploring these two artists' *individual* conceptions of synthesis,
structure, experience, revelation, and usefulness, I intend to demonstrate how Cage, using

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4 Ibid., 51-52.
many of the same or similar methods in addition to those which are uniquely his own, continues and develops some of Kandinsky’s most fundamental ideas and approaches to art and its function in everyday life.
CHAPTER I

SYNTHESIS, PART I

The way we look is more important than what we look at. We should be concerned with quality of seeing rather than with the supposed quality of what is seen.\(^5\)

Christopher Finch

According to Kandinsky, every work of art is a combination of internal and external elements. The emotion of the artist makes up the internal element, without which the work cannot exist. The material form, which is a physical manifestation of the artist's emotion, is the external element. For Kandinsky, content determines form, not vice versa, and therefore the external part of the work of art is of secondary importance and completely contingent upon the internal element. Submission of form to content, of the external to the internal element in order to communicate spiritually is what he considered his single most important tenet.\(^6\)

The emotion of which Kandinsky speaks as being at the core of the internal part of the work of art, arises from what he designates as a “vibration” in the soul of the artist. This vibration can be set off by any number of experiences in the artist’s daily life. Kandinsky cites


\(^{6}\) Wassily Kandinsky, Painting as Pure Art, in Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art, ed. by Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), 350. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references to Kandinsky's writings will be from this source.
external impressions as catalysts for his own internal vibration, and these impressions can be received through any of the five senses, although he emphasizes that his inspirations are most often visual and aural. The spiritual vibration produced in the soul of the artist generates a need to express itself. The work of art that arises from this internal necessity emulates the artist's own spiritual vibration in the vibration produced through the ordered interaction between the internal and external elements of the work. The emotion itself leads to what Kandinsky calls "feeling" (Gefühl), through which we receive and transmit emotions which are embodied in the work of art. Thus, these feelings act as links between the artist's emotion and the work of art, and then from the work of art to the observer's emotion. The link formed by the feelings of the artist and the observer can also be described as one that connects the material (the work of art) and the immaterial (the emotion). The chain of transmission from artist to observer is also one from emotion to emotion. In other words, the initial catalytic emotion provokes feelings in the artist which he translates into the physical (external) work of art. The observer, upon contemplating the work of art, explores his own feelings which, ideally, evoke those which are sympathetic to the internal aspect, or content, of the work of art.

Like the concept of beauty held by many early twentieth-century artists such as Brancusi and Malevich for example, Kandinsky's beauty is more an ethical condition than a visual one. It is achieved through the appropriately ordered balance of the internal and

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7 This passage comes from Kandinsky's response to Paul Plaut's questionnaire for his study The Psychology of the Productive Personality (1929), 737-738. Plaut's question concerns how the artist "gives birth to the idea of a new work of art."
8 Kandinsky, Painting as Pure Art, 886.
9 Ibid., 349.
external components.\textsuperscript{10} So long as artistic forms are manifestations of their internal aspects, they can be said to be the result of "purposeful creation," and so long as this purposeful creation is motivated by internal necessity, the forms can be called "beautiful."\textsuperscript{11} Since the external aspect cannot exist without the internal aspect and the internal aspect cannot be communicated from artist to observer without the external aspect, the ideal work of art is a balance of content and form, although Kandinsky insists that the content always precedes the form. Thus, the transmission of emotion, perhaps the most crucial function of Kandinsky's art, relies on the careful use of form in the material work.

The feasibility of Kandinsky's synthesis becomes more apparent in his monumental work on form entitled \textit{Point and Line to Plane}, published in 1926. Here, the point is identified as the most basic element of visual form. Points can be arranged in space to create images or they can be arranged in a period of time to create music.\textsuperscript{12} A large point can consist of many individual points, just as a chord consists of many individual notes. But this is different from the use of the dot in representational art, which involves making a drawing from many dots which are arranged in such a way as to form shapes that recall the shapes of material objects. Kandinsky considers this an "unjustified use of the point." When placed in submission to the representational aim of a painting, the power of the inner quality of the point is reduced.\textsuperscript{13} When a point is used in abstract art, as in \textit{Many-colored Ensemble} of 1938 (ill. 1), it can retain its essential integrity while simultaneously interacting with the inner

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} \textit{Ibid.}, 350.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Kandinsky, \textit{On the Spiritual in Art}, 205-206.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Kandinsky, \textit{Point and Line to Plane}, 559.
\item \textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, 570.
\end{itemize}
qualities of the other points. The points of the latter painting work like cells in an organism, each preserving its expressive sovereignty while working together to make a larger form with its own expressive qualities. Perhaps a similar idea exists in music. Employing notes to create purely abstract, non-representational music allows them to be musical, whereas using notes to evoke sounds from the extra-musical world (notes that simulate bird calls, rainstorms, or battle sounds, for example) diminishes their musical expression, forcing them to imitate noises and, in effect, to become representational.

To demonstrate the affinity of musical and visual points, Kandinsky translated several excerpts from Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 in C minor into a sequence of visual points (ill. 2). We can still "read" these points as the opening notes of Beethoven’s symphony, due in part to the fact that musical notation is made up of points and lines. In fact, the only thing really missing from Kandinsky’s diagram is the staff. In this diagram, however, Kandinsky’s dots do not communicate emotionally the way Beethoven’s music does.

Two paintings composed after the publication of Point and Line to Plane contain images which bear obvious resemblances to the written language of music. The central element in the 1929 painting Horizontal--Blue (ill. 3) is constructed of lines joined at right angles which could be interpreted as simulating the connected tails of quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes. In the upper half of Animated Stability of 1937 (ill. 4) "points," both circular and rectangular appear on and between lines, as though plotted on a graph, designating specific coordinates just as musical notes designate the location of a pitch and a temporal duration on the coordinates of its staff lines.
Another of the primary elements of purposeful creation discussed by Kandinsky is the line. In music, lines are not only produced by sequential arrangements of points (notes) but, as mentioned above, the horizontal lines of a staff provide a matrix on which the pitch of a note can be "plotted." In addition, Kandinsky believes that the dynamic range of a piece of music can be represented in a visual work by the relative intensity of the line. Light, thin lines might be used to express pianissimo, whereas darker, thicker lines might express fortissimo, as in Sketch of 1920 (ill. 5). Kandinsky, who had studied piano and cello in his youth, proposes that, "the pressure of the hand upon the bow [of a string instrument] corresponds perfectly to the pressure of the hand upon the pencil."\(^{14}\) In a related manner, the color and medium of the forms in Kandinsky's paintings has an effect on their musical timbre: the glistening dots and lines of India ink contrast with the dry, diaphanous shapes painted in gouache the way the intonation of a piano contrasts with that of a cello, for instance. To carry the comparison one final step further, time also is indicated by the "color" of the notes, a whole note being "white" and a quarter note being "black."\(^{15}\) The ability of points and lines to evoke an emotional image is made apparent in one account of an experience Kandinsky had while attending a concert in Moscow. He saw the lines of the music, not the written lines of notation, but the rhythmic evocation of lines "rising in the air in front of him, tangling in the sound-space, pausing, swelling and fleeing into infinity."\(^{16}\)

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 618.
\(^{15}\) Ibid., 619.
Kandinsky praises the "complete conciseness and simplicity of these elements of translation [the elements of musical notation], which in the clearest possible language transmit to the trained eye (and indirectly to the ear) the most complex sound phenomena." He simultaneously marvels at the ability of these "sound phenomena" (musical pieces) to evoke an intellectual response in the listener and attests to the comparable ability of abstract painting.

In *Point and Line to Plane*, Kandinsky also reminds us of the use of curved and straight lines to denote the rhythmic forms of poetry. By identifying the combination and sequence of straight and curved lines, we can identify various poetic meters, and it is only a small step from this to the realization that learning to read a written language of any kind consists mainly of learning to interpret lines and points. A section of *On the Spiritual in Art* deals with the means by which words, sounds, and images have meaning. According to Kandinsky, the inner quality of a word (which has both visual and aural aspects) is derived from the object for which the word is a definition. If we hear or read the word, but do not see the object, we instantly construct an "abstract impression" of the object within our minds and this, in turn, acts as the catalyst for the spiritual vibration evoked by that object.

In the same manner musical and visual forms act as "words" which designate internal states of mind or spirit. These internal states are externally imperceptible. But by hearing and seeing the music and art which express these states, we form a concept of them within and thereby affect a reaction sympathetic to that of the artist or composer. Such a use of musical

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phrases can be found in the operas of Richard Wagner. Through his device of leitmotiv, Wagner employs sound to represent concepts, characters, and complex emotions, thereby intending to provoke the appearance of these concepts in the mind of those who hear these musical phrases in the context of his operas. Perhaps Kandinsky intends his repeated use of veiled forms such as the rowboat and St. George to evoke such responses as well. These visual leitmotivs will be dealt with below.

The meaningful substance of an abstract painting by Kandinsky is the contact point between content and form, between the spiritual and the material. He describes the creative process as,

the reverberating clash of different worlds which ... are fated to create that new world which is called the work of art. Every work is born, technically, in the way the cosmos is born, out of catastrophes and the wailings of chaos, which in the end form symphonic harmonies.\(^{19}\)

Kandinsky hints again at the chaotic excitement of creation and its capacity to unite opposing entities in the Prelude to his 1909 stage composition *The Yellow Sound*, in which the chorus sings of,

Dreams hard as stones ... And speaking rocks ...
Earth with riddles of fulfilling questions ...
The motion of the heavens ... And melting ... of stones ...
Invisible rampart ... growing upward ...
Tears and laughter ... Prayers while cursing ...
The joy of union and the blackest battles.
Dark light on the ... sunniest ... day ...
Blindingly bright shadow in darkest night\(^{20}\)

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\(^{19}\) Volboudt, *Kandinsky*, 28. Here Volboudt quotes Kandinsky from an unidentified source.

The Yellow Sound is arranged in seven parts: the Prelude and six acts which Kandinsky calls “Pictures.” There are actors, a chorus, and perhaps most importantly, an orchestra and lighting technicians. Much of the performance’s emotional import is carried by the constantly changing color and intensity of lights and their alliance with the music, written by Thomas von Hartmann. The text, written by Kandinsky, consists only of the Prelude (reproduced in full above), indistinct whispering or chanting, the exclamation “Silence!” at the end of the fourth “picture,” and the following brief, spoken chorus which seems to be a poetic counterpart to

On the Spiritual in Art:

The flowers cover everything, cover everything, cover everything.
Shut your eyes! Shut your eyes!
We are looking. We are looking.
Cover conception with innocence.
Open your eyes! Open your eyes!
Gone. Gone.²¹

The Romantic notion of seeing with the eyes closed is embodied in this exhortation to look within and characterizes much of the mystic quality of The Yellow Sound, as well as the obvious spirituality of Kandinsky’s paintings.²² The lack of a traditional narrative also relates the work to the artist’s later rejection of representation in painting. There were three separate unsuccessful attempts to produce The Yellow Sound: first, by Hugo Ball in Munich in 1914 (interrupted by the start of World War I); next by the Volksbühne in Berlin in 1922; and finally by Oskar Schlemmer at the Bauhaus in Weimar (at an unknown date after 1922). But

²¹ Ibid., 217.
²² In a letter to Will Grohmann dated November 25, 1925, Kandinsky writes, “Once you referred to ‘Romanticism’ and I am glad you did ... Today there is Neue Sachlichkeit; why should there not be a New Romanticism?” Künstler schreiben an Will Grohmann (Cologne, 1968); quoted in Jelena Hahl-Koch, Kandinsky, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1993), 276.
Kandinsky never saw it performed, despite the fact that its radical innovation was immediately recognized by many contemporary artists and musicians who were full of praise and enthusiasm for it from the very beginning. Kandinsky was drawn to theater works because they represented an art form capable of drawing together many different media, including painting, music, dance, and poetry. He probably realized, as did Cage, that, "what comes after theatre is what we have to begin with and that’s daily life."  

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27 John Cage, interview by Nicholas Zurbrugg, transcript, February 7, 1990, 3. John Cage Archive, Music Library, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. The John Cage Archive comprises Cage’s correspondence and other papers from 1950-1992, organized chronologically: the Notations collection, a project undertaken by Cage and Alison Knowles in 1969 involving four hundred score manuscripts by approximately three hundred composers; and the original manuscript scores for Music of Changes and the Piano Solo from Concert for Piano and Orchestra.
CHAPTER 2

EXPERIENCE AND USEFULNESS

...one must achieve this unselfconsciousness by means of transformed knowledge. This ignorance does not come from lack of knowledge but rather it is from knowledge that one may achieve this ignorance ... It is by reason of this fact that we are made perfect by what happens to us rather than by what we do.  

Meister Eckhart

As previously mentioned, Kandinsky values personal, external, sensory experiences as causes of the spiritual vibration necessary to launch the material work of art. He also specifies that his inspirations are most often visual and aural and may spring from a tremendous variety of circumstances, from works of art to ordinary occurrences such as the sight of a mailbox or the sound of a board falling to the floor. Several of his most significant experiences are recorded in his 1913 memoir, Reminiscences. Before The Yellow Sound, Kandinsky credits Claude Monet and Richard Wagner with helping to plot his trajectory towards abstraction and the relationship between art and music in his painting. It is likely that he came in contact with Monet’s paintings in Moscow at the 1896 French Industrial and Art Exhibition. He was

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25 Kandinsky, The Psychology of the Productive Personality, 737-38.
26 Hahl-Koch, Kandinsky, 37.
particularly struck by one of the *Haystack* paintings, which were no more than six years old at the time. What he found so intriguing about the image was that he did not, at first, see the haystack. His first reaction was to dismiss the work and its creator. But after further reflection, and because it was only after he read the title of the work in the catalogue that he realized that the object in the painting was a haystack, he writes, “for the first time, I saw a picture.”

Less than a year later, a comparable incident further cemented his resolve to purge his paintings of objects. Upon returning to his studio at dusk, he was surprised to find that he did not recognize one of his own paintings leaning sideways against the wall. Unable to discern the objects depicted, he nevertheless appreciated the colors and forms and made a failed attempt the next day to recreate the experience with a new painting. Despite the shortcomings of this experiment, he recalls that, “now I could see clearly that objects harmed my pictures.” Although his first abstract watercolor was still several years away, from this point, Kandinsky did not consider any object to be necessary for painting but saw instead that a *non-objective* painting could possess more power to efficiently transmit emotion than a representational one.

Although Kandinsky’s encounter with the music of Wagner at a performance of *Lohengrin* occurred at about the same time that he first saw Monet’s *Haystacks* and his own painting at twilight, the significance of this encounter was of a more intuitive nature. He later

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28 Ibid., 369-70.
dismissed *Lohengrin* as superficial and sentimental, “the weakest of Wagner’s operas,”
but this assessment probably refers more to the story than the music because he greatly
esteemed the rest of the composer’s musical œuvre. Sitting in the audience at the Bolshoi
Theater, Kandinsky recalls, “I saw all my colors in my mind; they stood before my eyes.
Wild, almost crazy lines were sketched in front of me ....”

30 He became convinced that a painting could be the catalyst for a similarly powerful synesthetic experience, and although he
was not certain how it would be done, he probably felt that it would be accomplished
through some means not unlike that used by Monet to de-emphasize the object.

Kandinsky’s interest in forging a synthesis of the arts, especially between visual art and
music, intensified in Munich in January of 1911 when he and Franz Marc attended a concert of
works by Arnold Schoenberg. The program included Schoenberg’s *Three Piano Pieces* and
*Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, works composed at the beginning of Schoenberg’s atonal
phase but before his formulation of the twelve-tone method. Kandinsky was initially intrigued
by the music itself, especially *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, a cycle of *lieder* with texts
taken from poems by Stefan George, whom he admired. But he was particularly excited by
Schoenberg’s program notes, which were excerpted from the composer’s treatise
*Harmonielehre*. Though they had never met, Kandinsky immediately wrote to Schoenberg,
introducing himself and his own ideas and launching a correspondence and personal friendship
that they sustained until Kandinsky’s death in 1944.

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29 In a footnote to an earlier publication of *Reminiscences* as “Stupeni” (Steps) V.V. Kandinsky, Tekst
Khudozhnika (Moscow: IZO NKP, 1918); quoted in Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky: Complete Works*, 889.
It was probably this pivotal evening which inspired Kandinsky's painting of the same year, *Impression III* (ill. 6). The angled open lid of the black grand piano and the members of the audience are clearly discernible, particularly if one is provided with the painting's subtitle, which is "Concert." What is less obvious, but perhaps more informative in terms of understanding Kandinsky's development of abstraction and his inspiration from Schoenberg is his devotion of half the canvas's surface to a bright, saturated yellow hue, which seems to flow from the piano and inundate the audience. Hahl-Koch points out the relationship of this painting to Kandinsky's exploration of the innate qualities of specific colors in *On the Spiritual in Art*. Yellow, according to the artist, "is disquieting to the spectator, pricking him, stimulating him."31 It is clear that, for his impression of a concert of shocking, ground-breaking music at which he himself was a member of the audience, Kandinsky chose his colors carefully and thoughtfully.

Musically speaking, what seized Kandinsky's attention was Schoenberg's attack on the long-standing imposition of arbitrary definitions of consonance and dissonance. His music was revolutionary in its abolition of relational harmony and, partly for this reason, was ill-received by most contemporary audiences. He sought a means of musical self-expression which emphasized the inner rather than external beauty of tones.32 Likewise, Kandinsky and other artists were harshly criticized for their abandonment of representation in painting and for sacrificing what their opponents called "beauty" in the process. It was perhaps at this time that

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31 Citing examples from the extra-aesthetic world, Kandinsky explains, "it is interesting to notice that lemons are yellow (acid taste), and that canaries are also yellow (shrill sound of their singing). These are examples of a particular intensity of the color-tone." Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, 180-181.

32 Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, 149.
Kandinsky realized that music had already attained the level of abstraction to which visual art aspired. He was almost envious of the purity and advancement of music, especially as he saw it used by Schoenberg, and regretted that it would probably be many years before painting reached the same point. He saw, in the "clarity and complexity of musical counterpoint," the goal of abstract art.

Part of Cage's intention is to abolish the line that separates art from life, which, he contends, is full of countless unrelated elements that constantly strike and pass us, and none of which is more significant than any other. Art becomes something that provides us with a way of looking at the rest of the world differently, instead of something that provokes us to look at it differently than we do the rest of the world. Cage was intrigued by the "white writing" paintings of Mark Tobey (ill. 7) and, in a manner akin to that of Kandinsky's Reminiscences, explains how he used them to change his perception of the world:

... I was standing at a corner on Madison Avenue waiting for a bus and I happened to look at the pavement, and I noticed that the experience of looking at the pavement was the same as the experience of looking at the Tobey ... The aesthetic enjoyment was just as high ... In other words, I used Abstract Expressionism as though it were something I could use, not as something that had been given to me to understand, but as something that I could see in the way that I had been changed to see.

The viewer is encouraged to use art, rather than merely look at it. Cage recalls that this experience caused him to realize that "...if art was going to be of any use, it was going to be of

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33 "How infinitely lucky... musicians are with their so far advanced art. Real ART that already has the privilege of dispensing totally with strictly practical means. How long will painting have to wait for this?" Kandinsky, letter to Arnold Schoenberg, April 9, 1911; quoted in Hahl-Koch, Kandinsky, 152.
34 Kandinsky, Content and Form, 90.
use not with reference to itself, but with reference to the people who used it, and that they
would use it not in relation to art itself, but in relation to their daily lives.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, 176-177.
CHAPTER 3

ABSTRACTION AND SYNTHESIS

The whole work, called art, knows no borders or nations, only humanity.37

Kandinsky and Franz Marc

Many years later, in his article "Abstract Painting," published in 1936 in the Dutch journal Chronicle of Contemporary Art and Culture, Kandinsky used the example of music in defense of abstraction in painting. His argument was directed toward earlier critics who claimed that abstract art was too "limited in its expressive resources"38 to sustain itself. Opponents of abstract art believed that there were not enough possible combinations of form and color to keep an observer's attention without some narrative or reference to the world outside painting. Kandinsky counters this denunciation by pointing out the lack of representation in music and ironically lamenting,

... poor music! How "perilously" limited its resources are. The same strings and wind instruments over and over again, with just a touch of timpani thrown in. How is one supposed to distinguish between Bach and Johann Strauss?39

Kandinsky professes that the varieties of musical expression are unlimited and that their

\[\text{\textsuperscript{37} Kandinsky and Franz Marc, preface to The Blaue Reiter Almanac, 251.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{38} Kandinsky, Abstract Painting, 787.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.}\]
exhaustion is nowhere in sight, thereby implying that abstract art possesses a potential
diversity comparable to that of music.

Earlier, in response to negative criticism of an exhibition of his work in Stockholm in
1916, Kandinsky published a statement entitled "Art Without Subject," which again uses the
established example of music to defend the elimination of representation in visual art. He had
already created The Yellow Sound, a theater piece without narrative but, since it was never
performed in his lifetime, there were relatively few people who knew about it, perhaps none
outside his own artistic circles. The reaction to it was overwhelmingly positive. But the
exhibition in Stockholm was public and received very public and unfavorable reviews. In "Art
Without Subject," Kandinsky fabricates a fictitious concert-goer whose conception of music is
limited to songs (in which the "extra-musical" content is more or less plainly expressed in a
national language). Attending a concert of pure instrumental music, he finds it
incomprehensible. The reaction of the bewildered and insulted concert-goer includes his
contention that, without reference to some text, the musicians "can continue to play
indefinitely or stop at will. Without beginning! Without end! Such music even I can make!
Ha!"40 It can hardly be doubted that some members of the general public laughed at
Kandinsky's paintings for similar reasons. However, the idea of being able to "continue to play
indefinitely" without beginning or end effectively underscores the spirituality of Kandinsky's
paintings and their emphasis on the immaterial and, furthermore, supports his avowal that

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40 Kandinsky, Art Without Subject, 419-420.
abstraction is teeming with expressive resources. In any case, it can be seen that he found in music a powerful justification for the elimination of representation from visual art.

Part of Kandinsky’s plan to create a synthesis of the arts, and of visual art and music particularly, was to demonstrate their common roots. In his article "L’Art Concret" of 1938, he cites physical and scientific connections between human perceptions of music and art and their effects. Kandinsky’s description of the internal vibration of the components of the work of art is once again established as a preface to his consideration of the external vibrations involved in perception. He points to the manifestation of music and art in waves. We perceive musical sound as vibrations or waves which travel through the air to our ears, and we perceive visual art through light waves which travel to our eyes.\(^{41}\) Music’s essential means of expression are sound and time, while those of painting are color and space. Kandinsky’s proposed synthesis involves inverting these aspects; that is, composing and perceiving music in terms of color and space, and composing and perceiving paintings in terms of sound and time.

In *Content and Form*, the kinship of music and art is made evident by means of an analysis of our perceptions of them. Colors in isolation will always cause the same spiritual vibration, not unlike the sounding of one note by one instrument. But since absolute isolation is impossible, the absolute inner vibration is always altered by the peculiar circumstances which accompany the isolated color-tone, including the juxtaposition of another color-tone.

\(^{41}\) Kandinsky, *L’Art Concret*, 815.
In music, this is analogous to the simultaneous playing of other notes in a chord or by other instruments.\(^{42}\)

These circumstances are not meant to be seen as interfering with our perception of the pure color-tones. The work of art is made of many parts, and "in isolation, these individual parts are lifeless;"\(^{43}\) they can only be "purposeful" when perceived as part of the whole. Kandinsky compares the individual colors, forms, or notes within a painting or composition to a human finger. Alone, it is purposeless and useless. Its effectiveness is determined by its ordered juxtaposition with the other fingers, the hand, the arm, and the rest of the body. In his comments on Schoenberg's music theory published in *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, Kandinsky praised the "organic" quality of the connections Schoenberg made.\(^{44}\) In Schoenberg's essay "The Relationship to the Text" of 1912, the composer's ideology runs parallel to Kandinsky's when he observes that "...the work of art is like every other complete organism. It is so homogeneous in its composition that in every little detail it reveals its truest, inmost essence."\(^{45}\)

Many of Kandinsky's forms overlap and change one another in doing so, particularly in his more geometric paintings of the Bauhaus period. Works such as *Several Circles* (ill. 8) and *Asserting* (ill. 9), both of 1926, contain forms which change hue or intensity or both as they pass behind and in front of one another. In some cases it is impossible to determine what color the form would be if one were to see it in isolation from the others because the new

\(^{42}\) Kandinsky, *Content and Form*, 89.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 89-90.

\(^{44}\) Kandinsky, *Footnotes to Schoenberg's "On Parallel Octaves and Fifths,"* 93.

hues existing at the points of intersection are not created according to laws of any optical color theory; for example, the color "child" of a yellow and a red disk in Several Circles is not orange. None of the overlapping transparent forms in Asserting are obliterated by any other as they would be if they adhered to an optical rather than intuitive use of color. Instead, each "asserts" its unique form and hue without submitting to or dominating any other. Cage, too, makes his interaction of forms harmonious by allowing each to mingle with all of the others and yet preserving its individual essence. But his use of harmony is neither conventional nor structural; it is allowed to exist as merely another formal element and in this way it is allowed to be expressive rather than dictatorial.46 One of his more traditional musical compositions, Dream for Piano Solo (1948), is a Satie-like piece composed for a dance by Merce Cunningham. At the pianist's discretion, tones can be "freely sustained, manually or with the pedal, beyond notated durations."47 Depending upon the performer, the result can be the gradual condensation of a cloud of tones from which individual tones emerge and then into which they sink back, the cloud itself continually growing and evaporating.48 As if paraphrasing Kandinsky's ideas from On the Spiritual in Art and throughout his written production, the performance notes of Dream include the premise that "dreams translate internal reality into the vocabulary of external reality, turning impulse into image."49

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48 This is realized particularly well in the 1993 recording by Hildegarde Klee, (Therwil, Switzerland: Hat Hut Records, Ltd., 1993), CD6129.
49 Cage, Dream, 1.
CHAPTER 4

STRUCTURE

Schoenberg's song cycle *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, which Kandinsky heard in Munich, was one of his first works to abandon tonality. Over a decade later, Schoenberg began composing works using his twelve-tone method in tandem with serialism. The structure of his compositions, rather than being based on traditional tonal and harmonic relations, is derived from the twelve tones of the chromatic scale arranged in any order in what Schoenberg calls a “tone row.” Once this order is decided upon, it may be varied by repetition backwards (retrograde), upside-down (inversion), and upside-down and backwards (retrograde inversion). These variations may be used sequentially in any order designated by the composer and two or more transpositions of the original tone row may be used simultaneously to create atonal harmonies. Schoenberg used this method most strictly in his 1928 *Variations for Orchestra*, in which the theme and all of its variations are based on a single tone row (ill. 10). Subsequent works use the twelve-tone method with varying rigidity, particularly during his years in Los Angeles when he composed using multiple techniques, both tonal and atonal. By this method, tones and chords are allowed, through repetition and variation, to express individually rather than in traditional harmonic relations.

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Both Kandinsky and Schoenberg agree that the meaning of forms can be elucidated by their repetition. Kandinsky reminds us of childhood games in which the repetition of a word can make it nonsensical. But it can also lead to the expansion of our conception of the word and elaborate "unrealized spiritual qualities of the word."\textsuperscript{50} Repetition in music has an equivalent use. Schoenberg's \textit{Five Orchestral Pieces}, composed in 1909 were criticized not only for their atonality, but for their perceived redundancy. The third of these pieces makes use of a five note chord that is repeated throughout the piece, with altered instrumentation, temporal duration, and dynamics. The meticulous changes used by Schoenberg were spawned by the visual impression of light reflected from a lake and serve to highlight the multiplicity of the chord's expressive import. In a like manner, repetition in Kandinsky's paintings achieves similar results. In his 1927 painting \textit{Square} (ill. 11), a repeating pattern of squares might at first appear merely duplicative, with only the colors of the form in the middle ground introducing any variation. But upon closer examination, even the brown and white squares of the background show slight shifts in their geometric form and subtle gradations of hue which change from one square to the next and allow each one to take on a slightly different appearance. \textit{Division--Unity} of 1934 (ill. 12) has a structure akin to Schoenberg's twelve-tone compositions and its diagonal grid is strongly reminiscent of that in \textit{Square}. Here, however, each irregularly-shaped enclosure contains a different group of active and organic forms, smaller forms in each case seeming to orbit the larger, more complex ones.

\textsuperscript{50} Kandinsky, \textit{On the Spiritual in Art}, 147. This idea is not unlike that in Gertrude Stein's now famous poem "Sacred Emily" of 1913, in which Stein observes "rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," asserting that this repetition is not redundant.
The repetition of a form makes it possible to take in connotations which we might not be able to grasp if we see it only once, because the form is allowed to interact with itself, with its own varied internal aspects.\(^{51}\) This interaction, because it relies on repetition, must take place over time. One of Schoenberg's students, Anton Webern, compared his teacher's use of varied repetition in the twelve-tone method to the structural laws of nature. Webern contends that the parts of a plant, its roots, stem, leaves, and flowers, are all variations of the same concept though each contributes a different function to the whole.\(^{52}\)

The structure of Kandinsky's paintings is also, in some cases, derived from a particularly significant form which can be compared to Schoenberg's tone row. A number of Kandinsky's images from his more objective early paintings, images such as St. George and the rowboat, appear in more abstract form in his later compositions and other paintings. While Schoenberg often used numerology (frequently derived from the Kabala) to determine the order of his tone row, Kandinsky's method was less calculated, if not less mystical. The rowboat, which appears prominently in *Improvisation 26 (Rowing)* of 1912 (ill. 13), turns up again the same year in a woodcut vignette accompanying the poem "Open" in his book *Sounds* (ill. 14). This motif appears numerous times, sometimes in highly altered form, throughout the course of his career. There is also an intriguing handling of the motif in his

\(^{51}\) In this case, I am referring to a relatively complex form such as those within the grid of *Division--Unity*. Because each of these forms is made up of several smaller forms and several different colors, one may speak of multiple internal aspects. In this way, the structure of such a painting may be compared not only to that of Schoenberg's twelve-tone method, but also to that of some Baroque music. This analogy may be borne out through a reading of Friederich Neumann's *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music* (Princeton University Press, 1978) with Kandinsky's paintings in mind.

1913 Small Pleasures and its subsequent variations, which will be discussed below. One of the most interesting uses of the rowboat motif is in his 1913 Composition VII (ill. 15), in which Kandinsky apparently uses it in the lower left corner as the starting point of the entire painting. A preliminary oil sketch for the painting (ill. 16) shows no rowboat in the lower left corner but, instead, according to Hahl-Koch, a reclining couple. An outline in ink for the work (ill. 17) designates this motif as the zarozhdienie, meaning "genesis," "root," or "starting point" of the painting. When creating the work on a much larger scale in oil on canvas, this corner is occupied by the rowboat motif. This change in imagery is significant because it points to a change in Kandinsky’s metaphor of creation from one of material conception to one equating it with a sort of crossing, a passage from one place to another.

Similarly, the image of St. George is clearly identifiable in figurative paintings such as All Saints I of 1911 (ill. 18) and in a design from the same year for the cover of The Blaue Reiter Almanac (ill. 19). This figure recurs much later in Kandinsky’s career in Isolation of 1944 (ill. 20), in which St. George appears on the right facing a dragon composed of curiously three-dimensional trapezoids in a white cloud with a white spiral to one side, perhaps suggesting the dragon’s tail. The rowboat motif, altered to resemble something like a horse, hovers to the left of St. George’s head. The rowboat appears again on the right-hand side of a 1943 painting entitled Brown Impetus (ill. 21) in which St. George and his horse have been formally reduced in the both geometric and yet organic style of Kandinsky’s late period. The dragon has become a simple, wiggling, serpentine line. The inclusion of the word “impetus” in the title points to the role of these recurring motifs as motivating forces in Kandinsky’s mode of
visual expression and that expression’s role in the abandonment or destruction of the material in favor of the spiritual.

Possibly related to this repeated use of motifs in Kandinsky’s paintings is the occasional inclusion of a small version of one painting in the plane of another. His 1929 oil painting *Picture Within a Picture* (ill. 22) contains two rectangular areas in its composition which have been interpreted as designating earlier stages in the development of abstract painting.\(^{53}\) The sub-composition in the upper right corner may refer both to Kandinsky’s Bauhaus period with its profusion of triangles and other geometric shapes, and to the earlier landscapes of his Murnau days because of their oblique references to “mountains and heavenly orbs.”\(^{54}\) The nearly square composition located slightly below the center of the painting refers to Neoplasticism and to what Mark Cheetham specifically calls the “narrowness” of Mondrian’s brand of essentialism. He states that these two pictures within the picture refer to two different steps on the road to pure abstraction which fall short of the mark. It seems, however, that Cheetham’s interpretation of the upper right corner of the painting is accurate only in part. I would argue instead that the upper right corner of *Picture Within a Picture* both looks back to the artist’s earlier works and acts as a catalyst for a new work. While this corner of *Picture Within a Picture* may very well allude to the character of Kandinsky’s earlier works, it is also remarkably similar to his watercolor entitled *Peaceful* (ill. 23). The sail-like triangles and stabilizing horizontally-oriented rectangles of this work make it a very probable candidate

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\(^{54}\) ibid., 95.
for the work which Kandinsky calls to mind in *Picture Within a Picture*. However, the latter work dates to 1929 while *Peaceful* is dated 1930. Kandinsky may have been working on both paintings simultaneously, although it seems unlikely that he would have been working in oil and watercolor at the same time. The seed of *Peaceful* was planted in Kandinsky’s Bauhaus and Murnau periods, sprouted in *Picture Within a Picture* and finally took on its own independent existence as a watercolor the following year. The precedent for this handling of his own history is set in his variations on his 1913 painting *Small Pleasures* (ill. 24).

The primary forms and composition of *Small Pleasures* appear almost without deviation in his 1917 painting *Blue Arch (Ridge)* (ill. 25). The city on the hill motif appears centrally in both works and the red rowboat with black oars from the right side of *Small Pleasures* appears, much elongated, at the foot of the hill four years later in *Blue Arch*. Around 1924, in an attempt to illustrate to his wife Nina the compositional character of the previous decade’s work, Kandinsky made a simplified ink drawing of *Small Pleasures* (ill. 26). Many scholars point to this drawing as the beginning of the artist’s transition to the pure geometricity of his Bauhaus and later works because of the inclusion, for the first time in this work, of a circle drawn with a compass. This precise circle appears at least twice in his oil painting of the same year, *Backward Glance* (ill. 27), along with two different variations on the rowboat motif in the lower left corner. Despite the fact that he had already made a large-scale oil painting (*Blue Arch*) obviously based on *Small Pleasures* in 1917, the 1924 painting *Backward Glance* is clearly looking back at *Small Pleasures* and the 1924 drawing of it and not to *Blue Arch*. Kandinsky does not necessarily develop his career in ordered steps, but leaps back to pick up loose threads and weave them into new works which bypass the stages in-
between. Cheetham contends that Kandinsky places replicas of his (and others') earlier works in his paintings to emphasize his progress, but it may be more accurate to say that what the artist wants to emphasize is process. The significant forms in Kandinsky's works develop over a long period of time, not merely within one painting, but over the course of his career. This is what makes it possible for him to take one corner of a work which refers to one of his earlier styles and create a new and independent work from it.

Cage also uses pieces within pieces. Museumcircle, although conceived and organized separately, was incorporated within Roywholyover as if it were an installation that was equal to the other works from each museum's permanent collection. What is particularly intriguing about this is that, although it is installed along with works taken from within museum's permanent collection, the objects in Museumcircle come from outside the museum in which they are exhibited. He also writes pieces which have interchangeable parts "to be played in whole or part in any ensemble." His Solo for Piano may be played independently or with other works such as Winter Music and Fontana Mix, or with solo parts for other instruments to become Concert for Piano and Orchestra. In addition, parts of it were simultaneously performed with Cage's narration in Indeterminacy and many of his works, though composed as strictly instrumental works, have been used as accompaniments to dance pieces by Merce Cunningham, as is the case with the aforementioned Dream for Piano Solo. Cage's entire output, for that matter, may be seen as an enormous work in

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55 Cage, general directions for Atlas Eclipticals (New York: Henmar Press, Inc., 1961). The directions also indicate that this work may be performed with or without Winter Music (1957).
progress with each individual piece operating independently or in any combination with one another.\textsuperscript{56}

It is Cage's earliest works, however, that show the most fastidious dependence on structure. Pitch, timbre, loudness, and duration are, according to Cage, the four characteristics of sound, whose inverse is silence. The principal conceptual reason that Cage abandoned tonality and traditional harmony and concentrated instead on the temporal aspects of music was that it was the only characteristic that both the polar opposites sound and silence shared. Rhythmic structure can be the only appropriate, or as Kandinsky would say, \textit{beautiful} basis for composing music because it is the only one which is true to all aspects and materials of the medium.\textsuperscript{57} As mentioned above, Kandinsky felt that the transmission of emotion relied on the skillful use of form in the material work. Being truthful to one's medium is an integral part of both artists' works.

Rhythm, for Kandinsky and Cage, exists in every musical structure, every painting, and in the unintentional arrangement of objects in the natural world. In nature (and in abstract painting), this rhythm is not as readily discernible because it has no apparent intention. Trying to define the distinction between rhythmic and non-rhythmic forms in nature and abstract painting is as irrelevant, as Schoenberg shows, as attempting to define the boundary between consonance and dissonance in music, an arbitrary boundary born of human conventions. Kandinsky expands this argument when speaking of spirit and matter. "Is everything matter? Is

\textsuperscript{56} Cage's original conception for his work entitled \textit{The Ten Thousand Things}, begun in 1953 was outlined in a letter to Pierre Boulez: "... a large work which will always be in progress and will never be finished: at the same time any part of it will be able to be performed once I have begun." John Cage, New York, to Pierre Boulez, Paris, May 1, 1953. John Cage Archive, Music Library, Northwestern University, Evanston Illinois.

everything spirit? Is it not possible that the distinctions we draw between matter and spirit are merely degrees of matter or spirit?\textsuperscript{58} Like Cage, he seems to urge us to avoid a too-scrutinizing concern for categorization when considering such things.

Upon settling on rhythm as the most important compositional element for his early musical works, Cage developed what he called his micro-macrocosmic structure and utilized it with subtle augmentations for almost two decades. To illustrate this device, I will summarize James Pritchett’s treatment of the subject in terms of the 1939 percussion work *First Construction (in Metal).*\textsuperscript{59} The work (ill. 28) contains sixteen rhythmic units, each of which contain sixteen measures. Each unit of sixteen measures is divided into five phrase groups of oscillating number; they are arranged sequentially in groups of four, three, two, three, and four measures. Likewise, the sixteen rhythmic units of the piece are arranged in sections of four, three, two, three, and four units. Thus, the same numerical sequence used to group the smallest parts of the piece is also used to group its largest parts. The precision and austerity of Cage’s micro-macrocosmic structure resembles Schoenberg’s twelve-tone method in its organization of sound around a numerical sequence, although Schoenberg is dealing with tones and harmony while Cage’s focus is rhythm alone. In both cases, however, the sequence acts as the primary form or “genesis” of the work. Perhaps more importantly for this discussion, it also bears out, albeit in a rather sterile manner, Kandinsky’s intention that the external form should reflect its internal qualities. Cage’s micro-macrocosmic structures also bear a resemblance to fractals which, before they were generated by supercomputers,  

\textsuperscript{58} Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, 138.  
were discovered in the natural world (e.g. in the arrangement of stars in a galaxy and the fibers in the down feathers of geese). For all their ethereality, Kandinsky’s and Cage’s ideologies are consistently reverent toward nature.

Something like the micro-macrocosmic plan exists in some of Kandinsky’s paintings from the 1930s. The three strong vertical bars of Intimate Division (ill. 29) make up a form on which the painting’s smaller forms are constructed. These smaller forms may directly echo the three vertical bars, or the three lines may be joined at the top and bottom to create a rectangle divided into two color halves, or they may intersect both vertically and horizontally to make a cross-like grid reminiscent of Jawlensky’s “Kopf” paintings. As in First Construction (in Metal), there is a powerfully, though not inexpressively, rigid structural integrity between the smallest and largest parts of the composition. Thirty of 1937 (ill. 30) makes use of a grid and checkerboard-like alternation of black and white that correlate it with the earlier Division--Unity and Square, discussed in relation to Schoenberg’s twelve-tone compositions. Several of the rectangles within the painting echo the proportions of the whole canvas, relating its smaller parts to its largest part and, in addition, the lower left corner contains a diagonal grid which echoes that of Division--Unity.

Repetition and variation of this sort may also be found in the “fanlike” shapes which, when grouped, make a “fanlike” composition in Kandinsky’s 1941 tempera painting entitled Fanlike (ill. 31). These forms, narrower at the bottom than at the top, have counterparts in the more rounded forms surrounding the central grouping and presage, according to Hahl-Koch, the trapezoidal boxes that comprise the dragon in Isolation of 1944.
Like Kandinsky and Schoenberg, Cage valued the cumulative effect of repetition in a structure. In his *Ryoanji* (1983-85), each member of the orchestra is allowed to choose any tone which he or she repeats over a central rhythmic structure in an accompaniment to a soloist whose instrument varies from performance to performance. In *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs* (1942), one of Cage’s many works which make use of texts by James Joyce, the vocalist’s line begins and ends on a “B” and continually reverts back to it from the “A” below and the “E” above it, as though circling around and alighting on it throughout the piece (ill. 32).

Cage’s most extreme (and most notorious) experiment in repetition did not even involve his own work, but one which he rediscovered in Paris in the 1950s and whose premiere he organized in 1963. This was Erik Satie’s *Vexations*, a piece for solo piano which repeats the same lines approximately once every eighty seconds for a total of eight-hundred and forty repetitions. The concert began at 6:00 in the evening on September 9 and concluded at 12:40 in the afternoon on September 11. Among the pianists who took shifts in the relentless performance were Cage himself, Viola Farber, Christian Wolff, David Tudor, and John Cale. *Vexations* had long been considered a joke, but since Cage’s premiere, many musicologists have taken the piece more seriously. The experience was a profound one not only for Cage, who remembers driving home “a changed man,” but also for the other performers and all those present for any part of it. After the conclusion of the performance, many bottles of champagne were opened, but scarcely a word was spoken.60 After lying

60 Looking back at the post-concert reception, Cage says that, “we all realized that something had been set in motion that went far beyond what any of us had anticipated.” Quoted in Revill, *The Roaring Silence*, 205.
dormant in an archive for decades, the piece was finally allowed to expand the way it should have long ago. On the page, as an idea, it was absurd. But as an experience in time and space, it enlightened. In reference to many things besides the Vexations premiere, Cage was fond of recalling a piece of advice from Zen: "If something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, try it for eight, sixteen, thirty-two, and so on. Eventually one discovers that it's not boring at all but very interesting."  

One of Cage's other intriguing uses of a primary formal structure or "genesis" is his employment of mesostics in preparing texts. When creating Roaratorio in 1979, Cage "wrote through" James Joyce's novel Finnegans Wake (ill. 33) by means of a process which is most concisely explained by Jill Johnston:

Using a method called mesostics -- a form of acrostics -- which means literally "a row down the middle," he went through the 626 pages of Finnegans Wake, reducing it at first to 120 pages, and later in a final version to 41 pages, by organizing the text around the two words: JAMES JOYCE. Beginning on Joyce's first page he selected the first word with a J in it that didn't have an A, because the A would belong to the next line for JAMES, and so on through the entire book, making a path or vertical line down the center of his own text consisting of the 10 letters of Joyce's name, and utilizing his time-honored chance operations to determine how many of Joyce's words surrounding the mesostic word proper would be included on each line ... so that Cage's text looks visually like a Minimalist concrete poem, or like a Cummings or an Apollinaire, especially as Cage lower-cased everything but Joyce's name, and eliminated all punctuation.  

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61 Cage, Indeterminacy: New Aspect of Form in Instrumental and Electronic Music. Smithsonian Folkways Recording SF40804/5, 1992. This work consists of the recording of a 1958 performance by Cage and David Tudor. Cage read ninety stories, each one minute in duration (regardless of the length of the text) while Tudor, at the same time but in a room where he could not be heard by Cage, played excerpts from Concert for Piano and Orchestra and Fontana Mix. Cage's comment for journalists on the Vexations premiere was, "If you think about it, there are a lot more than eight hundred forty repetitions in life -- like paying the telephone bill, for instance." Revill, The Roaring Silence, 204.  
By using the author's name as a structure for the creation of a condensed version of Joyce's text, Cage merges the creator and the creation so that they are embedded in one another, a state which was important to both Cage and Kandinsky. The main conceptual difference is that Cage generally uses someone else's work as the catalyst.

Although all of the abovementioned methods are important to Cage's body of work, he is perhaps best known for his chance-determined structures in which there is no principal form or genesis. Many Surrealists used aleatory composition and execution techniques in an attempt to open the subconscious, allowing it to be unleashed and expressed. This allowed art to be created from a sort of internal chaos. Dadaists also advocated the use of chance methods, in their case to eliminate "taste" from art and to expose the chaos of the external world and the absurdity of human attempts to make order out of it. Cage's use of chance operations has been described as a way of eliminating inspiration, decision making, and choice from creation.63

The process is somewhat different each time Cage uses it, but the essential elements are always present. First, he decides what questions need to be answered. In the case of his musical compositions, this meant tempo, tone, duration, timbre, pitch, dynamic level, and so forth. In his prints he needed to determine what print process to use (aquatint, engraving, dry-point, photo-etching, etc.), and then again to dictate what colors to use, and what images and where and how they were to be placed with the assistance of a numbered grid projected onto the printing plate. Three coins are tossed six times to generate a hexagram like those

found in the *I Ching* (ill. 34), which refers Cage to a numbered chart or grid (ills. 35 & 36) from which possible answers are taken. After the mid-1980s, this process was executed by a computer program specifically developed for Cage's work.

In a manner ideologically allied with his mesostic treatment of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, Cage subjected Satie's 1918 vocal and orchestral work *Socrate* to his chance operations. He had originally made a transcription of the work for two pianos to be used for a 1947 dance piece by Cunningham, but Satie's publisher later denied them permission to use it in 1969. In order to circumvent this legal barrier, Cage used his I-Ching based chance methods to transpose the tones of the melodic line, while retaining the structure of the rhythm and phrases which were crucial to Cunningham's choreography. Since it adds nothing original to Satie's *Socrate*, Cage entitled the piece *Cheap Imitation* and Cunningham entitled his dance piece *Second Hand*. As a result of Cage's handling of the original score, Satie can still be "felt" in *Cheap Imitation*, just as the fragments which make up the text of *Roaratorio* are unmistakably from Joyce.

For Cage, although the use of chance operations serves in some ways to abolish self-expression, it does not completely erase the artist's choices. He chooses which questions to ask and then allows chance operations to answer them. Schoenberg, when assigning problems in his courses at U.C.L.A., often would not accept a single solution but would instead repeatedly ask his pupils to find *another* solution. When Cage once told him that there were no more solutions to a particular counterpoint problem, Schoenberg then asked, "what is the principle underlying all of the solutions?" At the time, Cage was without an answer. But in a letter to Paul Griffiths over forty years later, he offers this answer: "the
principle underlying all of the solutions is the question we ask.\textsuperscript{64} In a characteristic blend of opposites, his method is both active and passive: Cage asks questions, but does not question the answers he receives.

CHAPTER 5

INTERSECTIONS

The idea that entities such as matter and spirit are not so much separated from one another as occupying different places on a continuum ideologically aligns Kandinsky and Cage with the Russian music theoretician Nikolai Kul'bin (1868-1917). Founder of Treugol'nik (Triangle), an association of artists based in St. Petersburg and formed in 1909, Kul'bin was also a painter, a physician, a psychoneurological researcher, and a professor at the St. Petersburg Military Medical Academy. When Kandinsky was president of the Neue Künstlervereinigung München (New Munich Artists' Association), he wrote to Kul'bin to arrange an exchange of information and ideas between his association and Treugol'nik. Over the course of 1910-11, Kandinsky and Kul'bin corresponded about their respective groups, the Society for the Synthesis of the Arts (ARS), their own work, and that of Arnold Schoenberg.

Kandinsky himself translated an excerpt from Kul'bin's essay "Free Music" in 1912 for the first edition of The Blaue Reiter Almanac. In his essay, Kul'bin proposes the use of minute intervals in music, not only quarter and eighth tones, but thirteenth tones as well. He

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claims that "such micro-tones [act] directly upon the soul without detouring through the brain."\(^{66}\) The human ear can make only a scant (if any) distinction between one tone and another that is 1/13th of a whole tone above it. But when grouped in sequence, the progression of sounds in such small intervals of pitch would create the effect of a subtle movement through time, just as the use of color tones whose differences in hue are individually imperceptible allow a form to radiate color and texture when grouped in a progression through space, as seen in Kandinsky's *Horizontal--Blue* and his 1928 painting *Blue Smoke* (ill. 37). In both Kandinsky's paintings and, theoretically, in Kul'bin's music, we are forced to consider the sound and color tones as being inextricably related to one another. It becomes difficult to draw a line between, for example, the blue and the violet in *Blue Smoke*.\(^{67}\)

Other works, such as *Animated Stability*, present, in addition to circular and rectangular points, forms on the staff which are not points but rather streak or claw-like shapes as well as curving lines which traverse more than one staff line or space. By refusing to be plotted as a specific pitch, these forms suggest a departure from whole tones, perhaps influenced by Kul'bin; or they may suggest a rejection of tones altogether, in which case paintings such as this one could have influenced Cage's musical scores, which use similar notation to indicate indeterminate pitches. Other works, such as *Composition VIII* of 1923 (ill. 38), display a blend of hard-edged geometricity in their straight lines, disks, squares, and

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\(^{66}\) Nikolai Kul'bin, "Free Music," in *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, 141.

\(^{67}\) Kandinsky's interest in Kul'bin's music has also been related to his earlier interest in Paul Signac's ideas about "mini-intervals" in color and its relation not only to human emotions, but to music as well. Hahl-Koch, *Kandinsky*, 76-77.
triangles and a more organic, free-flowing quality in their diaphanous washes of color and undulating lines. Such works may be compared to a Cage score, such as that of Fontana Mix (ill. 39) and parts of Concert for Piano and Orchestra (ill. 40). In his multi-media composition entitled HPSCHD (1967-69), Cage makes use of unprecedented allotments of tones in the tape-recorded parts which take the concept of microtonalism to dizzying heights. Each tape divides the octave into varying numbers of tones, sometimes as many as fifty-six (as opposed to the traditional twelve). Still unsatisfied with the broadness of this range, Cage used electronic means to “inflect” each of these tones by as much as one hundred and twenty-eight degrees. It still stands to reason, however, that works such as 433" and 000" allow for an even broader range of tones than this. HPSCHD68 will be discussed in depth in Chapter Eight.

Kul’bin’s neurological research on subliminal perception and response led him to his view of art as an external projection of internal states. Ideally, the internal and external elements of the work of art, whether it be visual or musical, would be united. Kandinsky, as mentioned above, had similar thoughts about the unification of internal and external vibrations and the unity of music and visual art through their common perceptual roots. Additionally, Kul’bin suggests that, in its notation, “...[free tones] may also be depicted in the form of a drawing with rising and falling lines.”69 Kandinsky would have seen the notation lines that

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68 The title of the piece, which is pronounced “harpischord,” was first the title of the computer subroutine used to coordinate the parts. The subroutine’s name could be a maximum of six upper-case characters, so “harpischord” was abbreviated to “HPSCHD.”

69 Kul’bin, “Free Music,” 146.
Kul'bin proposes as akin to the ones he saw while listening to music and those that appear in any number of his paintings.

A few decades later, Cage used precisely this means of articulating a progression of “micro-tones” in the notation of works such as *Ryoanji* (ill. 41). Kul'bin goes on to suggest that, “the simplest way to study the characteristics of free music is to use glass bowls or glasses and to fill them with different amounts of water.”

Cage used such unusual instruments as the prepared piano, the outer surfaces of the piano, conch shells, branches, and what music critic Peter Yates calls the “backyard gamelan” (an instrument constructed of automobile brake drums) to produce extra-tonal music. Kul'bin strongly affirms the crucial role such inventiveness plays in the development of musical ideas. In the excerpt from “Free Music” published in *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, he asserts that, “progress in music is possible when the artist is not bound to notes, when he can use any interval ....”

Yates, in turn, attributes to Cage the related statement that Schoenberg should have “gone on and liberated music from its fixed tones,” once he had freed it from the confines of diatonic harmony.

The possibility of Kul'bin’s influence on Cage has yet to be explored. I have not yet found any mention of Kul'bin in Cage’s writings or correspondence. Cage was, as previously mentioned, a friend of Galka Scheyer. In 1935 he bought a Jawlensky painting from her for $25 and was introduced by her to Oskar Fischinger, whose ideas about art and spirituality, as previously mentioned, had a strong influence on Cage. Given Scheyer's close ties to

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Kandinsky, it therefore seems likely that Cage would have encountered *The Blaue Reiter Almanac* and the excerpt from Kul’bin’s essay. Whether or not Cage read the entire essay (which may never have been translated into English) may be open to speculation. Certainly Schoenberg, Cage’s teacher, knew of Kul’bin even if it was for no other reason than that they both had works published in the *Almanac*. But since “Free Music” and its notation would probably have seemed perverse to Schoenberg, it is understandable that he would not have mentioned Kul’bin to his students. In spite of the puzzling fact that I have also found no mention of Kandinsky in any of Cage’s writings, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that he was familiar with Kandinsky, who was a well-known and highly respected artist throughout the more than thirty years that his and Cage’s lifetimes overlapped. From the summer of 1930 through the fall of 1931, Cage spent eighteen months in Europe, six of which were in Paris. While there, in addition to making the acquaintance of Pierre Boulez and Pierre Schaeffer, he also studied architecture and painting, with particular concentration on expressionism and abstract art. He and Kandinsky may have actually been in Paris at the same time in 1930 when the latter had an exhibition at the Galerie de France, but Cage had already returned to the United States by the time Kandinsky permanently resettled outside of Paris, in Neuilly. Inversely, it also seems certain that Kandinsky would have heard of Cage and his work through his friend Schoenberg. Late in life, when an interviewer asked Schoenberg about his American students, he first dismissed the question with the statement that “there were no interesting pupils, but then he smiled and said, ‘there was one,’” and
named John Cage, adding that, “of course he’s not a composer, but he’s an inventor -- of genius.”

Another intriguing intersection of these ideas of “freeing” music shared by Kul’bin, Kandinsky, and Cage can be found in Kandinsky’s poem “Oboe,” from his book Sounds, published in 1912. In the poem, a man sits on a hill playing “beautiful songs which everybody knows” on his oboe and, in the midst of one of these songs, another man runs up the hill with a sword and cuts off the end of the oboe. Kandinsky does not present this abrupt ending as a tragedy. The mood of the poem is decidedly playful, which leads one to believe that he did not condemn but instead condoned the swordsman’s act of destruction as an act of creation. At the end of the poem, the oboe can no longer be played in such a way as to produce the sounds traditionally associated with it; it has become a different instrument altogether (or two different instruments, if one is particularly optimistic). Its alteration has immeasurably increased the variety of sounds that the oboist can now produce and it is not difficult to see in this poem an analogy to Henry Cowell’s “preparation” of the piano in the 1920s, a technique taken to its height by Cage beginning in 1940. By inserting objects on and between the strings, the traditional intonation of the piano is destroyed, but at the same time it becomes an entirely new percussion instrument capable of producing an extraordinary range of sounds. Cage also felt it unfortunate that many of the early inventors of electronic musical instruments aimed at creating electronic versions of instruments that had been around

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for centuries (Hammond's Novachord, for example) and that when completely new
instruments such as the Theremin were invented, their myriad possibilities were ignored in
favor of imitating tradition. In his essay "The Future of Music: Credo," Cage writes,
"The Thereministes did their utmost to make the instrument sound like some old instrument,
giving it a sickeningly sweet vibrato, and performing upon it, with difficulty, masterpieces from
the past."75 He extends his diatribe, calling the early performers of the Theremin "censors"
who sought to "shield" the public from new sounds. Kandinsky may well have felt the same
way about the Fauvists, who liberated color only to confine it in representational paintings of
traditional subjects such as landscapes, portraits, and still-lifes.

75 Later in the same work, Cage predicts that, in the future, electronic instruments "will make available
for musical purposes any and all sounds that can be heard." Cage, "The Future of Music: Credo," in Silence, 3-4.
CHAPTER 6

IMAGES AND SOUNDS

The ability of visual art and music to communicate abstract ideas and provoke spiritual vibrations is one of the primary motivations for Kandinsky’s synthesis of the arts. Around 1920, Kandinsky conducted an experiment involving musical, artistic, and dance forms. While collaborating in Munich on some stage designs with the dancer Alexander Sakharov and Thomas von Hartmann (who composed the musical portions of The Yellow Sound), Kandinsky placed several of his abstract watercolors on a table and allowed Hartmann to select one at a time while Sakharov was out of the room. Hartmann would prop the painting up on the piano and “play” it as though it were a score. Then he would play the watercolor for Sakharov who would interpret it with dance movements. Finally, Kandinsky would ask Sakharov to find which painting he had just danced. The experiment sounds like a fairly informal one, but it was apparently important enough for Kandinsky to submit the idea to his colleagues at the first Pan-Russian conference held the same year.\footnote{Kandinsky, “Report to the Pan-Russian Conference“, 473-474. This conference, held in Moscow, was attended not only by Kandinsky, who was the Inkhuk delegate, but also by Anatoly Lunacharsky, Valery Briusov, and Vsevolod Meyerhold.} Kandinsky’s report makes no clear statement of the results of, nor of his conclusions from this experiment. The report does, however, mention a somewhat fantastic-sounding project undertaken by the composer
Alexander Shenshin in which a composition by Franz Liszt and a tomb design by Michelangelo were somehow united: “Dividing the musical composition into its constituent parts,” Kandinsky writes, “Shenshin obtained a certain correlation between the [numbers of] bars, which he translated into graphic form corresponding to the mechanical form that lay at the basis of the work by Michelangelo.”

In 1928, Kandinsky undertook another such project when Georg von Hartmann, the director of the Friedrich-Theater in Dessau, invited him to create a stage work based on Modest Musorgsky's 1874 piano composition Pictures at an Exhibition. Since Musorgsky's piece was, at the time, one of only a few musical pieces inspired by visual art, it is not surprising that Kandinsky accepted the invitation and commenced work on it at once. He was not only taken by the idea of the music responding to the images, but particularly to the composer responding to the images and transcribing his own personal experiences into a form which Kandinsky considered to be purely expressive.

Musorgsky had shared a close friendship with the painter and architect Viktor Hartmann, who is perhaps best known as the architect of Savva Mamontov’s house and the studio at the Abramtsevo artists’ colony. Hartmann’s career was cut short when he died in 1873 at the age of thirty-nine. About six months later, several of his friends organized a memorial exhibition of his watercolors in St. Petersburg. Pictures at an Exhibition is a musical expression of Musorgsky’s very personal emotional responses to the paintings, as well as his

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77 Ibid., 474.
78 To my knowledge, Viktor Hartmann, Georg von Hartmann, and Thomas von Hartmann do not have any familial relationship.
reminiscences of their painter and not an attempt on the composer’s part to duplicate a visual image in musical form. Through this composition, it becomes evident that Musorgsky was acutely aware of the lack of a temporal dimension in painting. He resolved this disparity in this particular piano work by extrapolating narratives from Hartmann’s paintings. For example, a design for a clock in the form of the hut of Baba Yaga (a witch from Russian folklore) becomes a scene of Baba Yaga riding through the woods in a mortar and pestle, looking for children so that she can eat them and crush their bones. As one might guess, and as more than one musicologist has pointed out, the music refers more to Musorgsky than to Hartmann’s paintings. To underscore the fact that *Pictures at an Exhibition* is not itself a eulogy to Hartmann nor a musical transmission of his pictures, Musorgsky wrote a recurring movement entitled *Promenade*, which repeats in a slightly altered form and represents the composer walking from one picture to the next. The *Promenade* begins and ends the work and appears between the first several picture movements, but then becomes incorporated into several of the final picture movements. It has been suggested that this illustrates the degree to which Musorgsky has been “drawn into the pictures and is no longer viewing them from outside.”79 Such a response to art alone would doubtless have gained Kandinsky’s highest esteem. One might recall that a parallel idea exists in Kandinsky’s *Impression III (Concert)*, but mirrored. Kandinsky renders visible the stimulating experience he had while listening to Schoenberg’s music through the significant use of the color yellow, which seems to pour from the piano into the concert hall where the artist sat. Just as Musorgsky’s experience

becomes part of his music, Kandinsky’s experience becomes part of his painting. Cage, too, by using Joyce's name as a structure for the creation of the condensed version to be used in *Roaring*, has merged the creator and the creation so that they are embedded in one another, a state which was important to both him and Kandinsky throughout their careers. Cage carries this merger of the experiencer and the work experienced one step further (a step which is, arguably, the inevitable one) in 4'33" by making his audience experience *and* create the work simultaneously, as he himself did later in *000". Cage creates neither the work nor the experience, but simply provides a context and a period of time in which they both occur.

In 1880, Musorgsky wrote an “Autobiographical Sketch” in which he outlines some of his philosophy of music:

...art is a means of communicating with people and is not an end in itself. The goal of the art of music is the reproduction in musical sounds of the mood of feeling... Only the reformers have given this art its laws, but these laws are not immutable; they grow, like all of man's spiritual world.  

It is uncertain whether or not Kandinsky ever read Musorgsky’s “Autobiographical Sketch,” but his association with numerous other musicians and composers suggests the likelihood of such an ideological encounter. In any case, the affinity between the two Russians’ philosophies of creation and expression is apparent.

Like *Yellow Sound*, Kandinsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* project involved music, visual art, and choreography. He was assisted by Felix Klee, who also made notes and a

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chooreographic score from Kandinsky’s ideas, which he diagramed on the backs of the pages of the piano score. Forms “swam” before his eyes while he listened to Musorgsky’s music as they did when he attended the performance of Lohengrin and Kandinsky attempts to record these forms in the sixteen scenes he created using not only painted canvases but also colored lights and dancers. By including the latter two elements, Kandinsky was able to introduce a temporal dimension to his visual works, although time in this case has more to do with theater than with painting.

The manner in which Kandinsky deals with time in Pictures at an Exhibition is not the only problematic factor in this attempt at “pure” expression. Kandinsky’s visual expression of his response to the music falls just short of being the inverse of Musorgsky’s musical expression of his response to the paintings, mainly because it is a response to a response. Furthermore, Kandinsky’s designs for the movements entitled Limoses, le Marché (The Limoses Market), Catacombae (Catacombs), and Bogatyrskie Vorota (The Bogatyr’s Gate, also known as ‘The Great Gate at Kiev) (ills. 42-44), clearly show that he was thinking about the images to which Musorgsky responded, or at least to the titles of these movements, rather than to the music only. Hahl-Koch contends that Kandinsky was unfamiliar with both Hartmann’s paintings and Musorgsky’s impetus for composing Pictures at an Exhibition. While Kandinsky does reveal some uncertainty about the specifics of the exhibition, it is difficult to believe that the activities of the Abraamtsevo circle could have escaped his attention, or that he would have begun work

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81 Kandinsky, “Pictures at an Exhibition,” 750.
82 Kandinsky describes his project as a rendering of “the impressions experienced by Mussorgsky at an exhibition of pictures. The pictures were of course ‘naturalistic’ (presumably all watercolors).” The use of the word “presumably” here does imply some uncertainty. Ibid., 750.
on his stage composition with such an incomplete knowledge of both Musorgsky’s musical work and his broader philosophy of musical expression. The congruence of the emphases on internal necessity shared by the artist and composer seem too great to be coincidental.

According to Kandinsky, everything imaginable lends itself to a visual delineation of its internal qualities,

... whether it be a thunderstorm, J.S. Bach, fear, a cosmic event, Raphael, toothache, some “exalted” or “debased” phenomenon, or an “exalted” or “debased” experience. The only danger would be that of hanging upon the external form and ignoring the content.\(^{83}\)

that is, if the image was made to be representational from the outset and was not composed out of internal necessity. It is for this reason that Kandinsky’s insistence on the precession of content in a work of art cannot be reconciled with his fixation on content in his *Pictures at an Exhibition* project; the content to which he responds (in his own mostly representational paintings) is not only that of Musorgsky’s music, but also that of Hartmann’s paintings.

What the above excerpt from *Point and Line to Plane* also tells us about Kandinsky’s means to synthesis is that it is not superficially exclusive. He defends the potential that all “exalted” and “debased” phenomena have to be expressed and perceived. Cage takes the same egalitarian line in his work, though not without admitting that it requires a great deal of work and a particularly sensitive frame of mind to resist receiving aesthetic experiences in terms of taste. One of the stories from *Indeterminacy* illustrates Cage’s own early difficulties with adopting such an attitude toward sounds. He attended a soirée after a Zen service at which the hosts entertained their guests (including the priest) by playing an out of tune piano

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\(^{83}\) Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, 619n.
and poorly singing "an excerpt from a third-rate Italian opera. I was embarrassed and glanced toward the Roshi to see how he was taking it. The expression on his face was absolutely beatific." Although he was well on his way to doing so, Cage had yet to rid his vocabulary of adjectives such as "exalted" and "debased."

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84 Cage, Indeterminacy.
CHAPTER 7

SYNTHESIS, PART II

In addition to studying Medieval and Modern architecture, as well as Expressionist and abstract art when he was traveling through Europe from 1930 to 1931, Cage also painted for a very brief period. Unfortunately, none of these paintings survive as Cage jettisoned them in Spain along with his earliest musical scores to reduce the weight of his luggage for his return trip to California. During the 1950s, he became closely associated with Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Mark Tobey, and Morris Graves among other artists working in New York. Throughout his life, Cage was acquainted with and worked with many artists and architects and it is therefore no surprise that he had a keen aptitude for the visual and that his musical scores have long been noted and even exhibited on the basis of their visual qualities.

The visually intriguing aspects of Cage’s musical scores range from the very simple and mostly inconsequential to the complex and structurally indispensable. His 1952 composition Seven Haiku (ill. 45) consists of a single melodic line which could have been printed with several lines per page as in most scores. Instead, Cage printed it on long, horizontally-oriented pages with a single line situated at the bottom of each page and a vast space hovering above it. This arrangement does not technically affect the music, but its visual effect puts the performer in a frame of mind that cannot help but influence the performance.
In a practice not unlike that in Kandinsky's diagram of the Beethoven symphony, Cage uses varying sizes of points to indicate relative loudness and duration in works such as *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* and *Atlas Ecliptalis* (ill. 46). One key difference between these two major works lies in the generation of these different-sized points. The points in *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* were taken, in part, from spots and other imperfections in the paper on which Cage wrote the manuscript. *Atlas Ecliptalis*, on the other hand, was written by laying sheets of tracing paper over a collection of astronomical charts (ill. 47). The vertical position of a point determines its pitch while its horizontal position determines its place in time. Since the magnitude of the stars, galaxies, and nebulae were indicated on the charts by means of points of various sizes, the loudness of each tone was already decided for Cage; the brighter the astronomical phenomenon, the louder the tone. Superimposition of imagery on a grid, staff lines, or other graphic organizational device occurs in many of Cage's musical compositions and the visual elements range from rock tracings in *Ryoanji* to botanical sketches in *Score (40 Drawings by Thoreau)* and *23 Parts* (ill. 48).

*Not Wanting to Say Anything About Marcel* (ill. 49), Cage's first visual work to be executed using the same chance methods he used in composing his music, was created by subjecting the Random House *American Dictionary* to the above-mentioned process. In keeping with his inclination toward superimposition in his musical scores, the words, letters, illustrations, and their fragments were printed on eight Plexiglas plates which, being transparent, can be viewed simultaneously or individually. The plates can also be arranged in

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85 The chart section included in the illustrations here is taken from Antonín Bečvář's *Atlas Coeli* (1956) the collection of star charts which Cage used in the composition of *Atlas Ecliptalis*. 

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any order or, ideally (though it is forbidden when the work is exhibited in public), picked up and viewed individually but simultaneously with whatever lies behind them.

In his 1978 edition of prints entitled *Signals* (ill. 50), the images consist of straight lines, circles and drawings from Thoreau’s *Journal* (ill. 51) which are so enlarged as to be unrecognizable. This extreme expansion of the images and their random placement on the page causes them to allude rather than signify in a tone like that of Kandinsky’s visual motifs in their transposition from his objective to his non-objective paintings.

*Déreau* (1978), another series making use of Thoreau’s drawings, also features lines created by dropping a string on the printing plate (ill. 52), a technique reminiscent of the one used by Duchamp for his *Three Standard Stoppages*. The two series *River Rocks and Smoke* (1990, ill. 53) and *Where R=Ryoanji* (1992, ill. 54), both dating from the last years of Cage’s life, were created by burning and smoking the paper, then placing river rocks on it and tracing around them with a variety of instruments (paintbrushes or feathers, for example) selected by the same methods of chance.

Perhaps Cage’s most intriguing and mesmerizing series of prints, *On the Surface* (ill. 55), makes use of scrap pieces of copper printing plates which Cage dug out of the trash bins at Crown Point Press between 1980 and 1982. As with his previous prints, the copper scraps are arranged according to Cage’s I-Ching chance process, but nothing was engraved on them. Each of the thirty-six pages contains an invisible horizon line above which no plate can extend. The horizon line starts at the top edge of the sheet of paper on the first page and moves down the succeeding pages by degrees, finally arriving the Golden Section point on the last page. Because nothing was engraved on the copper plates, the image left by them is
almost as invisible as the horizon line, save for the faint outline of the plates and imprints made by any accidental scratches or imperfections on them. Any part of a copper plate which, by its random placement on the paper, did extend above that page’s horizon line was cut off so that the pieces and their imprints become progressively smaller from one page to the next. The diminishing size of the forms and the descent of the horizon line make the impression one has in viewing this series that of a slow levitation. The subtlety of *On the Surface* attests to Cage’s fascination with the beauty inherent in the tension between nothingness and everything. Unlike *Signals*, it makes no use of Thoreau’s drawings, but the series takes its title from a passage in Thoreau’s *Journal*: “When we attend for a moment to our own infinity -- then and there is silence ... It is when we hear inwardly -- sound when we hear outwardly ... All sound is nearly akin to silence, it is a bubble on her surface which straightaway bursts.”

What can be seen in these visual works is something analogous to what one hears in a performance of one of Cage’s musical works. The implementation of chance methods on the composition of both visual and musical elements ensures that nothing is given priority, that none of the elements is more prominent or significant than any other, and that there is no sequentiality or predictable composition and balance. Just as sounds emerge and disappear in Cage’s music, images in his visual art appear to float across the page and off of it, beyond the edges of the paper.

The simultaneously active and passive experience of art was first induced in Cage’s work in 1952 with *4’33”*, a musical composition for any instrument or combination of

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instruments whose notation consists of four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence. But when performed, the listener does not hear silence, but the unplanned sounds of the audience and the concert hall and anything occurring outside of it within audible range. By "framing" the unintentional sounds heard in a section of time, Cage asks the audience to simultaneously take part in the performance of the work and to recognize it as no less legitimate a piece of music than the accepted canon, and no less so than the sounds we hear everyday if we listen.\(^{87}\)

Cage's static visual works emphasize the equality and integrity of individual elements within the whole. Some of his musical compositions and multi-media works reflect this as well and include visual elements in their performances. *HPSCHD* (1967-69), performed in a 16,000-seat sports arena, consisted of films and slide images projected from eighty projectors onto screens (sometimes individually, sometimes with several images on one screen); colored lights moving across the ceiling, floor, and walls and reflected at times in a mirrored disco ball; fifty-one different tape recordings of sounds, both naturally and electronically produced; live percussion; and seven harpsichords, from which the piece derives its name.\(^{88}\) Interestingly, some of the harpsichord parts are taken from Mozart's *Musicalisches Würfelspiel* (*Musical Dice Game*), which provides performers with a number of measures of music along with a

\(^{87}\) "It isn't useful, music isn't, unless it develops our powers of audition. But most musicians can't hear a single sound, they listen only to the relationship between two or more sounds. Music for them has nothing to do with their powers of audition but only to do with their powers of observing relationships. In order to do this, they have to ignore all the crying babies, fire engines, telephone bells, coughs that happen to occur during their auditions. Actually, if you run into people who are really interested in hearing sounds, you're apt to find them fascinated by the quiet ones. "Did you hear that?" they will say." Cage, *Indeterminacy.*

\(^{88}\)
numbered table which refers to the individual measures. The performers are instructed to
roll dice to determine which measures to play and in what order.

One reviewer astutely pointed out the impossibility of focusing on any one image or
sound for more than a moment before being distracted by something else, if not by the seven
thousand people who attended HPSCHD's first performance at the Illinois Assembly Hall in
1969. Confusion of this sort is part of what Cage endeavors to create and this, again, links
him to Kandinsky, who did not want his Compositions to be completely and immediately
apprehended so that the viewer is allowed the time necessary to receive them. In an
interview in 1987, Cage observed that many people,

have great difficulty paying attention to something they don’t understand. I
think that the division is between understanding and experiencing, and many
people think that art has to do with understanding; but it doesn’t. It has to do
with experience; and if you understand something, then you walk out once
you get the point because you don’t want the experience. You don’t want to
be irritated. 90

Cage does not mean that his works are unfathomable; he considers every performance
“definitive” but not final. Kandinsky supposes that an ideal observer can understand his
paintings through the passage of time. But the time required for Kandinsky’s works to unfold
completely is finite, while Cage’s works unfold continually in the ideal observer’s life. Rather
than create works which are impressions of significant and influential experiences, Cage’s
works themselves create experiences which can be significant and influential to the
experiencer’s everyday life.

99 Richard Kostelanetz, On Innovative Artists: Recollections of an Expanding Field (Jefferson, North
90 Cage, interview by Thomas Wufflin, New York Berlin l, no.1 (1984); in Kostelanetz, Conversing
with Cage, 115.
The density of *HPSCHID* seems to be a giant leap from the vacuity of "4'33";" a leap from minimalism to maximalism. But in both instances, and in the prints, there is an all-inclusiveness which links them. "4'33";" is not a performance of nothing, but of everything; the openness of the piece admits anything to it. Its receptiveness is like that of Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* and Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film*, both of which made an impression on Cage. Whatever happens to fall within the frame becomes part of the piece. Among these works, there is the same insistence upon the ability of the individual elements, or of any arbitrarily selected combination of these elements to stand alone, as in the all-over composition of Mark Tobey's and other Abstract Expressionists' paintings.

Kandinsky regards “pure” colors as individually vital, but this does not prevent the painting as a whole from possessing a vitality which is more than the sum of its parts. For Kandinsky, to see a painting as an unrelated collection of pure colors arranged merely to refer to itself is to ignore the spiritual experience of the ideal observer. Likewise, Cage believes that, in order to truly *listen*, we must cease filtering noise from our ears, to stop ignoring the sounds which are not traditionally considered to belong to “music.” In another passage from *Reminiscences*, Kandinsky recalls how his realization that nature and art were separate but not necessarily at odds with one another changed his perception of the world:

> Everything showed me its face, its innermost being, its secret soul, inclined more often to silence than to speech -- not only the stars, moon, woods, flowers of which poets sing, but even a cigar butt lying in the ashtray, a patient white trouser-button looking up at you from a puddle on the street ... Likewise, every still and every moving point ... became for me just as alive .... This was enough for me to comprehend with my entire being and with all my
senses the possibility and existence of that art which today is called "abstract...."91

One of the key differences between 4’33” and HPSCHID is in the selection of the individual elements and their relative amount of intention. The sounds that make up 4’33” are not selected by the composer and most of the sounds (coughs, rustles, ventilation systems, creaking of chairs, etc.) are lacking in intention. It is, however, possible for a performance to include a car horn or siren from outside the concert hall, sounds which are made with specific intentions. There is also a now almost legendary story about a performance of 4’33” in a college conservatory auditorium within hearing range of a practice room from which a pianist’s struggles with a Beethoven sonata (as well as his frustrated profanities) became part of the piece. But for the most part, it is only when experienced within the time frame of the performance that any intention can be perceived and even then, it is the intention of the piece as a whole, not of the discrete parts. On the other hand, the individual parts of HPSCHID, such as the film images and harpsichord parts, were all selected by the composer and each have their own pre-existing intentions. To nullify these intentions and arrive at the chaotic mass of stimuli that HPSCHID generates, these parts with their intentions are given simultaneously, without accent or inflection so that we cannot grasp any one moment and make it the climax.91 Likewise, no one element in Cage’s visual works can be called the focal point or even a point that is crucial to its visual composition; there is no principal form or "genesis" as in some of Kandinsky’s compositions. The prints accomplish this mostly through

91 Kandinsky, Reminiscences, 361.
92 The same can be said of other works by Cage such as Roaratorio (1979) and the Europeras, particularly II (1985-87) and III (1990).
their chance-derived composition, while *Not Wanting to Say Anything About Marcel* combines this with the simultaneous perception of multiple letters and illustrations on and through the movable transparent plates. Cage asserts that although each element "was full of intention, the sum result was an absence of intention. And that brings us to our daily experience."93

The absence of intention in Cage's musical works extends to several of his later multimedia works such as *Empty Words*, the *Europeras, Roaratorio*, and *Rolywholyover*. Each of these works presents familiar things in unusual contexts or combinations, thereby changing the way we perceive them. As the print series *Signals* and *Dereau* displaces one's perception of the drawings from Thoreau's *Journal*, so *Empty Words* (1973) did with Thoreau's text. The four part work consists of readings from sections of the *Journal* which have been subjected to chance operations. The process reduces the text to its essential elements by degrees: it first eliminates complete sentences, then phrases, then words, then syllables, so that the fourth part consists only of letters. Slides of the enlarged parts of Thoreau's drawings (ill. 56) fade on and off of two screens while the narrator reads the altered text.94 Cage's essentialism recalls that of Kandinsky and other early twentieth-century artists in its arrival at a sort of reductive purity. But while Kandinsky, in *Point and Line to Plane*, advocates the creation of visual art from its essential components, Cage contends that the components with which the artist must

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93 Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 189.
94 The series from which work reproduced here is taken also bears a remarkable, though certainly unintentional resemblance to any number of Kandinsky's improvisations.
begin need not originate in an ethereal, almost Platonic realm. They can be extracted from an existing work.\footnote{This is analogous to the formal studies executed by students of Johannes Itten at the Weimar Bauhaus. By reducing old masters' paintings to their compositional minimum, Itten's students created abstract drawings which could easily stand as new and independent works.}

In the first performance of *Rooratorio* in 1986, Joyce's "mesosticized" text was read by Cage while a consort of five live musicians and sixteen tapes of diverse atonal sounds played, and a group of fifteen dancers led by Merce Cunningham moved about the stage. The only unifying element in *Rooratorio*, which is subtitled *An Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake*, is *Finnegans Wake* and its Irishness: the title is a word from the novel; Cunningham's choreography, although it, too, involved the use of chance operations, has an Irish reel or jig flavor to it; the live musicians played flute, fiddle, bodhrans, and uileann pipes; and the tapes contain sounds recorded at locations all over Ireland and other parts of the world mentioned in Joyce's novel. As in *HPSCHD*, one cannot concentrate on any particular thing for long before some other thing drowns it out. Cage makes no attempt at creating order out of chaos. In effect, he enhances, or intensifies the experience by imposing his own chaos on someone else's.

Dispensing with discernible structure in this sort of overwhelming barrage of images and sounds is once again seen as a means of making art analogous to our everyday experience. "A comparable visual experience," Cage once explained in connection with an earlier piece, "is that of seeing someone across the street, and then not being able to see him because a truck passes between."\footnote{Cage, "Preface to *Indeterminacy*" in *John Cage, Writer: Previously Uncollected Pieces*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 77.} Cage implies that we ought not to see the truck as an
interruption of our view of the person across the street, but as another interesting element in
the whole experience of standing on the street, looking and listening. Kandinsky’s experience
in the audience of the Schoenberg concert was no less important to the artist than the music
itself, as is evident in Impression III (Concert), just as Musorgsky’s walk from one picture to the
next was not to be ignored in favor of merely presenting a “musical version” of the pictures.
Like Cage, Kandinsky and Musorgsky, in their own senses, coalesce their experiences with the
expression of another’s.

Just as Cage did not attempt to comprehend Abstract Expressionism’s intentions, he
makes no attempt to interpret Joyce’s text. “For me, each instant in Finnegans Wake is more
interesting than trying to find out what the whole book is about,” he admitted.97 In this
statement, Cage exposes two of his definitive ideas: using art instead of looking at it (in this
case, using literature instead of merely reading it) and proclaiming the equal importance of all
individual elements within the whole.

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similar confession about his reading of Wittgenstein’s writings: “I rarely understand what he’s saying, but
nevertheless I’m fascinated by the beauty of his language.” Idem, in Francesco Bonami, “John Cage,” FlashArt 160
CHAPTER 8

TIME AND REVELATION

I simply wanted to shape sounds. But they shape themselves. This is the
description of the content, of what is inside. It is the ground, the earth in
which a profusion of things grew, partly by themselves, partly thanks to the
hand of the calculating gardener. But this hand was never cold; it never
summoned by force the 'propitious' hour: in spite of all calculations, even this
hour comes by itself and determines the moment.98

Wassily Kandinsky

For both Kandinsky and Cage, the essential revelation lying at the heart of the work of
art relies not only on the artist's material means of expression, but on the viewer's sensitivity
and, significantly, patience. In order for the viewer to experience the revelation of the work's
content, he or she must allow the work to unfold. As mentioned above, the success of
Kandinsky's proposed synthesis relies on the inversion of the traditional bases of music and art:
music will unfold in space (as it did when Kandinsky listened to Wagner at the Bolshoi) and
paintings will unfold in time. The solution to the problem of imbibing painting with a temporal
aspect came from another seminal experience which Kandinsky relates in Reminiscences, but
one which seldom receives as much notice as those which point to Monet and Wagner as the
artist's muses. While a student in St. Petersburg, Kandinsky was transfixed by the Rembrandt

98 Kandinsky, publication announcement for Sounds, quoted in Hahl-Koch, Kandinsky, 142.
paintings in the Hermitage. He marvels at the ingenious subtlety of Rembrandt's color and light, which attests to his knowledge, centuries before, of the power of pure color. He goes on to suggest that even more powerful is Rembrandt's combination of colors due to the fact that a color increases its power of expression when combined and contrasted with other colors, so much so that a pure color on its own, according to Kandinsky, "betrays its derivation from the palette," but that, when purposefully juxtaposed to another color, it obtains a power so tremendous that its origin can only be "superhuman." He compares the subtlety of Rembrandt's color combinations to "Wagner's trumpets," probably referring to the composer's habit of announcing his heroes' and heroines' leitmotifs with muted trumpets which seem to sound from far away or from deep within another character's memory. But the most salient revelation Kandinsky received while in the presence of Rembrandt was his realization that it had come to him after standing in front of the paintings for a very long time. He apprehended this unconsciously at first, then intuitively, and finally, analytically. "I felt that his pictures 'last a long time,'" Kandinsky writes, "explaining this to myself by the fact that I had gradually to exhaust first one part, and then the next. Later, I realized this division conjures on to the canvas an initially foreign and apparently inaccessible element for painting -- time."

The perception of Kandinsky's own formal "leitmotivs" (e.g., the boat with oars, the archer, the cannons, St. George) can only be accomplished by a viewer who is willing to spend some time with the paintings. After careful, sensitive observation and contemplation, the forms reveal themselves "only in the course of time to the engrossed, attentive viewer,
indistinct and at the same time tentative, quizzical at first, and then sounding forth more and more, with increasing, 'uncanny' power."^99

In order to encourage the viewer's absorption of his paintings over a long period of time, Kandinsky not only veils his images in his works on the threshold of pure abstraction, but also painted a number of works in the 1910s which are unusually large and contain more veiled forms than his earlier works. The density and scale of works such as Composition IV and Composition V, both of 1911 (ills. 57 & 58), can be overwhelming (Composition IV is approximately 62 x 98 inches) and even Schoenberg suggested that they might be less confusing if they were smaller and the profusion of imagery were pared down. Kandinsky understood Schoenberg's point, but explained his decision by admitting that he thought some confusion was necessary. "Are you against doubling the strength of an orchestra?" Kandinsky responds, "By using dimension my aim is (sometimes) to prevent a person from immediately grasping the picture in its entirety."^100

Despite the efforts of a number of his contemporaries, Kandinsky seems never to have entertained the notion of exploring his ideas about time and the visual arts through the creation of a film. Given the technological possibilities of his day, works such as The Yellow Sound and Pictures at an Exhibition would have been more easily adaptable in a cinematic version than as a stage production, although he would have had to wait until the 1930s to produce these in color. Likewise, many of his paintings, Balancing of 1942 (ill. 59), for

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^99 This and quotes in the preceding paragraph from Kandinsky, Reminiscences, 366-67.

^100 Schoenberg's letter dates from December of 1911 and Kandinsky's from January of 1912. Quoted in Hahl-Koch, Kandinsky, 166.
example, contain an implied movement which would translate well into the medium of film. Interestingly, Schoenberg had suggested that his friend design a film version of his own 1913 stage production *Die Glückliche Hand*, but the project was never undertaken by either of them.\(^1\) Kandinsky’s lack of interest in cinema may be due to the fact that, although in this medium his images could have moved and unfolded over time, the *quantity* of that time would still be fixed. Kandinsky believed that a relatively passive mode of looking at a painting was the best way to receive its revelation, but that revelation must happen on the observer’s own terms. The tempo of the film could be too fast or too slow; in either case, the necessarily specific amount of time involved would be detrimentally restrictive.

In accord with Meister Eckhart’s belief that what happens to us is more important than what we do, both Kandinsky and Cage seek to create a situation in which the viewer or listener can allow a significant experience to happen to them. Eckhart precedes his conclusion about the instrumentality of acceptance and passivity in the reception of revelation by confessing that, “in the middle of the night when all things were in quiet silence there was spoken to me a hidden word.”\(^2\) The *hearing* of the hidden word may be a passive experience requiring receptive sensitivity, but one must play an actively aggressive role in uncovering it. Kandinsky hides his “word” so that the viewer must spend the time necessary to reach the state of “quiet silence” necessary to receive it, whereas Cage announces the

\(^1\) Arnold Schoenberg to Emil Hertzka, Autumn 1913, in *Arnold Schoenberg Letters*, ed. Erwin Stein (London: Faber & Faber, 1974), 43. It would have also been interesting if Kandinsky had created a film for Schoenberg’s opus 34, *Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene* (*Accompaniment to a Film Scene*) of 1929-30. Although its three movements have titles suggestive of the nature of the film scene (or scenes, it seems to me; the movements are entitled *Drohende Gefahr* (Danger threatens), *Angst*, and *Katastrophe*), Schoenberg composed this orchestral work with no existing film in mind.

possibility of revelation in the commonplace and, in 000" (which will be discussed below), a work which he considered a continuation or augmentation of 4'33", obliterated time entirely so that the state of receptiveness becomes perpetual.

In his enumeration of his three main types of paintings in *On the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky describes the composition as the expression of an inner state which has formed over a long period of time, and which takes shape on the canvas after many hours of painting motivated by "reason, consciousness, [and] purpose ... But of the calculation nothing appears, only the feeling." 103 This differs from the more spontaneous expression of the improvisation. He then differentiates between two different types of composition: the *melodic* composition, which takes a simple and relatively immediately accessible form and the *symphonic* composition, which is more complex and built around a principal form which "may be hard to grasp outwardly, and for that reason possessed of a strong inner value." 104 So, in Cage's scores, nothing of the calculation, process, methods, or micro-macrocosmic structure is audible in his musical compositions or visible in his prints and multi-media works. But the hours spent by the experiencer in interpretation are as necessary as those spent by the artist in preparation.

In reference to Cage's musical works, Noël Carroll argues that the same thing can have different meanings in different contexts. For his example, Carroll points to the semantic content of the sounds heard in a performance of 4'33". They may be the same sounds we hear in any ordinary situation outside of the performance, but in the everyday context, the

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sounds are not framed. The sounds in "33," however, by being self-referential, act as examples of the sounds we hear in ordinary situations. Carroll suggests that the "noise" in a piece by Cage can make us contemplate "congruent properties in other noises. Cage's noises are ... illustrative. Thus, they have a ... function that the ordinary noises to which they allude lack."\textsuperscript{105} Correspondingly, Kandinsky's discussion of the emotional and expressive qualities of color is illustrated using examples which are not taken from "art," pointing out, for instance, that the sharpness of yellow is like the taste of a lemon, or that blue contracts within itself like a snail into its shell.\textsuperscript{106} He also sees music in such commonplace occurrences as a sunset in his hometown:

\begin{quote}
The sun dissolves the whole of Moscow into a single spot, which, like a wild tuba, sets all one's soul vibrating ... It is only the final chord of the symphony, which brings every color vividly to life, which allows and forces the whole of Moscow to resound like the \textit{fff} of a giant orchestra ... the deeper tremolo of the trees, the allegretto of the bare branches, the red, stiff, silent ring of the Kremlin walls ...
\end{quote}

Kandinsky objects to the use of points arranged in forms which imitate those of the material world because this forces the submission of the inner quality of the point to the representation intended by the painting as a whole. By the same token, forcing tones to imitate sounds from the material world deprives them of their inner quality as well. Cage's use of sounds from the extra-musical world is, however, not imitative. "33" does not

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necessarily contain musical sounds which imitate extra-musical sounds. It contains sounds which are nothing but themselves.

As if inspired by the fictitious concert-goer in Kandinsky's *Art Without Subject*, Cage composed a work in 1962 which eliminates any need for time constraints. The work is entitled *0'00"* and subtitled *Solo to Be Performed in Any Way by Anyone*. Its performer truly can "continue to play indefinitely or stop at will," and, indeed, such music *anyone* can make. Kandinsky never takes such an egalitarian line of thinking to the creation of art, believing instead that the artist is a particularly sensitive and insightful individual whose work leads others toward sensitivity and insight. But what Cage proposes in *0'00"* is not entirely different from what Kandinsky states is necessary to be an artist. As a spectator, one must be committed to the intellectual and emotional effort necessary to experience Kandinsky's paintings in the fullest sense; that is, to reach a state of mind which approximates that of the artist when the work was created and which leads one to contemplate the world outside the artwork in a different way. In a manner of speaking, Kandinsky and his spectator collaboratively perform the work. Similarly, the mere fact that one undertakes the performance of *0'00"* displays a commitment to a state of mind. One creates the work while performing it. Cage, refusing to place himself (or any artist) on any level of a hierarchy above the performer or experiencer of the work, also, quite literally, created the work while performing it. The first performance of *0'00"* took place in Tokyo on October 24, 1962 and consisted of Cage writing the score, which reads as follows: "In a situation provided with a maximum of amplification (no feedback), perform a

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107 This could occur if, for example, the abovementioned practice room was occupied by someone practicing a part of Respighi's *The Birds* or some other imitative piece. But even in this case, *4:33"* could only contain an imitation; it cannot itself, in any case, imitate anything.
disciplined action." At the bottom of the published score, Cage includes an instructive note telling us that 0'00" is, in fact, 4'33" (No. 2). As James Pritchett observes, Cage's note casts a new light on 4'33", which was now suddenly opened up as if by implosion: "...Cage now considered it as a musical work that went on constantly, an intimation of the ultimate unity of music and life."  

4'33" is a piece which, like any traditional work of music (even Satie's Vexations), is temporally finite. In 0'00", Cage's concept of time becomes parallel with Kandinsky's in its indefinite quality. Kandinsky's paintings are experienced and received over time by the viewer, but not in a closed quantity of time, as if they were pieces of traditional music. The viewer must experience the work as long as it takes to experience it. The viewer's emphasis is on the quality of the experience as opposed to that of the painting which begins it. Cage also wishes art to be considered an experience rather than an object. In an interview, he explained that,

...if music is conceived as an object, then it has a beginning, middle, and end, and one can feel rather confident when he makes measurements of the time. But when it is process, those measurements become less meaningful, and the process itself, involving if it happened to, the idea of Zero Time (that is to say no time at all), becomes mysterious and therefore eminently useful.  

Cage's Sculptures Musicales (1989) represents the other side of the coin Kandinsky minted while looking at the Rembrandt paintings in the Hermitage. Kandinsky's paintings place visual form in time; Cage's Sculptures Musicales places sound in space. Dedicated to

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110 Cage, interview by Roger Reynolds, in Kostelanetz, Conversing with Cage, 295.
Marcel Duchamp, the score, one of several of Cage's scores which consist of text alone, reads, in part, "An exhibition of several, one at a time, beginning and ending 'hard-edge' with respect to the surrounding 'silence,' each sculpture within the same space the audience is."\(^{111}\) Preceded and followed by silence, each sound is unchanging in terms of pitch and timbre so that the only thing that propels the work is the relationship of the sounds to the silence that surrounds them; “it's as though the sound were the other side of silence,” Cage explains.\(^{112}\)


\(^{112}\) Cage, interview by David Patterson, March 12, 1990. Transcript, John Cage Archive.
CHAPTER 9

SYNTHESIS, PART III

Like Kandinsky, Cage hopes that those who experience his work will use it to experience the rest of the world differently, the way he uses the work of others to the same end. Two of Cage's late multi-media works use the work of others directly and concretely as means toward the end of altered perception. *Museumcircle* and *Rolywholyover* are projects that, on the surface, resemble exhibitions, though unorthodox ones by any standard.

*Museumcircle* was first conceived in 1990 but was not realized until September of 1993 at MOCA in Los Angeles, where it was incorporated into *Rolywholyover* as an installation (ill. 60). Cage's plan was simple. All the museums in the Los Angeles area were asked to submit a list of ten objects they would be willing to loan as part of a work by Cage. Every museum was not so enthusiastic about accepting invitations as Cage was: of the one hundred and thirty museums contacted, only twenty-two responded with lists, but those twenty-two participants were as diverse in nature as could be expected. Among them were the Los Angeles County Museum, the California Afro-American Museum, the Cabrillo Marine

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113 In a letter to her sister, Lucretia Harvey Cage (John Cage's mother) writes of her son, "He has inherited Father's... desire to help the world know how to live..." Lucretia Harvey Cage to Lucille Harvey, undated. John Cage Archive.

114 *Rolywholyover* and *Museumcircle* opened at MOCA, Los Angeles and subsequently traveled through mid-1995 to the Menil Collection, Houston; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Art Tower Mito, Mito, Japan; and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.
Museum, the Los Angeles Children’s Museum, the Frederick’s of Hollywood Lingerie Museum, the Museum of Jurassic Technology, the Martyr’s Memorial and Museum of the Holocaust, and the California Museum of Science and Industry. From each museum’s list of ten objects, a single object was selected using Cage’s *I Ching* chance process, which also determined the object’s placement on a floor plan of the gallery at MOCA in which *Museumcircle* was installed. In the room with the loaned objects, there were movable file drawers, display cases, and cabinets containing Cage’s scores, writings, books, and other items, and even a table with two chess sets for visitors who felt like playing a game. In its early stages of conception, this part of the "circus" was to have even included areas where visitors could dance, cook, make prints, or soak in a hot tub.  

115 He wanted it to be as much like everyday life as possible, but practicality and museum regulations prevented the inclusion of the potentially messier elements.

Like *Museumcircle*, *Rolywholyover* involved the random arrangement of works as well as unannounced events such as films, lectures, performances, and panel discussions throughout the duration of the exhibition. The objects selected by Cage from each venue’s permanent collection are indicative of the sort of visual art he admired. Many are conspicuously lacking in a compositional center of focus, many make use of unusual combinations of images or objects, and nearly all are abstract. Cage’s list of artists features himself, Paul Klee, William Anastasi, Jackie Matisse, Mark Tobey, Marcel Duchamp, Morris Graves, Sol LeWitt, Louise Nevelson, Nam June Paik, Jasper Johns, Joseph Cornell, Joseph

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Albers, Joseph Kosuth, Alison Knowles, Ad Reinhardt, and Robert Rauschenberg. In *Rolywholyover*, however personal the compilation of the checklist may have been, chance operations introduced another layer of displacement not found in *Museumcircle*. Cage’s Ching computer program was used to determine the location of each object not only for the opening day of the exhibition, but for *every day thereafter*, as well as how long each piece would remain in its assigned location. On a given day one could enter *Rolywholyover* (ill. 61) and see paintings, prints, sculptures, and other objects scattered around the walls and floor in full view, as well as movable walls along the sides of the galleries with works which were temporarily off display, but which would (or maybe would not) be on display some other day. One day visitors might see a Duchamp readymade next to a Franz Kline painting and the next day they could see a Japanese scroll hanging over it. Also, wall-hung works might be separated by, for instance, three feet or by three inches and could likewise be three feet or three inches from the floor or ceiling. Visually and conceptually, there is no sign of traditional or even predictable categories or classifications. As one reviewer noted, “there is no contextual coherence to the show, either art-historical or individual.” The changing nature of the project also prevents the experience of it from being the same for each viewer. Since preparators are constantly moving about the galleries rehanging and repositioning objects, it is never the same exhibition for more than a moment. The passage from *Finnegans Wake* from which *Rolywholyover* takes its name is an apt description of the state of the exhibition at any particular moment: “it is just, it is just about to, it is just about to rolywholyover.”

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By taking each object in *Rolywholyover* and *Museumcircle* out of its familiar surroundings and giving it new neighbors, Cage separated it from any preconceptions the viewer might bring to a more conventional exhibition, thereby facilitating what Marshall McLuhan calls "the brushing of information against information."\(^{118}\) In response to Cage's book *Silence*, McLuhan suggests that,

> as our entire environment becomes structured by human artefacts, it would seem that our only way of acquainting ourselves with their new properties and meaning for us is to allow them to encounter one another directly in a kind of dialogue.\(^{119}\)

An especially illustrative example might be the proximity of three objects from the Los Angeles incarnation of *Museumcircle*: a Salvador Dalí drawing, an elephant seal skull, and Ingrid Bergman's bustier. When seen together, they are seen *individually* as if for the first time. As in 4'33", *HPSCHD*, *Empty Words*, *Roaratorio*, and his own use of Mark Tobey's paintings, this fresh perception is the experience Cage hoped would cause viewers to stop elevating art above life and to see it as one *part* of life. On a slightly different tack, Kandinsky hopes that his works, through their careful arrangement of color and form, will elevate the viewer's life from the physical into the spiritual.

Even the catalogue for *Rolywholyover* is recognizably Cagean. It consists of a box full of loose pages and booklets, on which are printed Cage's writings, writings about him, writings by others who influenced him, reproductions of visual works by Cage and others,

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\(^{118}\) Cage, interview by Robert Filiou, in Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 246.

\(^{119}\) Marshall McLuhan, Toronto, to John Cage, New York, March 30, 1965. John Cage Archive. In the preceding paragraph of the same letter, again referring to *Silence*, McLuhan writes, "Your own volume ... puts me in mind of the possibilities of what the physicists call the 'cloud chamber' as a new technique in the arts. In this chamber they balance and collide the known against the unknown in order to discover new properties and new dimensions."
recipes, pages from musical scores, letters, and even a diagram of Cage’s apartment showing
where all of his plants were and how often they needed to be watered. Since they are not
bound together, the contents of the catalogue can be read in any order and even the written
contributions lack page numbers. Of the intended experience of reading the catalogue, Cage
suggested that, “the action is such as though you hadn’t done anything.” The similarity of the
Rolywholyover catalogue to other boxed works such as Duchamp’s La Boite en Valise (1941–
49) has been noted by several scholars, but there is an even earlier prototype which more
closely approximates Cage’s idea. The arrangement of The Blaue Reiter Almanac is
something of a montage of writings and reproductions of works by its contributors and others
who had no direct or intentional involvement in the project whatsoever, whereas the
contents of La Boite-en-Valise were all produced by Duchamp. The articles, essays, and
other contributions to The Blaue Reiter Almanac are accompanied by illustrations (usually
reproductions of works of art) which often have no apparent correlation to the text with
which they share the page. Leonid Sabariev’s article on the Russian composer Aleksandr
Scriabin, for example, is interrupted by two facing pages which juxtapose a German relief
sculpture of a saint and a Benin relief sculpture of a warrior.

In 1970, long before Cage’s museum projects, Andy Warhol was asked to curate an
exhibition from objects in the permanent collection at the Rhode Island School of Design.
After hunting through the school museum’s storage areas for the items he wanted to include,
Warhol planned the exhibition with a refusal of hierarchy and taste that Cage must have

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120 Lazar, “nothingness,” 23.
admired. Warhol wanted to display as much of everything as would fit in the galleries, including paintings, sculptures, shoes, hats (which were to be left in their boxes), chairs, baskets, and umbrellas. The heterogeneous compilation of objects in *Rolywholyover* and *Museumcircle* demonstrates not only an egalitarian treatment of art objects and non-art objects, as in Warhol's exhibition, but also the disintegration of existing hierarchies within art found in German Expressionism and manifested in *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*. The process puts art in new contexts; not just the individual works of art, but art itself. The objects are said to have been "liberated".

With the exception of the *Museumcircle* installation, however, the chance methods used in *Rolywholyover* are applied to objects which Cage chose, and his methods and instructions are very systematic and demanding. The museum staff, especially the preparators and guards, have more to do with this exhibition than with most. But Cage says that they have more freedom than it at first appears and that art is a process involving many people, rather than a single result effected by one. As is the case with other works by Cage, the performers create the piece. Following the "score" of *Rolywholyover* is a way of becoming a part of that process, which, he explains,

includes structures that can last any length of time, that can begin and end at any time within the time-bracket ... our relationship is apolitical and anarchic.

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... The idea of law and control moves away and you get into the kind of life where we don't have government, which is what all this change is about.\textsuperscript{124}

The work is not simply a system constructed of Cage's choices and instructions; his authority is tempered by the decisions of others and his utopian analogy of art to politics draws near Kandinsky's implication that, in an ideal world (i.e. the spiritual world), political systems are unnecessary.\textsuperscript{125}

Decades before the creation of 4\textsuperscript{33}, Schoenberg told Cage that he had no aptitude for harmony. In Indeterminacy, Cage recalls that, "he then said that I would always encounter an obstacle, that it would be as though I came to a wall through which I could not pass. I said, 'In that case I will devote my life to beating my head against that wall.'"\textsuperscript{126} What he did instead was make the regions separated by the wall identical, so that the wall became pointless and fell of its own accord. Furthermore, for Cage, the new opposition to overcome was not between representation and abstraction (as it was for Kandinsky) nor between consonance and dissonance (as it was for Schoenberg), but between musical and non-musical sounds. Cage mitigates this conflict with a simple solution: putting these two warring factions on the same side; that is, declaring the nonexistence of a sound which is not musical.

\textsuperscript{124} Lazar, "nothingtoseeness," 22. Earlier, when asked by Terry Gross if he liked to speak to performers before they perform one of his pieces, Cage replied, "I like to make suggestions and then see what happens, rather than setting down laws and forcing people to follow them. Since I don't hear music in my head to begin with, I don't lose anything at all by leaving a little more freedom." Cage, interview by Terry Gross, Fresh Air, National Public Radio (September 10, 1982).

\textsuperscript{125} In a letter to Will Grohmann on August 11, 1924, Kandinsky writes, referring to a recent newspaper article about himself and the Bauhaus and the threat of so-called Kunstbolschewismus, "I have absolutely no interest in politics, I am completely apolitical and have never been involved in political activities (I never read papers). . . . Even in artistic matters I have never been biased; the Blaue Reiter and the exhibitions of its editorial team show this quite plainly." Quoted in Hahn-Koch, Kandinsky, 276.

\textsuperscript{126} Cage, Indeterminacy.
Carroll's interpretation of the function of "non-musical" sounds in Cage's music may be applied to the function of the "non-art" objects in *Rolywholyover*. They cannot help but communicate with one another and with those who observe them. Cage himself attests to the impossibility of attaining nothing in art. Concerning "4'33"", he explained that sounds that are not notated appear in the written music as silences, opening the doors of the music to sounds that happen to be in the environment ... try as we may to make a silence, we cannot."127

One of Cage's other significant experiences is related in *Indeterminacy*. On a visit to Harvard University in the 1950s, he was allowed to enter the anechoic chamber, a room engineered in such a way as to absorb all sound waves. After spending an unspecified amount of time in this "silent" room, Cage emerged and mentioned to the engineer present that he could, in fact, hear a very low-pitched noise and a very high-pitched noise. It was explained to him that the low noise was his blood circulating and the high one was the sound of his nervous system in operation.128 Cage himself admits the obsession he had with this experience, confessing that everyone he knew had heard the story of the anechoic chamber because he was constantly telling it. It makes an informative epigraph to "4'33" and its provision of a situation in which the audience is both active and passive simultaneously; as quietly as they may sit, they are still making music. This sort of passivity and receptiveness is found in Kandinsky's ideology as well, but it becomes even more crucial for Cage. Cage was fascinated by the relationship between opposites such as nothing and everything, and would

128 Cage, *Indeterminacy*. 
have recognized and capitalized upon the difference between statements such as "I am not saying anything," and his own, "I have nothing to say and I am saying it."\textsuperscript{129} Here again, as philosopher and art critic Arthur C. Danto observes in \textit{The Transfiguration of the Commonplace}, an artwork can be about \textit{nothing}, but no artwork can \textit{not} be about \textit{anything}.\textsuperscript{130} In other words, the concept of nothingness could be the content of a work, but the work cannot be without content.

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\textsuperscript{130} "... when I ask \textquoteleft what his work is about, I am told that it is about nothing. I am certain this is not a description of its content ... things, as a class, lack aboutness just because they are things. \textquoteleftUntitled,\textquotesingle [i.e. artwork] by contrast, is an artwork, and artworks are ... typically about something." Arthur C. Danto, \textit{The Transfiguration of the Commonplace} (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 2-3.
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CONCLUSION

Thomas McEvilley: I remember an interview with John Archibald Wheeler, the physicist, in which he was asked, When you began a certain line of investigation what were you looking for, and he said, Why, whatever I would find.

John Cage: Isn't that beautiful.\textsuperscript{131}

In many ways Cage continues and develops, though he certainly does not (nor wishes to) finish what Kandinsky started. Although Kandinsky would not necessarily have disapproved, the means by which Cage went about picking up where his predecessor left off may not have taken the form that Kandinsky imagined for this “spiritual awakening.” But if he had had the chance to read \textit{Silence} or to have painted an impression after sitting in the audience at a performance of 4'33” or to have walked through an installation of \textit{Rolywholyover}, Kandinsky almost certainly would have thought Cage’s efforts to be, at the very least, earnest. He would have taken them as seriously as Cage took Satie’s \textit{Vexations}.

Kandinsky’s art and theory effectively address the problem of using a structured means (visual art or music) to express something as innately structureless as emotion. He accomplishes this without sacrificing the vitality and spirituality of his work. And the inverse is true as well; that is, he expresses the internal essences of the content of his work without compromising its form. Kandinsky’s theory facilitates the communication between the artist

\textsuperscript{131} Thomas McEvilley, “In the Form of a Thistle,” \textit{Artforum} 31 (October 1992): 100.
and the observer, from one immaterial realm to another, through the material forms of his paintings, and through his written works. As Kandinsky himself explains, "I want people to see finally what lies behind my paintings." It is significant that his efforts to make his art comprehensible to others must have not only contributed in some way to his own self-discovery, but to that of those who attempt to understand his work. In the introduction to On the Spiritual in Art, Kandinsky quotes Robert Schumann on the mission of the artist. Schumann proclaims that this task is "to send light into the darkness of men's hearts." Kandinsky would not have interpreted this to mean a messianic light, nor the light of salvation by divine intervention, but rather the light of clarification. Schumann and Kandinsky both intend to shine light into every corner of the soul, so as to perceive every subtle nuance of emotion and make it apparent to those who will look and listen. Since one of Kandinsky's goals is to create art which transmits emotion, his quest is to find the most efficient means of that transmission, a way of using form in such a way that it reveals content clearly, unequivocally, and unambiguously. Likewise, Cage repeatedly emphasizes the usefulness of music and art and the predication of this usefulness on the active but receptive role of the viewer and listener. By making it impossible to perceive art in the traditional manner, Cage also makes it impossible to interpret it (and the world) traditionally. In effect, the manner in which Cage frames and presents the world in his works highlights the usually hidden aspects of things, allowing his audience to see and hear them with inexperienced eyes and ears, to "cover conception with innocence," to use Kandinsky's parlance from The Yellow Sound.

133 Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, ed. Sadler, 3.
If visitors to *Rolywholyover* achieve the erasure of boundaries between art and life through their contemplation of this unusual group of objects, they may lament the return of the objects, especially the ones in *Museumcircle*, to their homes since this only throws up the walls between them again. After leaving the open quasi-utopia of Cage’s project, they are no longer merely objects, but resume their pre-installation status as natural objects, historic objects, utilitarian objects, and art objects. When brought together, they seem to change. But Cage would say there is no difference in the objects. What changes is how we perceive and consider them, and this is accomplished through the chance-determined change of context that he provides. This raises the problem of establishing a difference between objects in an art museum, objects in a science museum, and commonplace objects not found in any museum. If there really is no difference, one cannot know if one is seeing a work of art or merely passing through life, just as Kandinsky, watching the sun set over Moscow could just as well have been listening to Schoenberg in a concert hall. This new hesitancy to label objects and experiences but rather to allow them to express themselves in these two artists’ works attests to their success at the erasure of the boundary between art and life. And they would add that we would then not be merely passing through life, but passing through it perceiving in a manner that is not concerned with such definitions as what is art and what is not. Both Cage and Kandinsky create experiences which do not alter the material world, but only our perception of it and the way we exist in it. At the end of one section of his essay *Four Statements on the Dance*, Cage retells a lesson of Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki:

> Before studying Zen, men are men and mountains are mountains. While studying Zen, things become confused. After studying Zen, men are men and mountains are mountains. After telling this, Dr. Suzuki was asked, “What is
the difference between before and after?” He said, “No difference, only the feet are a little bit off the ground.”

If one does use Cage's work to undergo a change in the way one perceives the world, this renders it impossible to view his œuvre as aiming at non-meaning, just as Kandinsky's abandonment of representation cannot be considered an endorsement of nihilism. Cage's methods reject the use of precedents, categories, hierarchies, and value judgments that make art (and the artist) something of which the viewer is to stand in awe.

He employs chance methods to create art that is not self-expressive and by doing so, empties art of the artist’s self. Kandinsky’s work begins with the self but strives toward, and ultimately reaches, something broader. Such an elimination of the self from art places the artist in the role of a mediator who, as Cage hopes, facilitates a connection between art and everyday experience by allowing us to see both differently. Upon reaching the essential, Kandinsky also

135 Moira Roth provides an insightful look at Cage, Duchamp, Rauschenberg, and Johns as advocates of a new, postwar “aesthetic of indifference.” She sees the rise of these artists during the McCarthy era as practitioners of “art characterized by tones of neutrality, passivity, irony and, often, negation.” Roth discusses the paralysis of the arts following World War II and the contrast between the active, anti-intellectual masculinity of the Abstract Expressionists and artists like Duchamp and Cage, the new “slender, cerebral, philosophical, iconoclastic type” who had a disposition “which delighted in cool and elegant plays of the mind: playfulness indeed was a key characteristic...” This aesthetic of indifference can be seen in part as a reaction against the heroism of Abstract Expressionism, because of its ambiguity and de-emphasis of the artist's self in his art. Moira Roth, “Aesthetic of Indifference,” Artforum 16 (November 1977): 46-53.
reaches the universal and the same may be said of Cage who, in framing the commonplace, extends his frame around the universe.\textsuperscript{136}

Asked “where does that leave us?” Cage replied, “It leaves us at the point when our work is unnecessary. So that we do it even though there’s no reason to do it. We do it out of our energy and joy, and to celebrate....”\textsuperscript{137} Kandinsky as well works toward a future era when art will no longer be necessary because there will be no separation between the spiritual and physical worlds -- in effect, working himself into obsolescence.

The constant references to the other arts (music, poetry, sculpture, architecture, dance, and theater) in Kandinsky’s theories of creation are the result of his conviction that the arts all stem from a common root, and that all are, ideally, created from internal necessity. The synthesis of the arts made possible by their shared origin represented for Kandinsky the zenith of modernism. Hugo Ball described Kandinsky’s paintings as a “liberation from a century on the point of collapse.”\textsuperscript{138} This is not to say that Kandinsky’s art provides an escape

\textsuperscript{136} The themes of The Yellow Sound, which, simply put, deal with such vague and enormous things as creation, vision, and revelation, also link it to contemporary developments in the physical sciences. The cosmological theory known as the “Big Bang” was spawned, in part, by Albert Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity, formulated in 1915 (the Special Theory of Relativity was formulated in 1905). In letters to Gabriele Münter from Odessa in 1905, Kandinsky describes his family’s visits from an unnamed astronomer who gave lectures and demonstrations with a telescope in their home every night. Hahl-Koch, Kandinsky, 284. Since The Yellow Sound dates from a period when few people outside the scientific community would have been aware of Albert Einstein (who did not become a household name until 1919), the stage composition can only truly be considered a foreshadowing of Kandinsky’s paintings of the 1920s and later (e.g. Several Circles, 1926; Blue, 1927; Graceful Ascent, 1934) which almost certainly show an interest in astronomy and particle physics. The way in which Kandinsky describes his reaction to “the division of the atom” in Reminiscences may also provide another link between Kandinsky’s and Cage’s interest in the idea of reduction and nothingness. To take the cosmological model to a broader level, one might say that Kandinsky’s approach follows the Big Bang: condensing form and content to a point of infinite density and allowing it to explode. Cage follows something more like the Steady State model because the origin of things, the moment of the explosion itself, is not as interesting to him as the current state of the explosion, how things continue to move and change as the universe expands.

\textsuperscript{137} Cage, interview by Zurbrugg, 3.

\textsuperscript{138} Quoted in Hahl-Koch, Kandinsky, 398.
from reality, but only that it exposes the secondary importance of the material world. For
Kandinsky, the spiritual is as much a part of reality, perhaps more so, than any object. He did
not advocate art for art’s sake, nor did he seek a completely materially practical role for art. It
was to be, instead, a path to the spiritual, but this could not be accomplished through visual
art alone: it had to model itself after and ultimately merge in some way with music, which
Kandinsky felt was a more successful means of creating a connection with the immaterial and
immutable. By uniting forms of internal expression that had been forced apart by centuries of
what Kandinsky called "academicism," he made manifest his own vastly encompassing
approach to life itself. Kandinsky looks forward, but not so much to a different or more
perfect world, but to a new state of mind, what he called a "spiritual awakening."139 Cage
provides an art which is a means to his and Kandinsky’s shared goal, the ideal attainment of
which would be immediately present and ongoing. Only fifteen years after Kandinsky’s death,
Cage wondered,

Was that what Sri Ramakrishna meant when he said to the disciple
who asked him whether he should give up music and follow him, “By
no means; remain a musician. Music is a means of rapid
transportation to life everlasting."140

And in a lecture of his own, Cage added, “to life ... period.”141

139 In a later dated April 21, 1940, Kandinsky writes to Galka Scheyer, “All the really awful things that
people of today are experiencing will lead eventually to a spiritual awakening. When exactly this will finally come
about, I’ve no idea. Maybe by the year 2000.” Ibid., 331. In May of 1992, in the midst of the Los Angeles riots
following the Rodney King/L.A. Police Department trial, Cage predicted that, “we will have, if you wish, more
‘horrible’ things until we come to an understanding and care for the whole.” Hines, “Then ‘Not Yet Cage,’” 99.
140 Cage, Indeterminacy.
141 Ibid.
Illustration 2. Wassily Kandinsky, Diagram of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C Minor from *Point and Line to Plane*, 1926.
Illustration 10. Arnold Schoenberg. Tone row from *Variations for Orchestra*, op. 31, 1928.

Illustration 15. Wassily Kandinsky, Composition VII, 1913.
Illustration 18. Wassily Kandinsky, All Saints I, 1911.
Illustration 19. Wassily Kandinsky, Cover design for The Blaue Reiter Almanac, 1911.
Illustration 25. Wassily Kandinsky, *Blue Arch (Ridge)*, 1917
Illustration 28. John Cage, Diagram showing micro-macrocosmic rhythmic structure of First Construction (in Metal), 1939.
Illustration 31. Wassily Kandinsky, Fanlike, 1941.
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Illustration 34. Hexagram chart from the I-Ching.
Illustration 35. John Cage, Excerpt from worksheet derived from I-Ching chance process, used for Roaratorio, 1979.
Illustration 37. Wassily Kandinsky, *Blue Smoke*, 1928
Illustration 38. Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition VIII*, 1923
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Illustration 44. Wassily Kandinsky. *Stage Design for Pictures at an Exhibition: Bogatyrskie Vorota*, 1928
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Illustration 48. John Cage, Excerpt from
Score (40 Drawings by Thoreau) and 23 Parts, 1974.

Illustration 49. John Cage, Not Wanting to
Say Anything About Marcel, 1969.
These are the horns: a foot or two high. In the rock there were upright icicles, as I have close together, three long, thus: left, with a homogeneous undivided base. They appeared like crystallizations, as quartz crystals with rounded instead of flattened summits, built from below and, as they grew, widening or thickening to fill the space.

The only birds I have seen today were some jays,—one whistled clearly,—some of my mewing red frontlets, and some familiar chickadees. They are inquisitive, and fly along after the traveller to inspect him.

In civilized nations there are those answering to the rain-makers and sorcerers of savages. Also this office is universal among savage tribes. After cutting, cold northwest wind on causeway, stiffening the face, freezing the ears.

Jan. 27. Trench says a wild man is a willful man. Well, then, a man of will who does what he wills or wishes, a man of hope and of the future tense, for not only the obstinate is willed, but far more the constant and persevering. The obstinate man, properly speaking, is one who will not. The perseverance of the saints is positive willedness, not a mere passive willingness. The fates are wild, for they will; and the Almighty is wild above all, as fate is.

What are our fields but fields or felled woods. They

Illustration 51. Henry David Thoreau, sketches of ice forms from his Journal, January 26, 1853.

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Illustration 52. John Cage, Dérou, no. 8, 1982.
Illustration 57. Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition IV*, 1911.
Illustration 58. Wassily Kandinsky, Composition V, 1911.
Illustration 61. John Cage, Installation views of *Rolywholyover*,
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