

Joe Panzner (2015), *The Process That Is the World: Cage/Deleuze/Events/Performances*, New York: Bloomsbury.

Iain Campbell

[draft only, final version published in *Deleuze and Guattari Studies* 12(3): 444-453] DOI: 10.3366/dlgs.2018.0320]

Since the earliest days of scholarly engagement with the work of Deleuze, the relation between Deleuze and art has been central – any understanding of the Anglo–American reception of Deleuze’s thought would be incomplete without due consideration being given the key role played in this reception by a broad range of writers and practitioners concerned with the creative arts, from literary critics to art theorists and artists themselves. Despite this, and despite the regular references to music we find in Deleuze’s writings, the topic of music was surprisingly underrepresented in the initial wave of publications concerning themselves with Deleuze and art. In recent years, however, there has been an increasing volume of important work between musical practices and Deleuzian thought,¹ and with the publication of Joe Panzner’s *The Process That Is the World* we can welcome what should be a catalyst for much work on Deleuze and music to come.

Panzner wisely limits his exploration of the vast potential offered up in the conjunction between Deleuze and music to one figure, the American experimental composer John Cage.² Present in the popular imagination as the provocateur who dared claim that silence could be music, Cage’s

musical and artistic engagement and reach in fact covers such a broad and pluralistic span – on one side drawing from musical serialism, Zen Buddhism, Indian philosophy, Dada, American anarchism, architectural utopianism and more, on the other feeding into a slew of performative and multimedia artistic practices and theoretical approaches – that his work admirably resists all but the most expansive summary.³

There are, as Panzner notes, a handful of brief but important references to Cage's work across Deleuze's writings, and one notable encounter between the two at Columbia University's *Schizo-Culture* conference of 1975.⁴ This alone, however, provides scant indication of why the two should be considered together, and Panzner astutely refuses to position his work as any kind of reconstruction of a minor biographical encounter. *The Process That Is the World* is instead concerned with the philosophical conditions under which such an encounter could take place, and what could be produced through the exploration of this encounter (Panzner 2015: 9).

In his introductory opening chapter, Panzner sets out the terms of his Cage–Deleuze conjunction, centering it on an ontological premise he claims to be shared between the two – a premise of the world as process. By foregrounding the figure of process, Panzner aims to show how Cage enacts a shift between an understanding of music as grounded on musical *works* – a standard classical music notion of performances being deemed adequate or inadequate by reference to their analogical relation to the fixed written score – towards a compositional and performance practice focused on variation, chance, openness, and experimentation. More generally, Panzner's interest lies in a move from the production of *objects* to the creation of *events*. The role of Deleuze, then, is to offer a kind of consistency to the musical philosophy Cage lays out in his

compositions, writings, and interviews, to clarify and intensify what Panzner identifies as the process ontology underlying Cage's practice (16).

The subsequent chapters each take on individually distinct but overlapping aspects of Cage's work and thought – works, ethics, encounters, performances, and politics – and through each unfold more of what it means for Cage to construct a process-oriented musical practice. The second chapter, on 'works', features some of Panzner's strongest analysis, carefully negotiating the passage between both sympathetic and antagonistic musicological interpretations of Cage and a more straightforwardly philosophical discourse, laying the grounds for a detailed exploration of how the performance of a Cage piece is to be understood. Here Panzner makes clear Cage's interest in undermining that which in classical music practice serves to give stability and closure to a mutable and open world of sound, his resistance towards what he calls the 'logical minimizations that we are at each instant tempted to apply to the flux of events' (34, quoting Cage 1976: 80–81). In developing this position, Panzner alludes to a philosophical–aesthetic problematic which permeates much work on Deleuze and art and is likewise of central importance here – the contention between a Kantian concern with the conditions of possible experience and a Deleuzian concern with the conditions of *real* experience, here seen in the guise of the musicologist Lydia Goehr's discussion of the 'regulative' aspect of the musical work (Panzner 2015: 41).

Panzner follows this grounding with an exploration of the ethics of musical performance. While here Panzner does much to justify the philosophical status of an ethics of recognising one's finitude in a world of moving actors (68), an ethics of allowing interruption (67), and a

performance ethics of resisting a simple transfer from the God-like authority of the composer to the God-like authority of the performer (75), this discussion at points feels distant from a musical practice. This is unfortunate as the account of Panzner's own experiences performing Cage's pieces that closes the chapter is evocative and brings a clarity and concreteness to the ethical discipline required of a Cagean performance practice that is somewhat lacking in the preceding pages.

The following chapter, concerning 'encounters', is again more satisfying in its alignment of musical and philosophical questions. Here Panzner explores the theoretical status and implications of one of the most widely recognised premises of Cage's music, namely that it takes as its object 'the sounds themselves' rather than the contingently predetermined standards of musical aesthetics (112). What would it be to encounter a sound itself without the conceptual and perceptual 'oversimplification of the situation we are in' (124, quoting Cage 1961: 149) that cultural, historical, and phenomenological structures constitute? By taking on this question through Deleuze's transcendental empiricism, Panzner importantly emphasises a crucial aspect of Cage's practice which is overlooked in many accounts – namely that Cage is less interested in the aesthetic appreciation of the banal, where 'all sounds are music', than he is concerned with how an experimental attentiveness towards the sounds themselves serves to rupture and reconfigure the boundaries of experience, disrupting the line between possible experience and real experience (Panzner 2015: 132).

Chapter five, on 'performances', can in many respects be paired with the previous analysis of ethics in chapter three, and does much to illuminate what in that chapter seemed all too obscure.

Here Panzner is impressive again in knitting together a theoretical argument and a close study of specific performances, in particular with his discussion of the virtuoso pianist David Tudor's complicated procedures in preparation for his performances of Cage's *Variations II*. Panzner convincingly presents Tudor's approach, which included producing a simplified model of the score and developing an 'amplified piano' system on which to play it, as an example of a performative practice that allowed finally a successful break from the musical work model and the definitive authority of the composer (155). Panzner also discusses *unsuccessful* performances of Cage pieces, such as the New York Philharmonic's famously disrespectful performance of *Atlas Eclipticalis* (162) or those performances of *4'33"* which put upon it a 'stagey, ironic, and conceptual' character (158), and while he is again convincing in these accounts, I believe that another such account indicates some potential tensions in his reading – and perhaps in Cage's musical project – that spill also into the final chapter's account of 'politics'.

Panzner describes a performance by the composer and vocalist Julius Eastman of a work from Cage's *Song Books*. In Panzner's recounting, the piece, which consists of the sole instruction 'In a situation provided with maximum amplification (no feedback), perform a disciplined action',⁵ was performed by Eastman as a mock lecture entitled 'a new system of love', in which he undressed his partner 'Mr Charles' and attempted also to undress his sister, who vocally refused. Cage attended the performance and was reported to be furious, commenting 'I'm tired of people who think that they can do whatever they want with my music!'

As Panzner interprets this 'failed' performance, Eastman remained 'trapped within *identity*', suggesting that the transgressive and provocative nature of Eastman's performance could do

nothing to produce the legitimate shock to thought that is the creative event, and could only in the end be mapped back onto the given regime of identities (145-148). The certainty of Panzner's dismissal comes as something of a surprise – deriving, after all, from only a small number of hostile accounts of the performance. One could envision, on the contrary, an account which considers whether there is something of interest at stake in the encounter between Cage's practice and Eastman's own more confrontational and antagonistic musical practice, or one in which Panzner follows the example of Ryan Dohoney (2014) and asks what could be said of the conflict between the direct engagement with sexuality and race that permeates Eastman's career and the reticence of Cage regarding his own sexuality.⁶

Nevertheless, Panzner could still quite rightly contend that Eastman's performance deviates from and perhaps subverts anything that could be considered a Cagean approach to performance – the area of interest here is more likely to be the points of tension pushing and pulling between two related but quite distinct performance practices. With this example in mind, however, we could consider a more ambiguous instance of performances of Cage's work which displeased Cage, not discussed by Panzner, that of Charlotte Moorman. Moorman, in her prolonged series of interpretations for cello of the strenuously difficult *26'1.1499*”, would increasingly incorporate performative elements, such as in a rendition with Nam June Paik in which Paik, stripped to the waist, imitated a cello, his back being bowed by Moorman. Of this performance Cage would refer to the ‘liberties taken’ with regards to the score (Cage 1993: 21), in private correspondence describing *26'1.1499*” as ‘[t]he one Charlotte Moorman has been murdering all along’ (cited in Piekut 2011: 149–50). However Moorman, it seems clear, started from an attempt to ‘authentically’ interpret Cage's extraordinarily difficult and significantly open piece, and only

gradually, over a prolonged period of time and many performances, revised her approach to the piece to produce something quite different – a close engagement with the work indicated by her heavily annotated notation (158). Why, then, should this transformative engagement be deemed different from Tudor’s equally ‘inauthentic’ interpretation of *Variations II*?

Marking both Eastman’s and Moorman’s performances is a direct confrontation with cultural and social questions in a way Cage would tend to avoid in his compositions. This leads us to Panzner’s final chapter, on ‘politics’. Panzner is clear in his introductory chapter that he intends on maintaining an affirmative tone throughout, a move I believe is largely justified by the kind of theoretical constructivism he is attempting, but a hint of something more critical, and of how this could have been a productive line to pursue, appears in the first pages of this final chapter. Here Panzner sweeps through some of the most influential critiques of Cage, which themselves largely circulate around social and political questions – among them Yvonne Rainer’s accusation of a naïve quietism present in Cage’s practice (Panzner 2015: 179), Douglas Kahn’s claim for a function of social silencing in Cage’s thought (181), and George E. Lewis’s location of Cage within an exclusionary distinction between white post-classical ‘Eurological’ indeterminacy and ‘Afrological’ jazz improvisation (210n9).

Following this summary Panzner goes on to argue that Cagean politics are not to be understood in terms of a liberal–democratic concern with individuals and their identities, but rather through a ‘creative anarchy’, in Deleuzian terms a micropolitical approach concerned with a deeper level of processes and nodes of variation. Panzner, again, is convincing in showing this as a point of congruence between Cage and Deleuze, but is less convincing in showing how exactly it serves

as a response to the criticisms, themselves uniformly convincing, voiced in the opening pages of the chapter. There appears to be an obscure gap between the ‘micropolitical’ Cage that Panzner posits and any socio–political investment, such that when Panzner closes by noting that ‘there is a place for struggles for greater material equality’ (209), it is quite unclear how this should relate to any Cagean politics.

One can imagine ways in which this gap could be explored, and ways which could be particularly fruitful regarding the Cage–Deleuze conjunction. Rainer’s critique, for instance, is grounded on a psychoanalytic claim that Cage evades any reinscription into the symbolic order – a claim which could be addressed through the more critical or antagonistic positions Deleuze and Cage take, such as Deleuze’s prolonged contention with a Lacanian form of structuralism or Cage’s refusal of a surrealist concern with exploring the unconscious. Likewise, and from a different angle, Branden W. Joseph’s sympathetic but critical remarks, drawing from Deleuze, with regards to Cage’s understanding of power could offer a fascinating route of enquiry beyond the passing mention Panzner affords, and the question of a Deleuzian politics itself could be teased out further through engagement with the important and influential critiques from thinkers such as Alain Badiou (2000) and Peter Hallward (2006).⁷

This points to something fundamental in the structure of *The Process That Is the World*.

Panzner’s project is built on two primary founding limitations, carefully and wisely chosen to render the project as useful as possible, but also producing, I believe, some notable points of tension and new, undesirable limitations, indicated by this uneasiness with regards to political problems. The first of these limitations is the restricted purview it takes with regards to the span

of Cage's career, focusing primarily on the period characterised by an interest in performative indeterminacy (Panzner, 2015: 21), the second is a certain one-sidedness with regards to the relation between Cage and Deleuze, with Deleuze being used to explicate and justify Cage but little in the way of a reciprocal interaction being considered.

With regards to the first limitation, I believe the main problem produced here is that while Panzner emphasises the practical aspect of Cage's work, much of the richness and depth of Cage's practice is lost when we are not privy to its development across and through countless theoretical and artistic inspirations, interactions, and relations. At the turn of Cage's indeterminate period we find him moving through a staggeringly diverse artistic and intellectual milieu, from his fellow New York School composers (Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, and Earle Brown) to painter Robert Rauschenberg, choreographer Merce Cunningham, Zen philosopher Daisetz Suzuki, key links to Japanese art and music in Yoko Ono and Toshi Ichiyanagi, and not least the participants in his Experimental Composition class at the New School for Social Research, many of whom went on to be central figures in the developing performative and conceptual artistic practices of the 1960s⁸ — all of which together produced a distinctive set of conditions for a practice of performative indeterminacy.

By beginning his analysis from *within* Cage's indeterminate period, Panzner perhaps cannot but fail to account for the complex ecology that spawned the very idea of artistic indeterminacy, and, more broadly, for precisely how this period fits into the trajectory of Cage's lifelong practice, from the ground zero modernism of an early concern with noises and percussion music to the artistically diffuse final decades which even his most perceptive readers and listeners have had

difficulty in applying any conceptual consistency to.⁹ Likewise, by reducing Cage's practice to one historical moment, Panzner risks asserting a claim for its immutable permanence, for the *actuality* of the process ontology under discussion – where an ontological understanding of the world as process can be taken as a fixed point in Cage's work, with the ironic twist that emphasising a process ontology diminishes the understanding of a practical process.

This resonates into the second limitation of Panzner's project, regarding the lack of reciprocity between musical and philosophical practices. It is worth noting, first of all, that the respective secondary literatures on Cage and Deleuze are equally voluminous, and while Panzner does an admirable job of capturing the breadth and depth of that discourse with regards to Cage, regarding Deleuze there is perhaps a foreclosure in the specific interpretation that is the distinctive virtualism of Brian Massumi. While Cage's work is explicitly periodised in its indeterminate phase, there is no parallel periodisation of Deleuze's work, and the practical process which constitutes Deleuze's thought, not least considering the 'break' that occurs upon his own encounter with Guattari, nor the artistic encounters – Cage included – which we see moulding and modulating Deleuze's thought across the decades, is itself lost. With this confluence of factors, Panzner perhaps slips into the kind of strong, ahistorical ontological claims which Brian Kane claims characterise what he calls the 'Deleuzian' strand of the field of sound studies (Kane 2015). One must question whether characterising the world simply as 'process' is entirely satisfying from either a Cagean or a Deleuzian perspective, or whether it perhaps reinstates something fixed and essential rather than more precisely capturing that which had been previously obscured.

I am not arguing here that Panzner should have produced a historiographical work on Deleuze, and more generally I do not wish to criticise Panzner for failing to produce a kind of work he had no intention of producing. I wish only to highlight some questions which could be of interest in future enquiries. That this is one of the first monographs on Deleuze and music is perhaps why the singular direction of Panzner's project occasionally frustrates. At points we sense a hint of the grounds for a sustained treatment of Deleuze's relation to music, only for it to slip beneath the forward momentum of Panzner's argumentation. For instance, further consideration of the reciprocity between practices could have allowed for close engagement with a commonly raised concern with regards to Deleuze, that of his tendency to remain within the frame of a certain artistic modernism,¹⁰ a modernism which Cage (as reflected in his divergence from Deleuze's most-cited musical theorist, Pierre Boulez) is in at least some respects orthogonal or antagonistic to. That these lines were not pursued is not the fault of Panzner, but rather indicates the richness and depth of his chosen topic. *The Process That Is the World* provides a fine example of what work on Deleuze and music can be, but also points towards where else it could go. Our primary suggestion coming off of Panzner's work is not to change paths, but to embrace a plurality of practices in dealing with the space between Deleuze and music.

More pointedly, Panzner's work raises the importance of further engagement on the relation between Deleuze and Cage, despite the lack of obvious textual basis for doing so. The stakes of the Cage–Deleuze relation are higher than is immediately evident. Peter Osborne has argued (albeit critically) that there is a dominance of a certain kind of Deleuzianism in areas of British art world (Osborne 2013: 12), and the same could be said of a certain kind of Cageanism – here in large part via artistic sources in Fluxus, performance art, minimal art, and elsewhere. Moving

through Cage and Deleuze together could help us better understand the status and stakes of this dominant position, whether construed positively or negatively. Likewise, the emerging academic fields of performance studies and sound studies alike both position Cage and Deleuze as monumental figures, making a clearer understanding of their points of connection and disjunction of paramount importance in the development of these fields – work that we already see ongoing in, for example, the space that James Lavender, drawing from Cage, constructs between Deleuze studies and sound studies in order to shed new light on both (Lavender 2015: 409). Panzner’s project no doubt presents a consistent, convincing, and effective Cage–Deleuze conjunction, but perhaps a greater concern with these questions of practical process, reciprocity, and periodisation could lead us elsewhere – mapping the two heterogeneous practices in process would no doubt have produced something less harmonious than the Cage–Deleuze conjunction Panzner puts forward, but perhaps exploring a Cage–Deleuze *disjunction* could be equally, and differently, productive.

Iain Campbell

Independent researcher

Notes

1. Some titles of particular note include E. Campbell (2013) and the edited volumes by Hulse and Nesbitt (2010) and Criton and Chouvel (2015).
2. I note here that I have also explored the relation between Deleuze and Cage in my own work, particularly I. Campbell (2015).
3. Some able attempts at introducing Cage’s work and thought include Gann (2010) and Haskins (2012).
4. Documented recently in Lotringer and Morris (2014).
5. Echoing the earlier *0’00”*, a ‘sequel’ to *4’33”* which for Cage marked for a significant turning point into more performative practices.
6. Dohoney’s account of the performance differs somewhat from that presented in *The Process That Is the World*, drawing on interview and recorded sources which go unmentioned by

Panzner, and painting Cage in a somewhat less sympathetic light. For a close and thoughtful study of the relation between Cage's politics, his artistic practice, and his sexuality, see Katz (2001).

7. An interesting and diverse engagement with political themes in Deleuze's thought can be found in Alliez et al. (2009).

8. Rebecca Kim (2011) offers a detailed analysis of how this class, attended by Allan Kaprow, Dick Higgins, George Brecht, Jackson Mac Low, and Al Hansen among others, provided the grounding for Cage's formal outline of indeterminacy.

9. Haskins (2012) and Pritchett (1993), for example, take this period to be unified only in terms of its stylistic diversity.

10. A concern acted out recently in the pages of this journal through a debate between Brian Hulse (2015) and Edward Campbell (2015).

References

- Alliez, Eric, Claire Colebrook, Peter Hallward and Nicholas Thoburn (2009), 'Deleuzian Politics? A roundtable discussion', *New Formations*, 68 pp. 143-187.
- Badiou, Alain (2000), *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cage, John (1961), *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press
- Cage, John (1976), *For the Birds: In Conversation with Daniel Charles*, London: Marion Boyars.
- Cage, John (1993), 'On the Work of Nam June Paik', in Toni Stoss and Thomas Kellein (eds), *Nam June Paik: Video Time, Video Space*, New York: Harry Abrams Publishers.
- Campbell, Edward (2013), *Music After Deleuze*, London: Bloomsbury.
- Campbell, Edward (2015), 'Musicology after Deleuze: Response to Brian Hulse's Review of *Music after Deleuze* – All Music is 'Deleuzian'', *Deleuze Studies*, 9(1), pp. 145-152.
- Campbell, Iain (2015), *Experimental Practices of Music and Philosophy in John Cage and Gilles Deleuze*, PhD dissertation: Kingston University London.
- Criton, Pascal and Jean-Marc Chauvel (eds) (2015), *Gilles Deleuze: la pensée musique*, Paris: Centre de documentation de la musique contemporaine.
- Dohoney, Ryan (2014), 'John Cage, Julius Eastman, and the Homosexual Ego', in Benjamin Piekut (ed), *Tomorrow Is the Question: New Directions in Experimental Music Studies*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press
- Gann, Kyle (2010), *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hallward, Peter (2006), *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, London: Verso.
- Haskins, Rob (2012), *John Cage*, London: Reaktion Books.
- Hulse, Brian and Nick Nesbitt (eds) (2010), *Sounding the Virtual: Gilles Deleuze and The Philosophy of Music*, Farnham: Ashgate.

-
- Hulse, Brian (2015), 'Rev. of Edward Campbell (2013) *Music after Deleuze*, London: Bloomsbury', *Deleuze Studies*, 9(1), pp. 137-145.
- Kane, Brian (2015), 'Sound studies without auditory culture: a critique of the ontological turn', *Sound Studies*, 1:1, pp. 2-21.
- Katz, Jonathan (2001), 'John Cage's Queer Silence; or, How to Avoid Making Matters Worse', in David W. Bernstein and Christopher Hatch (eds), *Writings through John Cage's Music, Poetry, and Art*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kim, Rebecca Y. (2011), 'The Formalization of Indeterminacy in 1958', in Julia Robinson (ed), *John Cage: October Files 12*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.
- Lavender, James (2015), 'Objects, Orientations and Interferences: On Deleuze and Sound Studies', *Parallax*, 21:4, pp. 408-428.
- Lotringer, Sylvère and David Morris (eds) (2014), *Schizo-Culture: The Event, The Book*, New York: Semiotext(e).
- Osborne, Peter (2013), 'October and the Problem of Formalism', in *Quaderns portatils*, 28, pp. 1-16.
- Panzner, Joe (2015), *The Process That Is the World: Cage/Deleuze/Events/Performances*, New York: Bloomsbury.
- Piekut, Benjamin (2011), *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits*, Berkeley: University of California Press
- Pritchett, James (1993), *The Music of John Cage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.