

The Artist and the Audience:  
An Interdisciplinary Study of Composer-Audience Relationships in Musical  
Communication

By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to explore the possibility of identifying ideas about audience common to Western art music and Communications studies in order to establish an interdisciplinary method of musical study based on human relationships. This study focuses on the role and empowerment of the audience in terms of their relationship with the artist, and explored alongside changing ideas about the audience in Communications through the twentieth century. The audience relationships of three prominent composers whose art may be considered to have expressed their distinct attitudes about audience – Arnold Schoenberg, John Cage, and Laurie Anderson – are explored in order to demonstrate how Communications theory can provide an interpretive framework for the extended study and understanding of music.

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## Introduction

The network of relationships that exists in a musical performance is both unusual and extremely common – unusual in that what is being communicated or transmitted (music) is not something that can communicate precisely to many different people, where the performance situation – a few transmitting to many – is very common (à la mass communications). The premise that the relationships of participants in a performance can have an impact on the communication itself forms the foundation of this thesis.

That music – specifically performance – can be a form of communication has been assumed, discussed, and studied by scholars since ancient Greece. Both fields are bound up intrinsically with human relationships: power structures, the understanding of meaning, even the simple act of exchange. The development of the Western classical music tradition provides hundreds of years of documentation on performances, artists, and audiences, and therefore of ongoing musical communication. However, until relatively recently, music has not been studied in terms of that communication, nor of the relationships formed by it.

There are, of course, many ways of studying human relationships in music, and many different relationships that form and communicate during a musical performance. The relationship that provides reasonably accessible data in the form of interviews, published writing, and the relative size of the communicative group, is that of the Western art music composer and the audience. This specific dynamic is the focus of this

thesis, particularly framed in terms of the composer's attitude towards their audience and how it affected their art.

Investigating the differences between the artist-audience relationships expressed by different composers directed the research towards Communications theory. There is little study on communicative relationships in musicology at present, but a great deal in Communications – in fact, a significant part of the field is built on mapping, modeling, and investigating the relationships within the process of communication, and their effect on that communication. Operating under the assumption that the principal use for music is communicative, this connection is easily made.

I propose that a method of study that frames Western classical music in terms of relationships, asking questions in common with and using ideas native to Communications, will enhance understanding of both fields. This interdisciplinary investigation is worthwhile in many ways: first, in the exploration of a method of musical study based around communication, incorporating the history and cultural entrenchment of music and the wealth of information and theory developed in the Communications field; second, in demonstrating that the role of audience, necessary to both fields, both changed in reaction to and enacted change on those fields; third, in identifying similar ideas between stages of development in both fields, suggesting a common thread of cultural and social change; finally, in establishing that the relationships of participants play a central role in the study of music and

Communications, and closer study of those relationships can result in a different kind of understanding.

The twentieth century was a time of rapid advancements in the Western world – technology, politics, civil rights, academia, and arts flashed through stages of experimentation that quickly became part of the mainstream. Communications<sup>1</sup>, a field of study only really introduced in the past sixty years, changed at a similar rate, as the introduction and exponential growth of mass media technology brought about significant changes in the nature and method of communication. The contemporary importance of this field is evident in the number of individual communication theories and models developed since the ostensible advent of the field in 1949, and the widespread application of those theories over all areas of culture; it makes the field as a whole one of the key discourses of the twentieth century.

One possible observable progression of Communications in the West indicates a re-orientation of the role of audience from witness to collaborator, leading to the organization of communication changing from directional to interpersonal, from a linear sender/receiver transmission to an integrated network.

How, then, do changes in the attitudes of artists towards their audiences affect their art, and the communicative possibilities of that art? Do changing ideas in Communications, especially in regard to audiences, compare to the changes seen in the artist-audience relationships? What implications may be drawn from any parallel shifts?

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<sup>1</sup> To reduce confusion throughout this thesis, “Communications” with a capital C will indicate the field of academic study as opposed to the act of communication or communication technology.

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to first explore changes in Communications, particularly since the ostensible midcentury advent of the field. The first chapter of this paper pinpoints moments in the development of that field, exploring especially those changing aspects that relate to the role of the audience and the relationship of the creator of the message to that audience. Robert Craig writes that more than 249 individual Communications theories have been identified (Craig, 124). The sheer number and variance of these makes the field unwieldy for use in focused study; this paper is purposefully selective of theories and models that are specifically suited in some way to the corresponding study of music and audience. The roles of both audience and communication in music – and how they have changed – are also discussed in this chapter, illustrating the potential for comparison and some interesting similarities between fields.

The three chapters following investigate three prominent composers in Western art music through the twentieth century; three composers who represent markedly different attitudes towards audiences – Arnold Schoenberg, John Cage, and Laurie Anderson.<sup>2</sup> The progression in time and audience-relationship is made more intriguing and perhaps effective by their individual teacher/student relationship: Cage both studied with Schoenberg and mentored Anderson. In each of these chapters, the artists' relationships with their audiences will be placed in cultural context and compared with critical and communications theories that share similar ideas about audience.

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<sup>2</sup> The selection of these specific composers, like the selection of communication theories mentioned above, has been limited to artists considered either representative of change in the art or particularly prominent in their field – and, of course, they were chosen because of their distinct and often discussed relationships with their audiences.

Schoenberg is the first composer addressed; his dramatic departures from tradition in both harmony and ideology enacted in his music established him in a place of prominence in the Western classical canon. His rejection of harmonic tradition resulted in music that affected the audience's reaction and altered the role audiences were accustomed to playing. Schoenberg wrote extensively on his own music as well as others'; added to interviews with the composer, this makes up a clear picture of his conception of the audience, as well as how he thought of his own role. Schoenberg's relationship with the institutions and traditions of classical music is considered as well; his image of himself as a successor to the "old masters" of classical music in addition to his expectation of an elite, appreciative audience, make for an interesting portrayal of the composer as both consummate artist and audience member. Schoenberg's conception of audience is then placed alongside the Shannon-Weaver transmission model of Communications that established the sender-message-receiver process; this theory established a linear directional process with a passive audience, and would seem to correlate in places with the traditional hierarchy of the concert hall. Schoenberg's ideas are also placed within the interpretive framework of Theodor Adorno's conception of the mass audience. There are many connections to be made between the two, but their ideas about audiences show striking similarities, particularly carried out in the relationships they engaged their work.

John Cage played, if anything, a more important role in contemporary art music even than Schoenberg; his complete rejection of the idea of music as communication, negation of his own importance as artist, and redefinition of music as something created

by audience members as individuals shows a definite departure from tradition. Cage is one of the most written-about and prolific composers of the twentieth century; many of these documents, particular those in which Cage participated, contain references to his unusual attitudes towards audience. His conscious transfer of the responsibility of meaning to the audience members as individuals in his art shows some elements in common with Stuart Hall's 1980 theory of audience reception. Hall's model privileges the act of decoding, and in so doing, both depicts the audience's role of reception as an active and powerful one, and suggests that audience has the capacity not only to decode meaning, but to change it. Cage's ideas about audience (and the demonstration of those ideas in his art) certainly take this empowerment to an extreme, but there is an intriguing similarity in direction.

Laurie Anderson, too, has introduced unusual ideas about musical communication to the Western art music tradition; as a practicing performance artist, the impact of her relationship with her audience can be seen in continuously new ways in her art. She recognizes the audience as an equal and opposite part of the artistic process, demonstrated in the kind of participation she asks from that audience (laughter, empathy, critical distance), but also in how she approaches a live relationship with them. Her music demonstrates the expanded communicative possibilities of Western art music to a social structure where the role of audience is not that of witness, but collaborator. Anderson's attitude towards audience displays a correspondence with Manuel Castells' Network Society, a theory which defines communication based on networks as social organization – the "Net" (or greater society) is an equal player with

the “Self” (the individual). Her engagement with pop culture, technology, and multimedia forms as communicative tools also shares common ground with Castells, who depicts communication as the integration of culture with each individual, a search for connection around shared and constructed identity.

Each of these composers conceptualizes the audience differently, and these conceptions are visible in their artistic processes and music, as well as stated outright in their writing and conversation. Studying these relationships – and the resulting art – may shed a different and interesting light on musical performance, understood through cultural context and an exploration of contemporary Communications theories.

## Chapter 1

### Communications and the Evolving Concept of Audience

In this chapter, communication is established as a key discourse in the twentieth century, relevant to and intertwined with cultural and artistic change; the evolution of that discourse through the century will be depicted through a brief summary of the theories pinpointed as important to this thesis.

““Communication” is one of the characteristic concepts of the twentieth century,” writes John Durham Peters in his 1999 book *Speaking into the Air*. “It has become central to reflections on democracy, love, and our changing times” (Peters, 1). Peters writes about communication in terms of what he calls the ‘branches of meaning’ and implies that there is a cycle of kinds of communication that rise to prominence over periods of time. For example, he lists three kinds of communication that depict the relationship between author and audience: a branch that has to do with imparting (the audience ‘partakes’ rather than participates), another that involves transfer (made useless without an audience, but with no required response), and a third of exchange and interchange, relating to everything from message-and-response to intimate conversation (Peters, 7-8). He goes on, then, to describe “An even more intense sense of communication” or ‘communion’ that allows for shared experience without necessary explanation, calling it “[the definition of communication] that has risen to prominence in the past century” (Peters, 9).

As communication has been central to change in this century, so too can it be defined by changing awareness and experiences of communication. “Ideas about

communication have evolved historically,” Robert Craig writes in his 1999 article “Communication Theory as a Field,” noting that communication theories are reflexive, both drawing from and influencing culture (125). Because of this, Communication theory can be practically applied to many aspects of culture, and it is therefore possible to consider that the arts have changed alongside Communications, and with developments in common.

The statement “the arts require witnesses” was made in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the French philosopher Marmontel, and this role for the audience has since become naturalized in art music, both in academia and (often) in practice. Concert hall etiquette, for example, has reflected the emphasis and importance placed on the agency of the artist, whether composer or performer, and as a result, the implication that the audience must be silent and appreciative<sup>3</sup>.

Over the course of the twentieth century, many of these ideas were challenged by artists, theorists, and the changing expectations of the audience. John Dewey’s *Art as Experience* is an early work on the dispersion and individuality of meaning in music; clearly engaging with communication in art, he explores to some extent how it is done and the power structure within the process. If art speaks, he writes, it cannot be translated, and it exists only when it is listened to as well as spoken. “The hearer is an

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the widespread distaste for any kind of noise made at an orchestra concert – coughing, shuffling, moving, audible breathing – even clapping between movements. The prominent composer John Adams’ November 2, 2009 blog post “Hocking a Hooey at the Concert” – and the resulting comment thread – stand as an excellent sample of the certain kind of musical elite (a classical composer and his audience informed and interested enough to respond to his post) who believe the audience’s role to be one of utter and inhuman silence.

Adams, John. “Hocking a Hooey at the Concert.” *Hell Mouth* (blog). November 2, 2009.  
<http://www.earbox.com/posts/28>

indispensable partner,” he rules, “The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created it” (211). In ascribing the responsibility of meaning to the audience, Dewey acknowledges the ambiguity of meaning in art. Unlike words, which he describes as symbols representative of objects and actions with an external reference, music has meaning presented “directly as possessions of objects which are experienced” (209) – no need for interpretation, as meaning is inherent to the audience’s experience.

Dewey presents art very clearly in terms of audience, albeit in close collaboration with the artist and ascribing a certain intrinsic quality to artwork that is able to clarify and concentrate meaning for a participant (209). It is his elaborate descriptions of the capacity of the individual to carry their individuality to their experience of a work that is his most striking and relevant point.

Music has been well established as a form of communication – both in terms of a message to be shared, and also in its capacity as a medium between individuals – by theorists and thinkers from Aristotle to Leo Tolstoy, Charles Seeger to Schopenhauer, and many more. Communications as an academic field of study, in contrast, is relatively young; its advent and mid-twentieth-century dispersion was both reaction to and observation of technological and social change.

When the study of Communications is linked to the development of media technology, the connection to music is made even clearer. Music played a central role in the progression of communications technology, particularly in the mass media. Recording technology, developed near the beginning of the twentieth century, was used

primarily for the reproduction and circulation of music, and live and recorded music on the radio were at the forefront of technological advancement and audience consumption. The advent of the music video and MTV enabled television audiences to engage differently with music as well, and today online communities find ways of making music that are again at the leading edge of communication and audience engagement. Music, then, has the ability to function both as vehicle and content for the shifting mode of interaction established by evolving media technology.

Until quite recently, the field of Communications has been varied and chaotic. “Although there exist many theories of communication,” writes Craig, there is “no consensus on communication theory as a *field*.” It is, in fact, Craig’s 1999 article that has been adopted by some as a new framework for understanding the spectrum of communications theories as a whole (Griffin, 2006). Craig argues that all communication theories are relevant and practical in understanding a world in which communication is so central. He claims that the “various traditions of communication theory each offer distinct ways of conceptualizing and discussing communication problems and practices” – each solving problems and creating others – even as the dialogue created between the traditions allows for greater understanding.

Craig covers a huge range of theories, models, and traditions in his article, beginning with the roots of Communications in rhetoric (a practical art or craft of discourse), semiotics (the “intersubjective mediation by signs”), and phenomenology (communication as the experience of ‘otherness’), and continuing with what he terms “cybernetic,” “sociopsychological,” and “sociocultural,” traditions, all ostensibly

developed in the latter half of this past century. It is these three newer traditions that will be engaged in various forms in the upcoming chapters.

The information processing or transmission model of communication – Craig calls it the “Cybernetic tradition” – is frequently referenced as the first major model for communication; it was established in 1949 by Bell Labs engineers Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver as a sender-message-receiver process in response to the development of the telephone. Since then, it has been used as a kind of baseline for engineers and theorists to respond to and build upon. This speaks to its strength as a model – developed for the purposes of engineering and technology, it was found to be relevant to studies of critical theory, language, and culture as well. In the transmission model, communication is “a process of sending and receiving messages or transferring information from one mind to another” (Craig, 125); it allows for interference, complexity, and unintended results. But Craig also notes the flaws in this system, writing that many argue “the transmission model is philosophically flawed, fraught with paradox, and ideologically backward, and that it should be supplemented, if not entirely supplanted, by a model that conceptualizes communication as a constitutive process that produces and reproduces shared meaning” (125). The model places the sender and receiver at opposite ends of a directional hierarchy – like at opposite ends of a telephone system – and requires a process of message and feedback in order that communication may be achieved; this, to many, is a weakness in the theory when applied to other kinds of communication between people.

Shannon and Weaver – and those that followed who expanded upon their model – eventually used it to discuss mass media and mass audiences. The ‘receiver’ role became synonymous with the mass audience of television and radio, and feedback became a much more nebulous thing, response being far more diluted and difficult to ascertain due to the number and dispersion of audience members. While the initial telephone-based model was linear, it had the capacity to be bi-directional; the linear model applied to mass media is, for all intents and purposes, a mono-directional communication.

The Frankfurt School of critical theory occupies significant space in the history of the political economy of communication and culture. Theorists of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno in particular, produced a theory of mass culture and mass communication that sprang in part from a reaction to the abuses of propaganda and totalitarianism that were direct consequences of the mono-directional use and understanding of mass media. The critique he produced demonstrated the significance of the media in constructing social consciousness, and wrote extensively on the dangers of allowing mass-produced and profit-oriented art – the “culture industry” – to dictate the preferences of the mass audience. The audience, he felt, adapting their taste to what was fed them by the culture industry, would be blinded to alternatives, and therefore less able to question prevailing systems. His conception of the audience, then, was one of passivity, the consummate consumers, whose consumption and power to respond were both limited by the mass media. The linear communication structure of

the mass media described by the transmission model speaks to Adorno's conception of the audience as passive and with limited (or no) power.

As one of the earliest models, the transmission model and its depiction of the audience allows for an understanding of attitudes towards audiences at the time and place of its development; the criticisms and revisions applied to the theory over the following years demonstrate change in those attitudes. There were numerous altered versions of the model that followed: to the initial linear model Weaver proposed to add feedback (essentially a second linear process in response, reversing the sender/receiver roles), Wilbur Schramm's 1954 criticisms necessitated an examination of the impact messages have on the audience, and Barnlund's 1970 transactional model which requires simultaneous sending and receiving of message from all participants – and these are only a few.

The Cybernetic tradition – the set of communication theories and models that grew up out of Shannon and Weaver's transmission model and mass media technology – were primarily developed in the United States. In the U.K., however, communication theory was enmeshed with cultural studies from the outset. Stuart Hall was a prominent theorist at the Birmingham School for Cultural Studies; much of his work explored the reciprocity of cultural texts, engaging with mass media and the effects of culturally-constructed identity, and questioning producer/consumer hierarchies like those espoused by members of the Frankfurt School. Hall's criticism of hierarchies extended to the linear, directional form of the transmission models of American communication theory, and it is the theory he developed as an alternative – a theory which redefines

the power vested in the audience – that makes his an important perspective to consider.

Hall's encoding/decoding or reception theory plays into what Craig terms the "Sociocultural tradition." This tradition represents communication as "a symbolic process that produces and reproduces shared sociocultural patterns" (Craig, 144). "We exist," he writes, "in a sociocultural environment that is constituted and maintained in large part by symbolic codes and media of communication" (144); these codes are shared among all participants of the communication, allowing interaction to 'reproduce' social order, even as the individual agency of sender and receiver 'produces' it.

Hall, in his 1980 article "Encoding/Decoding," identifies a 'dominant cultural order', in which participants have a common understanding of referents. His proposed idea of 'decoding' the text depends not only on shared "frameworks of knowledge, relations of production and technical infrastructure," but also on an audience active in their reception (Hall, 1980: 131). Hall was interested in exploring different kinds of communication between producer and audience occurring via television mediation (Davis, 62). He searched for a more complex structure of relationships, eventually building a theory to acknowledge the *activity* of both sender and receiver in their respective roles. Hall argues that consumption is not a passive act because it requires the generation of meaning (without which there can be no consumption) and that meaning must be created by the audience. "The audience is not obliged to interpret and understand the text exactly as it was intended," writes Helen Davis in her 2004 book *Understanding Stuart Hall*. "The margin for difference between the manner and mode

of production and reception can be narrow, or in some cases, exceptionally wide” (Davis, 63). Hall’s theory did not provide the audience with full control over meaning in the message, but it did propose that audience interpretation is an equal player in the communicative process, and that the combined interpretive capacity of audience members within a culture has the power to change the meaning of a message. From previous models that either depicted a passive reception or a combined sending/receiving role, allowing for an *active* reception was Hall’s significant contribution to the portrayal of audience in the communication field. Hall did not intend for his theory to generate a model of any lasting influence, but he writes “if it’s of any purchase, now and later, it’s a model because of what it suggests. It suggests an approach; it opens up new questions” (Hall, quoted in Cruz and Lewis, 1994: 255). “Encoding/Decoding” lays the foundations for a sophisticated group of reception theories centred on audience agency and the empowerment of the receiver.

When Hall considers communication, mediated by mass media, he posits a common culturally-based code and social hierarchy that allow for meaningful communication. When Craig writes about the Sociopsychological tradition, he describes communication as “a process of expression, interaction, and influence” mediated by psychological predispositions – attitudes, emotional states, personality traits, etc. – modified by contemporary forms of interaction, whether media technologies, institutions, or interpersonal influence (Craig, 143). These predispositions can be either unique to the individual or shared, and the process of communication occurs via the interaction and influence of individuals on each other. This tradition, while relevant to

the aspects of communication that are personalized – personality, emotion, and bias affected by social context – tends to work from the assumption that human interaction is innately irrational (Craig, 144) and somewhat disorganized, expecting the relationships between individuals to be similar to those that occur in mass media.

Where Shannon and Weaver's transmission model dealt with communicative possibilities of the telephone, television, and radio, and Stuart Hall's reception theory engaged the activity of mass media audiences, further advances in media technology led to the fragmentation and specialization of individualized audiences from the mass.

Francoise Sabbah, in 1985, describes the change and its result:

In sum, the new media determine a segmented, differentiated audience that, although massive in terms of numbers, is no longer a mass audience in terms of simultaneity and uniformity of the message it receives. The new media are no longer mass media in the traditional sense of sending a limited number of messages to a homogeneous mass audience. Because of the multiplicity of messages and sources, the audience itself becomes more selective. The targeted audience tends to choose its messages, so deepening its segmentation, enhancing the individual relationship between sender and receiver. (Sabbah, 1985: 219, quoted in Castells: 339)

The changing media, as Sabbah writes, is a cause for and result of the changing mass audience; the understanding of the relationships embedded in that communication has led to the development of alternative theory. Manuel Castells' far-reaching trilogy, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, describes both sociological and communicative models that require understanding of individuals in terms of social dynamics – both as discrete and inter-related entities. In it, Castells depicts the current age as an integrated result of the cultural, political, technological, and economical change over what he calls "the Information Age." He uses this integration to suggest alternative perspectives on the development of ideas and

systems of society; the proposal that not only sums up his work but also relates most closely to the state of Communications in the present, replaces the societal metaphor of the *machine* with that of the *network*. “Our societies are increasingly structured around the bipolar opposition of the Net and the Self” (Castells, 2000: 3), he writes, where the “Net” refers to network-shaped social organizations (as opposed to vertically integrated hierarchies), and the “Self” refers to the individual (although still through a socially constructed identity). This particular model places “Net” or society at equal advantage with the “Self” or individual, creating a necessary environment of collaboration in which the systems of power are far more balanced; unlike previous models, it has far more to do with the sharing of messages than the sending of them.

Castells’ Network Society and ideas about a self-directed mass audience (Castells, 2005: 13), then, can be usefully applied to the understanding of the communication systems of the present. The technological advances of media like the Internet and mobile devices allow audiences members to be equal and individual participants in communicative processes while also enabling them to participate in the mass audience of society<sup>4</sup>. The examples Castells provides are that of extensive cable channel selections that cater to individualized tastes, finding a very specific audience because of the availability of the medium to an opinionated public, and the widespread distribution of VCRs, reinforcing selective viewing both in time and content (Castells, 337-338). The Internet is an even greater equalizer, both in terms of content provided and feedback. The ability to precisely track hits as well as users’ comments on blog

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<sup>4</sup> For example, mobile devices now allow the audience for television shows to provide feedback instantaneously, voting on televised competitions or even collectively deciding on plot twists.

posts, YouTube videos, and news stories serve as sources of feedback and direction to online media. To Castells, the Internet is the embodiment of the Network Society.

If meaningful communication exists as chosen experience, framed, created, and absorbed in terms of the participants' self-directed *and* collective action and interaction, the relationships between those participants are important aspects of that communication. There are few theorists who approach art music in terms of relationships, but Christopher Small is one of them. "The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies" (Small, 1998: 8) he writes. His work on the structures of meaning and social relationships in music culminated in the idea of "musicking" – a verb, implying the embedded dynamic quality of music and meaning, that of activity. Small defines it as "to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing" (Small, 1998: 9). He extends the meaning to the ticket-takers and stage hands and cleaners, arguing that every aspect of the event of musical performance is music.

Small also sketches out the common conception of the communication process in the performance of a piece of music – a one-way system of communication, running from composer to individual listener through the medium of the performer. "It suggests," he writes, "that the listener's task is simply to contemplate the work, to try to understand it and to respond to it, but that he or she has nothing to contribute to its meaning." He continues his criticism of the standard, noting that it makes music an

individual matter, not social, that “the presence of other listeners is at best an irrelevance and at worst an interference in the individual’s contemplation of the musical work” (Small, 1998: 6). By making no distinction – in contrast to Dewey’s artistic/esthetic division – between performers and others, Small hopes to construct a reminder that “musicking is an activity in which all those present are involved and for whose nature and quality, success or failure, everyone present bears some responsibility” (10). His preferred graphic realization of communication, then, is covered in omni-directional arrows – not just a matter of composers and performers being active to or for a passive audience, Small presents music as a fully interactive group activity. “Whatever it is we are doing,” he writes, “we are doing it all together” (10).

When Peters indicates that a particular kind of communication has come into prominence in this past century, he implies a process of change in the relationships inherent to communication. That audience and the relationships formed with audience are intrinsic to both music and Communications allows for an examination of the former in the context of the latter. When Castells writes “what truly matters for social processes and forms making the living flesh of societies is the actual interaction between modes of production and modes of development, enacted and fought for by social actors, in unpredictable ways,” it affirms the possibility of understanding culture via the ideas of social actors. Changing attitudes towards audiences in music, then, can potentially be understood in relation to the work of artists.

## Chapter 2

### Schoenberg: An Exclusive Audience

Schoenberg is a prominent figure in Western art music of the twentieth century; a founder of the modernist movement, he acted as a catalyst for change in the classical tradition both musically and ideologically. His relationship with the audience, however, demonstrates attitudes far more fixed. Christopher Small, in his brief 1978 biography of the composer, describes how Schoenberg was “building new linkages and new relationships and offering them to us as models for the perception and ordering of the contemporary world” (10). Schoenberg’s ideas about audience represent an almost reactionary traditionalism, but Schoenberg’s rejection of traditions of harmony (Schoenberg, 1975) resulted in music that dramatically affected the audience’s reaction and altered the role audiences were accustomed to playing (Botstein, 1999).

“I developed my style in such a manner that to the ordinary concertgoer, it would seem to bear no relation to all preceding music,” writes Schoenberg in his evocative essay, “How One becomes Lonely” (1984: 41). “I had to fight for every new work...and I stood alone against a world of enemies.” This music was disparate in sound, and proposed radical changes to the institutionalized concepts of art music, particularly form, melody, and harmony. Schoenberg and his students challenged tradition so abruptly – and with little exploration of possibilities between atonality and tonality – that it could not really stand as simply evolution of technique; the speed of radical development itself was a clear message.

Schoenberg's relationship with audience is well documented in his own writing, and provides insight into whom, exactly, Schoenberg thought of as the receivers to his musical communications. It is clear that Schoenberg did indeed believe that music should communicate. "True love and understanding of music will wonder: What has been said?" he claims, "How was it expressed? Was there a new message delivered in music?" (Schoenberg, 1984: 77). It also models a very traditional kind of communication; the earliest model of communication theory – Shannon and Weaver's 'transmission' or 'linear' model – mirrored the functions of radio and telephone technology, dividing the process into a one-way (active) sender-channel-(passive) receiver form. Schoenberg's relationship with the physical audience at performances of his works mostly demonstrates the composer's disdain for those uneducated enough to misunderstand (or dislike) his art. This disdain for reaction similarly demonstrates his view of the audience as witnesses rather than valued participants – and shows a similarity to the elite views of the "masses" proposed by the Adorno and the Frankfurt School. It is worthwhile, however, to examine Schoenberg's communicative intent in another light: his respect for the "old masters" of the classical tradition in conjunction with the alternative system of harmony he developed – possibly in response – demonstrates his self-defined identity as an audience member; his role as a teacher – including the influence his music and ideas have on later artists within the institution – demonstrates the success of his engagement with that institution (rather than the public) in an artist-audience relationship.

### **Protest Music or Contextualizing**

The political context of Schoenberg's musical career was marked by not one, but two world wars. Schoenberg's forced emigration to countries more hospitable to his Jewish culture (first France, then the United States) was an oppression, and the natural response thereto, subversion. Reginald Smith Brindle, in the initial chapter of his book *The New Music*, writes that some composers "[sought] relief in protest and violence; others withdrew into anti-establishment groups of a more pacifist nature. Some rejected society completely and acknowledged no responsibility toward it (2)."

Schoenberg, both by the music he chose to write and the fact that he continued to write it, enacted a kind of subversion or rebellion against his situation.

The idea of positioning Schoenberg's work as protest music plays into understanding modernist music as part of a movement of response, not only to the institution it is a part of (western art/classical music), but also to the politics of the world into which they were writing. "The emancipation of the dissonance," a phrase Schoenberg is well known for, is language that demonstrates a certain kind of defiance that parallels other civil rebellion happening at the time. The music of the Second Viennese School was held up as an example of free speech by social critics, academics, and even governments of the allied nations. Separated from historical influence and unaffected by propaganda, "Serialism became a symbol in the post-war years of spiritual and intellectual freedom and renewal" (Brindle, 8). It was considered to be the opposite of conservatism, as Leon Botstein explains in his 1999 article "Schoenberg and the Audience."

The alliance between the [progressive in politics and the modernist in music] went largely unquestioned for decades, even well after 1945...Schoenberg's brand of modernism continued, until the late 1960s, to appear as a non-subversive but forward-looking contemporary line of defense of individuality and freedom against uniformity and tyranny within the "free world"...according to this line of interpretation, modernism in music of the sort audible in Webern...eloquently confronted the corrupting influences represented in the West by commercialism and mass society, the very ills that had helped fascism succeed. (Botstein, 1999)

Freedom of expression and individuality were attractive ideas, and relatively easily communicated to the demographic of an audience already participating in protests and campaigning for other forms of freedom. Even so, Schoenberg never composed with a physical audience in mind, particularly not the audience who applauded his efforts. He was suspicious, too, of the sudden increase in status of his music.

Success comes in waves; and thus, after this climax, I sank into the depression between waves. It was the war which made people think differently about modern music. But as soon as the war was over, there came another wave which procured for me popularity unsurpassed since. My works were played everywhere and acclaimed in such a manner that I started to doubt the value of my music. This may seem like a joke, but of course, there is some truth in it. If previously my music had been difficult to understand on account of the peculiarities of my ideas and the way in which I expressed them, how could it happen that now, all of a sudden, everybody could follow my ideas and like them? Either the music or the audience was worthless. (Schoenberg, 1984: 51)

This politically-motivated acceptance of Schoenberg's work petered out shortly after, and Schoenberg, here, blames an unstable audience. But many of his associates, particularly those with socialist leanings, pointed towards his implicitly contemptuous attitude towards the audience as the culprit for this turn. David Josef Bach, for one, warned Schoenberg and enthusiasts that "their hostility betrayed an unattractive sense of superiority at odds with the hope that radical change through art might advance the

larger struggle for a more just and egalitarian world” (Botstein, 7). He, Hanns Eisler, Kurt Weill, and others who subscribed to a more Brechtian conception of audience<sup>5</sup> noted the inherent contradiction in the attitudes of those who sought change in the hierarchy of harmonic structure but not in the hierarchy of social structure. The public appeal Schoenberg’s music was afforded when it stood *for* a relevant, communicable message had reason to disappear when the artists (and a handful of well-educated enthusiasts) rejected that interpretation.

### **Adorno and the Audience of the Culture Industry**

Adorno, too, was a Jewish refugee, and his experience with the abuses of mass media during the World Wars for purposes of propaganda and misinformation had a role in the development of his ideas about the culture industry. Adorno’s self-defined role as cultural critic – which he also saw as a contradiction, the critic a part of culture – attempted to decipher the “general social tendencies which are expressed in intellectual phenomena” (Muller, 113). His ideas rode a fine line between acknowledging art as existing in society and as a product of society. Adorno’s complicated relationship to society and art were complicated still further by his conception of the mass audience as

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<sup>5</sup> Eisler and Weill were among the composers, emerging from the Western classical tradition in the same time and culture as Schoenberg, who did not reject the public’s approval and involvement. The contrast between Schoenberg’s attitudes and theirs provides an interesting point of cultural divergence that further ties in with their associated critical theorists – Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno. Weill and Eisler both shared Brecht’s Marxist view of the public, in which art was used to “wake up the masses.” Brecht distrusted music made for its own sake (in noted contrast to Schoenberg’s favoured “art for the sake of art” maxim) because he thought it had a narcotic effect, and worried that words and meaning would become “mere material” and be “embraced without critical reflection” (Kowalke, 64). To ward off this effect in the setting of his own music, he came up with another variety of music making that he called ‘Misuk’; Eisler described it as “not decadent and formalist, but extremely close to the people. It recalls, perhaps, the singing of working women in a back courtyard on Sunday afternoons” (Kowalke, 64). They hoped to make music that would establish social change and empower the audience – who would identify with the music they were making – to transform itself.

a group without real power over their consumption of mass-produced art (Adorno, 1991: 29). He disagreed with the idea that the mass audience freely chose to listen to mass-produced music, and found it questionable, even dangerous, to assume a freedom of choice which, “empirically, in any case, no one any longer exercises” (Adorno, 1991: 29). There is a body of research and opinion that suggests Adorno did not precisely think that the mass audience were essentially sheep, duped by commercial or political venture into enjoying whatever was put in front of them, but it is clear that he considered their enjoyment to be flawed: uninformed and unbeneficial. His assumption was that audiences liked mass-produced music because it was systematically familiarized (and commercialized at the expense of artistry), and that they therefore disliked contemporary classical music because it was new and unfamiliar<sup>6</sup>.

“For Schoenberg,” writes Murray Dineen in “Adorno and Schoenberg’s Unanswered Question,” “the aesthetic appreciation of a work was based upon a fitness of the human mind to a purely musical idea, an idea made concrete in a musical work” (415) – art for the sake of art. For Adorno, on the other hand, “Schoenberg’s music was bound up of necessity with everyday life; not even the musical idea was immune to its influence. Instead of transcending life’s vagaries, the music of Schoenberg’s nontonal period reflected the modern condition with the greatest accuracy” (Dineen, 416). Adorno considered Schoenberg’s music as composed in resistance to the culture industry, and what he considered to be a petrification of change in style brought about by the use of music as a commodity of exchange.

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<sup>6</sup> There is a kernel of truth to this, perhaps, but the point of departure for many scholars today is that Adorno thought this *wrong*.

While Adorno's ideas about the purpose of Schoenberg's music were different from the composer's own, they shared something like disdain for the listening preferences of the mass audience. Adorno not only thought the audience ignorant and dupe-able, but privileged artistic intent in the first place, identifying only two kinds of artistic authenticity: that of the composer, identified, as Barbara Barry writes, "by serious purpose and creative vision," and that of the performer, "fulfilling the demands of fidelity to the score with interpretive insight" (Barry, 87). The absence of an audience-based artistic authenticity is notable, given the composer-performer-audience relationships established in the traditional concert hall of Western classical performance.

### **Schoenberg and the Audience**

In the Shannon-Weaver model of communication, meaning is assigned by the information source, or *Sender*; it is then transmitted through a *Channel* to a *Receiver* whereupon the meaning of the message is shared. Because this model deals with signal systems rather than meaning, it has limited utility for theorizing about human relationships or for allowing the message or hierarchy to be challenged (Cummings/Gottshall, 504). However, these same limitations transfer to those of the communicative aspects of Schoenberg's music. The model is criticized as linear and one-way, particularly in terms of a mass audience where the possibility for response and feedback is almost nonexistent; Schoenberg's communicative intent was similarly one-way. He operated under the assumption that, as a composer, he had "a right to be listened to" (Schoenberg, 1984: 102). This artistic privilege was embedded in the

Western classical tradition, and the canon of genius, particularly since Beethoven. The hierarchy, wherein the composer creates, the performer transmits, and the audience receives, places the composer and the composer's right to express in a position of dominance and power. The lack of ability to respond that is found when the transmission model is applied to the audience of mass media is seen in these relationships as well, and made particularly evident in the harmonic language of Schoenberg's music.

In order to communicate with one another, people require in-common reference points. By removing these reference points almost entirely, Schoenberg effectively invented a new language with his protégés, and presented it to the audience in a way that implied they should understand – under the auspices of the concert hall. They did not – and still mostly do not – understand that language; nor, since Schoenberg obviously cared little for teaching to them slowly (or at all – none of his theory texts touch on serial techniques), did they care to learn it. That Schoenberg's contempt for the public audience was legendary (Botstein, 1999) is no real surprise.

"Theorists as disparate in their approaches as Boretz and Epstein have suggested that when we look carefully at music as a reflexive system of communication, we need to explain rather than dismiss the failure of any music to gain response, engage listeners or be easily preserved in memory," writes Botstein in his 1999 paper. He notes the failure of Schoenberg and his students to communicate with most concert-goers, whose experience of serial and atonal works is described by critics with words like "abstract," "inaccessible," "unfriendly," and so on. Schoenberg's modernism offended a significant

portion of its audience at a time when it was being presented as a voice of freedom; that it continues to “turn off” a majority of concert-goers suggests that the problem was not simply one of education or conservatism, but one of, to quote the pop culture Schoenberg was loathe to acknowledge, a “failure to communicate.”

“Called upon to say something about my public,” Schoenberg wrote in his 1930 essay, “My Public”, “I have to confess: I do not believe I have one” (Schoenberg, 1984: 96). Schoenberg wrote often about his feeling of alienation by a public unwilling to embrace his ideas many times in essays like “How One Becomes Lonely,” and spent a fair amount of time trying to explain why this was the case. He admitted that his music was difficult, and even spent time analyzing the trouble, breaking it down into characteristic qualities of his music: first, that his music lacks repetition; second, that variation takes the place of repetition; third, that ‘variation’ implies only the most tenuous and various of arrangements of ideas (102-103). “In general, music is always hard to understand – unless it is made easier by repetition of as many minute, small, medium, or large sections as possible” (103).

Schoenberg then notes that memory is the first condition for understanding. He claims that repetition of elements makes a piece easier to comprehend, connecting it to a person’s understanding of a sentence relying on their memory of the meanings of the words. This would be a clear comparison, but Schoenberg, connecting understanding of a sentence to a source of knowledge outside that sentence, does not take the same step with a piece of music. In other words, Schoenberg only points to understanding a piece within its own context, and within the limited scope of understanding that is music

theory rather than within the context of the cultural knowledge of the listeners. His example of the repetitive quality of the Blue Danube Waltz, for example (103), does not mention the familiarity of the motion of the melody or intervals to the Western ear at the time. Schoenberg discusses education a great deal, prizing the educated or “cultured” listener over those he refers to as “plebes” (Schoenberg, 1940: 39), but even so, he expects understanding of the music to come from within the piece, not from the individualized and culturally embedded understandings of the audience.

Schoenberg’s exploration of the difficulty his music presented to an audience continued throughout his career. “Perhaps people as a whole do not sufficiently consider that I am perhaps saying something which cannot be grasped easily or straight away,” he wrote.

Consider; if I utter a simple idea, which I base on phenomena that are obvious, then people can easily follow. But if an idea, which I base on phenomena that are obvious, then people can easily follow. But if an idea presupposes experiences that cannot have been everyone’s or that are not familiar to everyone, then some people will be quite unable to follow. And, if in expressing such an idea, one uses special resources connected with the subject in question, the difficulties become far worse. (Schoenberg, 1984: 99)

Schoenberg, over the course of his career, refused to take responsibility for the communicative difficulties of his compositional choices. He did become ambivalent and defensive about the reaction of audiences to his work, blaming others he felt should know better: conductors (Schoenberg, 1984: 96), performers (Botstein, 7), and of course, musicologists. “It is the musicologist’s duty to guide the audience in order to procure a fair evaluation of one who had the courage to risk his life for an idea,” he writes.

Musicologists have failed to act in favour of the truth. This is the reason why my situation with the audience is often as follows: those of my works that might interest them (that is, those they consider atonal and dissonant) they refuse to listen to, and those works that are not called atonal but are less dissonant are not interesting enough – to people who do not know them at all. (Schoenberg, 1984: 77)

He is also not above claiming that the truly adventurous and intelligent among his audiences should understand, or work towards understanding, his music (119), and of course, implying the contrary: that those who did not ‘get it’ were inferior. And, of course, he consoles himself with artistic integrity in what Botstein refers to as “a nearly puritanical façade of ethical superiority” (7). In “Heart and Brain in Music” he writes that a “real composer” writes music for “no other reason than that it pleases him,” that composers who write with audiences in mind are not real artists, but instead entertainers<sup>7</sup>. Seen from the other side of the century, these sound increasingly like excuses.

“The problem of contemporary music is its lack of popularity among the public,” writes Nobuko Kawashima in her 2000 orchestral marketing study *Beyond the Division of Attenders vs. Non-Attenders*. “Generally speaking, contemporary music of Western classical tradition is a minor, specialist art form... Those who have some vague idea about it often see it as esoteric and elitist (33).” She continues by suggesting that composers of modern music have insulated themselves against valuing communication with their audiences over the course of the twentieth century.

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<sup>7</sup> Another tie-back to Adorno’s culture industry criticisms – Schoenberg thought that writing music to appeal to audiences took away from the authenticity of the art; Adorno would have considered it “selling out.”

David Smith and Jordan Witt's 1989 study, "Spun Steel and Stardust: The Rejection of Contemporary Compositions" discusses why audiences consistently reject contemporary orchestral music, discovering that a) inaccessible form and syntax cause interpretive difficulties for listeners and that b) contemporary music is "impoverished in emotional or referential expression." In the study, they focus on the transition from Romanticism to serial composition, comparing Schoenberg and Berg's tonal works to their atonal, serial music. They played both types of pieces for typical non-professional classical music fans, and asked them to describe each piece, rating them by a set of 26 adjectives (taken from Hevner's 1936 adjective "clock") on appropriateness for the music. They further asked subjects to rate the imaginative, emotional, sensory, and rule-based aspects of the pieces between 1 and 7, providing an aesthetic profile for each excerpt. The tonal compositions were, unsurprisingly, found to be preferred in every way: more expressive, inspiring, and easy to understand.

"One possibility is that contemporary music lacks an accessible syntax," explains Smith. "In tonal Western music, composers play creatively within the grammar of melody and harmony, using the rules of succession, resolution, and closure to pose problems for listeners, give solutions, arouse expectations, then fulfill or deny them. Aesthetic pleasure arises in the knowledgeable listener from these cycles of denial and fulfillment" (169). He notes that the removal of syntax or the use of unfamiliar or extremely complicated syntax do not provide listeners with reference points, shutting off the possibility for communication much like a language barrier. Another possibility Smith proposes is that the atonal and serial music presented in the study lack extra-

musical meaning all together; not only are they written in an alternative language, but without embedded ideas, emotions, or referents at all (170).

Schoenberg's writing displays a curious interplay between arrogance and genuine lack of understanding towards the audience's rejection of his work. One of the occasions he found most traumatic was at the premiere of his Second String Quartet, where the audience laughed during the Scherzo – not the “understanding smile” Schoenberg was hoping for upon what he would have considered understanding of the music (Schoenberg, 1984: 47). He wrote hopefully about his first Chamber Symphony, “I had enjoyed so much pleasure during the composing, everything had gone so easily and seemed to be so convincing, that I was sure the audience would react spontaneously to the melodies and to the moods and would find this music to be as beautiful as I felt it to be” (49). When it met with harsh criticism from the public, culminating in the *Skandalkonzert* of 1913 in which a Viennese audience, shocked by the atonal music of Schoenberg and his students, rioted, ending the concert prematurely, his response was one of confusion: “...of what use can theoretical explanations be, in comparison with the effect the subject itself makes on the listener? What good can it do to *tell* a listener, ‘This music is beautiful’, if he does not *feel* it? How could I win friends with this kind of music?” (50)

Schoenberg wrote further about his struggle between communicating effectively with an audience and staying true to his vision in his 1924 essay, “Heart and Brain in Music”:

While composing for me had been a pleasure, now it became dirty. I knew I had to fulfill a task: I had to express what was necessary to be expressed

and I knew I had the duty of developing ideas for the sake of progress in music, whether I liked it or not; but I also had to realize that the great majority of the public did not like it. (53)

Schoenberg's grief at the opposition to his progressive work demonstrates his desire not just to create for posterity – despite all his talk of art for art's sake. But the idea of a duty to develop something – particularly an idea – “for the sake of progress” rather than for the sake of interaction or relationship with an audience, redirects any communication in music back on itself. Placing the Modernists, particularly those of the Second Viennese School, in the role of response to or continuation of an institution is useful in understanding the communicative value and intent of these composers and their music.

Schoenberg was a catalyst, both a member of the institution and an agent of change within it; his active resistance to traditional harmonic rules allowed Western art music to expand beyond even those new systems. Schoenberg's writing and composition, understood in a role of response to the traditions of the institution, created possibilities for different kinds of communication in later art.

### **The Artist as Audience**

While it is easy to paint Schoenberg as an elitist, as an enemy of the audience, it is perhaps more interesting to consider that Schoenberg identified *as* audience, and that the audience for whom he wrote was the Western classical institution itself – particularly the educational institution invested in the “first Viennese school” of composers. Schoenberg references this group often as “the old masters,” claiming them as natural predecessors outright, painting his role as heir and audience. “My teachers

were primarily Bach and Mozart, and secondarily Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner,” writes Schoenberg in a 1931 article, “National Music (2)” (1984: 173). In the article, he attempts to show that his music was rooted in and worthy of the tonal masters criteria, evidence of power of the “old masters” and the classical institution on Schoenberg’s inspiration and process. “Musical value,” writes Joseph Straus, “for other composers, might be measured by other standards – such as how well the music expressed a program or text, or how well it pleased a patron or audience (8).” Straus notes that Schoenberg did not write his music for the audiences in the concert halls, but for the metaphorical ears of the master composers whose work he valued so highly. This demonstrates Schoenberg’s desire to add to the canon as an act of response, and this response eventually impacts the educational institution of the Western classical tradition.

While the music of every era is significantly shaped by the music that came before it in a series of reactions and evolutions, the relationship of the composers of the Second Viennese School with their predecessors was more urgent; it had a different direction. Before 1800, most music performed was contemporary; as audiences grew, however, precepts of marketing kicked in, and audiences developed a preference for the familiar. The classical canon became an institution to be reckoned with, and it was Schoenberg’s rejection of those harmonic traditions (while maintaining his self-claimed succession to its “masters”) that form the strongest element of intended artistic communication in his music.

Schoenberg experienced the influence of past composers “as a sense of compulsion,” explains Straus. “In his own view, he composed not from personal choice, but in obedience to the dictates of history” (6). In his essay “New Music: My Music” Schoenberg writes,

I have to say: ‘I can do it no other way, and it does not work any other way. Only, I did not choose to write like that, I do not go out of my way to write like that, and it would be a relief to feel I might do it differently.’ ...What history requires, from Schoenberg, is progress. (104)

Straus calls this pressure of tradition an “intolerant despot” (7), and again the notion of a force to be subverted and responded to is clear. Composers of the Second Viennese School were eminently musically suited to defy political oppression, since the music they wrote was a defiant response to a tradition rooted in the past. Progress comes up in their writing time and time again, as a need to move against and beyond tradition. To this end, this responsibility to progress, were developed the tools and techniques for which the Second Viennese School are best known: atonality, dodecaphony, and serialism – all major departures from previous tonal techniques and sounds, and unfriendly to the ears of the Western audience.

In addition to his many, *many* other theoretical texts and writings, Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre* process his substantial knowledge and understanding of (German) classical traditions, so much so that the Straus equates him with Heinrich Schenker among “the greatest tonal theorists of this century” (Straus, 7). Straus, in fact, spends a great deal of time exploring the unusual relationship between the Second Viennese School and the “old masters,” attempting to assemble a theory of musical influence in

his 1990 book, *Remaking the Past*. “Twentieth century composers incorporate traditional elements...as a way to grapple with their musical heritage,” he writes. “They invoke the past in order to reinterpret it” (1). Botstein agrees: “Just as Wagner helped alter the way future generations would understand the place in music history occupied by past masters such as Beethoven and Mendelssohn,” he writes, “Schoenberg defined the terms by which the past should be interpreted” (8).

Barry writes that dissonance was “a private, exclusive language, inaccessible and beyond the understanding of people outside that rarefied discourse” (83). She goes on to point out that unrooted dissonance did not serve the community as a large-scale language of communication, but that Adorno through the potency of dissonance in contemporary music could inform our understanding and performance of music of the past. “Whoever does not understand Schoenberg today cannot understand Beethoven,” he writes, “but rather obstructs any relationship to the work through the reified guise of its effect” (Adorno, 2006: 194). Adorno considered Schoenberg’s music to display a response to the stylistic apparatus of the Western classical tradition, paring away the harmonic structure set in place by what he referred to as the “second, latent structure” of tradition:

The manifest sound-material of Classicism and Romanticism, the tonal chords and their normed associations, the melodic lines balanced between triad and second intervals, in short the entire façade of the music of the last two hundred years is submitted to productive criticism [by Schoenberg] ...What was crucial in the great music of the tradition was not those elements as such, but rather the specific function they assumed in the presentation of a particular compositional content. Beneath the façade was a second, latent structure. (Adorno, 1983: 155-156)

To some extent, Adorno's role as cultural critic functions in a way comparable to Schoenberg's "responsive" compositional role – they are both experts, steeped in the institution, and their works contribute and respond to things that have happened within the field, rather than addressing a wider public audience. "The early twentieth century saw radical changes in the language of music," writes Stephanus Muller in "Music Criticism and Adorno, "in music criticism this resulted in the serious critic, closely following the composer, parting company with the public." He compares the critic's path with that of the journalist, "trying to keep up communication with the public, often los[ing] sight of the composer and modern music" (Muller, 105).

When Schoenberg's artistic role is seen in terms of response, some of the first alterations to Shannon and Weaver's initial model are worth engaging. Norman Weiner, working independently from Bell Labs, proposed that the possible confusion or entropy arising from one-way transmission could be mitigated through feedback (Griffin, 53), and subsequent application of that feedback to refined understanding of the original information transmitted.

Schoenberg's music, therefore, can be seen to communicate to participants in the Western classical music tradition – musicologists, theorists, composers – as the living embodiment of that tradition. That Schoenberg taught implies the possibility of further response from future members of the institution; his numerous indications of his hope to be understood (and the expectation that his works would only be understood by those possessing a certain level of education in music) suggest he did indeed hope to communicate.

## Conclusion

“No one should give in to limitations other than those which are due to the limits of his talent,” Schoenberg writes, describing a number of scenarios he believes artistic integrity makes unthinkable – a tight-rope walker going a certain way (“the wrong direction”) to please the audience, or for fun; a violinist playing out of tune to flatter “lower musical tastes,” a mathematician doing mathematics in a way that are publically accessible (Schoenberg, 1984: 123-124). His characteristic high-mindedness blinds him to the realities of all these situations: tight-rope walkers perform for audiences in circuses, improving their acts for the maximum pleasure of observers; musicians play out of tune in order to blend with a group or student, or, indeed, to incorporate timbral aspects of non-traditional or non-Western music; mathematicians, particularly lately, do develop techniques and concepts that allow a less-educated or less-intelligent public to understand them.

Schoenberg bemoaned the loss of friends and his unpopularity with audiences in “How One Becomes Lonely,” but relatively speaking, his music was quite popular and well known among audiences of classical music through the twentieth century. To be fair, the audience was divided between the Romantics (and their more logical successors – Stravinsky, etc.) and the Second Viennese School; Brindle writes that listeners “had to become partisans of one camp or the other; to have a foot in both worlds was almost an impossibility. To one faction, serialism itself was a virtue, the mechanisms of which could only lead to perfection and high artistic merit. To the other faction, the use of Schoenberg’s series could only produce non-music” (4). Nonetheless, there was an

audience, a specialized and exclusive group who did understand Schoenberg's music – those that shared his membership in the elite of the Western classical institution. When Schoenberg writes “if it is art, it is not for all, and if it for all, it is not art,” he indicates exactly what he thinks of the communicative possibilities for music – that it is for only the exclusive group that already understands. Later in this same passage, he writes “One thinks only for the sake of one's idea...thus art can only be created for its own sake” (124). It is this passage that allows for striking contrast with the development of artist-audience relationships that follow.

Music like Schoenberg's is consumed passively, mostly in performance and on record; it's habitus is aural, not something to be danced to in a club, sung along with in the home, or even performed by someone of non-virtuosic skill. This is not music with any kind of participatory intention. When the argument is made that Schoenberg did not compose with an audience in mind, but for the sake of musical progress and as a response to the canon, some of his reasoning for deliberately ignoring the needs and wants of the former can be understood. Through the practice of assembling serial patterns and simultaneously taking away some of the agency of the composer, they removed (or greatly lessened) the possibility for artist/audience communication. Further removal of materials – particularly evident in the works of some of Schoenberg's students, Webern especially – left little enough to be interpreted. However, this removal of communication was a kind of communication in and of itself, something to be “overheard” by that physical audience, and something to which that audience responded powerfully. The role of the mainstream audience listening to music from the

Second Viennese School is not totally passive, however Schoenberg intended it to be. In many ways, it parallels the responsive role of Schoenberg's self-imposed audience-hood, in that both criticized and argued against what they were being told to assume or witness.

### Chapter 3

#### John Cage: The Audience as Artists

It is Cage's work that first inspired this thesis, his observation of a changing audience and the effect this had on his music. In this chapter, Cage's attitudes towards the audience as a group of individuals, as well as his depiction of music itself as in their ears, are examined in parallel with three temporally distinct ideas about the power of the audience – John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, Stuart Hall's reception theory, and Christopher Small's *Musicking*.

"When people only know one name in contemporary music," writes William Duckworth in his introduction to an extensive interview with the composer, "that name is usually John Cage" (Duckworth, 3). Duckworth calls Cage "the perfect embodiment of the experimental attitude so essential to avant-garde music," and this same status is portrayed by Mark Swed in his 1993 obituary in *The Musical Quarterly*, where he calls Cage "the world's most controversial composer" via his famous silent piece, *4'33"* and recognizes him as "the first serious composer since Wagner to have a pervasive influence on the art-world as a whole" (Swed, 1993: 132-133).

John Cage is perhaps Schoenberg's most famous (and most famously 'failed') student. There is only one publically known and widely circulated opinion of Schoenberg's on his wayward student: "He's not a composer, he's an inventor – of genius" (Griffiths, 116). In spite of this pseudo-dismissal, Cage considered Schoenberg to be one of his greatest mentors, and wrote and spoke of him extensively throughout his career.

In the previous chapter, Schoenberg's communicative intent was demonstrated to be, in part, a response to previous Western classical music – a foil to some of the traditions and expectations of the institution. Cage's music, too, was in part a response to expectation and a break with tradition. Cage's rejection of harmony parallels Schoenberg's rejection of 'traditional' harmony, even as the former's music was a response to and rejection of Schoenberg's musical expectations. Schoenberg's influence was not reduced to a force to be fought against, however. Cage's favoured compositional principle – all the solutions existing within the question, giving up choices and instead asking questions – he relates back to a counterpoint exercise Schoenberg set him, which he suggests led eventually to his embrace of chance techniques (Cage, 1993: 14-15).

When Schoenberg is considered a catalyst for Western art music, both in terms of composition and his communicative intent (as response to the institution), it implies a distinct change in the field that followed. John Cage was certainly a player in that changed field, and a great deal of his music was responsive in a similar way. But Cage, too, was a catalyst; his dismissal of the idea of music as communication, negation of his own importance as artist and subsequent ascription of artistic power to the audience, and exploration of sound as both means and end had profound impact on generations of composers and audience members during his lifetime and since.

### **Art as Experience**

While Cage was afforded a good deal of classical legitimacy by his (albeit brief) academic training and studies with Schoenberg, his rejection of tradition formed his

attitudes towards music as communication: “I was disturbed in both my private life and in my public life as a composer,” he wrote in his 1991 “Autobiographical Statement.” “I could not accept the academic idea that the purpose of music was communication, because I noticed that when I conscientiously wrote something sad, people and critics were apt to laugh”. Cage decided, therefore, to give up composition unless he could find a different reason for doing it. His interest in Zen Buddhism and Eastern spirituality eventually lent his artistic ideas direction, specifically the oft-quoted “To sober and quiet the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influence” (Cage, Kostelanetz, Foreman, 1979: 79). In other words, and this Cage clarifies on several occasions, the purpose of music – creating or experiencing – is to pay attention, to listen.

Cage does not, however, dismiss the communicative power of all music; he instead creates a distinction between music that *says something* and music that *does something*. He also indicates that ‘speaking’ through music is defined by the intention of the composer – assisted by language, or interpreted in words:

Well, for the person who uses it to speak, it speaks, I’m sure. In his programme notes, James MacMillan, for instance, tells us what he succeeds in doing, doesn’t he. He says, ‘this is very convincing’! So if you have that intention, you do everything you can to make it heard. It seems to me, that if you’re going to speak, then you should speak. So words of some kind are important.  
(Turner/Cage, 1991: 5)

Cage, however, indicates a preference for music that *acts*, his way of indicating that a sound does “what is its nature to do” – acting like a sound, vibrating. This clearly indicates his idea of musical meaning is defined by listening.

Cage also expresses a distaste for what he saw as an emotionally manipulative quality to music – uninterested in evoking emotional response, he created deliberately

ambiguous music with the intent of creating space for audience interpretation (Turner/Cage, 1991: 6); fascinated by individuality, he wrote music intended to create a situation “in which life on the part of everyone concerned” was absolutely necessary (Cage/Kostelanetz, 1991: 115).

When Cage’s approach to and relationship with audience is considered in terms of a group of individuals, the reasons for his attitudes towards what was (and is) frequently seen as the purpose of music – some kind of emotional communication – become clear. When Thomas Erikson asked Cage in a 1987 interview how emotion fit into his work, the composer responded absolutely in the negative. “It doesn’t fit into my work,” he said. “It exists in each person, in his own way; but I’m not involved in that...I have emotions, but I don’t try to put them into my work” (Cage/Kostelanetz, 1987: 107). He regarded composers who did this, whose music attempted to express something, as imposing on the audience; Handel’s Hallelujah Chorus, for example, was pushy and controlling (Cage/Kostelanetz, 1987: 124).

In his seminal collection of essays, *Silence*, Cage describes the many natural occurrences that can evoke emotion in a mind: a mountain evokes awe, otters along a stream, mirth, night in the woods, fear, and so on. But he acknowledges that those responses are his and it is likely they will not correspond with another’s. “Emotion takes place in the person who has it,” he writes, “And sounds, when allowed to be themselves, do not require that those who hear them do so unfeelingly” (Cage, 1961: 10). In other words, communicable emotion does not exist in nature – except in the mind of the individual.

His decision that emotion is not something to be specifically expressed in music is related to this perception of people not as a group – “the Other” – but as a collection of individuals. This conception of groups of any kind – students, performers, audience members – as individuals appears time and time again in his interviews. For example, in a 1977 talk Cage states that his reason for not teaching was that teaching the students as individuals – as he would have to do, being Cage – would take an enormous amount of time (Cage/Reynolds, 1977: 593). Cage suggested that teaching is “no longer transmission of a body of useful information” but conversation, whether the participants are aware of it or not (Cage, *A Year from Monday*, 29). “We need to approach the mass as though it were as many individuals as there are in the mass,” he said in an interview with Joan Retallack, clarifying that people “get culture” individually rather than as a group (Retallack, 55).

Cage’s individualized conception of audience is not without precedent, however. John Dewey’s *Art as Experience* is an early work on the dispersion and individuality of meaning in art; while it was published in 1934 (well before the ostensible advent of the Communications field in the fifties but right around the time Cage was beginning his career as composer), many of the ideas expressed in the book are notable as early depictions of an altered communication power structure. Dewey’s book presents the experience of art – the reception side of things, the audience – as its purpose. He uses the word ‘esthetic’ to connote the consumer’s experience, although – unlike Cage – he also notes that the distinction between esthetic and artistic “cannot be pressed so far as to become a separation” and that the line between *doing* and *undergoing* is, in artistic

experience, often blurred (207). He also stipulates that one cannot exist without the other; “To be truly artistic,” he writes, “a work must also be esthetic – that is, framed for enjoyed receptive perception” (207). This idea shows a striking similarity to Cage’s notion that “paying attention” is the purpose of the creation of music; but he ascribes this purpose to both artist and audience while Dewey still finds a separation between artist (creating *for* experience) and audience (experience). If art speaks, Dewey writes, it cannot be translated, and it exists only when it is listened to as well as spoken. “The hearer is an indispensable partner,” he rules, “The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created it” (211).

Cage’s understanding of audience in terms of a group of individuals is preceded by Dewey as well; Dewey does touch briefly on the idea of a united and inter-related experience of members of an audience, but he spends considerably more time with the idea of the unique experience. He acknowledges that representative art may bear uniqueness due to the personal medium of the artist, but may also bear the mark of the individual enjoying it, telling them something about “the nature of their own experience of the world” (209). This esthetic experience he describes as having innumerable qualities or kinds, with no two audience members having exactly the same experience. “A new poem is created by every one who reads poetically,” he claims, “not that its *raw* material is original for, after all, we live in the same old world, but that every individual brings with him, when he exercises his individuality, a way of seeing and feeling that in its interaction with old material creates something new, something previously not existing in experience” (212).

Dewey's recognition that the raw material of the artwork is unoriginal and indeed empty of "meaning" is another notable comparison with Cage's ideas. He claims that a work of art, no matter how old and classic, is "actually, not just potentially" art when it lives in the experience of the individual. "As a piece of parchment, of marble, of canvas, it remains (subject to the ravages of time) self-identical throughout the ages," he writes, almost dismissively (213). Cage's well-documented relationship with the raw materials of music – sound and silence – both reflect and contrast Dewey's ideas. Unlike Dewey, Cage approaches sound as musical regardless of its structure or organized intent, but he also recognizes the necessity of experience to the creation of art. For Dewey, music has meaning presented "directly as possessions of objects which are experienced" (209); no need for interpretation, as meaning is inherent to the audience's experience. In assigning the responsibility of meaning to the individual, Dewey's *Art as Experience* is a clear predecessor to Cage's ideas about music and audience.

Where Dewey still makes room for the artist, allowing for them to imbue their art with something 'extra' that can direct the individual experience, Cage's focus on a perceived audience of individuals increased his desire to remove himself as composer from his work. Cage's most famous method of removing himself from his work, of composing without intention, is his use of the *I Ching* in chance operations, making his job, as he states frequently, that of asking questions rather than making choices (Cage, 1991). This new philosophy and method of music valued individual sounds and silences, chosen by chance, on their own merit rather than for their relationships. Because of the indeterminate nature of the sounds this process created, Cage equates his role as

composer with that of the audience. He noticed that performers in his indeterminate music identified themselves with the audience, too – because of the uncertainty of their actions, they react as observers: attentive, interested, and curious (Cage, Kostelanetz, Foreman, 1979: 78). He says, “...instead of hearing music in my head before I write it, I write in such a way as to hear something that I have not yet heard. Therefore, I’m in the position that the listener is in...with respect to my music” (Duckworth, 27). Not that Cage thought *of* the audience when he wrote –he found the prospect of considering the individualized listening and responses of audience members intimidating (Cage/Kostelanetz, 1988: 27).

### **Diary: Audience**

Cage’s consideration of the role of audience to the institution of music is clearly stated in the brief article “Diary: Audience” that he wrote in 1966. It expresses several extraordinary points about this relationship and about how it was – and is – changing.

The first point Cage makes is that he considered artists and audiences to be on the same ‘level’ – an idea that sprang from his affinity with Eastern spirituality – a rejection of the ego and the usual role of director or sender. His music went through phases of the realization of this idea, first in his removal of compositional purpose, then in transference of control of sounds to the performers, and later in shifting that control to the audience, and, in many senses, removing ‘control’ all together. “I frequently say that I don’t have any purposes, and that I’m dealing sounds, but that’s obviously not the case,” Cage noted in an interview. “On the other hand it is. That is to say, I believe that

by eliminating purpose, what I call awareness increases. Therefore my purpose is to remove purpose” (Cage/Kostelanetz, 1987: 110).

The rejection of the ego became Cage’s practice of negating the composer’s authority, both in his compositional style, and in how he listened to other composers. In the service of the listener, and in the service of “useful” music, Cage was invested in demystifying the musical process and de-deifying the traditional music makers. “We used to have the artist up on a pedestal,” he wrote “Diary: Audience”, “now he’s no more extraordinary than we are.”

The traditional artistic hierarchy wherein the genius artist is interpreted by a performer and absorbed by an audience, then, is dismantled by Cage’s ideal of music individually created by the attention of a listening audience.

Cage, having rejected this hierarchy, makes his second point in “Diary: Audience”: that the musical experience of the audience *constitutes* music (consistent with the above analysis of Dewey’s *Art as Experience*). “When you get right down to it,” he writes, “a composer is simply someone who tells other people what to do. I find this an unattractive way of getting things done. I’d like our activities to be more social and anarchically so.” (Cage, *A Year from Monday*, Foreword: ix.)

It is this idea of music as a social activity, of reception and creation as two faces of the same coin that Cage expressed through indeterminate composition. In “Diary: Audience” he writes, “Anyone who experiences a work of art is as guilty as the artist. It is not a question of sharing the guilt. Each one of us gets all of it.” The responsibility for or control over the music, therefore, is given to the listener in the act of listening. “Seen

from a particular view,” he says, “music is simply the art of focusing attention on one thing at a time” (Cage/Kostelanetz, 1988: 29) or “paying attention to vibratory activity” (Turner/Cage, 1991: 5).

The third point in “Diary: Audience” Cage makes in response to the question “Do you love the audience?” He replies, “Certainly we do. We show it by getting out of their way.” Cage’s words are not empty; his music expresses this paradigm, making room first for musicians and later handing control directly to the audience.

*Concert for Piano and Orchestra*, Cage’s first work for orchestra, demonstrates his initial recalibration of the institutional hierarchy towards the empowered performer; it had no unified score, but instead an individual part for each musician, making musical interaction more or less random. Ian Pepper calls the parts indeterminate, clarifying that “their realization in performance is open, in radical contrast to most modern scores [*ed. note - at the time of its premiere in 1957*], which provide the performer with instructions of such specificity that an “expressive” or creative role for the performer is called into question;” he calls Cage’s musical notation in that score autonomous, extraordinarily interesting visually, but ultimately incapable of producing a recognizable musical object (Pepper, 37). Pepper does not take into account here that Cage developed the notation of the parts with the players, so, he continues in the interview with Duckworth, “the notation was not strange to them, but arose out of our conversations” (Duckworth, 18). Nevertheless, the score provided a considerable amount of freedom to the performers as individuals. Pepper describes a work by Heinz-Karl Metzger, a prominent European

critic and associate of Adorno, in which the latter seizes on this empowerment of performers as a model of a nonauthoritarian society of free individuals:

Concretely, almost too concretely, Cage's most recent works propose social visions. Until now, musicians, even those trained to perform chamber music, only knew the law of coerced labor as specified in the musical text and the conductor's baton, invisible, virtual, reigning also over quartets and quintets. Cage set the musicians free, allowing them to do what they like in his works and giving them – although he is not always thanked for this at performances – the dignity of autonomous musical subjects: to act independently and to understand the significance of their work... (Metzger, trans. Pepper, 1997: 55)

Cage's ideal of individuality extended to everyone involved in those performances – he considered musicians so, and wrote accordingly, doing what he called 'translation' to music he had written throughout his career in order to adapt it to an individual performer's needs and abilities (Cage, 1991). The autonomy offered to performers in works like *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* was a disruption of the traditional performance hierarchy, but it was also a continuation of performer individuality that had been established – in a small way – in classical mainstays like improvised cadenzas and rubato. Cage, recognizing this, conceived of a piece that would symbolically overturn that hierarchy.

### **The Audience as Artist – 4'33"**

John Cage's 'silent' triptych *4'33"* has the distinction of being probably the most well known piece of experimental music or sound art in Western culture, lambasted in newspaper funny pages<sup>8</sup>, name-dropped online (see inset, below), and referenced in the course of all kinds of performances, musical or otherwise. Kyle Gann calls it "one of the

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<sup>8</sup> Kyle Gann's *No Such Thing as Silence* references Hilary B. Price's *Rhymes with Orange*, in particular the strip published June 25, 2008 (30).

most misunderstood pieces of music ever written” with the contrasting corollary that it is occasionally one of the best understood as well (Gann, 10). The discussion around *4'33"* has continued as a heated debate in academia and performance since it premiered on August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1952.

*4'33"* has the philosophical upside of having the capacity to mean many things – from an insult to the ritual of the performance of art music, to deliberate provocation, a logical turning point for experimental music to performance theatre. Gann notes that Cage considered it to be “an act of *framing*, of enclosing the environmental and unintended sounds in a moment of attention” in order to vividly demonstrate his firm belief in the idea that all sounds are music (Gann, 11). It is worth adding, in light of this paper, that Cage, with *4'33"*, also framed the audience. After all, he is the author who wrote, “Anyone who experiences a work of art is as guilty as the artist” (Cage, 1967: 51).

*4'33"* was composed via Cage’s favoured chance technique in three movements, each *tacet*, lasting 30”, 2’23”, and 1’40” respectively. Often called Cage’s ‘silent’ piece, it was actually written to demonstrate the lack of silence, to point out that sounds and music always exist, and that by listening one can take part in a constant performance. “They missed the point,” Cage said of detractors of the 1952 premiere, “There’s no such thing as silence. What they thought was silence, because they didn’t know how to listen, was full of accidental sounds. You could hear the wind stirring outside during the first movement. During the second, raindrops began pattering on the roof, and during the third the people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out” (Cage/Kostelanetz, 1987: 97). In some senses, it is incidental music of the

kind Cage is known for – the performer (the pianist sitting on the bench), and the composer (Cage) have no control over the musical experience; but in this case the audience, as those not only listening but taking conscious or unconscious sonic part, have been handed the metaphorical reins.

In *4'33"*, silence from the ostensible performer allows the listeners to insert their own meanings into the space, to apply their individual interpretations of the experience, and, what's more, to *recognize* that fact. It points fingers at a culpable audience to decide for themselves what they are experiencing. *4'33"* both *empowers* audience members to ascribe meaning to their individual experiences and *requires* it of them.

The original structure of the piece also creates room and requirement, in a sense. The setting of an artistic performance is traditionally one of highly ritualized actions and reactions, replete with etiquette. Within the confines of this ritual – a concert hall, a quiet audience, a performer on a stage in front of an instrument – Cage took the liberty to flout several of the key rules, and in so doing, encourage a startled audience to do so too. Joan Retallack writes that much of Cage's work "directs audience attention to the ambient context in which it takes its time and place" (Retallack, xxvii) – and surely *4'33"* embodies the essence of that direction, not only framing sound over time, but the act of attention perpetrated by the audience.

Gann, in his 2010 book *No Such Thing as Silence* writes that *4'33"* "...called upon the audience members to remain obediently silent under unusual conditions" (19). He goes on, suggesting the silent 'performer' "calls a whole network of social connections

into question and is likely to be reflected in equally unconventional responses on the part of the audience” (19).

Those responses are the second task of the responsible audience. Silence from the ‘performer’ and in the notated structure does not simply leave room for an individualized, audience-created meaning, but also for *sound*; and that sound can, in large part, also be provided by the audience. Rustling papers, whispering, breathing, laughing, coughing, and walking out are among audience-generated sounds that go into a performance of *4’33”* – and in fact, go into live performances of every work, even as they are regarded as distractions from the music. But Cage upends the predisposition – and expectations – of a passive audience. “An audience can sit quietly or make noises,” he wrote in a 1966 published diary entry on audience, “People can whisper, talk and even shout. An audience can sit still or it can get up and move around. People are people, not plants” (Cage, 1966: 50).

Cage, expecting a sentient, non-plant audience, also expected a critical audience – many of his works were unexpected or jarring, unpleasant or challenging, and he took the negative reactions alongside the positive ones, and in the same way: as the right of the audience to act and react, but also as a reason for his work. Retallack describes an event at which Cage was asked to respond to skeptical and hostile reactions to his work; he said “Everything I do is available for use in the society” (Retallack, xxvii) – compare this with Schoenberg’s ideas of “art for the sake of art.” Cage’s art was explicitly *for* the audience; Schoenberg’s explicitly not. To suppose that Cage composed his work to be deliberately inaccessible is a misunderstanding; but he certainly wrote to be

provocative, to engage sound and its listeners in conversation and confrontation. “Art is either a complaint or do something else,” is the title and content of one of his lecture-mesostics (Retallack, 3) – a challenge.

*4'33"* in particular was challenging, and is often mocked even as it is praised; it has to be said that the notion of handing power to the audience to listen to and produce sound and meaning as they would has every possibility of being simultaneously overwhelming and insulting. To subvert expectations as *4'33"* did and does, asking an audience – who expect and perhaps paid to be passive – to be active and to take responsibility for their individual experiences turns the culture, economics, and the system of art performance upside down.

Cage's subsequent reinventions of and sequels to *4'33"* continue this idea. 1962's *4'33" No. 2* features instructions that allow interruptions (presumably by anyone and anything) and that state that the action performed should “fulfill an obligation to others”. *One*<sup>3</sup>, the third installment of the *4'33"* trilogy, requires a single performer to build a sound system in the concert hall so that the entire hall is on the edge of feedback, amplifying the sound of the hall and the audience, and reinforcing the idea of audience performance by essentially handing them individually and collectively a microphone. Another piece that plays into this same idea of an active, creative audience is *33 1/3 – Performed by Audience*. Conceived in 1969 as an “audience participation” work, John Cage's original “score” simply stipulated that the gallery be filled with about a dozen record players and two- to three- hundred vinyl records. Museum visitors were

encouraged to act as DJs and create a musical mix by playing records freely – thus performing the work.

### **An Evolving Audience**

“Diary: Audience” adds one additional point to the previous three, and this final idea sums up the entirety of this thesis: the artist/audience relationship is evolving.

Notice audiences at high altitudes and audiences in northern countries tend to be attentive during performances while audiences at sea level or in warm countries voice their feelings whenever they have them. Are we, so to speak, going south in the way we experience art? Audience participation? (Cage, 1980: 51)

He posed this question in 1966, and it was still on his mind during a 1985 interview with Birger Ollrogge. “So it’s exclusively the reader or the listener of your music who is doing something with your works?” Ollrogge asks. “Yes,” replies Cage, “the response, I think, finishes it. I think we’ve been moving from ownership to use” (Cage/Kostelanetz, 1987: 127).

Cage’s interest in creating art with *use* is one that points towards a changing audience as well. In an interview late in his life he questions the purpose of art music. “Does it occur in their lives? Is it something of any use to them?” he asks. At this point in his career, Cage dismisses music purposed for relating to personal experience and asks instead for music that can be used. His comparison to “that business of owning your home” references the ‘American Dream’ ideal – a house bought and paid for, the title to property – that even then was becoming obsolete. “We are involved not in ownership,” he says, “but in use” (Kostelanetz, 1991: 10).

When Cage references “moving from ownership to use” and “going south in the way we experience art” – it indicates his belief in a shifting cultural paradigm centred on the audience. This same cultural shift is visible in ideas about audience written about by theorists and scholars in critical and communications theories through the twentieth Century. John Dewey’s 1934 *Art as Experience* provides a base for this kind of audience-centric thought, but that kind of experience-empowerment does not appear in communications theories for some time.

Stuart Hall’s 1973 essay “Encoding/Decoding” is considered an early contrast to the previously established Communications models – models that disempowered the audience by not acknowledging the reception of a message as active. Reception Theory, the model that resulted, moved away from the idea that media has the power to directly cause a certain behavior – while still allowing it the power of suggestion – and proposed a model of possible “negotiation” and “opposition” (in addition to agreement) from the audience, saying that the viewer interprets meaning based on their culturally and experientially defined identity. Hall’s search for a ‘complex structure of dominance’ and insight into the hierarchy of the flow of communication led him to argue that what is being communicated undergoes a change in form over the process of communication, and that the form created by the sender is “necessarily different” from that which the audience receives – and not only receives, but creates (Davis, 61). Hall’s work also redefined meaning as active, placing significant power over that meaning in the ears of the audience. “If no ‘meaning’ is taken, there can be no ‘consumption’,” he writes, “If the meaning is not articulated in practice, it has no effect” (Hall, 91). Referring to

production and reception as “differentiated moments within the totality formed by the social relations of the communicative process as a whole” (Hall, 93), Hall notes that production and reception of the message, while not identical, are related and of equal importance.

Susan Bennett, a Canadian scholar credited with bringing reception theories into the sphere of performing arts with her 1997 book, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, identifies problems with the traditional hierarchy of performance art and explores contemporary changes. She quotes Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, outlining the situation in which an audience is typically observed:

What there is to see is very clearly exhibited: spectacle implies a distinction between the roles of performers and audience. Performers are set apart and audiences asked to respond cognitively and emotionally in predefined categories of approval, disapproval, arousal or passivity. (Dayan and Katz, 16-17 in Bennett, 87)

She notes that this summary does not take into account the shifting role of the audience in new and non-traditional forms of theatre practice, performances that provide a central role for the spectator and involve the audience in multiple layers of production – with reception being an integral part of performance. Further, she draws attention to ways in which audience members as individuals have transcended the traditional bounds of the cultural institution that by and large has interacted with and understood the audience in its physical presence as a group.

“Neither theories of reading nor theatre semiotics, however, go far beyond the issues facing an apparently individual subjectivity,” she writes. “Yet all art forms rely on those cultural values for their existence, and among them, theatre is an obviously social phenomenon. It is an event which relies on the physical presence of an audience to

confirm its cultural status” (Bennett, 86). She later explores how it is not simply the presence of the audience that gives meaning to the performance, but the audience members themselves, their “moment-by-moment perception of that in the experience of a social group, and the outer frame of community (cultural construction and horizons of expectations)” that hold the power in the interpretation process (Bennett, 156).

Bennett claims that alternative theatre productions challenge the audience’s culturally-defined ideas of art and theatre, asking for a different (frequently more active) kind of reception. Bennett uses Cage’s *4’33”* as an example of a challenge to audience’s receptive expectations and strategies, calling it “an even more concerted attack than the works of Pinter and Beckett”. “As well as stretching musical boundaries,” she writes, “Cage is clearly challenging the concepts of theatre and performance” (Bennett, 96).

Hall and Bennett, like Dewey, allow the creator of the message to maintain control over aspects of the content and meaning of that message, allowing for real communication even as they empower the audience’s understanding – whether individual, according to Dewey, or a combination of individuality and culturally-embedded norms, following Hall and Bennett – as paramount to the process. Cage’s aversion to creating music intended to communicate and negation of Artist control is, in many ways, different from these ideas, but the trend in the hierarchy of communicative relationships is similar – Dewey prioritizes artistic experience above creation, Hall acknowledges the *action* of audience interpretation as powerful in the communicative process (and allows the audience to change the message), while Cage takes the whole

thing to its logical end and throws out artist and message entirely in favour of individualized interpretation.

### **Musicking**

The idea that meaningful art exists as experience, framed, created, and absorbed in terms of the participants, is taken further still by Christopher Small late in the century. Small's work on the structures of meaning and social relationships culminated in an idea he referred to as "musicking." Musicking implies the embedded dynamic quality of music and meaning, that of activity. Small uses "music" as a verb, defined thus: "To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing" (Small, 1998: 9). He extends the meaning to the ticket-takers and stage hands and cleaners, arguing that every aspect of the event of musical performance is music.

But even before Small solidified the idea of musicking, he spent time investigating the interactive roles of every individual participating in music. In his article "Cage and Cardew – Words on Music" he notes – and quotes – Cage saying, "Art, instead of being an object made by one person, is a process set in motion by a group of people. Art's socialized" (Cage, 1969, as cited in Small, 1973: 77). It's clear that Small takes a great deal of inspiration from Cage's ideas about performance; "[Art] isn't anyone saying something but people doing things, giving everyone the opportunity to have experiences they would not otherwise have had," he quotes again (77),

foreshadowing his own musical ultimatum: “Music is not a thing at all, but an activity, something that people do” (Small, 1998: 2).

Small rejects the pervasive notion that “musical meaning resides uniquely in music objects” (5), and claims that the focus on a self-contained work passing through a performer to reach its audience-goal and a score that may only be fully understood when read on paper (5) is deeply flawed; he also criticizes “reception history” as focusing one-sidedly on the audience reaction (4). Musicking attempts to distribute the responsibility for meaning evenly to all participants. Certainly Cage would have agreed; in his “Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) 1965” he describes a discussion in which a student wanted him to agree “that the piano tuner and the piano maker have nothing to do with it (the composition).” He goes on to allow the other side of the argument, “The younger ones had said: Whoever makes the stretcher isn’t separate from the painting” and to continue, a tantalizing parenthetical, “(it doesn’t stop there either)” (Cage, 1967: 7). It doesn’t stop there either – every stage of the musical process, every person with a musical experience is not separate from the musicking.

Small’s experience as audience member in the concert hall was one of discomfort; he notes the relationships displayed during the proceedings did not correspond with his ideal or experience of human relationships (Small, 1998: 16). Cage’s *4’33”* and other works turned those relationships on their heads. If the relationship-experience of performances of *4’33”* is not analogous to daily life, then at very least Cage subverted the ritualized standard and pointed in that direction.

Cage's music displays both kinds of the relationships Small describes as meaningful in extraordinary ways; first, in his anarchical and chance approaches to sounds and their relationship to one another, he asks the listeners to hear sounds as they are, as strictly sounds. Cage often identified himself as an anarchist (Retallack, 51), substituting the uniqueness of the individual for the notions of politics, and it is interesting to consider possible social implications in terms of the system Small has proposed – *4'33"* is a clear analogue. In Jesse Stewart's article "Intervections" he writes, "If the relationships between sounds in any act of musicking do indeed model social relationships, musical systems in which all sounds are treated as equals – systems that 'let sounds be themselves' as Cage advocated – can be construed as a musical embodiment of a social order without hierarchy" (Stewart, 334).

Second, *4'33"* dramatically altered the relationships between participants, adding to the audience's role as witnesses those of composers, performers, critics, and (particularly in the piece's early performances) both scientists and test subjects, but also adding participants in a way of which Small would surely have approved. By allowing for this kind of sound-anarchy, every sound-maker audible participates in not only the social relationship, but the sonic as well.

Cage, like Small and Dewey, is happy to place the blame for musical meaning on the audience; unlike them, however, he separates music from communication, particularly in terms of the relationship between composer, score, performer, and audience.

Cage's interaction with artistic meaning has everything to do with the individual, and he delighted in it. "Art's a way we have for throwing out ideas – ones we've picked up in or out of our heads," he said, but continued, "What's marvelous is that as we throw them out – these ideas – they generate others, ones that weren't even in our heads to begin with" (Cage, 1967: 50). That *4'33"* manages to gesture so indexically to this idea is undoubtedly part of Cage's point – by making room, by subverting the standard, by asking bluntly for the audience to take over nearly every aspect of the performance, he privileged experience in a way foreshadowed by Dewey and expanded upon by Small. *4'33"* as a work, hands over the burden of artistic experience to the individual, setting them up to take responsibility in such ways as it is impossible to ignore. Furthermore, it performs perfectly as an example of Small's expectation of musicking as social reflection and construction – the hierarchy of traditional performance (a governing force) is dismantled, and the level playing field of the participants allows for a community-anarchy built of individual responsibility.

### **Cage, Contradiction, McLuhan**

As much as Cage hoped for anarchy in his art, as much as he tipped artistic hierarchy on its head, and as much as he promoted individualized interpretation and understanding, he was by no means invisible or uninvolved in developing an understanding audience. Cage wrote *extensively* on his art – essays, lectures, books, interviews, liner notes – for a man who prioritized individual interpretation, he also explained those motivations and intentions frequently and eloquently.

Further, Cage did not dismiss communication as a field, simply as a requirement in his art. His extensive knowledge of the works of Marshall McLuhan (and personal relationship with the Canadian scholar) suggests he was a bit of a fan – Cage references him frequently, and considered him one of his greatest inspirations. McLuhan’s demonstration of the sweeping change in society reinforced by technological developments allowed Cage to feel justified in continuing work that critics called irresponsible.

Art and now music in this century serve to open people’s eyes and ears to the enjoyment of their daily environment. We are now, McLuhan tells us, no longer separate from this environment. New art and music do not communicate an individual’s conceptions in ordered structures, but they implement processes which are, as are our daily lives, opportunities for perception (observation and listening). McLuhan emphasizes this shift from life done for us to life that we do for ourselves. (Kostelanetz, 1991: 170)

Cage identifies McLuhan as “a detective who observes the patterns and points these out, and wishes...to make us aware of our environment” (Kostelanetz, 1987: 105) and notes that he shares the same intention. However, Cage recognizes the similarity stops there: McLuhan, interested in patterns, is also interested in relationships. “I have spent my life denying the importance of relationships,” he says, “and introducing, in order to make it evident what I mean and what I believe, situations where I could not have foreseen a relationship” (Kostelanetz, 1987: 105).

Of course, that very statement displays the contradiction inherent to Cage’s artistic anarchy – his music was ostensibly free of communicative intent and meaning, but he also ‘introduced situations’ in order to make his ideas *about that freedom* known. When added to his considerable body of explanatory and exploratory published

work, there appears a discrepancy not between what Cage did and what he said, but between what Cage said and the fact he was saying it.

### **Conclusion**

This contradiction, however, does not detract from the bent of the ideas presented in Cage's work. His revolutionary ideas about art and their integration with similarly changing ideas in sociological fields of aesthetics, sociology, and Communications, make Cage a notable link between an institutionalized tradition and much broader artistic freedom. In his article "Composing after Cage," Geoff Smith notes that "the question is no longer, 'Can we do it?' – that goes without saying – but 'What do we want to do?'" (Smith, 1998: 5). Smith further quotes many contemporary artists on the influence of Cage's ideas on their careers: Yoko Ono says, "What Cage did for us on an artistic level was to tell us that we were all right." George Crum called him "a liberating influence for all kinds of composers throughout the world," Philip Glass noted, "the whole tyranny of history, the historical imperative of contemporary music, was demystified entirely...it simply didn't matter anymore" (Smith, 1998: 5). It is this freedom from tradition that Cage established in the musical ideas of generations of composers that followed, but it is of equal importance to bring attention to the implied freedom from tradition for the audience that occurred during and after his lifetime.

Not only do composers and artists have the opportunity to choose the nature of their engagement with an audience, but the audience, as a group of individuals, have the opportunity to choose in kind. Cage's willingness to subvert tradition and institution

and attempt to empower an audience of individuals establishes his importance to an audience-oriented trend in arts, Communications, and related fields.

“There’s another way of looking at things which sees that the main stream has now gone into delta. And beyond that into ocean,” wrote Cage, describing the present and future of art music in a 1990 interview. “And there’s a multiplicity of possibilities rather than just one principle one....now you can go in any direction at all, even your own direction” (Turner/Cage, 1990: 469).

## Chapter 4

### Laurie Anderson's Collaborative Network

Laurie Anderson was one of the first artists to rise to prominence in both the world of Western art music and that of performance art. Her music was instrumental in expanding the possibilities of Western art music to the social communication structure found more commonly in performance art – a structure where the role of the audience is more equal to that of the artist. Anderson's relationship with her audience demonstrates this balance in a number of ways, and those ways display similarities to several critical and communications theories of the time.

In addition to her prominence in the art world, Anderson has had a comparatively large impact on and involvement with pop music and pop audiences. In 1981, the song "O Superman" from *United States*, unexpectedly rose to #2 on the UK Singles Charts (Howell, 24), leading to a multi-record contract with Warner Brothers and a well-funded, well-marketed touring and recording career – and the relative renown implied.

Anderson's particular greater-genre-bending influence means not only that her work has been heard by a larger audience, but also that she has a much larger presence in the media. Many interviews, lectures, and performances are available online, and this creates a body of data in which trends can be noted, one of the clearest being that of her relationship to her audience. In the unedited transcript that was published online for an interview in *The Wire* with Laurie Anderson, the interviewer, Laurie Gray, references Anderson's friend and colleague Marina Abramovic, and how her durational

performances “have this emphasis on the body in the here and now...to be a witness is of fundamental importance.” She then asks Anderson if she sees her audience as witnesses.

Not in that way, I think. As a performer I self-consciously create those as part of something sometimes, but I’m more presentational. Standing on the stage and I’m going, right...hopefully not to go look at me, what I’m doing, but as more of a narrative. So it is a radically different way to relate to an audience, I think, than what they’re doing...I have to think about that, the witness aspect. Audiences, I think of them not so much as witnesses as collaborators. The best thing that can happen with an audience is for someone to say, ‘I know what you mean,’ not so much, ‘wow, I’m here looking at this’ (Gray, 2007).

The distinction made here – between witness and collaborator – establishes the relationship between artist and audience for Anderson very clearly. It also references the shift in that relationship this paper tracks – from Schoenberg’s insistence upon the audience as witnesses, to Cage’s redistribution of power that elevated the audience to artists, and finally the more equal responsibility of collaboration.

Anderson trained in art music through her childhood, but it is her background (and foreground) in visual and performance arts that cause her music to be as drastically different from Cage’s as his was from Schoenberg’s. Anderson’s relationship with Cage was one of mutual respect and friendship – she was interviewed in the *American Masters* documentary made of Cage’s life, “I Have Nothing to Say and I Am Saying It”, she participated extensively in the 1993 tribute album “A Chance Operation: The John Cage Tribute” alongside David Tudor, Yoko Ono, Frank Zappa, John Cale, and others, she quotes him in her song lyrics, and she once interviewed him for *Tricycle* about music and their shared interest in Zen Buddhism. She summarizes the influence he had on her art in an interview in *Wired* magazine:

It all became very wide open from the moment John Cage said that everything sounded as good as everything else, and it was only our limitations that made it beautiful. I don't know – to me that's a giant stumbling block. I think the thrill of creation is making something from nothing. Yet whenever I stop to listen, for just one minute, to whatever is happening in this giant ocean of sound, I thank John Cage for making me pay attention. There are some things you don't really need to manipulate. Art is about paying attention. (McCorduck, 1994)

Cage, in return, seemed to respect both Anderson's art and her willingness to engage with culture and politics in her art; in their interview in *Tricycle* he describes her work as "very, very important, and very much used by society" – high praise from Cage, who valued highly music that could be used (Coe, 1992).

It is Cage's legacy that explains why many include Anderson in the world of Western art music; even as her music is more performance art than traditional concert, that distinction post-Cage is seen as a function of the changing direction of art music. Schoenberg's music, for example, has a presence in score form that, for many scholars, is as important as its performance. The score, however, only functions as a useful communicative aid for those with the high level of education required to understand it. John Cage, on the other hand, separated his scores from both performance and reception, negating the importance of an exclusive understanding – or any kind of understanding. Anderson's mostly score-less music and her use of new technology connect performance and reception in a collaborative process. Where Schoenberg purposefully narrowed his communicative scope and Cage gave it up all together, Anderson makes music intended to communicate, and creates it in such a way that meaningful power is shared between performer and audience.

Anderson's willingness to engage with her audience as equals in a mutual give-and-take-artistic relationship stems from her insistence on creating music that is for *people*, intended to communicate. She employs a number of methods to do this, but they are rooted in a recognition of her audience as individuals with a huge amount of shared knowledge and experience, all of which has gone into the construction of their identities. The idea of identity as something that is constructed largely out of culturally embedded shared knowledge appears in a number of theories around the time Anderson was performing. Donna Haraway's Cyborg Theory is one of them, as is Manuel Castells' Network Society. Castells' ideas about communication in a society of shared, constructed identity have a number of things in common with Anderson's method towards and conception of audience – not least of which is the intentionally collaborative quality of her art.

### **The Collaborative Audience**

Collaborative process is referenced often in Anderson's interviews and lectures; she describes altering performances based on audience feedback, gratefulness for the act of attending a concert, and how her art is both conversational and influenced by conversation. The idea of shared creativity, the responsibility of authorship distributed to an audience of individuals with individual identities is almost certainly what Anderson is getting at when she references collaborative communication. Uncomfortable with her role as a social commentator, she insists in a 1985 *Electronic Musician* interview, "My job as I see it is to make images and leave the decision making and conclusion-drawing to other people" (Diliberto, 1985). This is similar to Cage's mandate of the individualized

power of the audience, but unlike Cage, Anderson is willing to acknowledge her role in the creation of the art, and in the fact that the audience *will* make decisions and draw conclusions if she is successful.

The career she has built as a performing artist as opposed to a more conventional composer or visual artist has been intentional, focused on the social process (very like Christopher Small's theory of musicking). "I like the contact, the feedback," she says, "I resisted the urge to shoot [*Home of the Brave*] on video because it's too flat and too lonely. Movie theaters are social – the gossipy ticket line, the communal high-velocity eating in the dark" (Goldberg, 117).

Anderson's artistic decisions, too, are made with communication – and collaboration – in mind. Again in contrast to Cage and his desire to negate his role as composer in his music, she writes that one of her jobs as an artist is to "make [immediate] contact with the audience" and that contact is not a Dadaist or Futurist provocation to shock and surprise, but instead a combination of new and old – songs that "combined the complexity of abstract discourse with the 4/4 beat of rock and roll", or mimicked "the regular rhythms of ordinary conversation or the to and fro of arguments" (Goldberg, 11) in combination with the latest of electronic sound techniques, unusual sounds and sampling, challenging lyrics, and her curious cadre of invented instruments.

In a 1992 interview with John Howell, she says she is "going along for the ride, just like everyone else" in her performances. Mutual openness and shared experience are what she considers the process – success is a two-way street. "Sometimes people

tell me ‘Oh, I got so many ideas from your work.’ Then they tell me what the ideas were, and they have nothing whatsoever to do with what I said or did,” she explains; “this tells me that the work was really a success – when other people take it and use it in a way I’d never dreamed of.” (Howell, 30) Later in the same interview she says again that the success of the work is dependent on the reaction of the audience; “I write something and I’m not sure what’s funny and what isn’t, until I see what people’s reactions are” (Howell, 45). This audience-as-collaborator dynamic isn’t just an abstract for Anderson, however, and she demonstrates it in numerous ways, both physical and virtual.

Anderson places a great deal of value on the act of attendance by the audience, acknowledging her sense of imposition as a theatrical performer on the regular life of her audience. “It’s a time-based thing,” she said in an interview on Q with Jian Ghomeshi on CBC Radio earlier this year, “It’s a time-based thing, and I’ve asked people to come to a show, and it’s not like a gallery where they can come any time they want, they have to like, go to this thing and it’s a lot of challenging stories, and some of them are sort of gloomy.” This favour she seeks to return by being aware of her audience, and by being flexible in subject matter (which she changes according to current events) and in content and presentation; if no one laughs at a joke, or if people are falling asleep, she will alter or remove portions of the piece. “I try to make something that I really like, and consider myself an average enough person that other people will – no, that’s not always true,” she continued in the Q interview, “sometimes you think something’s *really* funny, but you’re the only one who thinks it’s funny – but you find that out pretty quickly in a show. And I found that out over several points in those four shows, that I

was the only one in the room who found that interesting.” “And so because of the reaction of the Calgary audience you will remove those elements from the show forever?” queried an incredulous Ghomeshi, the host of the show, to which Anderson replied in the affirmative (Interview in *Q, The Podcast*, 23:28-24:15). This willingness to change artistic material to suit the needs of the audience is one of the most direct examples of two-way communication in Anderson’s art, and is related to that of stand-up comedy, where an unresponsive audience spells failure. She explains in an interview:

Howell: If it resonates for you, it might vibrate out there.

Anderson: I just hope I’m an average enough human being. And plenty of times, I’m the only one who thinks something is funny; everyone else is going, “Huh?” It doesn’t remind them of their Uncle Fred and a sound he used to make. They don’t even have an Uncle Fred.

Howell: Do you revise shows when things like that happen?

Anderson: Yes.

Howell: Things drop out?

Anderson: Yes. If I get enough blank stares, it’s gone – I can entertain myself at home talking about Uncle Fred.” (Howell, 93)

What seems an obvious course of action to a comedian – altering a set that is not effective – is practically unheard of in the Western art music tradition. Part of this willingness to change stems from Anderson’s self-defined role as entertainer (also unusual in the classical tradition); the other part is her desire to tap into shared cultural and emotional experience. For Anderson, communication is most effective – or only effective at all – when it engages things the artist and audience members have in common.

Anderson’s willingness to change her work to better reach the audience not only appears in performance, however; the music she writes and records is similarly created

with them in mind. Susan McClary, in her book *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* includes an article which discusses in depth the musical dimension of Anderson's art – a field not often touched on, as traditional musicologists dismiss it as simplistic: triadic alternating chords, that is all. But McClary demonstrates how Anderson's music has an entirely different premise to that of traditional art music, setting up two-chord structures as a reflection of social reality as it is organized through binary oppositions, but also suggesting that tonal music has an ability to create depth in the music. "Because we are familiar with tonal procedures, we are able to take pleasure in the note-by-note events in a piece of music and still follow the long-term structural mechanisms underlying it," she notes. (McClary, 1991: 144) This again establishes Anderson's constant reference to collective knowledge, to creating a common ground with the audience where they may interact with her art as individuals. "Her music may sound simple up against the sophisticated devices of music theory," McClary continues, "but the self-contained rigors of music theory can seem almost endearingly naïve up against Anderson's music, the multi-voiced popular culture with which it has fused, and the social reality that is being negotiated through such new voices and forms (McClary, 1991: 145)."

Anderson's tone of voice and style of delivery are a part of the music that allow for individual audience engagement as well. "Her music is hypnotic and her ululating voice is oddly comforting," writes John Lewis in *The Guardian* in 2012, comparing her delivery to that of a children's TV presenter. And indeed, the image of a storyteller is one that she engages with regularly, sometimes setting herself up in an easy chair on

stage, allowing the text of her pieces to build, climax, and finish like children's stories. Googling the phrase "Laurie Anderson's voice" brings up critics, writers, and fans referring to it in terms of a mother (Midgette, 2010), a friend, comfort (Marcus, 2007), and many times a storyteller.

She further makes use of familiar sounds – samples, loops, and sounds she makes herself – to reference the collective knowledge that she shares with her audience, reinforcing the open channel of communication and acknowledging common experiences. When Anderson uses sounds that are unfamiliar, she explains in a way with which the audience may interact based on their own experiences.

Laurie Anderson's pieces tend to be lyrically heavy – the music is a foundation, not the purpose – and though her live performances can range from huge lightshow-tech-heavy performances with a band and backup singers to much-scaled-back, just her and a synthesizer or three, she maintains the identity of a storyteller. She tells personal stories about her family (her missionary grandmother's hat-making and existential crisis, her piano-playing rat terrier Lolabelle), and experiences (teaching art history but making up most of the content – until she got fired). These function as empathetic hooks to allow the audience to gain an affinity with her as a conversationalist. Pop culture references and current event talk accomplish something similar. For example, in her most recent tour, *Another Day in America*, she talks about NASA's nebulae images and mentions that their colour is designed by a NASA employee, as opposed to natural. She references the colour of the nebulae knowing that her audience will be privy to the brightly tinted extraterrestrial reference material. Anderson also incorporates her sharp

wit and sense of humour – jokes and turns of phrases that appear in nearly all of her work – which allow the audience to ‘come in on the joke’, cementing the conversational bond. Howell writes that “[a]udiences commonly respond to her work by saying, “She is saying what I was thinking and never said.” That intimacy is the mark of a lyric method rather than an analytic one, one that allows emotional contact with an audience” (Howell, 19).

All of these ways Laurie Anderson converses with her audience, responds to and engages with them as individuals, can be seen recently in her career, but also early on, as in her hit 1981 single, “O Superman (For Massenet)”. Lyrically, “O Superman” begins with a repeated loop of Anderson’s voice – a syllable recognized almost universally, “ah.” Perhaps it is laughter or enlightenment, or the seed syllable for a Buddhist mantra, but in any case it is recognizable and unprocessed. The first few lines ‘translate’ the first few lines of a Massenet aria “Ô Souverain” into commonly understood language with the ability to reference individual identity: “Ô Souverain” becomes “Oh Superman,” “ô juge” becomes “oh judge,” “ô père” becomes “oh Mom and Dad.” The next few lines, a mother’s answering machine message, are simultaneously familiar and comforting – the trope of a concerned mother calling her daughter is so common that it becomes humorous. This familiarity couches the darker message of the song, about big government and things to be afraid of (see appendix for full lyrics), but returns again to the familiar via an altered quotation from the Tao Te Ching:

When love is gone, there’s always justice  
 When justice is gone, there’s always force  
 And when force is gone, there’s always Mom.  
 Hi, Mom!

Anderson has performed this piece regularly in concert, but for the sake of this analysis her communicative performance techniques are demonstrated with the music video. She uses many of the techniques discussed above – shadow puppetry as an alter ego, establishing multiple characters with which to dialogue (narrator, mother, newscaster, daughter), and even performs a verse in American Sign Language, reinforcing the idea visually that she, the artist, comes to the place where her audience is to communicate.

The music itself is harmonically simple, using the two-chord pattern McClary talks about; it serves two purposes: first to allow the lyrics to be foregrounded and their communication not to be jeopardized, but also to be recognizable to an audience. Themes build and are repeated clearly, and the harmony shifts from a C minor triad in root position to an Ab Major triad in first inversion in a way that establishes a recognizable binary easily equated with that of the subject matter of the lyrics: the known and unknown, familiar and fear-full.

### **Anderson, Technology, and the Cyborg**

Anderson's unique weave of video, sound, and story all facilitate the collaborative communication structure she aspires to; it is technology, however, that facilitates that weave, and she is known as one of the pioneers of electronic and multimedia performance art. Her personal relationship with technology and gadgetry is well documented in interviews – most of which she manages to turn back into

discussion of how she talks to people and how audience members talk to one another during performance.

What is referred to in this paper as “collaborative communication” has distinct similarities to ideas presented in Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” of *affinity*: interactions and relationships built on entirely individual identities understanding the world and each other on their own terms through communication. There are other parallels between Anderson’s performance practice and Haraway’s cyborg, too, perhaps more obvious, as the former is a near perfect example of the merging of organic and electronic.

“Since the late 1960s,” writes Jon McKenzie, “Anderson’s homey yet alien work has been short-circuiting the often great divides between street talk and philosophy, popular culture and experimental art, everyday life and its electronic ghost.” He describes her medium as “an electric body in which gestures, stories, and songs mix with synthesizers, video projections, printed matter, and, most recently, personal computers,” continuing in a description of how it has changed and grown, using language like “crystalline” and “fractal structure” that clearly evoke the cyborg (McKenzie, 1997: 30). She was among the first performance artists to merge theatre and technology as a means of interacting with the individual in the audience – a theatre where “technology becomes an organic extension of voice, body, and space (Jestrovic, 2000).”

Roy Ascott, in his 1990 pangyric “Is There Love in the Telematic Embrace?” touches on this idea of multi-way communication, of affinity. “...telematic culture

means...that we do not think, see, or feel in isolation. Creativity is shared, authorship is distributed, but not in a way that denies the individual her authenticity or power of self-creation. ...Telematic culture amplifies the individual capacity for creative thought and action, for more vivid and intense experience, for more informed perception, by enabling her to participate in the production of global vision through networked interaction with other minds, other sensibilities, other sensing and thinking systems across the planet – thought circulating in the medium of data through a multiplicity of different cultural, geographical, social, and personal layers.”(Ascott, 1990: 238)

In a 2001 *Great Thinkers* video (YouTube), Anderson talks about a situation where an interviewer asked her about her take on “colonizing the new continent of the Internet” and she deftly changed the subject to her rat terrier, Lolabelle. In a 2010 interview in *Smithsonian*, she says that she is not on Facebook or Twitter, but qualifies: “I’m a miniaturist and a confessional writer, so it seems like it would be a natural form for me. I also like that the writing is meant to be conversational.” It comes back and back again, this redirection of questions related to technology towards the personal, towards affinity – but perhaps it isn’t a redirection, after all.

Anderson’s epic work, *United States I-IV*, attacks technology head-on in its content, but as she herself notes, “I’m using 15,000 watts of power and 18 different pieces of electronic equipment to say that. So what am I saying?” A couple of things at least” (Diliberto, 1985). She manages to make use of technology – very skillfully, and with a certain measure of ironic enjoyment – but also to stay self-aware, to recognize what she is doing, how her art is constructed. She allows the technology she uses so

adroitly to facilitate communication and affinity rather than interfere with it – a constant challenge and love/hate relationship. “The second that technology becomes the most salient feature of music is the point I think the music begins to fail. Then you're at a trade fair listening to the latest in modern technology. Now that's very interesting, but it has nothing to do with art, nothing,” she continues, placing ‘demonstration’ in opposition to the artistic ‘communication’ in the *Electronic Musician* interview (Diliberto, 1985).

There are a pair of YouTube videos that involve Anderson showing off her home studio in the late 1980's. In a room surrounded by synthesizers, tape, microphones, and all kinds of at-the-time state-of-the-art technology, she opts to talk about how she communicates with other musicians on stage, her interactions with an acupuncturist, and finally, when she gets into demonstrating gadgetry, she goes straight for the vocal filters – the Voice of Authority, “backup singers from boxes”, a filter with a very long delay that in effect allows her to be her own echo or response. She uses vocal filters to create characters, alter egos with which to enact conversation onstage. She has invented multiple new instruments to this end – notably, the self-playing violin (that can perform alone, or in duet with Anderson), and the harmonizer, which allows her to perform in many voices and interact with alter egos instantly. “I literally do drag the whole studio onto the stage,” she says, “to the point of using a lot of filters as instruments” (Diliberto, 1985). Her stage set up frequently includes a pair of microphones, side by side, one filtered and one not, so that by turning her head slightly

from side to side, she can have a conversation with someone Other while performing solo on a stage.

In Silvija Jestrovic's 2000 article "The Performer and the Machine," she describes some of these Others. "Some of Anderson's stock characters who came to life through the amalgamation of the performer and the harmonizer include Sharky, a guy who wanders around New York using the language of the 50's; and the allegorical figure Voice of Authority, whom Anderson describes as 'a car salesman or a guy who wants to sell you the insurance policy you do not need' (28)." This Voice of Authority, coincidentally, has become a fixture of her performance practice, and has since acquired a name (Fenway Bergamot, given by the artist's late husband, Lou Reed), official Facebook<sup>9</sup> and Twitter<sup>10</sup> accounts, and a gig for Nonesuch Records leaving voicemail for lucky winners<sup>11</sup>. "He got melancholic and got a personality somehow," she says in a 2010 interview in the *New York Times*.

She describes her penchant for enacting dialogue with an Other in her essay "Control Rooms and Other Stories: Confessions of a Content Provider":

"As a talking artist, I'm always on the lookout for alter egos – surrogate speakers," she writes, describing her brother's African Gray parrot as one such surrogate. "You're never sure with Bob [the parrot] where the line is between repetitive babble and conscious communication...it made me realize how much human language is a combination of rote

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Fenway-Bergamot/116460365031587>

<sup>10</sup> <http://twitter.com/fenwaybergamot>

<sup>11</sup> Nonesuch. "Enter to Win a Voicemail from Fenway Bergamot, Laurie Anderson's Male Alter Ego." *Journal* (blog), September 24, 2010. <http://www.nonesuch.com/journal/enter-to-win-a-voicemail-from-fenway-bergamot-laurie-anderson-male-alter-ego-2010-09-24>

phrases and fortuitous invention, a complex mix of the things that can be said and the unsayable" (128). The notion of constructed language crops up in her lyrics time and time again – phrases that possess meaning, but only for those privy to the source material. Phrases like "Hi, Mom!" "Smoking or non-smoking?" "Lucy, I'm home!" "Attention shoppers!" "There but for the grace..." would be meaningless (or have very little meaning) for an audience outside the influence of Western culture; one or more examples appear in almost every lyric Anderson has created. This sets regular reference points for a specific audience, reference points that resonate within in the individual, intersectional identity of each member in a unique way based on their experiences. The idea of delegating an alter ego to say those lines allows the artist to participate in that reference material with the audience. Jestrovic describes this use of alter ego as "an interplay of real and simulated, presence and absence, performer and object; and it enables the extension and multiplication of voice and body as a means of making the theatre of 'electronic storytelling' inter-subjective and dialogic (27).

Anderson's identity is first and foremost a storyteller; her lyrics often include personal tales, descriptions of current events, or extended jokes. "For me," she writes, "electronics have always been connected to storytelling. Maybe because storytelling began when people used to sit around fires and because fire is magic, compelling and dangerous. We are transfixed by its light and by its destructive power. Electronics are modern fires (Anderson, 1994: 175).

The lyrics for Anderson's song "Yankee See," from the *United States* tour include the following:

“Well I was trying to think of something to tell you about myself,  
and I came across this brochure they’re handing out in the lobby.  
And it says everything I wanted to say – only better.  
It says: Laurie Anderson, in her epic performance of *United States Parts I-IV*  
Has been baffling audiences for years with her special blend of  
music...slides...films...lights...tapes...films...(did I already say films?)”

Here she makes fun of people who describe her music via technology, who highlight the shiny, glitzy “multimedia” aspect of her work – particularly that they stress her film work. In her interview in William Duckworth’s *Talking Music*, she mentions that she doesn’t make distinction between visual things and aural things. “For me they come totally from the same sensibility...I try to make records that are cinematic, movies that are musical” (373). This idea of multimedia isn’t simple surface glitter, it runs much deeper than that. The visual aspect – video clips, projected stage sets, images and backgrounds – add dimension to the communicative possibilities of the performance. Jon McKenzie describes her practice as “supplementing living behavior with film, video, tape, synthesizers, and computers to enhance the building and playback of her idiosyncratic archives” (31) which enables her to connect her performance in culture to other performances, cultural, social, and technological.

Anderson’s use of technology simultaneously backs her away from the audience while connecting her art to them in a multitude of media. Its flexibility and scale allows her to integrate regionally-specific collective knowledge into her constantly changing performances. “She did this,” Goldberg explains, “by taking photographs of the empty theater as soon as she arrived at a new location; they were developed into slides that afternoon and included in the evening’s show” (Goldberg, 143). During the *United States* tour, a meditation on the state of the world as grand and operatic as its subject matter

suggests, Anderson made use of ironic imagery: huge clocks ticking on screen, blasting rockets, an American flag tumbling in a clothes dryer, and more. She also used screen projections to extend the stage space: a platform with a single step allowed her to enter the space of the film projections themselves. She makes regular use of video projection to alter the representation of place and body, displaying her face (frequently altered in colour and composition as well as size) as another version of the alter ego. "Live body, sound, and real space interact with filmed imagery and recorded soundscape," explains Jestrovic, "not necessarily to establish the contradiction...but to show them as complementary (31)." This representation therefore becomes a hybrid – part projection and recording, part organic body and live speech – the cyborg.

Anderson further uses computer-generated effects in her art for the purposes of adding to the dimension of her communication, allowing the audience to engage visually as well as aurally. From dissolving into a screen of smoke in the 1984 video "Sharkey's Day," being interviewed by her computer-generated alter-ego for *Alive from Off Center* on the station WNET, and incorporating operatic-scale computer-generated images as backdrops to her live shows.

"On *Big Science* there's this howl," she explains, "and on the stage screen there's a close-up of an electrical outlet that looks a lot like the close-up of a face, so it's a literal animation of something. It's like a lot of words in English that confuse the idea of life and electricity like 'livewire.' Something that has so much power must have life. Instruments have the same thing, like when I'm playing what looks like a violin, actually a tape-bow violin, and you hear a saxophone. I'm looking for the same kind of jarring

relationship between sound and picture” (Diliberto, 1985). This kind of jarring image increases the depth and clarity of what Anderson is talking about. For example, in “My Grandmother’s Hats,” a piece she performed on her *Nerve Bible* tour, Anderson uses video backdrops to reinforce and comment upon her own performance construction. The initial image is one of feathers floating, which could represent any number of related things – feathers from Anderson’s grandmother’s hats, the soul, angel’s wings – but Anderson later uses the projection to point out her storytelling – the images of moving feathers switches to agitated stop-motion, underlining the transition in subject matter from control to confusion and disorientation.

Flashing URLs superimposed over video of a tunnel, moving strips of light, a spider’s web, and grass-skirted male dancers on a tropical island provide illustration for a story Anderson tells about the Internet in performance of “Microsoft and the Vatican” on the *Nerve Bible* tour. But it isn’t simply a backdrop; Anderson directs the video like an air traffic controller, waving handheld flashlights, drawing attention to herself as mediator and creator (Hood, 1998: 170). But even this, which ought to place the artist directly at the centre of the communication, allows for personal interaction from the audience – from the act of recognizing Anderson’s motions based on personal experience, to understanding the visual pun of “the web.”

Recorded material – both film and audio – might seem to throw up a road block in this communicative process. How does an artist engage collaboratively with an audience they can’t see or respond to? Anderson would likely say she is principally a performance artist, a number of her recordings have demonstrated a response to this

challenge. Several sound recordings – 2010’s *Homeland* most recently – include DVDs of live performances and interviews – again, not a perfect interaction, but demonstrative of concern for an audience *listening* to performance art. Her performance of *Home of the Brave* was released principally as a film and only in a secondary capacity as a soundtrack. And there’s *Puppet Motel*, probably the best example of audience interactivity in a recording one could find anywhere. A multimedia CD-ROM written by Anderson, designed by Hsin-Chien Huang and released in 1995, the game was acclaimed as surreal and artistic. The promotional description on Amazon.com describes it as “eschew[ing] gaming conventions of most interactive CD-ROMs in favor of casting the user adrift on an ocean of repeated images, ubiquitous voices, and mesmerizing rhythms. Navigating PUPPET MOTEL is a challenge in itself; the map is your memory of what you’ve already seen with objects functioning as signposts.” This (unlike many promotional descriptions) is telling – it clearly places the artist(s) and audience in roles Anderson maintains in her live performance, one of collaboration. The user must rely on their unique memory to navigate the material, the artists merely create place for that to happen. Additionally, it was possible to access the Internet via the CD-ROM, plugging in both figuratively and literally to the social network on the specially-created website, enabling the audience/users to discuss their personal experiences in playing the game (Book Description, Amazon.com).

Perhaps most importantly of all her technological activities from film to sound recording to performance practice, Anderson uses electronics as the base for her music, speaking through microphones, synthesizers, keyboards, samplers, and as discussed

above, filters. What initially set her apart from other electronic musicians was the performative aspect – unlike most modes of mechanical and electronic reproduction, the audience gets to see her create the loops and sounds they hear. “But,” cautions Susan McClary, in her 1991 article “This Is Not a Story My People Tell,” “her presence is always already multiply mediated: we hear her voice only as it is filtered through vocoders, as it passes through reiterative loops, as it is layered upon itself by means of sequencers...the closer we get to the source, the more distant becomes the imagined ideal of unmediated presence and authenticity (137).” Further, she continues, this is a mediation Anderson insists on and problematizes, the idea of “Man versus Machine” with which she has a dual relationship.

Arguably the closest relationship with technology of one kind or another that Anderson maintains is that with the violin. She refers to it often as the instrument closest to the human voice (itself an alter ego), and she went to far as to string the bow with magnetic tape and install a pickup on the violin so that recordings – footsteps, other instruments, yes, but most frequently voices – can be played and manipulated, taking the violin/voice metaphor to a rather more literal place. Other invented instruments that demonstrate Anderson’s relationship with technology include “Head Music” in which contact microphones were placed around her skull, amplifying internal sounds – breathing, gnashing teeth, grinding jaws – usually only heard by the individual making them, and her drum machine suit in which her movements were turned into beat patterns and incorporated into the music. “Head Music” in particular is a very potent example of Cyborg Theory in that technology allows the individual to share

something personal and unique with other individuals whose experiences, while related, will not be the same. In another example of projecting personal, organic sounds, Anderson puts a microphone/stethoscope combination on her chest to allow the audience to listen to her heartbeat. “The technological equipment, enabling the performer’s heartbeat to be heard, has a contradictory effect,” writes Jestrovic; “it distances the spectator from the performance, while at the same time bringing him/her right into the performer’s body (32).”

Anderson also performs with a pillow speaker, a small speaker placed in the pillow for the questionably effective purpose of hypnopedia – sleep learning. She sings through it, describing herself as “the kind of person who gets a thrill from putting electronics in her mouth (“Performance with a Pillow Speaker,” YouTube video).” This is a near perfect summation of her relationship to technology and to the identity of a cyborg – the self-aware acknowledgment of danger, the excitement of communicating in new ways from a personal place (one’s own mouth), the intimate – if wary – engagement of technology and the body. Anderson uses technology both as a voice, to communicate with the audience, but also allows it to use her in a controlled way, thereby extending the demonstration of collaborative communication – and of the cyborg – one level further.

While Laurie Anderson in both word and deed undoubtedly places a great deal of importance on an active, collaborative audience through simulating conversation, engaging the audience on a level of individuals on multiple dimensions, and inventing new ways to say those things, she maintains something of a distance. Anderson’s art is a

performance, an enacted conversation, not a real one – but of course, the “struggle against perfect communication” is a cyborg characteristic as well (Haraway, 1991: 176). This is a simulation – but one that manages, more than many other artists and composers, to engage with the audience at a cyborg level of affinity through technology.

### **The Evolving Audience – Flow, Network, Musicking**

The empowerment of the audience, while a relatively recent development in cultural theory, is readily exploited by artists who are willing to engage. “Performative modes of art are merging with mass culture and entertainment,” writes Auslander. “When one can obtain the same cultural object at The Performing Garage in Soho, at the neighbourhood video store, at the museum, or on network television, any clear-cut distinction between “advanced” art and mass culture has become untenable.” (Auslander, 122) – and Anderson is no different from the performance artists Auslander references in welcoming the exposure and variable consumption medium. In fact, Raymond Williams’ concept of “flow” (how programming, or the elements of what holds an audience between segments, are the many small individual parts that fit together to create a whole experience) can further be used to discuss Anderson’s communication structure and how it attempts to enter mass culture rather than offer detached commentary, or that make her work, as Auslander writes, “part of the dizzying intertextual mass culture it seems determined to enter, rather than as a set of individual texts which somehow respond to social contexts from which they are detached” (Auslander, 125).

Anderson's performances are structured in segments, much like television programming, but unlike television programming, this is done in order to get the audience to engage critically. Woodrow Hood writes that where television flow is used to bring the audience back from the distractions of the home (where they are watching), Anderson's use of flow happens in a dark theatre where time must be set aside. It essentially doubles the "drawing in" effect and allows seemingly disjointed segments to be connected over a longer performance (Hood, 1998).

Where the notion of Flow falls short is in its depiction of communication happening in one direction at a time, and also in its assumption of a homogeneous audience; contemporary communications theories like Manuel Castells' Network Society imply a far more multifaceted organization (or, perhaps, disorganization) of people and communications. Castells is willing to engage with the idea of a culture fed by mass media – "the media are the expression of our culture, and our culture works primarily through the materials provided by the media," he writes. "In this fundamental sense, the mass media system fulfilled most of the features suggested by McLuhan in the early 1960s" (Castells, 337). But while he holds a great deal of respect for McLuhan's ideas (and those of other mass media Communications theorists), he emphasizes the appearance of a new communication system, distinct from the future McLuhan predicted. This new communication system is built on the audience not as a passive object, but as an interactive subject, and the subsequently transforming media from mass communication to "segmentation, customization, and individualization" (337). Some of Castells' hesitations sound very like Stuart Hall's reception ideas – he calls mass

media a one-way communication system where the actual process depends on an interaction between sender and receiver in the interpretation of the message (Castells, 335). “While the media have become indeed globally interconnected, and programs and messages circulate in the global network,” he writes, “we are not living in a global village, but in customized cottages globally produced and locally distributed” (Castells, 341). This metaphor shows a striking resemblance to Laurie Anderson’s habit of customizing her multimedia performances to their individual locations, and many of Castells’ other metaphors and ideas bear out in practice in her art.

The case that Anderson and her audience interact with each other in a manner consistent with Haraway’s cyborgs was made earlier. Castells, too, considers individuals in terms of shared, constructed identity; it forms the basis for his informational society. “Social relationships,” he writes, “are defined *vis-à-vis* the others on the basis of those cultural attributes that specify identity” (Castells, 22). This is different from what he calls “the traditional Western concept of a separate independent subject;” he notes that in contrast, communication must now acknowledge independent identity in terms of an interconnected society (23).

Castells wrote about the Internet in its early days, but many of his ideas are still relevant and effective in understanding what it has done for contemporary communications and culture. He calls it “the integration of various modes of communication into an interactive network” (328), and in many ways it functions as means and metaphor for the informational society. “The Web allowed for groupings of interests and projects in the net,” he writes. “On the basis of these groupings,

individuals and organizations were able to interact meaningfully on what has become, literally, a World Wide Web of individualized, interactive communication” (355). Castells wrote about computer-mediated communication (CMC) in 1995, and did not, at that time, expect it to become a general medium of communication in the foreseeable future (358); his theorizing, then, only goes so far. What Castells began to consider in the ‘nineties has carried on in a similar, if unspeakably broader, vein – the Internet facilitates not only the construction and distribution of shared identity, but the means for identity (both constructed and individual) to be expressed.

This evolution of mass society to one diversified, specialized, and divided by ideology, taste, and lifestyle has the potential to baffle mass media. Castells defines three features of social and cultural patterns supported and augmented by the multimedia Network. First, widespread social and cultural differentiation and segmentation that require messages to be similarly segmented and diversified, both by those sending the messages and by those interacting – and Castells uses that word on purpose due to the multimedia nature of the messages – with them. Second, the audience features members of increasing social stratification; class and wealth no longer necessarily dictate access to knowledge or define action. Finally, even as audiences and content become increasingly diversified together, all the communication within a system, even an interactive and selective system, is integrated in a common cognitive pattern (370). “From the perspective of the user (both as receiver and sender, in an interactive system),” he writes, “the choice of various messages under the same communication mode, with easy switching from one to the other, reduces the mental

distance between various sources of cognitive and sensorial involvement” (371). This interactive communication system, then, addresses participants as both sender and receiver, even as it facilitates the switching between roles.

It is Anderson’s ability to interact with the individuality of her audience through their culturally-constructed identities that orients her art easily in Castells’ Network Society. Not only do her performances reference shared nostalgia and contemporary, localized information, but her references to the personal establish her role as an individual contributing to the conversation. The multimedia nature of her performances – and the fact that they are live performances – draws a further parallel to the informational society; Castells’ analysis of multimedia systems as better able to support participants with multiple roles points to the inherently interactive, collaborative communication system Anderson seems to intend. “The human spirit reunites its dimensions in a new interaction between the two sides of the brain, machines, and social contexts,” writes Castells – the connection to Anderson’s music, audience, and self is quite clear, here. “The potential integration of text, images, and sounds in the same system, interacting from multiple points in chosen time (real or delayed) along a global network, in conditions of open and affordable access, does fundamentally change the character of communication” (328).

### **Conclusion**

Laurie Anderson knows what she is doing here; if nothing else, she is a self-aware, postmodernist performer and composer. But she’s also an empathetic individual who values communication, and this relationship she has with her audience comes up time

and time again in interviews and lectures, in her personal writing, and most importantly, in her art. Her conscious detachment from setting herself as the figure of authority (a natural role for a solo performer), her willingness to alter her music to sharpen communication, and her use of technology, cultural reference, and story to create and enhance connection with the audience, all demonstrate a very contemporary kind of collaborative, useful communication, like the one established in Castells' Network Society. "I think your work is very, very important and very much used by society," said John Cage in the *Tricycle* discussion he shared with Anderson in 1992. "This is the marvelous thing. Because you can perform and be seen, you see. I mean, the flow is taking place and you can increase it (Coe, 1992)." Where Cage's art handed the power of meaning to the audience directly, Anderson's performances make use of shared experience to influence and catalyze response, even while maintaining an empowered audience.

## Conclusion

When John Cage writes about his observations of audiences “moving South” in the way they experience music, he suggests active participation becoming an integral part of the communicative process. The shift in the role of the audience that he makes note of in “Diary: Audiences” as seen through the eyes of composers and demonstrated in their music is notable over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its comparability to similar shifts in the conception of audience in other, related fields – especially Communications – allows for an interdisciplinary exploration of the evolution of that audience. The implications of correlation between new development in the fields of Communications and music as both relate to audiences can inform a different understanding of the artist-audience relationship. It is apparent, when this concurrent evolution is examined, that attitudes towards audience – even those held by audience members themselves – changed towards an expectation of participation and collaboration.

The study of composers – and the attitudes they maintain in their lives and represent in their art – provides the means to examine this change. Over the course of this thesis, this study was interpreted and explored in terms of Communications theories, allowing for identification of common traits and ideas, as well as different perspective on audience relationships.

In the early decades of the century, Schoenberg’s dismissive attitude towards the large part of his audience and maintenance of the elitist “art for the sake of art” as motivation for his work – even as those things were expressed in the harmonic language he created – reflected the traditional passive role of audience. His expectations of

audience and communication in music have elements in common with Shannon and Weaver's transmission model of communication – both linear, organized, and in possession of a defined hierarchy of power for the sake of relaying a message. These theories, as well as Schoenberg's conception of audience, were criticized for their inability to afford the audience power in the communicative relationship.

Reception theory, sparked by the ideas of Stuart Hall in the 1980s, proposed that audiences not only had the power to respond, but that the act of reception was a powerful one. John Cage's music and writing often demonstrate similarities to this idea; he considered the act of listening to be the creative and artistic force behind musical understanding (if indeed there needed to be understanding at all). Cage's observation in "Diary: Audiences" that audiences are active participants in the creation of art – and that the role of the composer is minimal – is not only referenced often in his writing and interviews, but also displayed in many of his different works.

With a similar frequency in word and art, Laurie Anderson acknowledges a collaborative relationship with her audience. Unlike Schoenberg, she recognizes the importance of the audience to the performance, and she writes with the purpose of communicating, incorporating pop culture and other common referents into her music, lyrics, and performance practice. Unlike Cage, she still maintains a certain amount of creative power and individuality in her art; as a storyteller, she engages both with the greater society and culture, and with the individual. She also, unlike many other artists, is willing to *change* her music to better communicate, based on the audience's response to her work. Castells' Network Society presents a similar conception of communication

in which individuals participate both as members of an audience and as individuals in multiple roles and with different kinds of power, both creative and receptive.

Each of the specific communication theories mentioned in this thesis was developed to engage the audience of specific kind of media technology: the transmission model for the telephone and early mass audience of radio and television, reception theory to add to the communicative power of the television mass audience, Castells' Network Society for recording and computer technologies that offered creative power to the audience on an individual and societal level.

The Internet that Castells knew when he wrote about it in *The Information Society* has since evolved from a platform that was built around principles of the linking of information to one that primarily facilitates the linking of people (Wesch, 2007). "In particular, the types of interaction on Web 2.0 raise questions about what it means to exercise *authorship*, communicative with an *audience*, and produce a text or multimodal *artifact*" (Warschauer/Grimes, 3). Warschauer and Grimes note that online staples like the 'wiki' format of article that allows anyone to create and edit public information collaboratively, the constructed identity and community native to social media, and the comments section on weblogs and videos "represent a continuation of much older trends from plain text to multimedia, from static to dynamic content, from authorship by an educated elite to mass authorship, and from high costs of entry into the public sphere to low ones" (Warschauer/Grimes, 16). In his 2007 YouTube video "The Machine is Us/ing Us," Michael Wesch demonstrates how the language of the Internet has changed structurally, and as that structure has evolved, so has its purpose. "The web is

different,” he writes, “digital text is no longer just linking information. Web 2.0 is linking people – people sharing, trading, and collaborating” (Wesch, 3:45-3:55).

The completely collaborative communication and relationships facilitated by and enacted on the Internet have changed not only how audiences interact, but also the importance of the role itself. The audience has become central to contemporary communication, the constant exploration and development of relationships with people – whether fictional heroes, politicians, a micro-blogger on the other side of the planet, or anyone else – a striking demonstration of changing attitudes and communicative practices. It is this contemporary focus on audience and communication that requires a reframing of cultural study, an alternative approach that seeks the understanding of art in terms of relationships.

The possibilities for further inquiry into connections between Communications and the arts make for an interesting study; it is also a necessary one. With Western art music rooted in the past, the most prominent methods of study are still based on history and theory rather than relationships. An alternative course of study like the one presented in this thesis, based not on harmonic language as a purveyor of meaning in music, but on the artist-audience relationship, the communicative expectations of audience, and Communications theory, has the potential to provide an understanding of music as a function of cultural development, and of human interaction.

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