



STILL CONVERSING WITH CAGE

DOVE BRADSHAW

Université Paris Sorbonne (Paris IV), 2012

Amphithéâtre Quinet

Cover: John Cage, I Ching Notations, [two pages written both sides], 1951

Ink, pencil, scotch tape on note paper written both sides

Page 1: 8 x 5 ½ inches; page 2: 8 x 5 ¾ inches

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“I hope you don’t mind, I think of Dove as the daughter I never had,”¹ John Cage said to my mother at my 1981 exhibition in a small gallery across from the Whitney Museum on Madison Avenue in New York. My mother, who had come from my childhood home a few blocks away, replied, “Of course not, you can do much more for her now.”²

Indeed he did during the 15 years I was in and out of his household with William Anastasi, my life partner of nearly four decades. Together we visited three times a week for chess (after awhile Bill played daily), and for dinner, mushroom hunting or going to concerts, exhibitions, films, once a Broadway show, *Tango Argentina*, a Christmas present from John to Merce and us—birthdays, holidays, opera, openings, and parties. John’s spirit continues to accompany me with his sweeping embrace twenty years since he died. Even here to this podium. His attention and work provoked me, as a budding Minimal/Conceptual painter and sculptor, to rise to his higher opinion of me. It still challenges. Last year I scored my film, *SPACETIME*, to his 1983-85 *Ryoanji* that will have a live accompaniment at the Paris Conservatoire on Madrid Street closing the symposium. My title comes from John’s description of the chemical paintings that change in the atmosphere, “We’re confronting now it seems to me in the very full way that her work is itself working—the identity, not the separateness, but the identity of time and space.”³ John said this in early July 1992 a few weeks before he died—for a taped conversation with art

¹ Told to me by my mother

² Ibid.

³ John Cage and Thomas McEvilley, *A Conversation*, 1992, *Dove Bradshaw Works 1969-1993*, Sandra Gering Gallery, New York, 1993, p. 8.

historian, Thomas McEvelley about my work. It became the text for my first monograph and as it turned out was his longest final interview.

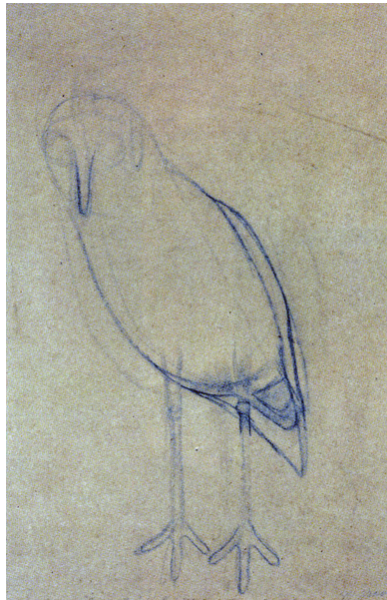


Dove Bradshaw, *SPACETIME* (film), 2011, scored to John Cage's *Ryoanji*, 23' 22"; Museum of Modern Art, New York

I first heard of John Cage in 1969 or 70 at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston when I came across *Silence*. Everyone had read or was reading it at the time. It was a college textbook. I hadn't heard any of his music, but he was definitely a force. Even Miles Davis, we heard, had read *Silence*. *Centering*, about the Zen approach to pottery by M.C. Richards was another timely influence—she had lived with David Tudor and was a close friend of John and Merce. I would later meet M.C. at their home over dinner. John always said he was allergic to teaching, yet he had an unmistakable pedagogic streak. In lectures and introductions to his work he spelled out his sources as though he was instructing others not only on his own methods, but also how one could find a process to make art for oneself. Really anyone who had eyes and ears to learn and came in contact with him became a student.

When we met in 1977 John was 65, I was 27, ripe for his influence. He often lectured or performed at colleges eager to have artists follow his revolutionary ideas. He himself

was making visual works, while always aiming for a greater reach. Almost as an evangelical proselytizer he advocated for the use of Chance and Indeterminacy as the artistically, as well as, politically enlightened path—though he might never have put it that way. Political in the sense that we should all be as free as possible, from convention, the past, authority of any kind—a concert conductor for example—even the artist himself should be freed of his narrow intentions. He had an antipathy to symmetry and imagery, emancipating the ground from old orders. He considered abstraction the direction of art. Anything that looked like something else soon lost his interest, though he wasn't doctrinaire. One of Morris Graves' birds, sent in a letter, hung over his breakfast table.



Morris Graves, *Little Bird*, 1938 Ink and graphite on paper, 12 ½ x 19 ¼ inches
Estate of John Cage and Merce Cunningham

Bob Rauschenberg told John that it was all well and good for a composer to use 100 percent chance, but that it was impossible in painting—meaning in its composition. As John once observed to us Bob structured his wild gestures, drips and collage imagery on a grid. After strenuously rebelling at Black Mountain, perhaps, this was Rauschenberg's only nod to the dominant Albers.

Taking the challenge of a totally chance-determined composition, in 1984 I started covering handmade paper with a thick German silver leaf and treating it with a chemical,

liver of sulfur used to antique silver. When I brushed it on, it lost any memory of the stroke and I noticed that it changed and continued to change thereafter, seemingly never settling down. The hills and valleys of the wetted paper caused the chemistry to pool—making natural patterns without my having to “compose.” Variety was endless, either due to weather, different surfaces or my imprecise mix of water and liver of sulfur. I could add depth by using other metals—aluminum or copper leaf—under the silver. John was very excited by their first exhibition. That Christmas I gave him a work that was particularly dramatic. Almost a decade later when Thomas McEvelley interviewed him about this particular piece, he said:

The things that happen in her work are, so to speak, full of not her determination but its determination, such as chemical change, or gravity. She used the word event, whereas she's interested in an undefined freedom of action for the chemistry. Of not doing anything. ...what we find in Dove's work is constant experimentation with things to see what happens when you do that.⁴



Dove Bradshaw, *Contingency* [1 of 12 works selected by Cage as part of his 1991 Carnegie International], 1985
Silver, liver of sulfur, varnish on paper, 32 x 24 inches; Collection of the National Gallery, Washington, DC

A few years later John told me that he no longer *liked* the work—the grid of order (the

⁴ Dove Bradshaw, *Works 1969-1993*, p. 17.

silver squares) had emerged—instead he had been attracted to the mystery, to the amorphous shape at its origin. I offered to exchange it, but he refused. I was unsettled—why had he shared his disappointment and then didn't want to choose something else? Only after he died when the following exchange with McEvelley came out, did I learn why:

*...Dove has introduced time into space, and our living is in that confusion.*⁵

He saw it as a test.

*It's quite amazing. The fact that [the work] changes requires a change for me; it requires a change of attitude. If I so to speak change with it, then I can change with the world that I'm living in, which is doing the same thing.*⁶

John had taken the work not simply as an esthetic experience, but as a life lesson as well. Who else would have made such a leap? In accordance with Zen, he believed that if we gave up our likes and dislikes that we would be happier socially, not only freer, of course, of wars and controversy, but more interesting in all our expressions—artistic or otherwise. In other words—we'd need to give up our overbearing egos.

I suspect that's what he thought was the political future of art. He never meant Political Art with a capitol "P" which has a specific address. He made a revealing remark to McEvelley about a 1979 work of mine in which, dressed as a nun, I had collected money in the New York Subway at 42nd Street. I thought of it as a "poetic experiment" since I sat one day straight faced, the next smiling, to tabulate the "value of a smile." Afterwards I gave the money to Care, as the Catholic Archdiocese preferred. When McEvelley said that it was the most political work I'd done to date, John replied, "that it [was] the difference between applied science as opposed to pure science."⁷ McEvelley understood from him that political art was more like applied science. Then John said, "I think her normal way of working is higher, that it could go through more aspects of our lives."⁸

⁵ Ibid. p. 17.

⁶ Ibid. p. 8.

⁷ Ibid. p. 33.

⁸ Ibid. p. 34.



Dove Bradshaw, *50% Better*, 42nd Street Subway performance on two successive days: one straight faced, the other smiling, collecting money; Estate of John Cage

My performance was enlivened by a famous remark of his, “I’m more interested in self-alteration than self-expression.”⁹ Another iteration, that art should be directed ethically. In John’s “Essay on Nothing” he had attacked the Abstract Expressionists. He criticized their self-indulgence, their inflated notion that their gestures were personally determined by supermen, advocating that artists give up their druthers to Chance, or at least to self-alteration. He advocated that we should no longer celebrate ourselves, or give way to mere feeling. John had often said Beethoven’s “carrying his heart on his sleeve had taken music in the wrong direction,”¹⁰ and every person should attempt to “get out of the cage he is in.”¹¹ As a form of meditation John told me that he dedicated himself to Chance Operations—it was, so to speak, his way of sitting. A discipline.

Each aesthetic decision, he seemed to be declaring with his own work, has a social, as well as personal basis. A work is a representation of a philosophical point of view. John told McEvilley:

Right now I am reading “The Yellow Emperor,” an ancient Chinese text on health. What they do anciently in terms of health, as far as I understand it is to take nature as the model for human behavior—which is the cyclic succession of spring, summer, fall and winter, together with heaven and earth—and to see all that as

⁹ John Cage told me and others

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

something which if it works rightly (if it is in the Tao, the Way), the normal succession of events will be for each person to live for a hundred years. And if you did it incorrectly, if you don't act as nature does you will die much sooner. So long life consists in acting as nature does. Another thing that I think I learned from Zen and from the teaching of Suzuki is that the whole of creation is Mind with a big M, and each person is mind with a little m. The little m often thinks that it has purposes and senses of direction, but if it changes its direction, if it turns round or is converted, then it looks out of itself toward the big Mind, either at night through dreams or in the day through the senses. And what Zen wants is that it flows with the Big Mind, and what Chinese medicine wants is a relation of conduct to nature.

And there's no fear of chaos.

McEvilley: So Dove's work seems to be an attempt to do this...to act according to nature.

John: Particularly when it doesn't seem to be art.¹²

Notably, he thought that the farther away from contrivance that art is—the more mysterious and the deeper reaches it touches—the closer it is to unmatched nature. The idea that he did not intend his music to move the listener emotionally may come from Coomaraswamy, the philosopher he loved to quote, who invoked the ancient Indian notion: “the purpose of music was to sober and quiet the mind, thus rendering it susceptible to divine influences.”¹³ John was full of deep feeling, but didn't like dramatic display. Once I brought Merce, Bill and him to Pina Bausch to see her *Sacre du Printemps*. She had set barefoot dancers dressed in pink satin slips to a frenzy on an earthen floor—in time their sweat muddied their limbs and underwear. Afterwards John exclaimed, “Those Germans, too much sturm und drang!”¹⁴ Together in Venice we attended an avant-garde festival and were struck by how far his music stood out from the others—Schoenberg, Morty Feldman, Earl Brown, Stefan Wolpe and Xenakis. His music was altogether from another place—it was not driven by expression. Instead it was driven by the formal range of the selected instruments and performers, or in the visual arts the demands of drawing, printing or watercolor techniques, with Chance Operations organizing the possibilities. It wasn't any “old” chance, however. As John explained his decisions derived from the kind of questions he asked, and those questions surrendered particular answers. Finally those answers were subjected to Chance. Someone else's use of chance, of course,

¹² Dove Bradshaw, *Works 1969-1993*, 17.

¹³ John Cage would say to Anastasi and me and of course, others

¹⁴ Ibid.

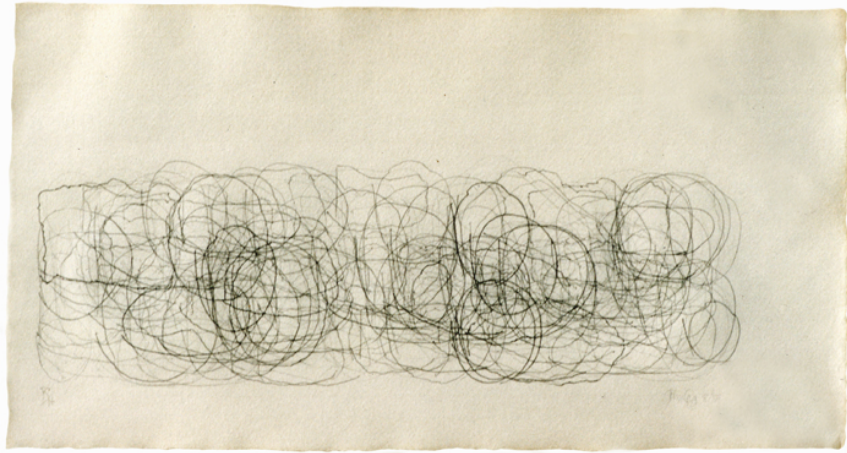
might not come from the same rigorous procedure. He said that he wouldn't have been satisfied with pulling torn paper out of a hat the way Duchamp had for his *Musique Sculptural*. It wasn't a dependable operation.

"The artist should not devote himself to the personal expression of his feelings or ideas," he insisted, "instead, he should operate according to Nature in the manner of her operation."¹⁵ His embrace of chance, distancing from emotions, denial of particular likes and dislikes, propelled his work above the personal entering it into a loftier, broader view of the world. He was a visionary. Nonetheless evidence of his personality, or psychology would seep through—leaving it the opportunity to leach out in a pure form "filtered" through his Chance Operations. The artist cannot do other than express himself no matter how formal his intent. Emphatically, John would say to Bill and me, "Psychology, never again!" attributing the statement to Kafka (actually, Rilke). He was not fond of Kafka, nonetheless, because of the weight of the psychological in his work.

While at the same time, clearly he made conscious choices before the introduction of Chance that were revealing: for example, with the *Ryoanji* Drawings: in the choice of his title—that not only identified, but structured the series around the fifteen stones in the famous Japanese garden; in the marks, he decided to trace 15 stones that he had collected according to taste, each around the size of a small fist; in his choice of pencil as medium; in the selection of paper, its size and horizontal orientation (referencing landscape) and not least in his *choice* to use Chance. When all this was in place, he asked of the *I Ching* which pencil to use among the possible range of 16 from hard to soft and how many times it was to be used. In regard to the stones, Chance determined which of the 15 to use and how many times, its placement allowing for a border, and how many times it was to be traced. In other words the composition and nuances of the medium were subjected to chance, the rest was determined according to his taste.

¹⁵ John Cage interviewed by Richard Kostelanetz, *Anastasi, Bradshaw Cage, Marioni, Rauschenberg, Tobey*, imitating nature in her manner of organization," curator: Dove Bradshaw, Sandra Gering Gallery, New York, 1991; John Cage on film, *Merce Cunningham, A Legacy of Dance*, Marie Hélène Rebois, 2012 France, 56 min.

Similarly, he approached musical composition.



John Cage, *Ryoanji Drawing R2.16, 8/84, 1984*, pencil on paper, 10 1/8 x 19 inches
Collection of William Anastasi and Dove Bradshaw

In John and Merce's work increased power came from giving their subconscious the freedom of display. Bill and I wondered whether Merce's *Cormorant and Owl* revealed, at least in the arena of art, Merce's subconscious depiction of John as the dominant Cormorant, over himself as the more reticent Owl.



Merce Cunningham, *Without Title [Cormorant and Owl]*, before 1990
William Anastasi used it for a MCDC drop for *Polarity*, 1990
Ink on paper, 11 x 8 1/2 inches; Collection of William Anastasi and Dove Bradshaw

A work of mine also conceived in formal terms, surprised me when a reviewer imbued it with psychological content. It was the 1996 *salt, half heard* in which a 1000 ml separatory funnel of water suspended over a mound of Himalayan crystal salt, in which the water slowly dripped, boring a hole into the mound. When it was shown in *The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama*, organized in order to raise consciousness for Tibet, one reviewer described it as “An elegant visual balance and a concise metaphor for time, death, man versus nature, or just about anything else, it works as a kind of universal mantra.”¹⁶ I was simply trying to make a sculpture that would change shape.



Dove Bradshaw, *salt half heard*, 1000 ml separatory funnel, 150 lbs. Himalayan crystal salt
The Missing Peace, Rubin Museum of Art, New York; Collection of the artist

Cage was interested in the individual, rather than the group. If he was given a bouquet for instance, he would place each flower in a single wine bottle—he kept dozens for that purpose. This had political ramifications. He quoted Thoreau: “When I hear a sentence I hear an army marching.”¹⁷ Cage often spoke of a multiplicity of centers—and against

¹⁶Robert Schuster, “The Missing Peace, Artists Consider the Dalai Lama,” *The Village Voice*, Tuesday, July 31st, 2007.

¹⁷*Dove Bradshaw, Works 1969-1993*, 37.

hierarchies. He had no need for conductors, as mentioned, in their usual function once he had adopted Chance. The leader then simply marked time, sans emphasis—each sound given its own importance. His work strove to be free, in his view, of authoritarian figures. He was even against the notion that music was designed to control one’s listening. For *You Are*, a performance created by William Anastasi for The Clocktower, New York in 1977, Anastasi invited Cage to describe the visitors. Cage had asked whether it was permissible to sit with his back to the room and describe the sounds around him. The following typographical errors are from the original speed typist, interpreting shorthand.)

*whats so beautiful about this kind of situation which is the sound around us is that its not directed it isn't pushing. Even when the striking percussive sounds come like opening this box and the stapling machine, the sound of laughing is no sooner laugh than done. So that your hearing goes on as freely after een a very striking sound as freely after as before. And that the kind of situation is so re rare in so called music. When isay so called music i mean music music. Because there everything is underlined and your taken like a criminal in a truck right up to the climax.*¹⁸

This is as close to a political, as well as to an esthetic manifesto as John established: freedom of action and freedom from controlled relationships. A similar example in microcosm comes from his description of my work to Thomas McEvelley when John observed that a pool of the chemistry would leave the impression of a “solar burst:

*...she recognizes this as something that works against what she's actually doing, which is not doing anything. It's doing too much of one thing, whereas she's interested in an undefined freedom of action for the chemistry. Of not doing anything.*¹⁹

Championing the lack of a center in a totally different dimension, his long experience in the theater taught him to deal with dissatisfied audience members, “Every seat is the best seat.”²⁰ In a related way, he disliked repertory (ironic since dance and music, as performance arts, are repeated). Recordings were even lower on his list. He famously said he preferred a poor live performance (at least “new” each time) to a superior recording.

¹⁸ William Anastasi, *You Are*, three successive evening performances in which three narrators were invited to describe the audience: a writer, Carl Kielblock, a visual artist, Les Levine and a composer, John Cage. A shorthand court reporter took down each narration; within a couple of minutes a speed typist delivered a phonetic version with errors that was then stapled to the wall by an assistant. The performance was at the Clock Tower, New York City, October 31, 1977, 81-82.

¹⁹ *Dove Bradshaw, Works 1969-1993*, p. 28.

²⁰ John Cage would say this often

Not liking to have a work mechanically reproduced, when he embarked on a series of unique artist's books for Osiris Press, New York, John asked me to make afresh a Mel Daniels watercolor. The Daniels hung over his flat files—a soft green-and-blue herringbone pattern. John had framed it without a matt exposing its process, the drips revealed “off-stage” as it were. He liked to share his or other's methods. It wasn't how Mel Daniels had presented it, but his widow, Minna Daniels, approved. In the end I couldn't reproduce it by hand in any pleasing manner. Underscoring his aversion to anything “canned,” finally it was made into a painterly photogravure.

Cage would say about his own work, “It comes from ideas, but it's not about ideas.”²¹ For instance, the idea of Indeterminacy. Contingency. These ideas would lead to the “madness” of his creations. He wrote sixteen ingredients for making a work of art. When they first appeared he had crunched the words together without spaces in order to fit on the spine of his Norton Lecture. Liking the compression, he had them printed the same way inside:

MethodStructureIntentionDisciplineNotationIndeterminacy
InterpenetrationImitationDevotionCircumstancesVariableStructure
*Non-understandingContingencyInconsistencyPerformance*²²

I've used them as titles, half so far: discipline, notation, indeterminacy, devotion, variable, contingency, inconsistency, performance, and have challenged myself to match new works against the rest. There is a difference between my procedure and Cage's—mine though infused with ideas, derives from materials. Concrete materials. Composition by nature is more abstract, more intellectual—in John's case, and for some composers, the piece isn't heard until it's performed. He further abstracted both his music and visual work from emotion with strict devotion to Chance and Indeterminacy. I've adhered to a

²¹ John Cage would say this at lectures.

²² John Cage, *Cage I-IV, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 1988-89*, Harvard University Press/Cambridge, Massachusetts/ London, England, 1990, foreword.

much simpler set of ingredients by the Japanese poet, Hakuin Zenji (1686–1769)—Clarity, Simplicity, Spontaneity, Precision²³—more adaptable for a minimalist in the plastic arts.

For the most part Cage was not interested in the history of music. Though at one time he got a great pleasure from Bach, mentioning that after hearing a piano performance of *Art of the Fugue* he never have to listen to anything else for the rest of his life. Ad Reinhardt said that any artist who says he likes another artist's work is either lying or isn't an artist. However reprehensible this statement may strike one, Reinhardt had a very specific focus. As Cage did with music. As Anastasi does with visual art (he's not particularly interested and hasn't a visual memory). Anastasi's omnivorous love of music however, and Cage's of art, stand in contrast. The iconoclasts, Cage, Reinhardt and Anastasi, were each stimulated by dismissing a lot more than they embraced of their chosen vocations. It made all three revolutionaries.

In 1991 John included me in his invitation to the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh. Artists always presented their own work. Not John. Along with his own, he decided to exhibit the work of three women he admired. Traditionally he had been more notably associated with men—Johns, Rauschenberg, Twombly, Toby, Graves, but only a few women—Sonya Delaunay, Louise Nevelson, and Annie Albers, who were also friends and whose work hung in his loft. At age 79 in the last year of his life he focused on a younger generation of women creating an installation with his and the work of three women he championed, with these instructions:

in an empty room the chair(s), the walls neither painted nor the paint removed (the walls as they are), the use of chance operations to determine the placement and orientation of the chair(s), and which fifteen of a source of forty-eight works, twelve each by dove bradshaw, john cage, mary jean Kenton, marsha skinner are presented each day in which positions ²⁴

It was a precursor to his much more ambitious *Rolywholyover Circus*, which he was concurrently planning.

²³ Committed to memory, no longer have the source.

²⁴ John Cage, *Carnegie International 1991*, The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Rizzoli, New York, 1991



Dove Bradshaw, *Contingency* [1 of 12 works selected by Cage as part of his 1991 Carnegie International], 1985
Silver, liver of sulfur, varnish on paper, 32 x 24 inches; Collection of the artist

John selected twelve of my *Contingency* works on paper and generously paid for their framing. This amounted to a significant sum since they were in hand-wrought metal with the work shown between two sheets of glass. (Later I donated one to a benefit for the Cunningham Dance Company and as each work sold I repaid John for its frame.) The room John chose at the participating Mattress Factory Museum was scruffy. The dusty windows were grafittied; the chairs were a battered assortment. But when the work and chairs were placed according to a chance-determined daily score with each placement indicated and each daily rotation noted, the entire space, walls and floor became involved. Even the marked windows came into play. The room was “activated” like no other presentation that year—or perhaps any other year. The accepted pristine white cube of the gallery was under attack. And the hierarchical notion that art requires an aristocratic place in which to be viewed was done away with—certainly in my mind—forever. In addition John’s instructions as seen above were written in small case including

the artist's names in alphabetical order, a further nod to free the piece from hierarchies—all the way to giving the artists, the chairs and the space equal importance.

Though John didn't vote or read newspapers—from time to time he'd ask us about news people talked about—once wondering who Jesse Jackson was, a prominent black figure at the time—he practiced democratic principles basing his decisions not on seniority, fame, money or habit, but on merit alone. He embraced unknown artists on the strength of their ideas. At a downtown performance BAR where the missing curves of the neon "B" became "EAR" with the addition of the word "INN," John gave a reading of one of his *Mesostics*. Earlier, we had heard a reading of a young actress, Deirdre O'Connell, whose performance so astonished us we went to her next play. It was by playwright Ann Bogart, staged in her Brooklyn townhouse. The action moved from room to room, down the stairs and into the street where the dozen audience members followed. Years later John arranged for one of Anne's plays to be performed at the American Center in Paris. In his egalitarian way he would exchange work of unequal value, and in contrast once refused an offer of a drawing of de Kooning's, due, in his mind, to its lack of merit. John told us after de Kooning was already famous that he had made the offer. In his studio after ten minutes or so sifting through a pile of drawings, de Kooning picked up, "You don't like anything." John was silent.

At Joseph Beuys' 1979 retrospective in the Guggenheim Museum in New York, John, Bill and I were carrying on, excited by what we saw. Beuys was in town and the three of us had run into him at PS1 where John had introduced us. A few days later, Bill and I attended one of Beuys' near all-nighters at Cooper Union. At the Guggenheim at one point an elderly man witnessing that John enjoyed something that had eluded him, and apparently identifying with his age rather than knowing who he was, exclaimed, "What is he trying to do?" John thought for a long moment as he always did before speaking, "He's

trying to change your mind.” The man seeing that this was said with thoughtful authority, didn’t question further, and renewed his attention to the work.

When I showed John a new work, if he didn’t like it he was silent. Once I asked advice on a work in progress and found that he didn’t want to weigh in unless it was finished. It felt as if I had stolen his time. But if he liked a work, he would beam, “Isn’t it beautiful!” Invariably that was the adjective. About his own work when chance delivered something choice, he’d say “Isn’t it marvelous!”²⁵ as though he was talking about somebody else’s work, nothing to do with him.

If John believed in the trajectory of an artist’s work he set his full force behind it, particularly with his friends. He wouldn’t hear of diversion from their path. He’d lecture about it the proper course of development, and as mentioned he’d purchase a work he admired, hanging it in his and Merce’s loft. If he was inspired by it he made no bones about using it in his own work. If not, as in the case of Bill’s research that delved into Duchamp’s extensive use of the works and posture of Alfred Jarry, he’d try to discourage it, at least initially. In fact he was quoted as having said to Laura Kuhn, his assistant, “It will kill Teeny (Duchamp),” because Teeny believed that Marcel “came up from the ground whole.” In actuality, John was speaking for himself too—in addition to also believing in Duchamp’s inviolable originality, he might have had a resistance to the openly gay, and scatological irreverence of Jarry and what he later described as Bill’s over-estimation of Duchamp’s dependence on him.²⁶ He came down on Bill severely, declaring that as an artist in his own right he shouldn’t spend so much time on another artist’s work. He, in fact, went so far as to say that it was affecting their relationship. As noted elsewhere, other friendships of John’s had foundered on philosophical differences. After experiencing this censure for some time, Bill telephoned John at the unusual hour of noon—their daily chess game was

²⁵ John Cage would often say this to Anastasi and me and many others as well

²⁶ Joan Retallack, *Musicage, Cage Muses on Words, Art, Music*, Wesleyan University Press, University Press of New England/Hanover and London, 1996, 156-158

at 5 PM with no need for telephone confirmation—to propose a separate meeting. When John asked what it was about, Bill replied, “Friendship.” John agreed. During the meeting Bill defended his right to this side-pursuit. At last John relented, commenting, “Perhaps you use it the way Marcel used chess.”²⁷ More importantly—he said that he was grateful to Bill for caring enough about their friendship to put it on the line.

Cage’s *Rolywholyover Circus*, opened just after he died on his birthday at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. He had planned it with the assistance of Julie Lazar, one of their curators. It traveled to the Menil Collection, Houston, the Philadelphia Art Museum, the Guggenheim, New York and Mito Tower, Mito, Japan. Works were selected from the last century that John thought essential, beginning with Duchamp’s *Standard Stoppages*, for him, the Rosetta Stone of 20th Century Art. The fact that Duchamp had used three droppings of a meter of string to determine a new metric measure was a profound comment that whatever measure is used, is itself incapable of true measurement. Significantly this predated Heisenberg’s uncertainty principal by a dozen years. The rest of John’s choice of 20th Century works flowed from it with only a couple of earlier major influences. Thoreau was represented by John’s prints of the “thumbnail” drawings taken from the margins of Thoreau’s *Journal*. A small selection of 19th Century Japanese *Ensōs* were shown accompanied by one of his own and one by Anastasi. *Ensō* “means ‘circle’ and “[is] a concept strongly associated with Zen. It is one of the most common subjects of Japanese calligraphy...and symbolizes absolute enlightenment, strength, elegance, the universe and the void; it can also symbolize the Japanese aesthetic itself. As an expression of the moment: it is often considered a form of minimalist expressionist art.”²⁸ This reduced gesture powerfully embodies John’s aesthetic as well: his circle was brushed in watercolor. Bill’s was a stained cloth used while cooking rice. John had showed us how to make perfect brown rice, the Macrobiotic staple he advocated, and after many years

²⁷ William Anastasi reported to me

²⁸ Seo, Audrey Yoshiko; Addiss (1998). *The Art of Twentieth-Century Zen*. Stepen. Boston: Shambhala Publications

the cloth had a rich pattern of rings. He said about Bill's work, "He was able to make that which is like the highest Zen work of *Ensō* without doing anything, as in Zen. In fact, they would say, 'By taking a nap I pound the rice.'"²⁹



John Cage, *New River Watercolors, Series 3*, 1988
Watercolor on paper, 34 x 13 ½ inches; Collection of William Anastasi and Dove Bradshaw

Cage had also subjected *Chance Operations* to borrow works from museum collections—not necessarily art museums—within a thirty-mile radius. The breadth of the exhibition was stunning with a filmography, library, dance videography, live concerts, a chess nook and a boxed catalogue that housed a revolution of ideas. It included his and other's texts—one by Andrew Weil on diet, a book of his own favorite recipes (some he invented), his political manifesto embracing anarchy, images of his art collection (Anastasi and I included), and his thoughts about the visual arts, music and dance. Similar to the *International*, the

²⁹ Dove Bradshaw, *Works 1969-1993*, 31.

gallery walls were scored by Chance. At the opening I remember the top corner of one of my *Contingency* paintings was abutting a Robert Ryman painting. One unschooled viewer asked me whether it was a single work!

Another surprise hanging—I had five other pieces in the exhibition—was the delightful revelation of the blackened top of one of my all-white paintings because of its unusually low placement. It added interest to the work and normally would never have been seen. Throughout the exhibition according to Cage’s chance-determined score the works were either hung on the wall or stored opposite on open metal screens. Again similar to the

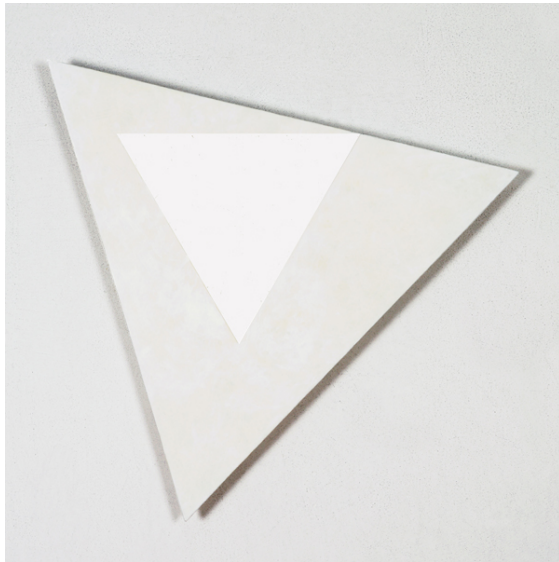


Dove Bradshaw, *Carbon Removal*, 1992, carbon paper, 6 ½ x 5 ½ inches
[one of the works selected by Cage for his *Rolywholyover Circus*]; Estate of John Cage

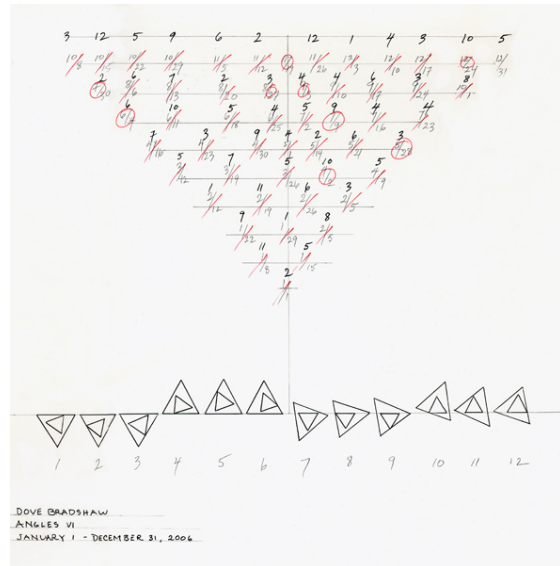
Carnegie, the works were placed at chance-determined times by white-gloved art handlers who executed the changes according to a daily score. This made for a lively museum experience and gave the public an acute awareness that paintings and works on paper are not only windows into another world, but also objects.

This idea of an exhibition-as-theater inspired my “performance” of a series of triangle paintings titled *Angles*. Each painting could hang twelve different ways in which either the inner or outer triangle was level with the horizon. The rotations were enabled by

appropriately placed holes on the back. The first one exhibited in 2005 at *Anastasi Bradshaw Cage* at the Word Sound Image Museum, in Roskilde, Denmark. A pair of dice, divisible by twelve, neatly determined its daily rotation. The score was also exhibited with each change notated in red pencil after completion. Below is a similar score for another painting from *Angles 12 Rotations*.

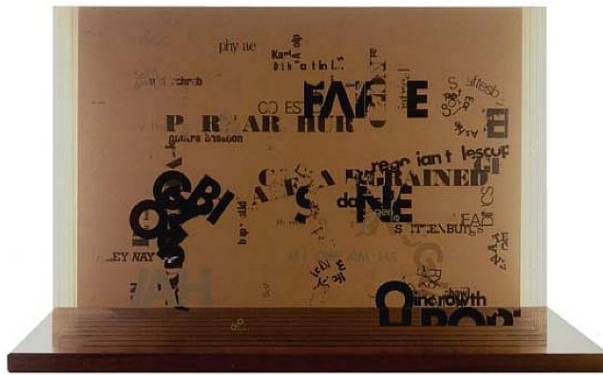


Angle II [from *Angles 12 Rotations*], 2001
 Oil gesso on linen over wood; 21 ¼ inches each side
 Sol LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut



Angles VII, 2006 [Score for that year's rotations]
 Ink, pencil on paper; 10 7/16 x 10 3/16 inches
 Collection of Robert Gordon, New York

The exhibition in Los Angeles was in some ways the most interesting of the three venues where I saw it. Because it was in an earthquake zone John had designed flat files similar to one he had at home, only these were made of clear Lucite on rollers with rubber stoppers in case of a quake. Viewers were invited to open the files to discover works displayed in each drawer. The various manuscripts, prints, scores, stones from the making of his own *Ryoanji* drawings, brushes and pencils, including the score by Dick Higgins in which a machine-gunned ream of music could be played following the “notes” — all made for an extraordinary three-dimensional collage when looking from the top down through the transparent drawers.



John Cage, *Not Wanting to Say Anything About Marcel II*, 1969
Portfolio with eight serigraphs printed on Plexiglas panels (plexigram), 14 ¼ x 24 x 14 ½ inches

A precursor was John's own 1969 three-dimensional collage, *Not Wanting to Say Anything About Marcel* where he had slotted into a wooden base a half-dozen Plexiglas sheets printed with graphically altered, chance-placed words and letters from Duchamp. In 1917 Duchamp declared, "I want to put art back into the service of the mind."³⁰ (The notes on the *Large Glass* in *The Green Box* reflect this impulse.) While a couple of decades later John subjected Marcel's texts to Chance Operations in his nearly opposite impulse, chopping them into non-sense. He declared, "My work became an exploration of non-intention."³¹



John Cage, instruments for *Child of Tree (improvisation I)* for percussion solo, 1975
recreated by the Mesostics Ensemble, Conservatoire à Rayonnement Régional de Paris, 2012

At an early age John considered becoming a minister. That desire to be a spiritual leader continued expressing itself in the commanding role he took in aesthetics in all fields. Af-

³⁰ John Cage interviewed by Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, "An Autobiographical Statement" in Kostelanetz, 1993, 241

³¹ Marcel Duchamp interviewed by James Johnson Sweeney, *Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1958, 129-30.

ter his celebrated class at the New School, in New York he continued formally lecturing at colleges in the United States, Europe and Japan—furthering New York as the center of the Art World after Duchamp had weighed in from Paris. Beginning his conversation with Thomas McEvelley for *Works* he offers his definition of art:

There's an idea I had in the 40s, and now that I'm a little bit older (age 79 in the last month of his life) I still have the same idea more or less that one of the ways of saying why we make art is to help us in the enjoyment of life. The way of enjoying life keeps changing because of changes in our scientific awareness. The way you enjoyed life say in 1200 is different from the way you enjoy it now, and that accounts for the changes in art. There is a close connection between art and religion or what we call a spiritual life because of the enjoyment, because religion or philosophy expresses itself in words whereas the artist uses materials. So in the Middle Ages art was called the handmaiden of religion. I think that relationship of art to the spirit continues.³²

As mentioned, John's 80th birthday would have occurred on the opening date of the *Roly-wholyover*, but he was ready to leave. For a long time he had dreaded these birthday celebrations pouring in around the world from Australia, Japan, all over the US and Europe requesting his presence. Composers are more notably honored on these occasions than artists. How would he have reacted had he lived to 100. Laura Kuhn, Head of the Cage Foundation, is overwhelmed with news every day of "three to five" memorial events this year.

There's much more to tell on another day—collaborating together with Merce in the theater, on John's collection, on his views of other artists while we attended their exhibitions, on Christmas and birthday gifts of his work, and of other exhibitions we both participated in that I, and others, organized. Through John and his "father" Duchamp I found an enduring vein from which to tap my own work and I found a most loving friend.

Oh, but one more story. Once Bill, John and I were in our car driving in Manhattan and John turned to us, asking, "What is Conceptual Art?" Bill put his hand on his shoulder, laughing, "John, you were its founder!"

³² *Dove Bradshaw, Works 1969-1993, 5*