

# THE YEAR OF JOHN CAGE

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The publication of *PAJ* 102 coincides with the worldwide celebrations of John Cage's birth on September 12, a century ago. We highlight his extraordinary legacy in a special section of the journal that brings together Claire MacDonald's fascinating account of Cage's influence in England, and the transatlantic exchanges at the experimental school Dartington Hall (Devon), among European, Asian, and American artists and thinkers. Her essay reveals the numerous groups of artists, patrons, intellectuals, and teachers drawn from the east and west coasts of the U.S. and from abroad, who laid the foundation for the making of modernity in the American arts in the early decades of the twentieth century. In his commentary on the world of Cage exquisitely detailed in the new biography by Kay Larson, *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists*, George Quasha brings his own poetic gifts and understanding of the spiritual in revealing Larson's knowing exploration of Cage's rootedness in Buddhist principles. Her book is both an historical document and a manual for living, and in every sense a profound opening to the life and mind of Cage. I have also included in the section my own essay "The Mus/ecology of John Cage," written shortly after his death, since it appears in the new reprint of my *Ecologies of Theater* (1996) as well as being timely in today's attention to biopolitics, one of the underlying links in Cage's work well before the concept was formulated in contemporary terms.

*PAJ*'s focus on John Cage joins the numerous special events, concerts and exhibitions that have been ongoing on several continents since the start of 2012, and continue in full force as his birth date approaches. In recent travels I visited an exhibition of his visual art, accompanied by months of programming around his work, at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, entitled "John Cage und . . ." This highly informative show corroborates the perspective in Claire MacDonald's essay, especially noting the impact of Mark Tobey on Cage's art, as well as the connection with Walter and Louise Arensberg, Galka Scheyer, Helen Ross Wilson, and Pauline Schindler on the west coast who were introducing Cage to European art and supporting his own work as well. At the same time it demonstrates the affinities between Cage's visual art and Bauhaus artists Josef and Anni Albers and László Moholy-Nagy. As early as 1949 Cage organized an exhibit of Paul Klee, Alexei Jawlensky, and Vassily Kandinsky at the Cornish School in Seattle, where he met Merce Cunningham.

Closer to home, on June 30, I joined an audience of fifty for a special twelve-hour event sponsored by the John Cage Trust at Bard College's Fisher Center, offering an opportunity to experience Cage's rare recording of his EMPTY WORDS. His "demilitarization" of language in four Parts works through Thoreau's *Journals*, gradually eliminating sentences, phrases and words to end with sounds and silence. All of us came prepared with sleeping gear to spend the night in the Spiegeltent on the Bard campus, in upstate New York, listening to Cage's astonishing articulation of his text based on chance operations, and accompanied by projected images of Thoreau's drawings from the *Journals*. There were macrobiotic food breaks throughout the night during the intermissions between the Parts, and in the morning the doors of the tent were opened to allow the sounds of nature to mingle with the recording, as Cage had wished. This remarkable performance event was surely one of the best instances of Cage's ideal of the social. Already nearly forty years ago he imagined the future of music as "the expression of the pleasures of conviviality."

The voice of John Cage has been a steady presence in *PAJ* over the years, starting from his 1979 dialogue with Richard Foreman and Richard Kostelanetz, "Art in the Culture," featured in *PAJ* 10/11. It will shortly be available on our Website. In 1994, Cage's score of *Solo for Piano, Concert for Piano and Orchestra* was the cover image of one of our most-read theme issues, *Ages of the Avant-Garde*, in *PAJ* 46. More recently, in 2009, we published the *Ryoanji* drawings and scores (a "garden" of sounds) by Cage in the *PAJ* 93 performance drawings portfolio.

The legacy of John Cage has been at the center of the founding of *PAJ* in 1976, perhaps only fifteen or so years after he had gained real recognition for his work, here and abroad. Kay Larson's book amply details the enormous struggle—psychological, cultural, philosophical, economic—that John Cage experienced to bring forth his vision of life and art. Published a few years earlier, Carolyn Brown's *Chance and Circumstance* gives a first-hand account of the critical and public rejection Merce Cunningham, his dancers (she was one of them), and their resident composer and guiding spirit, John Cage, endured in the post-war period that was defining contemporary performance.

It is clear now that over the decades our most visionary and progressive artists often spent years exiled to the margins of the culture, scoffed at by critics and academics, ignored by its major theatres, concert halls, and museums, and disrespected by the press and public, only to find themselves at the forefront of influence in the making of performance history in our time. To witness the unfolding of this process has been for me one of the most pleasurable and rewarding experiences of editing *PAJ*. With this fall issue we honor one of the great artistic thinkers of the twentieth century, whose ideas are still paving the way for *the bringing of new things into being* in the twenty-first.

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