

Philosophical Reflections on the Art of John Cage's 4 Minutes 33 Seconds

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Abstract

John Cage (1912-1992) was the most direct challenger of traditional music, a composer and musical inventor with considerable achievements in both destruction and reconstruction. He undoubtedly became the representative of the 20th century avant-garde music, and his works brought the people of the world a kind of shock and a kind of thinking. In opposition to traditional European musical art, 4 Minutes and 33 Seconds blurs the boundaries between sound and soundlessness, music creation and music appreciation, creating contemporary musical art that is purely centred on reflection. Because of the peak nature of the presentation of contemporary art, the philosophy of art also extends to the thinking of the entire philosophical community, so is the philosophical aspect of art at this time still called artistic thinking? In fact, it extends to people's thinking about the meaning of the existence of art and what is art. In Zhu Di's book Contemporary Western Philosophy of Art, he proposes that the concept of art is a "floating reference", which has a temporal transfer and presents different entities in different times.

Keywords

John Cage; 4 Minutes 33 Seconds; Atonal Music; Nature of Art.

1. Introduction

John Cage has been in the position of a pioneer or prophet in the history of the development of American music, fully enjoying the artistic atmosphere brought about by a high degree of freedom, and innovating new developments in music in a serious way, which has been universally welcomed and noticed. At first, he generated music as if he were a "tapping" artiste, or added hard discs and plugs to tell the music he had in mind. Later, John Cage not only put his vision of music in classical music, but also added elements of Indian Buddhism and the Chinese I Ching, and considered music as a sound of sound, thinking that prolonged silence is also a form of musical expression, and the work "4 minutes 33 seconds" was created. 1952 première, the performer sat down in front of the piano, opened the piano cover, and sat in silence for 33 seconds. After thirty-three seconds of silence, the pianist closes the flap and immediately opens it, and after another two minutes and forty seconds, he repeats the action of closing and lifting the flap again, and after one minute and twenty seconds of silence, the performance ends. The audience, on the other hand, showed silence at thirty-three seconds, whispered mutterings at two minutes and forty seconds, and an unprecedented clamour at the end of the performance. Thus, the work 4 minutes 33 seconds constructs a music-free space, during which the audience hears not the acoustics emanating from the piano, but their own breathing, coughing, car noises, and bird chirping, during which the acoustics also include the noise of the audience's commotion due to disbelief or curiosity. There is not a single note or symbol in John Cage's score that begins with lifting the lid of a piano and ends with putting the lid back on the piano. Between these two actions, John Cage moves his arm three times, also divided into three movements. The sound generated by accidental, natural and unintentional factors together

constitute the work "4 minutes and 33 seconds", which triggers a philosophical reflection on art.

2. The Re-Deepening of Atonal Music

John Cage was born in September 1912 in Los Angeles, USA, and after graduating from high school, he went to study at Pomona College in San Clemente, and in 1930, he left Pomona College to go to major cities in Europe to study and create music, paintings, and poems. In the early days, John Cage was not successful in painting and had no choice but to give up his studies. In 1933, John Cage studied under Adolf Weiss, attended Cowell's music research class, and became very interested in the various strange sounds found in Cowell's piano. 1934, he returned to his hometown at the University of California to study with Schoenberg, and was deeply influenced by Schoenberg's "twelve-tone sequence composition", and composed "Six Little Ideas", "Three Little Ideas", "The Three Little Ideas", "The Three Little Ideas", and "The Three Little Ideas". "Six Little Ideas" and "Three Partita", which involved different voices and timbres of the same tone in the "twelve-tone sequence composition method"; and "Metamorphosis" and "Music for Woodwinds", which involved the sequence of fragments in the "twelve-tone sequence composition method". The technique of "twelve-tone sequence composition" was involved in the sequence of fragments. John Cage began his musical career under the influence of Cowell and Schoenberg.

Due to Schoenberg's musical influences, John Cage's early music was associated with the twelve-tone sequence method. The term "tonality" was only used in the 19th century by the composer Joseph Fétis, and the modern composer Schoenberg made a breakthrough in tonal music, while in the early 20th century a group of composers with a spirit of "rebellion" made opposition to the Western tradition of tonal music the centre of their compositions. Schoenberg, on the basis of opposing tonality, pioneered the "twelve-tone sequence composition method", i.e. twelve semitones in an octave as independent and equal individuals, which was gradually formed in music creation, breaking the traditional existence of the central tone and the rules of the compositional model. According to Schoenberg, "the twelve-tone compositional method replaces the compositional method that arises from the constant connection with the tonal centre. According to this method, each component of a piece is derived from a 'tonal relation' within a twelve-tone sequence, and its 'basic form' remains consistent due to an enduring association with the basic sequence." According to Schoenberg's "Composing with Twelve Tones" and related documents, the "twelve-tone sequence compositional method" can be summarised in four ways: firstly, individualised tonal composition, i.e. the twelve-tone sequence compositional method can only be used once in a piece of music to avoid weakening the tonal unity; secondly, there must be no repetition of twelve-tone hierarchies in the pitch relations, i.e. twelve semitones are independent and equal in status with each other, to avoid shifting the centre; third a musical work can only use one tone sequence, to maintain the unity of the basic structural form; fourth the basic forms of the sequence, i.e. prototype (0), retrograde (R), inverted (I), and retrograde (RI), can be shifted upwards on the basis of semitones, and 48 forms of sequences can be derived from the 12x4 basis. But ultimately John Cage and Schoenberg had different views on harmonic concepts and eventually went their separate ways.

Deeply influenced by the informal devices of Cowell's music, in later years John Cage showed an unusual interest in percussion. He will percussion percussion in the complex rhythmic changes instead of music in the traditional musical structure, the main musical works are percussion quartet "the second structure", percussion sextet "the first structure" and so on. 1937, John Cage understand the importance of non-musical sound in music, in the music kind of innovation, the piano into a percussion instrument, according to the needs of the intention

of the creation of the piano inside the installation of fittings, rubber, Plastic, screws and other things, changed the notes of the bar, so that the notes can produce a completely different nature of the tone. 1940, received Ford's request, hoping that John Cage can be for the "Wine Festival" soundtrack, due to the venue and time constraints, can not be used percussion instruments, no choice but to John Cage in the original idea of the musical practice, will be placed on the stage in the piano strings added screws, successful use of the piano string He added screws to the strings of the piano placed on the stage, and succeeded in using the piano to play the percussion effect. Since then, John Cage has composed 21 works of music for the pre-produced piano, including The Earth of Nature's Sprouting, Mysterious Expedition, Sonatas and Interludes, and many others.

Under the influence of Cowell and Schoenberg, John Cage regarded music as an aimless game, without the need to look for the law of development of things in chaos and chance, and believed that art, like life, should be close to life and obedient to nature, which highlighted the philosophical idea that life is music. At the same time, he broke the traditional compositional techniques and instrumental methods, and used unpredictable musical sound to create musical works.

3. Breaking the Nature of Music Auditory Art

The musical work 4 Minutes 33 Seconds represents an important philosophical turning point for John Cage, that is, the most important factor of music is listening, not playing. Since its inception, music has been known as an aural, temporal art, which is not good at depicting concrete things, but it is a part of life, a way of behaving in life, and it affects people's emotions as time passes. According to John Cage's later answers about his work, he once said that Chinese philosophy gave him something to think about. For example, in the Taoist Laozi's thought, the very famous "Great Sound", and the Confucian "Rituals", "Silent Music", opened John Cage's thinking about the silent world.

The philosophical thought of the ancient Chinese philosopher Laozi was formed on the basis of "Tao", which is explained in the first chapter of Laozi as follows: "Tao, may be Tao, but is not Tao; name, may be name, but is not name." " That is, "Tao" is a concept or a name, it is only a code name of things, if you want to pursue the eternal "Tao", you can not be greedy for a moment of fame. On the basis of "Tao", "Great Sound" is derived. The so-called "Great" is explained in the 25th chapter of Lao Tzu as follows: "Something mixes and is born before The world was born first. Silence and loneliness, independence without change, circumference without danger, can be the mother of heaven and earth. I do not know its name, the strong word said: Dao, strong for the name said: big. Great is said to pass away, pass away is said to be far, far is said to be against. Therefore, the road is big, the sky is big, the earth is big, people are also big. Domain in the four big, and live in one of its people law of the earth, the law of the earth, the law of the sky, the law of heaven, the law of the road, the law of nature." To put it succinctly, the "Great" here is the "Tao". The so-called "great sound" is regarded by some as ideal music, and by others as music that is grand and harmonious. In Laozi's view, "great sound" is a kind of impeccable music. The word "xi" is translated as "sparse" in the versions of Heshang and Wang Bi. Therefore, some people think that "xi sound" refers to a sparse and weak sound, while others think that "xi sound" refers to no sound at all. Therefore, some people think that "Xisheng" refers to the thinness of sound, while others think that "Xisheng" refers to the absence of sound. However, in Laozi's thought, the so-called "great sound" has two meanings, one of which is to talk about "Tao" with "sound". Due to the inaccessibility of "Tao", the use of "silent music" to feel the existence of "Tao", which is precisely the place of Laozi's superb writing style. Secondly, he uses "Tao" to talk about "music". Because only music that is as natural as the Tao is true music. In addition to the Taoist emphasis on "great sound", the ancient Chinese philosopher

Confucius also has a "silent music" exposition, Confucius advocated the "rites and music" ideas, that music cultivation on the one hand, is the way to reach the highest level of human beings. Confucius advocated the idea of "rites and music", believing that musical cultivation was, on the one hand, a necessary way for people to reach the highest state, and on the other hand, an important means of governance. In the twenty-ninth book of the Book of Rites, Confucius argues that the purpose of "music without sound" is for the gentleman to admire inner peace. On the one hand, this idea is in line with Confucius' "Rites and Music" guidelines, and on the other hand, it has the purpose of governing the world.

As a piece of "silent" music, "4 minutes 33 seconds" has been the subject of much debate and mixed reviews. Whether it is the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu's "Great Sound, Great Sound", or the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius's "Silent Music", or John Cage's "4 minutes and 33 seconds", these kinds of "silent music" have their similarities and differences, as well as the philosophical and aesthetic foundations of their respective eras. Lao Zi's "great sound" is derived from the foundation of "Tao", and is also a manifestation of the pursuit of nature and reverence for simplicity; Confucius' "silent music" is a manifestation of man-made art. Confucius' "music without sound" is a manifestation of man-made art, and its purpose is to enable the gentleman to reach the highest state in cultivation and achieve the effect of ruling the country. However, both of them never put music into practice, and could only imagine and feel it among those who conformed to the "Tao" and improved their "cultivation". John Cage, on the other hand, is the one who puts "silent music" into practice by liberating musical notation from the rules of music and expressing the concept of life as music. As commonalities, all three are characterised by indeterminacy, voicelessness and disorder. On the one hand, they change the form of music, so that music is no longer a symbol, a work of sound, but can also be a musical act, a purely internal idea. On the other hand, this "silent music" breaks the definition of traditional music creation, performance and appreciation, and expands the way of music, showing the audience a new world of seemingly "silent" music and "sound" music. A new world of "sound" music.

4. The Cult of Absolute Human Freedom

The 20th century was a period of change. Two world wars were waged early on, both at a time when people thought they could control mankind entirely with technology or power. Conflicts between imperialists gave birth to wars, and different capitalist countries fought for their interests in defiance of justice and peace. Art also subverts the traditional way of existence and exists as "anti-art". 4 Minutes 33 Seconds is a piece of music that is completely different from the traditional existence of art. From the essence of art philosophy, it trampled European music and art underfoot, bringing people new ideas and new thinking. In terms of the causes of the wars that broke out in the early 20th century, 4 Minutes and 33 Seconds is also about the absolute worship of human freedom and the denial of the intrinsic significance of the past.

The worship of human freedom is the cause of art. The cult of absolute human freedom defines the requirements of modern philosophy, which is dominated by subjectivity, but modern subjectivism ignores the importance of human freedom in a one-sided statement that neglects to realise the nature of the human subject. The artist's free construction through art is not a direct copy of real life, but an explanation of the integrity and unity of the real world. Art as the subject's understanding of the world, the worship of freedom is expressed in the form of music as the subject's expression of the harmony and unity of life through everyday sounds. The reason why man is able to create music and art lies on the one hand in the fact that man is able to fight and eliminate the tenacity of the outside world with his free identity, and on the other hand, the subject needs to express his thoughts and feelings in music and art, and to satisfy the creativity and imagination of the artist through music and art.

Art is the basis for the realisation of man's free worship. The essence of art lies in the unity of the subject's individuality and diversity, i.e. the completion of the subject's own reconciliation with the outside world. Absolute freedom as the independent existence of art as a whole is not only manifested in the subject of art, but also in the freedom to overcome external causes, and ultimately achieve the transformation of spiritualisation. As the unity of form and content, the composer can transform the inner spiritual world into a work of art. But the prerequisite for freedom is the construction of freedom, followed by the function of "release".

John Cage's silent work "4 minutes 33 seconds" conveys a new way of thinking about composition, abandoning the relationship between emotion and music in the traditional sense, breaking the framework of the art of music as opposed to a specific way of performance and expression of emotion, incorporating the element of freedom into compositions, freeing the music relatively from a system of human intervention, and making use of non-musical elements, using all kinds of external sounds as audio, such as car stereos, bird stereos, high-frequency vibration stereos, and so on. such as car stereos, bird calls, and high-frequency vibrations. The use of uncertain notation in the score allows the performer to give free rein to his or her music, giving him or her absolute freedom of worship, and making the work "4 minutes 33 seconds" an unrepeatable piece of music.

To sum up, John Cage, as a representative figure of incidental music in post "modern art", studied hard on painting in his early days and failed to achieve his goal, so he had no choice but to give up his studies to follow Schoenberg to study composition, but due to the difference of opinion between the two on the issue of harmony, they parted ways. Later, John Cage heard lessons on Zen and Buddhism and soon incorporated these ideas into his compositions. He no longer followed the traditional rules of music composition, employing his own set of unpredictable and unpredictable sounds as his musical compositions. The release of the work "4 minutes and 33 seconds" undoubtedly impacted traditional artistic innovation, but whether it was traditional artistic creation or John Cage's new mode of composition, they were both in infinite pursuit of art. The difference is that John Cage's way of creation fully reflects the characteristics of postmodern people's centrelessness and fragmentation, so that people can learn to re-listen to the original musical sound in the world, and show is the mysterious power of Eastern philosophical thought.

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