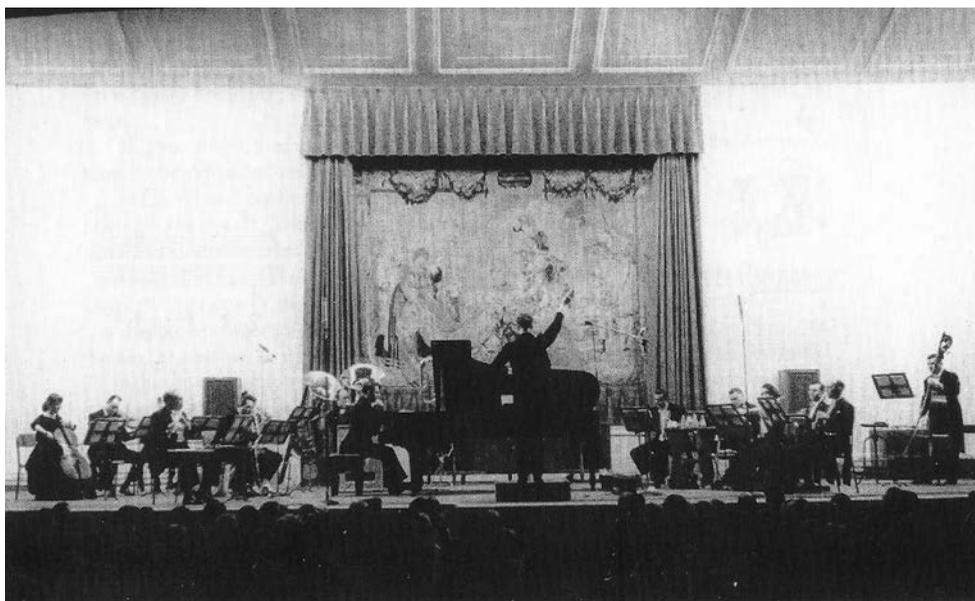


More than Meets the Ear

An Account of the Shared (Ac)counts of Cage and Stravinsky

Kay Festa



Anecdotal Interjections

We begin with a well-known story that John Cage recounted on several occasions. On 15 May 1958, Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* premiered as the last piece of the evening for his *25th Year Retrospective Concert* at Town Hall in New York City.¹ This seminal composition of Cagean indeterminacy treated all 13 instrumentalists as soloists, each of whom was given a graphic score that juxtaposed, through chance operations, all the possible playing styles, timbres, and extended techniques specific to the given instrument. Three different sizes of notes suggested either dynamics or duration of sound. In addition, the *Solo for Piano*, written for David Tudor, was an astonishing compendium of 84 different notational styles Cage had developed, dispersed across 63 pages. There was a separate score for the conductor, whose role was

1. This essay is a byproduct of extended research undertaken for the construction of *Vesna's Fall*, an evening-length dance piece created by No Collective (You Nakai, Kay Festa, Earle Lipski, Jay Barnacle, and Ai Chinen) and Lindsey Drury, and performed at Judson Church, Black Mountain College, and Cholula, Mexico (February-April 2014). An earlier version of this paper was "performed" at the Performatica Festival 2014 (Cholula, Mexico), by dancers Laura Bartzak (as John Cage), Paige Fredlund (as Igor Stravinsky), Kaia Gilje (as everybody else), Katelyn Hales (as Kay Festa), and Molly Schaffner (as Vaslav Nijinsky).

not to coordinate the diversely juxtaposed soloists by setting the tempo and counting the beat, but to merely indicate the passing of time.

The resulting extravagant and complex music was met with myriad hostile sonic interjections: boos, clapping, and laughter from the audience; as well as quoted passages from other music pieces tossed in by performers—in the composer’s own description: “sounds of a nature not found in my notations” (Cage 1967:136). Among the first and the most well known of these misplaced sounds was a passage the tuba player decided to slip in to his performance just three-and-a-half minutes from the start of the piece: an ostinato that reiterates the four-note sequence Db-Bb-Eb-Bb. This was a quote from the “Augurs of Spring” movement of *Le Sacre du printemps*, composed by Igor Stravinsky and also premiered in May, but 45 years earlier. This musical commentary, ridiculing the freedom that Cage’s indeterminacy had given to the performers, was of course not appreciated by the composer. As he later accounted:

At one point, one of the woodwind instruments quotes from Stravinsky...I think it’s *Le Sacre*. You could look at the part I had given him and you’d never find anything like that in it. He was just going wild—not playing what was in front of him, but rather whatever came into his head. I have tried in my work to free myself from my own head. I would hope that people would take that opportunity to do likewise. ([1970] in Kostelanetz 2002:73)

The ostinato from *Le Sacre du printemps* was obviously nowhere to be found in Cage’s notations. But the insertion of this particular historical piece in the setting of this evening may be noted for a peculiar relevance or significance that the composer could not have anticipated. For the uproar of the audience in 1958 found its best parallel in the infamous premiere of Stravinsky’s legendary piece in 1913. The witnesses of the Town Hall concert even managed to find an observer who claimed to have been present on both occasions, testifying that the one in New York caused “more of a disturbance [in the audience] than anything that happened at the Champs Elysees” (in Palmer 1981). So it was that the interjection of Stravinsky’s mythological work happened not only in regards to the delivery of Cage’s work, but also in the form of its reception.

Cage’s Accounts

Other than this story, however, the connections between Cage and Stravinsky are sparse. Cage repeatedly accounted for his decision to study with Schoenberg as a choice between him and Stravinsky: “When I was young, you had either to follow Stravinsky or Schoenberg. There was no alternative. There was nothing else to do” ([1980] in Kostelanetz 2002:211). This absolute dichotomy pervaded musical modernism, fortified by musicological discourses like the ones outlined by Theodor Adorno in his *Philosophy of Modern Music*, where he analyzes the state of modernist music as a diametrical opposition between Arnold Schoenberg, who represented progress, and Stravinsky, who was equated with the regressive (Adorno 1973). So the young Cage made a choice, and became an avid follower of Schoenberg and his dodecaphony. This in turn placed

Figure 1. (facing page) Merce Cunningham conducting John Cage’s Concert for Piano and Orchestra at the 25 Year Retrospective Concert at New York City’s Town Hall in 1958. (Photo by Aram Avakian)

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him in opposition to the composer of *Le Sacre*: “I was *extremely* partisan. I was like a tiger in defense of Schoenberg, and I was less and less interested in Stravinsky’s music as time went on” ([1974] in Kostelanetz 2002:9).

The reason behind Cage’s preference of Schoenberg over Stravinsky is easy to see. For Stravinsky’s compositional methods, according to his own account, were clearly antithetical to Cage’s. The tuba player was accused of “playing whatever came into his head,” perhaps appropriate considering the composer of the music he quoted had claimed that his music arrived more or less in the same way to him in the first place: “I was guided by no system whatever in *Le Sacre du Printemps* [...] I had only my ear to help me. I heard and I wrote what I heard. I was the vessel through which *Le Sacre* passed” (Stravinsky and Craft 1962:147–48). This could not have been any more contrary to Cage, the composer who aimed to, as he put it, “free myself from my own head”: “You see, I don’t hear music when I write it. I write in order to hear something I haven’t yet heard” ([1983] in Kostelanetz 2002:67).

But perhaps there is more similarity here than meets the eye—or the ear. Cage paid a one-time visit to Stravinsky in 1966, following Cage’s appearance as the Devil in *L’Histoire du Soldat* for a Stravinsky festival organized by the New York Philharmonic.² He gave an account of the meeting:

We had a very pleasant conversation, and I found him an extremely interesting man, so I said something to this effect: “You know, the reason I never made an effort to see you before was because I was so partisan and so devoted to the work of Schoenberg.” He made this rather remarkable statement: “You know, the reason I’ve never liked Schoenberg’s music is because it isn’t modern.” This reminded me of things which I’d heard Schoenberg say when he was teaching us. He would take a particular group of four notes and he would say, “Bach did this with these four notes, Beethoven did this, Brahms did this, Schoenberg did this!” In other words, it was as if Stravinsky was saying, Schoenberg didn’t think of himself in any sense as constituting a break with the past. ([1974] Kostelanetz 2002:9)

This exchange puts Cage’s own relationship to Schoenberg in perspective: Cage’s repeated account of his connection with Schoenberg stressed a similar continuity with the past for which Stravinsky was here criticizing Schoenberg. For modernism’s sake then, it is perhaps the apparent break between Cage and Stravinsky, probably constituted by both composers’ radical break with their respective pasts, that merits attention.

Nijinsky’s Counts

The Ballet Russes’ premiere of *Le Sacre du printemps* on 19 May 1913 is filled with its own stories. Stravinsky recounted his version on various occasions:

I left my seat when the heavy noises began—light noise had started from the very beginning—and went backstage behind Nijinsky in the right wing. Nijinsky stood on a chair, just out of view of the audience, shouting numbers to the dancers. I wondered what on earth these numbers had to do with the music for there are no “thirteens” and “seventeens” in the metrical scheme of the score. (Stravinsky and Craft 1959:46)

This account reveals two striking facts about the nature of choreography. First of all, Vaslav Nijinsky was counting for the dancers because the noise from the audience made it impossible for the dancers onstage to hear the music. The dancers, in other words, could execute their movement in the absence of music, as long as they were being counted. Secondly, the fact that Stravinsky could not recognize it indicates that the counting of Nijinsky’s rhythm followed, at least to some extent, a different structure from the metrical scheme of the music.

2. The program is available through the New York Philharmonic archives at NYPhil.org (NYPhil.org 2014).



Figure 2. Four Dancers from Nijinsky's 1913 production of *Le Sacre du printemps*. (Photo from Berg 1988:56)

Nijinsky's choreography is lost, and all we have is an accumulation of partial accounts.³ They tell that Nijinsky created an intricate dance that echoed Stravinsky's music in the utmost detail. Given the complexity of Stravinsky's score, it is understandable that Nijinsky's thorough attentiveness to the music apparently left his dancers at a loss. The choreographic process commenced in November 1912, and by December, Sergei Diaghilev, the founder of Ballet Russes, decided to seek outside help with teaching the dancers the choreography. Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, a Swiss composer and music teacher, had developed a method of learning music through bodily movement that he called Eurhythmics. As the name suggests, Dalcroze focused on the systematic memorization and analysis of musical rhythm, which seemed to make Eurhythmics an ideal approach to the problem of rhythmic complexity in Stravinsky's score that Nijinsky and his dancers were facing. But Dalcroze's system did more than just synchronize the body to the music. It also conceived human movement as "silent music" that retained an autonomy distinct from the music heard through the ears. The conception of music as merely an acoustic phenomenon was for Dalcroze an unjust limitation of its possibilities (see Albright 2004:85). As Daniel Albright writes: "Dalcroze thought that living plastic could, in the absence of sound, manifest every attribute of music" (2000:102).

Upon their visit to the Dalcroze institute, Diaghilev and Nijinsky were shown an example of silent music, danced in polyrhythm. Nijinsky's sister, Bronislava Nijinska, accompanied them on the visit: "A group of young girls came onstage. They followed each other in a long chain,

3. In 1987, Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer reconstructed Nijinsky's choreography for the Joffrey Ballet, using the published choreographic notes from the four-hand piano score, Marie Rambert's copy of the score containing notes from rehearsals, along with pencil sketches of the dancers that Valentine Gross had made when the original production was performed in Paris, numerous interviews, memoirs, and reviews. Though Hodson claimed at one conference that their reconstruction revived 85 percent of the original dance (in Levy 1988:52), Jordan maintains that this accuracy is dubious since Hodson only had access to the typed description of the notes from the four-hand piano score that Stravinsky made for the publication, which differs largely from the actual handwritten notes, in addition to the ambiguous, syncretic nature of the notes themselves (Jordan 2007:431).

led by an older student. The girls walked to the 2/4 beat of the music; at the same time one arm was gesticulating to a 3/4 time and the other was marking a 4/4 time” (Nijinska 1992:451). The Russian troupe recruited Dalcroze’s best student, a dancer named Marie Rambert, to assist Nijinsky in conveying his choreography to the dancers. Together with Rambert, Nijinsky started counting the number of bars or beats necessary for each movement. Rambert herself recalled that: “everyone had little booklets, writing down their bars!” (in Berg 1988:28).

As Stravinsky noticed, Nijinsky’s dance, his silent music, thus diverged from the composed music:

The dancers had been rehearsing for months and they knew what they were doing, even though what they were doing often had nothing to do with the music. “I will count to forty while you play,” Nijinsky would say to me, “and we will see where we come out.” He could not understand that though we might at some point come out together, this did not necessarily mean we had been together on the way. The dancers followed Nijinsky’s beat, too, rather than the musical beat. (Stravinsky and Craft 1962:143)

But the autonomous structure of the dance not only followed a different count from the music; just as he was shown at the Dalcroze institute, Nijinsky created several different layers of rhythm that ran simultaneously. As a dancer who performed at the premiere testified: “Nijinsky was in the wings tamping and trying to count for different groups all at once” (in Berg 1988:27).

The separation of counts between the layers of dance, as well as between the dance and music, thus echoed what Peter Hill aptly termed the “reptilian indifference” in Stravinsky’s score—the stratification of independent motivic lines and layers, each moving in different meters, seemingly without building any expressive contact between themselves (Hill 2000:53).⁴ The critic Jacques Rivière noted the intentional disjointedness of the choreography in his account of the premiere:

The dancing of each group consists of movements hatched in isolation from the other groups, like those spontaneous fires that break out in haystacks [...giving] the sensation of watching the inhabitants of a given state moving about, passing, accosting and parting from each other, each intent on his own business, taking his neighbours for granted and putting them out of mind [...]. (in Buckle 2012:355)

The fact that the temporal conflict between dance and music was partially a result of the use of Eurhythmics was also apparent to some critics. Emile Vuillermoz, for instance, noted that the Dalcrozian method of extracting rhythm by relying on the strong beats of the bar went directly against Stravinsky’s syncopated rhythm: “Their aim is to find the strong beats hiding in the melodic underbrush. What good can this do for dancers who have been instructed to visualise modern rhythms that actually contradict the bar-line and will soon want to get rid of it?” (in Jordan 2008:431).⁵

4. This layering technique in *Le Sacre du printemps* has been noted and analyzed by many authors. Pierre Boulez, for instance, called this a process of “tiling,” and saw it remarkably at work in the introduction to Part I (Boulez 1991:64). Pieter van den Toorn categorized such superimposition of layers as “rhythmic Type II,” contrasting it with “rhythmic Type I,” the many other instances in *Le Sacre* where short “blocks” of material are juxtaposed abruptly with one another, causing thus a constant flux in meter (van den Toorn 1987:99–101). In particular, this latter process of juxtaposition has become known as the “block form,” though the term has been used to encompass the vertical process of stratification as well.

5. Stepping aside from *Le Sacre du printemps*, harsher commentary was raised against the choreography of *Jeux*, which Nijinsky choreographed during the same period as *Le Sacre*, applying the same Dalcrozian method to the music of Claude Debussy: “One critic felt that the composer and choreographer took absolutely no notice of one another, while Debussy himself accused the choreographer of being ‘Dalcrozian’” (Berg 1988:30).

Stravinsky's Accounts

Nijinsky's original choreography for *Le Sacre du printemps* was performed only eight times in 1913 before the choreographer married Romola de Puzsky in September of that same year, causing an immediate break with his former lover, Diaghilev, and a dismissal from Ballet Russes. Soon after, Nijinsky became mentally unstable and spent most of his remaining years unable to dance in public. But in that short period following the premiere, Stravinsky energetically praised Nijinsky's work. In a letter from 3 July 1913, the composer wrote: "Nijinsky's choreography is incomparable. Everything is as I wanted it, with very few exceptions. But we must wait a long time before the public grows accustomed to our language" (in Stravinsky and Craft 1978:25). It was, however, Stravinsky himself who could not stand to wait.

The composer entirely shifted his opinion about Nijinsky's work around 1920 while a revival of *Le Sacre du printemps* was in progress, with new choreography by Leonide Massine. In tune with his then-current "neoclassical" preoccupations, Stravinsky now insisted on the importance of mutual autonomy between the music and the dance. In an interview with *The Observer* conducted on 3 July 1921, after stressing his concern for a "purely musical construction," Stravinsky claimed that Massine's choreography was better because it was not "subjected to the tyranny of the bar" as Nijinsky's had been (in Lesure 1980:77). The new dance was based on phrases composed of several bars, thus allowing "the free connection of the choreographical construction with the musical construction" (77).

Stravinsky held on to this story until late in his life. In 1960, almost half a century after the premiere, he recounted:

[Nijinsky] believed that the choreography should re-emphasize the musical beat and pattern through constant coordination. In effect, this restricted the dance to rhythmic duplication of the music and made of it an imitation [...] I thought Massine's choreography excellent—incomparably clearer than Nijinsky's. (Stravinsky and Craft [1959–60] 1981:37–42)

But immediately before this, he had attributed the faults of the original choreography to Nijinsky's ignorance of music:



Figure 3. Lydia Sokolova from Leonide Massine's 1920 production of *Le Sacre du printemps*. (Photo from Berg 1988:70)

My own disappointment with Nijinsky was due to the fact that he did not know the musical alphabet. He never understood musical meters and he had no very certain sense of tempo. You may imagine from this the rhythmic chaos that was *Le Sacre du Printemps*, and especially the chaos of the last dance where poor Mlle Piltz, the sacrificial maiden, was not even aware of the changing bars. (Stravinsky and Craft [1959–60] 1981:37)

Stravinsky's revisionist account thus wavers between two contrary claims: that Nijinsky's dance was subjected to the tyranny of the bar and that the choreographer was unmusical and could not even follow the changing bars. The dance was either too close to the music or too far from it.

Despite these fissures in the narrative, this authoritative account of Nijinsky and his work succeeded in formulating much of the public opinion about the original choreography. But it could not persist. In 1967, the four-hand piano score Stravinsky used in rehearsals of the original production was sold at Sotheby's and returned to the composer. On this recovered score, Stravinsky discovered that he had written out choreographic annotations above the music notation. These notes revealed a surprising fact that the composer had long forgotten: "The dance is almost always in counterpoint to the music" (Stravinsky 1969:35).

Given this finding, Stravinsky made two strange, contradictory assertions. First, he claimed that these notes were *his* original plan for the choreographic movement, written as instructions for Nijinsky. The radical rhythmic counterpoint of the "silent music" was now Stravinsky's own invention: "I confess that what I do recall, aided by the memory drug of this score, greatly surprises me, especially that I could have envisaged synchronization of music and choreography to such a degree, and expected any choreographer to realize it in 1913" (Stravinsky 1969:35). He was so proud of the intricate nature of *his* choreographic ideas that he typed the handwritten markings out and published them in 1969 as an appendix to *The Rite of Spring: Sketches 1911–1913* under the title "The Stravinsky-Nijinsky Choreography." He now considered this to be the definitive account of what was staged in 1913: "this account of the choreography supersedes all others, including those testaments of my own faulty memory now permanently on exhibit elsewhere" (35). Second, he radically altered his attitude towards Nijinsky's choreography. That same year, he told Yuri Grigorovich, the choreographer of the Bolshoi Ballet, that, "of all the interpretations of *Sacre* that I have seen, I consider Nijinsky's the best" (in Nijinska 1992:471). In 1968 or '69, he read Irina Veshinina's *Stravinsky's Early Ballets*, and scribbled in the margin that his criticism of Nijinsky's choreography had always been "unjust" (Berg 1988:41). And in 1970, he urged that a revival of *Le Sacre du printemps* using the original Nijinsky choreography be created from the recovered notes in the piano score. The composer died the following year without ever seeing this realized.

Checking Accounts

Contrary to Stravinsky's claim, the account of the 1913 choreography is far from conclusive, and raises more questions than it answers. Were the choreographic notes in the piano score really the composer's instructions to the choreographer, then realized by the dancers? If so, why did the composer complain about the discrepancies between Nijinsky's beats and the music's, and why didn't he recognize the counts that Nijinsky was shouting from the wings of the stage during the premiere? If they were written by Stravinsky, but not realized at the premiere, why did Stravinsky praise Nijinsky's work in 1913 saying, "Everything is as I wanted it"? And why then did he include Nijinsky's name in the title of the typed notes, and radically change his attitude toward the original choreography following his discovery of the piano score?

Could it be instead that Stravinsky was yet again fabricating an account, and the choreographic notes were descriptive, rather than prescriptive — shorthand notes that Stravinsky scribbled down while watching the dancers rehearse Nijinsky's choreography? Several things point toward this possibility. First, there is a note by Stravinsky on a section from "The Sacrificial

Dance” that straightforwardly defies his own claim that these were prescriptive instructions handed over to Nijinsky: “The rhythm and phrasing of the choreography are much too complex for verbal description” (Stravinsky 1969:43). Second, as Stephanie Jordan has shown, it was probably quite late in the process of choreography that Stravinsky actually got hold of a pre-publication copy of the printed piano score, which was officially published only a few days before the premiere. Nijinsky even sent a telegram to the composer in late March 1913, only two months before the premiere, asking for the piano score of “The Sacrificial Dance” to be sent to him (Jordan 2008:439–40).⁶ Thirdly, many of the “instructions” seem to display a strong Dalcrozian character. Most accents are assigned to the first beat of each measure, aligning well with Vuillermoz’s observations, and the many instructions to count a given number of measures “as if in” a different time signature reminds one of the polyrhythmic silent music that Nijinsky witnessed during his visit to the Dalcroze institute. In any case, the “authoritative” narrative of the composer cannot be trusted. We are thus left comparing partial accounts that contradict each other.

Stravinsky’s Counts

Matthew McDonald convincingly has refuted another of Stravinsky’s well-known accounts concerning *Le Sacre du printemps*. Against the composer’s claim (which placed him in a strong contrast with Cage) that he was not following any system when composing the piece, McDonald revealed the existence of several mechanical procedures that Stravinsky used to generate his rhythmic structures. In virtually all of the movements, the basic durational or rhythmic pattern was derived directly from the intervallic pattern of an important chord or pitch collection. This system allowed Stravinsky to obtain a result that he certainly had neither heard nor intended before writing it down: “he employed an ‘automated’ procedure to generate musical ideas, in which entities from one realm of music (pitch) are translated into another realm (rhythm) where their meaning is altogether different and any desirable musical result is largely fortuitous” (2010:506). In addition to this discovery, McDonald also showed, by decoding several numerical calculations left in the sketchbook, that at least in “The Sacrificial Dance” Stravinsky created large-scale durational structures by counting beats (defined here as the largest possible note value that allows all durational measurements to be made in whole numbers) and by pre-establishing an abstract numerical relationship between them. Thus, McDonald observes: “Stravinsky seems to have been engaged with counting beats and creating durational patterns on various musical levels, from surface rhythms to large-scale formal segments” (539).⁷

6. Jordan, who gained access to the original piano score, reported that the choreographic notes contain “different styles of handwriting, some musical notes decidedly amateurish, and different pencils have been used, including Stravinsky’s familiar blue one. There are also many crossings-out and second attempts at the documentation of rhythms” (2007:432). From here she speculates that at least some of the notes were written from a later period and refer rather to Massine’s choreography from 1920. This account is intriguing but still leaves the big question of why then Stravinsky maintained that “this account of the choreography” which “supersedes all others” belonged solely to the original production, urging for a revival of the original choreography from the choreographic notes under Nijinsky’s name—all this in late 1960s, when Massine, who passed away in 1979, was still alive.

7. This discovery accounts for one of the most pertinent criticisms of *The Rite of Spring*: the dissociation between the rhythmic structures laid out in the score, and the musical content. Cecil Gray complained, for instance, that “The time-signature changes constantly from bar to bar, but the music itself does not; it is only the eye and not the ear which perceives the changes” ([1927] 1947:142–43). And Adorno chimed in subsequently to make a similar point: “Rhythm is underscored, but split off from musical content [...T]here are only fluctuations of something always constant and totally static—a stepping aside—in which the irregularity of recurrence replaces the new” (1973:154–55). One reason for this impression, Adorno quite rightly deduced, was because Stravinsky’s rhythmic patterns involved counting “the smallest units of beat.”

As McDonald also pointed out, this adherence to the counting of beats was directly linked to the composer's choreographic concerns (regardless as to whether they were derived from or developed independently of Nijinsky's endeavors). In other words, the composer's preoccupation with counting and structuring large groups of beats that did not necessarily conform to the logic of music, seems to have been motivated by the dance that ran concurrently with and parallel to his composition. It was the intellectual nature of "counting" time, preceding the configuration of what meets the eyes or the ear, that provided a rhythmic framework transcending the traditional boundaries of genre. The neutrality of numbers devoid of any specific content provided a common denominator for music and dance (as well as for pitch and rhythm, within music). On one hand, this numeric denominator enabled Dalcroze/Nijinsky to develop their silent music, and on the other, it encouraged the composer to extend his composition to encompass dance.

Cage's Counts

Cage probably did not know any of this when he started counting in the late 1930s. He obviously knew that Schoenberg counted his notes, but the inventor of dodecaphony only did so up to the number 12, and never shifted the numerical axis to account for the temporal, rhythmic dimension of music. Stravinsky had already transitioned into neoclassicism, and from his own accounts of the day, seemed antithetical to Cage—as we have seen. What brought Cage as a young composer to his method of rhythmic structures circa 1938, were, according to his own account, two facts: "the physical nature of the materials with which I was dealing, and the experience I had in writing within the lengths of time prescribed for me by modern dancers" ([1948] 2000:34). The use of percussion sounds lacking clear pitch necessitated a musical structure that was not based on pitch. But moreover, this focus on percussion was itself triggered by his constant engagement with modern dancers. As James Pritchett noted: "the single most important factor in Cage's adoption of percussion music as his primary mission as a composer was his work with modern dancers" (1993:12). And in these initial collaborations, it was customary for Cage to write the music *after* the choreography was fully developed, following the counts of the dance as given to him. This primacy of dance over music resulted in a concern contrary to the one that surfaced in the Nijinsky-Stravinsky collaboration (or in the Dalcrozian silent music, for that matter). In 1939, Cage claimed:

The dancers have made the music identical with the dance but not cooperative with it.

Whatever method is used in composing the materials of the dance can be extended to the organization of the musical materials. [...] The music will then be more than an accompaniment; it will be an integral part of the dance. (1961:88)

The solution he arrived at, by extending the method of dance to music, is well-known: to compose durational structures based on the count of bars that *precede* both dance and music, which then serve as the common denominator for both. Here again, the neutrality of counting devoid of any specific content traversed the division of genres and allowed disparate elements to be composed together.

Accounts and Counts

This comparison of Cage and Stravinsky is based not only in their shared system of counts, but also on myriad accounts. With both composers, the neutrality of numbers inside a work is accompanied by a proliferation of stories surrounding the work. Stravinsky's claim that when composing *Le Sacre du printemps* he only heard and wrote what he heard, was inherently connected to his modernist disconnect with the past:

I was guided by no system whatever in *Le Sacre du printemps*. When I think of the music of the other composers of that time who interest me—Berg's music, which is synthetic

(in the best sense) and Webern's, which is analytic—how much more theoretical it seems than *Le Sacre*. And these composers belonged to and were supported by a great tradition. Very little immediate tradition lies behind *Le Sacre du Printemps*, however, and no theory. (Stravinsky and Craft 1962:147–48)

But if Stravinsky did employ a system of counts to connect music and dance (which then, in turn, connected him to Cage), the disconnect is largely a product of his account. Accounts, like counts, have the power to bridge apparent breaks and bring disparate elements together, to give order to the chaos that meets the eyes and the ears, and to render the heated uproar of audience into detached memoirs. And both Cage and Stravinsky were masters of this. But accounts must also choose what to account, and, in this regard, they are always authored. The authoritative accounts of composers about their own works thus become difficult to separate from their creations. If “sounds of a nature not found in my notations” are not excluded, then they may simply be reclaimed as being authored by the composer from the beginning.

But this is not to say that accounts contaminate the neutrality of counting, for counting is never entirely neutral. After recounting the discrepancy between Nijinsky's count and the musical beat, Stravinsky added a curious anecdote: “Nijinsky counted in Russian, of course, and as Russian numbers above ten are polysyllabic—eighteen, for example, is *vosemnadsat*—in fast-tempo movements, neither he nor they could keep pace with the music” (Stravinsky and Craft 1962:143). The discrepancy between one form of counting and another is here located in the particularities of a language that had to be used to convey the numbers. The inherent physicality of counting must meet the ear to be transmitted, and in this mediatory phase, the autonomy of counts approximates the authority of accounts. Precisely because of its force to assemble various disparate elements, counting becomes a political endeavor, and the question of who is counting (who is *accountable*) becomes a matter of dispute.

The power of counts to traverse established boundaries, a power upon which the modernist break with the past depended, is thus once again reduced to the specificities of a particular genre. There is an unfortunate, as well as ironic, tendency to leave unaccounted the crucial role of dance that composers so much counted upon.⁸ The 1958 Town Hall retrospective concert did not include any dance performances. Cage's music was presented all on its own, and any trace of the bodily movements that had accompanied the sounds in the past was cleared from the stage that evening. This was also a time when Cage put forward the dichotomy between music as “object” and as “process,” criticizing the former view as seeing music from the outside, and dismissing all attempts at counting as a result. In the decade that followed the composer would pursue various ways to realize “processes” in his works, now aiming to stretch music to encompass not only dance, but all other facets of what he uniformly called “life.” But for the *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* in 1958, Cage solved his progressive doubts about counting in a highly inventive manner. He foregrounded the physicality of counting by placing a conductor onstage who indicated the passage of time to the musicians by moving his arms in large circles, simulating the movement of a clock, in an indeterminate manner. At the premiere, this task of counting time using the body was assigned to the only dancer who appeared in the program that evening: Merce Cunningham.

8. In 1960, Robert Dunn started teaching a dance composition class at the Merce Cunningham dance studio at the request of John Cage. In this class, Dunn assigned the assembled dancers to devise choreographies using graphic scores by Cage, originally composed for music. The participants of this class eventually started performing their works at the Judson Memorial Church, and became known as the Judson Dance Theater and the initiators of postmodern dance.

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