

JOHN CAGE'S  
ENTANGLEMENT WITH  
THE IDEAS OF  
COOMARASWAMY

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**John Cage's Entanglement with the Ideas of Coomaraswamy**  
**by Edward Crooks**

**Abstract**

The American composer John Cage was famous for the expansiveness of his thought. In particular, his borrowings from 'Oriental philosophy' have directed the critical and popular reception of his works. But what is the reality of such claims? In the twenty years since his death, Cage scholars have started to discover the significant gap between Cage's presentation of theories he claimed he borrowed from India, China, and Japan, and the presentation of the same theories in the sources he referenced.

The present study delves into the circumstances and contexts of Cage's Asian influences, specifically as related to Cage's borrowings from the British-Ceylonese art historian and metaphysician Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. In addition, Cage's friendship with the Jungian mythologist Joseph Campbell is detailed, as are Cage's borrowings from the theories of Jung. Particular attention is paid to the conservative ideology integral to the theories of all three thinkers. After a new analysis of the life and work of Coomaraswamy, the investigation focuses on the metaphysics of Coomaraswamy's philosophy of art. The phrase 'art is the imitation of nature in her manner of operation' opens the doors to a wide-ranging exploration of the mimesis of intelligible and sensible forms. Comparing Coomaraswamy's 'Traditional' idealism to Cage's radical epistemological realism demonstrates the extent of the lack of congruity between the two thinkers. In a second chapter on Coomaraswamy, the extent of the differences between Cage and Coomaraswamy are revealed through investigating their differing approaches to *rasa*, the Renaissance, tradition, 'art and life', and museums. So why have such discrepancies – and related Orientalisms – frequently been ignored and furthered in writings on Cage? Utilizing the theories of Edward Said, the final chapter analyses Cage's writings and writings on Cage to reveal the operation of Orientalism in Cage studies.

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## **Introduction**

The present thesis has two key protagonists. The first is the American composer, writer, and artist John Cage (1912-92). The second is the British-Ceylonese art historian and metaphysician Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947). What their connection is to each other will be discussed in due course. At first glance, the title of this thesis might appear straightforward – even perhaps bland. However, like a shadow in Plato’s cave, appearances can be deceptive. The term ‘ideas,’ in the title, refers to two things. In the first sense it refers to the theories and thoughts that Cage encountered in Coomaraswamy’s books. The second meaning is more technical and refers to the Platonist concept of ‘Idea’: an eternal universal transcendent Form. Platonism and artistic idealism were essential to Coomaraswamy’s aesthetics and metaphysics. During the 1940s, Cage took ideas (in sense one) from Coomaraswamy. How these relate to Idea (in sense two) will be clear after chapter four.

Cage’s thought became entangled with Coomaraswamy’s ‘ideas’ in both senses. The nature of that entanglement, and its implications for Cage’s theories, has been difficult to see. This is chiefly because Cage’s borrowings from Coomaraswamy have been investigated in relation to Cage’s understanding of those borrowings. The concepts and doctrines Cage took from Coomaraswamy appear very differently when investigated outside of Cage’s usages. The first aim of this thesis is to investigate the contexts of the ideas Cage borrowed from Coomaraswamy. In order to understand that context it is necessary to investigate the circumstances of Cage’s initial introduction to Coomaraswamy’s writings. That introduction came through Cage’s friend, the Jungian mythologist Joseph Campbell. A related theory of ‘Idea’, that of phylogenetic archetypes, was equally essential to the psychology of Jung and the theories of Campbell. Cage also borrowed ideas (in both senses) from Jung and Campbell.

When Cage borrowed ideas from Coomaraswamy, or from Jung and Campbell, he did not reproduce the idea faithfully in his work. Instead, he adapted them to be congruent to his own theories through what Gann (2010: 90) described as ‘creative misreading’. Although Cage’s ‘creative misreadings’ have been discussed, chiefly by Patterson (1996) and Gann (2010), the implications of those misunderstandings were not dealt with by Patterson and only touched on by Gann (2010: 93-4). There is thus a need for a thorough

investigation of the implications of Cage's creative misreadings: that is the second purpose of this thesis.

The ideas of Coomaraswamy, Jung, and Campbell were themselves entangled in a number of discourses. One of those was the discourse termed Orientalism by Edward Said in 1978<sup>1</sup>. A number of the ideas Cage borrowed were dependent on conceptions of the 'mystic East'. As will be argued in chapter five, the only idea Cage took from Coomaraswamy virtually unchanged was the conception of modern Europe as the dialectical Other of the 'Orient' and the medieval. Coomaraswamy's ideas led Cage, via Jungian psychological theories, to a conception of 'Oriental philosophy' thoroughly entangled in the discourse of Orientalism. Approaching Cage's borrowings from a historical perspective gives an increased understanding of Cage in relation to nineteenth and twentieth century history. Meanwhile, approaching Cage's borrowings through Postcolonialist discourse analysis reveals the implications of the subjectivity of Cage's creative misreadings.

### **Thesis Overview**

It is intended that the thesis explains itself as it progresses; therefore, to avoid the repetition of material, the present outline will be kept to a bare minimum.

**Chapter one** outlines John Cage's life and work, thus grounding the context of his borrowings in the wider picture of his overall career. Section 1.7 contains a literature review; section 1.8 situates the present thesis within Cage studies and discusses earlier related work.

**Chapter two** focuses on Coomaraswamy's life and work. Unlike Cage, Coomaraswamy has not been the subject of extensive scholarship. With the exception of Roger Lipsey's 1977 biography, the majority of other studies have been predominantly hagiographical. This chapter combines original biographical research with analysis of Coomaraswamy's various contexts. Section 2.7 outlines the ideology of his theories.

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, Said's terms Orientalism and Orientalist will appear capitalized. When referring to the older use of the term – an orientalist as an academic expert on Asia – the word will not be capitalized.

**Chapter three** investigates the origins of Cage's encounter with Coomaraswamy through Joseph Campbell. Campbell's life and work is considered, in particular focussing on the relation of his theories to those of Jung. In 3.1.4 the problematics of his theories are investigated. 3.2 charts the friendship of Cage and Campbell and provides a detailed outline of Cage's readings. Cage is considered in relation to Jung in 3.3; in particular, in 3.3.1, an earlier encounter with Jungian theories and with Zen Buddhism through a lecture by Nancy Wilson Ross is detailed. 3.4 analyses material borrowed from Campbell and Jung in a number of Cage's lectures and texts from the 1940s and 1950s.

**Chapters four** and five consider Cage in relation to Coomaraswamy. The phrase 'art is the imitation of nature in her manner of operation' is the chief focus of the first of these chapters. The phrase originated in the *Physics* of Aristotle; travelling via St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* and Coomaraswamy's *The Transformation of Nature in Art* it reached Cage. In charting the development of the metaphysical meanings of the phrase through classical philosophy and into the Middle Ages, the meaning intended by Coomaraswamy becomes clear. Cage's interpretation of the phrase and how that related to Coomaraswamy's interpretation is analysed in 4.1.6. In 4.2 The findings of 4.1 are used to investigate the concept of nature in Cage's work in relation to two previous studies of Cage. In each case, the different understanding of the phrase provided by investigating Coomaraswamy's interpretation of the phrase is used for further investigation. In 4.2 Cage and John Ruskin are analysed in relation to George Leonard's *Into the Light of Things: The Arts of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (1994); in 4.3 the focus moves to Cage, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau in relation to Christopher Shultis's *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition* (1998).

**Chapter five** looks at the remainder of Cage's borrowings from Coomaraswamy. These are divided into four further sections. In 5.1 Cage's use of the Indian aesthetic theory of *rasa* is analysed. 5.2.1 looks at Cage's borrowing of Coomaraswamy's depiction of the Renaissance and post-Renaissance Europe. 2.2.2 investigates Cage's partial adoption of the rhetoric of tradition, 5.2.3 his concept of 'art and life', and 5.2.4 his attitude to museums. In each case it will be shown that Cage's use of such rhetoric had little relation to similar ideas in Coomaraswamy's work. Further, in certain cases, it shall be shown that Cage could often have come to the same ideas through other sources. Finally, in section 5.3, the

Coomaraswamian and Jungian elements of Cage's lecture 'Defense of Satie' will be analysed.

**Chapter six** differs methodologically from the previous chapters. Postcolonial discourse analysis will be used to investigate representations of Asia in Cage's writings and in Cage studies. The theories of Edward Said will be focused upon in particular. The influence of Orientalism in Cage's writings and theories will be demonstrated; further, it will be argued that the depiction of Asia and Cage's Asian sources within Cageian discourse has been limited by the boundaries of Cage's knowledge. This will be postulated in reference to the investigations of chapters one to five. The chapter concludes the thesis and ends by rounding up the implications of the investigation in relation to the methodology of the final chapter.

Finally, a few words must be included on the limits of this thesis. The initial research proposal seemed to be manageable within the time-limit imposed. Nevertheless, during the course of research I uncovered far more issues than it was possible to adequately research and write up given the time-constraints and the upper word limit. It is now intended that this thesis will form the first part of a larger research project. The postdoctoral research I hope to undertake will build on and continue the investigation started by this thesis. Therefore, there are occasions in the present thesis when a subject cannot be covered where it has been necessary to allude to this subsequent research. That research will centre on Cage's post-1950 borrowings, particularly from D. T. Suzuki. It will build on the analytical findings of the present thesis by mapping the presence and purpose of claims to veridicality and authority in Cage's writings, relating that to what will be argued is an unresolved conflict between anarchism and authoritarianism found in Cage's work. Based in a pragmatic dialogue between postcolonial discourse analysis and the study of religions, the final part of the project will investigate the boundaries and oversights of Cage's influential theory of silence.

#### **A note on transliteration**

Indic words appear in this thesis following contemporary conventions of transliteration and therefore appear with diacritical marks. Nevertheless, to preserve the integrity of material quoted from or referenced, I have not updated or corrected transliterations employed by

authors or publishers. Thus, the reader will at times come across two different transliterations of the same word; for example: when the reader encounters the Indian guru whose life and sayings Cage came to through the book *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the guru's name will be transliterated as Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa.

Chinese words are transliterated following the now standard Pinyin system, with the same exceptions as above regarding quotations and references. The older, sometimes more familiar, Wade-Giles transliteration will follow in brackets on the occasion of a word's first appearance if confusion would otherwise be caused; for example: *Yījīng* [*I Ching*]. A Pinyin → Wade-Giles conversion table can be found following the bibliography.

# 1. John Cage

## 1.1. Youth

John Cage was born in Los Angeles on 5 September 1912. His father was an inventor of fluctuating fortune. Most depictions of Cage's parents come from Cage himself. He was obviously proud of his father and the example he set. Cage's father comes across as a romantic optimist, always willing to try out his ideas, never quite succeeding in what he did. His mother bore the consequences, seemingly never content. She is projected through his writings less clearly: she appears mostly as the subject of short vignettes, often providing a putdown punch line with pithy directness. She was obviously independently minded, and strong-willed; yet behind the humour and warmth accompanying Cage's recollections there are also often significant hints of sadness. Cage presents his mother in terms that distance her from him (Nicholls, 2007: 88).

The family moved frequently; work often kept Cage's father away from home. Cage grew up an only child, and young John often appears alone in the older John's recollections: left to entertain himself on the beach every morning and getting sunstroke; alighting barefoot from a streetcar and picking his way across hot tar that stuck to his feet (Cage, 1968a: 88, 263). And he was picked on at school. The stories raise numerous questions surrounding the issues Cage chose not to address: was the family happy? Why did Cage's mother never enjoy having a good time? Did John feel loved? These things Cage never really wrote about. Autobiographically as well as philosophically, Cage's public pronouncements often disguised pain with humour or optimism. His biographers have uncovered little more. But then again, these are Cage's self-admittedly unreliable recollections. 'Mother said, "I've listened to your record [*Indeterminacy*] several times. After hearing all those stories about your childhood, I keep asking myself, "Where was it that I failed?"' (Cage, 1961a: 273). These stories, after all, may not be representative. Cage clearly grew up with a sense of entitlement twinned with the general sense that he was responsible for his own path to success. And, perhaps crucially for his future career, he became mentally and physically resourceful (Hines, 1994: 70-5; Revill, 1992: 22-7; Silverman, 2010: 3-6).

The stories Cage told about his teenage years are often characterized by demonstrations of his qualities of organization and leadership. Another significant theme is his early interest in religion and music (especially Grieg). School got better; he made friends. Aged twelve, Cage was a member of a Boy Scout troop; he was also fascinated by

radio. Combining these two interests he pitched a weekly Scout radio show to a local station. The resulting show, which Cage hosted, combined musical performances and talks by Scouts with a devotional message delivered by a representative from a local religious institution. The show proved highly popular (Cage, 1965a: 132; Cage and Kostelanetz, 1989: 272-3). The presence of religious figures in the shows points to Cage's religious involvement. Cage's family were Methodists. His paternal grandfather had been a Methodist Episcopal minister; his maternal grandmother, who for a time lived with them and with whom he read the Bible, was obsessed by self-righteous millenarian beliefs; his aunt Phoebe sang in church where for a time Cage regularly heard her sing (Cage and Kostelanetz, 1989: 274; Kostelanetz, 2003: 1; Hines, 1994: 69, 75). Young John had two main ideas about his future: one was to be a musician, the other was to become a Methodist minister. His aunt, Phoebe James, who was involved with both music and the church, may have been an inspiration in both regards<sup>2</sup>. The friends he had in his early teens were also religious and he would frequently discuss theology with them. When he was fifteen he briefly attended and considered joining the Liberal Catholic Church, a Theosophical Society offshoot which blended High Church Anglicanism and Catholic ritual with universalist beliefs, Theosophical Society esoteric lore, and support of the imminent arrival of the Society's messianic World Teacher (Krishnamurti)<sup>3</sup>. Cage seems to have been

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<sup>2</sup> Phoebe James seems to have been a steady presence in Cage's early years. In the late 1930s they taught a course together at an elementary school called 'Musical Accompaniments for Rhythmic Expression'; the music they produced involved found and made percussion instruments (Silverman, 2010: 27). With thanks to William Brooks for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>3</sup> Although the Liberal Catholic Church [LCC] claimed to be independent with a 200 year history, its bishops were all committed members of the Theosophical Society. At the time of Cage's involvement, the Presiding Bishop of the LCC, and the co-author of its liturgy, was Charles Leadbeater, among the most powerful TS members of the time (see B. Campbell, 1980: 125-7; Liberal Catholic Church, 1938: 15-6; Lutyens, 2005: 146-9, 210; Tillett, 1982: 176, 179, 183, 185, 189, 191-2; Wedgwood, 1937). The doctrine of the LCC was generally Christian, but allied itself with certain doctrines of the Theosophical Society. This was particularly obvious in its universalism, its focus on esoteric spirituality, and its largely secretive adherence to the doctrine of the World Teacher. What it openly admitted to was an aim to 'bring into alliance with the worship of the Church... the newer "borderland" science, mysticism, new thought, psychical research, and other kindred movements' (Liberal Catholic Church, 1938: 12). This was presented as being true to the spirit of the theology of the Early Fathers and therefore with Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrines as well as 'Eastern' religious traditions (Liberal Catholic Church, 1938: 5; see also *ibid.*: 6-7; Leadbeater, 1927: 7, 48, 311, 360, 363-66, 449-50; Tillett, 1982: 179, 185, 236-7). Cage may have been unaware of much of this. Contemporary

chiefly attracted by the theatricality of the services. Cage's parents objected and he returned to more conventional religion (Cage, 1961a: 271).

When he entered Pomona College in the early fall of 1928 he still intended to become a minister. After two years of college he dropped out having lost interest in formal education. At the same time he had also lost the desire to become a minister, and perhaps, more generally, had lost faith with conventional Christianity and bourgeois life aims (see R. Barnes, 1966: 52). Religion and spirituality took a back seat in his life for a while. In the meantime he headed to Europe where he remained for a year and a half (Hines, 1994: 67-79; Revill, 1992: 31).

Growing up mostly in Los Angeles and elsewhere in California, and with an inventor for a father, Cage is often seen as having absorbed the mindset of a society that

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articles in the *Los Angeles Times* on the Church noted only that one could be a follower of any religion to join, that freedom of interpretation of scripture and tradition were encouraged, that their place of worship was particularly beautiful, and that their services were noted for ornate ritual and magnificent vestments (for example, *Los Angeles Times*, 1922: II3; Whitaker, 1923: I9). Cage's visits to the Church took place when he was fifteen, at some point between the fall of 1927 and early the following summer. He may have heard about the church through the Scouts. He ran his Scout radio show between approximately 1924-5 and 1926-7; late in 1924 the LCC venue Cage would later visit set up a scout troop (*Los Angeles Times*, 1924: B17). That venue was the Pro-Cathedral of St. Alban at 2041 Argyle Avenue, Hollywood. It was the flagship church and central administrative building of the LCC in America; beautifully and expensively designed in the style of the old Spanish missions, it was dedicated in May 1922 (*ibid.*). Cage's account of the service and its rituals is confirmed and elaborated upon by other sources (Whitaker, 1923: I9; for the order of service and photographs of the vestments worn see Leadbeater, 1920). The service itself lay somewhere between Roman Catholic and Anglican. Although Cage recalled 'Occidental and Oriental' rituals at the service, he can only have been referring to the Western and Eastern Christian Churches. In other words, the 'Oriental' rituals were those that reminded him of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Although the LCC did make use of terms and ideas drawn from Hindu and Buddhist sources, this was predominantly in texts for the use of the clergy rather than the congregation (Leadbeater, 1920: 76; Wedgwood, 1928). Nevertheless, sermons delivered at LCC venues could include universalist messages and mentions of Asian religious traditions (for example, Jinarājādāsa, 1924). Therefore it is possible, though by no means certain, that Cage heard mention of Asian religions at this time. In Cage's recollection of his visit (1961a: 271), he notes that he talked to a priest who advised him that he should not join the church against the wishes of his family. Revill (1992: 32) suggests that the priest Cage talked to was the Rev. Tettermer. John Moynihan Tettermer (1876-1949) was the Diocesan Bishop at the time Cage visited; nevertheless, he was only one of a number of clerical figures based at the church at the time of Cage's visits. Revill's source does not prove that it was Tettermer who Cage spoke to (*Los Angeles Times*, 1927a: A2; 1927b: A2; 1928: A6). Given that we do not know the exact dates of Cage's visits, it would seem unlikely that the identity of the priest Cage talked to can be ascertained.

was fixated on innovation and progress. The population of the Los Angeles area boomed in the early twentieth century; mass automobile ownership revolutionized how people lived and consumed. The potential for great wealth and an ever-expanding population led to new ways of life, but there was disquiet behind the sunny face. Limited natural resources, particularly water, led to innovation but also violent competition and environmental damage. As Donald Worster argued in *Rivers of Empire* (1985), the influence on Californian culture of the utilization of resources can also be seen as part of a legacy of environmental and human exploitation.

Human exploitation is particularly relevant to the position of Asian-Americans in California in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There has been an assumption in writings on Cage that the presence in California of Asian immigrants contributed to and partially explained Cage's later appropriation of Asian religious and philosophical concepts. Nevertheless, unlike Henry Cowell's recollections of his boyhood in San Francisco, Cage made no reference to hearing Asian musics in his childhood. Cowell grew up in singular circumstances: a child of bohemian parents, he grew up on the edge of San Francisco's Chinatown (Hicks, 2002: 19-20; Higgins, 2002: 23). For Cage's childhood years, in contrast, there is no evidence of any significant interaction with Asian-Americans, their culture or music. It is almost certain that he would have had some notion of the presence of Asian communities within California; however, assumptions should not be made about how he would have understood non-WASP communities (cf. Silverman, 2010: 52). Such assumptions generally ignore the frequently derogatory or exoticized depictions of Asian-American communities found at the time, and the legal and social prejudices many Asian-Americans in California faced. Nor should the nature of the cultural identities of the Asian-Americans Cage did meet during the late twenties and thirties be assumed. In Cage's recollections of his early years in California, one of the only stories to mention a person of Asian origin relates to his time at Pomona College. Here he befriended a 'Japanese tennis player' named Tamio Abe; his new friend was 'absolutely devoted to the string quartets of Beethoven' (Cage and Kostelanetz, 1989: 274).

Cage's thinking has often been explained by his Californian and American heritage. This element of his heritage is certainly not irrelevant; however, as Nicholls (2002b: 3) pointed out, assuming that Cage can be explained by where he grew up acts to disguise the complicated web of influences that informed Cage, his ideas and his music. The stimuli that sparked Cage's chains of thought originated in many locations, and often had ties back to

earlier periods and discourses (Arthur, 1934a: 53; Hines, 1994: 74; L. E. Miller, 2006: 49; Patterson, 1996: 60; Rawls and Bean, 2008: 208, 241, 275-9, 283, 298-9, 306, 421).

## 1.2. 1930s and 1940s

Cage departed for Europe in the early summer of 1930. He absorbed something of modernist discourse and reacted enthusiastically to recent avant-garde trends. In Paris he became briefly infatuated with gothic architecture and for a while studied the subject intensively (Cage, 1948a: 28; Cage and Retallack, 1996: 83-4). After six months in Paris, Cage headed south-east to Italy. In Capri, Cage met an American man named Don Sample; fleeting encounters aside, he was Cage's first romantic partner. After Italy, the couple travelled together on a lengthy sojourn through southern Europe and the Mediterranean. Around ten years older than Cage, Sample had attended Harvard and was passionately cultural (Silverman, 2010: 8-10). It was Sample, Cage told Hines (1994: 81), who broadened his horizons through introducing him to the journal *transition* and to the artistic and cultural vision of the Bauhaus.

Although based in Europe for the majority of its run, the English-language ultra-modernist journal *transition* (1927-38) focused on both sides of the Atlantic<sup>4</sup>. Edited by Eugene Jolas, a leftist French-American writer who had settled in Paris, it published Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* as a work in progress, as well as pieces by Gertrude Stein, Beckett, Kafka, and many others. Besides literature, *transition* paid attention to modern art music, particularly George Antheil, and visual art through reproductions of works by Ernst, de Chirico, Schwitters, Picasso, Arp, Picabia, Moholy-Nagy, and Brancusi. Dada, surrealism, expressionism, post-expressionism, and related movements were all featured in its coverage. In all areas Jolas and the journal called for a radical advancement of the arts.

The journal claimed to look to the future, eschewing the past. Salt (1928: 177) lauded Antheil's music because it proclaimed that the '[a]ristocracy of music is dead! All the prettinesses and frills are going, and the obviously beautiful, so obscene in the face of truth, along with it'. According to the journal, Europe was dying (see the question asked to Stein et al., 1928). America displayed the dynamism of the future. Yet, as much as it frequently lauded America and American culture, many of the journal's authors realized that America too had 'a metaphysical sordidness which repels' (Jolas, 1929: 13). 'We are

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<sup>4</sup> On *transition* see McMillan (1975), and on Cage in relation to the journal see Joseph (2002).

waiting for a new type of man', wrote Jolas (ibid.: 12), 'a universal being'. 'The arts of tomorrow must find their expression in the double reality of the natural and the supernatural. The universal man must find a mythos which is adequate to his changed outlook' (ibid.: 13). Thus *transition* championed radical voices, European or American, who sought to smash the dead vestiges of 'civilized' art whether in painting, architecture, literature, or music.

The search for new instruments, a minimizing of the use of the old melodic instruments... a search for new percussions and new intervals that will require a re-education of the human ear, and for a new scale, the development of rhythms that are both violent and unfamiliar, and a complete departure from the conception of music as a drug, a balm, a soothing-syrup, or as a literary-programmatic composition, an attempt to give it its place as one of the vital forces of modern life corresponding to the forces of our time – this is the direction music is now taking (ibid.: 14).

Such a vision seems to prefigure Cage's own aims.

More generally, Jolas saw the potential future of the world's peoples focused on the example of 'a super-America', the 'sublimation of the Occident... a super-Occident' (ibid.: 16). This rejuvenated world of the future needed a new language: symbolical, universal, 'pre-logical' (Jolas, 1932: 284). Unsurprisingly for the time, there was a considerable focus throughout the journal's run on the themes and language of the discourse on primitivism. The moderns projected their own hopes of acquiring an intuitive, natural anti-aesthetic onto the figure of the primitive. Gertrude Stein, for example, was praised in vol.3 because '[n]o one but she has been willing to be as ordinary, as simple, as primitive, as stupid, as barbaric as successful barbarism demands' (Riding, 1927: 157). In the 1910s and 1920s, 'primitives' fulfilled a similar role to 'Orientals' at the end of the nineteenth century and in the 1950s and 1960s: they were a source that could be plundered in order to rejuvenate stagnating European and American culture (see chapter 6). In *transition* the discourse of primitivism was accompanied by a modernist drive for a universal aesthetic language and a firm belief in art as a force that shaped society. In its later issues (when it went from being *transition* to *TRANSITION*), the journal was centred on Jungian theories and a utopian belief in the transformative potential of art on the individual. All of these themes can be found in Cage's later thought, often expressed in terms drawn from later influences such as Coomaraswamy. Cage was not alone in being drawn to the ideas of Primitivism. Later he would come into

contact with artists in Seattle and New York who were also drawn to Primitivist themes (see Varnedoe, 1984: 2:615-59). Cage continued to avidly read the journal after his return to America, later acquiring a complete set of issues. In addition, the journal's star writer, James Joyce, would be a lasting obsession for Cage, inspiring his work for the next sixty years (Hines, 1994: 79-81; Jolas, 1938: 7-9; Joseph, 2002: 144-7, 161-2; McMillan, 1975: 1, 9, 50, 57-8, 66, 68).

Cage and Sample left Europe and returned to California in late 1931. Back in his home state, Cage imbibed Californian bohemianism through associating with a circle of modernist artists, designers, thinkers, and musicians who were connected by the figures of patron and writer Pauline Schindler, patron and agent Galka Scheyer, and composer Henry Cowell. Schindler, with whom Cage had a relationship in 1934-5, furthered Cage's artistic interests: she was a passionate supporter of modernist music and art and had even had an article on the poet Robinson Jeffers published in *transition* (Schindler, 1930: 270-2). Through her, Cage published his first essay on music, 'Counterpoint' (1934). But Cage's romantic relationship with Schindler, and with Sample, ended when he met and married Xenia Kashevaroff. Although originally from Alaska, Kashevaroff had come of age living with her sisters on the Monterey Peninsula and was similarly steeped in Californian bohemian culture. Another significant presence in his life at the time was Schindler's friend Galka Scheyer who had strong connections with the Bauhaus and was an American agent for The Blue Four (the painters Feininger, Jawlensky, Kandinsky, and Klee). Both women expanded Cage's knowledge of modernism and its aesthetics, while also inspiring him by example.

Cowell, Schindler and Scheyer were three more figures in Cage's early years with loose ties to the Theosophical Society and/or Krishnamurti. During his relationship with Schindler, the pair exchanged passionate letters which included mystical descriptions of natural phenomena seemingly influenced by Theosophical Society ideas and the nature mysticism of the poet Robinson Jeffers (Cage, Schindler, and Mary, 1996). It was through Scheyer that Cage met Oskar Fischinger, who also held esoteric ideas about art. A comment that Fischinger made on the spirit of materials released through sound fired Cage's enthusiasm for percussive sounds, one of the central planks in his aesthetic<sup>5</sup> (Cage and

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<sup>5</sup> For information regarding the life and work of Pauline Schindler and the circles she moved in I am indebted to the research of John Crosse and his generosity in sharing archival material. He has an excellent blog on the architectural and design history of California at <http://socialarchhistory.blogspot.com>.

Dickinson, 1987: 34; Cage and Retallack, 1996: 87-8; Hines, 1994: 83-9; Key, 2002: 110-1; Kostelanetz, 2003: 8, 62; Moritz, 2004: 16, 78, 112, 165-6).

Having initially imagined that his creative energies would find their outlet in painting, Cage realized that his calling lay in composition. His earliest pieces had been the result of self-directed study. Through an interest in the music of Schönberg, Cage made contact with the pianist Richard Buhlig; he in turn introduced Cage to Henry Cowell, who encouraged Cage's composition as well as his desire to study with Schönberg. On Cowell's suggestion, Cage moved to New York in April 1934 to study with Schönberg's former pupil Adolph Weiss.

Cowell was also in that city for much of the time, teaching a globally minded course on music at the New School of Social Research. Although Cowell's devotion to comparative musicology (what would now be called ethnomusicology) was forward thinking for its time, the course continued to split music up into the problematic categories of European musicology – categories that would not start to be questioned until much later in the century: 'Primitive Music', 'Oriental Music', 'Folk Music', and 'European Cultivated Music'. There certainly was interest in music of the first two categories in this period, but that interest was seldom concerned with such musics on their own terms. Taking the musics out of context and squeezing them into the homogenizing categories of Primitive and Oriental flattened them. And, as with Primitivism in general, interest was focused not on the musics as such, but on how they could inspire modern composers (see Cowell, 1933: 299-303). This impression is given not only by Cowell's own words but also by contemporary descriptions of his activity; one, for example, writes that Cowell 'organizes concerts not only of new music but also oriental and semi-barbaric music interesting to the moderns now that the occidental scales have ceased to satisfy' (*Dune Forum*, 1934: 70). Cowell (1933: 300-1) promoted musical Neo-Primitivism as the future of modernity in art music, 'a strong new counter-movement, full-blooded and vital'. Neo-Primitive music was strong, raw, and simple – similar, in fact, to the contemporary caricature of the figure of the primitive. By late 1934, the end of his first stay in New York, Cage had developed a warm friendship with Cowell.

Meanwhile, Schönberg had immigrated to Los Angeles. Cage returned to the city of his birth hoping to study with the man who had become his compositional idol; he started attending Schönberg's classes in mid March 1935. Although Cage presented his training with Schönberg as formative, at the time he also found the lessons constricting and

apparently quit the class over Schönberg's insistence that he must master harmony (Patterson, 2002d: 94). These formative influences all left their mark in Cage's early compositions, such as the *Quartet* for percussion (1935).

By the middle of 1938 Cage had decided to leave Los Angeles. Heading to San Francisco via Carmel, he made contact with the pioneering young composer Lou Harrison who he had heard of through Cowell. Harrison in turn introduced Cage to choreographer Bonnie Bird. Through Bird he was offered a job in Seattle at the Cornish School of Music. His time at the Cornish School cemented his involvement with modern dance; previously, while based in California, he had worked with dancers at UCLA and Mills College. In many of these pieces, his early musical influences and the proportional micro-macrostructure form he was developing were melded to a primitivist aesthetic probably inspired by *transition* and Cowell as well as a futurist devotion to noise-music and the spirit of the city. Cage came to aspire to work with all sounds, freeing music from the prejudices of past art-music values. He regarded dodecaphonic composition as the way forward, but thought that the potential of the method was held back by conventional instruments. Pieces such as *First Construction (in Metal)* (1939), *Second Construction* (1940), *Living Room Music* (1940) and the *Third Construction* (1941) experimented with the boundaries of instrumentation. Dominated by permutations of rhythm and form and the timbres of batteries of standard and improvised percussion instruments and electronic tones, the aesthetics of Cage's pieces of the late 1930s and early 1940s were drawn both from the everyday sounds of an urban environment and an exoticized European-American evocation of its cultural Others. His sound was both modern and 'primitive', an unsurprising combination at a time when the latter could easily suggest the former. Cage's new doctrine was rendered in powerful prose in the 1940 manifesto 'The Future of Music: Credo' (Born and Hesmondhalgh, 2000: 1; Bernstein, 2002a: 70-2; Joseph, 2002: 161-2; Cage, 1948a: 31-2; Cage, Schindler, and Mary, 1996; Hines, 1994: 89-93; L. E. Miller, 2006: 51-4, 59; Silverman, 2010: 13-4, 27).

It was through searching for a 'primitive' sound that in 1940 Cage discovered the prepared piano. In Seattle, Cage was asked to compose music for a dance named *Bacchanale* by dancer and choreographer Syvilla Fort. The performance location was too small to accommodate Cage's percussion battery, so his only option was to resort to a piano. Fort was African-American; whether by her instruction or through his own choice, Cage had decided he needed to make music that suggested Africa. After a failed attempt to

find an ‘African sounding’ twelve-tone row, Cowell’s techniques of playing directly on a piano’s strings inspired Cage to experiment with placing objects between the strings. The result altered and Othered the timbre of the notes when played from the keyboard, creating the prepared piano and the first composition for it: *Bacchanale* (Cage, 1973a: 117-8; Cage and Montague, 1985: 209-10). Bonnie Bird remembered it happening differently.

According to her, Cage was trying to recreate the sound of a gamelan on the piano; accidentally a piece of metal fell onto the strings during a rehearsal and Cage went from there (Bird and Boyle, 1993: 70-2). Either way, the intention was to produce an exotic sound; and even if the new instrument was originally supposed to conjure up Africa, it did not take long for listeners and critics to decide that it sounded like a gamelan (M. L. Tan, 1989: 39; Thomson, 1945: 71-2). Cage went on to write extensively for the instrument during the 1940s (Charles, 1990: 46-8; Corbett, 2000: 170; L. E. Miller, 2002b: 48; 2006: 68; Silverman, 2010: 27).

In Seattle, Cage met two artists and a writer who further shaped his knowledge of Asian arts and religions. Painter Morris Graves, who Cage met in the autumn of 1938, had investigated Zen and Vedānta and was interested in Buddhist, Hindu, and early Christian iconography. Judging from his later writings on aesthetics and his correspondence with Ananda Coomaraswamy, Graves’s understanding of Indian and Japanese religious traditions was fairly typical for the period. It was grounded in the conception of Asian aesthetics and religious traditions found in Coomaraswamy’s writings, works by orientalists such as Heinrich Zimmer, and the universalized Vedānta that had followed from Svāmi Vivekānanda’s game-changing appearance at the 1893 Chicago World’s Parliament of Religions (see King, 1999a; Seager, 1995). It is possible that Graves was already studying Coomaraswamy’s books in the period Cage was in Seattle; certainly by 1946 he had read much of Coomaraswamy’s work. Again, however, this interest was tied to the discourse of modernism. As Ray Kass (2002: 41) revealingly points out, Graves conceptualized his use of Asian religious iconography as ‘expansions of the experimental imagery of modernism’. At the time Cage knew Graves, they shared a love of Dada. They met after Graves had interrupted a performance of Cage’s *Quartet* at the Cornish School by standing up and yelling out the words “Jesus in the Everywhere” (Cage, 1973b: 99). According to Kass (2002: 48), around this time Cage accompanied Graves to a Seattle Buddhist temple. A greater augury was both men’s attendance at a lecture called ‘The Symbols of Modern Art’

by writer Nancy Wilson Ross that Cage later recalled as being named ‘Zen Buddhism and Dada’ (see section 3.3.1 below).

A mutual friend of Cage and Graves with similar interests was painter Mark Tobey. Tobey had direct experience of East Asian aesthetics through having visited China and Japan; in Japan he had stayed in a Zen monastery. His religious beliefs, however, were centred in the universalist-perennialist Baha’i faith<sup>6</sup>. Tobey, older than either Graves or Cage, was another figure who guided Cage’s way of imagining the world. In particular, Cage remembered a walk he took with Tobey across Seattle:

Well, we couldn’t really walk. He would continually stop to notice something surprising everywhere... That walk was a revelation for me. It was the first time that someone else had given me a lesson in looking without prejudice... Tobey would stop on the sidewalks... and his gaze would immediately turn them into a work of art... For him, everything was alive (Cage and Charles, 1981: 158).

At this point, however, it was the possibilities of electronic music that dominated his thinking; in the summer of 1940 Cage told Ross he thought electronics were the only future for music (Cage, 1940: 54-7; Cage to Ross, 16 August 1940, Ross Papers 118.4). Cage’s aesthetic vision was still closer to the Bauhaus and to Futurism than to the mystical dreamings of the inner eye found in the works of Tobey and Graves (Cage and Charles, 1981: 158-9; P. Griffiths, 1981: 7; Harris, 2002: 370; Joseph, 2002: 137, 140; Kass, 2002: 41-4, 47-8, 53; Kreul, 2002: 68-9; Lipsey, 1977c: 223-4).

As Shultis (2002: 22-3) noted, the influence of the Bauhaus was never that far away for Cage in the 1930s and early 1940s. Cage had met László Moholy-Nagy in 1938 during a period of employment at Mills College. Moholy-Nagy headed the School of Design in Chicago, a version of the Bauhaus transplanted onto American soil after the closure of the German design school by the Nazis. Cage was employed to teach a course on experimental sound late in 1941. The experience of reading Moholy-Nagy’s text *The New Vision* had earlier greatly stimulated Cage’s artistic ideas (Cage and Retallack, 1996: 87). In *The New Vision*, the first edition of which was published in 1928, Moholy-Nagy called for the resurrection of the ‘whole man’. ‘Primitive man’ had been skilled in all the arts – hunter, craftsman, builder, doctor – but modern development forced ‘him’ to specialize and cramped him up in poorly designed cities. Life and education should be holistic and organic

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<sup>6</sup> Founded by Bahā’u’llāh [Mīrzā Ḥusayn ‘alī Nūrī (1817-92)] in West Asia in the 1860s, the Baha’i faith preached a universalist message (Bowker, 1997: 118, 120-1).

and respond to technological advances. The ‘work of children and of primitive peoples’ should be learnt from, and their ‘spontaneous expressions’ that ‘spring from an inner sense’ should be emulated as models of organic perception (Moholy-Nagy, 1947: 17-8). The experience of using all the senses would make modern people whole once more (ibid.: 13-9). There might be thought to be echoes of such ideas in Cage’s notable compositions of this period which included the percussion and noise-source pieces *Imaginary Landscape No.2* and *No.3*. Nevertheless, despite some small successes, Cage was still struggling to establish himself. In June 1942 John and Xenia moved again, this time to New York (Joseph, 2002: 137, 140; Silverman, 2010: 43-4, 49-51).

John and Xenia arrived in New York almost penniless. Initially they stayed in the luxurious home of influential art-collector Peggy Guggenheim and her husband Max Ernst. When that arrangement ended after a couple of weeks they found alternative accommodation with dancer Jean Erdman, whom Cage had recently met, and her husband Joseph Campbell, whom Xenia knew from California (see 3.1.1). At the time Erdman was performing with the Martha Graham Dance Company alongside Merce Cunningham. Cage had first met Cunningham in Seattle; the two met again when Cage composed *Credo in Us* to accompany a dance Cunningham performed with Erdman. Three years later Cunningham became Cage’s life partner.

The brief stay with Campbell and Erdman was the start of what would become a radical change in the direction of Cage’s aesthetic and rhetoric. As shall be seen in 3.2.1, it was Campbell who rekindled Cage’s spiritual interests through introducing him to the work of Ananda Coomaraswamy and his own Jungian-influenced investigations in mythology. It is also probable that Campbell’s individualist style of religious observance, inspired by a formative friendship as a young man with Krishnamurti, encouraged Cage to seek religious meaning away from the confines of organized religion.

Although it was not until the late forties that Cage took his new spiritual interests for guiding principles, it is notable that several prepared piano pieces that Cage composed at this time to accompany dance works point to the influence of Campbell. The Futurist direction of Cage’s works of several years previously began to give way to works with primitivist and mythological associations: *Totem Ancestor* (c. October 1942)<sup>7</sup>; *And the*

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<sup>7</sup> In certain cases, including that of *Totem Ancestor*, Cage composed the music to accompany Cunningham’s choreography. In such cases it is sometimes not obvious who was responsible for the title. As Copeland

*Earth Shall Bear Again* (November, 1942); *Primitive* (December 1942); the Arthurian *The Perilous Night*<sup>8</sup> (1944); and *Daughters of the Lonesome Isle* (1945) (Bernstein, 2002b: 117). Cage and Campbell also shared an interest in the writings of James Joyce, particularly *Finnegans Wake*; originally published as a work in progress in *transition*, it had recently been released in its final book form<sup>9</sup>. Late in 1942, employing text drawn from the *Wake*, Cage composed the spellbinding *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs* for a singer and a pianist who uses the casing of a piano percussively.

While his friendship with Campbell opened spiritual doors, Cage's friendship with Peggy Guggenheim helped open art world doors. Through Guggenheim Cage encountered Marcel Duchamp: the two would subsequently become friends. Cage began to get significant notice from 1943; for example, a percussion concert he organized and conducted was covered by the *New York Herald Tribune*, *Time*, and *Life* (Kostelanetz, 2003: 13; Patterson, 1996: 55-7; Silverman, 2010: 55-6).

Ultimately, it was a personal and professional crisis that brought Cage back to religion. The titles of several prepared piano pieces by Cage of the period 1943-5 hint at what was happening: *Tossed as it is Untroubled*, *The Perilous Night*, *A Valentine out of Season*, *Mysterious Adventure*. The music and theatrical content of the dance piece *Four Walls* (1944) also bear signs of this pain (Gillespie, 2003). Around the start of 1943 Cage and Cunningham moved from being friends to being lovers. As the personal and professional relationship between the two men blossomed, Cage's relationship with Xenia withered. She moved out of their shared apartment late in February 1944; they were divorced in 1946. Cage was unsettled by the split from Xenia and the resulting need to reorientate his sexual identity.

What saved his mental state, he later suggested, was the realization of his thirst for spirituality. The religion he had grown up with seemed irrelevant, he told an audience in 1969 (Waddington, 1972: 44). The material that Campbell introduced him to opened his mind to other spiritual possibilities. Cage had read Coomaraswamy's *The Dance of Shiva*

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(2004: 72) points out, the primitivist undertones of *Totem Ancestor* may also have been influenced by Cunningham's time with the Martha Graham Company.

<sup>8</sup> See below 3.4.1.

<sup>9</sup> Campbell's first major published work was *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* (first printed in 1944). Although Cage had developed an interest in Joyce prior to meeting Campbell, it is probable that at least some of Campbell's interpretations influenced Cage's understanding of Joyce. See also J. Campbell (2002b).

(1918) and/or *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (1934) at some point between mid-1942 and early-1946 (see 3.2.2 and the introduction to chapter four). By April 1946 and the publication of his essay 'The East in the West' Cage's mind was already focused on 'the Orient', which he largely imagined in the simplistic dialectic of Orientalism. From the start, his understanding of Asia was characterized by a style of Orientalist discourse that, following King (1999a: 92), will be termed here 'affirmative Orientalism' (see section 6.2 below). Although his position became more nuanced and less simplistic as time went on, his thought never fully escaped the limitations of that dialectical construction.

In 1946 Cage was introduced to further sources that expanded his knowledge. In August 1946 he made a new friend in Indian musician Gita Sarabhai. After a period of several months of intensive dialogue on music and religion, Sarabhai gave Cage a copy of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in Nikhilānanda's 1942 translation. Cage probably already knew about this book, as Joseph Campbell had assisted Nikhilānanda in the preparation of the translation (see 3.1.1). Campbell's focus on Jung probably influenced Cage towards reading Jung's *The Integration of the Personality* (1940) (see 3.2.1 and 3.3.2). And a work by another of Campbell's friends, Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy* (1946), a work heavily indebted to Coomaraswamy, also influenced him. Having been introduced to the texts of Meister Eckhart through Coomaraswamy and Huxley, Cage read Eckhart's *Sermons* in Franz Pfeiffer's edition (1857) translated and re-edited by C. de B. Evans (1924 and 1931).

During the year and a half following Sarabhai's departure in December 1946, Cage pored over these works intently. Beyond calming his inner turmoil, these new influences inspired a gradual yet dramatic change in Cage's compositional methodology and aesthetic. However, because Cage's religious and philosophical influences of the 1940s have been seen through the prism of his later theories and beliefs, the basis of all these texts in philosophical and religious idealism has been largely overlooked. Far from confirming his later theories, many of these texts rely on metaphysical assumptions that Cage would come to deny in the 1950s and after. Similarly, the ideological basis of several of these works was opposed to Cage's later values (Cage, 1946: 21-25; J. Katz, 2001: 42-3; Patterson, 1996, 64-7, 75-8; Silverman, 2010: 61-5).

In the period his marriage broke down, Cage hit a compositional crisis. In works such as *The Perilous Night* he had attempted to describe the troubled nature of his feelings, yet audiences often failed to understand what he sought to communicate. Some, for

example, found such pieces funny. If he could not communicate through music, Cage wondered, what was the point of composing at all? He therefore set himself the task of finding a different reason to make music. The books on spirituality that he was reading suggested answers (Cage, 1966a: 76-7; 1989: 239; Cage and Dickinson, 1987: 35). From Coomaraswamy, Cage lifted ideas and language drawn from the Indian aesthetic theory of *rasa* (see 5.1). Cage claimed that *rasa* theory informed the *Sonatas and Interludes* for prepared piano (1946-8) and the score for Cunningham's *Sixteen Dances* (1950-1). He also explained the orchestral ballet score *The Seasons* (1947), the *String Quartet in Four Parts* (1949-50), and the *Concerto for Prepared Piano and Orchestra* (1950-1) in terms he attributed to his reading (Cage and Charles, 1981: 41; Pritchett, 1993: 39-40, 48).

Two talks Cage gave in 1948 illustrated his new ideas. His lecture to an audience at Vassar College (1948a) mapped his biography and his current view of the purpose of music. One idea, seemingly drawn from Huxley, was a description of a work in progress named *Silent Prayer* that prefigured *4'33"* (1952). Teaching at Black Mountain College in the summer of 1948, Cage wove many of his earlier sources together for the purposes of launching a pugnacious attack on Beethoven and his legacy in 'Defense of Satie' (1948b) (see section 5.3). Coomaraswamy's ideas, alongside quotations from Eckhart and Rāmakṛṣṇa, further appeared in 'Forerunners of Modern Music', an article from 1949. It was during this period that Cage came across two phrases that would subsequently become catchphrases he used to explain and justify his work. Borrowing from Coomaraswamy, Cage claimed that the purpose of art was to imitate nature in her manner of operation. The second phrase, borrowed from Sarabhai and the seventeenth-century English musicologist Thomas Mace, stated that the traditional purpose of the artist was to quiet and sober the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences. While Cage often suggested that these phrases embodied an Indian, 'Oriental', or traditional theory of art, his highly individual interpretation of them moved them away from their original meanings (Cage, 1948a: 43; 1948b: 77-84; J. Katz, 2001: 43, 45; Pritchett, 1993: 39-40, 48).

### **1.3 1950s**

Cage's increasingly radical musical language brought the composer considerable criticism. His works of the 1950s were often accused of being little more than pranks performed by a Dada clown. Explaining and defending his works became a necessity. To defend the worth and seriousness of the experiments he was undertaking, Cage began to explain the value of

his work in terms drawn from the material he had encountered through Campbell. Cage had solved his compositional crisis: if an audience could not understand what he was saying, then he would say nothing. His journey from determinism to openness, and the lack of comprehension that this journey was greeted with in some quarters, is well illustrated in Cage's correspondence with Pierre Boulez (b.1925) (Nattiez, 1993).

Cage and Boulez met during Cage's stay in Europe during the spring and summer of 1949; initially they felt that they were tackling similar problems in complementary ways. They corresponded frequently until they met again in New York in 1952. After that the letters become much less frequent, and then stopped. The friendship disintegrated over Cage's new compositional techniques. Boulez told Cage that he would never be able to 'admit... chance as a component of a completed work... the thought of it is unbearable!' (ibid.: 150). Cage had started to use chance-based compositional processes while working on the *Sixteen Dances* and *Concerto for Prepared Piano and Orchestra*. Initially he used magic squares, but these were replaced in 1950 by the *Yijīng [I Ching]*, the *Book/Classic of Changes*, whose influence was reflected in the title of Cage's major piano work *Music of Changes* (1951). Although he used the work ahistorically as a random-number generator rather than an oracle, the *Yijīng* became essential to Cage's compositional programme.

The manner in which Cage's interest in the *Yijīng* developed was not unconnected to his interest in Jung and Coomaraswamy. Cage was given a copy of the book by Christian Wolff, a young composition pupil of his. Wolff's parents ran the publishing company Pantheon Books as well as overseeing production of the Bollingen series, a philanthropist-funded programme of Jungian publications. Campbell was among Bollingen's key writers. The version of the *Yijīng* given to Cage by Wolff was published by Bollingen and featured a foreword by Jung; it had come to press through the interest of Jung and the efforts of Jungians. Coomaraswamy, who knew Campbell, also had links to Bollingen. So too did two new spiritual influences in Cage's life: D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts. It is also worth noting that Suzuki and Watts were two further figures in Cage's life who had been involved with the Theosophical Society and Krishnamurti (see Tweed, 2005; Watts, 1973). For all these reasons, there were significant continuities between Cage's influences in the forties and his influences in the fifties. However, the manner in which Cage represented and combined them tended to hide both how he diverged from his sources and how those sources presented highly essentialized versions of the traditions they depicted (Cage,

1988a: 6-7; Cage and Charles, 1981: 103-4; Patterson, 1996: 23-7, 344-5; Pritchett, 1993: 71, 92, 140; Silverman, 2010: 128-8; Wolff and Patterson, 1994: 63).

Suzuki had numerous connections with Cage's earlier sources. His modernization and Westernization of Zen had been influenced by many of the same figures and processes that had also affected the depictions of Asian religions in Coomaraswamy, Campbell, Jung, and Huxley. Cage had first encountered Suzuki's version of Zen through his readings; he began to conceptualize his theories in terms of Zen several years before the start of his attendance at Suzuki's lectures in the spring of 1952. However, it does not follow that the theories Cage developed inspired by Suzukian Zen were philosophically or religiously congruent with the ideas he had previously been espousing. This will become clear in the later chapters of this thesis and will be the subject of subsequent research (see introduction). During the 1950s Cage's interest in Suzuki's version of Zen led him to read other texts associated with Chán/Zen and Dàoism [Taoism]. He read James Legge's 1891 translation of the Dàoist texts attributed to Zhuāngzǐ [Chuang-Tzu] published as part of Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East* series, and John Blofeld's translation of the *Chuánxīn Fǎyào (Ch'uan-hsin Fa'yao) (Essentials of Mind Transmission)* of Huángbò Xīyùn (Huang-po Hsi-yün). In addition, he read *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics* (1942) by Suzuki's friend R. H. Blyth.

Terms and concepts drawn from Suzuki's writing and its dissemination in other writers' works, and from the Chinese Dàoist and Buddhist texts he had also read, now joined and in certain instances replaced terms and concepts Cage had previously drawn from Coomaraswamy, Huxley, Jung, Rāmakṛṣṇa, and Eckhart. Cage updated the terms of his rhetoric, but often not the meaning of what he was saying. As he became surer of his philosophical stance, Cage's compositional methods travelled ever further towards nonintention and purposeful purposelessness. *Imaginary Landscape No.4* for twelve radios (1951), and *Imaginary Landscape No.5* for any 42 recordings (1952) relied on sounds originating from sources outside Cage's control or volition. He started using new scoring techniques to facilitate his ideas, in particular graphic notation. While Cage's development of graphic notation fitted in with the openness of his new musical language, his use of such scoring techniques was also due to the influence of Morton Feldman. Feldman was one of a number of composers and artists Cage became closely involved with in the early 1950s (Emmerik, 2002: 229-32; Nattiez, 1993: 50; Patterson, 1996: 42-4, 141-2, 241-2, 333, 340; Pritchett, 1993: 90-1; Wolff and Patterson, 1994: 70).

Cage's confidence was bolstered by finding a circle of composers and artists who believed in the value of his work and were producing work that could support his own. The purpose of a number of his lectures of the fifties was to explain their shared ideals. Cage met Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, and the pianist and composer David Tudor in 1950; Earle Brown arrived in 1952. Together they have often been referred to as the New York School. Their common denominator, Cage claimed, was their belief in the aims of progressive American music and art – a new way of doing things unconnected to the old ways of Europe (for example, Cage, 1958a: 52-3). However, Cage's interpretation of their position also can be read as a critique of values current in American culture.

The name given to the group was coined partly in reference to the group of painters also known as the New York School. These painters, most of whom were associated with abstract expressionism, included Philip Guston, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko. There were links and friendships between both groups stemming from mutual attendance at the Artist's Club, a loose organization of artists who met at a bar on Eighth Street and with which Cage became associated in 1949. However, in many ways Cage stood apart from some of the members, particularly those like Pollock who revelled in masculinity and ego. The 'Lecture on Nothing' (c.1949-50) and 'Lecture on Something' (1951 or later) were delivered at the club; certainly the latter was written with that audience in mind. In these lectures Cage first explicitly declared his rejection of symbolism and his concomitant embrace of the non-symbolic quasi-numinous reality of a thing which he termed the acceptance of 'nothing'. From this point he started advocating saying 'nothing' – the removal of self-expression from artistic production. This nothing was the basis for the sonic potential of the 'silent' piece *4'33"* (1952). A work devoid of conventional performed music but open to the ambient sounds of the performance location, *4'33"* has often been explained in terms of Cage's Asian influences. From then on, Cage's concept of silence played an integral role in the majority of his works (Brown and Dickinson, 1987: 140; Cage, 1959a: 72-3; Cage, 1968a: 128; Copeland, 2004: 1, 12; Feldman, 1971: 93-101; Nicholls, 2002c, 17-9, 25-6, 52-3; Patterson, 1996: 23; Pritchett, 1993: 105-6; Roth, 1977: 36).

The developments in Cage's thought, as demonstrated in the lectures, have been understood in several different ways. One widespread reading views them as a reasonably faithful adoption of doctrines and traditions found during his ongoing study of Asian religions and philosophies and thus relates his embracing of nothingness to his study of

Zen. Alternative readings seek to explain Cage's new thinking as the result of sociological concerns. As Jonathan Katz (2001: 41-61) has shown, it is plausible to read Cage's embrace of nothingness and silence as a queer reaction against the aggressively heterosexual posturing of the abstract expressionists and the heteronormativity of society. Moira Roth (1977: 33-47) earlier discussed the same aspect of Cage's work, alongside the contemporaneous work of Cage's friends Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, as a reaction against the anti-communist McCarthyite fervour of the 1950s. In both readings silence and blankness are seen as resistance through indifference and negation (J. Katz, 1998: 62-8). Cage had nothing to say and he was saying it, and saying nothing said volumes. These alternative readings suggest that when Cage initially came to advocate discarding symbolism and meaning in favour of nothingness, there was more at play than purely spiritual meaning.

However, there is a further angle which has not been discussed and which is outlined in the present thesis. Whether he realized it or not, Cage's rejection of symbolism contradicted his earlier philosophical and religious influences. Through analysis of his borrowings from Coomaraswamy, in chapters four and five it will be shown that Cage's rejection of symbolism from the early fifties on negated the philosophical and religious theories outlined by Coomaraswamy in addition to the psychological theories of Jung and Campbell. Cage presented the progression of his theories as linear. While it may have appeared that way to him, his new theories rendered his borrowings from his earlier influences effectively meaningless when understood in their original contexts. Despite this, Cage continued to use motifs drawn from his earlier readings. The implications of this for Cage's later thought will be discussed in chapter six. A more complex image of Cage's thinking at this time will emerge.

Cage's philosophical embrace of nothingness and indeterminacy during the 1950s was matched in his compositional notation systems by a similar revolution. In both cases he explained these developments in terms of Zen and 'Eastern wisdom'. Feldman had been developing graph notation systems from 1950. Although Cage's work had started to move towards indeterminacy from 1948, it was not until 1952 that Cage's graph notations began; they quickly grew independently of earlier precedents. This move allowed his music to more fully embody principles of chance and nonintention. The *Music of Changes* had been composed using chance procedures but this had not resulted in an indeterminate score. Cage's new systems allowed not only the compositional process but also the score itself to

incorporate degrees of indeterminacy. As he developed these techniques, he prised apart the authoritative relationship between score signifier and signified sound. His techniques – and the level of indeterminacy in performance – developed from *Music for Carillon No.1* (1952), through *Water Music* (1952), the ‘Ten Thousand Things’ (including 34’46.776” for a pianist, 31’57.9864” for a pianist (both 1954), 26’1.1499” for a string player (1953-5), and 27’10.554” for a percussionist (1956)), and *Winter Music* (1957), to the *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1957-8). In the *Concert* all the instrumental parts are separate. The score for each instrument is named as a solo (*Solo for Piano, Solo for Violin I, Solo for Tubas in F and B Flat* etc.), any part may be played as a solo, or any combination of the parts played together to form the *Concert*. The player of a part may play any amount of the score, or none. The conductor, if there is one, is reduced to the role of a clock; the conductor becomes a utility rather than a police officer. The *Solo for Piano*, written with David Tudor in mind, is the most elaborate of the scores. It features 63 pages of highly inventive experiments in composition and scoring employing around 84 different systems. The result is astonishing: randomly placed graphic notational systems spread out across the large-format pages like maps to unknown possible worlds (Brooks, 1982: 86; Nicholls, 2002c: 26-7, 42-3; Pritchett, 1993: 96-104, 112-23).

Cage’s life and work underwent significant changes during the 1950s. Cage, Feldman, Brown, and Wolff each had their own ideas and by 1954 had begun to walk further apart. At the time the New York School composers cast out in their own directions, Cage discovered the natural world. Thirsty for spirituality in the 1940s, in the 1950s Cage realized he needed nature for sustenance (Kostelanetz, 2003: 17). In 1953 Cage was forced to move from his apartment. Given the opportunity to move to an artists’ colony being set up by friends within commuting distance of New York, he took the chance and in the autumn of 1954 found himself sharing simple accommodation in the midst of woodland and streams. To get some space he took to walking in the woods, discovering mushrooms and a love of nature in the process. Cage maintained his residence at the community until 1972.

In the same period, Cage’s influence on younger artists rapidly grew. Cage taught at the New School for Social Research in New York from 1956 until 1960. Among those who attended his course in experimental composition were George Brecht, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, Alan Kaprow, and Jackson MacLow, all of whom became involved with the art movement Fluxus. In 1952, teaching at Black Mountain College, Cage had organized what

became known as the first happening. The *Untitled Event* featured simultaneous non-narrative sound, words, images and action; a quasi-anarchic mixed-media theatrical form was born. Happenings and other experimental art forms dominated the works produced by Cage's class, and from it developed several of the techniques used the following decade by artists associated with Fluxus. Mixed means pieces also featured heavily in Cage's output of the 1960s; often created in collaboration with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and artists such as Rauschenberg and Johns, these events journeyed far beyond the confines of conventional concert music (C. Brown, 2007: 52, 106-7; Gann, 2010: 35; Higgins, 2002: 11-2; Kostelanetz, 2003: 15-6; Nicholls, 2002c: 52; Patterson, 1996: 239-40; Revill, 1992: 180; Silverman, 2010: 120-2, 133-4, 197; Tomkins, 1965: 121-2).

Cage's scores of the late 1950s and early 1960s include those in which his techniques moved towards full indeterminacy. Initially working with systems modelled on elements of the *Solo for Piano*, Cage developed a score technique where the performer(s) was provided with transparent sheets and pages of points, lines, and/or curves (*Variations I* (1958); *Music Walk*, 1958; *Fontana Mix*, 1958) from which they could construct a performance. From a score system such as *Fontana Mix*, Cage himself could then create further works – in this case *Aria* (1958), *Sounds of Venice* (1959), *Water Walk* (1959), and *Theatre Piece* (1960). *Cartridge Music* (1961) could also be used in this way. With *Variations II* (1961) Cage went further: although the questions the performer is prompted to ask include timbre, frequency, amplitude, duration and timing, Cage specified that the score could be used to answer any other questions beyond those mentioned (Brooks, 1982: 86; Pritchett, 1993: 128-37)

#### **1.4 Cage in Europe in the 1950s**

The seeds for Cage's later international success had been sown in the 1950s. Ironically, considering Cage's much flaunted antipathy to the continent and its culture, notice and influence in Europe were important in gaining Cage standing in America. Cage stayed in Europe again in the autumn of 1954, touring his own music and music by Brown, Wolf, and Feldman with David Tudor. Taking in Cologne, Paris, Brussels, London, Zurich, Milan, the tour started at the Donaueschingen Musiktage where Cage and Tudor played a shortened simultaneous version of *34'46.776"* and *31'57.9864"* to considerable uproar. Some of the uproar was positive, some negative – but it was uproar, and widely reported. Cage and Tudor were asked to make a radio broadcast that reached listeners across West

Germany. The tour gained him new contacts, including Karlheinz Stockhausen who would further disseminate (and copy) his ideas. As Christopher Shultis (2002: 33) suggests, the negative reception Cage received on this tour was probably partially responsible for the distinctly antipathetic tone his polemics mentioning Europe now took on.

His combative stance was fully in evidence when in the autumn of 1958 he visited Europe again. Early in September, Cage and Tudor arrived at Darmstadt for the Ferienkurse für Neue Musik. Cage had been invited not just to perform but, after Boulez pulled out at short notice, to teach the composition course. Cage's works played included *Variations [I]*, parts of the series *Music for Piano*, and *Winter Music* (1956-7). Audience reaction was harsh, sometimes drowning out the performance with derision (Iddon, 2007: 94). The lectures Cage gave (1958a: 18-56) were equally controversial. The first lecture, 'Changes,' was the least provocative. Mostly autobiographical, it discussed many of Cage's earlier works; it also mentioned his use of the *Yijing*, his attendance at Suzuki's lectures, and his studies with Schönberg. With the second lecture, the deliberately pontifical 'Indeterminacy' (1958a: 35-40), Cage went on the offensive. He aggressively attacked the vestiges of traditional European art music in compositions by Stockhausen (*Klavierstück XI*), himself (*Music of Changes*), and Earle Brown (*Indices*)<sup>10</sup> (Cage, 1958a: 35). This assault was not unprovoked. The previous year at Darmstadt, a lecture, 'Alea,' written by Boulez and read out by Heinz-Klaus Metzger, had launched a tirade of invective against composers 'obsessed' with chance techniques. While Boulez did not mention Cage by name, the target of his criticism was obvious: composers who used 'quasi-Oriental philosophy' and 'puerile mumbo-jumbo' to justify their use of 'accidental chance' compositional techniques only did so to disguise their own inadequacy as composers (Boulez, 1991: 26). The lecture was published in print in French late in 1957. Cage must have felt that many in his audience at Darmstadt in 1958 would have agreed with Boulez's 1952 assertion that 'all non-serial composers are *useless*', and perhaps with the French composer's view of indeterminacy (Boulez, 1991: 214). In Cage's 'Indeterminacy' lecture he pummelled his audience with a battery of references including Meister Eckhart, Jungian theory, and 'the "deep sleep" of Indian mental practice' (Cage, 1958a: 35). He rebutted serialist supremacy, insisting instead that only indeterminate compositions were justifiable. Nevertheless, more was to come: it was only in the third lecture that Cage fully took the gloves off.

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<sup>10</sup> His analysis also praised the openness of compositions by Feldman, Brown, Wolff, and indirectly his own more recent music.

The day after he delivered ‘Indeterminacy’ he again addressed the course; the third lecture, ‘Communication’, critiqued the audience personally. As Shultis (2002, pp37-8) has shown<sup>11</sup>, the force of Cage’s speech was greater in the printed German translated version provided to audience members. He made a series of attacks on the intellectual abilities of the audience and ridiculed the European new music scene in general. Much of the lecture was designed as a series of questions which he used to range through his preoccupations – ‘Have we got truth? Have we got religion? Do we have a mythology? Would we know what to do with one if we had one?’ (Cage, 1958a: 42-3). Then there were thought-provoking mind-games with a sting in the tail – ‘Which is more musical, a truck passing by a factory or a truck passing by a music school?’; ‘Are sounds just sounds or are they Beethoven?’ (ibid.: 41). More directly than in the previous two lectures, ‘Communication’ attacked elements of European culture disliked by Cage using ideas and rhetoric taken from Coomaraswamy, Suzuki, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the *Yijing*, and the Dàoist text the *Zhuāngzǐ* [*Chuang-Tzu*]. In doing so Cage intimated that his own music was one with ‘Oriental thinking’, and opposed this dialectically to the attitudes of his critics and ‘European thinking’ in general (e.g. ibid.: 46). Thus Cage effectively utilized the affirmative Orientalism of Suzuki and Coomaraswamy to further the cause of American experimental music and his own aesthetic position. As the lecture continued it would have been obvious that several of the questions were aimed directly at his critics:

Do you agree with Boulez when he says what he says? ... Why is it so difficult for so many people to listen? Why do they start talking when there is something to hear? Do they have their ears not on the sides of their heads but situated inside their mouths...? Why don’t they keep their mouths shut and their ears open? Are they stupid? And, if so, why don’t they try to hide their stupidity? Were bad manners acquired when knowledge of music was acquired? Does being musical make one automatically stupid and unable to listen? (ibid.: 48-9).

In the German translation, in the production of which Cage’s level of involvement is disputed, Cage appeared to be going even further: ‘Why don’t *you* keep *your* mouth shut and *your* ears open? Are *you* stupid? And, if so, why don’t *you* try to hide *your* stupidity?’ (Idden, 2007: 100, emphasis added). Finally, Cage ended by reading in full part five of book eleven of the *Zhuāngzǐ* in Legge’s 1891 translation. According to Legge (1959: 191,

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Idden (2007: 89-104).

348), in the story the spirit of clouds meets primeval chaos and asks him about ‘governing men, the latter tells him about the nourishing of the heart’.

In all three of his Darmstadt lectures, Cage used ideas he had found in works by Coomaraswamy, Suzuki, Huxley, Jung, and Campbell as polemical weapons. Shaped to support his aesthetic, they ultimately aided his rise to success in several ways. Yet, as will be explored in chapter six and in subsequent research, although Cage made significant changes in the ideas he borrowed, the ideology of those ideas entangled Cage’s theories in earlier discourses. The Darmstadt argument concerned the purpose of music and the ideology signified by compositional processes. In some cases, the sounds of rigorously serialist works and radically indeterminate ones were virtually indistinguishable. It was the score and the linguistic communications of the composer that revealed what distinguished them from the opposing camp. Cage’s borrowings from Asian and European religious and philosophical traditions were central to his linguistic communications, and these in turn helped define what was signified in his scoring systems. The irony was that Cage was battling one ideologically compromised system with another that was itself also compromised. To quote Huyssen (1995: 204), ‘it is precisely this inability to distinguish indeterminacy from excessive overdetermination that also reveals how close chance and indeterminacy are to the very oppressiveness of rationalization they ostensibly want to overcome’.

The reaction to Cage’s performance at Darmstadt was not kind. The resulting controversy is still numbered amongst the greatest in the history of the Darmstadt Ferienkurse. Many composers and critics took sides. Cage did find supporters, including Mauricio Kagel and Nam June Paik. And, although Cage himself did not return to Darmstadt until 32 years later, his music returned with Tudor the following year and in 1961. His stay in Europe following Darmstadt saw him performing in key cities in Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Great Britain, and Italy. In Italy he worked with Luciano Berio and Cathy Berbarian, creating *Fontana Mix* and *Aria* among other works. While he continued to experience hostile press for his music, Cage became an Italian media celebrity, appearing on TV show *Lascia o Raddoppio*. All these activities paid off. He may not have been liked by the music critics, but he was getting extensive coverage. At a time when it was difficult to hear Cage’s work in America, European interest in American experimental composition actually provided opportunities for young American composers to become acquainted with recent American experimental music (Beal, 2007: 77, 82). In the

long run, the controversy helped Cage. He became seen as leader of the experimental opposition, a figure who inspired numerous young composers around the world who did not want to conform to what had become the establishment (see, for example, Nyman, 1999). The 1961 publication of Cage's book *Silence*, which included the lectures given at Darmstadt in 1958, widened Cage's influence further (Attinello, 2007: 27, 31-3; Beal, 2007: 82-5; Charles, 1965: 144-5; Dickinson, 2006b: 3-4; Iddon, 2007: 90-4, 97-100, 103 f.n.34; Shultis, 2002: 32-9; Silverman, 2010: 125-30, 160-5).

### **1.5 1960s**

The 1960s was the decade when the *Zeitgeist* seemed most closely to entangle itself with Cage's own *Geist*. It was the decade when he became a guru, when his ideas seemed to presage the possible rather than the utopian (Brooks, 1982: 82-3). Several events and publications came together at this time that allowed Cage to be appreciated on his own terms. Before the late 1950s it was difficult for anyone outside Cage's circle to get a clear idea of his development or the scope of his ideas. His scores were not published; there were few recordings; there were no books on or by him. Although some of his earlier prepared piano works were now held in favour with critics, his more recent work was still deemed unacceptable. On 15 May 1958 the *25-Year Retrospective Concert of the Music of John Cage* was held at Town Hall, New York. Produced by Rauschenberg and Johns with Emile de Antonio, the concert played to a large, influential audience. Proceeding roughly chronologically from compositions of the 1930s to those from the year of the concert, many of the earlier works were loudly applauded. The concert climaxed with the premiere of the *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*: this was greeted with both acclaim and ferocious abuse. It was, nonetheless, a remarkable achievement that helped gain Cage greater following – not least because the concert was recorded and released as a three-LP set the following year. Another recording released the same year helped too: *Indeterminacy* featured Cage reading an entertaining series of anecdotes and Zen stories at chance determined tempos, while David Tudor performed a backdrop of music from the *Solo for Piano* and *Fontana Mix*. Pritchett (1993: 141) points out that both recordings provided critics with the possibility of hearing Cage's music in context, thus allowing Cage to be seen as an intelligent and dedicated artist rather than as a joker. Further aiding the spread of Cage's work, in June 1960 Cage was offered a publishing deal with Henmar Press/C. F. Peters that

gave his scores worldwide distribution. By 1962 and the first catalogue of his compositions, Peters had issued or were preparing to publish a considerable portion of his oeuvre.

The greatest boost to Cage's standing came in 1961 when Wesleyan University Press published *Silence*, the first volume of Cage's writings. The impact was considerable: Cage told Roger Reynolds in 1962 that 'I've had more response from the book than I've ever had from the publication of a record, the publication of music, the giving of a concert, the giving of a lecture or anything' (Cage and Reynolds, 1962: 47). Made up of his key essays and performance texts from 1940 onwards, *Silence* gave a wide audience an opportunity to hear from Cage himself. It became, in the words of Calvin Tomkins (1965: 270), an 'underground best seller': 'Intense young loyalists of the New York art scene carry it reverently to happenings... Cage's influence extends well beyond the field of contemporary music'. For many drawn to Cage in the 1960s, *Silence* was their first introduction to his work; the book was instrumental in shaping how Cage was received and understood. Because the contents of the book were presented out of chronological order, it gave the impression that Cage had been advocating roughly the same message for the previous twenty years. In fact, as we have seen, his thought was in a constant state of development.

Cage's successes of the fifties and sixties cast a particular spotlight on his religious inspirations. In the texts, interviews, and talks he was increasingly asked to give, the subject came up again and again. Giving pride of place to Zen in his list of inspirations, Cage rarely failed to mention his studies with Suzuki, or add a reference to Rāmakṛṣṇa, Coomaraswamy, or Eckhart. His phrases on the traditional purpose of the artist and the traditional function of art became well known. In turn, he was among a number of artists and writers who influenced the way Buddhism was perceived in America and Europe. As his fame began to eclipse that of his sources, his often highly individual interpretations of those sources began to inform how those sources were viewed in some quarters (Harris, 2002: 371; Patterson, 2002d: 85-86; Pritchett, 1993: 140-2; Silverman, 2010: 173-4).

With celebrity came greater pressures on Cage's time, including a 1962 tour to Japan and a 1964 world tour with the Merce Cunningham Company. Probably not uncoincidentally he seemed to lose interest in composition, or at least in spending the amount of time he formerly did in the activity of composing. *Atlas Eclipticalis* (1961-2) was made up of parts for full orchestra; derived from star maps, it took months to compose. The following year, the brief text score for *0'00''* (1962) could have been written in a

matter of minutes. *0'00''* was a logical development from the systems of *Variations I* and *II*, was entirely in keeping with Cage's preoccupation to remove the barriers between art and life, and was a pragmatic solution to the problem of having little time for composition. The score calls the work a 'solo to be performed in any way by anyone'. It only contains a few lines of words: an instruction to 'perform a disciplined action' that fulfils an obligation to others while being loudly amplified. *Variations III* (1963) and *IV* (1963) continued this trend; they are, respectively, a method of determining events for any number of people performing any actions, and a method of directing any number of performers to produce sounds and/or actions in any location (Brooks, 1982: 86; Pritchett, 1993: 128-37). The score of *Rozart Mix* (1965), for tape loops, consisted only of a brief series of communiqués between Cage and the event's organizer, Alvin Lucier. The score became a form of description of an occurrence which had already happened, a guide to future realizations sketched in broad strokes. *Variations V* (1965), *VII* (1966), and *VIII* (1967), along with *Reunion* (1967) and the *Musicircus* concept (1967), all gave notice of Cage's development of this form.

These last mentioned works focused on a new preoccupation in Cage's works: technology. He became focused on the future of the world. In particular he began thinking how technology could realize the potential of humankind globally. Basing his statements in the thought of Buckminster Fuller and Marshall McLuhan, Cage looked hopefully towards a day when everyone would have what they need (Cage, 1967a: 162; 1967b: 171). Several of his pieces of the period reflect his new interest. In particular, the mammoth multi-media event *HPSCHD* (1967-9), co-written with Lejaren Hiller, utilized computer technology to create a field of abundance. During the course of the composition the *Yijīng* was turned into a computer program. *HPSCHD* continued the course of several of Cage's pieces of the 1960s, yet in other ways it differed. For a start it was not fully indeterminate; secondly, parts of the work involved adapting music by Mozart (including the *Musikalische Würfelspiele* or *Musical Dice Game*), as well as music by Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, Gottschalk, Ives, and Schönberg. Through technology Cage could renegotiate his own relationship with art of the past, rewiring it for renewed usefulness (Brooks, 2002: 131; Cage, Hiller and Austin, 1992: 16-19; Cage and Kostelanetz, 1970: 21; Pritchett, 1993: 143-50, 152-7, 159-61; Silverman, 2010: 212-4, 216-20).

Fired by the possibilities of McLuhan's global village and Fuller's antipolitical spaceship earth, Cage took a giant lurch towards political and social polemic. His texts and

lectures had previously been chiefly concerned with music and culture. The reader of Cage's second volume of writings, 1967's *A Year From Monday*, found that the recent texts in the new volume were chiefly focussed on society. Having been resolutely apolitical in the 1950s, Cage had been encouraged by politicized friends and colleagues to engage with the radical spirit of the late sixties. In 1967-8, for Cage and others, a far-reaching radical change in society seemed possible and imminent. Cage started advocating revolution (Cage, 1968b: ix; Cage and Helms, 1997: 89). In the decade that followed, the question of how to improve the world (with or without making matters worse) occupied Cage's artistic and philosophical thinking.

In the same year as *A Year From Monday* was published he became reacquainted with the writings of the Transcendentalist writer Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau was to form an abiding interest for the remainder of Cage's life. Through the figure of the radical writer and naturalist, Cage refocused his work around ideas drenched in nature and salted with anarchist politics. Another, ultimately less lasting, influence began in the early seventies when Cage began to reference the thought of Máo Zédōng. By the time of the Chinese leader's death and the revelation of the dictator's crimes, Cage had ceased talking about Máo in glowing terms.

Despite dealing with political questions, throughout this period Cage firmly believed he was managing to stay apolitical. He did so by aligning himself with the seemingly politically neutral 'Eastern philosophy' he had previously studied while advocating Thoreauvian apolitical anarchism and Fuller-inspired ideas of the negation of government. Nevertheless, he was mistaken in believing that the nature of his engagement freed him from ideological involvement. Beyond the ideology of anarchism and Fuller's one-worldism, his ideas were still entangled with the ideological constructions and discursive formations of material he had borrowed from his studies of Suzuki's Zen, Coomaraswamy's Traditionalism, and other sources. The contradictions in his thinking did not go unnoticed. In particular, he was seen by some as reactionary in refusing either personally or through his work to partake in direct action and protest. In response, Cage argued that his most effective contribution was concentrating on the works he was producing, many of which were models for an anarchistic society. In these works there were no police and no government, and performers were called to act as responsible individuals who in their independent actions do not obstruct any other individual in their

actions. These pieces were his critical action (Cage and Charles, 1981: 225-7; Pritchett, 1993: 156, 192-4; Silverman, 2010: 268-9; Wolff and Patterson, 1994: 79, 82-3).

### **1.6 The Seventies to the Nineties**

Norman O. Brown (1988: 104) and David Patterson (1996: 26-9) both point out that by the 1970s Cage had become quite different to the person he had been in the forties and fifties. He cultivated an air of openness, consideration, and calm; he let his hair and beard grow shaggy, and adopted a uniform of practical denims. From a man of the city he seemed to have become a creature of the backwoods. Rhizomes of organic rather than abstract scientific nature sprouted through his works. Thoreau certainly influenced Cage in this regard. As William Brooks (2002: 130, 135) points out, Thoreau became an important example for Cage, not only for what he said, but because he had managed to integrate the present and the past, art and life, and cultural, philosophical, social, political, and environmental concerns in a non-reactionary manner. Thoreau was unconstrained by the dictates of modernism: he had no qualms in using whatever was *useful*, and did so for progressive purposes. He empowered Cage to do the same. The earlier Cage was quite different. He had been single-minded and intractable, feeling keenly the necessity to keep the barrier of modernity between himself and the past. As Kyle Gann (2010: 33) put it: 'He was always persuasive... but his manner of persuasion changed'. His new approach was to eschew argument and avoid negative criticism; he tried to support, not to negate. Instead of submitting Beethoven to a dressing-down, he asserted that even music he deemed useless could be enjoyed.

In the early seventies Cage started to discuss the acceptability of contradiction, perhaps a necessary step when so much of his earlier writing partook of the argumentative, negative criticism he now refused to countenance. The thought of his younger self travelled along with him and he refused to negate it. Contradiction, he thought, invited one towards a Zen understanding of the nature of reality. It allowed him to remain optimistic about the future of society even though, as the seventies wore on, events in society and the world were beginning to make him feel distinctly pessimistic. Hope and revolution dwindled, and did so further during the eighties.

Contradiction also allowed him to return to religious texts and ideas even though from 1969 onwards he also stated on several occasions that 'God is Man's stupidest idea' (Cage, 1969a: 70; Cage and Duckworth, 1989: 30; Kostelanetz, 2003: 155). Thoreau had

been interested in what was known at the time as Hinduism. It is noticeable that Cage returned to using Sanskrit religious terms and mentioning Hindu and Buddhist philosophy around the time that Thoreau became central to his thought (see for example Cage and Reynolds, 1979: 573-94). The various Asian aesthetic, religious, and philosophical concepts he had previously encountered and used had never completely left Cage's thought, but they had been less prominent in the 1960s. Elements of the rhetoric began to return to his pronouncements in the early seventies, one spur being his reading at some point before 1971 of *Neti Neti* (1955) by L. C. Beckett<sup>12</sup> (Cage and Charles, 1981: 93). He later described Beckett's book – which combined elements of Christian mysticism, Suzuki, Krishnamurti, and Jung with contemporary scientific theories – as a work 'of which my life could be described as an illustration' (Cage, 1988b: 220).

Cage's music was not the same as it had been in the forties and fifties either. With *HPSCHD* and *Cheap Imitation* (1969), Cage partially returned to creating works which would sound recognizably similar from performance to performance. The latter work, adapted from a piece by Satie, used standard notation and even sounded melodic. This did not stop Cage from continuing to create indeterminate graphic and text scores, but presented him with new possibilities. This new approach was abundantly illustrated in the remarkable fecundity of the *Song Books (Solos for Voice 3-92)* (1970), the 89 individual parts of which variously utilized conventional notation, numerous styles of graphic notation, and text instructions. Some of the pieces were theatrical, some purely musical; the *Solo for Voice 58* consisted of eighteen experimental rāgas<sup>13</sup>. Satie and Thoreau provided a running theme throughout the work. It was a recapitulation of his work of the previous two decades, but also a glimpse at the changes in his methods ahead.

During the previous decade, Cage had gained recognition as a composer of international significance. He therefore received more commissions than previously, and some of these came with scoring requirements that necessitated a pragmatic response. The *Etudes Australes* for piano (1974-5), *Etudes Boreales* for cello and piano (1978), and

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<sup>12</sup> Penname of Lucy Katherine Beckett, later Countess Czernin, later the Hon. Mrs Lucille Frost (1884-1979). See Franks, 1976; Humphreys, 1971: 81. Beckett's extraordinary life has never been properly documented. However, on Beckett and D. H. Lawrence and his circle see Lawrence, 1979-2001: 3:711-2, 718-9; 4:21-2, 36, 43, 367, 435, 447.

<sup>13</sup> On the composition of the piece see Brooks (2007b), and on Cage's rāgas in comparison to traditional Indian rāgas see Cuni (2007).

*Freeman Etudes* for violin (1977-80, 1989-90) used star charts as chance devices to compose notated music. *Apartment House 1776* (1976) contained historical music: four singers performing religious songs from the Native American, African-American, Sephardic Jewish, and Protestant traditions, and music adapted in the style of *Cheap Imitation* from early American choral music. However, he did not discard his previous acoustic and compositional interests. *Score (40 Drawings by Thoreau) and 23 Parts* (1974) and *Renga* (1976) for 78 players both utilized drawings by Thoreau. Placed into boxes with horizontal space equalling duration and vertical space equalling relative pitch, the drawings are then to be played by the assembled forces. After the former work a recording of dawn at Stony Point is heard, attesting to his continued acknowledgment of the interest of environmental sound. Ambient sound from Cage's home also features in *Etcetera* (1973) and, at a time when Cage had returned to living in New York, *Etcetera 2/4 Orchestras* (1986) (Brooks, 1982: 86; 2002: 130-1, 135; C. Brown, 2007: 339; Cage and Retallack, 1996: xxx-xxxi; Cage and Reynolds, 1979: 584-5; Pritchett, 1993: 4-5, 156-7, 159, 164-6, 173-4, 194; Revill, 1992: 247-8; Silverman, 2010: 267-8, 274, 395-7, 403).

The resonances of nature, and thus Thoreau, flowed through many of Cage's works of this period. *Child of Tree* (1975), a solo, and *Branches* (1976), for any number of players, are both text scores for percussionists using organic materials. Both involve cacti (living or dead), dried bark, seed pods and other plant materials. Amplified by contact microphones, the player creates sounds by improvising with the materials. Cage had struggled to find ways to use improvisation because of its potential for players to rely on their likes and dislikes, and thus their egos. In these pieces, the fragility of the instruments led Cage to a new methodology. Organic materials also featured in *Inlets* (1977) for twelve water-filled amplified conch shells and the sound of fire. Nature conceptually resonated through *Litany for the Whale* for two voices (1980), the *Ryoanji* series (1983-5), and *But What about the Noise of Crumpling Paper Which He Used to Do in order to Paint the Series of "Papiers froissés" or Tearing up Paper to Make "Papiers déchirés"?* *Arp Was Stimulated by Water (Sea, Lake, and Flowing Waters like Rivers)*, *Forests* for percussion (1985). Finally, nature (as the physical world) sounded in a further group of related works. Cage's 'municipal compositions' *49 Waltzes for the Five Boroughs* (1977) and *A Dip in the Lake: Ten Quicksteps, Sixty-One Waltzes, and Fifty-Six Marches for Chicago and Vicinity* (1978) are made up of lists of, respectively, 147 locations in New York and 427 locations in Chicago. The instructions are open: the score states they are for performer(s) or listener(s)

or record maker(s). Neither score has received adequate attention in literature on Cage<sup>14</sup>. Not necessarily tied to the institutionalized world of the concert hall, or to the limitations of owning or having learnt to play an instrument, both pieces can empower *listeners* through encouraging them to interact with sound and the ever-changing multiplicity of their environment. Recording sound at randomly derived locations (in this case those mentioned in *Finnegans Wake*) provided two of the four sound layers of another of Cage's key works of the period, the 'Irish Circus on *Finnegans Wake*' *Roaratorio* produced in 1979. Cage spent a month in Ireland in 1979 visiting locations and collecting sounds; other locations were much further flung, requiring him to solicit recordings of locations from friends and institutions worldwide. A final incarnation of Cage's municipal compositions came in 1991 with *Project for Hanau Squatters/Five Hanau Silence* (Brooks, 2002: 134; Cage, 1979a: 12; Cage and Retallack, 1996: 244, 344; Kuhn, 2010: 3-4; Nicholls, 2007: 93; Pritchett, 1993: 183, 189, 194-9; Silverman, 2010: 314-5, 396-7).

Cage's published writings of this period focused predominantly on language experiments, including his characteristic mesostics and non-syntactical 'writings through'. These were published, along with further instalments of the *Diary: How To Change the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)* in the collections *M* (1973), *Empty Words* (1979), and *X* (1983). Cage's final major literary work was *I-VI* (1990). Made up of a long series of mesostics created using chance operations, it formed the publication of Cage's Charles Eliot Norton Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1988. Cage also made a mark in the field of fine art, producing series of visual works from 1969 until his death<sup>15</sup>.

In his final decade, Cage was even found in an opera house. *Européras* (1-5) (1987-1990) entirely consisted of material from nineteenth-century European operas performed in overlapping chance-derived configurations. His final compositional works were the numerous entries in the series of 'number' or 'time-bracket' pieces composed between

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<sup>14</sup> Nicholls (2007: 94) and Brooks (2002: 134) are among the few Cage scholars to discuss these works; Brooks (ibid.) and Silverman (2010: 314-8) valuably discuss the pieces in relation to *Roaratorio*. Also see the beautiful 1994-5 video realization of the piece by Don Gillespie and Roberta Friedman which was released on DVD in 2008 by Mode Records (Mode 204). Although related to earlier compositions such as *4'33"* and *Variations IV*, Cage's municipal compositions might also be seen as a reaction against the authoritarian aesthetic implications of R. Murray Schafer's theories of soundscape as found in *The Tuning of the World* (1977). Cage's theory of silence, along with the mysticism he had promoted, were part of the basis for Schafer's pleas for aural cleanliness (cf. Kostelanetz, 2003: 243-5; Schafer, 1994: 5, 84, 256, 258-9).

<sup>15</sup> On Cage's visual art see K. Brown (2000), Cage (2009), and Cage (2010).

1987 and 1992. Sharing similarities in notation and composition, the works took their names from the number of performers the piece was written for (e.g. *Four*), followed by a superscript number (if appropriate) denoting their order in the series of works composed for that number of forces (e.g. *Four*<sup>3</sup>). Their sound varies from quiet, sober, and distinctly Feldmanesque, to, on occasion, unpredictable and explosive. They share a fragile beauty of disarming strength. Shortly before his eightieth birthday, on 12 August 1992 Cage died after suffering a massive stroke. His legacy was justly celebrated.

### **1.7 Of Hummingbirds and Sacred Cows**

Cage had an ambiguous relationship with linguistic communication. His music largely eschewed communicative meaning, many of his scores confound conventional musicological analysis; words, whether Cage's or others, were therefore vital in establishing the purpose and objectives of his works. This was still the case in his later years: even though his publications chiefly contained abstract language experiments, he continued to communicate his views through hundreds of interviews. These interviews appeared scattered in numerous publications and pamphlets, and in two book-length texts: *Pour Les Oiseaux / For the Birds* by Daniel Charles (1976/1981) and *Musicage* (1996) by Joan Retallack. Excerpts from earlier interviews were also collected by Richard Kostelanetz to form *Conversing With Cage* (1987/2003).

The peculiarities of the production of Cage's texts have led to a number of issues for Cage studies. A problematic result of the way texts such as *Silence* and *Conversing With Cage* were compiled was to form the impression of an Ur-Cage divorced from temporality. Both included texts written in different periods and presented out of chronological sequence. The development of Cage's thought was therefore hidden. To compound matters, as various scholars have duly mentioned, Cage masterfully created his own reception history. His interviews were equally problematic: skilfully retelling anecdotes and evading difficult questions, Cage normally gave an interviewer only as much information as suited him. Partly because of this, and partly because, as Cage admitted, his memory was not the surest, one of the most pressing tasks of Cage studies was to confirm the sequence of events in Cage's life. It was also necessary to provide a historical and contextual framework that could support research into specific areas of Cage's work across the arts.

The study of John Cage started during Cage's lifetime. The first people to study his life and work were personal acquaintances and supporters of Cage. This was necessary as

Cage was still not acceptable to some critics or to some university music departments. Richard Kostelanetz, while not a conventional academic, was the first to collect and edit texts by and about Cage to further understanding of his life and work. Having started writing about Cage in 1964, Kostelanetz went on to produce the 'documentary monograph' *John Cage* (1970), *Conversing with Cage* (1987), *John Cage Writer: Selected Texts* (1993), *Writings About John Cage* (1993), and various other more general works which dealt with Cage alongside other cultural figures. The first academic monograph solely on Cage's music, Paul Griffiths's *John Cage*, appeared in 1981. Two other significant collections appeared during Cage's lifetime: Gena and Brent's *A John Cage Reader* (1982) and Fleming and Duckworth's *John Cage at Seventy-Five* (1989). The first biography of Cage, David Revill's *The Roaring Silence* (1992), was useful but overly reliant on Cage's own version of events. *John Cage: Composed in America* (1994), edited by Marjorie Perloff and Charles Junkerman, included papers delivered at a 1992 conference and festival centred on Cage held at Stanford University in January 1992. It pointed towards the wide-ranging and detailed study of Cage's life, work, and thought that was beginning to emerge (Cage and Dickinson, 1987: 29; Dickinson, 2006b: 1; Hamm, 2002: 2; Kostelanetz, 1996: xi, 3-4; Patterson, 1996: 3-4, 6-11; Williams, 2002: 240).

A significant number of works appeared in the ten years after Cage's death. James Pritchett's *The Music of John Cage* (1993) provided the first thorough overview of Cage's music and its development. David Patterson's groundbreaking doctoral thesis *Appraising the Catchwords, c.1942-1959: John Cage's Asian-Derived Rhetoric and the Historical Reference of Black Mountain College* (1996) went a long way to providing a reliable chronology of Cage's activities during its period of coverage while unveiling the discrepancies in Cage's account of his Asian influences. *Writings through John Cage's Music, Poetry, and Art* (2001), edited by David W. Bernstein and Christopher Hatch, included papers delivered at a conference on Cage held at Mills College in 1995 in addition to new papers addressing themes emerging from the conference. Two useful collections appeared in 2002: *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, edited by David Nicholls, addressed many aspects of Cage's life and thought; while David Patterson's *John Cage: Music, Philosophy, and Intention, 1933-1950* contained papers concentrating purely on Cage's early years. In 2003, Paul van Emmerik's website *A John Cage Compendium* launched. Providing a complete bibliography of Cage's writings, music, and art works, and supplemented by a detailed chronology of Cage's life, it has become indispensable for

research on Cage. Lastly, several monographs have in differing ways filled gaps: Christopher Shultis's *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition* (1996) discussed Cage in relation to Thoreau and Emerson, while William Fetterman's *John Cage's Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances* (1996) considered the visual aspects of Cage performances. More recently, David Nicholls's *John Cage* (2007) provided a welcome short academic biography of Cage and his work; Kyle Gann's *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"* (2010) presented an up-to-date synthesis of current knowledge of Cage's most famous piece; and Kenneth Silverman's biography *Begin Again* (2010) unearthed some previously unpublished facets of Cage's life, though the author's interpretations of many of Cage's musical works were somewhat misleading.

The study of John Cage's life and work is far from complete. Cage lived a long, remarkable, and busy life. Furthermore, there are other factors which make the task of assessing his life and work difficult. One significant problem with Cage's writing and comments in interviews is what one could call their academic unreliability. What Cage presented as fact often cannot be accepted unquestioned; nevertheless, it often has been, and has then been reproduced again and again in texts about the composer. Carolyn Brown, who first met Cage in the early fifties and was introduced by him to many of his interests at that time, wrote of Cage thus:

Cage was a true eclectic: he borrowed ideas as easily as he changed his socks... John took in their ideas like a hummingbird flitting at high speed from flower to flower sipping precious nectar on the wing. In his own unique and perhaps intellectually outrageous fashion, he made their ideas his own, now blunderingly, now brilliantly synthesizing – but always with an ingenuous freshness and spontaneity. I think he often forgot where a particular idea came from... furthermore he enthusiastically believed every word he uttered (C. Brown, 2007: 38).

A second problem is that Cage's words were often vague or open to a variety of interpretations. Cage himself admitted, 'I'm not a scholar. I know what I mean when I say something or when I write something. But sooner or later I happen to forget what I had in mind' (Cage and Charles, 1981: 23). Both of these problems are matters which the Cage scholar has to negotiate.

With some notable exceptions the texts listed above, while necessary and hugely valuable, have generally affirmed Cage's thought. They have critically questioned his remembrance of events, but rarely his techniques, aesthetics or philosophy. Nor have they adequately addressed the implications of his 'hummingbird' borrowing. A certain balance has been missing. Reviewing Silverman's biography of Cage, composer John Adams wrote in the *New York Times*:

The problem with so much writing about Cage is the difficulty of finding critical balance. He has gone from being unfairly considered a fool and a charlatan to an equally unreasonable status as sacred cow. Criticizing Cage's aesthetic doctrines is by now a perilous venture because his defenders have become so skilled at turning any questioning around and using it as proof of the critic's poverty of awareness (Adams, 2010).

Twenty years after Cage's death, and a hundred years after his birth, the iconoclast has become an unimpeachable icon; the anti-capitalist anarchist has become a business concern (witness, for example, the John Cage diary with pages adorned with his slogans); the composer who hated recordings is endlessly recorded: Cage has been made *safe*. Probably there were always these contradictions in Cage's practice. Cage seemed to recognize this, saying things like 'Get rid of copyright (this text is copyright)' (Cage, 1965b: 17). But without Cage around to pragmatically diffuse such contradictions with romantic irony, his legacy has become ever more institutionalized. There have been studies over the past thirty years that have sought to uncover the problematics of Cage's strategies; nevertheless, the implications of those studies have often been ignored. Engaging with Cage's ideas and legacy in a critical manner is not necessarily the same as mounting an attack on him; it can also be an attempt to keep him relevant by causing engagement with his ideas rather than passive acceptance of them. It can help free him from the straight-jacket of sainthood.

### **1.8 Is There 'Trouble In the John Cage Studies Paradise'?**

The Gautama Buddha instructs me to walk away from illness. But he wasn't attached to a drip (Derek Jarman, 1995: 111).

As the tide of received opinion receded from the revolutionary hope of the late sixties, Cage was in danger of being beached on the sands of utopia. In 1982 William Brooks pointed out

that, compared to his role as a counter-culture guru in the sixties, Cage was now in a rather different position: he had become the elder statesman of an arts scene far less daring than it had been twenty years before. ‘Abbie Hoffman has turned himself in; Jerry Rubin’s getting rich. John Lennon is dead... The transcendent lunacy of an evening with Nam June Paik has been supplanted by the transcendent consistency of one with Steve Reich’ (Brooks, 1982: 82). More widely in America, neo-conservative forces had gained the upper hand. Opening his survey of political and cultural changes in American politics and society from the end of the sixties to the eighties, Philip Jenkins (2006: 1) imagined that if someone had fallen asleep at the start of the period only to awake mid-eighties they would have been ‘startled by how thoroughly conservative interests seem to have triumphed’. Cage continued to resurrect the spirit of the counterculture in performances; nevertheless, as these performances were often now in the bastions of high culture, or at large-scale festivals in his honour, he could be seen to have become an establishment figure. The possibility of actual anarchy receded: his pieces became mimetic performances of anarchic society that were safe for the concert hall. Disenchanted listeners were more likely to snore than riot.

Times and theories were changing, Cage’s thought was not; or at least not changing at the pace it had between the thirties and the seventies. Perhaps unsurprisingly, between composing, making art works, writing, cooking macrobiotically, and indoor gardening, and dealing with old age, ill health, relationships, and the endless commitments and calls for time that are the lot of an international celebrity, Cage was not spending a great deal of time researching and contemplating new directions in radical thought (cf. Retallack, 1994: 275-7). Cage’s pronouncements on the positive nature of unemployment and his refusal to see it as a bad thing looked unfeeling and reactionary in the climate of the eighties, particularly as he was starting to be well remunerated for his activities. His scores were printed in formal editions in the same covers as music by the classical greats; even his signature had become a logo.

In his essay ‘John Cage: Silence and Silencing’ (1997), Douglas Kahn wondered whether Cage’s silence did not also silence others. Wasn’t the original development of his theory problematic because it focused on the silencing of populist noise? While Cage claimed his music was a metaphor for an anarchic society (Cage, 1993a: 197), how anarchic was it really? Was it, as Ian Pepper (1997: 44) suggested, ‘an individualistic anarchism of the sort that often threatens to veer toward a reactionary libertarianism’?

Similarly, Sara Heimbecker (2011) questioned the social politics of the anarchic experience promised by *HPSCHD*. It claimed to be a space for everybody, but was it not instead ‘a uniformly chaotic space, undifferentiated, which catered to a homogenous, elite audience’? (2011: 214). The nature of Cage’s dislike of jazz was theorized by George E. Lewis in his landmark essay ‘Improvised Music After 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives’ (1996). Did Cage’s prejudices against Afrological improvisational styles reveal an all too familiar European and European-American bias against African American musics? ‘[I]t is clear that Cage has drawn very specific boundaries, not only as to which musics are relevant to his own musicality but as to which musics suit his own taste’ Lewis argued (1996: 99). In addition, Cage was unwilling to associate with the gay rights movement, or discuss his sexuality, despite his well-known long-term relationship with Merce Cunningham. Why? Cage continued to suggest that ‘every day was a beautiful day’, but maybe it wasn’t if you were living with AIDS or the prejudice that surrounded being HIV+. Caroline A. Jones (1993: 665) reported that at the 1992 Stanford University Cage conference, ‘one interlocutor admonished Cage at a public forum that “silence equals death,” echoing the slogan of the AIDS activists’. Cage shot back, problematically in the light of researches into Zen history which were emerging around the same time, “in Zen, Life equals Death”<sup>16</sup>. As shown by Sor-Ching Low (2006), even Cage’s knowledge of Zen doctrines was open to question (Revill, 1992: 236-8; Silverman, 2010: 324-5, 341, 349-50, 358-9, 364, 376, 391-2 399-400, 403-6, 410).

Cage was still strongly associated with his statement:

Our intention is to affirm this life, not to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply to wake up to the very life we’re living, which is so excellent once one gets one’s mind and one’s desires out of its way (1957a: 95).

In a farsighted article from 1981, Yvonne Rainer wondered if Cage’s blind optimism and refusal to engage in critical thinking did not sabotage what was most useful in his music: its ability to make us ‘more readily awaken to the ways in which we have been led to believe that this life is so excellent, just, and right’ (Rainer, 1981: 67-8). Rainer also put her finger on a problem within the nascent field of Cage studies: its reluctance to problematize Cage

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<sup>16</sup> It should, however, be pointed out that Cage did donate to fundraising for AIDS research and to the Gay Men’s Health Crisis (Cage, Anderson, and Coe, 1992; Silverman, 2010: 365). The researches into Zen history alluded to are mentioned in 6.5 below and will be discussed in subsequent research.

and his strategies (ibid.: 68). Thirty years later her call is far from answered. In 1995, at the ‘Here Comes Everybody’ conference on Cage at Mills College, Moira Roth echoed Rainer, questioning why Cage studies avoided problematizing Cage. ‘Five Stories about St. John, Seven Stories about St. Pauline, Surely There is Trouble in the John Cage Studies Paradise, and Readings from Today’s Headlines of the *New York Times*’ combined inspiring reminiscences of Cage, equally inspiring stories concerning Pauline Oliveros, nine statements sharply questioning the hagiographical tone of the conference, and the day’s headlines. Fifteen years later, Roth’s statements are still highly relevant; the majority remain unaddressed by Cage studies:

1. I find canonization of any artistic persona not only deeply disturbing but deeply questionable.
2. I find equally unconvincing the notion of the all-liberating and ‘above-it-all’ avant-garde.
3. Mostly, I am concerned with what is erased in order to erect these fictions.
4. I see John Cage as an extraordinarily inventive, interesting, durable, seductive, charming, lovable and controlling figure, confined and focused – as are we all – by his various contexts...
5. Not all of his contexts have been aired at this conference. Notably missing among them is his relationship to gay culture in his life, work, and career...
6. I am equally surprised by the presentation of him for the most part as being – I don’t know how else to describe it – above gender...
7. Although I abstractly love the conference’s title, ‘Here Comes Everybody’ – it’s so festive – I don’t think everybody has either come here literally, or metaphorically, or that Cage has indeed things to offer ‘everybody.’ In the desire to present Cage as a universal genius, there has been too little recognition of his own cultural focus, tastes and biases...
8. ...I’ve always thought a love affair with a saint would have rather a lot of drawbacks – too many relics around, not to mention devotees – and that flawed human beings with an edge (and Cage certainly had an edge) are more interesting. This ‘edginess’ of Cage seems to be disappearing with his elevation to sainthood.
9. ... I myself would never turn to Cage’s sense of “politics” for guidance, anymore than I would ask a blind man to direct me across a busy thoroughfare (Roth, 1995: 140-1).

Although Roth's presentation was not published in the book that developed from the conference (Bernstein and Hatch, 2001), her critique of the conference's lack of discussion of Cage's sexuality was addressed: the book contained Jonathan Katz's trailblazing essay 'John Cage's Queer Silence'. The present thesis and the larger project of which it is part, while they do not claim to be able to address all of the issues identified above, have been particularly inspired by the critiques of Rainer and Roth and duly acknowledge their inspiration.

## **2. Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy**

### **Introduction**

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has frequently been mentioned in Ceylonian studies; nevertheless, the depiction of his life has often been skewed towards making him into a figure sympathetic to Cage's ideals. The aim of this chapter is to present a representative discussion of Coomaraswamy's life and thought not exclusively limited by Cage's interests.

### **2.1 Early Life and Young Adulthood**

The multicultural direction of Coomaraswamy's mature thought was presaged by his background. His father was Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy, a member of one of Ceylon's most powerful political families, whose career combined law, politics, and scholarship. Already wealthy, he was also financially shrewd and managed to amass a significant fortune during his life. Qualifying as a lawyer in 1856, he left Ceylon for Europe in 1862. Working against the racial prejudices of the British Empire, he fought for the right of Asian subjects of the Empire to be able to practice law in Great Britain. He succeeded and in 1863 was called to the Bar. Returning to Ceylon in 1865, his career continued to flourish; on the occasion of his second stay in Britain from 1874 to c.1875, he was knighted.

During Mutu's time in Britain, his social polish, financial acumen, and determination opened the doors of high society. His friends included Prime Ministers Viscount Palmerston and Benjamin Disraeli. Disraeli was so taken with Mutu Coomaraswamy that he fictionalized him into a character (Kusinara) in one of his final novels. The novel remained unfinished at Disraeli's death; however, the text that remains contains a brief though fascinating portrait of Coomaraswamy's father (see Disraeli, 1929: 2: 1521-50). Another friend was Sir Walter Trevelyan, Pre-Raphaelite supporter and friend of John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle. Mutu is known to have met with Ruskin, as well as Algernon Charles Swinburne, at least once. Such meetings are of note due to the interest Ananda Coomaraswamy would take in the legacy of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites (Lipsey, 1977c: 7-9; Morrell, 2004; Ripley Hall, 1974: 107; Singam, 1977b: 8-9; 1977d: 17; Singh, 1974: 268; Wilson, 1966). It was through another friend, the American Unitarian minister Moncure Daniel Conway, that Mutu Coomaraswamy met Elizabeth Clay Beeby, the future Lady Coomaraswamy. She was also wealthy, the daughter of a prosperous Kent

family who had made their money in colonial India. Conway was the minister of the South Place Chapel in London; Mutu lectured at the chapel on occasions as well as attending functions. At one such function he met Elizabeth, a frequent member of the congregation at Conway's non-denominational services (Conway, 1906: 153; Singam, 1977d: 17).

Conway led a fascinating life on both sides of the Atlantic. In America he had rebelled against the values of his slave-owning Virginia family to become a passionate abolitionist. He had significant links to the New England Transcendentalists and for a while lived in Concord. There he walked the banks of Walden Pond with Thoreau, and cemented long-standing friendships with Emerson and Bronson Alcott. In 1863 he left for London, and was forced to stay there after a daring attempt to broker peace between the Unionist north and the Confederate South backfired (Conway, 1904: 1: 140-1, 365-6, 412-26; Davidson, 1880: 241-52; d'Entremont, 2004; W. S. Smith, 1967: 107-8, 110-2). In London he combined ministering at South Place with the role of British literary agent for Walt Whitman, Louisa May Alcott, and Mark Twain. He was also a writer himself. His most notable effort was the *Sacred Anthology: A Book of Ethnical Scriptures* (1874), which provided a quasi-Bible for non-conformist rationalists. The aim of the work was to pick the most relevant and least superstitious portions of wisdom from the sacred texts of the world, fitting them together to uphold the mixture of Transcendentalist mysticism and progressive ideology that flowed through his sermons (Conway, 1874: v-vi). He quickly built a loyal congregation and a substantial reputation. His mix of artistic, sacred, and rationalist interests led him to forge friendships with Friedrich Max Müller, John Ruskin, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, and Edward Burne-Jones (Budd, 1977: 221-3; Conway, 1904: 1: 143; Davidson, 1880: 242; d'Entremont, 2004; W. S. Smith, 1967: xiii-xvi, 111-2). Again, there are notable links between Coomaraswamy's later interests and the circles his parents mixed in. Nevertheless, there was one key difference. Mutu and Elizabeth seem to have held progressive beliefs and were keen to associate with Conway, one of London's leading free-thinkers. Ananda Coomaraswamy came to take a very different line.

Mutu and Elizabeth Coomaraswamy were married in 1875. The marriage was blessed by the Archbishop of Canterbury. A year later the couple moved to Ceylon; on 22 August 1877, Elizabeth gave birth to a son. They named him Ananda Kentish – his middle name made reference to his mother's home county (Lipsey, 1977c: 9-10; Ripley Hall, 1974: 107; Singh, 1974: 268). Under a year later they decided to return to Britain for a period. There were a number of reasons for their decision. Disraeli, amongst other friends, had

encouraged Mutu to stand for the British parliament. Elizabeth wished to visit her family. Further, Singh (1974: 268-9) suggests, the attitudes of the British colonial community in Ceylon did not make it conducive to stay. Elizabeth and the infant Ananda left for England in April 1879. Mutu made plans to follow; however, on 4 May of the same year, the day of his departure, he suddenly died. His wife and son remained in England, settling in a rural cottage in southern England with Elizabeth's sister and mother. Until the age of twelve, Ananda was home-schooled by his mother, aunt, and grandmother. Little information has come to light about this period in his life. He had a sheltered, albeit somewhat eccentric childhood. All three of his relatives were strict vegetarians who grew their own food. Elizabeth and her sister dabbled in spiritualism and psychic healing and conducted scientific experiments on the kitchen table. His mother continued to hold progressive views and to actively support various causes. What religious beliefs he was brought up with are not known (Lipsey, 1977c: 10; Ripley Hall, 1974: 108; Singam, 1977d: 19, 21).

In 1899 Coomaraswamy's education became more formalized when he began boarding at Wycliffe College, an elite 'public school' in Gloucestershire. He did well, but classmates recalled that he was taunted due to his ethnic heritage (Gane, 1974: 245; Hastings, 1974: 247). He particularly excelled at the sciences and went on to study geology and botany at University College, London. After graduating with a First in 1900 he used part of his significant inherited wealth to fund a year-long geological survey of Ceylon. His work was taken note of and, back in England, he was chosen to lead an official mineralogical survey of the island (Lipsey, 1977c: 11). While in England he met his first wife, Ethel. She would later become better known as the weaver and handicraft expert Ethel Mairet (see Coatts, 1983).

Ethel and Ananda shared a passion for geology and, it can be presumed, the Arts and Crafts Movement. When Coomaraswamy started writing on cultural, artistic, and social matters it was clear that his views on those subjects had been strongly shaped by the writings of Ruskin and Morris. Indeed, the theories of both men were essential to the direction of Coomaraswamy's life and thought. At what point he began to read their works is unclear; however, it can be presumed that he would have been exposed to their ideas from a relatively early age. His parents had moved in circles that included Ruskin and patrons and friends of the Pre-Raphaelites. In addition, at least one other member of his family had connections to Morris's circle. Coomaraswamy's older cousin Ponnambalam Arunachalam was a close friend of the socialist campaigner and back-to-the-land 'simple

life' pioneer Edward Carpenter, as well as being a keen reader of Ruskin<sup>17</sup> (S. Rowbotham, 2007: 222). Coomaraswamy had spent time with his cousins on their trips to England and on the two occasions he had visited Ceylon. It would thus seem unlikely that it was only Ethel's involvement with the Arts and Crafts Movement that resulted in his interest.

Ananda and Ethel were married in 1902 and left for Ceylon early in 1903. However, they may already have had plans focused on art rather than geology. Ethel knew C. R. Ashbee, one of the leading lights of the later Arts and Crafts Movement, through her brother. Ashbee ran the Guild of Handicraft based in East London; the Guild moved to the Gloucestershire town of Chipping Campden in the year of the marriage of the Coomaraswamys. Since its inception the Guild had been 'an endeavour towards the teaching of Ruskin and Morris', that followed 'the prophetic inspiration of [Ruskin] in his plea for the relation of Art to life and to industry', and the 'practical example of [Morris] in his hand to hand fight with British Commercialism'<sup>18</sup> (Ashbee, 1901: 49). Either before they left or in the first year or two of their stay in Ceylon, the Coomaraswamys decided to live near Ashbee's Guild on their return. Ashbee found a property he thought was suitable: a ruined chapel dating from the early Norman period. At considerable personal expense, Coomaraswamy funded its repair and conversion into a stunning Arts and Crafts home (see C. R. Ashbee, 1907). Its medieval trappings were lovingly repaired and refurbished by the craftsmen of the Guild. While Ashbee's craftsmen were busy with the renovations, the Coomaraswamys were discovering the crafts of Ceylon (Coatts, 1983: 11-4, 20; Crawford, 2005: 16-7, 140-1; Crouch, 1984: 55-6; Lipsey, 1977c: 7, 11, 14, 259; MacCarthy, 1981: 15; Mitter, 1984: 50; Singam, 1977b: 10; 1977c: 4).

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<sup>17</sup> See Arunácalam and Carpenter, 1927; Carpenter, 1903; S. Rowbotham, 2007: 220-31. On Carpenter see S. Rowbotham, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> On the background to the work of Morris, the origins of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and the history of the Guild of Handicraft see F. Ashbee, 2003; Blakesley, 2006; Crawford, 2005; MacCarthy, 1981; 1994. A wonderful source, consulted by the present author in gaining a picture of Coomaraswamy's life at the Guild, is the Ashbee Journals (1884-1941); the 44 volumes are in the archives of King's College, Cambridge. I would like to thank King's College Library for granting me access.

## 2.2 The Perfect Morris Home

The Mineralogical Survey lasted for three years. Among its achievements, it located a new mineral which was named Thorianite<sup>19</sup>. It also earned Coomaraswamy his doctorate (Singam, 1977d: 12). The Coomaraswamys were based at Kandy, the ancient Sinhalese capital. Although Coomaraswamy performed his work diligently, he increasingly dedicated his effort to the preservation of the arts and crafts of Ceylon.

Coomaraswamy's first publication on non-geological matters appeared in 1903; it was a decidedly Ruskinian letter to the *New Age* on the labourer in industrial societies. He continued writing, almost always on subjects close to the hearts of Morris or Ruskin. As he travelled through the highlands of Ceylon conducting his work, he was observing the workings of European influence on traditional ways of life. His first three pamphlets were polemical reports on village craftsmen, traditional dress, and the protection of ancient buildings from modern additions. Each echoes Morris or Ruskin in style and content; *An Open Letter to the Kandyan Chiefs* (1905) ends with a long quotation from Morris (Brow, 1999: 77; Coomaraswamy, 1957: 7). His other non-geological publication of that year would appear exceedingly strange without the Morris connection. This was the 1905 publication of a translation Coomaraswamy had made of the Icelandic *Völuspa*. Morris had been largely responsible for popularizing Norse legends and the Icelandic Sagas in the English speaking world (MacCarthy, 1994: 290-2). These old texts and the culture they represented held a distinct appeal for Coomaraswamy. Shortly before leaving for Ceylon, Coomaraswamy had joined the Viking Club of University College, London (Ashbee Journals, 12: 23 December 1902). For the second edition of his translation of the *Völuspa*, he even tracked down Morris's Icelandic collaborator Eiríkr Magnússon to check his work (Crouch, 2002: 21-2; Lipsey, 1977c: 260).

A further venture Coomaraswamy undertook in 1905 was the founding of the Ceylon Social Reform Society. With honorary members including Theosophical Society leader Henry Olcott and future leader Annie Besant, British MP Dadabhai Naoroji, and Coomaraswamy's mother, the Society set out to educate the locals in dress, temperance, diet, sanitation, and, above all, the preservation of traditional ways of life (Ceylon Social

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<sup>19</sup> It has often been claimed that it was Coomaraswamy who discovered and named the mineral. In fact, he appears to have only played a supporting role in its discovery (see Crouch, 1984: 56; Dunstan and Blake, 1905: 253-54).

Reform Society, 1906a: 119; 1906b: 119). Their manifesto made clear the nature of what they believed to be the chief problem facing Ceylon:

Eastern men and women who have broken with all natural traditions of their own and who do not realise that it is not only undesirable, but impossible for them to consistently adopt the outlook on life of Western nations, suited to quite another climate and to others races of men (Ceylon Social Reform Society, 1906b: ii).

The Society had little success. According to Nira Wickramasinghe (2006: 69), Coomaraswamy's 'syncretic ideals remained confined to the literati'.

Despite this setback, Coomaraswamy continued his cultural mission. Assisted by Ethel, he made detailed studies of Sinhalese craft traditions. The project – which eventually became his first book, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* – involved studying, photographing, and sketching traditional symbolism, architecture, woodwork, stonework, sculpture, painting, ivory and bone work, metalwork, earthenware, weaving and embroidery (Coatts, 1982: 18-9; Lipsey, 1977c: 26). By 1906 his work on the mineralogical survey was complete. He did not return professionally to science (Mairet, 1981: 41).

Before returning to England in 1907, the Coomaraswamys spent two months travelling in India. During this trip, Coomaraswamy became a member of the Theosophical Society; later he would distance himself from its syncretizing doctrines (Singam, 1977b: 12; Woodward, 1952: 200). His level of participation in the society, or his belief in its doctrines, is not known. Nevertheless, it is plausible that the universalist doctrines of the society may have influenced his ideas on religion.

One spring, a year or so after the Coomaraswamys returned to Britain, a youthful T. E. Lawrence and his friend Vyvyan Richards set out by bicycle on 'a pilgrimage in honour of William Morris'. They had heard that there was a splendid collection of Morris's works located near Chipping Campden. As snow fell and soaked them through, they eventually managed to find what they had been told to look for: a renovated medieval chapel. Richards knocked and the door was opened by 'Mrs Coomaraswami' (V. Richards, 1936: 42-3). The Coomaraswamys had moved in even before the renovations were complete (Coatts, 1982: 27-8; Mairet, 1981: 40). Since that time they had expended considerable effort in magnificently furnishing the house. Ethel welcomed the two soaked boys in and, despite the state of their clothes, willingly showed them around. 'It was indeed the perfect Morris home,' Richards remembered, 'far more than his own specially built *Red House*... or even

the stone house at Kelmscott' (V. Richards, 1936: 42-3). As Ethel guided them from room to room they would have seen many newly commissioned pieces from the Guild of Handicraft's workshop, pieces from Ceylon and India, and tapestries by Burne-Jones set off with fabrics from Central and South Asia (Mairet, 1981: 43; Ashbee Journals, 19: 25 January 1908; Ashbee, 1907: 292). But it was the Morris works which caught the attention of Lawrence and Richards:

Upstairs there was a low gallery at one end screened with Morris chintz, a long, polished refectory table and shelves full of the Kelmscott printings... Above all, on a special oak lectern lay open the great Morris – Burne-Jones Chaucer... and, to crown all... the very hand-press that Morris himself had used (V. Richards, 1936: 43).

The hand-press had indeed been one of those owned by the Kelmscott Press<sup>20</sup>. Its presence in the nave of the Norman Chapel was a boon for Coomaraswamy, but a sign of the misfortunes of the Guild of Handicraft.

The rise of Coomaraswamy as an authority on South Asian art coincided with the decline of Ashbee's dream. When the couple had departed for Ceylon, the future of the Guild seemed secure. Nevertheless, the patronage of the Coomaraswamys had not been replicated by enough other clients. The workforce had been cut; the Guild's publishing arm, the Essex House Press, had to be sold. Coomaraswamy bought it, using it to print his own works; this suited Ashbee as he could still use the printing press for the works of the Guild (F. Ashbee, 2002: 79, 114; Crawford, 2005: 135-8, 141, 146-7, 396, 449). The Essex House Press issued a number of Coomaraswamy's early writings; including a series of immaculately crafted pamphlets and one book that ranged over Coomaraswamy's artistic and social interests.

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<sup>20</sup> The Kelmscott Press closed down in 1898 after Morris's death. At that time Ashbee took over two Albion printing presses, a small amount of other equipment and three of Morris's printing men. Morris's types were retained by his executors and his woodblocks were left to the British Museum. Ashbee thus had to buy a new typeface, though he would in time design his own (Ashbee, 1901: 33-34; Crawford, 2005: 375-379). One of Ashbee's two presses was sold in 1904, leaving one press and the newly purchased typeface to be sold to Coomaraswamy in 1907. Coomaraswamy sold the press in 1910; it currently resides in America (Crawford, 2005: 459; Letter from Ethel Coomaraswamy, Ashbee Journals 22: 14 Sep 1910).

Coomaraswamy was proud that his first major work, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* (1908), had been printed on Morris's press. As he stated in the foreword to the magnificent volume, which took fifteen months to print:

this book has been printed by hand, upon the press used by William Morris for printing the Kelmscott Chaucer... I cannot help seeing in these very facts an illustration of the way in which the East and the West may together be united in an endeavour to restore that true Art of Living which has for so long been neglected by humanity (Coomaraswamy, 1956: ix).

Even at this time, Coomaraswamy felt he had identified what *the* true art of living was. It was this true art, his vision of which became more focused on Traditionalism as his career progressed, that he sought to explain and bring about in all his writings. Combining Indian nationalism with Morris's vision of the arts and crafts with Ruskin's attitude to aesthetics and social and political issues, the essential direction of his career had already been forged. Coomaraswamy's interest in and respect for the works of Ruskin and Morris was continued until the end of his life (Coomaraswamy, 1946b: 14; McNamara, 1974: 177; Rossiter, 1974: 159; Schroeder, 1952: 76).

The inclusion of the word *mediaeval* in the title of Coomaraswamy's first book is apt to cause confusion. The title does not indicate art produced in Ceylon contemporary with the European Middle Ages: Coomaraswamy referred instead to art produced under 'mediaeval conditions'. In Coomaraswamy's vision it was only the introduction of European modernity that ended the medieval period in Asia (Coomaraswamy, 1956: v). 'Mediaeval art', in this sense, thus refers to art produced prior to the colonial period or to art of the present day produced away from corrupting European influences. This appears to be an early reflection of his belief that Europe and Asia had been one before the Renaissance, and only Europe had broken with the fundamental norm of humanity. Beyond European modernity, the medieval paradise continued unabated.

The Coomaraswamys fully joined in with the life of the Guild, taking part in Guild plays and hosting a rural salon in the Norman Chapel (Ashbee Journal, 19: January 1908; 21: January 1909; Singam, 1974b: 322). At their salon, among the drapes and tapestries of their enchanted medieval island, speakers were invited, talks held, and lively discussions blossomed. C. R. Ashbee's wife Janet recorded one such occasion in the Ashbee's journal (19: 25 January 1908). The invited speaker on this occasion was Sister Niveditā (Margaret E. Noble), an Irish woman who had become one of the Indian nationalist and Neo-Vedānta

universalist Svāmi Vivekānanda's most trusted followers. With her was Sara C. Bull, who had taken the name Sister Dhiramata; the wife of the late Norwegian violinist and composer Ole Bull, she was also a follower of Vivekānanda (Sil, 1997: 183). To an audience of craftsmen, Cotswold villagers and other guests, Niveditā talked on 'Women's Ideals in India' and waxed lyrical on India's poetry and religion. Janet records that she received a rather nonplussed reception. In the same journal entry, Janet also recorded her memories of the Coomaraswamys. She wrote of numerous walks in the countryside and meals at the chapel accompanied by Coomaraswamy's enthusiastic argumentation and endless discussions. She praised his artistic taste, but noted that it was seemingly solely focused on the art of India, medieval Europe, and William Morris.

### **2.3 A War on Suet Puddings**

While Coomaraswamy introduced new faces to the Guild, Ashbee introduced Coomaraswamy to many of his contacts on the London art scene. Several of these contacts significantly influenced the development of his thought. In particular, Coomaraswamy forged associations through Ashbee with William Rothenstein and Roger Fry (Rothenstein, 1932: 231; Spalding, 1999: 18-21). Through Fry, curator of the landmark 1910 exhibition 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists', Coomaraswamy encountered modern art. Although he never entirely overcame his distaste for modern styles, Coomaraswamy certainly had knowledge of such works. Most consequentially for his later philosophy of art, through these sources he came into contact with the theories of neo-idealist aestheticians Clive Bell and Benedetto Croce. Platonist idealism became one of his key focuses; that focus can be seen emerging in his writings from around 1909. From the 1930s onwards Coomaraswamy almost exclusively referred to philosophies of idealism that long predated Bell or Croce (see Coomaraswamy, 1948: 58-59; cf. Sastri, 1974: 101-102). In turn, Coomaraswamy enhanced Fry's knowledge of Indian arts. Fry's landmark 1910 article in the *Quarterly Review* assessing works by Coomaraswamy, Havell, Binyon and Migeon, was among the first in British art criticism to attempt to understand Asian art on its own terms (Lipsey, 1977c: 67-8; Spalding, 1999: 125-33).

Through Rothenstein, Coomaraswamy was introduced to the eccentric Catholic artist Eric Gill. Gill is today best known for his sculpture and graphic design – particularly his typefaces, including the one that bears his name. He was also connected to the later Arts and Crafts Movement. Gill's friendship with Coomaraswamy started in 1908 and lasted

until Gill's death in 1940; the most important consequence of their friendship was to direct Coomaraswamy to Catholic theology. They were drawn together by a number of mutual beliefs: both looked to Ruskin for inspiration, saw spirituality in erotic art, and believed passionately in the importance of religious traditions. Their mutual loathing of modern industrialism, capitalism, and materialism was reflected in what became a mutual religious affinity. Gill embraced Catholicism in 1912; Coomaraswamy's interest in Catholicism grew during the 1920s. For Coomaraswamy, Gill was a key early source of knowledge on Catholic art and neo-scholasticism. The importance of Catholic theology on Coomaraswamy's later thought cannot be underestimated: it became as important a part of his thought as Brahmanic Hinduism (Crouch, 1984: 60; E. Gill, 1940: 172-4; Lipsey, 1977c: 117-20, 173-4; MacCarthy, 1989: 72, 93, 98-9, 112-3, 161; 2007a). Finally, he also became friends with Arthur J. Penty. A leading proponent of Ruskin- and Morris-influenced Guild Socialism, Penty collaborated with Coomaraswamy on various occasions during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The title of one of Penty's best known works – *Post-Industrialism* (1922) – originated with Coomaraswamy (Lipsey, 1977c: 110-4; Penty, 1922: 14).

Coomaraswamy's entry onto the London art scene was part and parcel of his attempts to establish himself as an expert on Indian and Asian art. His standing was boosted strongly by a paper delivered to the International Oriental Congress in Copenhagen in 1908; in this paper he had aggressively repudiated the then common assumption that Indian sculpture had been extensively influenced by Hellenic style. Joining forces with the Indian art historian E. B. Havell<sup>21</sup>, Coomaraswamy launched a powerful and successful assault on contemporary European assumptions on the arts in India. His attack was threefold: he continued Morris's rhetoric by questioning the categories of 'fine' and 'decorative' art; he challenged the contemporary notion that there was no fine art in India; and he sought to change prevailing views on the type of art education that was suitable in India.

Sir George Birdwood was regarded a leading authority on the arts in India. Birdwood, like Ruskin before him, valued Indian craftwork, but insisted that 'the Indian mind' did not engage in the kind of intellectual processes that were a first principle of fine

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<sup>21</sup> Like Coomaraswamy, Havell was a medievalist who saw a strong link between the arts of the European Gothic and the arts of India (e.g. Havell, 1908: 18-9, 25-6). Havell was older than Coomaraswamy; in the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth he had been an arts administrator in India. See Havell, 1908; Mitter, 1994.

art (Ruskin, 1888: 5:137-8). Coomaraswamy respected Birdwood, as he did Ruskin, but these attitudes incensed him. He was undoubtedly correct in assuming that Indian art was only being judged by European standards; however, his solution might be argued to have been a further hegemonizing distortion. To disabuse Birdwood, Coomaraswamy insisted that Indian art was if anything *more* intellectual in its idealism than most modern European art. This again, as we shall see in later chapters, became a central feature of the majority of his later writings. Back in 1910, such a notion seemed ridiculous to Birdwood and other orientalists (Havell, 1908: 6-7, 104-6, 166-7; Lipsey, 1977c: 64-5; Mitter, 1977: 51, 176-7, 238-9, 240-3; Singam, 1977b: 13).

The tension between these two positions resulted in a showdown at a meeting of the Indian Section of the Royal Society of Arts. On 13 January 1910, with Birdwood in the chair, and Coomaraswamy, Rothenstein, and Walter Crane in the audience, Havell read a paper entitled 'Art Administration in India'. His paper attacked current Government art school policy, and insisted that Indian art, craft, and architectural techniques should be the chief focus of Indian art students. According to Havell, India's arts were as notable as those of Europe and infinitely more suited to India than European art (Royal Society of Arts, 1910: 273-85). The paper divided the audience.

Opening the discussion, Birdwood gave his partial agreement, but would not agree that the Indian art Havell had discussed could be counted as 'fine art' (ibid.: 286):

My attention is drawn to the photograph, on my left, of an image of the Buddha as an example of Indian 'fine art'... one might as reasonably rave over Algebraical symbols as examples of 'fine art,' as include in that category this lame and impotent characterisation of the spiritual grace and glory of... Gautoma, the Lord Buddha. This senseless similitude, in its immemorial fixed pose, is nothing more than an uninspired brazen image, vacuously squinting down its nose... A boiled suet pudding would serve equally well as a symbol of passionless purity and serenity of soul! (ibid.: 186-7).

True fine art had to be founded in idealism, being 'as universally and eternally in the reality of its material mould, as in the ideality of its mental conception'. True art is of 'wondrous beauty', 'perfected in form, and material, and position' to its 'intellectual archetypes' (ibid.: 287). Coomaraswamy's challenge did not question this view of the nature of art, but instead argued for the idealism of Asian art and craft (Mitter, 1984: 49). In chapter four we shall

see how Coomaraswamy positioned his conception of Asian and medieval European art in relation to artistic idealism.

Coomaraswamy, Havell, and their supporters were incensed by Birdwood's comparison of a Buddha image to a suet pudding. Rothenstein organized a public protest; Coomaraswamy gave a rebuttal lecture; there was even an editorial in *The Times* on the subject. The result was the formation of the India Society, founded by Coomaraswamy, Rothenstein, Havell, Fry and others; the orientalist T. W. Rhys Davids became president, the musicologist A. H. Fox Strangways the secretary. In the coming years, one of the most significant achievements of the society was launching the great Indian polymath Rabindranāth Tagore to international attention. The Society's publication of his volume *Gitanjali* led to Rabindranāth being awarded the 1913 Nobel Prize for Literature (Lago, 1972: 8, 13-4, 38-9; Lipsey, 1977c: 71-2; Mitter, 1994: 311-2; Radice, 2006; Rothenstein, 1934: 231, 262, 282-3; Singam, 1977b: 14).

Despite his successes in Britain, Coomaraswamy still yearned to play find a role for himself in India. Between 1908 and 1912 he made a number of trips to the country he felt spiritually closest to. His trip in 1909 lasted ten months; it included extended periods spent with the Tagores in Calcutta, as well as extensive travel and time spent researching and lecturing. The Tagore's palatial residence provided the ideal atmosphere for him. Outside, the traditional rhythms of life reminded him of medieval Europe; inside, the philosophical and literary brilliance and anti-imperialist beliefs of Rabindranāth nourished his faculties. One of Rabindranāth's brothers was even a vociferous reader of Morris (Letter from Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Ashbee Journal*, 20: 16 March 1909). In London he had been involved with the ex-patriot Indian nationalist movement. In India, he continued his attempts to become a leader of the movement; his efforts were unsuccessful (Letters by Ethel Coomaraswamy, *Ashbee Journal*, 21: 28 January 1909; 14 March 1909; Lipsey, 1977c, 76-9; Moore, 1999: 435-40; Singam, 1977b, 13-4).

Coomaraswamy's *Essays in National Idealism*, an unusual mix of aesthetic history, Morris-inspired diatribe, nationalist polemic, and social comment, was published in India late in 1909 after his return to Britain from this trip. His 1912 volume *Art and Swadeshi* followed much the same pattern; both volumes contained new material alongside adaptations of articles Coomaraswamy had previously published in periodicals. These polemics returned to the issues he had been fighting against when he had established the

Ceylon Social Reform Society. Anglicized Indians were a chief target, particularly when they started buying textiles illustrated with bicycles or banknotes:

such monstrosities are an insult to European knowledge and an outrage on Indian art. Yet I have known educated Indians defend their use on the ground that Indians ‘cannot be expected to keep to one pattern always,’ and that ‘if it is right for Europeans to admire Indian patterns, why is it not right for Indians to make use of European forms?’... Only a century of education, entirely false in aims and method, could have produced such a result as this. Those who gave and those who accepted that education are equally at fault (Coomaraswamy, 1910a: 67).

The contemporary *swadeshi* movement for Indian made products was chiefly concerned with wresting economic control of India back from the British. Coomaraswamy, on the other hand, was chiefly concerned with compelling Indians to stick to what was deemed to be traditional (see Coomaraswamy, 1910a: ii, 1-2, 78, 92, 99-101, 106, 166, 202; 1912: 2-4, 7, 52, 55, 67-8, 141, 147). Later he would upbraid Gāndhī for being unconcerned with artistic values. For his part, Gāndhī is said to have remarked: ‘How I wish Ananda Coomaraswamy directed his energy and talents towards implementing these ideas’ (quoted in Singam, 1974b: 307).

Coomaraswamy’s nationalist polemics often featured patronizing rants against educated Indians; this may well have been among the chief reasons his writings never found a wide audience in India at the time (Mitter, 1994: 150; Ranganathan, 1974: 54; Singam, 1974b: 318). As in his later writings, the ideal he projected for Indian citizens (regardless of their cultural or religious identities) was based in orientalist definitions of what it was to be Oriental. He wanted to turn ‘a generation of parasites into a nation of orientals’, as well as to convince European and American readers of the vital need to do so (Coomaraswamy, 1912: 55). His writings were never only about art; from the start of his career they were also determined by his ideological convictions and epistemologically limited by the discourses that informed him (Spivak, 1988: 297-308). This issue, and how it is relevant to John Cage, is analysed in more detail in chapter six.

## **2.4 Endings and Beginnings**

The end of the first decade of the twentieth century coincided with the end of Coomaraswamy’s first marriage. In 1907 Coomaraswamy had met Yorkshire-born Alice Richardson when she came to the Guild to visit her friend Philip Mairet. Alice, a pupil of

Cecil Sharp, performed a recital in the Norman Chapel. She kept in touch with Coomaraswamy and the following year their friendship turned into a passionate relationship. He did not hide the affair from Ethel. Coomaraswamy wanted an heir; Ethel had suffered a miscarriage and they had not subsequently managed to conceive. In India in the autumn of 1910, citing traditional polygamous practices, Coomaraswamy proposed they enter into a *ménage-à-trois* with Alice. Hurt and saddened, Ethel packed and left. Her letters to the Ashbees record her pain and her refusal to be used, as she saw it, as a doormat (Letter from Ethel Coomaraswamy, Ashbee Journal, 23: 8 January 1911). The same month Ethel left, Alice Richardson embarked on a boat from Liverpool to Calcutta to join Coomaraswamy<sup>22</sup>. Back in Campden, Ethel packed up the contents of the Norman Chapel. She was helped in this task by Coomaraswamy's secretary, Philip Mairet; two years later, Ethel Coomaraswamy became Mrs. Mairet. Her celebrated weaving career took off shortly afterwards (Ashbee Journal, 22: 8 October 1910; 23: 11 January 1911; Coatts, 1983: 34-40; Mairet, 1981: 50-3).

While Ethel was packing up the Norman Chapel, Coomaraswamy was directing the Art Section of the United Provinces Exhibition in Allahabad. Late in 1911, Ananda and Alice Coomaraswamy were living in a house-boat in Kashmir. He was researching and collecting for his massive study *Rajput Painting*, eventually published by Oxford University Press in 1916. Alice used the time to study Indian classical music. On their return to Britain she took to the concert platform under the name Ratan Devī. Coomaraswamy often introduced her costume recitals, explaining the meaning of the music to audiences. Judging by the endorsements and favourable reviews she received from Rabindranāth, Yeats, Bernard Shaw, and Percy Grainger, in addition to journalists, her musical talent was impressive (Coomaraswamy and Devī, 1913: v-vii; Devī, n.d.: 2, 11-2; Hadland, 1916: 27-8; *New York Times*, 1916: 7). Coomaraswamy was having successes of his own. Although his nationalist texts had failed to excite much interest, he had steadily been making a name for himself as an art historian in Britain. Publications on the largely undocumented field of Rājput painting, journal articles, and two general volumes, *The Indian Craftsman* (1909) and *The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon* (1913), all established his authority to pronounce on Indian art. The couple could also celebrate the birth of two children. A son, Nārada, was born in March 1912, and daughter Rohini

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<sup>22</sup> United Kingdom. National Archives. BT27 Outward Passenger Lists. 13 October 1910, *City of Paris*.

followed two years later<sup>23</sup> (Coatts, 1983: 34-6; Lipsey, 1977c: 87-9, 92-3, 94-104; Singam, 1977b: 15).

Coomaraswamy had used a part of his fortune to purchase numerous works of Indian art. His aim was to present the collection to the Indian Nation if a suitable museum would be constructed to house it. On previous trips to India he had failed to find backers. The years of the First World War restricted Coomaraswamy's movements. In 1915 he managed to make another trip to India, but again returned without success. The following year he accompanied Alice on a concert tour to the United States. His nationalist activities made the British authorities suspicious of his motives for travelling; it was only with the help of influential friends that he acquired the necessary permits. By the time they returned, the Military Service Act had been revised and Coomaraswamy now found himself liable as a British national for military service. Not wishing to fight for Britain, or to serve a war-time civilian role, Coomaraswamy's predicament seemed dire. However, he had an ace up his sleeve. He had found a buyer for his art collection. Denman W. Ross wished to purchase the collection in order to donate it to the Museum of Fine Art, Boston. Moreover, the Museum wanted Coomaraswamy to join its curatorial staff. Using all his considerable connections, Coomaraswamy managed to evade the efforts of Scotland Yard to stop his flight; in December 1916 he left for America with his art collection and the bulk of his fortune intact. He never returned to Britain (Ashbee Journals, 42: 3 February 1918; 11 February 1918; Lipsey, 1977c, 122-6; Ripley Hall, 1974: 111-2).

## **2.5 Beginnings and Endings**

In October 1917, Coomaraswamy took up his duties at the Museum of Fine Art. The museum already had an extensive collection of East Asian art, particularly Japanese. The Coomaraswamy collection donated through Ross significantly expanded the Museum's holdings in South Asian art. Coomaraswamy's first post was as Keeper of Indian Art; from 1922 he became Keeper of Indian, Persian, and Muhammadan Art. Having led a globe-trotting existence moving between the worlds of art and politics in Britain and India, from 1917 his work in Boston provided him with a grounded focus. He increasingly concentrated on religious art in this period, centring his studies in religious and philosophical exegesis.

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<sup>23</sup> Nārada born 10 March 1912 (United Kingdom. General Register Office. GRO index ref. no.: 1912/J/Pancras/vol.1b/p.195). Rohini born 2 July 1914 (ibid. Ref: 1914/S/Pancras/vol.1b/p.225).

His final popular works of the decade were *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (1916) and *The Dance of Shiva* (1918). The latter work, which aimed to communicate the essence of Indian culture to European and American readers, combined religious and art-historical exposition with defence of aristocratic ideology and an exploration of the relevance of Nietzsche's philosophy. During the following decade, Coomaraswamy was primarily occupied with his work at the museum. His chief work of the 1920s was the formidable task of cataloguing the Museum's South Asian holdings. The six volume catalogue he meticulously prepared was published between 1923 and 1930 (Lipsey, 1977c: 130-1; Tomita, 1974: 162).

Coomaraswamy's equally peripatetic personal life took a little longer to settle down. His second marriage had come under strain before the permanent move to America. During their first trip, the couple were involved in a murkily documented entanglement with the infamous dark magus Aleister Crowley that appears to have ended badly (Crowley, 1979: 468-9, 773-6<sup>24</sup>; Sutin, 2000: 54-60, 255-7). Further, on that trip Coomaraswamy met seventeen-year-old dancer and painter Stella Bloch. In 1918 he left Alice for Stella; she became the third Mrs. Coomaraswamy in 1922. Stella had no wish to leave her life in New York; Coomaraswamy needed to be in Boston for work. As a solution, he lived in Boston and made frequent visits to New York. She accompanied him on collecting trips to Asia and they spent the summers together in rural Wyoming; a little while later, Coomaraswamy acquired a rather Thoreauvian cottage in Maine.

The image of Coomaraswamy that is often presented is that of his last years: the otherworldly scholar uninterested in modern life. In the 1920s he was not yet that person. In this period, he seems to have enjoyed the opportunities his frequent visits to New York provided (Vecchia, 2003, Lipsey, 1977c: 140-1, 143-7; Zilczer, 1996: 2:447). Coomaraswamy cut a stylish figure in New York avant-garde and artistic circles, in particular becoming part of the circle of artists and writers around the sculptor John Mowbary-Clarke and his wife Mary. Both had been involved with the landmark 1913 'Armory Show' of international modern art. The show had made an impact on the New York art scene as striking as Fry's 1910 exhibition of Post-Impressionist works. Mary was co-owner of the Sunwise Turn bookshop, a hub for those interested in contemporary art,

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<sup>24</sup> Crowley's account is filled with racism and ill-feeling and is certainly untrustworthy. Something clearly happened; quite what is difficult to know as only Crowley's account seems to have survived.

modernist writing and mysticism. The first edition of *The Dance of Shiva* was published by the bookshop's printing press. The example of Sunwise Turn perhaps suggested to Coomaraswamy the idea of his own book shop. In 1920, in partnership with a New York bookseller, he opened Orientalia. His involvement only lasted until 1923. In the 1950s, long after he sold his part of the concern, the bookshop's regular clientele included John Cage and Carolyn and Earle Brown (C. Brown, 2007: 37, 71; Lipsey, 1977c: 154-6; Wolff and Patterson, 1994: 68).

Around 1927 Coomaraswamy's interest in religion and metaphysics became his chief concern. Whereas many of his early texts had been guided by nationalism, from this point onwards his writings focussed intensely on spiritual beliefs. Between 1927 and the early 1930s the autodidact art-scholar transformed himself into an autodidact theologian and metaphysician. Perhaps it was this deeper focus on spiritual matters, or perhaps it was just getting older; either way, the handsome seducer mellowed. Stella and Coomaraswamy divorced in 1930<sup>25</sup>; shortly afterwards he married a twenty-five-year-old photographer named Doña Luisa Runstein. She was the final Mrs. Coomaraswamy, their harmonious relationship enduring until his death in 1947<sup>26</sup>. Two years after their marriage, Doña Luisa gave birth to a son whom they named Rama. Settled in a comfortable house close to Boston, Doña Luisa's careful attention allowed Coomaraswamy to shut out the modern world. She drove him to work, looked after his health, and acted as secretary, accountant, research assistant, and cook. He was normally to be found at the museum, in his study, or tending his lovingly maintained garden (Farmer, 1952: 297; Grossman, 1952: 32, 35; Heine-Geldern, 1952: 56; Lipsey, 1977c: 132-3, 146-7, 162, 209, 290-1; Vecchia, 2003).

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<sup>25</sup> After divorcing Coomaraswamy, in 1931 Stella Bloch married the lyricist and screenwriter Edward Eliscu; they were married until his death in 1998. She died on 10 January 1999, the day before her 101<sup>st</sup> birthday (Vecchia, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> Doña Luisa was the Mrs. Coomaraswamy referred to by Cage in two anecdotes (Cage, 1961a: 263-4; 1965a: 72). Cage probably met her on one occasion only. Their meeting occurred at a lengthy dinner party hosted by Alan Watts in the winter of 1950-1; the guests were Cage, Campbell, Jean Erdman, and Doña Luisa Coomaraswamy (see Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 358-9; Watts, 1973: 226-32). Cage had been introduced to Watts by Campbell and Erdman. Dating of the party based on Watts (1973: 204, 218).

## 2.6 Rage Against the Dying of the Light

By becoming Fellow for Research in Indian, Persian, and Muhammadan Art, in 1933 Coomaraswamy was able to devote himself to his research interests free from curatorial responsibilities. His academic reputation was now formidable: by this time he had authored 20 books and contributed around 650 articles, reviews, and letters to journals and periodicals in Europe, Asia, and America (see Crouch, 2002). He was often asked to lecture at leading universities and museums across the country, and kept up a voluminous correspondence with scholars across the world. In the remaining thirteen years of his life he completed a further eight books and around 230 articles and other publications. Coomaraswamy's most notable works date from this period. These late works can also be distinguished from Coomaraswamy's earlier publications due to their focus.

In 1927 Coomaraswamy's *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* was published; in 1934 *The Transformation of Nature in Art* and *A New Approach to the Vedas*<sup>27</sup> went on sale. In the seven-year gap between these publications, Coomaraswamy's focus underwent a dramatic change. Lipsey (1977c: 173) regards 1928 to 1932 as the years of that change. In a letter of 1939, Coomaraswamy explained this altered focus as a natural progression of his research in iconography:

I was no longer satisfied with a merely descriptive iconography and had to be able to explain the *reasons* of the forms; and for this it was necessary to go back to the Vedas and to metaphysics in general, for there lie the seminal reasons of iconographic development. I could not, of course, be satisfied with merely 'sociological' explanations since the forms of the traditional societies themselves can only be explained metaphysically (Coomaraswamy, 1988: 27).

Nevertheless, there was more behind his change of focus than merely a logical development of his research (Lipsey, 1977c: 135, 140-1, 207, 285; Tomita, 1974: 1626).

There were two separate but related influences behind this development. The first involved Neo-Scholasticism and Platonism; the second involved Traditionalism, the loose reactionary movement around the French esotericist René Guénon. We shall return to Traditionalism shortly. Coomaraswamy was introduced to Neo-Thomism, Scholasticism, and the philosophy of art of St. Thomas Aquinas, through his friend Eric Gill (see above). Gill translated the French Neo-Thomist theologian Jacques Maritain's 1920 *Art et*

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<sup>27</sup> Dating of publication of *A New Approach to the Vedas* follows Crouch, 2002: 71.

*scholastique (Art and Scholasticism)* in the early twenties (MacCarthy, 1989: 161). His private press published the translation and Coomaraswamy was provided with a copy. Inspired, Coomaraswamy researched further; he read works by Étienne Gilson, and delved back into earlier thought. His exhaustive scholarship led him to numerous sources, most influentially St. Augustine (354-430), Aquinas (c.1225-74), and Meister Eckhart (c.1260-c.1328). Coomaraswamy came to strongly identify with traditional Catholicism, his only misgiving being that it tried to claim exclusive possession of truth (Lipsey, 1977c: 174, 218-9). Concurrently he was investigating the streams of Platonism that had played an integral role in the development of Christian Theology: from Plato (427-347 BCE) and Aristotle (384-322 BCE) he worked forwards through Plotinus (c.205-70 CE) and Neoplatonism. By the mid 1930s he was convinced that there was a universal religious, philosophical, and ideological truth that united all orthodox traditions – the Perennial Philosophy. Independently, René Guénon had arrived at a similar belief.

Coomaraswamy probably encountered Guénon's work for the first time in the late 1920s or early 1930s, at the latest by 1935 (Lipsey, 1977c: 194-5). His relationship with Guénon was conducted by correspondence. From 1935 on they referenced each other's works, reviewed each other's publications, and in the process produced what appeared to be a shared vision. In 1935 Coomaraswamy introduced an article by Guénon with words that set out the future course of his own writings:

no living writer in modern Europe is more significant than René Guénon, whose task it has been to expound the universal metaphysical tradition that has been the essential foundation of every past culture... Europe has diverged from this path ever farther since the thirteenth century: only since that time have Europe and Asia been truly divided in spirit (quoted in Lipsey, 1977c: 169-70).

Guénon's works were largely polemical; their effect depending more on the strength of Guénon's vision than on academic rigour. Coomaraswamy brought his considerable scholarly knowledge to their loose partnership, grounding Guénon's vision in textual exegesis. His late works were respectable scholarly partners to Guénon's esoteric polemics. To understand this period of Coomaraswamy's work it is necessary to briefly consider Guénon's life and career.

Unlike Coomaraswamy, Guénon had not inherited considerable wealth or had an elite education. Nor did he have any familial links to Asia. He was born a French Catholic in 1886; after dropping out of education in 1906 he became involved with Freemasonry and

occultism through the Martinist Order and irregular Masonic Lodge of Gerard Encausse (aka Papus). Though claiming to be based on an eighteenth century esoteric order, Encausse's Order was chiefly influenced by the doctrines of Freemasonry and the Theosophical Society. Developing his own theories, he broke with Encausse and started writing on Hinduism and his own conceptions of a universal tradition. Over the next decade, Guénon undertook a number of other initiations; the importance of being initiated into an orthodox tradition became one of the major themes of his writings. His most lasting initiation came when the Swedish painter, Theosophical Society member, and convert to Islam, Ivan Aguéli initiated him into the Sūfī *ṭarīqa* [path, order] Shādhiliyya Arabiyya<sup>28</sup> (Sedgwick, 2004: 55-60; Waterfield, 2002: 29; Boström, 1996: 1:465-6). Following the sudden death of his wife and loss of his job, Guénon relocated to Cairo in the late 1920s. It was not until Guénon's relocation that he started strictly following Islamic practice. Even then, his belief system remained rooted in the syncretic Traditionalism he himself was largely responsible for devising.

Guénon's first book *L'introduction générale a l'étude des doctrines hindoues* (*A General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*) was published in 1921. It was a study of Hinduism based on Guénon's idiosyncratic interpretations of Indian religious texts (e.g. Guénon, 2001a: 125; 200-1). The text had started life as his doctoral thesis; however, Guénon's narrow focus and insistence on the presence of a primeval truth transmitted via Hinduism had led to its rejection by the Indologist Sylvain Lévi. The Neo-Thomist Jacques Maritain, with whom Guénon had for several years corresponded, was more impressed. The work was published following Maritain's recommendation. Guénon's following two books,

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<sup>28</sup> Aguéli had been initiated into this (at that time) minor, Sūfī *ṭarīqa* in Egypt by its leader 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Illaysh al-Kabir. Illaysh had inherited the *ṭarīqa* from his father, although it probably had no active membership during his leadership. Aguéli gave Guénon an *ijazah* which allowed him to initiate others into the Shādhiliyya Arabiyya (Sedgwick, 2004: 61-2). The ascetic Sūfī path within Islam is for Muslims who seek direct, personal experience of God (Trimingham, 1971: 1; Bowker, 1997: 925-6). For a detailed overview of the development of the Sūfī orders, the formation of *turūq*, and the place of this tradition in Islam see Trimingham (1971); on the theology of Sufism see Mayer (2008). The founder of the original Shādhiliyya *ṭarīqa* was Abu al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (1196-1258). Sunni in observance, the Shadhiliyya grew in Egypt to become significant in North Africa and some parts of Western Asia. In the twentieth century it travelled further when the Traditionalists, particularly Guénon and Frithjof Schuon, spread it and its offshoots into Europe, America, and elsewhere (Bowker, 1997: 881; Trimingham, 1971: 38, 45-6, 47-50). On the syncretic and deeply eccentric practices of Schuon see Sedgwick (2004).

*Le Théosophisme, histoire d'une pseudo-religion* (1921) and *L'erreur spirite* (1923), attacked the Theosophical Society and Spiritualism respectively. Among Guénon's remaining works, the most influential were *Orient et Occident* (1924), published in English translation as *East and West* (1941), and *La crise du monde moderne* (1927), published as *The Crisis of the Modern World* in 1942. Each expounded a vision of the modern world mired in degradation and the universal traditional way of life that it had replaced.

As Sedgwick points out, Guénon's religious ideology emerged from a Catholic milieu; even if not all his religious ideas were orthodox, his attack on the decadence of the modern world and its need for a renewal of hierarchical, non-democratic rule, was virtually identical to that of leading reactionary Catholic writers of the previous half century<sup>29</sup> (Sedgwick, 2004: 29). Nevertheless, Guénon's syncretic religious views and disparagement of Christian proselytizing in Asia drove away many of the Catholic supporters he had. Despite this, his anti-modern vision of a primordial universal tradition gained a small but dedicated following in Europe and America. Sustained by the financial support of his followers, he lived in relative isolation until his death in 1951 (Goodrick-Clarke, 2008: 138-45; Sedgwick, 2004: 22-3, 27, 30-1, 49-56, 73-5, 78-9, 131).

Although it was only after the early 1930s that the central purpose of Coomaraswamy's work became demonstrating the unity of all traditional religions and philosophies, the themes of 'perennial philosophy' and aristocratic elitism are both detectable in his work many years prior to his introduction to Guénon (Lipse, 1977c: 194-5). Coomaraswamy's writings of the first two decades of his career demonstrate knowledge and interest in classical philosophy and belief in an essential metaphysical confluence between the major religious and philosophical traditions (for example, Coomaraswamy, 1910a: 55-8). He could have been influenced in this regard by numerous sources. His mother held Unitarian beliefs and was interested in esotericism; during the first decade of the twentieth century Coomaraswamy was involved with the Theosophical Society, the doctrines of which relied on universalist and perennialist theories. He also had extensive contact with members of other groups with universalist inclinations including the Rāmākṣṇa-Vivekānanda movement, and the influential Neo-Vedānta reform movements the Brāhmo Samāj and the Ārya Samāj<sup>30</sup> (Bhushan, 2011b: 170; Das, 1952: 312; Singam,

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<sup>29</sup> See R. Griffiths, 1966.

<sup>30</sup> On Coomaraswamy's early writings in relation to contemporary Indian thought see Bhushan, 2011b: 170-84.

1977d: 21). Ideologically, Coomaraswamy's major influence appears to have been Ruskin. A particularly clear example of this can be found in an article Coomaraswamy published in 1916 in which he approvingly quoted Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (1862: 102):

My continual aim has been to show the eternal superiority of some men to others, sometimes even of one man to all others: and to show also the advisability of appointing such persons or person to guide, to lead, or on occasion to even compel and subdue their inferiors according to their own better knowledge and wiser will (Ruskin quoted in Coomaraswamy, 1916b: 453).

Whether Coomaraswamy came to the theories that dominated his later career independently or whether he was substantially influenced by Guénon, by the later 1930s the two theorists had aligned themselves with each other. Coomaraswamy placed his academic acumen in the service of Traditionalism.

In discussing the theories of Coomaraswamy and Guénon it is necessary to draw a distinction between two discourses. The first will be referred to as Ancient Theology or Perennial Philosophy (*philosophia perennis*)<sup>31</sup>; the second will be referred to as Traditionalism<sup>32</sup>. Traditionalism is a loose movement originating in the twentieth-century, the tenets of which stem from the conceptions of the former discourse. Within Traditionalist discourse, both terms have been used interchangeably. Tradition, Coomaraswamy explained in 1946, 'has nothing to with any "ages", whether "dark", "primaeval", or otherwise. Tradition represents doctrines about first principles, *which do not change*' (Coomaraswamy, 1988: 45, emphasis added). Coomaraswamy came to believe that these doctrines had been taught in *all* traditional societies. Handed down from teacher to disciple, they originated in a time long before textual production. When cultures did begin to make written records they preserved these doctrines in religious and philosophical texts. Working between these texts, a scholar such as Coomaraswamy could decipher the true, universal, and timeless perennial philosophy. Such truths could be found, for example, in the Vedas of ancient India, the dialogues of Plato, or the *Summa Theologiae* of Aquinas

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<sup>31</sup> There is as yet no objective scholarly text dealing with the whole history of this discourse. In relation to the development of the discourse of Ancient Theology see Walker (1972); on such theories in the Renaissance see Mulsow (2004: 1-13) and on the development of the tradition from Marsilio Ficino to Steuco and Leibniz see C. B. Schmitt (1966: 505-32).

<sup>32</sup> On the Traditionalist movement see Sedgwick (2004); on the movement from a Traditionalist perspective see Quinn, Jr. (1997).

(Sastri, 1974: 186; Gilbert, 1952: 86 Coomaraswamy, 1939: 7). The arts of traditional societies also recorded these beliefs through iconographic signifiers; these too could be used to uncover perennial truth. ‘There is only one mythology, one iconography, and one truth, that of an uncreated wisdom that has been handed down from time immemorial’ Coomaraswamy announced in a lecture in 1944 (quoted in Lipsey, 1977c: 265). As a consequence, the ‘fundamental doctrines’ of any one orthodox tradition could be used for the exegesis of the doctrines of any other orthodox tradition; all such doctrines were part ‘of the unanimous tradition of the *Philosophia Perennis et Universalis*’ (Coomaraswamy, 1947d: 411). Coomaraswamy’s range of sources were phenomenal: he delved into the beliefs and arts of Hindus, Christians, Platonists, Egyptians, Muslims, Buddhists, Dàoists, Native Americans, and Celts, as well as the native peoples of Australia, Africa, the Pacific, South America, and far northern Europe and Asia.

Evaluating Coomaraswamy’s work critically, it would be more realistic to say that he created a complex intellectual distillation of Brahmanic, Catholic, and Platonic doctrines that, in part, echoed earlier European thought. This distillation then directed his interpretation of all other cultures. The idea of a universal ancient theology had been present in Christian thinking as early as the syncretic Christian Hellenism of the Early Fathers (for example, St. Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 5, 46, 59; *2 Apol.* 8, 10, 13; Theophilus of Antioch, *Autol.* 3.16-30; Eusebius, *PE* 1.6, 2.1, 2.3-8, 4.1, 4.5-8, 7.1-2, 9.1-12, 10.1-14, 10.4.1.5, 11.1-38, 12.19, 13.1-5, 13.12-21, 15.3-14; see also, Hägg, 2006). For some Christian thinkers of the first millennium, the truth of their faith seemed to be proved by the existence of ancient texts that preserved the wisdom of figures such as Hermes Trismegistus; these ‘ancient theologians’ appeared to have had knowledge of the mysteries of the Christian faith in ages long prior to Christ. Nevertheless, most of these texts were in fact pseudepigraphica written in the early Common Era<sup>33</sup>. Contemporary syncreticism appeared to be ancient Christian truth. The similarly pseudepigraphal Christian Neoplatonist writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (fl. early 6<sup>th</sup> century CE), believed at the time to be the work of an Athenian converted to Christianity by St. Paul

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<sup>33</sup> For example: the *Hermetica* of Hermes Trismegistus (c.100-300 CE, Egypt), the *Chaldaean Oracles* (2<sup>nd</sup> century CE), the *Orphic Hymns* (2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, Western Asia) and the *Sibylline Oracles* (2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE – 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, Egypt and Western Asia). See Copenhagen (1992).

circa 30 CE (*Acts* 17:34), also worked to entangle Christianity and Platonism in the minds of medieval theologians<sup>34</sup>.

The entanglement of Christianity with Hellenic philosophy (as well as Platonism with Aristotelianism) was made more complex during the early modern period when the Platonic corpus was reintroduced through the mediation of Arabic philosophy. In this period, as Europe constructed its philosophical and religious historicity, complex tables of mosaic ethnology formed the base on which all subsequent thought stood. It was held that wisdom had descended through the generations passing from Adam to Noah, Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, and onwards. Nevertheless, although the sons of Noah had spread throughout the world after the flood leaving traces of the Jewish revelation behind, only the Christians still knew how to interpret such wisdom correctly. Thus, the Brahmans and the Buddha were sometimes mentioned in these lineages. Often – though not always – interpreted as corrupted versions of the original truth, Asian religions provided more proof of the universal extent of the Judeo-Christian revelation. Tables of Mosaic ethnology formed an important part of widely disseminated early reference works such as *De inventoribus rerum (On Discovery)* by Polydore Vergil (c.1470-1555)<sup>35</sup>. It was in this context that the Augustinian Agostino Steuco introduced the term perennial philosophy in his 1540 treatise *De perenni philosophia (On Perennial Philosophy)*<sup>36</sup> (Celenza, 2007: 91; C. B. Schmitt, 1966: 506).

Perennialist theories continued to hold sway in the work of early colonial orientalists, including the work of the celebrated Sanskritist William Jones (e.g. W. Jones 1789: 200; 1790: 266-8, 274, 209; Jones, 1807: 185-204. See also, Lincoln, 2002: 1-18). Jones believed it impossible ‘to read the *Vedanta*... without believing, that Pythagoras and Plato derived their sublime theories from the same fountain with the sages of India’ (W. Jones, 1789: 254). Less benevolently, before and after Jones, in China, India, and other locations colonized by Europeans, perennialist Mosaic ethnology aided physical and

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<sup>34</sup> On Pseudo-Dionysius see Coakley and Stang (2009) and Wear and Dillon (2007); and, in relation to Aquinas, see O’Rourke (1992).

<sup>35</sup> For example, see *IR* 1.16.1-2, 1.17, 1.20, 1.22-3.

<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the most influential philosopher to have read and borrowed from Steuco was G. W. Leibniz (1646-1716). The term ‘perennial philosophy’ has often been wrongly attributed to Leibniz (for example on the first page of Huxley’s *The Perennial Philosophy*).

religious imperialism through the colonization of the histories and beliefs of colonial subjects<sup>37</sup>. As Gibbon wittily observed:

Among the nations who have adopted the Mosaic history of the world, the ark of Noah has been of the same use as was formerly to the Greeks and Romans the siege of Troy... The last century abounded with antiquarians of profound learning and easy faith, who by the dim light of legends and traditions, of conjectures and etymologies, conducted the great-grand-children of Noah from the tower of Babel to the extremities of the globe (Gibbon, [1776-88] 1990: 1:204).

In India these conceptions played a part in orientalist philology and, not uncoincidentally, the universalizing vision of Hindu reformers such as Rāmmohan Roy (1772-1833). One result was the reification of a monotheistic and universalistic interpretation of Advaita-Vedānta as the essence of Hinduism. While, in Europe, interest in Perennial Philosophy and the discourse of the ancient theologians dwindled to become the esoteric preserve of Freemasons and occultists, in India elements of the same discourse were reformed as a weapon in the fight against European imperialism<sup>38</sup>.

As the late Ranajit Guha noted (1989: 210, 212), British imperialists may have fought ‘a battle for appropriation of the Indian past’ but they could not ultimately control how their constructions of the past would be used. By the later nineteenth-century, perennialist-universalism was being used by Indian religious nationalists for anti-imperialist purposes. That message gained global notice through the affirmative Orientalist Neo-Vedānta (or Neo-Hinduism) of Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa’s disciple Svāmi Vivekānanda<sup>39</sup>, as well as through the fantastical mythologizing of the Theosophical Society<sup>40</sup>. A universal ancient theology that united the world’s religions was introduced back to Europe and America wrapped up in the discourse of the ‘Wisdom of the East’. In the modern period,

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<sup>37</sup> See Brockey, 2007; Bryant, 2001; Cohn, 1997; Cook and Rosemont, 1981; Dirks, 2001; Halbfass, 1988; Mungello, 1989; A. Rowbotham, 1956; Trautmann, 1997; Županov, 1999.

<sup>38</sup> See Goodrick-Clarke, 2008; Halbfass, 1988; Hatcher, 2008; King, 1999a; Knoop and Jones, 1948; Pennington, 2005; Stevenson, 1988; Sugirtharajah, 2003; Trautmann, 1997; van der Veer, 2001.

<sup>39</sup> See Beckerlegge (2006) and Sil (1997).

<sup>40</sup> In large part the brain-child of Helena P. Blavatsky, a Russian émigré in America, the original doctrines of the Theosophical Society were chiefly inspired by European ancient theology. After the Society moved its headquarters to India, its doctrines eccentrically borrowed from Hindu and Buddhist sources and several of its key personnel embraced the cause of Indian nationalism. See B. Campbell (1980); Goodrick-Clarke (2008), and, on the Besant era, Lutyens (2005) and Tillet (1982).

few scholars were more successful at developing those theories than Coomaraswamy. However, his scholarship was not only dedicated to hermeneutics – it was also reliant on affirmative Orientalism and Traditionalist ideology (Barnard, 1997: 14-5, 109, 196-9; Bryant, 2001: 14-8; Copenhaver, 1992: xxiv-xxv, xxvii-xxx, xli-ii, lviii-lix, 1; 2002: viii, xix, xxi-ii, 495-502; Copenhaver and Schmitt, 1992: 329-31; Halbfass, 1988: 3, 14-5, 17; Idel, 2002: 137-48; King, 1999a: 118-24, 128-42; Osborn, 2005: 129-31; Rist, 2004: 105-8, 117-8; A. Sharma, 1979: 59; Walker, 1972: 1-2; Watson, 1984: 52-5; Wear and Dillon, 2007: 132-3; Yates, 1964: 6-8, 13; Trautmann, 1997: 8-11, 40-6, 52-3, 55, 59-61, 92-4, 166-7, 183, 193; B. Young, 2000: 97).

Coomaraswamy and Guénon believed perennial philosophy to be the ultimate truth and thus a justification for a return to ‘traditional’ values. Traditionalism was an ideological belief stemming from what Coomaraswamy and Guénon believed the Perennial Philosophy taught about society and humankind. The Perennial Philosophy provided the proper rules for all areas of life whether religious, social, political, or artistic. This was ‘Tradition’. Coomaraswamy and Guénon argued that societies should return to being governed by Perennial laws. Traditional societies, in their opinion, were ordered and based on principles; they were hierarchical and everyone in those societies knew and accepted their place. King, priest, and aristocrat were each respected and allowed to guide and rule. The lower orders were happy to be ruled. All members of society performed their divinely ordained roles as they had always been performed. The Brahmanic caste system or the medieval feudal system were examples of properly ordered societies (Coomaraswamy, 1946a: 11, 14, 38; 1946b: 2-3, 218-9, 233). This was the thought that guided the entire world, until, that is, the rot set in during the Renaissance. Since that time, Europe had progressively decayed until its present state of materialism, atheism, decadent art production, and chaotic liberal democratic society (Coomaraswamy, 1948: 164-5). Coomaraswamy had a favourite aphorism that summed up this decline: ‘From the Stone Age until now, *quelle dégringolade* [what a fall]’ (Coomaraswamy, 1947c: 443). Modern Europe, and its even worse offspring America, were the only societies that had diverged from the path of Tradition wholly; nevertheless, colonialism had spread European modernity and had corrupted those with which it came into contact. This was the message of Coomaraswamy’s late works.

In *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, Coomaraswamy sought to outline the Traditional philosophy of art. Perhaps his most sustained and successful monograph, the

related chapters outlined the metaphysics of aesthetic idealism through studies of Indian and Scholastic doctrines. Two later volumes of collected essays, *Why Exhibit Works of Art?* (1943) and *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought* (1946), continued his studies of Traditional art while expanding his gaze to encompass wider social and cultural issues. Of his other late volumes, *Am I My Brother's Keeper?* (1947) was almost exclusively concerned with the break between Oriental and modern European societies and the unity of orthodox religious beliefs; *Elements of Buddhist Iconography* (1935), *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government* (1942) and *Time and Eternity* (1947) were imposing scholarly texts, as dense as they were learned, that herded their respective subjects into the fold of Perennialist metaphysics. What were lost, it might be thought, were the earthly aspects of the traditions he dealt with. Looking back at Coomaraswamy's art-historical studies, Partha Mitter (1984: 49-50) concluded that Coomaraswamy's 'particular metaphysical approach has stood in the way of appreciating the intensely human art of ancient India... The image of Indian art he thus held up was more a mirror to his own soul than to a tradition existing in India'.

During this last stage of his career he remained a noted academic figure. Such was the formidable web of references that he spun around his exegesis that it was a brave scholar who sought to question his judgments. When they did, he proved himself an uncompromising and wily adversary (Schroeder, 1952: 71). Sometimes he came across as disagreeably vituperous. As Lipsey (1977c: xiii) put it: 'He was loved and detested; he was doubtless lovable and detestable'. In his final years he generated a loyal coterie of academic colleagues and younger admirers – including Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade – who respected him and his work (Lipsey, 1977c: 212-2, 224-5). Although he could be other-worldly and intensely critical, he could also be witty and charming. The recollections of Eric Schroeder, a close colleague at the museum, record something of the character that seldom emerged in his writings. Coomaraswamy had let slip a perfectly timed ironic comment:

It was not only the sublime detachment from what other people expected of him which delighted me, but rather the incongruity of this efflorescence, this perfectly aimed quotation from Edwardian conventionality, from the surface of a personality so unconventional and so unsentimental... The lenses of his large spectacles gleamed, and his cigarette-end glowed; I could more dimly see, through the thin beard, lines of laughter drawn about his painfully fastidious mouth... He had... a

certain appropriateness to old tweeds, a handsome relaxation and tact in the enjoyment of a fireside armchair, a slight but aristocratic taste in personalities, and an English literary wit (Schroeder, 1952: 67, 70).

A few years before his death he told Schroeder: ‘If I had known always what I know now, I think I would have tried to make my practice more like what I have preached’ (ibid.: 71). Early in September 1947, having recently retired from the Museum and with plans to relocate to India to end his days in contemplation, Coomaraswamy died peacefully in his garden while resting against his wife’s arm. His extraordinary temporal journey had ended. After the deaths of Coomaraswamy and Guénon, a small number of followers and sympathizers continued to promulgate their ideas<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> There were two further writers whose work was based in the conceptions of the Guénon and Coomaraswamy and who have subsequently had some influence. Julius Evola (1896-8-1974) was an Italian Fascist who tried to interest the Fascists and Nazi parties in Traditionalism with little success, though he did for a while manage to get Guénon’s writings published in his column for the far-right newspaper *Regime Fascista*. After the Second World War his writings were influential on Italian Neo-Fascist terrorists, particularly in the 1970s. He continues to be an influence on some early twenty-first-century Russian far-right movements. Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) was a no less controversial figure. While his writings were indebted to both Coomaraswamy and Guénon, in religious practice he chiefly followed Guénon. His Sūfī order moved to America in 1981 where he increasingly set himself up as a deity figure. His cult fell apart shortly before his death. Religion interpreted through the Traditionalist ideology of Guénon, Coomaraswamy, and Schuon has been widely disseminated through the works of more mainstream writers, academics, artists, and public figures. Not all of them have been particularly open about their debt or allegiance to Traditionalism. Sedgwick (2004: 111, 167-9) labels these less overt writers ‘soft traditionalists’: figures whose debt to Traditionalism is less obvious from their works or was less ‘hard-line’ than the original Traditionalists. Of these, the most famous are Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), Joseph Campbell (1904-2003), Mircea Eliade (1907-86), Louis Dumont (1911-1998), Thomas Merton (1915-1968), Huston Smith (b.1919), and the British composer John Tavener (b.1944) (Sedgwick, 2004: 109-117, 162-7, 214-6).

## 2.7 Traditional Ideology

The voice of one just man crying in the wilderness of modern democracy and mob-rule, with its hideous and unspeakable logical end, Red Fascist Totalitarianism, when it is the voice of a Coomaraswamy, may well serve to announce the retracing of steps up and out of the democratic-totalitarian midden, and to be the harbinger of the restoration of the humane civilized – and therefore aristocratic – values (Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji, 1947: 218).

Coomaraswamy's belief in a universal religious tradition was indelibly connected to his belief in a traditional social system. The two cannot be treated apart. Whether one led to the other or they were formed symbiotically is not entirely clear. Certainly his later political beliefs were clearly present in his writings by 1916, although traces of the same ideology can be found in his earliest writings. In chapters four and five, a variety of Coomaraswamy's artistic and religious theories will be discussed. In order that they can be seen in the context of his ideological beliefs, those beliefs will be outlined in this section.

Writing in the *Hindustan Review* in 1916, Coomaraswamy reviewed *Defence of Aristocracy: A Text Book for Tories* (1915) by his friend, the British far-right activist Anthony Ludovici<sup>42</sup>. His position on the book and its message for Indians was clear from the outset of his twelve-page essay:

Advanced modern Indians are so infatuated with western Democracy... so anxious to be given representative government... that it would seem almost hopeless to put forward any other ideal in India at the present day. It will appear to our reformers the more strange to realise how strongly the current of European thought is beginning to turn in the reverse direction. For Nietzsche does not stand alone in the conviction that wherever the rule of the best is not secured, the race inevitably deteriorates. The whole of Hindu culture in every detail is planned on the aristocratic and hieratic scheme... In every matter of principle the appeal is made not to the man in the street, but to *those who know* (Coomaraswamy, 1916b: 454)

Coomaraswamy's views on Traditional society were a mixture of brahmanic elitism, Catholic hierarchism, and European reaction. As he explained in a letter to Ethel Mairet in

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<sup>42</sup> On Ludovici see Stone (1999: 191-218); a glimpse of Ludovici's friendship with Coomaraswamy can be gleaned from Ludovici (1947: 238-43).

1937, he believed that the world had seen four levels of society, each descending further from ‘likeness to the Kingdom of God’. In the divine realm, ‘all things are in due hierarchy and “order” proceeds not from below, but from above’. Nearest in likeness to the Kingdom of God was the society ruled by spiritual authority in union with royal power; this he believed characterized the social organization of Traditional societies. Lower than that was the society in which royal power had usurped the rule of spiritual power; below that was the bourgeois-industrial class based society; and at the bottom of the heap was the rule of the ‘proletarians’. Coomaraswamy defined this as being either a modern democracy (America) or a communist dictatorship of the proletariat (the Soviet Union) (Coomaraswamy, 1988: 431-32).

Coomaraswamy believed that in parts of the world that were still Traditional there were a ‘folk’ (in India, the *śūdra*) who were only educated to the level necessary for their station. Modern democracies had destroyed the folk and made them into the lowest of the low, an ignorant proletariat. Because of democracy, ‘the ignorance of the uncultured masses’ drags all ‘down’ to the level of Indian Dalits (who he referred to as ‘untouchables’; that term, common at the time, is now regarded as pejorative). There were no longer priests or knights in the West, nor an aristocracy; ‘men are so much alike that these functions can be exercised by *anyone* – the newsboy, for example, becoming a President’ (Coomaraswamy, 1943: 136-7; cf. Ruskin, 1871-84: 8: 254-5). He thought that ‘[i]gnorant’ values ruled American society and that the conduct of its people was ‘governed only by likes and dislikes’ (Coomaraswamy, 1947a: 137).

America, where to talk of superiority was supposedly treasonous, was the worst offender in every regard for Coomaraswamy (1946a: 37). The English at least still had the residues of the class system and a comforting elitism: ‘the cultural domination of America is even more to be dreaded than that of England: for these United States are not even a bourgeoisie, but a proletarian society fed on “soft-bun bread”... and thinking soft-bun thoughts’ (Coomaraswamy, 1988: 59). Ideally, he thought, compulsory education would be withheld from the lower orders. Educating such people was nothing but ‘false pearls cast before real swine’ (Coomaraswamy, 1988: 209; see also 1948: 35 cf. *Matt.* 7:6). The barbarity of America stemmed from its people daring to think for themselves, going against the *dharma* of their station. Coomaraswamy counseled that there was ‘no greater lesson to be learnt than *not* to think for oneself, but by the Self’. The ruler of the self was to be found in Eckhart’s little castle in the soul, just as the ruler of the body should be found inside the

monarch's palace. A monarch should 'rule and not be ruled by the multitude of those who should be vassals and subjects', and the patriarch should 'rule and not be ruled' by their family (Coomaraswamy, 1993: 28; Guénon, 2001a: 148). All must be in hierarchy, that was the Traditional order of the world.

If ideas of equality had corrupted the 'folk', they had also corrupted women. Modern ideas had driven women to ignore what they truly were. In allowing women to perform the functions of men, modern societies had ignored the 'incommensurable' differences between the sexes (Coomaraswamy, 1948: 136). Only Traditional societies allowed a woman to 'be truly herself', because they recognized that a woman's primary function was to bring forth life. Furthermore, 'it is part of woman's innermost nature to worship man' (Coomaraswamy, 1948: 138). 'To one thing at least the greatest men have been always indifferent, that is, the amount of knowledge a woman may possess' (Coomaraswamy, 1948: 137). The true nature of a woman, Coomaraswamy thought, was illustrated by the virtues of Rādhā, Sītā, or Sāvitrī, or the courtly accomplishments of the ladies of the Middle Ages. A woman should inspire men to great work; she should not go out to work, nor even think about voting. The good wife throws herself on her husband's funeral pyre (see Spivak, 1988: 305). That was her *nature* (Coomaraswamy, 1948: 115, 123, 130, 136-8; Sastri, 1974: 37; Heine-Geldern, 1952: 58; see also Coomaraswamy, 1910b).

Coomaraswamy's view of the modern world was not entirely without hope. Many people clearly asked Coomaraswamy why he stayed in America when he disliked it so much. 'I remain here because my work lies here,' he replied; furthermore, he could ignore the outside world through not owning a radio or reading magazines (1988: 69). There was the chance of renewal; one purpose of his work was to act as a catalyst to instigate that change. Even in 1916 he was pondering 'in what manner the rule of the best is to be secured' (Coomaraswamy, 1916b: 460). His ideas for the resurrection of Traditional values concurred with those of Guénon. An 'elite' must undertake to return society to Traditional values. This elite would be hidden from the gaze of the vast majority of people and work on behalf of the forces of Tradition. In Europe and America those forces were principally hard-line elements of the Greek Orthodox and Catholic Churches (Coomaraswamy, 1947a: 62-3; cf. Guénon, 1942: 40). Coomaraswamy did not envisage that the solution was a wholesale return to the way of life of the Middle Ages, but a refashioning of society along Traditional lines (Chandrasekhar, 1952: 139; cf. Guénon, 2001a: 153). To that end, his

writings sought to inform the potential elite of the intellectual underpinning of the true way of East and West.

The truth or otherwise of Traditionalism and the perennial philosophy is the crux by which Coomaraswamy's arguments fly or fall. Coomaraswamy claimed that Traditional values were beyond subjective politics.

In the traditional and unanimous society there is a government by a hereditary aristocracy, the function of which is to maintain an existing order, based on eternal principles, rather than to impose the views or arbitrary will... of any 'party' or 'interest' (Coomaraswamy, 1946b: 234 fn.13).

This structure was correct because of its adherence to 'eternal principles', those known since primeval times. Any modern ideas – democracy, equality, women's rights – therefore could only be the 'views' of an 'interest' and not metaphysical truths (Coomaraswamy, 1988: 314). What was metaphysically true, Coomaraswamy argued, was the Traditional joint rule of *sacerdotium* (priesthood) and *regnum* (monarchy, kingship). Unbalancing this joint rule in favour of temporal ends led to chaos and evil:

when the Regnum pursues its own devices, when the feminine half of the Administration asserts its independence, when Might presumes to rule without respect for Right, when the 'woman' demands her 'rights', then... the King and the Kingdom, the family and the house, alike are destroyed and disorder (*anṛta*) prevails. It was by an assertion of his independence and a claim to 'equal rights' that Lucifer... fell headlong from Heaven and became Satan (Coomaraswamy, 1993: 23; see also Guénon, 2001b: 7-24, 41-64).

Traditionalism is inherently reactionary – any change away from the established forms of the past by definition must be wrong. In order not to be just another subjective ideology, Traditionalism relied on its claim to truth. If that divine truth is thought to be a tendentious construct, then Traditionalism is as open to question as any other ideology.

### **3. Joseph Campbell and John Cage**

#### **Background**

During the 1930s Cage interacted with a number of people with an interest in esoteric spirituality. These included his lover Pauline Schindler, teacher and friend Henry Cowell, and friends and informants Galka Scheyer and Oskar Fischinger. All had been influenced to some degree by the Theosophical Society or its offshoots, or by the Society's 'World Teacher' Jiddu Krishnamurti. The influence of the Theosophical Society and associated movements dominated American and European mysticism and esotericism during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, after 1929 its fortunes dramatically declined. In no small part this was due to Krishnamurti relinquishing his messianic role. On August 3 1929, Krishnamurti spoke in front of thousands of Theosophical Society members who had gathered to hear the words of the World Teacher. Rejecting the hierarchies and esoteric initiations of the society, he told his listeners:

I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect... I adhere to that absolutely and unconditionally. Truth, being limitless, unconditioned... cannot be organised; nor should any organisation be formed to lead or coerce people along any particular path... A belief is purely an individual matter, and you cannot and must not organise it. If you do, it becomes dead, crystallised; it becomes a creed, a sect, a religion, to be imposed on others... I do not want to belong to any organisation of a spiritual kind... I do not want followers... I am concerning myself with only one essential thing: to set man free. I desire to free him from all cages, from all fears, and not to found religions, new sects, nor to establish new theories and new philosophies (quoted in Lutyens, 2005: 278-9).

Krishnamurti's teachings presaged the mood of the following decades. Cultural trends were changing; the once-popular occultism of the Theosophical Society became less fashionable. The esoterically-tinged analytical psychology of Jung, on the other hand, was in the ascendant.

Jung's mixture of perennialist mythology and individualist psychology was better suited to the period than the occultism and hierarchies of the Theosophical Society. For a certain type of person interested in mysticism and esotericism, particularly among practitioners of the arts, Jungianism filled the gap left by the self-combustion of the Theosophical Society. There were considerable continuities between the two groups; in

particular, both relied on the conceptions of Asia of Orientalist discourse. In America, the author Joseph Campbell became one of the most influential disseminators of Jungian ideas; his life also illustrated the connections between the Theosophical Society and the spiritual current of the 1950s. Between the late 1930s and early 1950s, Cage closely associated with a number of Jungians including Campbell. Between 1942 and the mid 1950s Campbell was an influential figure in Cage's life; in particular he helped Cage to locate himself within the contemporary discourse on comparative religion. During the 1930s, Cage's interest in spirituality had not been manifested overtly in his work. In the late 1940s that situation changed. Before documenting Cage's involvement with Campbell it is necessary to understand Campbell's background and intellectual, spiritual, and ideological concerns.

### **3.1 Joseph Campbell**

#### **3.1.1 Campbell's Development**

Campbell was born in New York in 1904 to an upwardly mobile family of Irish heritage. He was raised Roman Catholic; his family were devout, but not unusually so. His mother attempted to ensure he received a privileged education with plenty of culture and travel. Campbell grew up sporty, competitive, handsome, confident, and erudite. As a boy he developed a romantic fascination with Native American culture and became fascinated by the natural history of the American landscape and the myths and legends of its native peoples. Although dutiful in his adherence to Roman Catholicism, he did not accept its services and rituals uncritically. His faith in the church and its doctrines survived his childhood and youth, but at college he increasingly found himself questioning the truths of doctrinal Christianity. Simultaneously he was developing academic acumen in the fields of comparative literature and anthropology. Reading about Leonardo da Vinci, the ever-enquiring heroic Renaissance man, opened up his mind to European art and increased his doubts about organized religion (J. Campbell, 2003: 27; Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 9-12, 15-7, 22, 30-2, 38-9, 53, 81).

The direction of Campbell's life, and the way he conceptualized religion, were both changed through his friendship with Krishnamurti. They first met by chance in the summer of 1924 aboard an ocean liner sailing from America to Britain. The Campbells were sailing to Europe for travel and culture; Krishnamurti, his brother, and two friends were travelling to join Theosophical Society leader Annie Besant for Society events. Campbell was not connected to the Society and knew nothing of Krishnamurti's role as vehicle for the World

Teacher, a fact that had not yet been made public. It was Krishnamurti's manner and words that caught Campbell's attention. One of the Krishnamurti party gave Campbell a copy of Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*. In the Victorian writer's hugely popular romantic verse retelling of the life of the Buddha Śākyamuni, Campbell made his first acquaintance with Buddhism. Campbell was enthralled and 'hooked' by Arnold's Christianized depiction of the Buddha (Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 41). After docking, the friendship of Campbell and Krishnamurti continued; they met in London, Paris, and New York and exchanged letters. Campbell was unprepared when the Theosophical Society announced that the World Teacher, a living deity, had arrived in the form of Krishnamurti. When they met up in 1927 and discussed the matter, Krishnamurti told Campbell that such ideas were the responsibility of the Society. He himself was interested in developing the spirituality of individuals, grounded not in organized religion but in individual spiritual awareness.

Campbell became increasingly critical of Christian dogma and began to explore the teachings of the Theosophical Society. He visited Krishnamurti at his Dutch residence, the Castle Eerde, on three occasions during 1928-9. His last visit to Eerde occurred around the time of Krishnamurti's defection; during his stay he had a significant numinous experience (Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 113). Krishnamurti inspired Campbell to believe in the potential of the self to spiritual knowledge and to cast off organized religion. The teaching Krishnamurti imparted to Campbell was substantially similar to what he announced to the thousands of the followers of the World Teacher who heard his resignation speech. During 1928-9, Campbell abandoned traditional Roman Catholicism; two years later he similarly dropped any belief he had had in the doctrines of the Theosophical Society. Later, through his highly successful books and talks, Campbell encouraged and empowered others to find their own paths (J. Campbell, 2003: 29; Ellwood, 1999: 135; Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 41-4, 47, 52, 54, 58-9, 63-7, 70-1, 76-7, 88-9, 97-8, 101, 103-4, 111-3, 129, 147, 178, 209, 229, 325; Lutyens, 2005: 49-50, 195)

The power of myth and its importance in the lives and cultures of humans occupied Campbell's mind from his final undergraduate year at university. After reading *The Light of Asia*, his next textual revelation came through reading another now problematic late-nineteenth-century/early-twentieth-century tome, the social anthropologist James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890/1907-15/1922). Frazer's essentializing methodological approach to the myths of disparate cultures foreshadowed that adopted later by Campbell (Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 48). Other stimuli followed: he attended Fenwicke Holmes's lectures on the

subconscious, and read *The Science of Mind* (1926) by Holmes's brother Ernest (1887-1960) thus becoming acquainted with perennialism, particularly in relation to Meister Eckhart. His M.A. thesis at Columbia took him deep into Arthurian myth and romanticized medievalism. Further post-graduate study took him to Europe. While based at the Sorbonne he encountered the works of James Joyce. Besides modernist art, he also encountered the metaphysical aesthetics of Antoine Bourdelle. In Paris he found himself drawn toward German academia and subsequently found funding to study in Munich. He fell in love with German language and culture, particularly relishing Goethe, Nietzsche and Mann. Taking advantage of the orientalist expertise of his host university, he studied Sanskrit and 'Oriental studies'. Nevertheless, the most significant development for his later work was his introduction to Freud's psychoanalysis and Jung's analytical psychology (J. Campbell, 2003: 34-5; Douglas, 1978: 151-6, 158, 161-2; Ellwood, 1999: 107; Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 48-9, 65-6, 67-8, 71, 75, 83, 87, 89, 94-5, 104-5, 107, 224-5, 248; Rensma, 2009: 135).

On returning to the United States, Campbell's path was not immediately obvious; he drifted to California, ending up on the Monterey Peninsula early in 1932. Partaking in the intellectual and cultural activity of the area, he embraced Californian bohemianism. Among numerous friends he made were authors John Steinbeck and Robinson Jeffers. As with Cage's lover Pauline Schindler, the spiritual vision of Jeffers influenced Campbell's thinking. Another friend was marine biologist and author Ed Ricketts (1897-1948). Campbell and Ricketts had numerous long conversations on philosophy and psychology, particularly focusing on nonteleological thought. The previous year Ricketts, then 34, had had a relationship with Cage's future wife Xenia Kashevaroff, then seventeen and at high school in Monterey. The Kashevaroff siblings, particularly Xenia's sister Tal (Natalya), were among the circle that Campbell joined. In the summer of 1932, Campbell sailed on a marine specimen collecting trip to Alaska with Ed Ricketts, Xenia's sister Sasha, and Sasha's husband. In Alaska the party met up with Xenia who was spending some time in a cabin on Baranof Island. She quickly took to Campbell. The pair enjoyed a platonic summer romance. Xenia joined the boat party on the journey to Juneau where they stayed with the Kashevaroff family. Xenia stayed in touch with Ricketts, Campbell, and Steinbeck; later, after her marriage, the Cages socialized with all three<sup>43</sup>. At the end of the

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<sup>43</sup> As Cage also lived in Carmel for a period of time in 1933, it is possible that he made some connections with people from this circle at that point independently of either Xenia or Campbell. However, so far little

summer Campbell and Ricketts sailed for Seattle. Campbell settled down; re-entering the academic world, he was employed first as a school teacher, then, until retirement, as a lecturer at Sarah Lawrence College, New York (Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 143-4, 148, 156, 163, 166-7, 171, 175, 179-81, 192, 197-201, 204, 206-10, 228; Silverman, 2010: 34).

Campbell's knowledge of Asian religions and philosophies widened during the thirties and early forties. Considerable stimulus was provided through Campbell's interaction with three inspiring figures: Coomaraswamy, Svāmi Nikhilānanda, and Heinrich Zimmer. In turn, Cage was influenced by all three through Campbell. Campbell began to read Coomaraswamy's works in the late thirties; in 1939 he became acquainted with Coomaraswamy personally. Coomaraswamy encouraged him to read Guénon, which he did, though with some reservations. The perennialist aspect of Coomaraswamy's Traditionalism entered his thinking alongside some of Coomaraswamy's ideological beliefs.

Svāmi Nikhilānanda, head of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center in New York, was introduced to Campbell in 1940. Nikhilānanda inspired Campbell to read more widely in Sanskrit literature. In turn, during 1940-1, Campbell assisted Nikhilānanda with the translation and editing of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Nikhilānanda's version of Mahendranāth Gupta's *Śrīśrīrāmākṣṇakathāmṛta* rewritten for an American audience. The version of Rāmākṣṇa that emerged from the *Gospel* was of considerable spiritual and personal appeal to Campbell; for the rest of his life he was known to quote Rāmākṣṇa. The insights of Nikhilānanda's Rāmākṣṇa and Neo-Vedānta Hinduism further shaped Campbell's spiritual conceptions<sup>44</sup>.

The German Indologist Heinrich Zimmer (1890-1943), introduced to Campbell by Nikhilānanda, was also a friend of Coomaraswamy's. Zimmer appealed to Campbell on several levels. He was a respected European scholar, an expert on Indian religious thought, and a personal friend of Jung. Zimmer shaped Campbell's knowledge of ancient Indian religion and the wider field of myths, as well as giving him an introduction to Jung's circle

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information on Cage's stay in Carmel has come to light. The Cages visited Ricketts in Monterey and Xenia's sisters in Carmel on several occasions during the late thirties; they met with Steinbeck in Chicago and New York, and frequently saw Campbell in the latter city (Kostelanetz, 2003: 12; Lyon, 1965: 154; L. E. Miller, 2002b: 48, 63; Silverman, 2010: 12).

<sup>44</sup> In 1954, Campbell travelled to India with Nikhilānanda; he returned disenchanted with the country in its contemporary condition – an insight that coloured his later writings (see Campbell, 2002; Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 365-91).

in America centred around the Bollingen Foundation and Series. Nevertheless, Campbell's thought cannot be understood without reference to the psychological theories of Jung (J. Campbell, 2002: 163; Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 265, 282-4, 292, 317-9; McGuire, 1982: 38-9; Rensma, 2009: 149)

### **3.1.2 Jung, Campbell and 'Eastern Philosophy'**

Campbell was initially influenced by both Jung and Freud; however, it was the analytical psychology of Jung that became central to Campbell's mature theories<sup>45</sup>. As Rensma (2009) points out, although Campbell's theories do differ from Jung's in some areas, the connections between the two are highly significant. Before outlining the areas of Jung's thought relevant to the present context, it is necessary to point out a number of issues. Jung revised many of his key terms and theories during his lifetime. Campbell first encountered these theories before Jung published his final statements on the subject. Campbell's theories also developed. In the present context, what shall be focused on are the elements of Jung's theories that were of relevance to Campbell at the time Campbell was in frequent contact with Cage.

The central concept of Campbell's theories is that perennial human truths can be deciphered in myths. These truths originate from what Jung termed the collective unconscious. Jung postulated levels of the human unconscious: the individual conscious is specific to one being and is encountered first; at a deeper level there is the collective unconscious which is shared by all humans. Within these deeper levels are traces of original psychological Forms, similar (not identical) in conception to Form/Idea in the Platonist tradition. Jung termed these Forms archetypes. They are a 'collective a priori beneath the personal psyche' that bear traces of primordial models of apprehension and perception (quoted in Rensma, 2009: 27). Archetypal images, then, are phylogenetic elements that structure the way experience is processed by the psyche (M. Adams, 2008: 107-8; Salman, 2008: 63-4). This was the key reason why the same myths and symbols could be found in the traditions and religions of different communities all across the world. At a deep level, all humans share the same unconscious and have recorded knowledge garnered from that unconscious in myths and symbols. Those perennial myths and symbols are representations of archetypes that make the unrepresentable representable. For the individual, analytical psychology allowed the guiding and balancing of the personal

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<sup>45</sup> On Campbell's relation to Jung see Rensma (2009) and Ellwood (1999).

unconscious with the collective unconscious. What Jung called the integration of the personality was the ‘individual path to objective awareness’ (Salman, 2008: 57; discussed further below in 3.3.2).

Jung’s theories were influenced on a number of levels by the ongoing discourse on Asian religions in Europe, Asia, and America. Jung believed that rational, directed thinking involved the conscious and thus the personal psyche, not the unconscious. Rationalism had distanced the ‘Westerner’ from the unconscious. Jung argued that modern societies were becoming divorced from precisely those myths and symbols which formerly guided them and gave their lives meaning. For Jung, the unconscious, as well as being a source of creativity and the grounding point of the psyche, was a space entered by metaphysical reality (divinity). It connected the human to the eternal. Thus, living in confluence with those parts of the self beyond the ego led to the numinous. Conversely, if the relationship with the unconscious is improper, the ego can be taken over: neurosis or madness ensues. Alternatively, it can lead to a descent into fanaticism, for example of the religious or political kind. In the Orientalist binary, the rational Occident was positioned in opposition to the irrational Orient. It was therefore logical that ‘Eastern thought’ could point towards relevant solutions. Jung’s writings frequently made reference to elements of ‘Eastern thought’. Devices drawn from Asian religious traditions could aid in the integration of the personality.

While Jung developed his theories with reference to a number of Asian religious and philosophical traditions, it is important to take note of how his theories altered conceptions of those traditions in Europe and America. In particular, this concerned Suzuki’s modernized version of Zen Buddhism. Jung’s ideas had been stimulated by those of William James<sup>46</sup>, and Jung found justifications for his own thinking in the James-influenced Zen of D. T. Suzuki. In turn, Suzuki was also significantly influenced by the theories of Jung. Jung and Suzuki corresponded, in the process affecting how Jung theorized the unconscious and how Suzuki theorized Zen. However, it was not only theoretical psychology that bound the Swiss psychologist to the Japanese religious philosopher. Both Jung and Suzuki were ideological reactionaries who wished to rebind communities along traditional lines. Each argued that the West was falling into sickness

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in which he suggests that the subconscious connects the self to the transcendent beyond, with reference, it is worth noting, to the neo-Vedānta of Svāmi Vivekānanda (James, 2002: 394-6; Suckiel, 1996: 120-1).

through ignorance of metaphysical truth. Such ideas easily led to anti-modern rhetoric, and, in turn, anti-modern affirmative Orientalism. Nevertheless, the level of Asian influence on Jung's ideas should not be overstated.

Jung's interpretations of Asian-derived material often had little doctrinal or historical grounding beyond European stereotypes<sup>47</sup>. For example, his use of *maṇḍalas*, borrowed from Indian and Tibetan Buddhist traditions, had no connection to established practices. Instead, Jung evoked a primal origin for the practice beyond its historical usage which allowed him to invent his own symbolic and conceptual *maṇḍala* practice (for example, Jung, 1940: 127-30, 145-6, 191-2). Jung's ideas were influenced more by his study of Platonist and Neoplatonist, alchemical, and Christian esoteric and perennialist sources. In the case of *maṇḍalas*, or in his interpretation and use of the *Yijing*, his practice had little historicity. What appeared to be founded in ancient truths was dictated by modern concerns. His metaphysical biases and conception of the purposes of ritual typifies this.

Jung's attitude towards religions, including Christianity, was dismissive of the ontological reality of deities. His theories essentially reduced the objects of the beliefs of different faiths to so many psychological manifestations, making them subservient to a secular-Christian monistic transcendent. Through regarding deities, dogma and ritual as being of less importance than the revelations of his own system – as well as through his reliance on simplistic stereotypes – Jung continued the biases of orientalist discourse. The 'East' that he referred to was largely the exoticized and undifferentiated Orient discussed by Said (see chapter six). For Jung, Asia was little more than a repository for the esoteric. The 'Oriental mind' in Jung's depiction was rendered as a primitive and feminine Other to the 'Western mind'<sup>48</sup>. For example, in his writings, Indians are the dreamers of the Orientalist imagination; e.g. his article on yoga in Iyer's Coomaraswamy Festschrift (Jung, 1947: 170). Therefore, Jung claimed that traditions such as yoga had to be adapted for 'Western minds'. Jungian psychoanalysis claimed to do this, positioning itself between the European or American person and the original tradition. Similarly problematic was the fact that Jung's theories could be allied to earlier Lamarckian theories of 'race memory', the idea that different ethnic groups were psychologically different because each shared a different collective unconscious (reflected in such phrases as 'the Indian mind'). Although

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<sup>47</sup> On Jung's interest in Buddhism from a Postcolonial perspective see Gomez (1995).

<sup>48</sup> On the ways some present day Jungian practitioners are working towards a more co-equal relationship with traditions of Buddhism see Young-Eisendrath (2008: 235-51).

Jung later revised his theories to distance him from Lamarck's theories of racially-specific mental phylogenesis, his earlier published works were ambiguous in this regard (M. Adams, 2008: 107-8, 116; Brooks, 2007a: 114; Clarke, 1994: 131; Ellwood, 1999: 47-8, 52; Gomez, 1995: 200, 203-7, 209-10, 214-5, 220-1; Jung, 1940: 52-3; McGuire, 1982: 11; Rensma, 2009: 17-9, 23, 27-35, 38-45, 47-8, 52-3, 59; Salman, 2008: 59, 61-4; Torgovnick, 1990: 11; Ulanov, 2008: 315-22, 325-6).

In the earlier and later stages of Campbell's career, Jung's theories were of particular importance. Campbell believed that archetypal images could be located in dreams and myths. Archetypal images appeared in different guises: the hero, the wise old man, the child, the eternal feminine, the trickster, et. al; or as animals, situations, paths, places (Jung, 1940: 89). The primal truths that were unveiled through listening to and deciphering the soul's uncoerced song aided individuation, informing of life's true purposes and the proper ways for humans to live. Campbell believed that myths had the potential to harmonize humanity with its inner nature – the ground of its soul. Through the realization of the separate but comparable journeys of humans, the understanding of myths could reveal a way to bring harmony to humanity. 'Myth is the psychological bridge to experience', as Larsen and Larsen (1991: 254) put it. Literature and art could form such a bridge when keyed with the psychology of myth; the study of both formed another strand of Campbell's thought. Artists themselves could shape culture and minds through that language, helping 'Western man' to 'find himself' (Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 226). Campbell joined Jung in viewing 'Oriental' and 'primitive' myth, religion, and art as sources that could be colonized for their potential to reveal the pure nature of humanity. Jung's theories, filtered through spiritual universalism, including that of Coomaraswamy, and the reductionist primitivism of Frazer and Frobenius, formed the basic ground from which Campbell constructed his increasingly monolithic texts. The first major example of Campbell's theory was *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, which remains his best known work. Campbell was working on this book during the period of his closest friendship with Cage, and allowed Cage to read it in draft (J. Campbell, 1949: 3-4, 11-2, 17-20; Ellwood, 1999: 44, 143; Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 107-8, 226-7, 254-5, 257-8, 294, 347; Lopez, 1995: 16-7; McGuire, 1982: 233; Rensma, 2009: 7, 99-101, 103-4, 106-7, 109-13, 127-8; Stevens, 2001: 30).

### 3.1.3 Campbell and Bollingen

*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), the book that made Campbell's name, found a highly suitable publisher in the Bollingen Series. The Series was the publishing arm of the Bollingen Foundation, which was dedicated to spreading the work of Jung. The Foundation, named after Jung's rural Swiss retreat, was financed by the extremely wealthy philanthropists and Jungians Paul and Mary Mellon<sup>49</sup>. In 1933, Mary Mellon had been introduced to Jung's theories by her friend Nancy Wilson Ross (see below, section 3.3.1). She quickly became a dedicated Jungian. Five years later the Mellons attended the Eranos Conference in Switzerland for the first time. Eranos was started in 1932 by Olga Froebe-Kapteyn, herself another former Theosophical Society member. Rudolph Otto, an early proponent of the comparative study of religion and mysticism, guided its foundation. Heinrich Zimmer, Jung, and the orientalist C. A. F. Rhys Davids were among the lecturers at the first conference. Jungian concerns dominated the agenda almost from the start. The Mellons first attended at a time when Froebe-Kapteyn had almost exhausted her financial resources; they came to the rescue. The Bollingen Series and Foundation, developed by the Mellons in stages during the forties, were an effort to transplant the spirit of Eranos to American soil.

Since the inception of Bollingen, it had been Mary Mellon's intention to organize for the publication of books on Jungian subjects. This was the rationale behind the Bollingen Series<sup>50</sup>. Zimmer was involved with this project from early on. He knew the Mellons through his connections to Jung and became one of the Foundation's directors and inspirations. He was also instrumental in involving the publisher Kurt Wolff, father of Cage's future pupil the composer Christian Wolff. After escaping Europe and the Nazis, the Wolffs had settled in New York where Kurt Wolff set up the intellectually-inclined Pantheon Books in 1942. The following year, Mary Mellon invited Wolff and Pantheon to publish the Bollingen Series. Jung's European circle furnished many of the authors the Series published, including Cary Baynes whose translation of the *Yijing* was used by Cage and became the press's best selling title.

Campbell was introduced to the foundation by Zimmer. His initial task was to write a scholarly commentary for the first Bollingen volume *Where the Two Came to Their*

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<sup>49</sup> On the Bollingen Foundation and Series see McGuire (1982).

<sup>50</sup> Later the remit of the series was broadened to encompass research in some way relevant to the wider field of Jung's theories.

*Father* (1943) on Native American Navajo traditions. The volume was based on ethnographic research by Maud Oakes; it featured Campbell's commentary alongside Oakes's painted depictions of sand paintings and her transcription of the ceremonial words of Navajo shaman Jeff King. Cage may have been influenced by Campbell's work on this volume (see below, section 3.2.1). After Zimmer's sudden death in 1943, Campbell was employed by Bollingen as editor of the Indologist's uncompleted works. In some cases this meant producing texts from jumbles of jottings; Campbell performed this task with guidance from one of Zimmer's chief sources, Coomaraswamy. Coomaraswamy also provided additional scholarly notes for the publications. During the period that Cage was in regular contact with Campbell, this process produced *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (1946), *The King and the Corpse* (1948), and *Philosophies of India* (1951), at least the second of which Cage is known to have read. From 1946 Campbell was additionally employed by Bollingen editing the Eranos yearbooks for publication. Nevertheless, Campbell's greatest triumph with Bollingen came in 1949 with the publication of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

Mary Mellon, the main driving force behind Bollingen's publishing programme, died suddenly aged 42 in October 1946. The Foundation and Series continued, guided by her aims<sup>51</sup>. One of Mary Mellon's aims for Bollingen was to spread Jung's theories amongst English language readers; Campbell might be thought to have fulfilled her aim, producing some of the most popular Jungian works in English (Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 320-3, 325, 327, 336-8, 345, 359, 362-3; McGuire, 1982: xviii-xx., 21, 23-4, 27-9, 33-5, 41, 48-9, 54, 59-66, 69-71, 85, 114, 120-2, 133, 138-9, 185, 235-6, 277; Rensma, 2009: 98-9; Wolff and Patterson, 1994: 63).

### **3.1.4 Problematizing Campbell**

Politically Campbell underwent a journey from apoliticalism to communism to libertarian conservatism. His political awakening did not occur until he was in his mid twenties. In the late twenties, inspired by the progress the Soviet Union seemed to be making, he embraced

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<sup>51</sup> Kurt and Helen Wolff returned to Europe in 1959; although Kurt Wolff left Pantheon he continued to work with Bollingen until his death in 1963. The same year Mellon decided to limit the Bollingen Series to publishing projects already planned and to wind down the Foundation. In 1967 publishing of the Series was entrusted to Princeton University Press; at the time of writing, PUP continues to complete and reprint the Bollingen Series (McGuire, 1982: 273-4, 278-84, 286).

communism. However, by the late thirties he regarded himself again as apolitical. He may have been apolitical in terms of lack of support or involvement with any particular political party; nevertheless, his thought became rightist and fervently against socialism or communism. Despite his aversion to speaking openly on political matters, like Coomaraswamy he can only be seen as apolitical if conservatism is believed to be truth. In other words, he failed in his effort to be above politics.

As the Second World War geared up, he refused to either support the forces of democracy or condemn the forces of fascism and he urged others to do the same. In his opinion, neither side was blameless. Campbell's abhorrence of British and American imperialism could certainly be seen to be justified, but this was only one of his motivations. The intellectual, he thought, like the artist, should be above such temporal concerns. Campbell appears to have followed Jung in believing that overt concern with political matters indicated an unbalanced personality, and that mass political movements were conducted by similarly deviant people. It was in this period that he was first labelled as a fascist; such charges would continue to be made, albeit without real grounds, for the rest of his life<sup>52</sup>.

Coomaraswamy was an influence in the development of Campbell's mature ideological views. Coomaraswamy demonstrated the way one should conduct oneself in the world and in art, awakening Campbell to the 'eternal' truth, and those 'permanent human values' that can be known through myths, sacred texts, and other works of Tradition. Coomaraswamy persuaded Campbell that the highest part of the self was not a denizen of the sensible realms, and it was to that self that the shadow self of the sensible world should look (see chapter four). 'Art I conceive to be the living of life and the fashioning of things in consonance with this truth', Campbell wrote in his journal (quoted in Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 287). Campbell believed that it was this transcendent reality that should be focused upon, not war, not the competition of democracy and other systems, not nationalism, or temporal politics and social questions. If this was the case, one might then wonder why he opposed America joining the Second World War yet was in favour of American intervention in Vietnam. Why was he so vociferously against any of his students taking part in Vietnam-era anti-war protests? More generally, why was he antagonistic towards the sixties counter-culture, feminists, socialists, and radicals? Discussing Campbell's dislike of

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<sup>52</sup> Coomaraswamy, too, has been accused of fascism (Mitter, 1984: 48); nevertheless, the label is no more accurate for Coomaraswamy than it is for Campbell.

Judaism, among other prejudices, Ellwood (1999: 164) commented that ‘One is left with an unpleasant feeling of something very narrow lurking within the broad mind of the world-scanning mythologist’ (see also Friedman, 1998: 385-401; Segal, 1999: 461-67). The permanent human values as depicted by Coomaraswamy, Jung, Campbell and others were not apolitical and unshaped by contemporary concerns (Alschuler, 2008: 300-1; Ellwood, 1999: 131-3, 137-8, 140, 149-51, 165; Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 141-2, 234, 263, 267, 278, 286-92, 295, 299-300, 302, 304, 308, 464-6; Rensma, 2009: 149).

Campbell’s conceptualization of myth and his methodology were also problematic. The key issue lies in his inference that his subjective method was universal in scope, applicable to the human soul and human societies *a priori*. The myths of the world’s traditions were, Campbell thought, the ‘depersonalized dream[s]’ of the world’s inhabitants whose insights were ‘valid for all mankind’ (Campbell, 1949: 18-9). On the one hand, he encouraged his audience to open themselves to the transcendent through finding their individual true calling or ‘bliss’. On the other, he used his authority to offer highly selective interpretations of myths. Often divorced from any contextualization other than his own theories, he postulated that these were myths by which one *ought* to live. It is not difficult to problematize Campbell: why choose those myths? Why make those connections? Why foreground that interpretation? Campbell was an interpreter of myth, and his interpretations often revealed far more about his own interpretations and ideological sway than they did about the original myths. Writing in his journal, Campbell remarked that Coomaraswamy’s Tradition had led him to see that his ‘final object must be the substantial human Norm over which play the historical styles like so many passing moods’ (quoted in Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 287). Campbell’s theories enshrined conservative social norms as veridical truths rather than relative values.

Campbell did not try particularly hard to hide the aspects of his thought that could be accused of reinforcing traditional modes of dominance. For example, he thought society did not need to update its attitudes towards women’s rights: all women needed to do was ‘stop looking at the boys and wondering whether they are in competition with them’ (J. Campbell, 2003: 93; cf. Coomaraswamy, 1948: 123-5, 126-7, 130-1, 134-7 etc.). In his final year of teaching, a female student asked him “you’ve been talking about the hero. But what about the woman?” Campbell replied “The woman’s the mother of the hero; she’s the goal of the hero’s achieving; she’s the protectress of the hero; she is this, she is that. What more do you want?” (J. Campbell, 2003: 93; cf. Campbell, 1949: 116). In the reply to his

student, Campbell revealed the conditions of dominance inherent in his theories of myth. He may have encouraged listeners to find their bliss, but he also encouraged them to accept traditional forms of dominance when those forms were enshrined in the monomyth. The individual should accept the society they are living in; the ego must train itself to fit in to the restrictions of that society. 'There's no point in learning to live in a society that does not exist or that lives over on the other side of the Iron Curtain. This which you have around you is it, my friend' (J. Campbell, 2004a: 70). One of the main purposes of myth, as he saw it, was 'to validate, support, and imprint the norms of a given specific moral order – that, namely, of the society in which the individual is to live' (quoted in Ellwood, 1999: 215). The messages Campbell found in myths often seem to be less echoes of the soul's primal song than the defensive devices of an elite struggling to hold on to structures of power threatened by aspects of modernity. The Hero, the Jungian archetype Campbell read into the myths of numerous cultures of the world and emblazoned onto the American consciousness, was a reactionary idol (Ellwood, 1999: vii, xiii, 8, 30, 131, 148-9, 166-8).

As frequently as Campbell referenced different global religions and cultures, American and European values remained the yardstick by which he made judgments. The results proved immensely popular with American and European audiences. When Campbell lost his faith in organized Christianity it was because of its rigid adherence to the truth of a body of doctrine which science appeared to disprove. The theories Campbell developed retained what he considered meaningful in traditional religion while jettisoning what to him was outdated (J. Campbell, 1949: 387-90; 2003: 27-8; cf. J. Campbell, 2001). He was inspired by the possibilities for humanity that the developments of the modern era provided, yet, like Jung, he was also pulled towards the anti-modern conceptions of the Traditionalists. He was a reactionary modernist: while affirming certain tenets of modernity he sought to rebuild the metaphysical ground of traditional values that had been eroded from under the feet of traditional religion. As demonstrated by the popularity of his work, Campbell struck a powerful chord. His work from *The Hero of a Thousand Faces* onwards, particularly as a lecturer, proved popular with non-specialist audiences though less so with scholars of religion and philosophy. He has proved most influential in New Age thought and popular culture – most famously through the influence of his ideas on works such as Richard Adams's *Watership Down* (1972) and George Lucas's *Star Wars* films (1977-

1983/1999-2005)<sup>53</sup> (J. Campbell, 2003: 180, 185; 2004a: xxiv, 85-7, 111-3, Ellwood, 1999: 130, 135-6, 143, 148-9, 152-4, 165-6; Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 462-4, 537-8, 540-3; Rensma, 2009: viii-ix, 93-4, 204-5).

## **3.2 Cage and Campbell**

### **3.2.1 A Friendship**

In 1938, Campbell married Jean Erdman, a former student of his at Sarah Lawrence College. She was a dancer; after graduation she joined the Martha Graham Dance Company. In 1941, while Campbell been at work on *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and had begun preliminary work on the project that became *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, she had been working with fellow Graham Company dancer Merce Cunningham and had met Cage. Campbell, as discussed earlier, had known Xenia and her family for some years. As discussed above in section 1.2, the Cages arrived in New York from Chicago in the summer of 1942. After a short stay with Peggy Guggenheim and Max Ernst, the Cages moved in with the Campbells in their small apartment on Waverley Place; they stayed for several months. Cage's friendship with Campbell started at this time (Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 255-6, 293; Patterson, 1996: 55-7).

Over the next ten years Cage investigated and aligned himself with a number of Campbell's interests. After the Cages moved out, they continued regularly to see the Campbells. The couple provided emotional assistance and advice to both John and Xenia during the break-up of the Cage's marriage. Cage was considerably psychologically affected by the split, which had been brought to a head by his burgeoning romantic relationship with Cunningham. Campbell suggested he try psychoanalysis: Cage did so, but was unimpressed. At a similar time, Cage became dissatisfied with the music he was composing and its inability to express what he wanted it to express. Both psychologically and aesthetically he found what he was looking for through the spiritual, philosophical and mythological traditions Campbell introduced him to. In the process Cage found he was becoming interested in the spiritual ideas he was encountering, finding in himself a desire for religious meaning (Waddington, 1972: 44).

Campbell and Cage frequently discussed philosophical, spiritual, and artistic matters throughout this period. Cage, it seems, was prepared to learn from Campbell; he

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<sup>53</sup> Cage and George Lucas shared a number of similar inspirations (for a start: compare Suzuki in the fifties and sixties to Jedi Master Yoda).

even, perhaps, wanted to emulate him. He took on an overtly Campbellian role in his lectures. Communicating ancient wisdoms made relevant to the modern world, he adopted several of Campbell's key influences as his own. In his talks he began to reference Jung and Coomaraswamy, quote from Rāmakṛṣṇa, and retell myths found in books by Campbell and Zimmer. Campbell's work on the first Bollingen volume, *Where the Two Came to Their Father* (1943), may have provided Cage with material for his depiction of Navajo sand painting in his 1949 lecture on the subject at the Artists' Club<sup>54</sup>. At one point, Cage and Campbell even worked together on an opera on mythological themes. In fact, almost all Cage's interests in 'Other traditions' can be linked in one way or another to Campbell. Nevertheless, in the early-to-mid fifties, Cage cast out resolutely in his own direction. Instead of being centred on myths and symbolism, his message became focused on the principles of Zen as depicted in a number of the sources Campbell led him to. Despite this, during this period Cage continued to rely on Jungian and Campbellian material. From the late fifties onwards, Cage rarely alluded to Jung or Campbell; however, Cage's metapsychology remained conceptually linked to Jung through Suzuki's Jungian depiction of the workings of the mind.

While professionally Cage and Campbell's collaboration came to very little, Campbell's preoccupations – mythology, Asian and medieval European religions, esotericism and Perennialism – influenced Cage's theories for the rest of his life. Campbell can hardly be faulted in his generosity in sharing his knowledge with Cage, yet one downside was that Cage developed a narrow knowledge of Asian religions epistemologically limited by the elitist interests of Campbell's Jungian circle. Much of Cage's reading in the forties and fifties was either published by Bollingen or was by authors associated with Bollingen and Pantheon including Jung, Zimmer, Alan Watts, Suzuki, and Coomaraswamy. Perhaps most significantly for Cage's later practice, it was Bollingen who published the Jung-introduced Wilhelm/Baynes translation of the *Yijing*. Cage was presented with his copy by Christian Wolff, son of Bollingen Series publisher Kurt Wolff; he used it in his composition from that point on.

Campbell not only introduced Cage to thinkers and subjects he might otherwise not have encountered, he also provided Cage with a model and a methodology. Like Campbell,

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<sup>54</sup> Nicholls (2002c: 18) records the lecture as being entitled 'Indian Sand Painting or The Picture That Is Valid for One Day'. See also: Cage, 1949a, p.65; Kostelanetz, 2003: 230. On the book see above, section 3.1.3; Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 323-5; McGuire, 1982: 63-6, 73-4.

Cage did not aim to embrace a body of doctrine complete, or become subservient to an organized religion. He interpreted and utilized material only as was relevant to his own programme. Cage, however, had little background in exegesis, comparative religion, or philosophy. Coomaraswamy's comparative analysis was frequently highly sophisticated; Campbell's conclusions, even if problematic, were informed by dedicated study; Cage's were often based purely on spurious surface level associations, and sometimes not even on that. In a surprisingly large number of cases this resulted in Cage reading a phrase or idea fundamentally against its original meaning yet confidently asserting that his interpretation was an accurate representation of the original. Chapter six will show why this was problematic (Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 333-4, 343, 358; Patterson, 1996: 56-7, 66-7, 123-4; Silverman, 2010: 59-66).

### **3.2.2 History of Cage's Readings**

Determining exactly what Cage read, and when he did so, is still a difficult task. Furthermore, knowing when Cage read something does not necessarily confirm when he was first exposed to ideas contained in the text. For example, although it was Gita Sarabhai who gave Cage his copy of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, his introduction to and understanding of Rāmakṛṣṇa were probably chiefly indebted to Campbell<sup>55</sup>. According to the Larsens (1991: 334), Cage acknowledged to them that it was Campbell who first introduced him to *The Gospel*. Cage may have discussed the text with Sarabhai but she had left by the time he was reading it. Campbell, on the other hand, was not only still in frequent contact with Cage, he was also one of the editors of *The Gospel* and thus a relevant person with whom to discuss the text. Similarly, many of the figures Cage would later reference – including Coomaraswamy, Rāmakṛṣṇa, Zen/Suzuki, and many aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism – are mentioned in Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, which Cage read in manuscript in February 1944 (Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 333; cf. Silverman, 2010: 62). Campbell's influence on Cage, then, is liable to have been greater than previously thought. Based on Patterson's conclusions, Cage's writings, and other evidence, the following schedule of Cage's readings and influences can be drawn for the period 1942 to 1952:

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<sup>55</sup> On Rāmakṛṣṇa see Beckerlegge (2006), Kripal (1998) and Sil (1991; 1998; 2009).

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|--|--|
| <b>Summer 1942<br/>1942/3</b>                        | Lodges with and becomes a friend of Joseph Campbell.<br>Possibly hears about concept of <i>rasa</i> ; if so, probably through Campbell (see below).  |
| <b>February 1944</b>                                 | Reads unpublished manuscript of Campbell's <i>The Hero with a Thousand Faces</i> and thus reads references to many of the figures and doctrines he subsequently researched. Extensive discussion with Campbell during this period and, less frequently, until the early fifties (see above).   |
| <b>After September 1945</b>                          | Reads Huxley's <i>The Perennial Philosophy</i> (Cage, 1959b: 78; cf. Bedford, 1974: 64).   |
| <b>Before April 1946</b>                             | Reads Coomaraswamy's <i>The Dance of Shiva</i> and/or <i>The Transformation of Nature in Art</i> (Cage, 1946: 24; Cage and Charles, 1981: 105)   |
| <b>Aug. – Dec. 1946</b>                              | Gita Sarabhai in New York. Discusses aspects of Indian religions and musics with her. She gives him a copy of <i>The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna</i> .   |
| <b>Before December 1946</b>                          | Lou Harrison reads Mace's <i>Musick's Monument</i> (Cage, 1948a: 41).  |
| <b>After December 1946<br/>Aug. 1946 – Feb. 1948</b> | Reads <i>The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna</i> .<br>Studies 'oriental and medieval Christian philosophy and mysticism' (Cage, 1948a: 41). This included the above, and also probably Evans/Pfeiffer <i>Meister Eckhart</i> (vol. 1: 1924, vol. 2: 1931). Lou Harrison writes to Coomaraswamy, he receives a reply dated December 17, 1946 (Coomaraswamy, 1988: 405). |
| <b>Late 1947 – early 1948</b>                        | Reads Jung's <i>The Integration of the Personality</i> (Cage, 1948a: 41; Clarkson, 2001: 80).  |
| <b>Before March 1949</b>                             | Reads Zimmer's <i>The King and the Corpse</i> (Cage, 1949a: 66).<br>Has definitely read Pfeiffer/Evans <i>Eckhart</i> by this point.   |
| <b>Before January 1950</b>                           | Becomes interested in Suzuki's work; in January 1950 he is anticipating the republishing of Suzuki's works on Zen (Nattiez, 1993: 50). Between early 1950 and early 1952 it is probable he read one or more of Suzuki's books.   |

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Late 1950</b>            | Given Bollingen edition of <i>Yijīng</i> (Cage, 1988a: 6-7; Silverman, 2010: 100-1).  |
| <b>Before January 1951</b>  | Becomes acquainted with Alan Watts through mutual friend Campbell (Watts, 1973: 204-218, 226-32).   |
| <b>Before December 1950</b> | Reads R. H. Blyth's <i>Haiku</i> (Cage, 1950: 90).  |
| <b>Before 1952</b>          | Reads Blyth's <i>Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics</i> and probably works by Alan Watts (Cage, 1959c: 143). This may include Watts's <i>Behold the Spirit</i> (see 5.2.3).  |
| <b>Spring 1952 – ?</b>      | Attends Suzuki's lectures at Columbia; also does so in autumn 1952. He may also have attended during periods in 1953 and 1954 (Patterson, 1996: 141-4).   |
| <b>Spring/summer 1952</b>   | Reads John Blofeld's 1947 translation of the <i>Chuánxīn Fǎyào</i> ( <i>Essentials of Mind Transmission</i> ) of Huángbò Xīyùn entitled <i>The Huang Po Doctrine of Universal Mind</i> (Kostelanetz, 2003: 57; Patterson, 1996: 147). |

### 3.3 Cage and Jung

#### 3.3.1 Nancy Wilson Ross, Jung, and Cage

Cage encountered Jung's theories throughout the thirties and forties. We have already noted that the journal *transition*, which took on a Jungian focus from 1929, was one such source. Another source has previously been overlooked: in 1938, Cage met Mary Mellon's friend Nancy Wilson Ross (1901-1986). Ross has often been named as Cage's first source on Zen – she gave a talk mentioning Zen and Dada at the Cornish School in Seattle, discussed below – it should be noted that she was also a Jungian and that the talk Cage attended was more concerned with analytical psychology than Zen. Beside being indirectly responsible for the creation of the Bollingen Foundation and Series through introducing Mary Mellon to Jungianism, Ross's second husband, Stanley Young, was the founder managing editor of the Bollingen Series as well as the recipient of a five-year Bollingen fellowship.

Ross's first publications were novels and two volumes on the history and culture of the American northwest. Probably due to her interest Jung's theories, she had begun to investigate Asian religious traditions. Ross made her first trip to Asia in 1939 and subsequently returned for further travels (Ross, 1966, rear dust jacket flap). In the 1960s she published two popular volumes on the subject of Asian religions: *The World of Zen*

(1960) was an anthology, and *Three Ways of Asian Wisdom* (1966) provided an introduction to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zen. Jung is presented as an authority on Asian traditions in both volumes. Her interpretation of Zen was largely indebted to the depiction of the tradition in the works of Suzuki and his disseminators Alan Watts, Christmas Humphries, and R. H. Blyth. However, when Ross talked to the Cornish School her knowledge of Zen was comparatively small (Clarkson, 2001: 80-2; Cornish, 1964: 226; Joseph, 2002: 162-3; Lund and Sibley, 1994; McGuire, 1982: 6, 8, 10, 46, 55, 58-9, 70, 79; McMillan, 1975: 48, 50-1, 57-9).

The main subject of Ross's lecture at the Cornish School was contemporary art. Having studied at the Bauhaus during 1931-3 and remained in touch with art world developments, Ross's knowledge in this area was considerably more developed than her knowledge of Zen. Cage's recollection of Ross's 1938 lecture was at odds with its actual content. According to Cage's foreword to *Silence* (1968a: xi), Ross's lecture was entitled 'Zen Buddhism and Dada'. In fact, her archived manuscript of the talk shows it to have been entitled 'The Symbols of Art' and reveal that it was more focused on Jungianism than Buddhism (Ross Papers: 69.8)<sup>56</sup>. The topics of Zen and Dada were only secondary subjects. The main focus of her talk was developments in art in the twentieth century and their relation to advances in knowledge in science and psychology. Her talk is summarized below.

The world has become fractured, Ross stated. There are so many different beliefs it can seem impossible to view the whole objectively. There are only two fields that allow such a view: science and art. Science is objectivity itself; art is different but allows an equally important vista: the psychology of a culture. Observing the symbolism of the arts in a specific period allows the observer to understand the state of consciousness of humans during the period in question. To understand the current state of consciousness, one must look to the art of the present time (Ross Papers, 69.8: 1).

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<sup>56</sup> The fact that a copy of the manuscript still exists is down to the careful preservation of a photocopy of the lecture by Bonnie Bird. In 1980 she made a copy for Ross who had long since lost the original (Ross to Cage, 8 May 1980, Ross Papers 118.4). That copy is now among the collection of Ross's papers held in the archives of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas in Austin. This collection also contains Cage's correspondence with Ross. I would like to express my gratitude to the Harry Ransom Center for access to Ross's papers.

Looking at the art of disparate periods and locations together reveals common symbolism. This clearly shows that common symbols, whether modern-surrealist or medieval, were not invented by psychoanalysis but have been present for a considerable length of time in the human unconscious (ibid.: 1, 8). Ross then proceeded to survey modern art in relation to the development of European art before arriving at her central theme (ibid.: 2-5).

Humans become more aware of their dreams, she argued, at key times in the development of humanity. Thus in the art of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and twentieth centuries there was a movement towards awareness of subconscious symbolism. As art always relates to the key phenomena of the culture in which it is produced, it is not surprising that in the twentieth century leading art movements relate to the advances in knowledge brought about by science and psychoanalysis. The aesthetic innovations of impressionism and constructivism relate to advances in science and the development of machines (ibid.: 5). Meanwhile, Dadaists, surrealists and artists such as Chagall and Klee, represent a different development: they have again come to focus on dreams and the interior life – the realm of psychoanalysis (ibid.: 6).

After outlining the history and development of Dada and Surrealism, she stated that it was a boon to the understanding of the commonness of humanity that there were clear similarities between Dada and surrealism and Zen Buddhism (ibid.: 7). Her information on Zen at this point was clearly limited: the topic of Zen takes up only one short paragraph (ibid.: 7). Even then, her depiction of Zen contained several errors. The remainder of the lecture (ibid.: 8-10) was again focussed on psychoanalysis, now in relation to surrealism, Chinese painting, Mondrian, Moholy-Nagy's *The New Vision*, and Dalí. Ross ended by encouraging her listeners to investigate all modern developments in the arts and never dismiss a work if they found at first that they could not understand it.

What Ross said about Zen, Cage later recounted, impressed him considerably, although not enough to make him investigate Zen texts for himself at that point<sup>57</sup> (Kostelanetz, 2003: 13). Reviewing the manuscript of Ross's lecture shows that, despite Cage's interest, it would have been impossible for him to have taken away any concrete information other than that there was a tradition of Buddhism called Zen and that certain aspects of its doctrines were psychologically similar to the attitudes of Dada and surrealism.

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<sup>57</sup> Although Cage probably forgot it, in her talk she also mentioned Aristotle's dictum that art imitates nature (Ross Papers 69.8: 4). A decade later, attributed to Coomaraswamy, it would enter his lexicon.

The fact that he remembered a minor part of the talk as constituting Ross's main subject – and title – seems to point to the comparative level of interest the subject caused in him even at that point. Although Ross's talk alerted him to the existence of Zen, it may also have helped forge the connection in his mind between 'Eastern religions' and psychology that characterized his interest in Asian traditions in the forties and early fifties. Furthermore, it may have conditioned how he saw Zen by instilling in him the questionable idea that Zen and Dada bear significant similarities.

Cage's connection to Ross did not end with the 1938 talk. The following year Cage wrote to Ross in the course of fundraising for new percussion instruments for his group; she became one of a number of donors. In 1940 she provided a reference for his application for a Guggenheim Fellowship, assisted in his attempts to found a center for electronic music, and gave much-needed encouragement (Cage to Ross, 27 September [1939], 16 August 1940, 10 October 1940, Ross Papers: 118.4). Their friendship continued as the years passed. Ross sent Cage her books and in turn attended his performances or those by Cunningham; they would meet occasionally when schedules permitted. The letters that have been preserved reveal an affectionate friendship that lasted into the 1980s (Cage to Ross, 10 October 1940, 7 January 1967, 11 May 1980; Ross to Cage, 20 November 1971, 31 May 1974, 16 October 1976, Ross Papers: 118.4). Further to Cage's association with Campbell, Ross was another friend who combined Jungianism with a strong interest in Asian religious traditions.

### **3.3.2 Jung's *The Integration of the Personality***

Through *transition* and friends such as Nancy Wilson Ross and Joseph Campbell, Cage gained an idea of modern analytical psychology. His interest was such that he investigated Jung for himself, reading *The Integration of the Personality* (1940) late in 1947 or early in 1948. The book consists of essays originally delivered at the Eranos Conferences by Jung in the translation of Stanley Dell (Cage, 1948a: 41). It can be suspected that Cage may have been guided to this particular work by Campbell: Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was heavily indebted to it (Rensma, 2009: 94, 162). It is possible to clearly identify Jungian terminology and concepts in Cage's writings of the forties and fifties; therefore, Jung's *Integration* should be treated with the same attention as the other influences Cage encountered in the period. As Jung's theories changed over time and were not always

identical to Campbell's theories, it is necessary to further summarize the theories Cage encountered directly through *The Integration of the Personality*.

In Jung's terms, the integration of the personality, or individuation, referred to the integrating process that makes a human an 'individual' or 'whole' person. The whole person includes the ego-consciousness, and the unconscious psyche that is prior to yet not directly known to the former; the unconscious is not ruled or ordered. While the ego is short lived, rising and falling with the individual life, the psyche, especially the unconscious, is of an age stretching back to ancient times. The human mind is as phylogenetically shaped as the body. Through the non-rational, the non-ego-driven, 'the unconscious opens the way to meaning by revelation' (Jung, 1940: 83). This was because the unconscious 'remains out of reach of all subjective caprice, a realm of nature that cannot be improved upon or perverted. It is part of nature's secret' (ibid.: 101). The unconscious can be the source of perennial knowledge, but also the harbour of mental danger. Modern life with its flood of media and noise blocks people's attention from the 'inner world', leading them to forget about the unconscious. Yet they forget about it at their peril. The unconscious is still there, and unlike 'primitives' who know to be wary of the power of the unconscious, Jung argued that modern Westerners were becoming defenceless. This could easily be seen in the willingness of normal people to support causes that attack the status quo: 'Their amazing defencelessness against suggestions, even against the wildest social and political ideas and ideals, is not exactly a proof of the strength of consciousness and reason' (ibid.: 10, cf. p.15). What was needed was a balance. This was not a question of repressing the unconscious, but of making it collaborate with its other half; to do so might only be achieved through struggle.

Successfully bringing the personality to wholeness was a considerable feat: 'the best possible development of all that lies in a particular, single being... Personality is the highest realization of the inborn distinctiveness of the particular living being'. It was an activity that lasted a lifetime, involving biological, social, and spiritual factors. To do so involved 'unconditional affirmation of all that constitutes the individual' in order to achieve 'the most successful adaptation to the universal conditions of human existence, with the greatest possible freedom of personal decision' (ibid.: 286). The development of personality was not, however, a case of encouraging individualism. Jung believed that individualism was an unnatural, hollow development (ibid.: 288-9). The individuated personality is the realization of 'full consciousness', true to the essence of humanity. 'He'

does not follow the whims of individualism, he is not following ‘his “own” law... it is *the* law’ (ibid.: 294-5). Nevertheless, in doing so he becomes separate ‘from the undifferentiated and unconscious herd’. He is strong, unafraid of the consequences, showing absolute belief and ‘fidelity to the law of one’s being’ (ibid.: 288-9). This individual knows both the ground of the group soul and his own true vocation. Through individuation he has managed to turn away from ‘the all-powerful, all-oppressing psychic life’ of the masses (ibid.: 294). Such ‘personalities are as a rule the legendary heroes of mankind, those who are wondered at, loved, and worshipped, the true sons of God’ (ibid.: 290). It was on this element of Jung’s theories that Campbell focussed on in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

It should also be noted that Jung’s *The Integration of the Personality* shared themes and sources with a range of Cage’s sources, not only Campbell. From Chinese traditions, Jung evoked the *Dào* and *Lǎozǐ*. He also notes that ‘One must be able to *let things happen*’: ‘I have learned from the East what it means by the phrase “Wu wei”: namely, not-doing, letting be, which is quite different from doing something’ (ibid.: 31-2; cf. Kahn, 1997: 564-5). Further, he mentions a range of classical, Neoplatonist and Christian figures that Cage would have encountered in the writings of Coomaraswamy and Huxley, including Pythagoras, Plato, Hermes Trismegistus, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, and Jakob Böhme (Jung, 1940: 3-12, 20-1, 25-7, 30-2, 38, 41-3, 46, 62). The remainder of the present chapter will focus on traces of the theories of Campbell and Jung in Cage’s texts of the forties and fifties.

### **3.4 Traces of Campbell and Jung in Cage’s Compositions and Texts**

#### **3.4.1 *Rasa* in *Amores* (1943) and Arthurian Myth in *The Perilous Night* (1943-4).**

Cage claimed in 1962 that the first of his compositions to bear the influence of Asian aesthetics was *Amores* (1943) (1962: 15, 33). Per this source, *Amores* attempted to communicate the *rasas śṛṅgāra* (the erotic) and *śānta* (tranquillity) (see 5.1). Although it is plausible that Cage was thinking about these ideas at the time he wrote the piece, it is more likely that this was a case of Cage retrospectively applying a theory. Even if we assume that Cage was not mistaken, the implications are relatively slight. Cage’s later attempts to communicate *rasa* were indebted to reading Coomaraswamy, it is therefore tempting to suggest that Campbell had introduced Cage to Coomaraswamy’s work by 1943. Nevertheless, Cage would not have had personally to read Coomaraswamy to have

encountered these ideas. Campbell was well versed in Coomaraswamy's work by this stage. He could easily have discussed these aesthetic ideas with Cage either in detail or in passing. The impact of such theories on the composition was probably minimal. Certainly Thomas DeLio's book-length analysis of the work *The Amores of John Cage* (2009) finds little evidence of such an influence, mentioning Cage's attribution of Indian influence only once (DeLio, 2009: 21). Even if *Amores* is accepted as the first of Cage's pieces to be influenced by a source introduced to Cage by Campbell, Cage did not dedicate himself to the study of such sources until 1946.

*The Perilous Night* (1943-4) for prepared piano, on the other hand, clearly shows traces of Campbell's hand. Cage remembered that the programme for this prepared piano piece came from a myth he had encountered through Campbell (Tomkins, 1965: 67). In the 1960s Cage recalled that the story concerned a 'perilous bed' on a slippery jasper floor. He thought of it as an allegory of the potential dangers of the erotic. Revill (1992: 85) suggested Cage came to the story through a collection of Irish folktales lent to him by Campbell<sup>58</sup>; however, this is unlikely to have been the case. The story is best known, and has been discussed by Campbell, as part of the legends of the Holy Grail. Arthurian lore and the Grail quest were central focuses of Campbell's work.

According to Campbell's telling of the story, the 'perilous bed' or 'the bed of marvels' was one of the challenges encountered by the knight Gawain. In the Marvellous Castle, Gawain was expected to pass the night on the marvellous/perilous bed; even getting onto the bed proved difficult. The floor of jasper made him slip and the bed itself, which stood on wheels of rubies, constantly darted out of the way. Eventually he managed to launch himself onto the bed whereupon it started to buck and rave with terrific force. Gawain thought of God and waited: the bed calmed down. But further perils awaited him: he was shot at with bolts and arrows; he was assaulted with a club; a lion charged into the room and it took all Gawain's might to defeat it. With the lion vanquished, the numerous female denizens of the castle appeared and tended his wounds (Campbell, 1968: 494-5). The tale also appeared in Zimmer's *The King and the Corpse* (1948), edited by Campbell, which Cage later read. In Zimmer's retelling (1948: 86-8), which Campbell may have seen in manuscript by 1943, the assaulting forces and escaping bed are seen as aspects of the feminine. Only once Gawain had proved his heroism would the ladies of the castle be

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<sup>58</sup> Revill's words could also be taken to mean a collection of folktales *by* Campbell, but this is impossible as Campbell had authored no such collection.

sufficiently conquered to recognize him ‘as their master and lord’. Such is the task of the individual if they are to integrate the masculine and feminine parts of the psyche. Campbell may or may not have presented the story to Cage with a Jungian spin.

Cage connected the story of Gawain’s ordeal to his own personal ‘loneliness and terror’ over the deteriorating state of his marriage to Xenia and his affair with Merce Cunningham (Cage, 1948a: 40). *The Perilous Night* therefore had a personal as well as mythical programme into which Cage poured considerable emotion. Yet when the piece was performed, some listeners did not manage to decipher the programmatic meanings; one reviewer suggested that the piece conjured up a woodpecker in a belfry. According to Cage’s later telling of the story, this situation convinced him that composers were in a situation like at the Tower of Babel. As this was clearly no good, he vowed to stop composing until he found a better reason to write music than communication. He found this better reason in Asian philosophy and aesthetics. Clearly Cage’s retrospective version of events has elements of personal myth. Cage did not stop composing, nor did he wholly stop attempting to communicate meaning until at least the late forties. Nevertheless, the experience does appear to have led Cage to question conventional programmaticism (Shultis, 1998: 90-1).

### **3.4.2 Individuation in ‘A Composers Confessions’ (1948)**

Jung’s theory of the integration of the personality appeared in two of Cage’s lectures of the late 1940s. Cage’s longest discussion of the theory occurred in the Vassar College Lecture also known as ‘A Composer’s Confessions’ (Cage, 1948a). In this lecture Cage’s depiction of Jung’s theories was blended with ideas taken from Moholoy-Nagy and Coomaraswamy. Cage referenced Jung’s theory explicitly and stated that the personality is primarily made up of the conscious and unconscious mind. In the majority of people these have become fragmented and pull the mind in different directions. For many people in modern (i.e. European and American) societies this has happened because their occupation only calls for the use of one element of the mind leaving the other part to degrade. When practiced with diligence and discipline, a proper occupation, such as music, can function to integrate the personality. Through sobering the mind<sup>59</sup>, music provides ‘a moment when, awareness of time and space being lost, the multiplicity of elements which make up an individual become integrated and he is one’ (Cage, 1948a: 41). This process occurs through

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<sup>59</sup> see 1.2.

composition, performance, or listening. Although Cage mentioned Jung, his conceptualization of his theory merged Jung's ideas with concepts taken from other sources. In introducing the idea that single-focus occupations developed one part of the mind over another, Cage repeated Moholy-Nagy's theories of the 'whole man' (Moholy-Nagy, 1947: 15; Joseph, 2002: 137, 140, 157-8; see section 1.2 above).

As Cage continued, his discussion blended Jung's theory with ideas he had first postulated in his 1932 essay 'Counterpoint'. The individuating potential of music is not imparted through direct communication, or through expression, but through the lived practice of those involved. He then sidestepped into ideas drawn from Coomaraswamy: the correct practice is to make music 'as the Orient would say, *disinterestedly*', without concern for 'money or fame'. Jumping back to contemporary America, Cage then mentioned two concerts, one featuring music by Ives, the other music by Webern. He surmised that these concerts were integrating experiences because the composers were 'at one with themselves', the performers were 'disinterested' and 'unselfconscious', and the listeners 'forgot themselves... and so gained themselves' (Cage, 1948a: 42). When the listener 'concentrates' the mind and the composer and performer work in disinterested concordance, a reciprocal symbiosis occurs where the 'music can give' and individuation can follow (ibid.: 42). Cage's rendering of the individuation process in this lecture is not particularly close to Jung's. Although Cage referenced the conscious and unconscious psyche, he replaced Jung's psychological methodology of integration with his own ideas. This was a method Cage would often use as he started integrating varied references into his essays and lectures.

### **3.4.3 The Story of the Prince and the Shaggy Nag**

One of the few elements Cage lifted directly from the literature on the Jung-Campbell archetype of the hero was based on the story Yeats referred to as 'The Story of Conn-eda; or the Golden Apples of Lough Erne'<sup>60</sup>. The hero of this tale was a young man who followed a rolling iron ball while being guided by a talking shaggy nag (or pony). In order for the prince to complete his quest and secretly gain entry into a fortified city, the nag ordered the prince to kill him, flay him, and use his skin to disguise himself. Despite the nag being the prince's only friend, the prince did as he was commanded and was successful

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<sup>60</sup> See Yeats's *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales* which seems to be the origin of the tale for Campbell and Zimmer and thus Cage [edition consulted, Yeats, 2003, 333-46].

in his quest. Afterwards, he returned to the body of the nag which was transformed into a fairy prince: 'the handsomest and noblest young man imaginable' (Zimmer, 1948: 32).

Cage's retelling of the myth, as well as his interpretation of it, derive from the twenty-six pages devoted to a Jungian analysis of the tale in Zimmer's *The King and the Corpse* (1948: 26-52). According to Zimmer, the ball is directed by gravity towards the ground of being, *the* law of all things, the First Principle. By following the ball, and then the shaggy nag, the hero is following this law, moving 'with the vast rhythm of the universe' (Zimmer, 1948: 40). The rational conscious (the prince) and the irrational unconscious (the nag) are but parts of the self. Through being true to *his* law which is identical to *the* law, the Prince fulfils his destiny. He successfully overcomes the rational through killing his only friend, the reward is the transformation of his unconscious (the nag) into an element of the psyche touched with the transcendent (the fairy prince) (Zimmer, 1948: 43-6). In the Jungian/Campbellian sense, he has become a hero. Zimmer, like Campbell, Jung, and Coomaraswamy, was quick to draw a link between non-rationality and Otherness. The prince's ability to overcome his rational side, Zimmer informs us, is due to his ethnicity and non-modern status:

Being an Irishman – and, moreover, one of the early period – he is spared that characteristic fault of modern man, the too exclusive reliance on intellect, reasoning, and consciously directed will power... Spontaneously and wholeheartedly, he submits to all the inscrutable commands and outlandish agents that steer him on (Zimmer, 1948: 41).

It is this quality that makes him a hero.

Cage was clearly particularly taken by this story as he made reference to it on a number of occasions over a thirty year period. He first referenced the story in footnote 15 of 'Forerunners of Modern Music'<sup>61</sup> (1949a: 66). It appeared again in the 1952 'Juilliard

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<sup>61</sup> Cage's reference to acquiescence in relation to Zimmer's text in footnote 15 of 'Forerunners of Modern Music' (1949: 66) almost certainly refers to his retelling of the shaggy nag story (cf. Cage, 1965a: 138); it is thus the first appearance of this story in Cage's writings. Zimmer's retelling was based on 'The Story of Conn-eda; or the Golden Apples of Lough Erne' in Yeats's *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales* (edition consulted, Yeats, 2003, 333-46). In the pages of Zimmer's book, Cage would also have encountered the perilous bed which is subjected to a Jungian analysis in pages 86-8. Although Cage (1959b: 78) claimed the story was from Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, that was probably another slip of Cage's memory; the story does not appear in that book although that does not rule out the possibility it was featured in the earlier draft that Cage read.

Lecture' (1952: 102-3), and he retold it more fully as one of the stories in *Indeterminacy* (1959) (printed in Cage, 1965a: 138). An excerpt from Cage's telling of the story in the 'Juilliard Lecture' (1952: 102-3) also appears as the opening lines of *45' For A Speaker* and another line from the tale appears in the middle of that work (1954: 148, 167).

For Cage, the shaggy nag story seems to have been an exemplar of disciplining the mind and performing in a disciplined manner. The prince and the nag followed the rolling ball without question. Both proceeded 'by chance, by no will of their own' (1952: 103). The implication is that Cage wanted others to behave in this manner. He made this explicit later in his career in the 1981 lecture 'Composition in Retrospect'. Written in mesostics on the word 'DISCIPLINE', Cage retold in fractured form the story of the prince and the nag, connecting it conceptually to sudden enlightenment, Suzuki's teachings, and moving beyond likes and dislikes (Cage, 1981: 130).

#### **3.4.4 Heroes in the 'Lecture on Something' (1951 or later)**

The path of the hero is a recurring theme in Cage's 'Lecture on Something' (Cage, 1959c). Delivered at the Artist's Club in New York in 1951 or 52, the lecture is notable for Cage's extensive use of Campbellian material. Several of the themes of the lecture are connected to ideas Cage had begun to encounter through his readings on (Westernized modernist) Zen. Although Cage probably had not started attending Suzuki's lectures at this point, he had probably read texts by Suzuki and/or Watts and had certainly read texts by Blyth and Huxley that mentioned Zen. The overlap between Campbell and Jung's hero theories and Suzuki's Jung-influenced Zen are clearly visible in Cage's thought of the early fifties.

The 'Lecture on Something' was a combative declaration of the validity of Cage's aesthetic against the egos of the abstract expressionists. 'The mythological and Oriental view of the hero is the one who accepts life' Cage announced, following Campbell in reading Jung's theories indiscriminately onto the thought systems of an entire continent (1959c: 134). 'And so if one should object to calling Feldman a composer, one could call him a hero. But we are all heroes, if we accept what comes, our inner cheerfulness undisturbed' (ibid.: 134). Ostensibly celebrating Feldman, Cage was clearly talking more about himself than his colleague (cf. Cage, 1968a: 128). '[W]hat is entertainment?' Cage asked. 'And who is being entertained? Heroes are being entertained and their nature is that of nature: the accepting of what comes without preconceived ideas of what will happen and regardless of the consequences' (Cage, 1959c: 136). Cage echoes Zimmer: the prince,

following the ball, accepting the instructions of the shaggy nag, is the hero whose nature is one with the first principle of being (cf. Zimmer, 1948: 40). This is how listeners of experimental music should behave, Cage advised. Heroes just listen; they do not analyse or desire musical conventions of the past. Heroes *love* art music composed using chance operations.

‘This morning I thought of an image that might make clear to some of you the natural usefulness of Feldman’s music’ Cage went on, continuing to imitate Campbell’s language:

do you remember, in myth, the hero’s encounter with the shape-shifting monster? The way the sounds between two performances shift their somethingness suggests this. Now what does the hero do? (You and I are the heroes and incidentally Morty too.) He doesn’t get frightened but simply accepts what the sound-shifting performer happens to do. Eventually the whole mirage disappears. And the prize or sought-for something (that is nothing) is obtained (Cage, 1959c: 144).

Cage made his alliance with Campbell’s universalizing theories clear through references to ‘the hero’ and the uses of myth for modern psyches. In case anyone doubted his authority to speak on such matters, Cage added ‘Now what if I’m wrong? Shall I telephone Joe Campbell and ask him the meaning of shape-shifters?’ (ibid.). Rather obvious name-dropping was a regular feature of Cage’s writing. It can be viewed as the wish to acknowledge his sources, or less charitably as buttressing the validity of his own theories through the usurpation of a respected figure’s authority. In this case, Cage’s purpose appears to have been to cement his authority over the topic through mentioning his friendship with ‘Joe’ Campbell. In later years, Suzuki played a similar role in Cage’s texts.

Even in comparison with earlier texts, Cage’s meanings in this Lecture had little connection to the theories of Campbell or Jung. The ‘Lecture on Something’ was also the occasion for Cage’s explicit rejection of symbolism. The Jungian-Campbellian path of the hero is of psychological value through the process of cognizing what is signified in the phylogenetic symbolism of archetypes. In the middle of the lecture, Cage stated that ‘Nothing in life requires a symbol since it is clearly what it is’ (ibid.: 136); after that, discussing the archetype of the hero was essentially meaningless. Perhaps Cage realized this: he largely dropped the archetype of the hero, as well as extensive references to Campbell’s books, as he became increasingly preoccupied with Suzukian Zen. Such inconsistencies point to the heterogeneity of the material Cage was encountering. The

material Cage was adopting was not coterminous in its ontology; to make it appear so required considerable syncretic adaptation. Cage's adoptions from Coomaraswamy ran into similar problems (see chapters 4 and 5). A major aspect of the ramifications of this is discussed in chapter 6 below.

### **3.4.5 The Deep Sleep of 'Indeterminacy' (1958)**

The last of Cage's lectures to overtly feature Jungian theories or Campbell-derived material was the purposefully pontificating 'Indeterminacy', the second of Cage's controversial 1958 Darmstadt lectures (see section 1.4 above). The long and dense lecture includes a block of words that recur at several points. In this block, Cage suggested that the performer of a properly formed indeterminate work was able to fulfil their function in a number of differing ways. They could do so in a planned (conscious) way, or in a way that did not involve conscious organization. In the case of the latter, Cage referred to his Suzuki-Jung-influenced theory that non-conscious organization can be arrived at by going 'inwards' or 'outwards' (see Cage, 1988a: 7; Kostelanetz, 2003, pp.244-5). Cage named a number of methods that were 'inwards'. The first was the arbitrary way, involving following the whim of the ego. Less knowingly, the dreams of the 'subconscious' could provide a path. One could also go 'to a point in the collective unconsciousness [*sic*] of Jungian psychoanalysis', in which case one would produce something 'of more or less universal interest to human beings'. Alternatively, there was 'the "deep sleep" of Indian mental practice' which Cage suggested was identical to 'the Ground of Meister Eckhart' (Cage, 1958a: 36-7). Cage named two 'outward' ways, both 'arbitrary': the first depended on sense perceptions and taste, the second was by using 'some operation exterior to his mind: tables of random numbers, following the scientific interest in probability; or chance operations' (ibid.: 37). Whichever route one followed, the important point was that one identified 'with no matter what eventuality' (ibid.: 36-7).

Locating sources for some of these references is more difficult than for earlier lectures. The phrase 'identifying... with no matter what eventuality' might be taken to refer to Suzuki's Zen, but it could equally well refer to Campbell's theories on the way of the hero (for example, the shaggy nag) or passages in Jung's *The Integration of the Personality*. Locating a definite source for Cage's use of 'the "deep sleep" of Indian mental practice' is probably impossible. However, Campbell may have had a hand in Cage's usage of the phrase. The original source for the concept was probably chiefly the *Māṇḍūkya*

*Upaniṣad*, a short text on the meanings of the sacred syllable *om*. There is no evidence that Cage read this or any other *Upaniṣad* himself; therefore an intermediary source would have been necessary. The state of deep sleep is briefly mentioned in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (M, 1942: 651-3, 699-700, 939) as well as Coomaraswamy's *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (1934a: 131-4). While it is conceivable that Cage took the term 'deep sleep' from *The Transformation*, the concept is not discussed in particular detail in that text in relation to Eckhart. Coomaraswamy did discuss the concept in more detail in relation to European mysticism and philosophy in *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (1916a: 188-93); however, there is no record of Cage reading this text. Campbell, on the other hand, had read this text and had studied the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* with Nikhilānanda (in the latter's translation). Campbell had found this *Upaniṣad* of great significance (J. Campbell, 1949: 34 f.n.39; 2002: 163; Larsen and Larsen, 1991: 282, 285). Campbell would have been in a position to elucidate the concept to Cage in relation to the *Upaniṣads* as well as in relation to Eckhart.

In verse 5 of the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*<sup>62</sup> [MU] deep sleep is seen as one of the quarters or four states of the undifferentiated Self (*ātman*). The *Upaniṣads* have been and continue to be interpreted differently in different traditions. For reasons that will be discussed in the chapters to come, reifying one interpretation as *the* interpretation homogenizes a heterogeneous situation. Nevertheless, it is possible to discuss the concept in relation to a specific interpretation. In this case, it is relevant to outline the interpretations of Coomaraswamy (which merged Brahmanic Advaita Vedānta with Platonism and Christian Scholasticism) in reference to the neo-Vedānta of Nikhilānanda. The first state is waking where what is perceived with the senses is *māyā* (illusion) (MU 3). The second state is dreaming sleep (MU 4). The third state is that of deep sleep. In this state there are no desires and no dreams (MU 5). In this state one is 'linked with radiance' (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* [CU] 8.6.3). There is less of a barrier to the realization of the true nature of Self: *ātman* is not different to *brahman* (the unchanging, ineffable and limitless absolute, the first cause and undifferentiated essence of all; in some interpretations, deity). In the Neoplatonic language employed by Coomaraswamy, one is in the realm of 'pure intelligence' (Coomaraswamy, 1934a: 133). Coomaraswamy suggested that deep sleep is what is realized in the state of *samādhi*, which Rāmākṛṣṇa blissfully achieved on numerous

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<sup>62</sup> The edition and translation consulted is principally that of Olivelle (1996: 288-90); Nikhilānanda's translation of the text and associated commentary was also consulted.

occasions. Only in the fourth state, which is beyond deep sleep, dreaming, or being awake in the sensible world, is the true undifferentiatedness of *ātman* and *brahman* realized (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.1.19-20, 2.4.5-14, 4.3.7-20; *CU* 6.11-13, 8.1-15; *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* 3.3; *MU* 2, 5, 7; Coomaraswamy, 1916a: 189-94; 1934a: 132-4; 1934b: 40-1, 44-5). For Coomaraswamy, the different levels of sleep describe ‘conditions of being’: they are levels of realization of the truth of *tat tvam asi* (that art thou, that is you, that’s how you are) (*CU* 6.6-16; Coomaraswamy, 1934a: 134). That which is asleep is the false knowledge of the individual personality, but through ‘sleep’ *ātman* is ‘awake’ to its nondualistic relation to *brahman* (Coomaraswamy, 1916a: 188-9). Thus, to describe the state as ‘deep sleep’ is to use an analogy: it should not be taken as a literal descriptor.

The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* states that deep sleep is the quarter where *prāṇa* (breath/life-force) is situated (*MU* 5); it is deep sleep as *prāṇa*, rather than as a state, that might be equated with Ground in Eckhart (albeit in a circuitous way). Eckhart used a variety of metaphors to describe what Cage refers to as ‘the Ground’ (in Middle High German *grunt*, in modern German *Grund*). Sells (1994: 148) suggests that Eckhart used a plurality of terms to make clear the impossibility of describing what was beyond words. Sometimes Eckhart called it the *bürgelîn in der sêle* (little castle or little town in the soul), at other times *vünkelîn* (‘spark’), and sometimes the ground or unified ground. It is the highest part of the soul, its ‘innermost depths’, and can be seen as akin to Intellect in the Neoplatonic theories which influenced him. The ground of the soul and the ground of God are not different (*German Sermons* [GS] 2, 15). The Ground is the source of human inspiration and the only place where true knowledge of God is possible. To do this one must ‘become nothing’ (GS 39<sup>63</sup>) through ‘annihilation’ or ‘loss of self’: ‘abandon yourself, all things, and everything you are in yourself, and take yourself according to how you are in God’ (GS 24). God is beyond conceptions of what God is, and thus also conceptions of what God would have people do. Instead, one must be confident of the oneness of the ground of God and the ground of the soul and one must work from there (GS 39). The empirical self must sleep (Davies, 2001: 225-7; McGinn, 1981: 31, 42-4, 47, 60-1; 1986: 16-7, 299, 402; Riehle, 1981: 152-3; Sells, 1994, 147-50, 173; Weeks, 1993: 70-1, 74, 80-2, 86).

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<sup>63</sup> All quotations from Eckhart’s German Sermons are trans. Tobin in McGinn (1986).

In the middle of the lecture, Cage compared a comment by Feldman that ‘when he composed he was dead’ with a comment by his father that he invented best when asleep; both, Cage said, ‘suggest the “deep sleep” of Indian mental practice. The ego no longer blocks action’ (Cage, 1958a: 37). Similarly, he suggested that acting ‘from the Ground of Meister Eckhart’ was relatively straightforward. In both cases, the spiritual aspect of achieving deep sleep or knowing what Eckhart called Ground seems to be largely missing. Rāmakṛṣṇa was venerated because he could enter *samādhi* (a state at the level of ‘deep sleep’). Although there could be perceived to be a similarity between deep sleep/*prāṇa* (interpreted as the breath of *ātman/brahman* within the person), and *grunt* (as the undifferentiated spark in the soul), in Cage’s hands these spiritual concepts became principally secular quasi-Jungian psychological tools. A similar lack of attention to ontology, epistemology, and questions of belief also characterized Cage’s borrowings from Coomaraswamy. It is those borrowings that shall be considered in the two chapters that follow.

Cage was one of many people who Campbell empowered to determine their spiritual values independent of organized religion. Through Campbell and his writings, Cage was led towards Asian and European spiritual and metaphysical traditions and the theories of Jung. Nevertheless, ultimately neither Campbell nor Jung was amongst the figures Cage placed in his personal pantheon. By the late fifties Cage had found other figures to justify his ideas. That does not mean that the influence of Campbell or Jung also disappeared. Cage continued to rely on certain Jungian concepts. In one sense, Campbell was responsible for setting Cage off on a path that he followed for the rest of his career; in another sense, the path Cage ultimately followed was largely one of his own construction.

## 4. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and John Cage 1: The Imitation of Nature

### Introduction

Coomaraswamy, Cage said, was the first person to convince him that ‘East and West’ were not separate and that ‘Eastern thought was no less admissible for a Westerner than is European thought’. Cage encountered Coomaraswamy at a time when he ‘dreamed of the Orient’ (Cage and Charles, 1981: 105). Coomaraswamy’s depiction of a perennial philosophical and spiritual basis for human society and art-making invigorated Cage’s artistic ideas (Cage and Charles, 1981: 104). After the negative reaction to *The Perilous Night*, Cage had decided that programmatic communication was impossible because everyone was composing in a different language. Coomaraswamy’s writings gave Cage new ideas about the purpose of art and a common basis for it. Patterson (1996/2002b/2002c) has already discussed and analysed the convergences of Cage’s and Coomaraswamy’s thought, highlighting the aspects of Cage’s thought which appear to have been borrowed from Coomaraswamy’s ‘Eastern’ thought. Focussing on several key aspects which Patterson’s analysis only partially explained or overlooked, the following two chapters present a differently nuanced view of Cage’s encounter with Coomaraswamy’s thought. An altered picture will emerge that will shed further light on the context and meanings of Cage’s borrowings.

Cage’s first mention of Coomaraswamy occurred in the essay ‘The East in the West’ of 1946<sup>64</sup>. Surveying several key modernist composers, Cage came to the conclusion that many experimental techniques of the most progressive composers of the time bore similarities to aspects of ‘Oriental’ musics, most notably Indian art music and medieval European music.

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<sup>64</sup> It is not clear which of Coomaraswamy’s books Cage read first. As shown in the previous chapter, Cage read both *The Dance of Shiva* and *The Transformation of Nature in Art*. It is certain that he read at least one of the texts prior to 1946; nevertheless, because Cage’s earliest references to Coomaraswamy do not specify a text, it is impossible to know in what order he came to them. Cage’s later texts tend only to mention *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, but as these date to a number of years after the time in question this means very little. The first mention by Cage of any material that can be directly linked to *The Transformation* only occurred in 1954. Any of the material Cage referenced in talks before that point, as well as the information on *rasa* he had when composing the *Sonatas and Interludes* and *Sixteen Dances*, could have come from either book. In the early seventies Cage discussed his initial reading of Coomaraswamy and seemed to suggest he read *The Dance of Shiva* first (Cage and Charles, 1981: 105); however, because his words could be taken in several ways and his memory was often unreliable, this does not prove the case either.

[A] community of purpose has shown itself between those composers whose work is 'Oriental' and those whose work is 'neo-Gothic'... This purpose is to express lofty sentiments in the most direct manner possible, rather than to evoke in any way the 'classical' tradition of music (Cage, 1946: 24).

Although Cage did not discuss his own work, it is possible he associated with both camps. The model of the gothic had been a touchstone for Cage since 'Counterpoint' of 1934.

Ironically, at the end of the essay Cage managed to identify precisely what now seems so problematic about his approach: 'composers who today wish to imbue their music with the ineffable, seem to find it necessary to make use of musical characteristics not purely Western' (ibid.: 25). In other words, the location for the signifier of the ineffable had shifted to occupy the same space as Europe's chief Other. And it was to this location composers now went to get what they needed. This interest, Cage made clear, was not in Asian musics in themselves, or in faithful transcriptions such as those by Colin McPhee, but in how Asian techniques could be *used* by modern European and American composers for their own ends (ibid.: 21). He concluded that modern composers 'go for inspiration to those places, or return to those times where or when harmony is not of the essence' (ibid.: 25). This implied either the 'Orient' or the European medieval; since the nineteenth century both had frequently been conceived in a dialectical relationship with the modern West. It is thus unsurprising that Cage's first mention of Coomaraswamy referenced the conjoined Orientalism and medievalism of the Traditionalists: 'There is, I believe, a similarity... between Western medieval music and Oriental. In other fields than music, Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has discussed such a relation' (ibid.: 24). From the start of Cage's modernist utilization of Asian material, his language was entangled with the affirmative Orientalism of the Traditionalists.

That Cage was himself attempting in this period to 'express lofty sentiments' seems fairly certain. In the late forties and early fifties, Cage found several lofty sentiments in Coomaraswamy's writings. Cage's most frequently referenced borrowing from Coomaraswamy was a phrase: the doctrine that 'art imitates nature in her manner of operation'. It is this phrase that shall be investigated first.

#### 4.1 *Ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione*

*Ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione*: ‘art imitates nature in its workings’<sup>65</sup> (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [ST], 1a 117). In the translation used by Coomaraswamy and thus by Cage: ‘art is the imitation of nature in her manner of operation’. Cage encountered this phrase in Coomaraswamy’s *The Transformation of Nature in Art* at some point after 1942. Cage presented the phrase as being an Indian aesthetic theory, and it became one of the central planks of what Charles referred to as Cage’s ‘Hindu culture’ (Cage and Charles, 1981: 105). It therefore served as an example and exemplar of Cage’s dedication to non-European aesthetics and values. Simultaneously, along with the phrase ‘to sober and quiet the mind’, Cage used the phrase to explain and justify his radical musical experiments and to counter the attacks of his critics. This was how it was largely interpreted in Cage studies before Patterson’s study (1996: 96; 2002b: 195). Since then, Cage scholars have had to acknowledge that while Cage borrowed the phrase from Coomaraswamy, Coomaraswamy was borrowing the phrase from Thomas Aquinas.

Patterson’s explanation of Coomaraswamy’s use of the phrase (1996: 95-8; 2002b: 194-7) is certainly substantially accurate; nevertheless, there are several important matters he did not cover. These omissions lie in three key areas: a) the considerable history of the phrase within the European aesthetic tradition; b) the centrality of European philosophy and Christian theology in Coomaraswamy’s thought; and c) the disjunctions between Cage’s and Coomaraswamy’s interpretations of the phrase. What has not been previously recognized in Cage studies is that, like Coomaraswamy, Thomas Aquinas was also quoting earlier theories. The origin of the phrase was neither Coomaraswamy, nor Aquinas, but Aristotle.

Following Coomaraswamy’s own description (1934a: 3-4), Patterson (1996: 66; 2002b: 179) described the *Transformation* as deriving ‘a general theory of art from the examination of not only Indian and Chinese treatises, but through the writings of the fourteenth century German mystic Meister Eckhart as well’. Patterson does not mention that Platonic and Neoplatonic metaphysics, general Scholastic theology, and the aesthetics of Aquinas were equally important for Coomaraswamy’s aesthetics, ontology, epistemology, and theology (cf. Patterson, 1996: 70-3; 2002b: 181-2). If Cage had wanted

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<sup>65</sup> Translation Charlesworth, 1970: 133; all Latin text and English translation from ST 1a100-19 refer to this edition unless otherwise stated. Translations from ST other than 1a100-19 are trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1948).

to found his aesthetic on ideas opposed to European traditions – whether ancient Greek, medieval or romantic – he would have been hard pressed to have made a worse choice than utilizing one of the most oft-repeated statements on mimesis that itself originated in the ‘most influential of all conceptions of mimesis’ (Halliwell, 1990: 488). Quite simply, the idea he referenced was among the most influential of any in the history of European aesthetics (Gombrich, 1977: 83, 85-6; Halliwell, 1990: 487-8, 490; Sörbom, 1966: 11). To uncover these points and to point to the problematics of Cage’s borrowing, it is necessary to explore the history, use, and interpretation of the phrase. This is a phrase with a considerable history – whole books have been written on the subject – so what follows is constrained by limitations on space. Further reading is suggested in the sources referenced.

#### **4.1.1 Origins of the Quotation: Plato**

To understand the phrase ‘art is the imitation of nature in her manner of operation’ we need to investigate the meaning of the terms ‘imitation’ and ‘nature’ as they are used in the phrase. In Coomaraswamy’s translation, ‘imitation’ renders Aquinas’s Latin *imitatur* (imitates), which itself was used to refer to the relevant form of the Greek *μίμησις* (mimesis). Mimetic theory in relation to the phrase relates both to the process by which art is created and the nature of cognition of the world. Although the word mimesis was in use by 400 BCE, Plato and Aristotle are normally credited as the originators of mimetic theory. In the dialogues of Plato, including most famously the *Republic*, mimetic theory is used not only to define the processes involved in musical, literary, and artistic production, but also as a central plank in Plato’s theories of education, politics and the ideal city (Gebauer and Wulf, 1995: 25; Halliwell, 1990: 487-9; Sörbom, 1966: 11-3, 18-9).

To understand the ontology of ancient mimetic theory we can start by following the well-worn footsteps descending into the gloom of Plato’s cave. The cave is inhabited by prisoners; since birth their movement has been constricted: they can only look further into the cave. Between the entrance to the cave and the prisoners is a fire, and between the fire and the prisoners all sorts of things are paraded. The things paraded cast shadows, but it is only these shadows and not the things themselves that the prisoners see. Because they cannot see the true forms, the prisoners assume that the shadows they perceive in front of them are real things. What they take to be reality is not that: it is a world of shadows. The world of shadows is like the sensible world, the world seen with the eyes (*Rep.* 517b). Above ground, in the intelligible world, lies the truth of all things (*Rep.* 517c). Unless

educated by philosophy, humans are like those prisoners (*Rep.* 514a-515c<sup>66</sup>). Nevertheless, philosophical education is difficult to give to cave dwellers, habituated to darkness and their belief in the reality of shadows (*Rep.* 515c-516c). It is for this reason that the people must be ruled, and that they must trust philosophers, those with true knowledge, to guide them. Because they have knowledge of what is truly real, philosophers know what is best for the masses of the cave better than they do themselves (*Rep.* 520a-d). Plato left open the question of how literally he intended the allegory of the cave to be taken (*Rep.* 517b); however, for the purposes of the present discussion it will be assumed that Plato was seriously questioning the ontological reality of the sensible world, suggesting that it was less real than the intelligible one (Kraut, 1992: 10-11). Similarly, it will also be assumed that Plato argued that the true self was not individual. In this interpretation – which has been argued both for and against – just as the shadows in the cave are not ultimately real, a belief in the ultimate reality of the individual self would also be a delusion (*Phd.* 115b-c; *Rep.* 589a-b, 611a-612a; *Tim.* 34c-38b, 44a-44c, 51c-52c, 69c; see Johansen, 2004: 137, 142-3, 157, 160-3, 167; Sorabji, 2006: 115-7). The aim of the present chapter is to elucidate Coomaraswamy's theories in relation to ancient texts, not to present a consensus of modern critical readings. The question of self will be returned to in 4.2.3 below.

The question of what should be imitated was of utmost importance to Plato in the *Republic*. Plato made clear that it was the original Form that should be imitated – not an individual example, nor an image of a Form, which is as limited a representation as a shadow. Coomaraswamy (1943: 19) illustrated this principle using the example of a horse; in the *Republic*, Plato discussed a bed. Plato started by positing the existence of a single universal Form of each thing – in this case of a bed. There will only ever be one Form Bed. All other beds are merely its likeness. If a carpenter makes a bed it is not Bed, but the likeness of Bed. If an artist now makes a painting of the bed made by the carpenter, this would be an imitation of a bed which itself imitates the Form Bed (*Rep.* 597a-e). Now let us consider Coomaraswamy's example of a horse. An individual horse is a likeness of the Form Horse. If an artist depicts an individual horse they are copying the appearance of a copy of the original, which is not the same as depicting (the original and only true) Horse. The artist does not capture the truth of Horse but an image of a phantom of Horse; they capture only a small part of the truth of Horse, and the individual horse is as distant from

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<sup>66</sup> In all references to Plato, the principal edition consulted has been Hamilton and Cairns (1961).

the true Horse as a painting of a horse is from an individual horse (*Rep.* 598b; cf. *Crat.* 432d).

What is perceived with the senses are merely shadows – not the reality of things, only their appearances. An image has the power to delude those who only know shadows, who will think of the shadow-image as the real thing itself (*Rep.* 598c). An artist who depicts the likeness of the image of the image only has an understanding of the outer appearance and cannot know whether what is depicted is good or bad (*Rep.* 602b). Such falseness corrupts. Corruption breeds false beliefs. This is particularly the case in poetry (*Rep.* 604e-605b). Therefore, in *Rep.* 595a Plato condemned imitative poetry: art that imitates the sensible appearance of things should not be admitted to the ideal state (*Rep.* 595a). What art, if any, Plato allowed has since been the subject of considerable speculation<sup>67</sup>. Some (though by no means all) theorists have supported Coomaraswamy's reading that while false art misrepresents by imitating the sensible appearance of a thing, correct art imitates the true Form of a thing. In Coomaraswamy's reading, art must communicate through symbols. Coomaraswamy (1946b: 144 f.n.38-9) suggests that a symbol must partake in the nature of the thing it symbolizes in the same way that Plato states that a name must be an adequate signifier of the nature of the thing signified (*Crat.* 385a-386e, 387d-390e). For any adequate sign, there is an unchanging and eternal relationship between signifier and signified. However, as suggested in the *Parmenides* (132e), a thing partakes of its form in nature rather than through visual likeness (Moss, 2007: 415, 418-21, 423-4, 428, 432-3, 437; Sörbom, 1966: 129-30, 132-6, 138, 142-4, 146-9).

Due to the considerable importance of artistic production in education and in ensuring the stability of the populace, Plato advocated defining what was artistically acceptable and unacceptable in the ideal state (*Rep.* 607a; see also, *Laws* 653-6; Gebauer and Wolf, 1995: 35; Sörbom, 1966: 150-1). Plato thus recommended that where Forms of artistic production were good (in the sense of being correct), censorship and control of artistic production should be rigorous in order to keep production in that form (*Laws* 656c-657b, 801d). Artistic practitioners should be taught by defined traditional standards and should be forbidden from innovating. The ideal was artistic canonical norms that would not change over thousands of years (*Laws* 656e). On this Coomaraswamy (1943: 11-2)

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<sup>67</sup> See Sörbom, 1966: 129-51.

wholeheartedly agreed, stating that the sections of *Laws* summarized above were ‘identical’ to the view held by the Scholastic philosophers (and thus Aquinas, and thus all ‘traditional’ Asian artists). It is in this regard that he argued, paraphrasing *Rep.* 424c, ‘New songs, yes; but never new kinds of music, for these may destroy our whole civilization’ (Coomaraswamy, 1943: 11; cf. Patterson, 1996: 59).

Coomaraswamy’s fears echo Plato’s. Innovations departing from established true Forms lead to the ‘evil’ of public challenges and the desire to depart from age-old ways (*Laws* 797d). Even new forms of children’s games would lead those children who played the new games to become adults who sought to change the rules; music was the same. The desire for new forms must not be allowed to develop, and should be dealt with by sanction if necessary (*Laws* 798c, 798e, 799b, 799d, 800b). The development of new forms, in Coomaraswamy’s reading, goes against the *nature* of something. This is a truth that applies both to systems of governance and artistic production (Coomaraswamy, 1946a: 16).

Cognizing Form requires intellect (*Phd.* 79a). Therefore, although discussing the production of art in the sensible world, the real concern lies in what is beyond the sensible world. To quote Gebauer and Wulf (1995: 9), ‘mimesis in general is a turn toward a world that is by no means identical with empirical reality’. A Form is eternally the same; its inferior copies (the shadows) do change, but they are not the thing itself (*Phd.* 78d-79a; *Rep.* 479a; *Symp.* 211a). In apprehending the intelligible quality of a thing, the soul works via Forms/Ideas from what is apprehended to the transcendent first principle of the thing (*Rep.* 510b). Therefore, Coomaraswamy (1943: 10-1) argued that

What Plato means by ‘true’ is ‘iconographically correct.’ For all the arts, without exception, are representations or likenesses of a model; which does not mean that they are such as to tell us what the model looks like... the forms of traditional art are typically imitative of invisible things... Plato has always in view the representation of invisible and intelligible forms.

The rightness of an artistic representation of the Ideal (Form) of a thing is not commensurate with the accuracy of representation of a thing as it appears manifested to the senses (*Rep.* 472d). However, art can still furnish knowledge. As Hadot (2006: 156) argues, the *Timaeus* provides a model for the idea that in imitating the processes of creation – the nature of the divine – artists are themselves moved closer to knowledge (Moss, 2007: 415, 419-21; Sörbom, 1966: 136-9, 142-4).

#### 4.1.2 Origins of the Quotation: Aristotle

The concept that an artist imitates nature is central to many readings of mimesis in Aristotle. In this view, the aim of the artist should be to work in the same way that nature works (Gebauer and Wulf, 1995: 55-6; cf. Halliwell, 1990: 490). It is in this regard that the origin of the phrase ‘art imitates nature’ is to be found. Aristotle’s theories of mimesis were clearly influenced by Plato’s, though to what extent is a matter of controversy. For example, in Aristotle, Forms do not have an ontological existence external to the material they are manifested in (Gebauer and Wulf, 1995: 53; Sörbom, 1966: 176-7; Waterlow, 1982: 228-9). Nevertheless, although not conceptualized identically, both Plato and Aristotle conceived mimesis as central to artistic production. In Aristotle it became a ‘technical concept’ (Gebauer and Wulf, 1995: 310-1).

The best known text by Aristotle on aesthetics is the *Poetics*<sup>68</sup>. Statements can be found in it that support Coomaraswamy’s attribution to Aristotle of a belief in the importance to art of correctly imitating forms (1946a: 140, 144 f.n.39). For example, in the *Poetics* 1460b30 Aristotle states that ‘it is less serious not to know that a female deer has no horns, than to depict one imimetically’ (trans. based on Halliwell, 1995: 129, Sörbom, 1966: 178). This could be read to suggest (as Coomaraswamy would) that what is important is to depict the universal *nature* of a female deer, not the exact copy of their phenomenal appearance. Nevertheless, it is important to note that it could also be read to suggest that what is important is not to depict inartistically, i.e. badly (Sörbom, 1966: 194-5). Similarly, *Poetics* 1451a37 states that the function of a poet is not to depict what has happened but what plausibly and necessarily might happen. Poetry deals with what is universal rather than particular (Sörbom, 1966: 197). Both these passages could be read in a number of ways; in terms of Coomaraswamy’s reading, it should be remembered that Aristotle denied that universals have the same transcendent ontological existence that Platonism had declared (*Met.* 1078b30; Gebauer and Wulf, 1995: 55-6; Lukasiewicz, Anscombe, and Popper, 1953: 73-4, 83-4; Sörbom, 1966: 195-6).

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<sup>68</sup> Editions and translations consulted in all references to Aristotle: the revised Oxford translation, ed. J. Barnes (1984); and the Loeb editions of *Poetics*: Halliwell (1995); *Phys.*: Wicksteed and Cornford (1929); *Met.*: Tredennick (1933). Unless otherwise stated, quotations from *Phys.* are from Wicksteed and Cornford with occasional minor modification.

The phrase ‘art imitates nature in its operation’ is to be found, not in the *Poetics*, but in the *Physics*<sup>69</sup> (194a21 and 199a15). Goldstein (1966: 569) contended that the passages from the *Physics* where the phrase occurs provided the key to understanding ‘the entire mimesis concept’<sup>70</sup>. In the appearances of the phrase in the *Physics*, the term ‘art’ is used in its wider sense and ‘nature’ is also used in a number of senses. It is also necessary to take note of Aristotle’s influential ‘Four Causes’; in the sense used, ‘cause’ (*aitia*) should be understood to mean explanatory factors or essential conditions. The four ‘causes’ are: i) material, ii) formal, iii) efficient, and iv) final (*Phys.* 194b23-35). Aristotle used these causes to explain numerous processes; however, we shall survey them here in relation to material things. Both uses of the phrase occur in the context of Aristotle defining the purview of the science of nature; in the course of this argument, he outlined the four essential conditions (causes) of all things that exist. We can use some elements of his argument (*Phys.* 192b8-195a4) to outline the meanings of the four causes for the purposes of understanding what is meant by ‘nature’ and ‘art’ in the phrase, and what it is for art to ‘imitate’ nature.

The first of the four causes is ‘material’. It can be said that the nature of a thing resides in its material: the bronze of a statue, the wood of a bed. If one buried a bed and it was to germinate, a tree sapling would sprout from it; it would not sprout beds. However, it is also said that the nature of a thing resides in its form – the type of thing a thing is. Using the example of art, one would not say that a bed was a bed until the materials were manufactured into the form of a bed; the same is true for natural things: potential flesh and bone are not a horse. This is the ‘formal’ cause. The third cause will be considered shortly, after the fourth and ‘final cause’. The ‘final’ cause is the purpose (*telos*) for a thing being,

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<sup>69</sup> The word ‘physics’ derives from the Greek for ‘nature’ (*phusis*). As Woodbridge (1965: 49) suggested, the subject of the text is not physics in the modern sense of the word, but is closer to being a science of the operation of nature. Our phrase also appears in the *Meteorologica* (381b6).

<sup>70</sup> Goldstein conflates passages on *ars* in the *Poetics* and *Physics* to suggest that the essential meaning of Aristotle’s use of ‘mimesis’ was ‘making things in imitation of the way that nature makes things’ (Goldstein, 1966: 570). However, Halliwell (1990: 490-1) argues, the relevance of Aristotle’s discussion of mimesis in relation to skills and trades wider than the ‘fine arts’ should not be taken to refer to the same concept denoted by his use of the mimesis word-group in his discussion of the fine arts (see also *ibid.*: 491-4, 509; Sörbom, 1966: 178-9). Readings prompted by the conflation of the two were widespread in the classical era and in more recent times and have clearly informed Coomaraswamy’s reading of Aquinas. It is this reading that shall be followed here, even though it can be argued to be against Aristotle’s meaning.

and the reason that the principle of movement operates within it – why a thing comes into being in the first place and why it becomes what it becomes. In the case of a bed, that might be because it was made to be useful for the purpose of resting on. The third cause, the ‘efficient cause’, is slightly more complex. Causes one, two, and four are found in things that come into existence by nature and in things that come into existence by art. This is not the case for the efficient cause. At the start of his argument on the causes, Aristotle divided things that exist into those things that come into existence by nature and those that do not: animals and plants, as well as the four elements (earth, water, air, fire) that they consist of, are regarded as belonging to the first category; beds, houses and other products of art belong to the second. The common feature that unites the first category is that all have within them, in varying degree, a principle of movement (or change) and stasis. A product of art, such as a bed, does not have this; or, it does, but only incidentally insofar as its matter is natural: the wood in a bedstead rotting, for example. Unlike the thing produced by nature, the thing produced by art does not have ‘within itself the principle of its own making’ (*Phys.* 192b30). In the thing produced by art, the principles that (in the thing produced by nature) cause change and stasis reside chiefly not in the object but in that which has produced it – for example, the maker of the bed. This artist has become the agent of change and stasis in the thing. The things produced by nature and the things produced by art thus differ in that the efficient cause is intrinsic in the former and extrinsic in the latter. Of these four causes, the most important in nature and art is the final cause. It is to this end that movement occurs. Aristotle thus formulated a teleological philosophy of nature whereby all things move towards their goal according to their purpose unless they are hindered (see *Phys.* 198b10-199b32). It is in this last sense that things are talked about as occurring ‘against nature’.

The phrase ‘art imitates nature’ occurs twice in the course of Aristotle defining the four causes and the purview of the science of nature. The phrase first occurs at 194a21. Earlier investigations into the science of nature had been concerned chiefly with the study of the material cause; they had largely ignored the study of the formal cause. ‘But if art imitates nature’, and if it is necessary for an artist to consider form and material – as a builder needs to know what the house to be built is to look like (its form), and also know the materials with which it is to be built – then natural science too must be concerned with the formal and material aspects of nature.

The second occurrence, at 199a15, concerns the final cause – the purpose for which a thing exists. In a thing produced by nature, provided that nothing obstructs it, the earliest stages of its development are for the sake of its final development. The same is true for art. If a house were a thing of nature, it would follow the same pattern of development as it does when produced by art; and, if art could produce natural things, art would produce them in the same way as nature does. ‘Indeed, as a general proposition, the arts either, on the basis of Nature, carry things further than Nature can, or they imitate Nature. If, then, artificial processes are purposeful, so are natural processes too’. Thus, Aristotle concluded that ‘the relation of antecedent to consequent is identical in art and in Nature’ (*Phys.* 199a15-20).

If we now refer back to the phrase ‘art imitates nature in its workings’, it can be seen that ‘nature’ and its ‘workings’ can be understood in terms of the four causes: i) material (the stuff out of which a thing is); ii) formal (the Form – in the sense of archetype – after which a thing is); iii) efficient (that which is the origin of change and stasis within a thing); iv) final (the purpose (*telos*) for the sake of which a thing is) (*Phys.* 194b23-35). Art thus imitates nature by working according to these same processes. The key difference between art and nature being that the artist becomes the efficient cause of the work created (Hankinson, 1995: 120-2; Waterlow, 1982: 1-2, 30-1, 242; see also 48-9, 164-7, 195-6, 198-203).

For Aristotle, as for Plato, mimesis was considerably more complex than simply the copying of sensible appearances. It will be clear from these passages that the phrase as it occurred in Aristotle was not the metaphysical doctrine it had become by the time it was encountered by Cage in the works of Coomaraswamy. Nevertheless, the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle did play a key role in influencing later interpretations of the phrase. The four causes relate to ontological and theological investigations that lie outside of the purview of the *Physics*.

Above the movement and nature of things is another element crucial to many later interpretations of the phrase: the possibility of an eternal highest being – the original preceding cause that everything has. To consider nature it is also necessary to contemplate the origin of nature, for it is this origin that started the processes from which everything moves towards its end. All things, apart from one, move (change) because they are set into movement by something already moving. Something must have started this movement. A chain of movement stretching back to a first mover is thus a precondition of change. But

the first mover must itself be unmoving and changeless, otherwise there would of necessity had to have been something that moved it. Aristotle postulated that the movement of the unmoved mover is not physical, but is movement in the sense of an intellectual catalyst. This first unmoved mover can be understood as ‘God’; it became so in Aquinas’s adaptation of Aristotelian philosophy for Christian theological purposes (*Met.* 1072a19-1073a13; *Phys.* 256a-260a; Goldstein, 1966: 569-70; Waterlow, 1982: 1, 225-6, 228 f.n.13; 232-4, 248-9, 252-3, 256-7, 261; Woodbridge, 1965: 61, 72, 82-5, 143). If it is taken that Aristotle was arguing for the existence of first (primary) causes of things that were equivalent to god(s); and if it is taken that he posited a theology of an unmoved mover, that he connected to first causes which are also final causes, then the principle of the unmoved mover of the *Physics* and the hierarchy of the *Metaphysics* can be used to support Christian theology – which, as we shall see, is where Coomaraswamy’s interpretation of the phrase ultimately derives from (J. Barnes, 1995: 103-8). Nevertheless, it should be noted that other passages of Aristotle can be used to negate that theory; contradictions and confusions abound (J. Barnes, 1995: 67-8, 105-6; Hankinson, 1995: 127-9, 132-5; Lang, 1981: 321, 326-7, 334-5; Pegis, 1973: 67-8, 71, 107-9, 114; Sykes, 1975: 322; Verdenius, 1960: 61-3; Waterlow, 1982: 238-9, 248-9, 256-61; Woodbridge, 1965: 74).

Aristotle cannot be said, then, to unreservedly support the theology, ontology, or philosophy of mind that Coomaraswamy theorized. It would be difficult to make Aristotle’s speculative theology truly support the conflated Catholicism and Advaita Vedānta of Traditionalist theology. This, as well as the vexed history of Catholicism’s relationship to Aristotle, may well be part of the reason why Coomaraswamy principally referred to Aquinas, and not Aristotle, in relation to the phrase ‘art imitates nature’. It is certainly unlikely that Coomaraswamy – a formidable classicist who quoted Plato and Aristotle regularly – would not have known the origin of Aquinas’s phrase. For whatever reason, Coomaraswamy turned to the Neoplatonist-influenced theology and philosophy of medieval Christianity to ground his use of the doctrine that ‘art imitates nature’.

#### **4.1.3 Between Aristotle and Aquinas**

Between the origin of the quotation ‘art imitates nature’ in Aristotle and its appearance in Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* [*ST*] (1266-73) lay the repetition and development of the idea and the philosophy from which it came. Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines of mimesis

proved influential in the late classical period and after. For example, in the *Orator* ii:8-10<sup>71</sup> Cicero (106-43 BCE) argued that a copy of a thing exceeded the beauty of the original because the copy had recourse to the ideal, the Forms/Ideas of Plato. The Ideal could not be perceived by the senses, only through the imaginative potential of the mind. This interpretation would be widely influential in later centuries.

Another hugely influential interpretation is found in the theories of the Neoplatonist Plotinus (c.205-270 CE). Neoplatonism largely depicted nature as a power operating within the sensible world; it was thus of the lower realms. Nevertheless, because of the hierarchy of causes, nature (the nature of a thing) could be known, and this, through its relationship to One, partook of the divine. Therefore, as Plotinus noted in the *Enneads* [*En.*], what art imitates is the intelligible antecedent to the thing consequent in the sensible realm. Plato's distrust of artistic imitation because it produced a thrice removed copy was transformed into a doctrine of idealism.

The idea that art imitates the Forms and is thus more ideal than particularized sensible things was articulated in statements that had a considerable effect on later European art. Plotinus's complex metaphysics posits three 'hypostases' or principles in the intelligible world: One, Intellect, and Soul (Gerson, 1994: 3). One is the origin and cause of everything, and also the goal of all; its limits cannot be conceptually described (*En.* V.3.13-4; Gerson, 1994: 9, 18; Emilsson, 2007: 1). Intellect is the second of the triad. 'Intellect' writes Emilsson (2007: 124-5) 'is at once the locus of the real or real being, and the locus of perfect knowledge and understanding... Everything else is an image, an external act of the real (or an image of an image)'. What is apprehended in the sensible world are the images of things, not the real forms (*En.* V.9.5, VI.3.15; Emilsson, 2007: 132-3; Gerson, 1994: 104-5). Soul has a similar relationship to Intellect as Intellect has to One. Soul belongs both to the intelligible and the sensible; its highest part belongs in the intelligible, its lower part in the sensible (*En.* IV.8.7). If humans in the sensible realm are to know the higher reality, then such knowledge must occur through the chain of being of which Soul is a part (*En.* III.4.3, 8.4; Blumenthal, 1996: 94-7; Emilsson, 2007: 101-2, 143; Gerson, 1994: 58; 104-6).

On art and imitation, Plotinus uses the example of a craftsman working with stone. The sculpture becomes beautiful not through the stone it is carved from but from the form into which art has sculpted the stone. The form comes via the mind and art of the craftsman

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<sup>71</sup> Edition and translation consulted: Hubbell (Hendrickson and Hubbell, 1939).

(*En.* V.8.1.1-16). The arts imitate nature, and natural things are imitations also. Yet what the arts imitate is not simply the sensible existence of things. The imitation derives from Intellect, and partakes of the same ‘forming principles from which nature derives’ (*En.* V.8.1.35). Thus, the art object can be perceived to reveal a higher truth than what is seen in sensible nature. This theory is directly related to theories of nature and mimesis in Plato and Aristotle and yet is not identical to them. Despite the differences, because of the role Neoplatonist works played in communicating classical Hellenic philosophy to later ages, Neoplatonic interpretations strongly influenced medieval European readings (Bredvold, 1934: 93; Hadot, 2006: 55, 218-9; Sörbom, 1966: 135-6; Wagner, 1996: 130).

#### **4.1.4 Origins of the Quotation: St. Thomas Aquinas**

To find the direct origin of our quotation – the words that Coomaraswamy quoted in Latin and in English translation and Cage copied – we need to move forward to St. Thomas Aquinas. Informed by the streams of Christian Platonism transmitted to him via St. Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and working directly from the texts of Aristotle known to his time, Aquinas played a decisive role in developing Christian philosophy and theology towards a point where it could meet the challenge of Aristotelianism<sup>72</sup> (McCool, 1994: 13-5; Pegis, 1973: 116; R. Sorabji, 2006: 51-2). Platonist and Aristotelian philosophy played a central role in Aquinas’s philosophy.

For Aquinas, the truth of things can only be known if the soul rises through intellect to be illuminated by grace (*ST* 1a12.1-2, 1a12.4, 1a75.1). It is the soul which is the true locus of the human form, and it is this part of the human which God made in his image. Neither soul nor intellect are material, they are spiritual faculties. The soul has ‘two cognitive powers’: firstly, it looks out through the senses to have cognition of matter in individuated form; its second cognitive power is non-corporeal, and this is intellect. This power has cognition not of individuated matter but of the nature of such matter. This is not vision in the sense of eyesight, but conceptual vision; it does not see the individual material things of the sensible world but comes to know the universal principle or nature of the thing (*ST* 1a.12.4, 1a84.5, 1a84.7, 1a.85.1; cf. *An.* 429b.19-21; Kretzman, 1993 pp.136-7, 141; MacDonald, 1993: 160-1,182-3). Nevertheless, Aquinas argued that, although the

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<sup>72</sup> On Aquinas and Aristotle in general see Owens (1993); on Aquinas and Aristotelian theology see Pegis (1973); on Aquinas and Aristotle in relation to philosophy of mind (relevant to the discussion that follows) see Kretzman (1993).

universality (or truth) of a thing lay in cognition of its universality, understanding that universality came through cognition of things in the sensible world. The universal things in their ideal are known through what are imitations of them (Kretzman, 1993: 140-3; MacDonald, 1993: 161, 182-4; *ST* 1a.85.1).

As Eco (1988: 71) points out, Aquinas used the term Form/form in several ways. In one sense, Forms were ideas in the divine mind (*ST* 1a15.2, 1a16.1; cf. *Met.* 1027b25). But form also meant the thing structured by Form. Forms are thus the principle of being, that by which a thing is (Eco, 1988: 71). Because Form is in the divine mind, another consequence is that there is a true Form of everything and a divine eternal law which is thus the measure of the ‘proper acts and ends’ of all things. Human laws are derived from this and, where they are right, are commensurate with eternal law and thus unchangeable in their first principles (*ST* 1a15.2, 1a103.1, 1a2æ91.1-2; 1a2æ93.2-3; 1a2æ93.6, 1a2æ94.5-6; see also 1a2æ96.6, 1a2æ97.1-3). Because cognition of universals is not automatic or easy, Aquinas’s system still leaves many humans prisoners in the metaphorical cave. The result, whereby some are wiser in eternal law than others and those less wise are ordered to obey those wiser than them, is an elitism of knowledge and governance and therefore people (MacDonald, 1993: 184-5; *ST* 2a2æ104.1-2, 2a2æ104.6).

Aquinas used the phrase ‘art imitates nature’ or its variant on several occasions, most notably in the *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics*<sup>73</sup> [*CAPhys.*], the *Commentary on Aristotle’s Politics* [*CAPol.*], and the *Summa Theologiæ*. Aquinas’s principal discussions of mimesis in relation to art and nature in the *CAPhys.* occur in his discussion of *Phys.* 194a21-7 (*CAPhys.* 170-3) and 199a9-30 (*CAPhys.* 257-60). The key points of these passages are outlined above in section 4.1.2. In *CAPhys.* 171 Aquinas states that ‘art imitates nature’ because ‘[k]nowledge is the principle of operation in art’<sup>74</sup>. Knowledge comes from what is known to the senses of natural things: thus in artificial things we ‘work to a likeness of natural things’. Likewise, natural things which can be imitated are also produced by art, because ‘all nature is ordered to its end by some intellectual principle’. It is the ‘work of intelligence as it proceeds to certain ends through determinate means’ in nature which is imitated by ‘art in its operation’. *CAPhys.* 173 postulates the primacy of form over matter in both art and nature in relation to the final cause (‘form is that for the

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<sup>73</sup> Edition and translation consulted and cited: edition: Maggiolo (1954); translation: Blackwell, Spath and Thirlkel (1963).

<sup>74</sup> ‘Eius autem quod *ars imitatur naturam*, ratio est, quia principium operationis artificialis cognition est’.

sake of which matter is'). *CAPhys.* 257 and 258 agree with Aristotle that in both art and nature things proceed in like manner towards an end from antecedent to consequent. The key passage from the *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics* will be looked at after the *Summa*.

In the *Summa*, Aristotle, although an important presence, is subordinated to Christian interpretation. Our phrase occurs in 1a117 (the 117<sup>th</sup> question of the first part of the *Summa*). This section of the work concerns the order of the world through God's governance of his creation. In 1a117 the question concerns the interaction of humanity with other elements of creation: angels, material things, and other humans. 1a117 is split up into four further articles; our phrase occurs in the discussion of the first: 'can a man teach another man, causing him to know?' The argument of *ST* 1a117.1 can be summarized as follows: Teaching is an activity that belongs properly only to God. If a human teaches another, the teacher does not cause knowledge; instead knowledge derives from 'intelligible illumination... as well as impressions of the object of knowledge'. Aquinas, following Aristotle (*An.* 429b30), states that 'the passive intellect of the human soul is in a state of pure potentiality with regard to intelligible impressions'. One who teaches does so by reducing one who is taught 'from a state of potentiality to a state of actuality' (cf. *Phys.* 255b1). Of things caused by an external source rather than an internal source, some are caused only by an external source (as art causes form to exist in matter when a house is built), while others are caused sometimes by external sources and sometimes by internal sources. Here Aquinas used the example of health. Sometimes a person who is sick is made healthy by an external source (again art, but in this example the art of medicine); sometimes they are made healthy by an internal source, in this case 'nature's power'. In the case of internal sources, there are two issues which must be remembered – and it is here our phrase occurs; 'First, that art imitates nature in its workings (*ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione*), for just as nature cures a sick man by altering and digesting and expelling the matter causing his sickness, so does the art of medicine'. Secondly, that the external cause, art, 'does not operate (*operatur*) as principal agency'. Instead, it operates to assist the principal agency, the internal cause (nature's power), 'by supporting it and providing it with the means it uses to produce the effect'. A doctor uses the same things that nature uses, such as food and medicine, thus the doctor supports nature and works towards nature's intentions. Aquinas then returns to the subject of the generation of knowledge, the minutiae of which cannot directly concern us here.

Summing up at the end of 1a117.1 Aquinas drew four conclusions; the first three are relevant to our topic. First, a teacher is an external source of help in the same way as a doctor is. It is ‘internal nature (*natura interior*)’ that is the principal cause of healing, and it is ‘internal intellectual illumination’ which is the principal cause of the process of knowing. The interior nature that is the principal cause of healing and the internal intellectual illumination that is the principal cause of the process of knowing both ‘come from God’;

thus, as God is described as *he who cures all your ills* [Ps. 103:3], so also he is described as *he who teaches men to know* [Ps. 94:10] in that the *light of his face is impressed upon us* [Ps. 4:6]. It is through this light that everything is made clear to us (*ST* 1a117.1).

Second, knowledge ‘is the principle by which one is guided in teaching’. In this regard, knowledge is like art because ‘art is the principle by which one is guided in making’ (cf. *ST* 1a2æ57.4, ‘art is the right judgment about things to be made (*ars est recta ratio factibilum*)’). In *Why Exhibit Works of Art?* Coomaraswamy condensed 1a117.1 to become the doctrine: ‘Art is the imitation of Nature in her manner of operation: Art is the principle of manufacture’ (1943: 110). Lastly, Aquinas returns to the teacher and the pupil. He concludes that a teacher neither causes the internal intellectual illumination that allows the pupil to understand, nor the impressions that the pupil gathers. What the teacher does is to move ‘the pupil by his teaching so that the latter forms intelligible concepts by the power of his own mind, when the signs of these concepts are put before him from outside’.

Throughout the *Summa* the example of a builder and a house – one who practices art and the product that is created – is used by Aquinas as a metaphor for the relationship between human and God. As Eco (1988: 170) explained with great clarity:

God, seeing and foreseeing all the varying degrees in which things imitate his essence, conceives the exemplary ideas of artificial things also. In this sense, the idea of a house exists inchoately in the divine exemplar and becomes determinate in the intellect of the artist who conceives it.

Art can bring the human soul closer to true knowledge through a process in which the understanding of nature leads to cognition of things which are intelligible, and thus to an understanding closer to that of the divine nature. Art is the imitation of nature; ultimately it is an imitation of the creativity and ideas of the eternal mind. In the most idealistic sense of the words, art brings form to (already created) matter and thus stands in mimetic relation to the ultimate artist (Eco, 1988: 169-70; Gebauer and Wulf, 1995: 71; Saward, 1997: 72).

Art, the knowledge of how and what to make, comes not from the artist but through the artist; God, the first creator, the unmoved mover, is the mover of the mind, the source of art. Art practice and art product stand in mimetic relation to Him. Art does not create, for creation belongs alone to God; instead art imitates creation as far as it is able. For Jacques Maritain (1930: 63), the artist becomes ‘as it were an associate of God in the making of works of beauty... Artistic creation does not copy God’s creation, but continues it’. Mimesis in the era of Aquinas was therefore conceptualized as ‘creation in reference to a model’; that model was of considerable multifaceted complexity (Eco, 1988: 167-8, 170, 173; Gebauer and Wulf, 1995: 61, 71).

We are now in a position to approach Aquinas’s most explicit statement on art and the imitation of nature. It occurs in his *Commentary on Aristotle’s Politics*:

As the philosopher [Aristotle] teaches in the *Physics*, art imitates nature (*ars imitatur naturam*)... The source of works of art is the human intellect, which is derived from the divine intellect, and the divine intellect is the source of all natural things. Hence not only must artistic operations imitate nature (*artis imitentur operationes naturae*), but also works of art must imitate things that exist in nature. Thus when a master artist produces a work of art, the pupil artist is well advised to pay attention to the master’s work of art, so that he can work in similar fashion. That is why the human intellect, which depends on the divine intellect for its intelligible light, must be informed concerning the things it makes by observation of things that are naturally produced, so that it may work in like manner. Hence the philosopher [Aristotle] says that if art were to produce things of nature, it would operate in the manner of nature itself; conversely, if nature were to produce the products of art, it would produce them in the same way that art does<sup>75</sup> (*CAPol.* prologue 1-2).

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<sup>75</sup> ‘Sicut philosophus docet in secundo physicorum, ars imitatur naturam. Cuius ratio est, quia sicut se habent principia adinvicem, ita proportionabiliter se habent operationes et effectus. Principium autem eorum quae secundum artem fiunt est intellectus humanus, qui secundum similitudinem quamdam derivatur ab intellectu divino, qui est principium rerum naturalium. Unde necesse est, quod et operationes artis imitentur operationes naturae; et ea quae sunt secundum artem, imitentur ea quae sunt in natura. Si enim aliquis instructor alicuius artis opus artis efficeret; oporteret discipulum, qui ab eo artem suscepisset, ad opus illius attendere, ut ad eius similitudinem et ipse operaretur. Et ideo intellectus humanus ad quem intelligibile lumen ab intellectu divino derivatur, necesse habet in his quae facit informari ex inspectione eorum quae sunt naturaliter facta, ut similiter operetur. Et inde est quod philosophus dicit, quod si ars faceret ea quae sunt naturae, similiter

The pupil artist needs the master artist to provide an external guide, so that the internal cause of knowledge can provide illumination. So also can the artist look to the work of the ultimate master artist in the world around them. Illumination is the result. ‘It is through this light that everything is made clear to us’ (*ST* 1a117.1).

This leads to another fundamental part of the aesthetics of Aquinas (and therefore Coomaraswamy): the metaphysics of beauty. As God is ultimate beauty, so the beauty manifested in art partakes of His beauty. As a house can be said to be true to the extent it realizes its design as conceived in the mind of the architect, every thing is true, and thus beautiful, by how *adequate* it is to the form of the idea in the divine mind (Eco, 1988: 100-1; *ST* 1a16.1). Beauty is integrity (or perfection), proportion (or harmony) and clarity (or brightness) (Eco, 1988: 64; *ST* 1a.39.8). The more perfectly a sensible thing participates in the principles of beauty, the more beautiful it is – the more it is mimetic of the forms in the divine mind. Beauty is order, symmetry, proportion, harmony, clarity, reason, dignity, virtue, suitability-for-purpose, illumination; a mathematical relationship exists between all things and those above. Beauty thus takes on an intellectual significance which encompasses but greatly transcends the modern meaning of beauty as something which brings pleasures to the senses. In macrocosm and microcosm everything was tied together through proportion, representation, signification; the principle that runs through all of this is mimesis – imitation (Eco, 1988: 64-5, 67, 70, 77-9, 81, 90-4, 97, 102-3, 105, 180; Gebauer and Wulf, 1995: 69-70; Saward, 1997: 42-6, 69-71). This was as true for the arts, with their traditions of representation or ratios in design and architecture, as it was in other areas of life. The imitation of nature is a vital part of this tradition. The imitation of nature and the imitation of Christ trod the same path (Gebauer and Wulf, 1995: 61, 64, 68-9, 311; Saward, 1997: 73-4).

In the same way that intellectual cognition of divine nature is acquired through the cognition of those things as they are in particularized nature, art imitates (divine) nature through imitating things as they are in (particular) nature. Thus, the most basic

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operaretur sicut et natura: et e converso, si natura faceret ea quae sunt artis, similiter faceret sicut et ars facit’. Translation principally that of Saward (1997: 74); the first two sentences and last sentence based on translation of Regan (2007: 1) with additional translation by the author. Edition consulted: Corpus Thomisticum (available at [www.corpusthomicum.org/cpo.html](http://www.corpusthomicum.org/cpo.html)); principal translation consulted : Regan (2007). As can be seen from the original, Saward’s translation might be accused of being interpretive rather than literal; however, the interpretation is consistent with Coomaraswamy’s meaning.

representation would be the imitation of a thing (e.g. a horse) exactly as it appears in particularized matter – a photo-realistic copy of a particular horse (e.g. Shergar). As illumination is bestowed and intellect knows things as they are in themselves, so an artist gains ‘a more and more genuine revelation both of Things and the Self’: the artist is *inspired* (Maritain, 1930: 69; 1953: 223). The transparency of a particular horse becomes clear: it is that-which-is-signified – the universal form Horse – that cognition re-cognizes. Art has imitated nature in its workings (Eco, 1988: 172). In the process it has learnt something of the true nature of the soul.

We will shortly see that Coomaraswamy’s interpretation of the phrase as aphoristically capturing traditional art-making combines elements of all the passages discussed above and thus the philosophy and theology of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and Aquinas. First I want to make a tiny puncture in the idealistic bubble above. For a start, we could question how representative of medieval art practice the theories of Aquinas really were (Eco, 1988: 188). Perhaps more importantly we could think about what is not being said. Much of what we have just discussed was concentrated on seeing beyond material reality. The earthly travails of non-elite medieval lives were irrelevant; it was all part of the divine plan (*ST* 1a47.2). The ideology of elites led to a philosophy and theology which reified that ideology as truth and beauty (Eco, 1988: 182). It can be argued, however – as could also be said in relation to India of the pre-modern period – that such concentration on the idealism of holy men, intellectuals and elites tended to disguise and excuse realities which were far less rosy for those not in the upper echelons of a society.

#### **4.1.5 Coomaraswamy’s Interpretation of the Phrase**

Coomaraswamy always claimed, not without reason, that he never presented his own ideas; the ideas he reproduced were all those of earlier authorities and he merely communicated them to his reader. In bringing together diverse sources from the world’s literature, he claimed to be doing nothing more than showing a universal wisdom. However, it was his interpretation and commentary that held these sources together and made them appear commensurate. On many occasions if sources had been presented in different translation, or subjected to a different reading, the connections would have seemed considerably more superficial. Aspects of Coomaraswamy’s interpretations of classical and medieval European and Indian thought can be readily challenged by more recent scholarship. It is

unlikely that he would have seen this as a problem. Indeed, his interpretations were also challenged during his lifetime – not, it might be said, an unusual state of affairs for any scholar of philosophy. What is unusual is the recourse by which Coomaraswamy challenged those who disagreed with him. What made him come to the conclusions he did, and in the eyes of his followers gave those conclusions great weight, were not advances in knowledge or the consensus of modern scholars, but access to an earlier, purer knowledge now almost entirely lost. His knowledge of Traditional thought allowed him to discount all modern critical opinion when it did not agree with his interpretation.

Coomaraswamy's turn to Perennialism was spurred by his introduction to the Neo-Scholastic writings of Maritain. It is perhaps thus not surprising that the first book he wrote after this development in his thought, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (1934), was largely an examination of Scholastic aesthetics in relation to Indian aesthetics. Mimesis and the philosophical and practical application of the 'art imitates nature' phrase form one of the main subjects of the book. The title itself alludes to this directly. It was a theme Coomaraswamy had charted before and was to return to on many occasions subsequently. Coomaraswamy did not need Neo-Scholastic writings to introduce him to the concept. He had already been encountering it for years, not only through classical texts but also as a theme threaded through the theories of numerous modern art theorists including one of utmost influence on Coomaraswamy: Ruskin. However, it was only after the early 1930s that Scholasticism became a central theme in Coomaraswamy's work. Besides *The Transformation*, Coomaraswamy discussed mimesis in relation to nature in *Medieval Sinhalese Art* (1908), *The Indian Craftsman* (1909), *Essays in National Idealism* (1910), *Art and Swadeshi* (1912), *The Dance of Shiva* (1918), *Why Exhibit Works of Art?* (1943), *The Religious Basis of the Forms of Indian Society* (1946), and *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought* (1946). All these works will be used in the discussion that follows.

Explaining his philosophy of art to his follower and biographer S. Duari Raja Singam in a letter of 1947, Coomaraswamy wrote:

What I say is what Ruskin said, that 'Industry without art is brutality'<sup>76</sup> or, as St Thomas Aquinas expressed it, 'There can be no good uses without art.' In his capacity as Creator, God is the archetype of the human artist as manufacturer; which is what is meant when art is called an 'imitation of nature in her manner of operation', ie, of the Divine Nature (Coomaraswamy, 1988: 380).

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<sup>76</sup> Ruskin, 1870: 88.

From this it should be obvious that Coomaraswamy's purpose was not to damn all of European art in comparison to the art of Asia. His target was modern materialist values and the cultures of those countries that promoted it, of which America was the worst offender in his eyes. As we shall see in chapter five, Coomaraswamy contended that art production in Europe had resembled that in Asia until the Renaissance introduced false ideas. For Coomaraswamy, Asian and pre-Renaissance European art was idealist; much post-Renaissance art, on the other hand, followed European (and American) society in being materialist – focussed on the material objects of the sensible world and believing the empirical self to be worthy of expression (Coomaraswamy, 1912: 56-7, 136-7; 1934a: 3, 9-11; 1946a: 44; 1946b: 154-5; 1956: ix). This was the matter at the heart of the fall of the modern world: its inhabitants stopped thinking of things as they were in God and started believing in things as they were to the empirical self. It was a descent back to the cave. From Coomaraswamy's perspective, Asians and medieval Europeans, both uncorrupted by 'Western materialism,' had freed themselves from the cave and learned to see the shadows for what they were. Thus, Coomaraswamy claimed, to understand Indian art one could turn to medieval aesthetics, especially Aquinas, and to understand medieval art one could turn to Indian aesthetics.

Logically following the key axiom of Traditionalism, Coomaraswamy developed a theory of art that he called 'the Traditional or "normal" view of art'; idealism provided its foundation (Coomaraswamy, 1943; 1946b). Tradition in art was for Coomaraswamy a universal descriptor for how art had been practiced and what it had meant. Coomaraswamy understood European pre-Renaissance art through the philosophy and theology of Plato, Aristotle, Neo-Platonism and Scholasticism. By attempting to reproduce the external sensible forms of things, Western art had fallen to a low level (Coomaraswamy, 1910a: 23-5; 1938a: 53; 1943: 10; 1956: ix). On the other hand, art in Asia was traditional and, at least until the nineteenth century, had stayed that way. Using numerous examples from Vedic texts and *sūtras* and commentaries from several Indian philosophical *darśanas* (schools of philosophy), Coomaraswamy attempted to show that the Indian theory of art closely resembled pre-Renaissance European theories<sup>77</sup>. He followed this by arguing that art in the

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<sup>77</sup> Before he became convinced of the truth of Perennialism, Coomaraswamy's writings occasionally criticized the lack of 'true' metaphysics in Greek and Roman philosophy, including Plato and Aristotle (for example, Coomaraswamy, 1910a: 58). In his later writing that is not the case: Plato became one of his chief

rest of Asia was congruent with Indian traditions as he understood them. However, we need to approach Coomaraswamy's arguments on the subject with care.

In most matters, Coomaraswamy was quick to make sweeping judgments on art production in East and West, in line with the Orientalist dialectic (albeit of the affirmative Orientalist kind). His knowledge of Indian art was considerably greater than his knowledge of Eastern Asian art, and his writing on the subject was consequently more detailed and nuanced. Even so, his depiction of Indian art essentializes his own ideological and religious persuasion, subordinating the variety of South Asia's art to a brahmin-centric reading:

just as through all Indian schools of thought there runs like a golden thread the fundamental idealism of the Upanishads, the Vedanta, so in all Indian art there is a unity that underlies all its bewildering variety. This unifying principle is here also Idealism, and this must of necessity have been so, for the synthesis of Indian thought is one, not many (Coomaraswamy, 1910a: 17).

He generalized about the other Asian traditions of art in similar style. Thus, to discuss 'the theory of art in Asia' in relation to East Asian art, he reified a handful of quotations from assorted Chinese or Japanese texts and certain examples of styles he considered typical and extrapolated for the rest of the region based on them.

Based on his logic – that what is traditional is therefore true and thus normal, that the oldest texts are the most traditional and thus the most valid, that idealism in art is in all cases a tenet of the highest art forms, and that what is true is everywhere the same – he could logically use fragments taken out of their philosophical context in order to represent thousands of years of art production across huge swathes of the continent. By a similar logic, the aesthetics of Aquinas could be used to illustrate the aesthetics of India. As 'normal' European art was idealistic and 'normal' Indian art was idealistic, this was the universal 'normal' tradition of art. Consider, for example, Coomaraswamy's introduction to his essay 'The Christian and Oriental, or True, Philosophy of Art' (1946b: 23):

I have called this lecture the 'Christian and Oriental' philosophy of art because we are considering a catholic or universal doctrine... and 'True' philosophy both because of its authority and because of its consistency... In the text of what follows I shall not distinguish Christian from Oriental...

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sources (see Coomaraswamy, 1988: 387). In the later writings, Coomaraswamy's gauge of the correctness of the Platonist tradition was largely Scholastic thought.

With these provisos in place we can say that, for Coomaraswamy, traditional art in Asia and Europe was always guided by idealism: it dealt with the subjective rather than the objective, the intelligible rather than the sensible, and thus the real rather than the unreal (1910a: 17, 34-5, 62-3, 89; 1912: 67, 136-7; 1932: 110-2; 1934a: 14, 56-7; 1943: 23, 89, 113-4; 1946b: 18-9, 154-5; 1956: 169-70; 1988: 46).

The Aristotelian-Thomist phrase *ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione* was a keystone of Coomaraswamy's idealist aesthetics. In understanding his reading of the phrase it is important to note the difference between two meanings of the term 'nature'. The first meaning is sensible material nature, what is seen with the eyes (*natura naturata*). The second meaning is archetypal nature, the nature of a thing in Idea or Form, the thing as it is in God (*natura naturans*)<sup>78</sup> (1934a: 9-11, 19; 1943: 33-4, 73; 1946b: 16-9, 135, 226). When Coomaraswamy defined art as 'the imitation of nature in her manner of operation', the nature he referred to was 'Natura naturans, Creatrix, Deus', 'nature, not as effect, but as cause... by no means our own already natured environment' (1943: 73). It was nature as we have encountered in Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and Aquinas. *Natura naturans* was the essence of a thing; the thing that made 'horses horsey', Form and origin, the spark that moved things into life (ibid.: 19; 1946a: 16). Coomaraswamy emphatically stated that '*this* Nature is not the environment in which we find ourselves and which we are a part, not that Nature that modern science investigates' (ibid.: 16; see also 1910a: 59-60). *This* nature was 'the eternal and intelligible models', the forms that can only be known through intellect (Coomaraswamy, 1934a: 95; 1943: 11; 1946b: 19). It is the divine glimpsed behind the thing, not in it (Coomaraswamy, 1910a: 32). To find this nature, Meister Eckhart wrote, 'all her forms must be shattered' (Coomaraswamy, 1946b: 16). One must see beyond appearances.

Coomaraswamy argued that his interpretation of the term 'nature' was what was understood by the term by the majority of all pre-modern Indian, Chinese, Greek, and European Neoplatonic and Christian philosophers (1946a: 16). This is why, in *The Transformation* (ibid.:15), Coomaraswamy wrote 'for the East, as for St Thomas, *ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione*'. Imitation referred to the imitation of a sensible thing

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<sup>78</sup> These terms were introduced by Michael Scot (Michael Scotus) (d. in or after 1235), a thinker of considerable influence who was amongst those who translated and introduced texts by Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd, and Aristotle to medieval western Europe. In later European philosophy, the terms are particularly associated with Spinoza (Mulsow, 2006: 379 f.n.65; Thorndike, 1965: 1, 24-8, 31).

in its real intelligible, not perceptible Form; imitation in art meant embodying Ideal/Form in already created matter (1943: 73; 1946b: 19, 134). Ideal nature determined how a thing should be depicted; if it was not depicted true to the Ideal, the depiction was against the nature of the thing depicted (1943: 19). Thus, when depicted properly in art, a thing will always be a symbol that signifies the true Form (1946b: 16). It should not be what Plato (*Rep.* 597-8) called a copy of a copy of a copy (Coomaraswamy, 1946b: 19, 135). The artist must imitate the workings of nature, and thus the workings of God (1988: 388).

Coomaraswamy grounded his metaphysics in the ontological axiom that the sensible world is not what is absolutely real; he linked these beliefs with Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, and the nondualist understanding of *māyā* in Advaita Vedānta (see 4.2.3 below). Nevertheless, as we have seen, there were considerable ontological differences between the theory of Forms/Ideas in those traditions. Coomaraswamy was aware of this and thus rejected the Platonist idea that Forms are ‘external to the conditioned universe’ (1934a: 17; 1946b: 136, 141 f.n.9). Even so, for Coomaraswamy this did not affect the essential validity of Plato’s metaphysics and (for him) their resulting equality with the systems of Aristotle, Aquinas, or, indeed, Eckhart (cf. *ST* 1a84.5). Indeed, it is Eckhart’s idealism that forms the subject of the chapter of *The Transformation* entitled ‘Meister Eckhart’s View of Art’. ‘The doctrine of types, ideas, forms, or images is of fundamental importance for the understanding of Eckhart’s references to art’, he stated (1934a: 67). Coomaraswamy argues that in Eckhart’s view, all things are Ideas in the divine mind and ‘Every nature emanates from its appropriate form’ (ibid.: 68, 71). It is ultimately in these latter areas, in addition to theology, that Coomaraswamy drew connections between Indian, Greek, Neoplatonic and Catholic theories (see, for example, Coomaraswamy, 1936a: 177-97). These traditions might differ superficially in how they postulate what ultimately is, but they do not differ in their beliefs regarding a highest being, what is ontologically real, the consequential causes of things, or the epistemological processes by which they are to be known (1934a: 10-11, 208 f.n.82; 1943: 19-20; 1946b: 16-19, 67, 72-3 f.n.11, 74-5 f.n.13, 134-6, 140, 153-4, 178).

Art as Traditionally practiced, that is to say as practiced everywhere and at all times apart from in post-Renaissance Europe, is in Coomaraswamy’s view a religious ‘metaphysical rite’ the goal of which is unity with that which is more real than the sensible. Art practice is knowledge through contemplation where, in the production of art, one imitates and partakes in the same processes as God and for the same ends (Coomaraswamy,

1934a: 90-3; 1946b: 177-8; 1956: 56). The traditional artist, he tells us, relies on inward vision for the forms they depict. Turning to reality (through the intellect) brings knowledge of what and how to depict (1909: 73; 1956: 78-9). Coomaraswamy (1943: 34) states that in the ‘Christian and Oriental philosophy of art’,

[t]he intuition-expression of an imitable form is an intellectual conception born of the artist’s wisdom, just as the eternal reasons are born of the Eternal Wisdom. The image arises naturally in his spirit, not by way of an aimless inspiration, but in purposeful and vital operation, ‘by a word *conceived* in intellect’ [*ST* 1a45.6].

Whereas ‘word’ (in the sense of *logos*, the Word of God) here refers to the creative inspiration by which an artist imitates the divine artist, Coomaraswamy uses a Sanskrit word, *yoga*, to describe the contemplative practice which leads to creative intuition. *Yoga* leads to experience of ‘the ideal world of true reality’ beyond the world of the senses (1910a: 24; 1943: 37; 1946b: 164-5). With a mind properly focused through *yoga* the artist visualizes the form following canonical prescription:

The mind ‘pro-duces’ or ‘draws’ (*ākarṣati*) this form to itself, as though from a great distance. Ultimately, that is, from Heaven, where the types of art exist in formal operation; immediately, from ‘the immanent space in the heart’ (*antar-hṛdaya-ākāśa*), the common focus (*saṁstāva*, ‘concord’) of seer and seen, at which place *the only possible experience of reality takes place* (1934a: 5-6, emphasis added).

Inspired, the vision of the Form to be depicted becomes clear and the artist has the direct experience on which to ground the depiction (1934a: 6; 1946b: 145-60).

Meaning should come through what is signified by an art work, it should not be thought to reside in the art work itself. To illustrate this, Coomaraswamy referenced the idealism of the Mahāyāna Buddhist *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* (II.48, v.118): ‘the (real) picture is not in the color, nor in the surface, nor in the surroundings (but in the mind)’<sup>79</sup> (1934a: 197 f.n.43; 1946b: 154-5). Modern audiences had come to believe instead that ‘the picture is in the colours, the colours are the picture’ (ibid.: 155). Concomittantly, modern artists had

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<sup>79</sup> The translation from the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* [*LS*] appears to have been Coomaraswamy’s own. D. T. Suzuki ([1932] 1999: 44) translates the verses (*LS* II.48, v.118-9) as ‘118. Who arrange colours to produce a picture, I teach. The picture is not in the colours, nor in the canvas, nor in the plate; 119. In order to make it attractive to all beings, a picture is presented in colours. What one teaches, transgresses; for the truth (*tattva*) is beyond words’. On the meanings of the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* see Sutton (1991).

stopped focussing on the true universal self (*ātman*) to concentrate instead on the ego of the empirical self (ibid.: 24-6, 154-5, 247). Symbolic depictions, as of the lotus in India or the rose in Tudor England, could convey far more of reality to an artist and audience than anything personal (1956: 66, 170). Since the Renaissance, instead of expressing ‘unchanging laws’, most expressed ‘individual whims’ (1909: 74-5). Instead of *knowing* the rules of art (art as ‘knowledge of the right judgment about things to be made’) as clearly as an engineer would know the science of their profession, the modern artist *thinks* (1988: 379).

Art became meaningless because it stopped communicating universal things through conventional symbols (1913: 27; 1934a: 25, 83-5; 1943: 102; 1980a: 125-7; 1980b: 128-33). It will be remembered that epistemology is the main subject of Aquinas in *ST* 1a117.1, and it is in this regard that the line ‘art imitates nature’ occurs. *ST* 1a117.1 states that because teaching is something proper only to God, human teaching can only bring the mind of the pupil (viewer) to potentiality whereby it can recognize ideas preconceived by God and inherent in intellect, and thus know them. A symbol is a teacher in this sense and thus a key part of the ‘transformation of nature in art’. In Coomaraswamy’s philosophy of art, a symbol is a form of expression grounded in convention passed down through the ages from ancient (and thus more knowledgeable) authorities<sup>80</sup>. Symbols do not imitate things as they are to the senses, but as they are to the intellect. Similarly, though the initial means of communication may be sensible, the understanding of the symbol comes through intellect. Symbols suggest the essence of their meaning to the mind through their participation in the sensible; but illumination results from the subsequent recognition of the truth of the symbol by the part of the mind of the viewer that participates in the divine (1934a: 83-4, 125-8; 1944a: 51, 54-5, 58, 60-1, 61 f.n.38; 1946b: 26). That is why art-making must in essence be conventional and must imitate nature in workings, not appearances; only through the transformation of nature (*natura naturata*) into the symbolic is nature (*natura naturans*) made *intelligible* (1934a: 24).

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<sup>80</sup> On this idea in relation to Neoplatonism and Renaissance Platonism and the concept of ancient theology see Gombrich (1948: 163-92).

#### 4.1.6 Cage's Interpretation and Use of the Phrase

Cage frequently suggested that the phrase 'art is the imitation of nature in her manner of operation' had been a significant influence on his practice in interviews from the 1950s onwards. One example is the following from the mid sixties:

I have for many years accepted, and I still do, the doctrine about Art, occidental and oriental, set forth by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in his book *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, that the function of Art is to imitate Nature in her manner of operation (Cage, 1968c: 31).

We will first try to ascertain when Cage became enthused by the phrase, chart his use of the phrase, and then turn to look at his understanding of it.

When Cage started contemplating the phrase 'art imitates nature in her manner of operation' is unclear; it may not have been until the early fifties. Although it is certain that Cage had encountered Coomaraswamy's theories by 1946, the first time Cage appears to have used or referenced the phrase in a lecture did not occur until 1954 and *45' for a Speaker*. This first appearance in Cage's writing runs: 'The highest purpose is to have no purpose at all. This puts one in accord with nature in her manner of operation' (Cage, 1954: 155)<sup>81</sup>. A further text probably documents his thoughts on the phrase in the same period. In a text from *Silence* written around 1961, Cage remembered:

I was driving out to the country once with Carolyn and Earle Brown. We got to talking about Coomaraswamy's statement that the traditional function of the artist is to imitate nature in her manner of operation. This led me to the opinion that art changes because science changes – that is, changes in science give artists different understandings of how nature works (Cage, 1968a: 194).

As Carolyn and Earle Brown did not meet Cage until 1951 and did not move to New York until 1952<sup>82</sup> this story must refer to a period later than that point; the reference to driving out to the country perhaps dates it to after Cage moved to Stony Point in 1954. Cage referred to this interpretation of the phrase in April 1956 where he stated that art should be 'an imitation (which is the artist's traditional responsibility) of nature in her manner of operation *as, in our time, her operation is revealed*' (Cage, 1956a: 115; emphasis added). The following month he wrote that art and music, when 'anthropocentric (involved in self-expression), seem trivial'. The world is full of things besides people: 'Trees, stones, water,

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<sup>81</sup> Cage also uses the phrase again in the same lecture (1954: 173).

<sup>82</sup> See C. Brown (2007: 5-15, 22-44).

everything is expressive'. He understood this as 'a complex interpenetration of centers moving out in all directions without impasse'<sup>83</sup>. And this, he stated, was 'in accord with the contemporary awareness of the operations of nature' (Cage, 1956b: 117-8). A year and a half later he claimed that the technological advances represented by magnetic tape meant that 'we are, in fact, technically equipped to transform our contemporary awareness of nature's manner of operation into art' (Cage, 1957b: 9). Then in c.1964, in the same essay quoted above, he made his position abundantly clear: 'Our understanding of "her manner of operation" changes according to advances in the sciences' (Cage, 1968c, p31).

From the mid sixties Cage developed the implications of his understanding of the phrase in various directions. He continued to state that if art imitates nature, then art changes as science develops its understanding of nature's workings (Cage, 1973c: 106; 1990: 229-30). In 1966, alluding to his other favourite phrase – that the traditional reason for making music was to 'quiet the mind thus making it susceptible to divine influences' – Cage stated that 'We learned from Oriental thought that those divine influences are, in fact, the environment in which we are' (Kostelanetz, 2003: 43). This interpretation also characterized statements where he connected the indeterminate and chance-based techniques of his composition with the workings of nature understood as chaos (Cage, 1969b: 16; Cage and Kermode, 1970: 200). Late in life he suggested that he understood nature in opposition to culture: nature is what has not been deliberately constructed by humans. Thus microtonal music or traffic sounds could be understood as being 'close to nature' (Cage and Retallack, 1996: 187). Cage's indeterminate and chance-derived scores, systems, and operations have thus frequently been read to illustrate his understanding of the phrase (C. Brown, 2007: 48-9; Gann, 2010: 94; P. Griffiths, 1981: 36-7; Snyder, 1977: 312; Shultis, 1998: 94-5; Tomkins, 1965: 74-5, 100).

These statements have formed the basis for the depiction of the phrase within Cage studies and have characterized how Cage's understanding of the phrase was understood. Until Patterson's work, it was largely assumed that Cage's use of the phrase was faithful to its meaning and therefore linked Cage to Indian aesthetics specifically and Asian aesthetics in general. Patterson suggested that Cage's interpretation of Coomaraswamy was not faithful but did not fully explain why. With specific reference to the phrase, he stated that although Cage 'never went into detail as to his own interpretation', 'fortunately,

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<sup>83</sup> Whilst the latter line refers to Suzuki's Zen, the line about the expressivity of trees, stones and water seems to hark back to the nature mysticism he shared with Pauline Schindler (see Cage, Schindler, and Mary, 1996).

Coomaraswamy clarified the meaning of each of the terms' (Patterson, 1996: 96; 2002b: 194-5). This could be read to suggest that it is possible to understand Cage's use of the phrase through reference to Coomaraswamy's interpretation and therefore that Cage's meaning was or may have been commensurate with Coomaraswamy's interpretation. Such a contention might be plausible for Cage's understanding in the forties because there is so little evidence for what that understanding was, if indeed he had even encountered the phrase by that point. Nevertheless, as shown above, from the early fifties onwards Cage did suggest how he interpreted the phrase, and in doing so he revealed that his interpretation was ontologically incompatible with Coomaraswamy's reading. Gann (2010: 94) suggests that Cage's reading of the phrase was likely to be different to Coomaraswamy's, but does not fully explain why. Neither author places the phrase in its philosophical context nor begins to examine the implications of our changed understanding of Cage's borrowing.

Cage may not have stated precisely what he meant when he used the phrase, but he said enough to make it clear that his meaning was opposed to Coomaraswamy's, and thus to Indian and medieval European art as interpreted by Coomaraswamy. The crux of the matter can quickly be illustrated. In relation to the phrase, Coomaraswamy thought:

it must be clearly understood that *this* Nature is not the environment in which we find ourselves and which we are a part, not that Nature that modern science investigates<sup>84</sup> (Coomaraswamy, 1946a: 16)

Whereas, for Cage:

art changes because science changes – that is, changes in science give artists different understandings of how nature works (Cage, 1968a: 194).

The nature Coomaraswamy suggested medieval and Asian art imitated was ideal nature (*natura naturans*), the forms not the shadows. Although Cage focused on the workings of nature, not its appearances, the nature whose workings he imitated was the nature that modern science investigates, meaning the workings of material nature, *natura naturata*. As Cage said, the understanding of science changes. For Coomaraswamy the true nature was eternal, and true understanding of it could never change because it never changed itself. 'An "evolution" in metaphysics is impossible', as he put it (Coomaraswamy, 1988: 211). Ontologically, Cage's and Coomaraswamy's usage was fundamentally and irreconcilably opposed.

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<sup>84</sup> Coomaraswamy said the same thing, though less clearly, in *The Transformation*: "'imitation" in the sense *Ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione*... does not mean... our environment' (1934: 208 f.n.82).

In Coomaraswamy's terms, Cage was a materialist. *Natura naturans* always had purpose because it was creation through Word; it was ordered, perfect, harmonious, and clear. It was not and could never be the chaos that Cage suggested it was. Cage's assertion that having no purpose was the highest purpose and that this was the principle by which nature operated could only relate, in Coomaraswamy's terms, to *natura naturata* (Cage, 1954: 155). For Coomaraswamy, the world of the senses was ultimately illusory (*māyā*): a thing was only real by virtue of its universal state and its participation in the divine, not in how it appeared to the senses. Cage believed that the only reality was the world of the senses. Thus Cage denied the importance of symbols, communication, and ideas, summarising in 1982: 'Object is fact not symbol (no ideas)' (unpaginated<sup>85</sup>; see also 1959c: 136; 1968a: 85). For Coomaraswamy symbols were vestiges of true knowledge and thus the true purpose of art (Coomaraswamy, 1980a: 125-7; 1980b: 128-33).

Cage had faith in the value of things as themselves and their immanent rather than transcendent spiritual participation. Cage's rejection of symbolism reflected his engagement with Suzuki's Zen. Nevertheless, his understanding of Zen substantially clashed with Coomaraswamy's theories, including Coomaraswamy's Perennialist interpretation of Buddhist ontology. This difference is succinctly illustrated by a story Cage told in which Suzuki was the key figure. Suzuki was at a philosophical conference the subject of which was reality. According to Cage, after three days in which he gave no opinions Suzuki was asked

'would you say this table around which we are sitting is real?' Suzuki raised his head and said 'Yes'. The chairman asked in what sense Suzuki thought the table was real. Suzuki said, 'In every sense' (Cage, 1965a: 35).

For Suzuki (and Cage) the table was wholly real, for Coomaraswamy the table was nothing but a shadow. This issue will be further argued in 4.2.3 below.

Ultimately, the two different interpretations of the phrase show a fundamental ontological difference in the views of Coomaraswamy and Cage on reality, the soul, and God. Coomaraswamy regarded the soul as the highest and only true part of being. Conversely, Cage suggested we might want to get rid of the soul: 'Meister Eckhart spoke of the soul's simplicity. But Nature's complicated. We must get rid of the soul or train it to deal with countless numbers of things' (Cage, 1968d: 24). For Coomaraswamy the soul was *ātman* (and *ātman* = *brahman*): he thus would not have been impressed by Cage wanting to

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<sup>85</sup> The phrase occurs on the 12<sup>th</sup> side of paper in the book.

either scrap the soul or make it contemplate ‘countless’ material things. Nor did Coomaraswamy think nature was complicated; like Eckhart’s soul, it was simple due to its essential participation in the eternal One. Finally, where Coomaraswamy believed ardently in a highest entity to which he was bound hierarchically, Cage denied the existence of such an entity. From the 1970s onwards Cage announced on a number of occasions that he believed God to be ‘man’s stupidest idea’, a statement he had borrowed from Marcel Duchamp (Cage, 1969a: 70; 1973b: 107; Cage and Duckworth, 1989: 30; Kostelanetz, 2003: 155). From Coomaraswamy’s perspective Cage was a materialist and thus part of the decline of the world.

Let us compare a final pair of statements by Coomaraswamy and Cage. Throughout his career Coomaraswamy complained of the complete ‘modern... subjection of art to science’.

Corrupted by science... the Western mind now demands of artists, not great ideas, imagination, fancy, tenderness, but what it calls ‘realism,’ little dreaming how far removed this may be from ‘truth’... Not thus did the great painters of Egypt or of India work. They indeed sought truth, but they sought it where alone it is to be found, within (Coomaraswamy, 1910a: 59-60).

Cage, in the ‘Lecture on Something’, c.1951:

someone said, ‘Art should come from within; then it is profound.’ But it seems to me Art goes within... When Art comes from within, which is what it was for so long doing, it became a thing which seemed to elevate the man who made it above those who observed it or heard it and the artist was considered a genius (1959c: 129).

Cage’s system would discount the theory, held by Coomaraswamy, that only from within can the self arrive at cognition of the real truth that is unavailable empirically. The art objects that Cage produced were not symbols, they did not signify anything other than what they were. The object and the meaning of the object were identical. Cage held this view in c.1952 and did not change it: ‘Nothing in life requires a symbol since it is clearly what it is: a visible manifestation of an invisible nothing. All somethings equally par-take of that life-giving nothing’ (ibid.: 136). *4’33”*, for example, was not more than the sounds present at the time, and that was enough. While for Coomaraswamy the real picture was not in the colours but in what the arrangement of the colours symbolized to intellect, for Cage the real

picture was neither more nor less than the colours. The colours in themselves were enough for Cage, it did not matter to him what arrangement they were in.

Nevertheless, where Cage's theory did have a spiritual implication (albeit an immanentist one) was in suggesting that the colours had value in themselves because they partook 'of that life-giving nothing'. Because that life-giving nothing is neither more nor less in the art object than in anything else, to be meaningful nothing need signify anything other than itself. In fact, if the colours (or sounds) were in an arrangement which signified something else (e.g. if the colours painted a picture of a horse, or the sounds imitated the noises a horse makes), then that would imply that the true value of the colours (or sounds) resided in what they were being made to signify, not in what they were in themselves (their nature). Cage therefore had no use for symbols, communication, souls, Ideas, or God. He eschewed purposeful meaning, imaginative and intellectual expression, communication, and symbolism, in favour of anarchy, chance operations and indeterminacy. There is a very real difference between Cage and Coomaraswamy which should not be overlooked by assuming that deep down both men were talking about the same thing or by quickly glossing over their disagreements. It can be definitively said that Cage and Coomaraswamy meant radically different things when they stated that 'art imitates nature in her manner of operation'.

## **4.2 The Nature of Nature and the Nature of the Self**

### **4.2.1 The Imitation of Nature after Aquinas**

Unknowingly, by aligning himself with the concept that art imitates nature in its workings Cage connected himself to one of the most influential concepts in European philosophy of art. A comparison of the history of the phrase with Cage's practice will show that Cage was not nearly as separated from European art history as he seems to have liked to have thought. It will also highlight what was different, and in doing so shed further light on the issue of why Cage disliked the philosophy of Emerson in comparison to that of Thoreau. Further, it will problematize aspects of two published monographs that discuss Cage: George Leonard's *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (1994) and Christopher Shultis's *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition* (1998)<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> It also sheds light on why there are similarities and differences between the theories of theatre of Aristotle and Cage as discussed in Natalie Crohn Schmitt's essay 'John Cage, Nature, and Theater' (1982: 19-20); and

Coomaraswamy's insistence that the arts in Europe deteriorated and lost sight of their true purpose after the Renaissance should be treated with care. Although there were significant changes, there were also continuities that Coomaraswamy's dogmatism disguises. The real subject of Coomaraswamy's critique was the gradual decline in dominance of the traditional Catholic world view. This should not make us overlook the fact that the theory 'art imitates nature' retained influence through much of the early modern and modern period. Mimesis of nature in the sense used by Coomaraswamy did not disappear; we will see its re-emergence in the eighteenth century and see how it led to art and philosophies of art seem to presage Cage's theories. Nevertheless, it will be argued that the same problematic occurs in such comparisons as occurred in comparing the ontological beliefs of Coomaraswamy and Cage.

Cage's worldview was essentially secular and his interpretation of the phrase was as far from Coomaraswamy's as many post-Renaissance European interpretations. Nature is not the straightforward term it sometimes appears to be. As John Dixon Hunt (1997: 14) admirably summed up the problem:

The convenience of the term in gesturing toward the organic and inorganic materials of the world... challenges our postmodernist sense of its constant manipulation by special interest groups at every place and time, a manipulation that its commentators contend deprives it of any usefulness as sound conceptual coinage.

In considering Cage's idea of nature in comparison to theories held in other times and places than his own it is vital to take into account the slippery multi-sidedness of the concept. Doing so gives a clearer picture of what Cage meant by the term, and how his usage relates to earlier European and American thought.

Between the Renaissance and the nineteenth century the multiple ways in which nature was understood changed considerably. In some cases natural causes replaced supernatural causes. For example, Montaigne (1533-92) in the *Apology for Raymond Sebond* presaged attitudes which would come to dominate in the following centuries by questioning the categorization of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* (Hoffmann, 2005: 163). Yet neither should it be assumed that naturalism equated to atheism. The equation in Spinoza between God and nature empowered faith in the numinous quality of immanent creation. In Spinoza's thought, sensible nature was not a poor copy of the divine nature;

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adds similar background to Jonathan Scott Lee's 'Mimêsis and Beyond: Mallarmé, Boulez, and Cage' (1986-7: 202-3).

there was no distinction to be made between God/nature: they were indistinguishable. The pantheistic gaze did not look for a transcendent deity through nature but an immanent god that was the cause of everything in the universe and the power that operated through it (Donagan, 1996: 354-5).

Unlike the artist envisaged by Aquinas who could only imitate not create, an artist in the thought of Spinoza is as much a part of nature's/God's workings as anything else and thus creates through the laws of nature immanent within themselves and the material with which they are creating. To quote Gabbey (1996: 180-1), for Spinoza '[n]othing can conceivably act *contra naturam*... so there cannot be a distinction *in re* between Art and Nature'. The implications were not just for art: looked at this way political and social revolution was not a revolt against heaven. This was just one of the reasons Spinoza's thought caused such widespread concern. Much of the natural theology, Deism and semi-pantheistic natural supernaturalism that ran through enlightenment-era and romantic attitudes to nature was characterized by the kind of enthusiasm (in its seventeenth century sense) that Coomaraswamy (not to mention numerous traditional churchmen) disapproved of. What slowly died was a belief in *natura naturans*, nature as understood as indelibly related to the hieratic universe of the Church. This was to have a profound effect; as Andrew Bowie (2003: 1) put it: 'Modern philosophy begins when the generally accepted basis upon which the world is interpreted ceases to be a deity whose pattern is assumed to have already been imprinted into the universe'.

Interpretation of mimesis in the arts also changed, though it did not wholly leave behind its previous meanings. The influence of Aristotle's *Poetics* was greater in the period after the Renaissance than the period before it. Amongst the intense battles in the arts of the enlightenment-era, one of the most notable was over what imitating nature meant and entailed<sup>87</sup>. One widespread interpretation thought that imitation of nature entailed copying natural forms which were interpreted to mean the established forms of an art, for example copying the model provided by Homer and Virgil. A different view, that of the influential theorist Roger de Piles (1653-1709), decided that the imitation of nature, when done properly, entailed heightening and perfecting nature. In general, neo-classical aesthetics taught that the phrase art imitates nature denoted copying and perfecting (Asfour and Williamson, 1999: 10-1; Draper, 1921: 373, 383-90). The rules of the ancients became artistic scripture.

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<sup>87</sup> See Todorov (1982: 84-221).

As the ancients lost to the moderns so it became widely agreed that rules had not been fixed for all time and that the future could surpass the past; a model came to the fore where taste and sentiment dominated convention. At least among elites, it was the individual human of 'taste' and not a God or a classical rule maker who was the judge of value. Art did not need to obey fixed rules, personal inspiration could lead the way. The death of the ideals of the ancients led to the diminishment of the rule of ideal universal forms in art and society. 'Farewell to religion, the norm common to all; farewell to the aristocracy, a caste with preestablished privileges', as Todorov (1982: 80) put it. That is one of the key reasons why Coomaraswamy was so against post-Renaissance developments, because they led to the death of many of the forms he held dear: fixed religious principles, aristocracy, caste. Yet what we have been referring to as idealism survived in several guises, one of which deemed it possible to see truer things in nature through cognition and intellect than with the eyes. The principle is not identical, yet neither is it negated: what took place was a 'reorganization' (Todorov, 1982: 290). To see what this has to do with Cage we need to step in closer (Gebauer and Wulf, 1995: 61, 68-9, 108-9; 116-7, 155, 311; Hadot, 2006: 202, 215, 252; Mortensen, 1998: 71; Taylor, 2007: 353-4; Todorov, 1982: 111-2; Walker, 1972: 154-6).

The third Earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper (1671-1713) – 'the beloved Plato of Europe' in Herder's words – is remembered as one of the first significant English aestheticians as well as one of the most influential of those who prefigured romanticism (quotation in Boyer Jr., 2003: 184). Influenced by Deist beliefs, Shaftesbury saw in nature a creative power which should be imitated by artists in their workings as well as humans in moral and religious matters. In the battle between the ancients and the moderns he had one foot in each camp. In some ways heir to the Cambridge Platonists, Shaftesbury's aesthetics formed a bridge between classical and Neoplatonic understandings of the imitation of nature's workings and the cult of nature in romanticism. Shaftesbury interpreted classical philosophy as being fundamentally secular; thus, unlike Coomaraswamy, he saw the medieval period not as a high point, but as a degraded superstitious low (Klein, 1999: xxiv; Shaftesbury, 1999: 356-79, 371, 373; Voitle, 1999: 334-5). In Shaftesbury, a proto-romantic view of art's imitation of nature is encountered. As Cassirer (1966: 310<sup>88</sup>) argues, Shaftesbury saw beauty as transcendence and believed that the dualism of human subject and divine object disappeared through artistic imitation of the creative processes found in

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<sup>88</sup> With thanks to Joanna Biggs for her translation of passages of this text.

nature. Like Aquinas and Coomaraswamy, Shaftesbury valued art objects as a way to knowledge of the ideal, and believed that such knowledge came about through imitating nature's workings. However, his conception of God and the relationships of humans to God was radically different; unlike Aquinas he believed that artists *themselves* can create, and he thus celebrated the individual material human by framing the level of true knowledge attained in terms of genius (Cassirer, 1953: 166; 1966: 309-11; Gebauer and Wulf, 1995: 143; Todorov, 1982: 153-4, 172-3).

In what is probably the most famous passage from Shaftesbury's writings the start of a tradition is found. George Leonard's *Into the Light of Things* traces the idea that the things of nature are of greater value than the things of art from Wordsworth to Cage. That idea was already present in Shaftesbury, and it inspired some distinctly Cageian artistic developments. In the 'philosophical rhapsody' 'The Moralists'<sup>89</sup>, Shaftesbury wrote:

O glorious nature! Supremely fair and sovereignly good! All-loving and all-lovely, all-divine! Whose looks are so becoming and of such infinite grace, whose study brings such wisdom and whose contemplation such delight, whose every single work affords an ampler scene and is a nobler spectacle than all which ever art presented! ... Thee I invoke and thee alone adore (Shaftesbury, 1999: 298).

Nature was guide and inspirer, the oracle of beauty, morality, and truth in general. Shaftesbury's philosophy was to influence significant developments in European philosophy in the coming century and a half, including Kant. More immediately, it influenced a revolution in gardening that moved away from human artifice towards a landscape that imitated nature.

Shaftesbury's celebration of the superiority of nature over art and natural scenery in general was at odds with the formalized, mathematical garden design favoured in formal gardens of the time. As Edmund Burke (1990: 92) put it, gardening had been seen as an act of improving not imitating nature: trees had been made into geometric shapes, hedges became walls, mathematical rules and strict symmetrical regularity were the order of the day. The new style of gardening responded to Shaftesbury's call to be true to the nature of nature. Associated most famously with the gardens of William Kent (1685-1748) and Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716-1783), the new style aimed at an imitation of nature in all her naturalness. The aim was to make the garden *look* uncultivated: parkland swept up to

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<sup>89</sup> In *Characteristics*. Page numbers refer to the Cambridge University Press edition by Lawrence Klein, Shaftesbury (1999).

the house, trees grew in (seemingly) wild clumps, deer and livestock grazed freely (save for the ha-ha), water snaked in natural formations (made through massive excavation). It was possible to mistake Brown's gardens for an unaltered natural landscape.

Where they differ from Cage's vision is that these gardens, particularly Shaftesbury's own, were also rooted in idealism: inspired aesthetically by the landscape paintings of Claude Lorrain and Poussin and the idea of Arcadia. Realistically then, these gardens involved considerable artifice, but they did imitate free nature rather than sculpting her into a pyramid shape and trussing her up amidst a geometric parterre. It was enough to make Burke declare that 'nature has at last escaped from their discipline and their fetters; and our gardens, if nothing else, declare, we begin to feel that mathematical ideas are not the true measures of beauty' (Burke, 1990: 92). Imitating nature from then on became a fundamental part of landscape gardening (D. E. Cooper, 2006: 35, 104; J. D. Hunt, 2000: 40-3, 89, 113-5, 209; Mowl, 2004: 38-40, 43-5). J. D. Hunt (2000: 113) records William Hanbury declaring in 1770 that 'Nature must be imitated in all our works'. This does *sound* Cageian. And, Cage (1972: 213) would seem to agree: 'Imitation of nature in her manner of operation, traditionally the artist's function, is now what everyone has to do. Complicate your garden so it's surprisingly like uncultivated land'. However, although the renewed interest in nature *qua* nature in eighteenth century gardening and later in romanticism bore similarities to Cage's approach, particularly when he made comments such as that just quoted, in its idealism the eighteenth century English landscape garden was also a manifestation of the kind of intellectual art Cage was trying to break away from. It is the idealistic element that complicates attempts to chart similarities between Cage and the imitation of nature in romanticism.

#### **4.2.2 Ruskin and the Nature of Nature**

The picturesque taste for tame nature was part of a significant change in the way nature was viewed. Tame led to wild, picturesque to sublime. A secular spirituality of the natural emerged (Mortensen, 1998: 29). Where mountainous peaks had been viewed as grotesque aberrations, they became the sight of spiritual-aesthetic pilgrimage (see Bevis, 1999). The perception of the numinous in nature through the overwhelming inspiration experienced through the sublime was an aesthetic re-enchantment of the world different to either the mechanistic view of science or the transcendent creationist view of Christianity (Hadot, 2006: 84-5, 250-1, 253). While the sublime is a slippery concept that cannot be gone into in

too much detail in the present context, suffice it to say that the experience of sublimity is grounded in idealism and still integrally involves the intellect and emotions (not to mention fashion and taste). By the nineteenth century even the silent barren sprawl of deserts was being admired for its beauty and sublimity. The painter Eugène Fromentin (1820-76) recorded his experience of the silence of the North African desert in terms not wholly different to Cage in the anechoic chamber: ‘Silence is one of the most subtle charms of this lonely, empty country... a sort of aerial transparency that clarifies our perceptions, opens an unknown world of infinitely small sounds and reveals an expanse of ineffable delights to us’<sup>90</sup> (trans. Bevis, 1999: 234). In their turn, the aesthetics of the great led to the aesthetics of the small, and a regard for the divinity and beauty of the overlooked and everyday. Nevertheless, even here there were differences. Cage might have joined Goethe’s Werther in laying down in the grass and finding illumination in the myriad variety of tiny plants and insects (particularly if Werther had found mushrooms), but he wouldn’t have joined him in greatly wishing that he could express what he felt (letter of 10 May<sup>91</sup>). And there lies the rub: while there are many striking similarities between Cage and conceptions of nature in romantic art they founder on the issue of expression and the role of the mental faculties.

Versions of the idea that art imitates nature were so prevalent in the arts in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that it is hardly surprising that numerous vague parallels between Cage and the arts of that time emerge. Cage was hardly alone in finding direction by conceiving a mimetic relationship between art and nature, in differing ways so did Kant, Goethe, Novalis, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Emerson, Turner, Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelites and Morris among many others. The similarity between the tradition as developed by Wordsworth and Ruskin, and the thought of Cage is the subject of George Leonard’s *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (1994)<sup>92</sup>. Much of the book is illuminating, his highly original approach to Cage refreshing and thought-provoking; the present disagreement of interpretation is confined to one thread of Leonard’s argument, albeit a central one. Leonard argues that Wordsworth

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<sup>90</sup> Taken from Fromentin’s *Un Été dans le Sahara* (c.1857): “Le silence est un des charmes les plus subtils de ce pays solitaire et vide... une sorte de transparence aérienne, qui rend les perceptions plus claires, nous ouvre le monde ignoré des infiniment petits bruits et nous révèle une étendue d’inexprimables jouissances”.

<sup>91</sup> Edition consulted Hulse, 1989: 26-7.

<sup>92</sup> The present author’s MA thesis investigated a similar topic. The criticisms I make here of Leonard’s interpretation apply equally to my own earlier interpretation. I would now revise my argument along the lines suggested in this section.

and Ruskin represented a fundamental change in attitude toward both nature and the art object which, via Carlyle and the Transcendentalists, entered received attitudes to art and ultimately appeared in the work and thought of Cage.

In the course of this argument, Leonard presents Marsilio Ficino and Joshua Reynolds as representatives of Platonic idealism in nature and art and Wordsworth and Ruskin as prophets of a non-idealistic movement towards belief in nature and a resulting disregard for the art object. To represent the former tradition, Leonard quotes Dryden quoting Bellori disparaging the likes of Caravaggio for imitating particular things in their sensible aspect, directly representing ‘ordinary objects’ (Leonard, 1994: 31-41; cf. Bredvold, 1934: 104-6). Yet Ruskin, who Leonard suggests opposed idealism, in *Modern Painters* strongly derided Caravaggio for his earthy (and earthly) naturalism. Ruskin held a similar view of other ‘naturalists’ such as Canaletto (1888: 2:133; 3:34, 263).

According to Leonard, Reynolds and his neo-classicist contemporaries valued the art object over real things because art was more perfect than nature (Leonard, 1994: 39). Leonard is right that Reynolds was influenced by Platonism, but it is surprising that he does not mention the influence of Aristotle who was as important for Reynolds as for Neo-Classicism and the arts in general. Aristotle’s dictum that art imitates nature was highly regarded among Neo-classicists. The concept of imitation dominated aesthetics for much of the eighteenth century (Todorov, 1982: 112). Although that concept was understood and adhered to in heterogeneous ways, Leonard fails to adequately take into account the distinction between sensible and ideal nature that such theories rely on. Neo-classicism may, in general, have put the art object above the shadow nature *natura naturata* but principally because it is more truly like ideal nature *natura naturans*. Leonard suggests Reynolds’s conception of art made the art object superior to nature, thus missing what Bredvold (1934: 113) called ‘the paradox of Neo-Classicism’: the theory ‘that unless Nature is improved upon it is not truly imitated’. Like other Neo-Classicists, Reynolds generally conceptualized such a distinction in a secular manner, thus there is a significant difference between Reynolds and the same idea as interpreted in Aquinas, Coomaraswamy, Wordsworth or Ruskin, but not the difference Leonard intimates<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>93</sup> Confusing matters further, Reynolds was another who did not mind contradicting himself, who used the term nature both in an Aristotelian sense and a naturalistic sense, who conceptualized the theory that art imitates nature in a variety of overlapping ways, and who readily adapted Platonic and Aristotelian concepts in line with contemporary thinking.

For Reynolds, Idea and Ideal related more to the categories of the mind than the categories of the divine; nevertheless, Reynolds's conceptualization of the world was still based on the idea of universal and particular forms and the role of the human mind and imagination in cognition of the essential nature of a form. For Reynolds, as for Shaftesbury, Ruskin, or Coomaraswamy, a 'photo-realistic' portrait was the lowest form of painting. While there were notable differences in how each viewed the value of sensible nature and the value and purpose of art, epistemologically neither Ruskin nor Wordsworth was directly opposed to Reynolds in the way that is suggested by Leonard. Reynolds cannot be separated from Wordsworth and Ruskin by Platonism because of the integral presence of versions of the same conceptions in eighteenth and nineteenth century art in general, Wordsworth and Ruskin in particular, and, not uncoincidentally, also in Christian theology (Bredvold, 1934: 97-103, 106-7, 113-6; Draper, 1921: 390; Gombrich, 1948: 187; Hipple, 1953: 231-40; Mannings, 1985: 319-20; Todorov, 1982: 112-9, 126).

At this point we move away from a focus on the history of the phrase *ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione* to concentrate instead on specific developments of the ideas behind it. Ruskin did not teach the phrase; yet if there can be said to be any one subject that runs through *Modern Painters*, correct mimesis of nature in terms of ideal and material appearance has a fair claim to be it. This is probably down to the vicissitudes of fortune the phrase encountered. With the fall of neo-classicism and the rise of romanticism, the phrase became an anachronism. Early in the twentieth century it was its anachronistic status that would bring the phrase new life as Tradition. Shorn by time of its neo-classical associations, the phrase was reincarnated in Neo-Thomist aesthetics; in particular, through the writings of Jacques Maritain (for example *Art and Scholasticism* and *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*). From there it entered the aesthetics of Eric Gill; from Gill to his friend Coomaraswamy was only a short step. Nevertheless, as we shall now see, the ideas embodied in the phrase did not disappear with the Neo-classicists.

For Wordsworth all natural things partook and expressed the organic power of nature. Thus, at least early in his career, he wrote of things derided as 'low' and 'uninteresting' by his critics, 'A host of dancing daffodils' for instance ('I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud'<sup>94</sup>; Butler, 2003: 53). Earlier in his career, nature often appeared

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<sup>94</sup> Edition consulted in the case of all quotations from Wordsworth: S. Gill (1984).

imagined in pantheistic terms; later in his life more conventionally Christian terms seemed to take over. Nature mysticism it remained, and idealism too. The numinous experience that starts with the simple natural thing is a process which can only be completed via the intellect. All natural things could therefore be seen as beautiful; yet in the same way a picture is not in the colours, beauty was not in the thing. This is why it did not matter how a natural thing looked to the senses: what was most important was not reflected in surface appearance (S. Gill, 2003b: 150-1; Mortensen, 1998: 48, 68-9). For Wordsworth, paradise could be found *in* the everyday, it was not the everyday itself. It is through the mind that that paradise is to be found. Paradise is not equal to the sensible surface: it is not in ‘vulgar<sup>95</sup> sense’ that it is cognized (see, for example, *The Prelude* XIII 66-199).

They need not extraordinary calls  
To rouse them, in a world of life they live,  
By sensible impressions not enthralled,  
But quickened, roused, and made thereby more fit

To hold communion with the invisible world (*The Prelude* XIII 101-5).

The simple things signify. Art imitates nature in its workings. Poetry could be an aid in the gaining of real knowledge (S. Gill, 2003b: 155). A poem can become ‘A power like one of Nature’s’ (*The Prelude* XII 312).

Coomaraswamy’s admiration for Ruskin is a sure sign of how he differed from Cage. Coomaraswamy followed Ruskin in many things, not least of which was a belief in the value of higher things cognized through what was natural. While Ruskin’s philosophy of art was by no means identical with that of Aquinas, Aristotle, or Plato, Leonard’s depiction misses what connected Ruskin’s thought to those earlier philosophies. Leonard argues that Ruskin’s antagonism to Reynolds practice of teaching via artistic models – imitation in the neo-classical usage – showed that Ruskin valued ‘real things above art objects’. This in itself is not incorrect. Nevertheless, that does not mean that Ruskin understood ‘real things’ to be material nature. Ruskin rejected the imitation of previous art works for a similar reason that Plato argued against the copying of what was already a copy of a copy: it cannot teach the real truth. Thus he railed against the idea that art must be a mimesis of earlier perfected human artistic forms, but he did not reject mimesis itself:

We must... be cautious not to lose sight of the real use of what has been left to us  
by antiquity, not to take that for a model of perfection which is, in many cases, only

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<sup>95</sup> I.e. ‘common’.

a guide to it. The picture which is looked to for an interpretation of nature is invaluable, but the picture which is taken as a substitute for nature had better be burned... all that is highest in art, all that is creative and imaginative, is formed and created by every great master for himself, and cannot be repeated or imitated by others (Ruskin, 1888: 1:xv; see also: xvii).

Leonard appears to argue that Ruskin's ire was directed against Platonist idealism (e.g. 1994: 104). Yet he does not question what any of the figures he discusses would have understood as the 'real'.

The present discussion will be based on Ruskin's statements on nature and art in his two principal works on art *Modern Painters* ('Complete Edition', 1888) and *The Stones of Venice* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1867). As Ruskin was another who frequently contradicted himself, and whose attitudes and religious conceptions changed throughout his life, it is important to point out that subsequent comments refer principally to the two works mentioned above (cf. Ruskin, 1871-84: 7: 99-112). Ruskin said so much, and went off on so many tangents, that it is not surprising that Leonard can create an argument from Ruskin's writing that the present author can contradict with the same author's words.

Leonard's reading of Ruskin attempts to make Ruskin relevant to contemporary arguments, and that in itself is valuable. Nevertheless, to do so would appear to involve reading Ruskin's religious convictions out of his prose and turning him into a materialist who rejected the intellectual faculty in art. An alternate reading will reveal a very different attitude; furthermore, this attitude reveals continuities with earlier philosophies which will in turn allow understanding of similar ideas in Emerson, and how the thought of both Ruskin and Emerson differs from Cage's vision of Thoreau.

Ruskin's conceptions of nature and the divine existed in an uneasy relationship with rationalist scientific investigations. He welcomed greater knowledge of how things worked. but was not for cutting open Isis to discover how her insides were formed. Ruskin may have lambasted those who did not paint true to nature, but he also decried those who painted a particular thing exactly as it appeared to the eyes. As in earlier thought, Ruskin used 'nature' in a multifaceted way (J. D. Hunt, 2007: 15-6). Complicating matters, his understanding of nature changed with time and context. Nevertheless there appears to be a relatively constant interpretation of nature in Ruskin's thought, at least in his middle years, that is similar to the understanding of nature in art as we have been tracking it.

For Ruskin, Turner was great because his paintings depicted nature more truthfully than a photograph did. What Turner captured was truth *in* nature, not realism of surface. Because of this, he believed that in most cases a natural thing presents a more direct experience of truth than the mediation of an art object. Thus for Ruskin the thing of nature *is* superior, but it is superior because it gives a more direct experience of what is significant *in* it. Ruskin did not say that art can not give a clear intimation into the light of things, he said that much art of the modern era has lost sight of how to do that. The ideal of beauty it developed was false and thus misrepresented things. Likewise, things had great value in themselves and he considered viewing things-as-themselves valuable; nevertheless, the value came from the relationship of the thing to the divine (ibid.: 17). Thus, art should not imitate in the neo-classical sense, it should instead be nobly inventive. Ruskin did not reject the mimesis of nature in the sense Coomaraswamy used it, the sense of religious imaginative idealism<sup>96</sup> (Ruskin, 1867: 2:185-6, 3:47-9, 88, 97, 151-3, 164; 1888: 1:19-24, 3:88; Wheeler, 1999: 53, 65).

Even in the first volume of *Modern Painters*, what Ruskin termed ‘truth’ touched on what Coomaraswamy meant by ‘imitation’:

Truth may be stated by any signs or symbols which have a definite signification in the minds of those to whom they are addressed... Whatever can excite in the mind the conception of certain facts, can give ideas of truth, though it be in no degree the imitation or resemblance of those facts... if there be in painting anything which operates, as words do... by being taken as a symbol and substitute for it, and thus inducing the effect of it, then this... can convey uncorrupted truth... But ideas of imitation... require the likeness of the object. They speak to the perceptive faculties only: truth to the conceptive (Ruskin, 1888: 1:21).

The older Ruskin, later referred to two kinds of imitation. In his conclusion to *The Stones of Venice* (1867: 3:174), Ruskin drew a distinction between ‘healthy imitation’ and its opposite. The languages of healthy imitation and symbolism were, he argued, the language

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<sup>96</sup> This is not to suggest that Ruskin’s religious beliefs were identical to Coomaraswamy’s. There were significant differences; yet also some significant similarities, such as a fluid religious identity that moved increasingly toward identifying with a form of universalist Catholicism as each grew older (Coomaraswamy, 1988: 235; Ruskin, 1871-84: 7: 107; Wheeler, 1999: 236-8). In the matter of ‘Christian’ art there was enough common ground between them for Coomaraswamy to gain inspiration from Ruskin (see, for example, Coomaraswamy, 1910a: 91-2; 1956: 103-4). On Ruskin’s religious beliefs see Wheeler (1999).

of the soul. Materialistic imitation was merely surface, truth came in depth: 'it is always easier to see the surface than the depth of things, the full sight of them requiring the highest powers of penetration, sympathy, and imagination' (Ruskin, 1867: 2:195). If Ruskin had considered the eyes to be the window to what was most real it would seem strange that he would claim that 'the first function of the imagination is the apprehension of ultimate truth' (1867: 3:153). The artist who paints only the particular, and not the universal 'ideal form' of a natural thing, could not capture the manner of nature's workings, nor what was truest in nature (Ruskin, 1888: 1:54, 2:196-7). Artists of the modern period learnt to capture faithfully the 'outside of nature'; however, that was nothing but the 'material commonplace', the things catalogued and systematically measured and catalogued by science. The material knowledge of science was not the purpose of art, Ruskin declared. That purpose came in catching the fleeting, the ineffable, the incomprehensible, the wonder – from perception, not measurement (Ruskin, 1867: 3:47-9).

Artists who depicted nature accurately – such as Turner and the masters of the Gothic – produced things which were beautiful and true but it was not because their works were photorealistic but because they gave a view of nature which was truer than the likeness that would be rendered in a photograph (ibid.: 2:196, plate XX, 3:171; 1888: 1:xliv). To paint nature truly an artist must know the nature of nature: how mountains are formed and how they are eroded, or how clouds form and how they vary. Any thing depicted, however small, must be depicted true to *its nature*. A rock in the foreground cannot be a generic rock, it must be a specific type of rock – limestone, granite, sandstone. Nevertheless, that did not mean that the answer was to exactly depict an individual rock. The creation of art also involved knowledgeable imagination: the artist must decipher the scene, untangling and making ideal (Ruskin, 1888: 1:xxxv-v, 156, 2:156, vol. 2 *in toto*, 3:81-96). The 'specific – not the individual'<sup>97</sup> character (ibid.: 1:xxv).

The operations of the mind raise the human artist above a camera (Ruskin, ibid.: 1:75-6, 109, 3:92). Of the mental faculties, it is imagination which perceives truth: 'the virtue of imagination is its reaching, by intuition and the intensity of gaze... a more essential truth than is seen at the surface of things' (ibid.: 2:182-3). For Ruskin in *Modern Painters*, nature is supremely valuable because of this. Nature provides imagination with the material that it penetrates. The painter must keep the imagination fed with physical nature to preserve the quality of the faculties and the keenness of the thirst. 'Fancy plays

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<sup>97</sup> Ruskin's use of 'specific' here presumably refers to the words' origin in the Latin *speciēs*.

like a squirrel in its circular prison, and is happy: but Imagination is a pilgrim on the earth – and her home is in heaven’ (Ruskin, *ibid.*: 2:185). Nature, then, should be approached with the senses and the imagination. Only in this way will the artist be able to know the truth of that nature in front of them: ‘external nature... has a body and soul like man; but her soul is the Deity’ (Ruskin, *ibid.*: 1:56, 5:360). To only paint nature’s external surface is to only depict the body of nature. It is to miss what is signified. ‘[A] thing is other and greater than it seems’, Ruskin wrote in *The Stone of Venice*,

this is true not of invented symbols merely, but of all things amidst which we live... there is a deeper meaning within them than eye hath seen, or ear hath heard... the whole visible creation is a mere perishable symbol of things eternal and true (Ruskin, 1867: 3:154).

For Ruskin as for Coomaraswamy, most modern-era art objects were inferior because they obfuscated rather than making things clearer (cf. Leonard, 1994: 46-8). The artist who can see into the light of things should be studied because their works afford those without this knowledge a way of gaining it. If they can depict things accurately for ‘lesser minds’, then, like Turner, their works are valuable. Not more valuable than nature, but valuable still. Nevertheless, however good the art work is, it is still not as good as knowledge itself, and thus the highest experience is that which is unmediated by art and comes to the mind directly in nature. That experience takes education of the senses, and good art aids the education of the relevant faculties (Ruskin, 1888: 1:xv, xxi-ii, xxxix f.n.1).

Leonard (1994: 112-3) discusses this issue but does so in a secular manner that passes over the religious implications of Ruskin’s thought. And, because he has presented the romantic attitude as in every way contrary to earlier philosophy of art and is determined to present Ruskin as a modern scientific naturalist, continuities to earlier thought are all but lost (cf. *ibid.*: 46-8, 51, 69, 73-4, 112-3, 102-8). In the sense just mentioned, Ruskin does suggest that art objects are of less value than ‘real things’, but if by ‘real things’ only material nature is intended to be meant, then that is to miss the religiously inspired idealism of Ruskin’s thought. After discussing Ruskin, Leonard charts similarities between the thought of Ruskin and Emerson and Whitman. Cage is shown to fit relatively neatly into the space they opened up. He discusses Suzuki, and wonders whether it was possible that these earlier ideas had an indirect influence on Cage through Suzuki’s reading of Emerson and Thoreau. He suggests it is possible that the success in America of Suzuki’s radical reworking of Zen was due to Suzuki having absorbed influences from European and

American natural supernaturalism (Leonard, 1994: 35-7, 42, 131, 136, 151). Nevertheless, because Leonard does not suitably engage with the religious and metaphysical dimensions of nature in the thought of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century figures he discusses, the intellectual journey he charts becomes framed in terms of a move from false conceptions to scientific ones. It is intimated that the view of the relationship between art and nature at the end of the journey – Cage’s view – is truer than the initial view. The problem with this idea is that it reifies a contemporary European-American interpretation of the concept of nature, presenting other conceptualizations as delusions that rightly progress towards the materialist-scientific paradigm. It might be considered less culturally imperialist to treat these shifts as movements between paradigmatic conceptualizations of nature, not towards a state of minimal delusion. In this sense, what is witnessed in the changing relationship between nature and art from Wordsworth to Cage is less a logical progression leading to the end of the art object, than a map of changes in British and American constructions of nature and concomitant changes in the ways artists have conceptualized and depicted those constructions in their works.

#### **4.2.3 Emerson and the Nature of the Self**

In looking to nature as a teacher, Wordsworth echoed Shaftesbury and foreshadowed Emerson. Thus in ‘The Tables Turned’ (15-32):

Come forth into the light of things,  
Let Nature be your teacher.  
...  
One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man;  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Then all the sages can  
...  
Enough of science and of art;  
Close up these barren leaves;  
Come forth, and bring with you a heart  
That watches and receives.

To receive from nature, in this meaning, is an intellectual activity. The nature that Wordsworth and Ruskin celebrated is only superficially the nature of science as understood

by Cage. However many similarities there are between their respective attitudes, there is always this significant discrepancy. Does that mean that when Wordsworth and Cage go ‘into the light of things’ they are talking about different things? A similar problematic occurs when discussing Emerson in relation to Cage and Cage’s interpretation of Thoreau. Investigating these questions alongside a further text on Cage, Christopher Shultis’s *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition* (1998), will make clearer still what Cage meant when he stated that he was engaged in imitating nature in its manner of operation. First, we need to consider the philosophical position of Emerson.

In his lecture ‘The Transcendentalist’, Emerson stated ‘What is popularly called Transcendentalism among us, is Idealism; Idealism as it appears in 1842’ (Emerson, 1842: 239). His philosophy was influenced by the Platonist and Neoplatonist tradition, including the Cambridge Platonists; American Protestant and Unitarian thought; the philosophy of Kant; British and German romanticism, particularly Wordsworth and Coleridge<sup>98</sup>; the theology of Schleiermacher<sup>99</sup>; the esoteric beliefs of Swedenborg; and the early Orientalist representation of Hindu beliefs. Thus we find in Emerson ideas of universal mind, the difference between understanding and reason, Ideas in the mind of God, and the cognition of nature in universal form through connection with the universal self. Emerson outlined much of his philosophy of nature in the famous text ‘Nature’ (1836). As Gravil (2000: 93-4) argues, it is laced with ideas from Coleridge and Wordsworth; yet in borrowing from them Emerson managed to go beyond his sources to forge ‘in prose as no English Romantic successfully did, the high Romantic argument concerning nature’ (Gravil, 2000: 99, emphasis removed; see also Bevis, 1999: 191-2).

By ‘nature’ Emerson meant everything outside of the essence of the self, for ‘the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul’ (Emerson, 1836: 36). God was not God as imagined in traditional Christianity but was an ‘Oversoul’ or ‘Unity’ in which all things are contained; it binds all things together, yet ultimately is not known (Emerson, 1836: 71-2 1841, 206-7). What in the human is the ‘universal soul’ he called ‘Reason’; the same relationship exists between nature and Spirit: ‘That which intellectually considered we call Reason, considered in relation to nature, we call Spirit. Spirit is the Creator. Spirit hath life in itself. And man in all ages and countries embodies it in his language as the Father’

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<sup>98</sup> See Gravil (2000) and Vogel (1955).

<sup>99</sup> See Richardson, Jr. (1999b: 121-47).

(Emerson, 1836: 49; Keane, 2005: 51)<sup>100</sup>. Nature signifies its cause, thus Emerson stated: ‘Nature is the symbol of spirit’ (Emerson, 1836: 48). What is most real is connected together through the unity of thought, nature, and universal spirit (ibid.: 60). In moments when this is cognized, ‘the universe becomes transparent, and the light of higher laws than its own shines through it’ (ibid.: 54). The essential sameness of all becomes cognizable. It is this idea that underpins what are probably the most well known lines of ‘Nature’:

In the woods, we return to reason and faith... all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God (ibid.: 39).

Cognizable in *natura naturata*, then, is *natura naturans*.

Emerson’s term Reason is closer to what, in reference to the Platonist conception of Self, we have called Intellect; Keane (2005) defines it as ‘intuitive reason’. Keane (2005: 51) quotes Emerson writing to Jonathan Edwards: aligning himself with Coleridge and (Coleridge’s interpretation of) Kant, Emerson wrote that ‘Reason is the highest faculty of the soul – what we mean often by the soul itself; it never *reasons*, never proves, it simply perceives; it is vision’ (see also, Grivil, 2000: 93). He postulated that the signs and symbols of language and art (where true) were also facets of nature that signify to intuitive Reason the spiritual meaning they embody; in a manner not wholly removed from Coomaraswamy’s interpretation of Aquinas, right cognition leads to knowledge of what is ultimately real (Emerson, 1836: 48, 50-2, 55).

Ultimately, ‘Nature’ does not come to a definitive conclusion on the nature of nature. ‘Three problems are put by nature to the mind’, Emerson writes: ‘What is matter? Whence is it? and Whereto?’ Idealism only provides an answer to the first question. ‘Idealism saith: matter is a phenomenon, not a substance’ (ibid.: 72). Instead, ‘Nature’ ends by looking forward to future prospects for the advancement of knowledge and, ultimately, the answering of those two remaining questions. Nevertheless, Emerson says enough in this and other writings to suggest an account of his metaphysics satisfactory for our present purposes. In ‘The Over-Soul’ (1841) Emerson theorized that:

We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE... the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one (1841: 207).

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<sup>100</sup> On Emerson’s concept of Reason, intellect and intuition see Keane (2005).

Extrapolating from this, we can suggest that Emerson theorized a largely immanent idealism suggestive of Kantian transcendental idealism and elements of Coomaraswamy's interpretation of Advaita Vedānta. The real operates in differing relations, yet only through (intuitive) Reason can what is ultimately real be cognized. What appears to the senses is not all that exists, but the universal/divine is not transcendent to the whole of which everything is a part. The eyes see time and space but these are 'relations of matter' which is phenomenon rather than substance (ibid.: 69-72). However, God and nature are ultimately not divisible and human Reason is part of that oneness. Therefore, while on a phenomenal level there is both matter and spirit, nature and mind, on an ultimate level all is one. Thus, what is ultimately most truthful is known through mind rather than sensible particulars (Christy, 1932: 86-94; Graviil, 2000: 92-9; Keane, 2005: 49-52, 57-60, 74, 77-8; P. Miller, 1956: 185-8; Richardson, Jr., 1999a: 101; Ziff, 1982: 24).

Cage distanced himself from Emerson's philosophy of nature. In his useful study *Silencing the Sounded Self*, Christopher Shultis compares and discusses both Emerson and Thoreau with Cage<sup>101</sup>. Shultis argues that it was Emerson's idealism that caused Cage to reject his philosophy. He suggests that Emerson was a dualist, and Thoreau and Cage nondualists. In this context, these terms relate as much to ontology as they do to philosophy of mind; this leads to a distinct ambiguity. Shultis suggests that Emerson was a dualist because he posited a difference between reality/mind and the sensible world, whereas Thoreau and Cage were nondualists because they did not: for Thoreau as for Cage 'humanity and nature are not separate, reality is not twofold and dual ... ideal and real do not need human reconciliation' (Shultis, 1998: 29-30; Cage, 1990: 3). Emerson's thought is only dualist if it is regarded that the sensible world is definitively real, and thus that any other dimension must exist in addition to it. If Emerson is taken to be arguing that all that actually exists is Unity of which Reason is a part, and that the sensible world only exists to the extent it is manifested in sensible but illusory time and space, then Emerson too is a nondualist. This would suggest that their conceptions of the nature of what exists are not the same: Emerson's nondualism is ontologically dichotomous to nondualism as defined by Shultis and attributed to Thoreau and Cage. Let us examine this opposition in greater detail.

In the nondualism that Shultis attributes to Cage and Thoreau, what is real is what appears to the senses; there is no need for what Coomaraswamy referred to as Intellect. To

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<sup>101</sup> On Cage literary works in relation to those of Thoreau see also Bock (2008). Bock's discussion of Cage in relation to his Asian influences is short and simplistic (2008: 31-2).

know truth, all one need do is observe nature. Nothing need be accepted *a priori*; the metaphysical as much as the physical is located in the experiential world. In the case of a sound, the meaning is only that which the sound imparts itself, the meaning does not come from an idea external to the sound added by the mind. In sum: there is no reality that cannot be discovered in physical reality (Shultis, 1998: 29-33). ‘The self does not mediate between physical and metaphysical worlds’ (ibid.: 31). For Shultis, as for Cage, Thoreau looked exclusively outside the self. Their Thoreau was neither interested in symbolism, nor cognized meaning through intellect (ibid.: 37-8). Shultis (ibid.: 39-46) therefore has to do intellectual battle against those, like Stanley Cavell in *The Senses of Walden* (1972), whose interpretation of Thoreau is considerably closer to Emerson’s position than Cage would have tolerated. Thoreau as interpreted by Cage has already been valuably discussed by Shultis, Bock (2008) and others; that discussion need not be repeated here. What correspondences and discrepancies there are between the philosophies of Emerson, Thoreau, and Cage in relation to this issue is beyond the scope of the present context to consider. It is a large and complex problem that can only be resolved through a detailed objective study. Until that study appears it should be noted that to read Thoreau as Cage does, one has to ignore all that appears to be symbolic and idealistic in his writing as well as the numerous intimations of Wordsworth and other romantics. To give one example, in a journal entry from 2 November 1843, Thoreau wrote: ‘I believe that there is an ideal or real nature, infinitely more perfect than the actual’ (Thoreau, 1981- : 1:481). Thoreau was neither Emerson nor Wordsworth, but neither was he John Cage (see, for example, Cavell, 1981; Gravil, 2000: 102-115; Bock, 2008: 8-9, 79; Buell, 1995: 171-93). However, the issue that will be addressed here is how Shultis aligns Thoreau and Cage and their ‘nondualism’ with Asian philosophies and Coomaraswamy’s use of the phrase ‘art imitates nature’.

Both Emerson and Thoreau had encountered various texts from the Brahmanic, Buddhist and Confucian traditions, including the *Bhagavadgītā*, in early often unreliable translations. As shown by Hodder (1999), the influence of these texts on Transcendentalism needs to be examined with care. Thoreau’s interpretations, unsurprisingly, did not transcend the Orientalist discourse his readings were rooted in; furthermore, his Indian readings ‘served as a mirror of his own interests and concerns’ (Hodder, 1999: 210). Seeking to overturn Cavell’s interpretation of Thoreau, Shultis suggests that Thoreau’s nondualism

was influenced by his understanding of Hindu, Buddhist and Confucian texts and thus has philosophical grounding missed by Cavell et al.:

Looking toward nature, away from the Emersonian self, leads one to the realization that nature and humanity are not separate at all. Nondualism may be a radical departure from nineteenth-century romanticism. However, it is entirely consistent with an Asian view of reality (Shultis, 1998: 43).

If we ignore the possible Orientalist implication that there is only one Asian view of reality (does that make, for example, Dvaita Vedānta [lit. Dualistic Vedānta] not Asian?), there is still the implication that the nondualism of Thoreau and thus Cage is the nondualism of the ‘Asian view of reality’.

Shultis expands on this point further on, suggesting that Cage’s knowledge of nondualism derived from Coomaraswamy and Suzuki. While Cage had knowledge of Suzuki’s Zen, Thoreau did not; Shultis’s suggestion of how Thoreau could have plausibly come to this form of nondualism via Buddhism is unconvincing<sup>102</sup>. Only India remains as a plausible source. As Thoreau had read the *Bhagavadgītā* and Cage had read Coomaraswamy, Shultis also suggests that this is what connected both men to ‘nondualism’. Nevertheless, this argument too is problematic.

Shultis quotes from Thoreau’s *Journal* entry for 20 March 1842: ‘All beauty, all music, all delight springs from apparent dualism but real unity’. Shultis then argues:

Thoreau’s ‘apparent dualism’ has confounded the critics. It is ‘real unity’ – the removal of separations between sound and silence, art and life, sense and intellect – that reveals his nondualistic thinking. To better comprehend the ‘both/and’ perspective of Cage and Thoreau, one must be acquainted with the nondualistic thinking that informs the Asian philosophies that so strongly influenced both men... Indian aesthetics thus played an important role in the work of both Thoreau and Cage. As the latter has remarked, ‘I was very impressed... years and years ago, by the reason for making art given by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in his book, *The*

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<sup>102</sup> Thoreau prepared English-language translations of passages from a variety of Indian Buddhist scriptures that he found, translated into French, in the orientalist Eugène Burnouf’s *Introduction à l’histoire du Bouddhisme indien* (Christy, 1932: 219-20). Shultis suggests that the difficulties of translating these passages from French to English may have caused Thoreau to discover nondualism because, in a story Cage relayed from Suzuki which itself is largely mythical, Chinese Buddhist monks translating texts from India were said to have come to nondualism through the same process.

*Transformation of Nature in Art*, in which he said that the business of the artist's responsibility is to imitate nature in her manner of operation.' Thoreau would have seen music as fulfilling Coomaraswamy's belief that art must imitate natural processes: 'Music is the sound of the circulation in nature's veins'<sup>103</sup> (Shultis, 1998: 56).

A nondualist interpretation of the *Bhagavadgītā* would not be unusual; for a start it can be said to be the interpretation of the Advaita [nondualistic] school of Vedānta. Of the different traditions of Vedānta and the different *darśanas*, this was the school Coomaraswamy was closest to. However, Coomaraswamy's nondualism was categorically not that of Cage and Cage's Thoreau. The difference is manifested in the same ontological and epistemological dichotomy that was shown to exist between Coomaraswamy and Cage in relation to the imitation of nature.

For Coomaraswamy, *brahman* (the unchanging, ineffable and limitless absolute, the first cause and undifferentiated essence of all; in some interpretations, deity) and *ātman* (self) are one and nondual; but *ātman*, the real self, is not the empirical self (*jīvātman*). Nondual *ātman* is what Coomaraswamy referred to as soul. Although *brahman* and *ātman* are one – and *brahman* is what is real – *ātman* can be deluded by *māyā* into believing the illusion of empirical reality, which is what the differentiations of the sensible world as it appears to the unenlightened and the false conception of being a particular individual empirical self ultimately are. The sensible world is 'a theophany and epiphany by which we are deluded if we are concerned with nothing but the wonders themselves, and do not ask "Of what?" all these things are a phenomenon' (Coomaraswamy, 1947e: 538 f.n.41). What is absolutely real is not to be found in sensible appearances but in the realization of the oneness of *ātman* and *brahman*, the knower and the known – 'the One and Only Transmigrant' (Coomaraswamy, 1944b). This axiom was at the core of the Perennial metaphysical concordance Coomaraswamy found threaded through Hinduism, Platonism, and Christianity (CU 8; Coomaraswamy, 1910a: 23, 57; 1916: 187-8, 209-11; 1934a: 6, 11; 1936: 185; 1939: 10-4, 17-22; 1942: 36-7; 1944b: 66-87; 1947b: 27-8, 81-2; 1956: 22; 1993: 26-7; King, 1999b: 53-5, 153-6, 201, 212-21; R. Sorabji, 2006: 336; Taber, 2011: 147, 151-4). For the sake of the current discussion, we will refer to Coomaraswamy's position as transcendental nondualism. The world of sensory appearances – that which is

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<sup>103</sup> The last line is taken from Thoreau's journal entry for 24 April 1841 (Thoreau, 1981- : 1:303).

the only reality for Cage and Cage's Thoreau – is for Coomaraswamy *māyā* and thus not truly real, therefore we will refer to Cage's position as immanent nondualism. Both systems claim to remove the barrier between subject and object and between natural and supernatural, but do so in ontologically incompatible ways; it is important to note that this is because, at least in his later thought, Cage denied anything *super*-natural. This is also the reason why Cage's use of the term 'deep sleep' (discussed in 3.4.5) was unlikely to be consistent with an Advaitin understanding.

In Coomaraswamy's depiction of Advaita Vedānta, Emerson's system would be closer to Advaitin nondualism than the system of Cage or Cage's Thoreau. However, as Coomaraswamy's own interpretation can at most only represent an Advaitin perspective – furthermore, one influenced by Platonism and Thomism – this argument can only show that Cage was not influenced by 'Asian nondualism' as it was interpreted by Coomaraswamy. Coomaraswamy's synthesis should not be reified to be representative of the beliefs of all Advaitins through the vast history of the development of Vedānta. Neither should it be made to represent all Hindu philosophy let alone all Indian or other Asian systems of thought. Coomaraswamy presented a limited picture of India's religious and philosophical traditions – ancient and modern – which fore-grounded the Advaitin philosophy of Śāṅkara at the expense of the thought of the other Vedānta schools, the philosophy of the other Brahmanical *darśanas*, and the systems of belief of other Indian peoples, in addition to the variety of positions found in contemporary Indian philosophy (see Bhushan, 2011a: 110; 2011b: 170-84; Inden, 1990: 67, 70, 72, 80-2; King, 1999b: 16-22, 42-3, 45-6, 53, 212-21; Rukmani, 2011: 129-30; Taber, 2011: 147-58). Although Coomaraswamy – as well as the subtly differing depictions of Campbell, Huxley, and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* – claimed to be depicting *the* Indian religion, this was an essentialized portrayal that hid the considerable diversity not only of Hinduism and Hindu philosophy, but of India's other religions and philosophies as well.

The discussion above cannot, then, confirm or deny the argument that Cage's nondualism is an expression of an Asian philosophy, only that it is not the nondualism of Cage's Indian sources. Nevertheless, Cage had other sources on Asian religions and philosophies: principally Suzuki (cf. Cage and Charles, 1981: 199). If Suzuki did hold to the same belief as Cage regarding nondualism then that would entail that Suzuki and Coomaraswamy were separated by a related ontological dichotomy to the one that separated Coomaraswamy and Cage. That question cannot be answered at the present time

– the concept of *anātman* (no-abiding-self) and the philosophy of Zen (and Mahāyāna Buddhism more generally) require their own discussion (see introduction). At the present time it should be noted that there are many heterogeneous philosophical theories that have developed in Asian philosophical and religious traditions: Cage’s system cannot be in agreement with all of them.

We now have an idea of the numerous tangled threads that lay behind Cage’s comment:

I kept coming back to western thinking to find the same idea in it, and more recently, in reading the Journal of Thoreau, of course, I find all of these ideas from the Orient there, because he actually got them, as I did, from the Orient (Kostelanetz, 2003: 56).

Riding merrily through all these tangles is the remarkable irony that a phrase central to European idealist philosophy of art for so long was used to explain and ground a philosophy of art argued to be the antithesis of European idealist art practice. Furthermore, in the quotation from Shultis on pp.171-2, the phrase is also being used as an example of Indian philosophy of art, and, despite the context of the quotation being grounded in a philosophy of universal Indian-European idealism in art, it is taken out of context to explain how an American artist came to a non-idealist philosophy of art through Indian thought.

Was Cage a materialist? While Cage may have rejected the possibility of Ideas and therefore the idealism of Coomaraswamy, in the early fifties he still averred that a thing was ‘a visible manifestation of an invisible nothing’ and thus was a ‘something’ that partakes of ‘that life-giving nothing’ (Cage, 1959c: 136). That ‘nothing’ is only nothing in the sense of being not a thing (i.e. it is not some-thing). This is clearly an apophatic description and would be best treated as such. This no-thing seems to be of numinous quality. To reduce Cage’s spiritual beliefs to materialism would be to agree with Coomaraswamy’s reductive implication that there is only idealism or materialism. Ultimately, Cage took nothing from Coomaraswamy apart from the empty words of the phrase and thus the starting point for an idea. There is little or no essential philosophical or religious agreement between the systems of Coomaraswamy and Cage. Those who write about Cage need to be very careful how they link Cage to Coomaraswamy, and by extension the Traditionalist interpretation of Perennial Philosophy. Cage’s version of Coomaraswamy should not be used to represent Coomaraswamy himself. Nevertheless,

neither should Coomaraswamy's opinion be used to make generalized comments regarding the whole of Asia; at the most he represented one tradition of Indian religion and philosophy out of many.

Through the aim of 'imitating nature in her manner of operation' Cage aligned himself unknowingly with a concept central to European philosophy of art. Nevertheless, the individualistic nature of his interpretation and implementation of 'imitation' entail that any systematic explication of Cageian mimesis in relation to this phrase is far from straightforward. The most it is possible to do in the present instance is to assert what Cage's nature was not. Examining Cage's thought in relation to interpretations of the phrase 'art imitates nature' in Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Aquinas, and Coomaraswamy, and the relationship of nature to imagination in Shaftesbury, Wordsworth, Ruskin, Emerson, and Thoreau has shown what Cage's 'nature' was not in numerous ways. Without examining Cage's use of Buddhist and Zen philosophy this is as far as it is possible to go.

## 5. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and John Cage 2: Beyond Imitation

### 5.1 Rasa

#### Introduction

Cage's 1946 essay 'The East in the West' contained his first mention of Coomaraswamy; it also contained his earliest mention in print of *rasa* (lit. taste, essence, flavour). A major feature of the 'Hindu esthetic', he said, was that 'the emotion of serenity or tranquillity is considered a necessary adjunct to the proper expression of any of the "permanent" emotions, e.g., the erotic, the heroic' (Cage, 1946: 24). Between 1946 and 1951 Cage wrote several works the content and meaning of which he explained in terms of *rasa*. Following the composer's lead, writers on Cage have frequently discussed the *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946-8) and *Sixteen Dances* (1950-1) in relation to *rasa*. Most recently, discussing the first of those works, Julia Robinson (2011: 180) wrote that the "nine permanent emotions"... became the crucial means by which Cage was able to shift *personal* emotions onto a more universal course... it allowed Cage to retain the force of contrasting emotions in the music, just not his own'. However, quite what the connection between *rasa* and the content of these pieces has been is, to quote Patterson (1996: 120; 2002b: 204), 'an eternally murky issue'. What is known about how Cage used *rasa* in these works is covered by Brooks (1984: 341-44), Pritchett (1993: 29-30; 2009: 9-12), Patterson (1996, 2002b), and Gann (2010: 94-97). *Rasa* has previously been approached from the perspective of Cage's usage of the theory, not from the perspective of the theory itself. Arriving at Cage's practice from a different angle reveals the extent of the idiosyncrasies of his usage.

#### 5.1.1 Coomaraswamy's Depiction of *Rasa*

Cage's main source of information on *rasa* was Coomaraswamy. Coomaraswamy discussed *rasa* in detail in four of his books: *Essays in National Idealism* (1909/1910), *The Mirror of Gesture* (1917), *The Dance of Shiva* (1918) and *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (1934)<sup>104</sup>. Cage did not read either of the earlier volumes. Which of the latter two volumes Cage read first is not known. It is possible that by 1946 Cage had only read *The*

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<sup>104</sup> See *Essays in National Idealism* (1910a) pp. 27-8, 37-9, 60. On Coomaraswamy's depiction of *rasa* in this earlier work see Bhushan (2011b: 175-6). Coomaraswamy's *The Mirror of Gesture* (1917) was a translation of the *Abhinaya Darpaṇa* of Nadikeśvara with a short essay. The *Abhinaya Darpaṇa* is chiefly a compendium of elements of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Coomaraswamy's account of *rasa* in all these works was compiled from a number of sources including the tenth century *Daśarupa* of Dhanamjaya.

*Dance* or had only read *The Transformation*; alternatively he may have read both. The technicalities of Coomaraswamy's description of *rasa* changed in certain ways between *The Dance of Shiva* and *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, but the basic emphasis was the same. The latter presents the most thorough discussion. As it is not certain which text Cage read when, we will examine both texts.

In *The Dance*, Coomaraswamy discussed *rasa* in reference to drama and likened it to theories of beauty or 'aesthetic emotion' in European philosophy of art. *Rasa* is brought about in a spectator, he writes, through the combination of determinants ('*vibhava*') (the plot of the play), consequents ('*anubhava*') (the signifying of moods through gesture), moods ('*bhava*') (thirty-three transient, and nine permanent, viz. the erotic, humorous, pathetic, heroic, terrible, fearful, odious, wondrous, peaceful), and involuntary emotions ('*sattvabhava*') ('emotional states originating in the inner nature') (Coomaraswamy, 1948: 53; transliterations as original text). By listing the names of the nine *rasas* (erotic, heroic, odious, et al.) as 'permanent moods', Coomaraswamy diverges from the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and other classical sources. As we shall see, the nine permanent moods (*sthāyībhāva*) are different to the nine *rasas*. For a work to evoke *rasa*, it is necessary for one or two of the permanent moods to be central and all others to be subordinate. Although he discussed in general terms what *rasa* could be said to be, his description was vague and he did not adequately distinguish how the nine *rasas* differed from the nine permanent emotions (ibid.: 54). In the course of his description, Coomaraswamy made frequent references to Benedetto Croce's neo-idealist aesthetics (on which see M. E. Brown, 1966). Finally, to illustrate the conjoining of art and religion that *rasa* brings about, Coomaraswamy quoted a paragraph from Clive Bell's *Art* (1914) and suggested:

Religion and art are thus names for one and the same experience – an intuition of reality and of identity. This is not, of course, exclusively a Hindu view: it had been expounded by many others, such as the Neo-platonists, Hsieh Ho, Goethe, Blake, Schopenhauer and Schiller. Nor is it refuted by Croce (ibid.: 58).

One could argue that, in attempting to argue for the general applicability of the theory, Coomaraswamy generalized the matter unhelpfully.

Coomaraswamy's depiction of *rasa* in *The Transformation* was more detailed and technical. Although the difference between *rasa* and *sthāyībhāva* was slightly more clearly explained, his description of the determinants, consequents, and moods was essentially reprinted from *The Dance of Shiva*; thus, the passage where he listed the names of the *rasas*

but described them as the ‘Permanent Moods’ was retained (1934a:52). Other elements, however, were different. In this version, Coomaraswamy interpreted *rasa* to mean ‘Ideal Beauty’, with a literal meaning of ‘tincture’ or ‘flavor’ (1934a: 47). Tasting *rasa* is an interior activity involving the imagination. It is the interior ‘energy’ of the *rasika* (a connoisseur of art) that is inspired by *bhāva* (translated by Coomaraswamy as mood) and becomes the ‘cause of tasting’. Thus the actions of the characters or the surfaces of art works are just colours; the real art work comes through the mind (ibid.: 46-50, 52). The tasting of *rasa* is only possible in those whose knowledge of true values is developed, who are pure and who concentrate more on interior things than what occurs to the senses. This ability has either been cultivated or is innate; either way it is imperative as the ability to taste the flavour depends on ‘an ideal sensibility (*vāsanā*) and the faculty of self-identification (*yogyatā*) with the forms (*bhavana*) depicted (*varṇanīya*)’ (ibid.: 51). Therefore, according to Coomaraswamy, the process by which the experience of *rasa* comes about in the audience is the same as that by which an artist imitates nature’s workings in the creation of a work. It is identification with the work and cognition of ideal forms (cf. Ghosh, 2003: 3:xxix-xxx). In doing so, the content is transformed from the sensual to the ideal. ‘Ideal beauty’ is tasted. And in tasting the ideal the absolute is also tasted ‘indivisible from the gnosis of God’. It is a flash of pure understanding; intuition of the universality of the true self (*ātman*) (Coomaraswamy, 1934a: 49-52, 55).

Coomaraswamy’s depiction of *rasa* was highly generalized. There was little information on traditional or modern usage of the concept by artists. As elsewhere in his texts, it is possible to feel that Coomaraswamy strove too hard to unify Indian, Platonic, and Scholastic elements and ultimately compromised the integrity of his material. His depiction of *rasa* is a notable example. Furthermore, there are a number of inconsistencies between his treatment of the subject in *The Dance of Shiva* and *The Transformation*; in general the latter is more accurate, but the impression given is that Coomaraswamy was, unusually for him, a little unsure of his material. In P. S. Sastri’s otherwise glowing study of Coomaraswamy’s thought, the subject of *rasa* is the one area where he calls Coomaraswamy’s knowledge into question (Sastri, 1974: 98-102). Similarly, V. K. Chari (1980: 47-8) suggests that Coomaraswamy’s account is ‘tendentious and overlaid with theological terminology’. Both Sastri (1974: 101-2) and Chari (1980: 60) argue that Coomaraswamy’s depiction of *rasa* was ‘distorted’ by his attempt to make the concept conversant with Platonic idealism. To quote Chari (ibid.: 60), ‘Coomaraswamy offers no

other criterion for the evaluation of art than that of a correspondence between the art-object and the art-worshipper's mental image of the Ideal'. This, he suggests, is not *rasa*. If that is the case, then what is *rasa*?

### 5.1.2 Traditional Sources

In terms of textual reference, the foundational source for the concept of *rasa* is the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (*NŚ*) attributed to Bharata (or Bharata Muni); it is regarded as the oldest surviving text wholly on the arts in the Indian tradition. Probably written around 200-400 CE, it is traditionally dated to as early as 200 BCE. Styling itself as a fifth *Veda*, the text claims to be the precise rules for the arts as formulated by Brahmā and communicated from him to Bharata (*NŚ* 1:1-25). As can be expected with a treatise of this age, instead of there being one definitive text there are variant versions and differing critical editions<sup>105</sup>. Further, the text itself often assumes knowledge now lost and is thus open to differing interpretations (P. L. Sharma, 2000: 99; Schwartz, 2004: 4-5).

The subject of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is often referred to as 'drama', but 'complete theatrical performance' – the combined art of drama, dance, and forms of music – would be more accurate (Pesch, 2009: 459). As well as discussing the art as a whole, the separate arts that combine to produce it are also treated individually. It is also often seen as a religious text which concerns the arts as a form of devotion. Its extensive discussion includes details of the conventions for gestures of the body and hands; expressions of the face; diction, intonation, and language; costume and make-up; staging; and the role of music. Most importantly for the present context, the sixth and seventh of the thirty six chapters, *Rasavikalpa* and *Bhāvavyaṅjaka*, are explications of the linked concepts of *rasa* and *bhāva*. *Rasa* can be translated to mean 'taste', 'flavour', or 'essence'; *bhāva* is discussed below. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is the earliest surviving text to document the eight *rasas*: *śṛṅgāra* (the erotic, love), *hāsya* (the ridiculous, the comic, humour), *karuṇa* (the pathetic, pathos, sympathy, compassion, sorrow), *vīra* (the heroic, heroism), *raudra* (the terrible, anger), *bhayānaka* (the fearful, panic), *bībhatsa* (the grotesque, the odious, disgust, distaste), and *adbhuta* (the wondrous, surprise) (*NŚ* 6:15). The ninth *rasa*, *śānta* (peace, dispassion, the absence of the other *rasas*), which in Cage's depiction is pivotal, became part of the

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<sup>105</sup> The present text refers principally to the edition and translation of Manomohan Ghosh (2003).

tradition from the eighth century CE. *Śāntarasa* is not, therefore, discussed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Before *rasa* can be understood, it is necessary to focus on *bhāva* – a term that in this context can be translated variously as ‘emotion’, ‘sentiment’, ‘mood’, or ‘psychological state’. While it should be noted that Ghosh (2003) uses the translation ‘state’ or ‘psychological state’, for the purposes of clarity in relation to Cage’s writings, in the present chapter ‘emotion’ will consistently be used to translate *bhāva*. There cannot be *rasa* without *bhāva*: *rasa* is the culmination of *bhāva* (*NŚ* 6:33, 36-8). *Rasa* can only be known through experiencing the combination of *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicārībhāva* (*NŚ* 6:31, 7:3-8). *Vibhāva* are determinants or susceptible emotions, the things that cause emotions to be realized; in *śṛṅgāra* (the erotic) this might be the sight of the beloved. *Anubhāva* are consequents or imitative emotions, the signs that signify the emotion caused by *vibhāva*; in our example that could be longing glances or delicate movements of the limbs. *Vyabhicārībhāva* are transient, mutable, or complementary emotions, the states and feelings resulting from the first two causes; in our example, this could be intoxication, tears, and joy (*NŚ* 6.44-5). From *bhāva* comes *rasa*: *rasa* arises from *bhāva* when the *bhāva* ‘are imbued with the quality of universality’. *Bhāva*, ‘proceeding from the thing which is congenial to the heart, is the source of [*rasa*] and it pervades the body just as fire spreads over dry wood’ (*NŚ* 7:6-7).

In addition to *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicārībhāva*, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* also gives details of eight *sthāyībhāvas* (permanent, stable, abiding or durable emotions). The *sthāyībhāvas* correspond to the eight *rasas*. They are the ‘masters’ of the thirty-three *vyabhicārībhāvas* (transient emotions) and eight *sāttvikabhāvas* (*sāttvika*<sup>106</sup> emotions) – in other words, a *sthāyībhāva* must be the dominant emotion of a performance or artistic work (*NŚ* 7:7-8, 107). The *sthāyībhāva* (permanent emotions) universalize the *bhāva*. The *vyabhicārībhāvas* (transient emotions) are weaker; nevertheless, in combination they work to strengthen the effect of the *sthāyībhāva*<sup>107</sup>. The eight *sthāyībhāva* (permanent emotions) are named *rati* (pleasure, joy), *hāsa* (laughter, amusement), *śoka* (grief, sorrow), *utsāha* (energy, enthusiasm, zeal), *krodha* (anger, displeasure), *bhaya* (awe, fear), *jugupsā* (disgust,

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<sup>106</sup> *Sāttvikabhāva* is difficult to translate (see Ghosh, 2003: 3:103 f.n.22). Mishra, Sharma and Saijan (1997) translate it as ‘emotional sentiments’.

<sup>107</sup> The *NŚ* does not make clear how *sāttvikabhāva* differ (*NŚ* 6:22).

revulsion), and *vismaya* (surprise, wonder)<sup>108</sup> (*NŚ* 6:17-22) (Ghosh, 2003: 1:xvii-xix, 3:xxvi-ii, xxxvi-ix; Ingalls, 1990: 16-7; Mishra, 1997: 255, 259; Patnaik, 1997: 15, 23, 26-7, 29, 32-4, 53; Raghavan, 1975: 1, 15-6, 26, 49; Ramanathan, n.d.; Sastri, 1974: 99; Schwartz, 2004: 12-5). Despite their connection and close similarity to the *rasas*, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (6:15, 17) states that the eight *sthāyībhāva* are not the same as the eight *rasas*. Exactly how they differ was not made entirely clear and was subsequently a matter of considerable debate (Ingalls, 1990: 16-9, 35). One explanation is that while the *sthāyībhāva* is the dominant emotion in the performance, it is the corresponding *rasa* that will be tasted (Pesch, 2009: 492). As we saw above, Coomaraswamy merged *rasa* and *sthāyībhāva* in his description. In consequence, Cage muddled the two up and referred to the *rasas* (the erotic, the comic, et al.) as the ‘permanent [i.e. *sthāyī*-] emotions [i.e. *bhāva*]’.

If that is the case, then how does *rasa* differ from *bhāva*? One could say that if *bhāvas* are the ingredient then *rasa* is the taste. It is tasted by *rasikas*<sup>109</sup> through cognition of what is signified in the performance. Although *rasa* is divided into eight or more engendering categories, this is only for the purposes of analysis: in reality it is one taste (W. J. Johnson, 2009: 267). In the realm of *rasa* there is no differentiation: as with a blend of spice, one does not taste each ingredient separately in the blend, one experiences the taste that is produced from their combination and is more than the sum of the individual parts (*NŚ* 6:31; Ingalls, 1990: 19; P. L. Sharma, 1990: 100; Schwartz, 2004: 8-9).

To bring about *rasa*, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* prescribes gamuts of possible *bhāvas*. Although each *rasa* is linked to a *sthāyībhāva*, each also has different gamuts associated with it. For example, there are forty-six *bhāvas* that can be used to lead to the erotic (*śṛṅgāra*) but only sixteen for the heroic (*vīra*) (*NŚ* 6: 66, 7:113-4)<sup>110</sup>. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* also

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<sup>108</sup> As translated in Mishra, Sharma and Saijan (1997): the *vyabhicārībhāva* (transient emotions) are detachment, remorse, apprehension, envy, intoxication, fatigue, indolence, depression, anxiety, delusion, recollection, contentment, bashfulness, agility, joy, agitation, stupor, arrogance, dejection, eagerness, slumber, sickness, dream, awakening, indignation, dissimulation, violence, resolution, disorder, insanity, death, terror, deliberation; and the eight *sāttvikabhāva* (*sāttvika* emotions) are inertia, perspiration, thrill, choking of voice, trembling, change of facial complexion, tears, fainting (*NŚ* 6:18-22, 7:8-99). The *rasas* added later were also assigned *bhāva*. Abhinavagupta regarded *nirveda* (indifference) as the *sthāyībhāva* of *sāntarasa* (*Loc.* 1.13).

<sup>109</sup> ‘One who can experience *rasa*’, a connoisseur of the arts (Pesch, 2009: 475).

<sup>110</sup> For a complete listing of all the permutations (with dramatic depictions) see Mishra, Sharma and Saijan (1997). Mishra, Sharma and Saijan use the Baroda edition of *NŚ* by Ram Krishna Kavi; there are some differences between that edition and the edition of Ghosh referenced here.

outlines numerous further details: *vibhāva* and *anubhāva* are suggested; *vṛtti* (styles of drama) are associated with different *rasa*, as are ten different types of plays; different metres are appropriate to different *rasa*, and different times of day are appropriate for their performance; in a performance numerous expressions, gestures, postures, and associated costume and make-up are connected with different *bhāva*. Styles of drumming, song, instrumental music and tone of voice all also signify differently. Then, to complicate matters further, there are guidelines and variations introduced in relation to gender, caste and regional characteristics (*NS* 6:23-30, 45-74, 7:7-125; Ghosh, 2003: 3:xxviii-xxix, xxxix-xl, xlviv-vi, xlviii, 1, liii-viii, 4:10-3; Mishra, Sharma and Saijan, 1997).

The result is thousands of possible representations with numerous regulations as to combination and use (Mishra, 1997: 253-7). And that is only to consider the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Partly because of the vagaries of the text, the prolific exegetical and commentarial tradition associated with it has been as influential as the text itself. The most notable of these are the *Dhvanyāloka* (*The Mirror of Resonance*) [*Dhv.*] by Ānandavardhana (9<sup>th</sup> century CE), and the *Abhinavabhāratī* and *Locarna* [*Loc.*]<sup>111</sup>, commentaries on, respectively, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Dhvanyāloka*, by the nondualist śaivite theologian Abhinavagupta (c.975-1025). These three texts developed and expanded the theory of *rasa*, in particular through creating a philosophical basis for the inclusion of *śāntarasa*<sup>112</sup>. The seed for a tenth *rasa*, *bhakti* (devotion), was planted in this development<sup>113</sup>. Even after this, commentaries continued to develop and influence how the tradition was understood and put into practice. Different traditions added further *rasas* and *bhāvas* and interpreted the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and related texts

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<sup>111</sup> Edition and translation consulted Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan (1990).

<sup>112</sup> On *śāntarasa* and its development see Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan, 1990; Masson and Patwardhan, 1969; Raghavan, 1975.

<sup>113</sup> *Bhaktirasa* is included in some systems and not in others; like *śāntarasa*, it does not feature in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. In particular it is associated with the *bhakti* (devotional) traditions of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism as systematized by the poet and theologian Rūpa Gosvāmī (c.1489-1564). Gosvāmī was a leading follower of the religious leader Caitanya (Kṛṣṇacaitanya), the founding inspiration of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. *Bhaktirasa* has been influential; nevertheless, because it is theorized in different ways and has its own traditions, in the present context it will be regarded as a tradition outside of that considered by Cage. In contemporary aesthetics, however, care should be taken: *bhakti* interpretations of *rasa* have influenced how *rasa* is understood leading to developments in practices and understandings (Pesch, 2009: 475; Schwartz, 2004: 19-20; Schweig, 2005: 97-101). *Bhaktirasa* was not mentioned by Cage and does not feature in Coomaraswamy's discussions of *rasa*.

in differing ways (see Raghavan, 1975). Traditions of oral and performative exegesis of the text, and the handing down of understandings of the concept from guru to pupil, are of vital importance. The complexity of the tradition of *rasa* should not be underestimated! For this reason, the present study will go no further down the perilous road of reifying one interpretation as *the* tradition; however, we will discuss certain interpretations among the continuum of meanings (Coomaraswamy, 1917: 1-2; Ghosh, 2003: 1:xx; Patnaik, 1997: 6-7, 9, 14-6; Schwartz, 2004: 4-5).

### 5.1.3 *Rasa*

As we have seen, *rasa* can be understood in two ways. Firstly and principally, *rasa* is joy or bliss tasted through aesthetic experience. Secondly, in order to analyse this single impersonal experience, it is divided into eight or more flavours (the *rasas*); in turn these *rasas* relate to a like number of engendering emotional categories, the permanent emotions (*sthāyībhāva*). Nevertheless, these meanings do not tell us what the nature of *rasa* is: the answer to that depends on the interpretative tradition one turns to. While *rasa* is often seen as a tradition of performative aesthetic-religious inspiration which can be formalized in terms of its depiction in ancient texts, it has since become part of many varying traditions in India, including among Indians of differing philosophical and religious beliefs, and in non-resident Indian communities across the globe. Because conceptualizations of the concepts have changed over time, and because it continues to be interpreted in a number of different ways, it is problematic to define it as any one particular thing (Bhushan, 2011: 175; Schwartz, 2004: 2). *Rasa* means different things to different people. Keeping this fact in mind, we can say that *rasa* is a structuring principle, a style principle, a psychological principle, and/or a religious principle. Although there are many varied interpretations of *rasa*, we can outline a number of positions which point to some of the major interpretations of the nature of *rasa*.

According to Sastri (1974: 98) *rasa* is the soul of a work of art in the same way as for Aristotle plot was the soul of the work. ‘Soul’ in Sastri’s analogy should be understood metaphysically. This reading allows us to understand something of the spiritual interpretation of *rasa*, at least as it pertains to Brahmanism. Such a reading might understand *rasa* as a form of spiritual cognition. Done properly (i.e. conventionally), art has the power to universalize the *bhāvas*. *Rasa* is the experience of an emotion made universal (numinous) through the efficacy of aesthetic delight (*Loc.* 2.4). What is tasted is not

external to the person who tastes it: it comes through perceiving and imaginatively experiencing emotions which engender the rapturous taste of *rasa*. That rapture ‘is different from the apprehensions derived from memory or direct experience’, it ‘takes the form of melting, expansion, and radiance... it consists of repose in the bliss which is the true nature of one’s own self’ (*Loc.* 2.4). It occurs through ‘the cessation of that obscuration which is caused by the thick darkness of ignorance’; in other words, it is not a product of the empirical person because it is an intimation of inner knowledge of the true self (*ātman*) and the real nature of its relationship to *brahman* (*Loc.* 2.4). The spectator who reacts imaginatively to the emotions depicted (*bhāvas*) must do so at a level beyond the empirical self, thus liberating themselves from the illusions that bind them in. *Rasa* is where art and spirit are unseparated; to bring about its tasting or to taste it are acts of devotion. It is like cooking a dish where the ingredients are the things of *māyā* (illusion), but the taste of the dish is of that which is ultimately real: a taste of *mokṣa* (liberation from *saṃsāra*). *Rasa* is the blissful delight which that brings (*NŚ* 6:31-3; *Dhv./Loc.* 2.4; Bhushan, 2011b: 175-7; Chari, 1980: 53; Chou, 1971: 222; Coomaraswamy, 1917: 9; Ingalls, 1990: 35-7; Ingalls, Masson and Patwardhan, 1990: 231 f.n.39; Patnaik, 1997: 18-20, 24-5, 42-3, 46-7, 49-50, 67-8; P. L. Sharma, 1990: 79, 88-9, 94-5, 100-1; Schwartz, 2004: 5-6, 8-11, 13-4, 17, 20).

Alternatively, *rasa* can be understood in more ‘realist’ terms. For V. K. Chari (1980: 47-61), the pleasure that *rasa* provides – delight in aesthetic emotion – is itself the purpose of art. In his reading, art is an endeavour that does not aim ‘directly to convey moral or spiritual truths’ (*ibid.*: 50). *Rasa* is a formulation of human emotion on a purely material level, ‘not a transcendental meditation on the attributeless Absolute’ (*ibid.*: 52). *Rasa* allows us to understand the psychology of art. Chari suggests that the overtly spiritual reading of *rasa* is down to reconceptualizations long after the time the *Nāṭyaśāstra* was written. Thus, in the Vedānta and Vaiṣṇava traditions, and more generally through the development and rise of *bhakti* practices, conceptualizations and formulations of *rasa* came about that differed to earlier ways of interpreting the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (*ibid.*: 50-5, 57; Schwartz, 2004: 19). Chari, therefore, sees the addition of *śāntarasa* as a distortion of the original tradition.

A further related interpretation could be called ‘universalist’. Theorists, including the philosopher K. C. Bhattacharyya, have depicted *rasa* as a universal aesthetic theory applicable equally to Indian and non-Indian art. In these readings, *rasa* becomes a method for understanding the production of feeling and emotion in spectators. Many such accounts

have not relied on an explicitly Hindu framework and have focussed as much on mainstream European and American art as the arts of India (Bhushan, 2011b: 176-7; Patnaik, 1997). Universalist readings, such as that of Patnaik (1997), have tended to derive their analysis from traditions of *rasa* in drama and literature rather than music; this creates conceptual difficulties when using these readings to analyse Indian art music (see below). Rather than suggesting that any one of the above interpretations is the ‘correct’ meaning, these various meanings should be seen as among the continuum of understandings of *rasa*. Nevertheless, as Cage’s depiction of *rasa* was drawn from Coomaraswamy’s explicitly religious account, it is the first of these three meanings that will form the predominant point of focus here.

Although we have discussed what *rasa* is, the question of how *rasa* is brought about in the different branches of the performing arts remains to be answered. The taste of *rasa* is one, therefore that taste does not change between the different branches of the arts. Nevertheless, while the principle of *rasa* is similar in essence between the different branches (especially as forms of music, drama and dance were traditionally thoroughly intertwined), conventions and structural elements vary. In all the branches, however, it is often thought only possible to bring *rasa* about through adherence to the traditions of performance. Because *bhāva* are universal rather than individual in relevance, their depiction must be stylized and guided by convention. Thus the manner in which the *bhāva* are evoked is of paramount importance. This could be argued to be because individual tastes or issues of entertainment are irrelevant, the aim having nothing to do with the personality of the empirical self. In a more materialistic way it is also because of the generation of meaning through the semiotics of conventions. In both cases – for artist and spectator – understanding the rules of the tradition is imperative if communication is to take place. An artist must be able to create a work that effectively communicates, while a spectator must potentially be able to identify with the work. In this way the experience of universal emotion can become an experience of truth (Patnaik, 1997: 46-7, 50-1; P. L. Sharma, 2000: 58-9; Schwartz, 2004: 13, 16).

Cage encountered *rasa* principally through Coomaraswamy who had discussed the concept in the abstract, unconnected to any particular performance tradition. The above discussion has been similarly general and derived principally from texts on *rasa* focussed on ‘complete theatrical performance’ or literary theory. *Rasa* theory is also important to traditions of dance and music. While there has been much overlap between the arts, each

has its own traditions tailored to the particulars of the medium; Cage seems to have known few of these, instead relying on Coomaraswamy's generalizations. *Rasa* in dance cannot be discussed here at all. *Rasa* in music is a complex topic that varies between styles, locations, and times; because of the complexity of the subject, it can only be covered here briefly.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* discussed music theory in some detail (see *NS* 28-33, for example 29:1-16, 32:371-406). It assigned musical modes and structural elements to different *rasa* based on their suitability to aid in the raising of particular categories of *bhāva* (Ghosh, 2003: 4:29 f.n.2; e.g. *NS* 29:1-16). Music of later times has retained its links to *rasa* theory, although the relationship has developed and changed considerably and is now often more loosely applied. To give one example, modern musical practice largely excludes the depiction of four of the *rasas*: *hāsya* (the humorous), *raudra* (the terrible), *bhayānaka* (the fearful), and *bībhatsa* (the odious). Thus, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* can only provide an outline of the origin of theoretical ideas related to the performance practice of modern music. Nevertheless, though regional variance such as between northern and southern styles should be noted, as should differences between genres of music and changes in styles over time, the concept of *bhāva* and *rasa* are still often considered important components.

Unlike forms of drama and dance that involve stylized expressive depictions of emotions, in art music those expressive emotional qualities are predominantly rendered as universalized structural signifiers (P. L. Sharma, 2000: 61-2, 105). To quote Prem Lata Sharma (2000: 62): 'In music, all these constituents of *Rasa* [*vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, and *vyabhicārībhāva*] are presented in a universalized state and the process of universalization [*sic*] is more or less eliminated'. *Bhāva* is therefore chiefly located in structural rather than programmatic signifiers. The various *bhāva* are rendered through intertwining elements such as *svara* (scale degree), *rāga* (melodic abstract), *śruti* (microtonal interval), *tāla* (rhythm cycle), movement of melody, and embellishment/ornamentation. Furthermore, an individual *rāga* is traditionally essentially connected to *bhāva* through a particular time of day for its performance. Some of these elements are bound by conventions, while others are creatively determined based on *rigorous* training. In these living traditions, what *rasa* is and what its roles in music are is a multifaceted issue; however, in a musical culture where traditions of practice are held in high regard by many, the importance of those traditions should not be disregarded<sup>114</sup>. Subsequently, the reification of one meaning or method erases

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<sup>114</sup> For more information on these issues see Pesch (2009), P. L. Sharma (2000), and Schwartz (2004); consult also the invaluable website [www.musicresearch.in](http://www.musicresearch.in).

more than it answers (Bor, 1999: vii, 1, 4; Chou, 1971: 222; Cuni, 2007: 22-3; Ghosh, 2003: 4:29 f.n.2; Pesch, 2009: 47, 141, 136-40, 159, 161, 163, 165, 168-9, 239-40; P. L. Sharma, 2000: 61, 95-6, 99, 101-6, 108, 251; Schwartz, 2004: 77, 83, 95). There is no evidence to suggest that Cage was aware of conventions regarding *bhāva* (and thus *rasa*) in any tradition of music, or that such conventions significantly informed any of his compositions. For this reason, further elaboration of such traditions is beyond the scope of this chapter.

#### 5.1.4 Cage's Depiction of *Rasa*

Cage first came across the theory of *rasa* in the 1940s. The first piece in which he may have attempted to utilize the theory, *Amores* (1942), has been discussed above (section 3.4.1) and will not be dealt with explicitly again here; however, the conclusions of this chapter are equally relevant to that piece. If *Amores* is discounted, then the first pieces in which Cage attempted to invoke *rasa* were the *Sonatas and Interludes* for prepared piano of 1946-8.

Writing in the late fifties Cage recounted how he came to the concept. The pieces were composed, he said, when he

first became seriously aware of Oriental philosophy. After reading the work of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, I decided to attempt the expression in music of the 'permanent emotions' of Indian tradition: the heroic, the erotic, the wondrous, the mirthful, sorrow, fear, anger, the odious, and their common tendency towards tranquillity (Cage, 1958b: 129).

There are several elements of this passage that necessitate comment. Firstly, while Cage made much of *śāntarasa* (tranquillity) Coomaraswamy did not; in fact, he barely mentioned it. Consistent with Ānandavardhana (*Dhv.* 3.29), Coomaraswamy believed *śṛṅgāra* (the erotic, love) to be the 'most significant' *rasa* (Coomaraswamy, 1934a: 47). Nevertheless, the inclusion of *śānta* is an important part of many later interpretations and in the *Locana* (3.26) Abhinavagupta stated that he regarded *śānta* as the most important *rasa*. This is therefore not another Cageian misprision, although the minutiae of his depiction of the relation of the eight original *rasas* to *śānta* is overly simplistic (see *Dhv./Loc.* 3.26a-b; Masson and Patwardhan, 1969). To depict *śānta* in the way he did, Cage must have had a secondary source. This source was almost certainly Gita Sarabhai: the traditional purpose

for making music in India that she gave to Cage appears also to have been derived from Abhinavagupta's commentaries (Cage, 1948a: 41; P. L. Sharma, 2000: 101).

The second issue that should be noted is that Cage referred to the nine *rasas* as the 'permanent emotions' (i.e. *sthāyībhāva*). The eight *rasas* and eight *sthāyībhāvas* play different roles in classical *rasa* theory and therefore have different names (see 5.1.2 above; *NS* 6:15, 17). The problem here may have originated with Coomaraswamy. In *The Dance* he described *rasa* as 'aesthetic emotion'; by the time of *The Transformation* he had changed this description to 'Ideal Beauty'. Both descriptions are conducive to misinterpretation. Furthermore, in *The Transformation*, Coomaraswamy translated *sthāyībhāva* as 'permanent mood' yet gave the names of the *rasas*:

Moods (*bhāva*)... include thirty-three Fugitive or Transient (*vyabhicāri*) Moods such as joy, agitation, impatience, etc., and eight or nine Permanent (*sthāyī*) Moods, the Erotic, Heroic, etc., which in turn are the vehicles of the specific *rasas* or emotional colorings (Coomaraswamy, 1934a: 52).

He also did the same in *The Dance*: 'MOODS: transient moods (thirty-three in number)... Also the permanent (nine), viz: the Erotic, Heroic, Odious, Furious, Terrible, Pathetic, Wondrous and Peaceful [*sic*<sup>115</sup>]' (Coomaraswamy, 1948: 53). Thus, in both cases, Coomaraswamy gave the names of the *rasas*<sup>116</sup> but referred to them as the 'Permanent (*sthāyī*) Moods'<sup>117</sup>. Using the word 'emotion' rather than 'mood' (either can be used to translate the word '*bhāva*'), Cage confused *rasa* with *sthāyībhāva* and took to describing the *rasas* as the 'permanent emotions'. The 'permanent emotions' (*sthāyībhāva*) are tasted as *rasa*; nevertheless, while the latter is evoked by and transforms the former, it is ontologically separate from it (*NS* 6:17, 31-8; *Loc.* 3.43b). Due to Cage's error, many writers on Cage (and Cunningham) have mistakenly described the *rasas* as the 'permanent emotions'. For example, Gann (2010: 94) writes: 'Along with the imitation of nature, Cage's other best-known inheritance from Coomaraswamy is the concept of the nine Indian permanent emotions, or *rasas*' (other examples include: Bosseur, 2000: 22; C. Brown, 2007: 47; Copeland, 2004: 71; Fetterman, 1996: 16; Patterson, 1996: 119; 2002b: 204;

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<sup>115</sup> Coomaraswamy only lists eight.

<sup>116</sup> I.e. *śṛṅgāra* (the erotic, love), *hāsya* (the ridiculous, the comic, humour), *karuṇa* (the pathetic, compassion, sorrow), *vīra* (the heroic, heroism), et al. (*NS* 6:15).

<sup>117</sup> Which, in fact, are *rati* (pleasure, joy), *hāsa* (laughter, amusement), *śoka* (grief, sorrow), *utsāha* (energy, enthusiasm, zeal), et al. (*NS* 6: 17). The full lists are given above, section 5.1.2.

Pritchett, 1993: 29; 2009: 10; Revill, 1992: 83, 91; Robinson, 2011: 180, 211 f.n. 34; M. L. Tan, 1989: 41; but notably not Chou, 1971: 222). The nature of this issue points to the wider problematics of Cage's use of *rasa*.

Due to his compositional processes and ontological beliefs, it is highly unlikely that any of Cage's compositions could invoke *rasa* in any conventional manner. Cage later claimed that he was 'convinced of the truth of the Hindu theory of art. I tried to make my works correspond to that theory' (Cage and Charles, 1981: 103). The *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946-8) were an attempt 'to represent in music... the aesthetic principles of India' (ibid.: 41). Cage's statements, which all date to after the composition of the pieces, imply that at the time of the work's composition he had intended to directly 'express' the *rasas* through the music. Nevertheless, the degree to which *rasa* affected the composition of the *Sonatas and Interludes* is debateable. Cage never made clear which *rasas* were expressed in which pieces; neither did he outline what expressing a *rasa* in music might entail. As Patterson (1996: 119-20; 2002b: 204) argued, the fact that Cage wrote the work in two stages and that it is impossible to correlate any particular sonata to any particular *rasa* 'if in fact, Cage's account is meant to be taken that literally at all', continues to make it difficult to assess the role of *rasa* in the work (see also Pritchett, 1993: 30; Kostelanetz, 2003: 67). It also makes the possibility of experiencing *rasa* through the piece difficult.

While the role of the *rasas* in the *Sonatas and Interludes* may have been slight and largely retroactive, individual *rasas* are named in the titles of nine of the movements of *Sixteen Dances* (1950-1). The music was composed to accompany Merce Cunningham's *Sixteen Dances for Soloist and Company of Three*. We shall consider the dance first. Nine of Cunningham's sixteen dances aimed to evoke an individual *rasa*; all but the erotic (duet) and tranquillity (quartet) were solos. The humorous (*hāsya*) featured Cunningham as a 'man caught in a chair'; the odious (*bībhatsa*) saw him as a loathsome warrior who groaned and yelled while wearing a patchwork coat decorated with bells, beads, and lace; for the wondrous (*adbhuta*), Cunningham wore a bird mask designed by one of the company from a drawing of a Native American ceremonial mask on display in New York's Museum of the American Indian. Accounts of the piece do not suggest that the choreography aimed to replicate the conventions of any Indian dance tradition, although there may have been

sporadic references to Indian culture in other aspects of the production<sup>118</sup> (C. Brown, 2007: 46-7; Copeland, 2004: 71, 73; Cunningham, 1968: unpaginated; Vaughan, 2009, 4-8).

Cage wrote his score at a watershed moment in the development of his compositional style: among the last of his pieces to employ deliberately expressive elements, it was also among the earliest of his scores to make use of chance operations (Kostelanetz, 2003: 67; Pritchett, 2009: 9-10; Vaughan, 2009: 6). A majority of the sixteen pieces were composed using a sound chart with sixty-four possibilities. The gamut of sixty-four choices changed over the course of the dances, thus ensuring variety. Both Brooks (1984: 343) and Pritchett (2009: 11) argue that Cage's choice of sounds for the table was deliberate and designed to facilitate the creative expression of the programmatic content of the dances. While Cage does not appear to have attempted to match the actions of the dancers, the music for each of the dances depicting a *rasa* also aimed to express that 'emotion'. Cage had restricted himself to the content of the sound table, yet in other areas he was relatively free. This allowed him to depict the *rasas* programmatically:

By various means – rhythms, dynamics, pacing, silences – Cage was able to mold the raw materials of the chart into expressions of the various emotions. The chart thus produced music which is in turn panic-stricken (fear), light-footed and quirky (humor), crabbed and ugly (the odious), bleak (sorrow), sensual and lithe (the erotic), and so on (Pritchett, 2009: 10).

Brooks (1984: 343) similarly describes the content of the movements that depict a *rasa*: Cage expressed the humorous, he writes, through 'extreme dynamic and timbral contrasts', while the odious is 'pervaded by finicky ostinati' (see also, Cage and Charles, 1981: 103-4). The role of *rasa* in the work appears to have been restricted to Cage's attempt to depict the feelings indicated in the names of the *rasas* through subjective programmatic interpretation. It became, in effect, a sort of 'pictures at an exhibition of emotional archetypes'. If that is the case, then there is as little correspondence between music and *rasa* in the *Sixteen Dances* as in the *Sonatas and Interludes*.

Cage's use of *rasa* was not grounded in any particular performance tradition. He had no experience of the practice of creating or performing music that could invoke *rasa*. Whereas a performer in any of the traditions of performing art where the concept is relevant would be trained for many years, Cage had only the barest knowledge of the concept. His

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<sup>118</sup> Carolyn Brown (2007: 46) remembers helping to 'paint the soles of the feet of the three women in *Sixteen Dances* with a red pigment mixed with water, a holy Hindu ritual'.

chief sources, Coomaraswamy's books, discussed *rasa* in abstract terms based on usage in drama and literature. When Cage came to attempt to use *rasa* in a musical context, he had little idea of the conventions and structural processes through which *rasa* is signified in that art. It is thus unsurprising that the *Sonatas and Interludes* and the *Sixteen Dances* (music and choreography) make use of the idea of *rasa* in a basic, very literal way influenced more by European and American artistic traditions than Indian ones. Just as a particular curry depends on the cook adding the proper ingredients and preparing it in the right manner, *rasa* cannot be tasted in these pieces because Cage did not know what ingredients to add nor how to prepare the dish.

Even where there does appear to be clear programmatic correspondence between Cage's pieces and the emotions indicated by the names of the *rasas*, Cage's compositional methodology and ontology precluded the possibility of *rasa* in the religious interpretation as outlined above. Prem Lata Sharma (2000: 79), for example, pointed out that 'Indian art is concerned with embodying spiritual experiences and impressions, not with recording or glorifying what is received by the physical senses'. In 1957, Cage equated *rasa* with emotions raised by natural phenomena:

Does not a mountain unintentionally evoke in us a sense of wonder? otters along a stream a sense of mirth? night in the woods a sense of fear? Do not rain falling and mists rising up suggest the love binding heaven and earth? Is not decaying flesh loathsome? Does not the death of someone we love bring sorrow? And is there a greater hero than the least plant that grows? What is more angry than the flash of lightning and the sound of thunder? (Cage, 1957b: 10).

Continuing, Cage revealed that he theorized *rasa* as a subjective personal emotion that would be felt differently from person to person: 'These responses... are mine and will not necessarily correspond with another's. Emotion takes place in the person who has it'<sup>119</sup> (ibid.). According to most of the sources mentioned above, the emotion tasted in *rasa* is eternal and transcendent rather than subjective and material; because of its universality it is possible for there to be fixed performative signifiers. While we do not know if Cage felt the same in 1947 as he did in 1957, it is clear that, at least by the early fifties, Cage believed

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<sup>119</sup> In the early seventies Cage suggested to Daniel Charles that all his pieces could be understood in this way. Even though his more recent compositions did not contain emotional signifiers, because Cage believed emotion to derive from the people who perceive the music, it was still possible as an individual to perceive emotions and thus 'tranquillity, heroism, anger, etc.' (Cage and Charles, 1981: 146).

there was ‘only’ what was perceived by the senses. For Cage, having rejected symbols, conventional signifiers, and the possibility of transcendent idealism, emotion (and thus, in his usage, *rasa*) could only be subjective (see also Kostelanetz, 2003: 227-8). This problematizes the idea that *rasa* allowed Cage to express ‘universal’ (i.e. objective) rather than subjective emotions.

Cage created a subjective interpretation of the universal nature of an emotion through an individualistic rather than conventional musical language. For all of these reasons there can be little correlation between Cage’s use of *rasa* and *rasa* as used in the religious sense outlined above. Universalist readings might be thought to be closer to Cage’s approach. Nevertheless, in order to analyse the programmatic depiction of emotions found in Cage’s pieces it is necessary to ignore how *rasa* theory is applied in Indian art music. If it is said that *bhayānakarasa* (the fearful) can be discerned in the thirteenth movement of *Sixteen Dances*, because the music of that piece can be interpreted to be ‘panic-stricken’, then it can equally be said that *vīrarasa* (the heroic) can be found in Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, because the music of that work can be interpreted to be triumphant. There are no links to *rasa* in the *Sixteen Dances* other than that. The *Sonatas and Interludes* do not even have that link: conventional emotional signifiers are largely absent and may not even have been intended. Communication is vital to all the readings discussed above: the signs must be discernible to at least a *rasika* (cf. P. L. Sharma, 1990: 60). As noted above, conceptually translating universalist readings of *rasa* for the purpose of analysing or performing Indian art music is far from straightforward. Thus, it is only at a highly generalised level that any link can be made between Cage’s pieces and *rasa* theory.

Even if we overlook the issue that Cage believed *rasa* to mean emotion, in terms of Indian art music, the emotions depicted in Cage’s work are locked in non-conventional subjective signifiers and therefore do not communicate appropriately. Cage’s use of *rasa* had little more chance of success than randomly waving one’s arms would if one was trying to communicate by semaphore. It was a well intentioned but ultimately clumsy attempt to approach musical emotion in a different way. As with the phrase ‘art imitates nature’, what Cage ultimately borrowed from Coomaraswamy were empty words that he filled with his own meanings.

### 5.1.5 Cage's Later Additions and *Solo for Voice 58* from the *Song Books* (1970)

The majority of Cage's comments on *rasa* date to the years after they were part of his compositional strategy. Until the early seventies Cage added little more than was contained in his comment from 1958 quoted above (e.g. 1955: 10; 1964: 92). However, based on the evidence of his published lectures and interviews, Cage went through a renewed period of interest in Indian philosophy and aesthetics in the late sixties or early seventies. At this point he seems to have drawn on a source other than Coomaraswamy to add new elements to his depiction of *rasa*.

In *For the Birds*, Cage continued to describe the *rasas* as the 'permanent emotions'; however, in other ways his depiction had changed<sup>120</sup>. Responding to Charles asking him to tell him more about the 'permanent emotions', Cage listed the nine *rasas* and then described them as being divided into 'the four "white" modes and the four "black" modes' between which stands tranquillity (*śānta*) which is 'their normal propensity' (Cage and Charles, 1981: 103). He mentioned this idea on most subsequent recorded occasions where he discussed *rasa*; for example, the following excerpt from a 1991 interview with Retallack:

The white emotions are the heroic, the erotic, the mirthful, and the wondrous. The black ones are fear, anger, disgust, and sorrow... And central to the white and black emotions, is the one emotion of tranquillity. So that traditionally in Indian culture, you're not to express any one, or any combination of the emotions, without expressing tranquillity (Cage and Retallack, 1996: 160).

The earliest example of this usage located by the present author dates to 1971 (Cage and Charles, 1981: 103); other examples include interviews from 1979 (Cage and Reynolds: 583), 1982 (Cage and Montague, 1985: 213), and 1983 (Kostelanetz, 2003: 227-8).

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<sup>120</sup> *For the Birds* was the product of a complicated editing process involving the translation and retranslation of the conversations. To create a polished text, Charles on occasion added material to Cage's remarks based on Cage's earlier published texts, Cage's letters to Charles, or 'if necessary, with the writings of others' (Cage and Charles, 1981: 239). Cage reviewed the resulting text and was given the opportunity to make any changes he deemed necessary. He chose only to insert square brackets to enclose material that he could not imagine himself having said (ibid.: 11). During the discussion of *rasa* on page 103 of the English language edition, someone (presumably Charles) has added a number of Sanskrit terms and descriptions that appear to derive from Coomaraswamy's *The Dance of Shiva* (1948: 53-4). Cage set these additions in square brackets. Because of the irregularities of Cage's depiction of *rasa*, Charles's additions only serve to confuse what Cage is saying. As the text in brackets did not derive from Cage, it will not be considered further in this chapter.

The origin of Cage's idea of white and black *rasas* is unclear. Coomaraswamy did not discuss *rasa* or *bhāva* in these or related terms in any of his publications, neither does any ancient or modern source on aesthetics located by the present author. In the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, each *rasa* was associated with a colour; however, they were not split into black or white, or even dark and light<sup>121</sup>. This idea certainly has no traditional grounding in Indian aesthetics. Although Cage may have invented these groupings himself, there are also other plausible explanations. It is possible that Cage came to this idea through Cunningham: in his 1968 publication *Changes: Notes on Choreography*, Cunningham mentioned 'light' and 'dark' 'permanent emotions' in connection with *Sixteen Dances*. In that text, Cunningham suggested that he ordered the work to alternate 'light' and 'dark' 'emotions' (the order of the final work ran anger, humorous, sorrow, heroic, odious, wondrous, fear, erotic, tranquillity). On the other hand, this 1968 text may be a retrospective explanation on Cunningham's part. It may even have been Cage who influenced Cunningham to depict the *rasas* in this manner. While the source is unknown, it is possible that one of them came across the idea in a depiction of *rasa* stemming from a tradition other than aesthetics: for example, modern American yoga or Āyurvedic medicine. Further archival research may solve the issue. It can be confidently asserted that Cage did not come to this idea through Coomaraswamy's writings, nor from a reliable text on Indian aesthetics. Unless a source is confirmed, Cage's categories of white and black *rasas* should be discussed with care.

The renewed interest in *rasa* that Cage took in the late sixties may be connected to his last composition to relate to Indian aesthetics: the *rāgas* of *Solo for Voice 58* from the *Song Books* (1970). Whether the composition was the result of his renewed interest or the renewed interest the result of the composition is not known. In the pieces, Cage attempted to replicate the structural and musical elements of Indian art music to a greater degree than

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<sup>121</sup> in the translation of the *NS* of Ghosh (G) (2003: 3:108) and the listings of Pesch (P) (2009: 407) and Schwartz (S) (2004: 15) the colours are: *śṛṅgāra* (erotic): light green (G), dark blue (P), green (S); *hāsya* (humour): white (G, P, S); *karuṇa* (compassion): grey (G), pigeon/dove coloured (P, S); *raudra* (anger/terror): red (G, P, S); *vīra* (heroic): yellowish (G, P), wheat brown (S); *bhayānaka* (fear): dark (P), black (G, S); *bībhatsa* (disgust): blue (G, P, S); *adbhuta* (wonder): yellow (G, P, S) (*NS* 6:42-3). The *rasas* can also be divided into two categories of primary and secondary (*NS* 6:39-41). However, the groupings do not correspond with Cage's in either case (see Patnaik, 1997: 58).

he had in any piece previously. Even so, the results were decidedly – almost certainly deliberately – unconventional.

Cage's instructions for the piece do not explicitly mention *rasa*; however, Amelia Cuni (2007: 22-3) has argued that Cage suggested *rasa* theory in his directions<sup>122</sup>. If this is taken to be the case, then *Solo for Voice 58* can be discussed in relation to Cage's use of *rasa* theory in his earlier works. In keeping with the *Song Books* as a whole, Cage left many decisions up to the discretion of the performer. The score for *Solo for Voice 58* consists of eighteen staves each with a series of notes divided into ascending and descending parts which Cage described as a 'double' *rāga*. The number of notes contained in each ascending or descending part and the pitches of the notes were chosen using chance operations. The vocalist is to use as much or as little of this tonal framework as is desired in their performance. The only other notation for each piece indicates the *tāla* (rhythm cycle) to be used; Cage's *tālas* also appear to have been decided using chance procedures and do not conform to convention (Brooks, 2007b: 13; Cuni, 2007: 16-7, 20-1). The choice of lyrics is left to the performer. On this matter, the score directs the performer to: 'Think either of the morning, the afternoon or the evening, giving a description or account of recent pleasures or beauties observed. Free vocalise also' (Cage, 1970: 1:208). Cuni argues that the first sentence 'is an obvious reference to... *rasa* theory' (Cuni, 2007: 22). If Cage was intending this instruction to suggest *rasa*, then, as she notes, Cage broke with conventions of Indian art music by abandoning the fixed universal signifiers of the tradition in favour of the temporal and subjective associations of the individual performer. Nevertheless, she argues, as Cage's *rāgas* result in music that breaks numerous conventions of the tradition, the outcome 'leads to a loosening up of the connections between *rasas* and specific intervals or modes'. This enables 'the performer to draw on his [*sic*] own experiences... to foster the growth of new and unpredictable *rasas*' (ibid.: 23). In traditionalist terms, this in itself might be seen as precluding the possibility of *rasa*; nevertheless, as we have seen, the history of *rasa* theory has been one of extensive development and variety of interpretation. What we find in Cuni's realization is not tradition but pragmatic innovation – of Indian art music and the performance of Cage's compositions.

Although Cage's score for *Solo for Voice 58* makes use of *rāga* and *tāla* principles (albeit unconventionally interpreted), that does not entail that there was any deliberate

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<sup>122</sup> Cuni is an experienced *dhrupad* vocalist, trained in India, whose performance of *Solo for Voice 58* in concert and on CD has forged a new performance practice for the composition (see also 6.5 below).

attempt on Cage's part to link melodic and structural elements and conventions concerning the raising of *rasa*. In itself, this composition has little more connection to traditional *rasa* theory than the *Sonatas and Interludes* or *Sixteen Dances* – if indeed Cage was consciously referencing *rasa* theory in *Solo for Voice 58* in the first place. Nevertheless, as Cuni shows, the situation can be altered by a knowledgeable performer utilizing the freedoms Cage's score incorporates. Whether even a musician with the requisite formal training in Indian music can bring about the tasting of *rasa* through the performance of *Solo for Voice 58* must remain a question for *rasikas* alone to answer.

### 5.1.6 Postscript

Cage made a small number of other remarks on Indian music; most are self-explanatory. There is one further such remark that necessitates investigation. This comment, concerning music as a constant aural presence in the world, was another that only appeared in Cage's later interviews and writings. Discussing the importance of *4'33"* with Montague in the early eighties, Cage said that his 'silent' piece could be heard all the time. This, he suggested, made it akin to an idea held in India:

Thoreau knew this, and it's been known traditionally in India, it is the statement that music is continuous. In India they say: "Music is continuous, it is we who turn away." So whenever you feel in need of a little music, all you have to do is to pay close attention to the sounds around you (Cage and Montague, 1985: 213).

Cage expressed the same idea on several other occasions during the eighties; the earliest located by the present author dates from 1982 (see Cage and Duckworth, 1989: 22; Kostelanetz, 2003: 47). Cage's source for this idea is not clear; nevertheless, the words of the statement appear to have originated in his own paraphrase of Thoreau rather than from any source on India.

On a number of occasions in the late seventies Cage attributed the statement discussed above solely to Thoreau. Thus, in an interview from 1978: 'All we have to do is pay attention to anything... Thoreau had this view – he said that music is continuous – only listening is intermittent' (Cage and White, 1978: 6). He said much the same the following year in the *Preface to "Lecture on the Weather"* (1976: 3). And, speaking to Richard Kostelanetz, probably in the same period:

my notion of music has always been ambient sound anyway, silence. This was Thoreau's notion of music too... Music is continual, he said; it's only listening

which is intermittent. I can read to you from the *Journal* long passages written when he was [around] twenty-one years old... on the subject of silence. He said silence was a sphere, and sounds were bubbles on its surface (Kostelanetz, 1996: 121; see also, Cage, 1981: 140).

Thoreau does not seem to have actually written the words Cage attributed to him: they do not appear in the *Journal* or any other text by Thoreau located by the present author. Instead, the words are likely to be Cage's broad paraphrase of the passage referred to in the interview with Kostelanetz (Thoreau, 1981-: 1:60-4; 2: 112). Whether that passage, or other such passages, can be said to reflect the meaning Cage read in it is an open question – and one that space precludes us going into here. Suffice it to say, some of Thoreau's comments do seem to imply Cage's interpretation – such as his thoughts on the music of what he referred to as the telegraph harp (e.g. *ibid.*: 4:279-80, 336, 6:47-8, 7:216); however, other passages suggest a meaning dependent on idealism – such as when Thoreau described the ever-present silence as 'Those divine sounds which are uttered to our *inward* ear' (*ibid.*: 1:60-1, emphasis added; see also 1:50, 144; 3:323; 5:271-2).

Although Cage had attributed the idea discussed above to Thoreau, from the early eighties onwards Cage began to cite his Thoreauvian paraphrase as a piece of traditional Indian wisdom. In 1982 he told Zwerin:

Thoreau and the Indians and I have said all along that the sounds all around us are equivalent to music. In India they say that music is continuous; it only stops when we turn away and stop paying attention. Thoreau said that silence is like a sphere. Each sound is a bubble on its surface (Kostelanetz, 2003: 47).

The question is why did Cage's paraphrase of an idea in Thoreau's *Journal* turn into what Cage told Duckworth was 'a cliché in Indian thinking'? (Cage and Duckworth, 1989: 22). One possible explanation involves Coomaraswamy; another involves Campbell.

The idea that music has an essential connection to an eternal sound was discussed by Coomaraswamy in *The Dance of Shiva* (1948: 111-2). He suggested that music can embody a constantly occurring divine sound that exists outside of the conditioned world; knowledge of this sound inspires the art of an accomplished musician. These transcendent sounds are known to the musician from within, because it is there that the musician may be inspired by what is truly real. 'For it is the inner reality of things, rather than any transient or partial experience that the singer voices... the *Vishnu Purana* adds, "All songs are a part of Him, who wears a form of sound"' (*ibid.*: 112). This eternal sound, he suggested, is

symbolised in a performance by the drone of a *tambūrā*. In expressing these ideas, Coomaraswamy appears to have been referring in part to the idea of ‘unstruck’ sound (*anāhata nāda*). Called ‘unstruck’ because it is not caused by two things set into vibration – in other words, because it is inaudible – only an advanced *yogī* will be able to perceive it. This eternal sound is thus not the audible sound heard as music and as ambient noise – that can be referred to as *āhata nāda* (struck sound). Nevertheless, the sound that can be perceived by an advanced *yogī* can be linked to music. Some interpretations suggest that the sounds codified in *śruti*, *svara*, and *rāga* imitate or manifest the eternal sound through its presence in the Self. Coomaraswamy’s quotation from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, which mentions the deity ‘who wears a form of sound’, is a reference to these ideas: it refers to the concept of *śabda-brahman* (word/sound-*brahman*) in his interpretation and thus both the Formal essence of language, whether linguistic or musical, and sound as Word, the original creative force (cf. *John* 1:1) (Coomaraswamy, 1936b: 257-63; 1937: 199 f.n. 4, 206; 1938b: 233; 1946b: 140, 144 f.n. 39; 1948: 111-2; W. J. Johnson, 2009: 17, 274; King, 1999b: 48-9; Pesch, 2009: 392, 457). Cage may have been referring to a version of these ideas; nevertheless, although Cage read Coomaraswamy’s book at some point during the 1940s, there is no evidence that he ever reread the text late in life. *The Dance* would thus appear to be an outside contender for Cage’s source for this idea.

Another possibility takes us to Campbell. The mythologist discussed the idea that music was thought to be continuous in India as part of a Jungian exposition of *Finnegans Wake*:

The personal and the collective, then, are the two levels of dream: the peculiar, ever-changing, historical moment associated with this, that or another person; and the eternal archetypal process common to all. When one listens to Indian music, it never has a beginning and it has no end. You know that the music is going on all the time, and the consciousness of the musician just dips down into the music, picks it up with the instrument, reads it again. That’s the way the *Wake* is (J. Campbell, 2004b: 198).

Campbell might be thought to refer to the same ideas discussed by Coomaraswamy; his version may even derive from Coomaraswamy. The passage above was published in a text compiled from Campbell’s lectures and writings on Joyce principally written between 1943 and 1970. Although further research would be necessary to identify a precise date for the

passage quoted, it is plausible that Cage came across the above quotation or that he was told about its contents by a friend or colleague.

Coomaraswamy and Campbell both refer to an interior process (cf. Campbell and Moyers, 1988: 230-1). The sound they refer to is not that which is found in the environment. Cage discusses ‘ambient sound’ and the ‘sounds all around us’; Thoreau, he wrote, could hear this constant music because he kept his ‘eyes and ears... open and empty to see and hear the world’ (1976: 3). Cage therefore appears to have been discussing events perceived by the ears and eyes. Furthermore, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, Cage’s ontology would largely preclude the possibility of a sound or music not experienced via the senses. In Coomaraswamy’s interpretation, the importance of the eternal non-sensory sound derives from precisely what makes it different to ‘sensible’ sound; furthermore, for him, it is the theoretical and practical relationship between Indian art music and the eternal sound that makes music spiritually valuable. In summary: the words Cage attributed to ‘Indian tradition’ were probably his own and originated as a paraphrase of Thoreau. The idea Cage connected to these words did have a tangential link to ideas of sound in Brahmanic thought; however, interpretations within that tradition would generally refer to conventional musical performance rather than Cage’s conflation of that idea with his own concept of silence as manifested in *4’33’’* and other works.

## **5.2 The Renaissance, Tradition, Art and Life, and Museums**

Much has been made of Cage’s reading of two of Coomaraswamy’s books, and his subsequent borrowing of key ideas from them. We have now looked at the phrase ‘art imitates nature’ and the concept of *rasa* and have seen how, in these cases, there was little connection between Coomaraswamy’s writing and Cage’s interpretation of those writings. What of the other ideas Cage is said to have borrowed from Coomaraswamy? These additional borrowings can be categorized into the following interrelated groups: 1) the glory of the medieval and the gothic, and the evil of the Renaissance and the resulting downfall of Europe; 2) the discourse of Tradition (Perennialism); 3) the concept that all people are artists, the value of traditional arts and crafts, and the idea of ‘art and life’; and finally, 4) the negative value of museums. Additional ‘Indian’ ideas in Cage’s writings –

such as the ‘Indian view of the seasons’<sup>123</sup> – do not derive from his reading of Coomaraswamy. After this investigation, Cage’s writing will be returned to with a close reading of the lecture ‘Defense of Satie’ (1948) which will be examined in the light of the findings of previous sections.

### 5.2.1 ‘a Renaissance question’

It was only in the late eighteenth century that the French-language term ‘Renaissance’ (lit. rebirth) came into use to describe the period after the Middle Ages. Although related terms had been used at the time of the period itself to suggest that it was an era that in certain respects had advanced from what had preceded it, the idea that it was a homogenous culture which broke fundamentally with the values of the past was a nineteenth century

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<sup>123</sup> Cage suggested that *The Seasons* (1947) and the *String Quartet in Four Parts* (1949-50) concerned this view (Cage, 1962: 33; Kostelanetz, 2003: 67). The former, Cage (1962: 33) wrote, was ‘an attempt to express the traditional Indian view of the seasons as quiescence (winter), creation (spring), preservation (summer), and destruction (fall)’. In the lecture ‘Indeterminacy’, Cage (1958a: 37) added that ‘quiescence’ was comparable to ‘the “deep sleep” of Indian mental practice’ (see section 3.4.5). Like many of Cage’s borrowings from sources on India, this idea has some basis in Indian Brahmanic cultural traditions but Cage confused key details in his retelling. The earliest Vedic literature recognised three seasons; in later portions of the *Ṛg-Veda* (composed before 1000 BCE), the year was divided into five seasons. By the time of the *Brāhmaṇas* (composed before 500 BCE), references to six seasons were not uncommon. Six seasons was the norm in classical Sanskrit literature, although references are also found to other divisions including seven, twelve, thirteen and twenty-four. Feller (1995: 10-1) lists the six seasons (*ṛtus*) as *vasanta* (spring), *grīṣma/gharma* (summer), *varṣāh* (rainy season/monsoon), *śarat* (autumn), *hemanta* (winter), and *śiśira* (cold season); other variations are also found. Descriptions of the seasons can be found in classical Sanskrit literature of many genres; examples include the epic the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahākāvya*s (‘great epic’ or ‘courtly epic’ poetry) of Kālidāsa (c. fourth-fifth century CE). Of Kālidāsa’s writings on the seasons, the poem *Ṛtusamhāra* (‘The Gathering of the Seasons’) is probably the best known (Feller, 1995: 7-11). On depictions of the character of each season in classical Sanskrit literature see Feller (1995: 109-97, 216). Cage’s interpretations show similarities and differences to the depictions discussed by Feller. While Cage suggests that there are fixed interpretations for each season in the ‘Indian view’, this is largely an essentialization: interpretations differ even in Sanskrit literature. Where Cage got his information from is unclear. Cage’s interpretation does not appear in Coomaraswamy’s writings; neither did Cage suggest he borrowed it from Coomaraswamy. In the case of *The Seasons* and the *String Quartet in Four Parts*, Patterson (1996: 121-2) shows that it is probable Cage added the idea of an Indian connection several years after the composition of the pieces. For example, Cage (1962: 23) originally described the quartet as depicting ‘Summer in France... Fall in America’.

construction (Bullen, 1994: 8, Hankins, 2005: 87-9). The word itself became charged with ideological significance; it came to mean more than a descriptor for a period of time. By the mid nineteenth century its significance was widely disputed: for some the Renaissance was the birth of the modern liberal age, for others it was a time when the Devil governed the world. How the term 'Renaissance' was used – whether the changes that were signified by the term were deemed positive or negative – largely rested on the contemporary ideological beliefs of the person using it. In nineteenth century debates over the value of the period, how the debater reacted to the myth of the period crucially affected how they deconstructed fifteenth and sixteenth century sources and how they went on to characterize and judge the art, architecture, politics, religion, and social values of the period (Bullen, 1994: 1-4, 6-7, 10-1, 79-80).

Far more than Cage seemed to realize, Coomaraswamy's theories were rooted in European discourse. Cage's theories regarding the Renaissance, which probably did not originate with his reading of Coomaraswamy but were influenced by him, are a good example. In this area, Coomaraswamy was largely basing his arguments in discourse originating in nineteenth-century European writings on history and artistic and architectural history. In this area he explicitly took one side, condemning the Renaissance as the start of modernity. Coomaraswamy encountered these theories principally through the writings of Ruskin, and later through reactionary Catholic thought. Ruskin may not have invented Neo-Gothic style, or originated pro-medieval anti-Renaissance discourse, but his setting and development of these theories within an artistic, political, and social framework was amongst the earliest in English writing and proved amongst the most influential of all (Bullen, 1994: 10, 111; Ganim, 2005: 36-40). In recent scholarship, the problematics of the historiographical construction of the idea of the Renaissance have been widely discussed. Those problematics also allow the questioning of the depiction of the period in Coomaraswamy and Cage.

The use of the word 'Renaissance' to describe the early modern period started in the eighteenth century. Voltaire's historiographical methodology and characterization of history – as well as his antipathy to the Middle Ages and its superstitious ways compared with his celebration of the cinquecento and its rationality – provided a foundation, but he did not create the concept of the Renaissance. The construction itself, as well as the use of the term 'Renaissance', largely originated in French architectural history writing published in the early nineteenth century. However, what had been welcomed in the rational idealism

of the enlightenment, found a more ambivalent reception in France after the outbreak of revolutionary fervour. A politically polarized image emerged in Western European discourse, characterized less by the facts of the period itself than the writer's own beliefs; how they situated themselves vis-à-vis romanticism, rationalism, republicanism, royalism, the *ancien régime*, Catholicism, the Reformation, and the relation between Church and state. Created in a dialectical relationship to the medieval, the 'discovery' of the Renaissance was intimately tied to the 'discovery' of the Middle Ages. As historical research codified and constructed the Middle Ages, the idea of the Renaissance expanded into literature of all hues, becoming fixed in the process as a period defined in oppositional terms to the medieval.

The value writers attached to each period often determined their depiction of the values of the periods. Influentially, for example, the idea of the Renaissance became the *bête noir* of the French Gothic Revival and of reactionary Catholic writers more generally. From this angle it was the monster that savaged the glorious Church and society of the Middle Ages; a sudden rush of rediscovered Hellenism had ushered in a revival of paganism that encouraged debauchery and ultimately tore society apart. This view spread into the English Gothic Revival where, as in mainland Europe, it became entangled in the romantic vision of the Medieval (Bullen, 1994: 11, 18-20, 22-4, 29, 33-4, 36, 59-73, 76-89, 99, 101-4, 244, 299).

In English language writing, Ruskin was among the most influential of early codifiers of the period. The concept of the Renaissance had been slow to spread in Britain, partly because of the explicitly Catholic dimension of much of the writing on the subject. However, once such ideas started to be adapted ecumenically, the characterization of the period gained ground. While English Gothic Revival architect A. W. N. Pugin had already disseminated elements of the French Catholic view of the period in his writings, his was an explicitly Catholic view launched on England during a fraught moment in Protestant-Catholic relations. Ruskin's view was similar to Pugin's, although Ruskin at the time detested anyone mentioning that similarity. Ruskin taught a highly negative version of the myth, a Protestant Tory adaptation of the depiction as found in French architectural and art literature<sup>124</sup> (Bullen, 1994: 11, 89-91, 95, 109-12, 114-6, 118-21, 127-8, 145, 149-50, 188; Hill, 2007: 458-9; Hilton, 1985: 149-50).

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<sup>124</sup> As a Protestant from an Evangelical background, at least for much of his life, Ruskin took a different stance vis-à-vis the Reformation. He saw the Reformation as a symbol of Renaissance evil, but after the

Ruskin's depiction of the period was more sweeping than Pugin's. Peculiarly his own, his depiction was influenced by earlier writers on art and architecture, Carlyle's critique of the modern age, and romantic idealism. While touring in Italy after the first volume of *Modern Painters* had been published, he had fallen in love with early Italian art (e.g. Giotto, Fra Angelico); however, when faced with the works of Raphael and Michelangelo he saw less that appealed to him. He came to feel the same way about the architecture of the respective periods, developing a profound moral distaste for the later period. Partly as the result of his own personal crises, he came to see the elements of style that appalled him as a reflection of the values of the society and culture that produced it (though he was forced to contradict himself in order to explain his love of the sixteenth century Tintoretto<sup>125</sup>).

Ruskin brought the Renaissance centre stage in *The Stones of Venice* (1851-3), devoting the whole of the third volume of his lengthy work to the rot that spread across the city. It was a break so decisive it could be dated to a single day, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1418: 'instant degradation followed in every direction'. The result: 'Christianity and morality, courage, and intellect, and art all crumbling together in one wreck... the fall of Italy, the revolution in France, and the condition of art in England' (Ruskin, 1867: 1:4, 23). His sweeping, damning characterization of the Renaissance as a modern fall that destroyed what was great in European culture and society popularized the term with English readers and was significant in shaping views of the period (Bullen, 1994: 122-4, 126, 128-9, 141-2, 146-7, 149-53).

Although Coomaraswamy's characterization of the Renaissance was chiefly influenced by Ruskin, he would not have been unaware or unaffected by influential

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Catholic Church fell into degradation it was a necessary one: 'The Protestant kept the religion, but cast aside the heresies of Rome, and with them her arts'; this last 'cramped his intellect in refusing to it one of its noblest exercises' (Ruskin, 1867: 1:22).

<sup>125</sup> In 1858 Ruskin found the need to renegotiate his views on the period. He had long contradicted himself in damning all Renaissance art yet finding things to like in selected artists of the period. Now he allowed himself to openly praise Michelangelo, Tintoretto, Titian, and Veronese and even their freedoms. Nevertheless, his willingness to contradict himself wilfully allowed him to continue to paint the period in dark shades while simultaneously praising certain Renaissance artists. In his last years he returned to the more negative views he had held in his younger days. Coomaraswamy could easily ignore these elements of Ruskin's thought and confine himself to echoing Ruskin's darkest pronouncements on the subject (Bullen, 1994: 14, 256, 259-61; Hilton, 1985: 254-6, 274; Ruskin 1871-84: 7:100-7, 109).

writings on the period published in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. Whereas Chateaubriand and, later, Victor Hugo portrayed the Renaissance largely negatively, for the French historian Jules Michelet (1798-1874), a republican writing before and after the 1848 revolution, the Renaissance had triumphantly given birth to republican ideals and the glories of the *modern* world. Indeed, according to Michelet it had even started in France. Again, contemporary politics and dialectical reasoning trumped historical accuracy. The reactionary view of the Renaissance became equally strident to keep pace. The character of the Renaissance became a battleground of mounting hyperbole fought over between republicans and Catholic conservatives. As Bullen (1994: 11) wrote of the period: 'For the Church party [the Renaissance] appeared to be an aggressively secular movement and the embodiment of religious infidelity; to the secular wing it epitomized man's successful and heroic struggle against repressive dogmatism'. It was rhetoric with a long legacy. Ultimately, however, the positive depiction of Michelet gained more credence than the negative portrayal (Brotton, 2005: 9-10, 38-9; Bullen, 1994: 156-9, 162-6, 169-70, 172, 181-2).

Michelet's theories were largely eclipsed in the later nineteenth century, yet his characterization of the Renaissance did not disappear; instead, they fed into the theories of the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818-97) whose key work *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* was published in 1860. The work's influence was widespread from the 1870s; first published in English in 1878 it continued to hold its place as the defining text on the period until well into the twentieth century. Identifying the Renaissance as chiefly an Italian rather than French phenomenon, Burckhardt similarly contrasted the advances of the period with the primitiveness of the Middle Ages. Like Ruskin and earlier writers, he too depicted the Renaissance as a decisive break between medieval and modern: nothing less than a fundamental change in consciousness. 'In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness – that which was turned within as that which was turned without – lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion and childish prepossession', could be said to typify his perspective (Burckhardt, 1990: 98). Burckhardt saw the spirit of the Renaissance as characterized by the birth of the modern individual, the revival of Hellenic culture, the exploration of new territories, geographically, scientifically, and in the world of the inner human, and the questioning of decadent religious authority. Indeed, after Burckhardt the changed relationship between self and society, and self and church, became a central feature of many histories of the period.

His has often been read as an endorsement of the European enlightenment worldview, even if, as Woolfson (2005b: 15-9) points out, the text itself is more circumspect about its claims, and negative about the effects of modernity, than is often thought.

Ruskin's negative depiction of the Renaissance was not the only opinion on the period found in nineteenth and early twentieth century English literature. It was, however, the one associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement and had been further extended by Morris, albeit along socialist lines. Furthermore, there were other reasons why an anti-colonial nationalist such as Coomaraswamy might stand so firmly with the negative camp. Coinciding with significant expansion of European colonialism, the view of the Renaissance ushered in by Burckhardt contained a dangerous streak of cultural supremacism. It helped cement the idea of European civilization (*Kultur*), explaining why Europe had risen above the rest of the world, and, concomitantly, why it was right that it should guide (or rule and exploit) those 'less fortunate' than itself. In that sense, it was little wonder that affirmative Orientalists like Coomaraswamy would look to the negative portrayals of the Renaissance and condemn what had been portrayed as the effects of humanism. Nevertheless, both sides relied on significant distortions; each reified what amounted to a grossly simplified myth (Black, 2005: 97-8; Brotton, 2005: 11-3; Bullen, 1994: 12-3, 156-7; Hankins, 2005: 73-4; Woolfson, 2005b: 9-17, 20-1).

Coomaraswamy largely imagined Renaissance Europe as homogenous, taking no account of regional or temporal differences. Although Coomaraswamy categorized the Renaissance as 'death' rather than 'rebirth', in basic conception he would not have challenged the depiction of the period as outlined by Michelet or Burckhardt. And herein lies the problem. The fact that many of Burckhardt's assertions are now questioned means the same questions have to be asked of Coomaraswamy. Was individuality really unknown before the Renaissance?<sup>126</sup> Was Renaissance thought really a war against religion? Was it directed only by materialism, liberalism, secular politics, and irreligious feeling? Is it even possible to discuss the Renaissance as one largely unchanging homogenous spirit? Where the nineteenth century answer had often been decisively yes, the later twentieth century answer was to problematize this view and point to the numerous discrepancies and ties to earlier thinking that had to be overlooked to come to that conclusion. Thus, even some later academics sympathetic to perennialism viewed the Renaissance very differently to Coomaraswamy. Paul Oskar Kristeller, for example, argued that Renaissance Platonism

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<sup>126</sup> On constructions of Renaissance individualism see Martin (2004).

continued the dissemination of perennial philosophy. The Renaissance was not the sudden, decisive break from the medieval as was imagined in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries. By the academic standards of the present time not only is Coomaraswamy's vagueness of dating questionable, but so are his sweeping generalizations and his wholesale belief in the reality of the Renaissance as imagined in the nineteenth century. By the second half of the twentieth century, such views of the Renaissance were being challenged in European and American academia. Coomaraswamy's view of the Renaissance, then, was rooted in late nineteenth century conceptions. Because Cage's view of the Renaissance was indebted to the same conceptions, he replicated the same problematic characterizations (Black, 2005: 98-100, 102; Brotton, 2005: 9; Bullen, 1994: 104; Hankins, 2005: 75-80, 82, 89-90; Martin, 2005: 193-6, 198, 200, 203-7; Najemy, 2005: 270-1, 274, 279-81, 288-9; Woolfson, 2005b: 9).

The recent questioning of the nineteenth and twentieth century historiography of the Renaissance sharply reveals the ideological dimension of Coomaraswamy's thought. Much of Coomaraswamy's thought *needed* the European/American modern to stand in dialectical relationship to the ancient, medieval, and 'Oriental' in order for his theory of Tradition to have meaning and authority<sup>127</sup>. Nevertheless, the European narrative of its own greatness was as propagandistic and debateable as Coomaraswamy's aristocratic and casteist elitism. Coomaraswamy's view that events in the period 1400-1600 led to the crimes against humanity perpetrated by later European colonial regimes is undeniable and should not be avoided. But neither should such activities be seen as unique or unknown in previous times or other places. Those events too have earlier roots and global parallels, albeit on a lesser scale. Little more than positive-Renaissance discourse inverted, Coomaraswamy's assertions are equally questionable.

Neither is the fact that Coomaraswamy linked European medieval culture to Asian culture as unprecedented as it might appear. As many of his conceptions of Asia were grounded in Orientalist discourse – itself dialectical to European conceptions of self – there were already strong links between the depiction of medieval/modern and Orient/Occident.

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<sup>127</sup> As Ganim (2005) showed, medievalism and Orientalism are remarkably intertwined. In his writings, Coomaraswamy tended to ignore the ambivalent relationship between ideas of the medieval and Oriental in Ruskin and Others. Although it was not unusual in the later nineteenth century to view medieval Europe in relation to Islamic, Indian or 'Oriental' culture and style, Coomaraswamy's position that those cultures and styles were equivalent was less common in either the late nineteenth-century or the period he was writing in.

Whether viewed in positive or negative terms, the Oriental and the medieval were often discussed in similar terms and viewed in the same light – sometimes literally so, as in the case of the Great Exhibition of 1851 at the Crystal Palace where the Indian Court and the Medieval Court (which housed chiefly Gothic Revival pieces including works by Pugin) were located in the same area of the building alongside other non-European displays (Ganim, 2005: 99; Hill, 2007: 454, 464). The supposed character of the Medieval and the Orient were both constructed dialectically. Affirmative Orientalism therefore affirmed many of the social, religious and political values similarly ascribed to the Middle Ages. Based on constructions widely disseminated in the sources Coomaraswamy grounded his theories in, it was logical for him to posit the identical nature of the Orient and the medieval in all areas and situate the Renaissance as the break that divided them from the modern. The postcolonial deconstruction of the Orientalist dialectic, part of extensive research on Indian and Asian history infinitely more plural and multifaceted than earlier depictions, challenges Coomaraswamy's dialectic of Traditional and modern as thoroughly as do recent studies of the early modern period.

Coomaraswamy, like Ruskin, was 'a violent Tory of the old school' (Ruskin, 1871-84: 1:10:2). He may have agreed with Morris on many matters, but, with the exception of their attitude to colonialism and cultures and societies outside of Europe, politically and socially Coomaraswamy was often closer to the least progressive aspects of Ruskin's thought<sup>128</sup>. Coomaraswamy followed Ruskin in blaming the Renaissance for a perceived decline in architecture, art, society, religion, and politics. In Coomaraswamy's Ruskin-inspired fantasy of the medieval, a hierarchical society was ruled over by saintly kings. Guided by God and his ministering servants on earth the benevolent monarchs and lords paternalistically ensured the welfare of all beneath them. Labourers were happy; artists and craftsman were satisfied. Medieval society was a perfect harmonious system that had been cast aside when religious faith declined after the rediscovery of Hellenic thought. Like Ruskin, Coomaraswamy believed that the return to classicism led to false pride, individualism, mechanism (philosophical and industrial), and the lust for power and wealth. Artists had become blind to idealism and had resorted to the triviality of realism instead. Art and architecture were separated from each other and became industry and aestheticism.

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<sup>128</sup> On Ruskin and Morris in relation to colonial India and the early Indian Nationalist movement see Brantlinger (1996: 466-85). Ruskin's sometimes contradictory social and economic arguments found supporters among Tories and socialists; on Ruskin's political and social legacy see Eagles (2011).

The fine arts became elevated above the applied arts. Before the Renaissance, all artists (in the widest sense of the word) had worked anonymously for the glory of God and there had been no enmity between the highest and lowest sections of society: all had accepted their God-given lot. After the Renaissance, artists sought personal glory; labourers were set against employers because employers wanted to capitalize on their wealth; labourers followed and became greedy too; working people fell to agitating for money, rights, and votes. The artistry of the craftsman was lost from everyday life. Art became separate from life. Eyes became blinded to the reality of the soul. All this was the result of the defeat of the gothic by what Ruskin called the 'evil spirit of the Renaissance' (Bullen, 1994: 148-9, 153; Coomaraswamy, 1909: 46; 1910a: 23-5, 27-8, 59-60, 91-2; 1912: 48, 138-40; 1913: v, 120; 1934a: 3-4; 1943: 39-40, 102, 111; 1946a: 16-7, 39, 43-4; 1946b: 154-5, 220-22; 1947a: 66; 1948: 131-2; 1956: vi, 19, 27-8, 30, 49; 1957: 1; Morris, 1969: 54-5; Ruskin, 1851: 27; 1867: 1:22-4, 30-4, 2:163-4, 3:14, 35, 60, 63, 110-1, 166; 1871-84: 1:1:4-5, 1:9:6-7, 1:10:8-9; 2:14:6-7, 2:17:4-5; 4:170-1; 5:131-2, 248; 6: 218, 345-9, 383; 7:16-9, 158-61, 8:252-3, 254-5).

Both Ruskin and Coomaraswamy wanted to re-enchant art and society with the brush of an angel's wing. Both sought to reinstruct society to show deference to the proper authorities. The influence of Ruskin and Morris is particularly clear in Coomaraswamy's early writing, as the following excerpt from his 1910 *Essays in National Idealism* shows:

when we come back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with the glorious work of the imagers at Chartres, the sweet ivory Madonnas, the crisp and prickly borders of the manuscripts, and the Gothic rose bequeathed to later times as the symbol of the idealism of the Middle Ages, then at last we find an art that expresses or endeavours to express something of that which we too desire to say. Nothing is more remarkable than the 'Gothicness' and, in Ruskin's sense, the 'Christianity' of Oriental art. From this point of view, indeed, I should like to classify Gothic, Egyptian, Indian, and Chinese art as Christian, and Greek, Roman, Renaissance, and modern European as pagan, or to use more general terms, as religious and materialistic respectively (1910a: 92).

Coomaraswamy essentially kept to this dialectic in his later writing, although it was swaddled in more conventionally academic and theological garb. In the thirties and forties Coomaraswamy filled out his theory of Traditional art with the kind of closely argued religious and philosophical exegesis that had largely evaded Ruskin. Even so, the

reactionary romanticism of Coomaraswamy's Ruskin- and Morris-inspired medievalism was still amply to be found.

Ruskin's arguments seem to have led Coomaraswamy to essentially connect morality and art; as in Ruskin's writings, the values of a society are deemed to be characterized by its art. Thus Renaissance Italian society was debauched, and so was its art. In surveying the modern world, Coomaraswamy saw only evils and viewed its art in that light. Coomaraswamy came to a vision of future happiness by looking back to the medieval, before individualism, materialism, and equalitarianism had allowed democracy to destroy the beauty of the world. He yearned for

a form of society in which, in the words of St. Augustine, 'everyone has his divinely coordinated place, and his security, and honour, and content therein; and no one is envious of another's high estate, and reverence, and happiness; where God is sought, and is found, and is magnified in everything' (Coomaraswamy, 1946a: 44-5).

What Coomaraswamy detested most was that the Renaissance broke apart what he thought had been a unanimous culture. The Renaissance fractured religion and society into splinters. The gothic symbolized the undivided nature of the pre-modern to Coomaraswamy as surely as it did to the Oxford Movement in England or the Catholic Revival in France (Ganim, 2005: 37-9). Thus, the taste for the medieval in Coomaraswamy was about much more than just artistic principles. Throughout his later writing, when he talked of the medieval, the gothic, or the Renaissance, it was in this sense and with these connotations. It was this idea that Cage picked up on and reproduced.

Cage did not encounter these theories through Ruskin, but he had come across such thought before he read Coomaraswamy. The legacy of Ruskin and Morris ran through several circles Cage moved in during the thirties<sup>129</sup>. In particular he would have encountered threads of these themes in the ideas of the Bauhaus, transmitted to him through material he read as a young man as well as through social and professional contacts he made in the thirties and early forties (see chapter one; Ganim, 2005: 38-9). In the guise Cage came across these ideas, the theories and rhetoric of romantic medievalism had morphed and developed to fit with different applications; thus, Cage's initial encounter with such ideas may have been only vaguely connected to the legacies of Ruskin or Morris.

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<sup>129</sup> See Cianci and Nicholls, *Ruskin and Modernism* (2001); also see Pevsner (1960), however cf. Leoni (2001: 194-7, 207).

Nevertheless, it did introduce him to threads of these ideas. For example, the journal *transition* had run an article on Gertrude Stein which had asked with baffling modernist-Primitivist logic: ‘Does no one but Miss Stein realize that to be abstract, mathematical, thematic, anti-Hellenic, anti-Renaissancist, anti-Romantic, we must be barbaric?’ (Riding, 1927: 157; see also Cowell, 1933).

In one of his first articles, 1935’s ‘Counterpoint’, Cage had used the gothic as an ideal of ‘common belief, selflessness, and technical mastery’ (Cage, 1935: 44). That idea stayed with him: the ideal of universal and unanimous artistic values founded in use and craft. Therefore, as was observed previously, when Cage encountered Coomaraswamy’s reactionary take on the Tory elitism of Ruskin and the romantic socialism of Morris, he had already situated several of Coomaraswamy’s major themes within progressive discourse of the thirties and forties and could more easily ignore the reactionary implications of Coomaraswamy’s writings. What should be noted is how many of the ideas that Cage borrowed from Coomaraswamy can be traced back to Ruskin and Morris. Cage studies has tended to typecast Coomaraswamy as Asian and as a purveyor of Asian traditions; in fact, his multicultural background was reflected in the content of his writings. Studies of Cage’s European influences up until the fifties should also consider Coomaraswamy and many of his key ideas to be within their purview.

In the opening pages of *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, Coomaraswamy impressed on his readers the need to remember that European art was of two very different kinds. The first, the traditional, was ‘Christian and scholastic’, the second was ‘post-Renaissance and personal’ (1934a: 3-4). The former art held almost identical values to the art of Asia. ‘Asia has remained herself’, Coomaraswamy wrote, ‘Europe’ – by which he meant the ‘west’ in general – had been changed by false values originating in the Renaissance. Cage leapt on these words. Coomaraswamy’s theory formed the context for Cage’s first mention of him. In ‘The East in the West’ (1946: 24) Cage suggested that ‘[t]here is, I believe, a similarity also between Western medieval music and Oriental. In other fields than music, Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has discussed such a relation’ (see also Cage, 1949a: 63). Cage expanded on this theme, and introduced more ideas from Coomaraswamy, two years later in the lecture ‘Defense of Satie’. The fundamentals of music had been rediscovered by Satie and Webern, Cage argued; but these values had also been ‘evident to some musicians in our Middle Ages, and to all musicians at all times (except those whom we are currently in the process of spoiling) in the Orient’ (Cage,

1948b: 81). Cage's breezy lassoing of the music-making of millions of people over thousands of years onto his programme was almost certainly inspired by similar pronouncements in Coomaraswamy's writing, alongside, perhaps, the primitivism, East-West dialectics and historical musicology of Cowell's teachings (for example, Cowell, 1921: 271-88; 1927: 290-1; see also 1933: 299-307). This came to be his standpoint on the issue.

In the early sixties Cage told Calvin Tomkins (1965: 99) that he had come to see 'that all art before the Renaissance, both Oriental and Western, had shared this same basis, that Oriental art had continued to do so right along, and that the Renaissance idea of self-expressive art was therefore heretical'. The implication was that his own art had eschewed the heresy and was based in truer goals. In 'Defense of Satie' he had gone into this in more detail. However, in doing so he once again revealed how little he understood of those goals as they had been outlined by Coomaraswamy:

harmonic structure in music arises as Western materialism arises, disintegrates at the time that materialism comes to be questioned, and... the solution of rhythmic structure, traditional to the Orient, is arrived at with us just at the time that we profoundly sense our need for that other tradition of the Orient: peace of mind, self-knowledge (Cage, 1948b: 84).

At the time Cage was writing it would not have been unusual to date the start of the development of tonal harmony to the late sixteenth century (and thus the end of the Renaissance) and to see such developments as a complete break with earlier compositional techniques rather than a development of them (Dahlhaus, 1980: 176, 179; Hankins, 2005: 89). Cowell certainly did in 1927 (p.291): he situated Palestrina (1525/6-94) at the start of the tradition. Thus the time when 'Western materialism arises' clearly refers to the Renaissance. In this matter Cage and Coomaraswamy were in agreement. However, Cage soon diverged from anything said by Coomaraswamy through discussing the time when materialism was 'questioned'. By this he presumably intended to indicate that the rise of modernism in music had been accompanied by a questioning of materialism.

Coomaraswamy had frequently lamented the rise of materialism after the Renaissance, including in those of his books read by Cage, but he had used the term in its philosophical sense, not in the more popular sense used by Cage<sup>130</sup> (e.g. Coomaraswamy, 1934a: 196;

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<sup>130</sup> What Cage meant by 'materialism' is more open-ended. In the Vassar College lecture Cage labelled as 'materialistic nonsense' things such as the concept of masterpieces, the desire for large audiences, the

1948: 46-7, 164-5). By ‘materialism’, Coomaraswamy meant the theory that matter is all; in this sense, as we have seen, Cage *was* a materialist. Cage’s Renaissance thus stood in a long line of characterizations of the period based on utilizing the period to stand for whatever was wanted of it. Adopting Coomaraswamy’s dialectic of medieval and Orient opposed to modern Europe, Cage simply attributed to the Renaissance everything he disliked about nineteenth- and twentieth-century European and American art and society and attributed its opposite to the medieval/Orient. It was the founding basis for his own myth of the European Other; this myth became central to his theories and, indeed, to his influence.

Cage continued to frame his encounter with his ‘Oriental’ sources and his relationship to his European colleagues in this light. On occasion Cage used ‘Renaissance’ as a derogatory term. Examples of this usage can be found from the late forties until the early seventies, the majority appearing in the sixties (from the late sixties onwards he tended to use the term ‘German’ instead). Critics who accused Satie of being unimportant because he mostly wrote short works were peddling ‘post-Renaissance art-propaganda’ (Cage, 1950: 90). He dismissed jazz because ‘We are not thinking in a Renaissance way any more’ (Cage and Zwerin, 1966: 164). Criticizing an Allan Kaprow happening in 1965, Cage opined that the artist was doing ‘something like a Renaissance work – namely, the expression of an idea or feeling that an individual has’ (Kostelanetz, 2003: 118)<sup>131</sup>.

Also in 1965, this time defending his refusal to define things thereby keeping them open to all meanings, Cage stated that ‘The whole desire for definitions has to do with the Renaissance in which we demanded clarity and got it’ (Cage, Kirby, and Schechner, 1965: 70). In this context, Cage’s idea of ‘definitions’ included structure, symbolism, and clear communication – all things Coomaraswamy had stated were essential aspects of medieval and Asian art. Elsewhere Cage linked the Renaissance with other concepts that went

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development of aesthetics and art-appreciation, the fetish for genius and self-expression, and composers who are inspired by ‘the rising crescendo of modern industrialism’ (Cage, 1948a: 42-3). This would suggest the sense of the popular modern use of the term: life lived for material gain. He possibly also meant art made for material gain rather than for the benefit of the human spirit; art which valued the material side of the medium over the spiritual; or, more religiously, the concentration on material value rather than spiritual value (cf. Cage, 1950; 1951). Either way he did not mean the loss of belief in immaterial reality, which is what Coomaraswamy argued was the root cause of the features Cage lamented and was what he meant when he critiqued materialism.

<sup>131</sup> See also: Cage and Feldman, 1993: 159; Cage, Kirby, and Schechner, 1965: 51; Kostelanetz, 2003: 25

fundamentally against Coomaraswamy's meaning. In some cases this threatened to make Cage's argument meaningless. For example, in 1967 Cage wrote:

in the Renaissance the notion was that an artist had to have something to say and that he accepted these limitations which were in turn understood and socially accepted in society and that through them he said something that if you listened or looked, you had to try to get out what it was he had in mind, not at all what you might have had in mind, that you could be, in looking or listening, wrong, and that you should go on until you were right. Well, I think things are changing now... What I would like is that we get to the point of doing our own thinking, our own experiencing, our own seeing, our own listening (Cage, 1967c: 68).

In other words, Cage wanted the freedom to experience free of conventions, pre-conceptions, external control, and authoritative readings and thought that the Renaissance was the origin of such things. By extension, he argued from the late sixties onwards, such freedoms could be linked to freedom from government, to autonomy of action and (self-disciplined) anarchism. The idea that those freedoms might be considered desirable, Coomaraswamy argued, was a product of the Renaissance (cf. Charles, 1991: 257). As we have seen, Coomaraswamy argued that traditionally it was realized that the individual self is an illusion. 'To "think for oneself" is always to think of oneself; what is called "freethought" is therefore the natural expression of a humanistic philosophy', he argued (Coomaraswamy, 1943: 38). It is undeniable that Cage was a freethinker, albeit one with a contradictorily ambivalent relationship to self-expression. In the present author's opinion, the freedom of Cage's thought was one of his most valuable qualities. In Coomaraswamy's terms, it made Cage a child of the Renaissance.

Coomaraswamy's suggestion that the desire to negotiate forms of dominance, whether stemming from government, religion, patriarchy, or artistic conventions, was purely a 'western' construct that was unknown before the Renaissance is untenable. Yet, as will be argued in the next chapter, because Cage had adopted a tripartite view of the world's cultures informed by the Orientalist dialectic, the forms of dominance found in Europe must, by this logic, not be features of modern Europe's Other. Being interviewed by Kostelanetz in 1970, Cage responded to a question: 'That's a European question, you know, not an American question, this whole thing of hierarchy... it took us ages, relatively speaking, to get out of that European thing'; and a little later: 'your comment is a linear

one, which is a Renaissance question, which is a European question' (Cage and Kostelanetz, 1970: 12, 25).

Did Cage really believe that hierarchy was exclusive to post-Renaissance Europe? In at least one sense he seemed to. Cage's grasp of the ideological implications of Coomaraswamy's espousal of the medieval and its way of life was shaky. The clearest example of this occurred in a 1967 interview-conversation with Feldman. The context for Cage's comment was not a text by Coomaraswamy, but Robert L. Heilbroner's *The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times and Ideas of the Great Economic Thinkers* (third edition, 1967) – a popular book on economics that Cage was reading at the time of the interview. Near the start of the book, Heilbroner stated that a man was bound to the occupation of his father in ancient Egypt, and of his caste in India (1967: 17). Several pages later, in more detail, he discussed medieval European feudalism. After discussing the role of a nobleman, he moved on to the situation for labour. In the towns, an apprentice was bound to a master; in the country, a serf was bound to the estate of a lord:

he baked at the lord's oven and ground at the lord's mill, tilled the lord's fields and served his lord in war, but he was rarely if ever paid for any of his services: these were his *duties* as a serf, not the 'labor' of a freely contracting agent (Heilbroner, 1967: 25).

With such limited markets, the necessity for theories of political economy was absent; 'society ran by custom and tradition' (1967: 26). It would seem unlikely that, without his former readings of Coomaraswamy, Cage would have reacted to Heilbroner's book as he did. Cage told Feldman that he had not realized

that spending your life trying to gain something is a very recent, modern way of spending one's life. That formerly one did things without being paid for them, simply because he was born into that situation – very much as we've spent out lives with music... through some kind of curious set of circumstances, we got involved with music, almost as though it weren't our fault. And we weren't paid for it. But that didn't disturb us... that way of living... was characteristic of life in the Middle Ages and apparently is going to become characteristic again<sup>132</sup> (Cage and Feldman, 1993: 159, 161).

Suffice it to say, a serf indentured to a lord is unlikely to have seen much similarity between their position and the freedoms of employment and movement enjoyed by Cage. It

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<sup>132</sup> Cage did not gain the idea that society would return to feudalism in the future from Heilbroner's book.

seems likely that Cage did not really understand the implications of what he was suggesting here: little else Cage said would lead one to suspect he was looking forward to a return to the inviolable hierarchical stratification of society! In fact, quite the opposite. Yet, having absorbed the veneration of traditional Asian and European pre-Renaissance culture and society from Coomaraswamy, Cage was apt to draw such parallels.

It could be argued that in appropriating such views from Coomaraswamy, Cage fundamentally changed the meaning of the original. Such a view might argue that Cage took conservative pessimism and transformed it into liberal hope. Yet if that is the case, why are so many traces of reactionary attitudes left intact in Cage's theories? Why was he so keen to banish individual self-expression? Why did he want to silence populist music? Why did he want to banish dissent with the belief that every day is a good day? Was this all down to his religious beliefs? Possibly, but we have shown how compromised by ideology Coomaraswamy's texts were, and furthermore how little Cage believed in Coomaraswamy's beliefs. We might put it all down to Zen. But in recent studies has not Zen been also shown to have been intimately connected with authoritarianism and the silencing of dissent, even in the twentieth century?<sup>133</sup> All these issues become particularly problematic in relation to the intersection of Cage's theory of silence with his distaste for self-expression. This issue cannot be dealt with in any detail here. What should be noted in the present instance, is how compromised by ideology the negative (and positive) historiography of the Renaissance was and how simplistic Cage's references to that period were. Beyond that it should be pondered why Cage was attracted to that discourse.

The idea that Cage's art was oppositional to the ideals of the Renaissance and its legacy found its way into the first round of critical writings on Cage. The complexity of Cage's relation to European and American art history was overlooked becoming simplified into a myth that had little foundation beyond Cage's words and primitivist-modernist discourse. Cage's supposed knowledge of 'Oriental philosophy' gave authority to those words. Tomkins (1965: 73) declared that Cage proposed 'the complete, revolutionary overthrow of the most basic assumptions of Western art since the Renaissance'. In an influential essay, Leonard Meyer (1967) asked if Cage and his colleagues in the avant-garde heralded 'The End of the Renaissance?' Two years later, Barbara Rose (1969: 188) wrote: 'When [Cage] refused to impose a set meaning to content, but left interpretation open to the psychology and experiences of the individual viewer, he destroyed the symbolic

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<sup>133</sup> For example, Heine, 2008; Ives, 2009; Victoria, 2003; 2006.

and metaphoric basis on which art since the Renaissance has rested'. In related fashion, Wilfrid Mellers (1967) suggested that Cage's art was all part of a modernist overthrow of Renaissance artistic values which had been inspired by or was analogous to 'Eastern' and pre-Renaissance philosophical and artistic principles (see especially Mellers, 1967: 1-2, 7-9, 136-9). It was, he argued with primitivist undertones, *Caliban Reborn*. The Shakespearian motif suggests that the caricatured primitive cannibal/Carib Other exploited by the power/knowledge of the colonialist Renaissance magus had finally been set free to release modern art from its own shackles. Nevertheless, the construction of the nature of that Other – and the time from when that construction originates – should make us question the reality of the shackles, the problematics of their supposed release, and the implication that Caliban's agency could and should have been appropriated by the major European and American modernists for their own benefit (see Said, 1993: 256-8; Scott, 2000: 14). For a while such contentions held court in Cageian discourse. However, texts on Cage from the 1990s onwards have generally been careful to avoid such sweeping generalizations. Hints of it still appear on occasion, however (for example: Charles, 1991: 257; Duckworth, 1995: 4; Lewallen, 2001: 242).

In one sense, Tomkins was right – Cage did propose the overthrow of Renaissance art. Nevertheless, just because he proposed it does not mean that that is what happened. In terms of Coomaraswamy's theories, Cage was not proposing the overthrow of post-Renaissance art, but the overthrow of all traditional art whether European or Asian. For Coomaraswamy, the strategies of American and European modernists were the logical result of processes and attitudes to art that originated in the Renaissance; by that standard, Cage and his colleagues were not oppositional to the Renaissance but marked its triumph. Nevertheless, as William Brooks (1993) pointed out in relation to Meyer (1967), the relationship to history of both Cage and Coomaraswamy was considerably more complicated than it appeared. That relationship was a tangled web involving colonialism, anti-colonialist nationalism, Orientalism, religious reformers and traditionalists, authoritarians and liberals, several hundred years of inter-cultural interpretations, and the complexities of the negotiation of modernity in differing cultures.

### **5.2.2 'the traditional reason...'**

In religious traditions as in societies, as Hobsbawm and Ranger's famous 1983 collection illustrated, tradition and invention have frequently formed a fecund partnership. For

Coomaraswamy, 'tradition' was the opposite of invention and development. Traditionalism taught of one ancient and inviolate belief known as *philosophia perennis* or Perennial Philosophy (see section 2.6 above). As shown in section 2.7, in the thought of Coomaraswamy and Guénon this long running European narrative of the nature of true knowledge became a reactionary ideology taken to esoteric, literally antediluvian extremes. In this programme, no term was more important than 'Tradition'. It was the marker of the truth of something, the stamp of its orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the level of Coomaraswamy's involvement in shaping the meaning of the doctrines he outlined should be recognized: through his syncreticism, he too was an inventor of tradition. Combining the discourse of ancient theology/perennial philosophy with the linked dialectics of Orient/Occident and medieval/modern, he believed he could discern one true metaphysic and one true social way. After reading Coomaraswamy, the term 'tradition' began to appear on a fairly regular basis in Cage's writings and talks. It provided the ground on which he built his increasingly universalist theories on music and, from the late sixties, society.

Long before encountering Coomaraswamy's ideas, Cage had developed a nostalgic view of an artistic culture with unanimous values. Cage found himself attracted to the gothic during the 1920s. This early attraction to medieval culture led him to a romanticized almost Ruskinian belief in the era. It is very possible that during his study of gothic architecture while in Paris in the late twenties, depending on his language skills at the time, Cage had either read French works on architectural history that were grounded in nineteenth century negative views of the Renaissance, had encountered Ruskin's ideas reproduced in other publications, or even had read Ruskin himself (Cage, 1948a: 28; Cage and Retallack, 1996: 83-4). In his 1935 article 'Counterpoint' Cage outlined his desire for the future of music referencing this interest:

I sincerely express the hope that all this conglomeration of individuals... will disappear; and that a period will approach by way of common belief, selflessness, and technical mastery that will be a period of Music and not of Musicians, just as during the four centuries of Gothic, there was Architecture and not Architects (1935: 44).

In the late thirties and early forties Cage aligned himself with a Futurist agenda that seemed to have little use for the past (e.g. Cage, 1940: 3-6). However, the end of his marriage and the concomitant realization that the meaning of his music was indecipherable to listeners because composers were all speaking their own individual languages led Cage to the edge

of breakdown. It was at this point that he found new hope via Campbell's universalist mythology and Coomaraswamy's theories of unanimous Tradition.

The new influences he encountered during the mid forties seem to have led Cage to take a step back towards his earlier interests (Cage, 1948a: 42-3). In 'Defense of Satie' (1948) he returned to discussing the Gothic:

we lament what we call the gulf between artist and society, between artist and artist, and we praise... the unanimity of opinion out of which arose a Gothic cathedral... We admire from a lonely distance that art which is not private in character but is characteristic of a group of people and the fact that they were in agreement (1948b: 78).

In the last section of the present chapter we shall look at this speech in more detail and see how Cage tried to balance his ultra-modernist direction with the desire for the unanimity of tradition. For now, we shall investigate how Cage and Coomaraswamy used the idea of 'tradition'.

Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Coomaraswamy's *The Dance of Shiva* and *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, Jung's *The Integration of the Personality*, and Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy* were all, to varying degrees, connected by perennialism. They shared a belief in a unanimous and eternal ground of human spirituality, society, and psyche. Furthermore, again to varying degrees, each relied on a romantic, essentializing view of 'the Orient' and esoteric and medieval European thought. Central to these visions was a nostalgia for a society where all members were in agreement as to belief, social structure, and culture. The distinctly modern nostalgia evinced in these works found a minor echo in Cage's thought, as quoted above. It is against this background that Cage's interest in 'the Orient' grew and his use of the term 'tradition' should be seen.

If Cage's later recollections are to be believed, it was Coomaraswamy's idea that all religions and cultures were based in the same tradition that led Cage to the opinion that 'Eastern thought was no less admissible for a Westerner than... European thought' (Cage and Charles, 1981: 105). While several of Cage's articles argued for the importance of overcoming tradition, there were aspects of his thought that seemed to suggest that there were some traditions that he regarded as desirous not to overcome. From 1946 onwards, following Coomaraswamy, Cage used the term 'tradition' in a positive sense in relation to Asian and pre-Renaissance European practices, and in a negative sense in relation to most

post-Renaissance European traditions<sup>134</sup>. For example, Cage embraced ‘the traditional reason for making a piece of music in India’ as a grounding principle of his work, yet lamented that ‘[t]he Europeans mostly continue their traditional interests in the organization of sound’, and found fault in the ‘European weakness for tradition’ (Kostelanetz, 2003: 43; Cage, 1949b: 46; 1959a: 71).

In addition to the split in his use of the term ‘tradition’ in reference to Asia and Europe, Cage held a third attitude when it came to America. He regarded post-Renaissance European traditions in negative terms: ‘It will not be easy... for Europe to give up being Europe. It will, nevertheless, and must’ (Cage, 1959d: 75). Simultaneously, he celebrated the ability of American culture to break with tradition (e.g. Cage, 1959d: 73). The glory of America was precisely ‘its capacity to easily break with tradition... its capacity for the unforeseen, its capacity for experimentation’ (ibid.: 74). A tripartite division of connotation can therefore be observed in Cage’s use of the term tradition in the forties and fifties: Europe was negatively traditional, Asia was positively traditional, and America was anti-traditional but in a way that allowed it to be open to embracing positive traditions and to develop them. All three meanings can be discerned in the following quotation from the ‘Lecture on Something’ dating to the early fifties:

as Bucky Fuller is fond of pointing out: the movement with the wind of the Orient and the movement against the wind of the Occident meet in America and produce a movement upwards into the air... But we are still at the point where most musicians are clinging to the complicated torn-up competitive remnants of tradition, and, furthermore, a tradition that was always a tradition of breaking with tradition, and further-more [*sic*], a tradition that in its ideas of counterpoint and harmony was out of step not only with its own but with all other traditions (Cage, 1959c: 143-4).

Despite the fact that, as we have seen, Coomaraswamy considered America lower than Europe *because* it broke with tradition even more than Europe, the basic idea implied in the second section of that quotation can only be understood in the context of Coomaraswamy’s thought. The idea that all traditions other than the modern European one were unanimous and opposed to modern European thought was Coomaraswamy’s theory in a nutshell. This

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<sup>134</sup> See Cage, 1948a: 41; 1948b: 78; 1949a: 63; 1959b: 76; 1959c: 144; Cage and Charles, 1981: 200; Cage and Duckworth, 1989: 21; Cage and Montague, 1985: 213; Kostelanetz, 2003: 43, 230; Patterson, 1996: 297; compared to: Cage, 1949b: 46; 1959a: 71; 1961b: 205-8; 1993c: 118-9; Cage and Turner, 1991: 4.

Cage sometimes appeared to align himself with. We shall return to Cage's tripartite division in the following sections.

Although the impetus for Cage's ideas about tradition came from Coomaraswamy, Cage used this language for his own ends. For example, Cage claimed that by following the 'doctrine about Art, occidental and oriental' that 'art imitates nature in her manner of operation' he was being true to the 'traditional function of the artist' (Cage, 1968a: 194; 1968c: 31). Similarly, he frequently aligned himself with another phrase he labelled 'traditional', this time 'the traditional reason for making a piece of music in India': 'to quiet the mind thus making it susceptible to divine influences'<sup>135</sup> (e.g. Cage, 1948a: 41; Kostelanetz, 2003: 43). In neither case was Cage's practice congruent with the meanings of the phrase as used in the sources he found them in, as we have seen in relation to 'art imitates nature'. In no sense was Cage traditional in Coomaraswamy's meaning, yet one of the rhetorical strategies adopted by Cage and some of his supporters was to imply that his music had value because of its association with tradition. Doing so allowed him to claim that his music was influenced by positive traditional whereas the European 'classical' tradition was a negative tradition.

Aligning himself with Coomaraswamy was partly what allowed Cage to claim that his art was 'at the service of metaphysical truth' (Cage and Wallace, 1958: 47). There were earthly benefits to this claim too. It allowed him to claim that his music was influenced by positive tradition while simultaneously criticizing his European antagonists and hostile audiences for their own allegiances to other traditions (Patterson and Wolff, 1994: 61, 75; Shultis, 2002: 39-40). This can be seen at its clearest in a 1957 essay on Cage's music by his young friend Christian Wolff:

There are, in fact, elements here which have been called 'traditional' – the desire for, or better, the condition of – objectivity, the indifference to 'a worldly matter of "taste,"' the 'treatment of the material used... in conformity with the nature of that material' (the phrases are Frithjof Schuon's). The Europeans Boulez and Stockhausen are thoroughly self-conscious about music history; the first directs a carefully programmed 'world' of music; Stockhausen speaks of 'the work to be

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<sup>135</sup> Cage's use of this phrase, which he claimed came both from Gita Sarabhai and the seventeenth century English theorist Thomas Mace, was just as problematic as the 'art imitates nature' phrase. This will be examined in a forthcoming paper.

done,' the 'right way' to be laid down and followed. Both have a constructive and methodical bias (Wolff, 1957: 86).

In their original context, the quotations from Schuon's *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (1953), a work heavily indebted to Guénon and Coomaraswamy, in no way support Cage's practices<sup>136</sup>.

In Schuon's book, both passages occur in a chapter on 'traditional art' entitled 'Concerning Forms in Art'; Schuon used the term 'Forms' in the Platonist sense. The first quotation, 'a worldly matter of 'taste'', comes from a passage condemning the ignorance behind modern denigrations of idealism in art (Schuon, 1953: 88). As we have seen, Cage himself criticized such idealism. The second quotation concerns the need for the symbolism of an art work to conform to the nature (i.e. *natura naturans*) of the material used. Again, Cage had aligned himself against the meaning of this quotation (cf. Schuon, 1953: 80-1). Furthermore, the quotations cannot be used against Boulez and Stockhausen without hypocrisy. The two composers may have been 'thoroughly self-conscious about musical history', but Schuon, Guénon, and Coomaraswamy were equally 'self-conscious' about art, and religious and political history. So too could traditionalist pronouncements on art and society be justly accused of directing a 'carefully programmed "world"'. Wolff quotes Stockhausen speaking of the 'right way' for things to be done, but Wolff's ellipsis hides a dictatorial command of Schuon's own: the original line runs: 'the treatment of the material used *must be* in conformity with the nature of that material' (Schuon, 1953: 90, emphasis added). If one denies the truth of the ontology of the Platonist tradition, as Cage did, then Schuon's 'must be' is fundamentally as questionable and controlling as any edict from Stockhausen.

In terms of what Coomaraswamy believed was traditional, Cage took from Coomaraswamy only the idea that Asia and medieval Europe had one tradition which was opposed to that of post-Renaissance Europe. He took practically nothing of that tradition itself, the fact of which invalidates any claim he made to be creating modern art analogous to traditional art as formulated by Coomaraswamy.

### **5.2.3 'art when it is... life'**

Following Patterson's 1996/2002 study it has been recognized in Cage studies that several of Cage's appropriations from Coomaraswamy were not particularly faithful. Nevertheless,

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<sup>136</sup> On Schuon see above, f.n.26 and f.n.37.

in some areas Cage is still thought to have accurately represented Coomaraswamy's position. Two topics will be reinvestigated in this section, another in the section that follows. According to Patterson, 'Cage's adoption of Coomaraswamy's attitudes toward art as life and of all persons as "artists"... is nothing short of categorical' (1996: 79/2002b: 186). It will be argued that the issue is considerably more complex than Patterson suggests. Not only is there is little actual similarity between their respective positions, but it is also far from clear that Cage's use of such rhetoric originated with Coomaraswamy.

In one sense, Cage and Coomaraswamy were in agreement over what was wrong with contemporary European and American cultural attitudes towards art. Cage appears almost to have borrowed Coomaraswamy's words when he opined:

I don't sympathize with the idealization of masterpieces... I think the history of the so-called perfecting of our musical instruments is a history of decline rather than of progress. Nor am I interested in large audiences or the preservation of my work for posterity. I think the inception of that fairly recent department of philosophy called aesthetics and its invention of the ideas of genius and self-expression and art appreciation are lamentable... it is rather the age-old process of making and using... that is of real value (Cage, 1948a: 42).

Most of these ideas can easily be located in Coomaraswamy's writings. Nevertheless, that does not mean that Cage critiqued these ideas, or argued for the necessity of use, for the same reasons Coomaraswamy did, or that the greater meaning behind their critiques is the same. There were, in fact, significant differences between their attitudes in this area. Furthermore, as this section progresses it shall become increasingly apparent that Cage would have encountered the language of art and life from sources other than Coomaraswamy. Unlike some of Coomaraswamy's theories, these ideas were relatively common in European and American art discourse of the period. The discussion will be divided into two sections; the first section discusses the idea that everyone is an artist, the second the rhetoric of art and life.

Coomaraswamy did suggest that an 'artist is not a special kind of man, but every man is a special kind of artist', but not in the sense a Cageian interpretation would lead one to expect (Coomaraswamy, 1934a: 64). This can be seen if Cage's conversation with Kostelanetz quoted in the previous section is returned to. For Cage, anything could be art if approached in the right way. The environment and the things in it, any object or sound, any

activity could be art. Because of this every person could be an artist, regardless of whether what they did would in ‘traditional’ terms be considered artful.

Cage: ...you can have art without even doing it. All you have to do is change your mind. You don’t even have to have any skill.

Kostelanetz: Does this bother you – the assumption that anyone can be an artist regardless of his skill?

Cage: No. No, not at all... That’s a European question, you know, not an American question, this whole thing of hierarchy (Cage and Kostelanetz, 1970: 12).

Coomaraswamy would not have agreed that skill was unnecessary to art, quite the opposite – he thought skill was *essential* (Coomaraswamy, 1943: 98). The idea that anyone without appropriate training could practice an art (used in its widest sense) would, for Coomaraswamy, be ludicrous.

The performance of a skill was an act of devotion because of the *nature* of the skill. For Coomaraswamy, every ‘man’<sup>137</sup> who performs his traditional function – their hereditary vocation – is an artist. ‘Art is that *by* which a man works’ (ibid.: 97):

Man’s activity consists in either a making or a doing. Both of these aspects of the active life depend for their correction upon the contemplative life. The making of things is governed by art, the doing of things by prudence [cf. *ST* 1a2æ57.5<sup>138</sup>]. The artist is not a special kind of man, but every man who is not an artist in some field, every man without a vocation, is an idler. The kind of artist that a man should be, carpenter, painter, lawyer, farmer or priest, is determined by his own nature, *in other words by his nativity* (1943: 23-4, emphasis added).

Patterson (1996: 73/2002b: 183) suggests that Coomaraswamy argued that ‘one’s particular “art” is simply determined by individual nature’; in other words, the art that an individual finds themselves attracted to. This is not so. ‘Nature’, in the sense used by Coomaraswamy in the quotation, refers to nature as divine will (*natura naturans*). The art of a person’s individual nature is that person’s hereditary vocation; in terms of Coomaraswamy’s traditional India, that refers to a person’s caste. If a person’s father is a feudal serf, that is

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<sup>137</sup> In Coomaraswamy’s view, the traditional vocation for women was mainly confined to motherhood and wifely duties (see section 2.7). To highlight the implications of Coomaraswamy’s gendered language, his use of the male pronoun will be preserved.

<sup>138</sup> See above; just as ‘art is right reason about things to be made’, ‘prudence is right reason about things to be done’ (*ST* 1a2æ57.5).

his art. If a carpenter or embroiderer, that is his art; if a king, officer of government, or priest, that is his art, and, indeed, his lot. All arts may be equal, but ‘in an established social hierarchy’ a person’s hereditary role comes with a traditional status based on birth (Coomaraswamy, 1934a: 9, 181 f.n.9; 1946a: 35; 1946b: 11-2).

According to Coomaraswamy, a man should normally only take the hereditary, divinely-ordained, vocation he was assigned due to his birth. This would traditionally have formed the vocation he would be taught. He would use the skills gained ‘to serve and praise the first cause of the work’, i.e. God. Because the artist knew the cause of his skill and inspiration, he would not pretend it was his individual self who should take the credit; this is why he preferred to stay anonymous and did not use his art to gratify his ego through expressing his personality. The artist was ‘nothing but a tool’ (Coomaraswamy, 1934a: 91; 1943: 39-40). Those persons who practice their vocation are all artists, and thus they are not special kinds of person. Their vocation is a special (i.e. specific) kind of art, and thus they are a special (specific) kind of artist. In the pages of *The Dance of Shiva*, Cage would have read Coomaraswamy stating his belief that traditionally there was no place for ‘the inefficient amateur’. ‘The musical cultivation of the public does not consist in “everybody doing it,” but in appreciation and reverence’ (Coomaraswamy, 1948: 103; see also, 1934a: 181 f.n.9). A work created without skill could not have been made in traditional fashion and thus could not serve its function; in Coomaraswamy’s terms it therefore was not art (1956: ix; cf. Cage and Retallack, 1996: 52-3).

An artist is not a special kind of person because *everyone* traditionally was a person who practiced an art. Nevertheless, if they had no art they were not an artist but a wastrel. For Coomaraswamy, to create art required *art*. Cage’s idea that anyone could be an artist regardless of skill would have been rejected by Coomaraswamy as surely as would the idea that a Duchampian ‘ready-made’ could be an artwork.

Although Cage and Coomaraswamy had very different ideas of what an artist was, they did both argue that art should not be divorced from life. References to art and life, and the fiction of the gap that supposedly resided between the two, occurred in Cage’s writings from the 1940s onwards. At first glance, the similarity between the positions of Cage and Coomaraswamy appears to be total; this was the interpretation of Patterson (1996: 79/2002b: 186). However, the situation may not be that simple. It should be noted that Cage never directly linked his usage to Coomaraswamy. The assumption that Cage adopted

this language and associated ideas from Coomaraswamy is justified by the similarity of ideas and terminology found in their respective writings. This assumption will be questioned. After surveying the use of the phrases in their writings, the question of attribution will be returned to.

Probably Cage's first definite use of the language of 'art and life' occurred in 1951 in a letter defending Satie against criticism in the pages of *Musical America*. To Cage's mind, Satie's critic Abraham Skulsky had suggested that the criteria by which art should be judged were chiefly related to cultural significance and market concerns. Cage was having none of it:

art is not a business... *Art is a way of life*. It is for all the world like taking a bus, picking flowers, making love, sweeping the floor, getting bitten by a monkey, reading a book, etc., ad infinitum... When life is lived, there is nothing in it but the present, the 'now-moment' (I quote Meister Eckhart<sup>139</sup>)... each one is 'the most honored of all creatures' (I quote the Buddha)... Art when it is art as Satie lived it and made it is not separate from life (nor is dishwashing when it is done in this spirit) (Cage, 1951: 93).

This theory does seem related to Cage's earlier Coomaraswamy-inspired statements (e.g. 1948a: 40), although it equally seems reminiscent of certain statements by Meister Eckhart (for example, Evans, 1931: 6). The references to Bashō and the Buddha point out influences Cage had come to in the intervening period.

As Cage became more inspired by ideas derived from Suzuki's interpretation of Zen<sup>140</sup>, his ideas changed. However, as shown in the Suzuki-influenced 'Julliard Lecture' of the following year, much remained the same:

Contemporary music is not so much art as it is life and any one making it no sooner finishes one of it than he begins making another just as people keep on washing dishes, brushing their teeth, getting sleepy, and so on (Cage, 1952: 101/1958a: 44; see also, 1952: 97-8).

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<sup>139</sup> The word 'now-moment' does not appear in the Evans/Pfeiffer Eckhart edition Cage is known to have read; neither does it appear in connection with Eckhart in Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy*. However, a short quotation from Eckhart using the word 'now-moment' does appear in Alan Watts's *Behold the Spirit* (1947: 29) published in 1947 by Pantheon Books (run by Kurt Wolff who also published Bollingen). It therefore seems likely that Cage's source in this instance was Watts.

<sup>140</sup> Suzuki's interpretation of Zen was so prominent that Cage had already come into contact with it prior to his attendance at Suzuki's lectures in 1952 through sources such as Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy*.

By the time of the 'Lecture on Something' (c.1952) Cage's ideas were more strongly influenced by Suzuki's thought and his theories of art and life had become adjusted accordingly.

For instance: someone said, 'Art should come from within; then it is profound.' But it seems to me Art goes within, and I don't see the need for 'should' or 'then' or 'it' or 'profound.' When Art comes from within, which is what it was for so long doing, it became a thing.

The artist now should not make a 'something', Cage argued, but a 'nothing'. The 'responsibility of the composer' had changed 'from making to accepting':

When a composer feels a responsibility to make, rather than accept, he eliminates from the area of possibility all those events that do not suggest the at that point in time vogue of profundity... And what, precisely, does this, this beautiful profound object, this masterpiece, have to do with Life? It has this to do with Life: that it is separate from it... Life seems shabby and chaotic, disordered, ugly in contrast (Cage, 1959c: 129-30; see also, Cage, 1958a: 44; Cage and Reynolds, 1962: 46).

This idea is now very different from anything in Coomaraswamy's writings.

In Coomaraswamy's argument art *had* to come from within to be art: that was how it could imitate nature. We have already seen that, for Cage at this time, every thing was 'a visible manifestation of an invisible nothing' and thus a 'something' that partakes of 'that life-giving nothing' (Cage, 1959c: 136). Cage therefore adapted his earlier rhetoric of art and life to fit in with his new spiritual/ontological belief. Art should not make a something that partakes in 'nothing' (which is something) into a something which it is not (which would hide its nothingness). Symbolism does this; as does purposeful harmony, melody, counterpoint, rhythm, etc. The creation of art in Traditional fashion involves the manipulation of a thing, turning it into something else against what Cage believed was its nature. In doing so, the work has become art (something) divorced from life (nothing). Therefore, an art not divorced from life would encourage the acceptance of things without conditions, simply as they are without like or dislike. An artist who works in this fashion 'is in accord with life' (Cage, *ibid.*: 132-3). This became one of Cage's purposes for art: 'simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord' (Cage, 1957b: 12; also 1957a: 95). It was thus a key part of his theory of silence, the idea that there was always music because silence was an impossibility. Everywhere, at all times, to

experience art all one had to do was look and hear and let sounds live their lives unhindered in one's own life (1955: 13-4; 1965c: 42; Cage and Charles, 1981: 87; Cage and Duckworth, 1989: 21-2). '[O]ne brings about an art that resembles life when we open our eyes and our ears to experience it' (Cage, 1993c: 84).

For Cage art was not separate from life and there was no difference between the two. To emphasize this, Cage wanted any gap between them to be blurred to confusion or even erased (Cage, 1965b: 19; 1968c: 32; Kostelanetz, 2003: 188). Cage later suggested that as he had come to embrace this philosophy, so his interest in purely musical matters receded. This idea was part of his reasoning for abandoning conventional composition in favour of radical indeterminacy (Cage, 1979b: 177). Although other questions began to occupy him, the rhetoric of art and life remained<sup>141</sup>. From the mid sixties, Cage's use of this idea evolved again. He now included the acceptance and utilization of technology as part of this attitude, suggesting that it could lead to a society of individualist-socialist anarchy. Use became his watch-word. When he returned to more conventional music making it was this meaning he retained. If art was useful in life (if lived as he deemed it should be lived) then it was good (for example, Cage and Retallack, 1996: 55; Cage and Zwerin, 1966: 164-5). Here again there are echoes of Coomaraswamy's ideas; nevertheless, as is discussed below, he had already discussed music in terms of use before reading Coomaraswamy.

Having established what Cage meant when he discussed art and life, we shall now investigate how Coomaraswamy used the terms. The background to Coomaraswamy's usage is rooted in the conflict between the idea of 'art for art's sake' and an oppositional attitude, sometimes termed 'art for life's sake'. Both phrases originated in European and American aesthetic disagreements of the nineteenth century. The theory of art for art's sake, or *l'art pour l'art*, developed in France in the early nineteenth century, initially in literary circles. Moving into fine art discourse by mid-century it crossed the channel and made its way as an English-language phrase during the 1860s. In this context it was associated chiefly with the loose Aesthetic Movement, the protagonists of which are normally said to include James McNeill Whistler, Charles Algernon Swinburne, Walter Pater, and Oscar Wilde. For many of its supporters, art for art's sake was a reaction against

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<sup>141</sup> See also: Cage, 1952: 98, 101; 1954: 173; 1957b: 134, 136; 1958a: 44-6; 1961b: 256-7; 1964: 92; 1967a: 146; 1969c: 111; Cage and Charles, 1981: 52, 87, 90-1; Cage and Grimes, 1986: 48; Cage, Kirby and Schechner, 1965: 50, 55, 58; Cage and Retallack, 1996: 55, 101, 103-6, 244, 318; Cage, Roth and Roth, 1973: 73; Kostelanetz, 2003: 43-4.

antiquated artistic rules and traditions, conformist morality, and obsession with history. Beauty was its guide and its only important criterion. A picture did not need historical or dramatic interest to depict a story; neither did it need moral, utilitarian, political, or educational value. As Guerard (1936: xii) put it, 'Art for Art's Sake means Art Dominant, Life for the Sake of Art, life subordinated to the service of beauty, a pilgrimage to the Land of Esthetic Promise'.

In reference to Coomaraswamy's usage of both phrases, it is important to note the enmity between the aesthete Whistler and the aesthetic moralist Ruskin. Much (though by no means all) of the arts for art's sake attitude was antithetical to the voluminous moralizing and endless history of Ruskin's tomes. For his part, Ruskin had scant regard for decadent aestheticism and the work of Whistler in particular. Pronouncing in 1877 on one of Whistler's more impressionistic offerings, Ruskin accused the painter of being a conceited fop who charged through the nose for 'flinging a pot of paint in the public's face' (Ruskin, 1871-84, 7:201). Whistler sued for libel; the result was arguably the most famous artistic legal fight of the age. Ruskin lost<sup>142</sup>. Nevertheless, Ruskin and Morris were not unconnected to the Aesthetic Movement: Ruskin was a key inspiration to several of the leading figures; the Pre-Raphaelites were close to Swinburne and were often caricatured as aesthetes. Both sides agreed that art and beauty were integral to life. The phrases refer to what was largely an in-house squabble between nineteenth century connoisseurs of artistic beauty. The legacy of that squabble is reflected in Coomaraswamy's writings of the following century (E. B. Adams, 1971: xvii-iii, xx, xxii, xxiv; Guerard, 1936: xiv-xvi, xviii-ix, 71, 88, 282-3; Hilton, 2000: 464-5; Merrill, 1992: 1, 50, 68; Morgan, 1996: 2:530).

Art for life's sake (or variations on those words) was not a movement; it was a retort against the ideal of art for art's sake. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the phrase is particularly found in British and American Arts and Crafts Movement discourse. Coomaraswamy's use of the phrase is consistent with this usage and is open in its debt to Ruskin and Morris. Art for Morris was much more than fine art: it was

beauty produced by the labour of man both mental and bodily, the expression of the interest man takes in the life of man upon the earth with all its surroundings, in other words the human pleasure of life is what I mean by art (Morris, 1969: 94-5).

Expanding on Ruskin's theories, Morris suggested that art should have utility in relation to life (for example, Ruskin, 1871-84: 3:25:4). This had been the case in ages past before

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<sup>142</sup> See Merrill (1992).

Renaissance ideals projected fine art above applied art and industrialism divorced art from everyday items. When all the arts were equal, co-operative, anonymous, and grounded in use not profit, the ideal of autonomous art could never have arisen. All people had *shared* in art, and all their products had been beautiful and useful. Because of this their lives were made pleasanter, and their lives were valued more greatly. Art, Morris argued, must be part of everyday life to have value; it must have a purpose in human activity, or be embodied in the design and decoration of useful things (Blakesly, 2006: 7; MacCarthy, 1994: 586; Morris, 1882: 18-9, 31, 75-6; Morris, 1969: 44, 47, 86-8, 104-7, 110-1, 114, 138, 150-1; Pinkney, n.d.: 63, 77-8). Morris's theories promised utopian results. Given the chance, art would bring about the return of 'real beauty that can be shared by all'; everyday work would be ennobled, equality would be reached (Morris, 1882: 112, 191, 194-5, 216-7). The return of this artistic ideal would encourage people to focus on the everyday, rather than looking for beauty only in an art gallery. They would see the beauty of life all around them, in nature, in the sky, in old buildings: art would return to life and elevate it as it had been elevated before (MacCarthy, 1994: 501; Morris, 1882: 216-7; Morris, 1969: 53, 137; Pinkney, n.d.: 75-6, 108-9). For all Morris's energy and rousing words, his socialist aims chiefly resulted in epic poetry, beautiful furnishings and furniture, and exquisitely designed books, predominantly destined for the enjoyment of the well-off. Nevertheless, this world of carefully crafted applied art formed the basis for much of Coomaraswamy's early writings on art.

Coomaraswamy's close early association with the Arts and Crafts Movement was reflected in his anti-aestheticist stance. His use of the language of 'art and life' appeared sporadically throughout his career in his discussion of the arts and crafts of Asia and medieval Europe. The connection is clearest in his early works. 'The Hindu's have never believed in art for art's sake', he defiantly pronounced in *The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon* (1913: vii). Similar pronouncements can also be found in his writings of the 1940s: 'On behalf of every man we deny that art is for art's sake. On the contrary, "Industry without art is brutality"' (Coomaraswamy, 1943: 101; the quotation, unattributed, is from Ruskin, 1870: 88). Coomaraswamy implied two main sets of meanings when he evoked the language of art and life. The first was close to the meanings of Ruskin and Morris: to destroy the distinction between applied and fine art; to encourage the return of art to use in life, rather than being seen in a museum; to encourage an end to mass-industrialization and a return to craft production; to return to a way of life where a person's art was their purpose

of life, their work, and their joy (e.g. Coomaraswamy, 1910a: 92-3; 1943: 15-6, 101; 1946b: 239; 1956: vi). The second meaning concerned ‘the art that is life’ or ‘the art of living’. Although these words had also been used by Morris, Coomaraswamy’s use was explicitly religious and linked to Aquinas’s words (*ST* 1a2æ57; e.g. Coomaraswamy, 1910a: ii, 160-1; 1946b: 22; 1956, ix). When Coomaraswamy critiqued ‘art for art’s sake’ he did so with both of these meanings in mind; for him, these meanings were synonymous. As art became separated from life, society fell into irreligion and false ways of life. This happened wherever traditional art had died (e.g. Coomaraswamy, 1910a: 84, 92-3, 160-1; 1943: 15-6, 94; 1956: vi.). These meanings were further expressed in his frequent quotation of Morris’s famous dictum that one should have nothing that one did not ‘know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful’. Regarding ‘correct’, ‘true’, ‘formal’ and ‘beautiful’ to be synonymous, Coomaraswamy claimed this doctrine belonged not only to Morris but also to Plato. The relationship of art to life in Coomaraswamy thinking was thus grounded in conjoined religious, metaphysical and aesthetic reasoning (Coomaraswamy, 1910a: 166; 1912: 9-10; 1943: 22; 1946b: 22, 34; 1988: 303; Morris, 1882: 108).

It should be briefly considered whether Cage meant the same thing as Coomaraswamy when he talked of breaking down the gap between art and life. Cage’s position has already been established. As for Coomaraswamy, it was not just a question of making life *pretty*. When Charles asked him about what he called ‘life as art’, Cage instantly corrected him: ‘No. It is art as life... If I want ‘life as art,’ I risk falling into aestheticism’ (Cage and Charles, 1981: 87). Nevertheless, the key difference between their usages lies in philosophy. Cage’s ‘art that is life’ led him to advocate an aesthetic based on material appearances; Coomaraswamy’s ‘art that is life’ was rooted in idealism. For ontological reasons that will now be familiar, Coomaraswamy was not arguing that art should take its lead from the life of the sensible world, as Cage was. Coomaraswamy argued that traditional art communicated real (i.e. ideal) things. Such art made the world better through its aesthetic beauty and therefore through the *inspiration* of its truth. Since the inception of the fine art paradigm, art had become divorced from life so that ideal art no longer surrounded the people and reminded them of what was real. Coomaraswamy was far from proposing Cage’s solution. Coomaraswamy made this clear in the following passage from *The Dance of Shiva*, which Cage would have read:

What we call our life is uncoordinated, and far from the harmony of art, which rises above good and evil... Art is an imitation of that perfect spontaneity – the identity

of intuition and expression in those who are of the kingdom of heaven, which is within us. Thus it is that art is nearer to life than any fact can be (Coomaraswamy, 1948: 112).

Again, the differences between Cage and Coomaraswamy come down to their opposing beliefs about the nature of the real and how that reality can be known.

Even having established the level of agreement between their respective positions, there is a further grey area concerning the mechanics of influence. There is a significant problem with the theory that Cage's use of the language and ideas of 'art and life' derived principally from Coomaraswamy. In the two books by Coomaraswamy that Cage read there are no particularly significant uses of the terms, and none which are particularly similar to Cage's usage. The closest is reproduced in the paragraph above, but even this would be unlikely in itself to have furnished Cage with the whole set of language and ideas he reproduced. However, there is one further source to consider.

In the autumn of 1946 Cage was reading *The Transformation* with Lou Harrison (Cage, 1948a: 41). At some point late that year, Harrison sent a letter to Coomaraswamy. As they were pondering Coomaraswamy together, it is probable that Cage had some part in the letter and, at the least, read the warm reply from Coomaraswamy dated December 17, 1946 (printed in Coomaraswamy, 1988: 405-6). Sadly, the present author has so far been unable to locate Harrison's initial letter in any archive. Nevertheless, an idea of the content of Harrison's letter can be gleaned from the reply. The letter must have asked Coomaraswamy for information on Indian, traditional and/or other Asian musics and perhaps the role of music in those societies. Coomaraswamy replied by recommending that Harrison refer to a number of his works<sup>143</sup>, particularly *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought* (1946) and the chapter 'Notes on Savage Art', as well as works by a number of other authors<sup>144</sup>. Coomaraswamy went on to add:

I think the point to be remarked is that just as we have isolated painting as something to be seen in Galleries, so we have isolated music as something to be

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<sup>143</sup> In order of first publication: *Rajput Painting* (1916); *The Mirror of Gesture* (1917); *Catalogue of the Indian Collections in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Part V Rajput Painting* (1926); *The Religious Basis of the Forms of Indian Society* (1946); *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought* (1946); and the essay 'The Bugbear of Literacy' (1944), later printed in *Am I My Brother's Keeper?* (1947).

<sup>144</sup> These included: *Peaks and Lamas* by Marco Pallis; *Dance Drama in Bali* by Beryl de Zoete and Walter Spies; *A House in Bali* by Colin McPhee; *The Winged Serpent* by M. L. T. Astrov; *The Music of Hindustan* by A. H. Fox-Strangways; and *Introduction to the Study of Musical Scales* by Alain Daniéou.

heard in Halls; whereas it was in all traditional societies bound up with all the activities of life (as it still is in India).

Cage certainly displayed this attitude toward museums, and in general towards art and life (e.g. Cage, 1959c: 130). Perhaps, therefore, the letter, alongside other vaguely relevant passages might be considered enough to justify appointing Coomaraswamy as Cage's influence in this matter. For example, Harrison and/or Cage may have followed up the references Coomaraswamy gave them. Had they read 'Notes on Savage Art' they would have found on the first page: 'It is clear that art in New Guinea is not divorced from daily life' (Coomaraswamy, 1946b: 239). Coomaraswamy is therefore a possible source, though with so many unknowns it is difficult to draw firm conclusions. Nevertheless, there are other possibilities.

The terms 'art as life' and 'art for art's sake', and the critique of the concept of fine art, were not exclusive to Coomaraswamy. As Cage never linked such language and ideas exclusively with Coomaraswamy there is no reason to insist that Coomaraswamy, or at least the two books of his Cage read, were its origin. It is perfectly possible that Cage was influenced here by friends, such as Campbell, who had read Coomaraswamy's other works, Harrison, who in the early fifties was fascinated with the life and work of William Morris<sup>145</sup>, or any number of artist, musician, or dancer friends. It should also be noted that ideas and rhetoric concerning the 'art of life' occur in the writings of Emerson and Whitman; Cage certainly read the latter as a young man (Cage, 1989: 238). Another possible explanation returns us again to Morris. The language of art and life and its variants could still be found after the Arts and Crafts Movement had faded away, often used to criticize the ideal of autonomous art and to urge a return to an idea of art which made no distinction between fine and applied arts. More specifically, the legacy of Morris and Arts and Crafts Movement ideals was among the key inspirations on the philosophy of the Bauhaus.

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<sup>145</sup> From 1949 or 1950 and for the following few years, Harrison took a particular interest in the art, literature, and life of Morris. Harrison's first opera *Rapunzel* (1952) was based on Morris's version of the tale. However, while Cage seems to have discussed Coomaraswamy and related matters fairly closely with Harrison in 1946, in May 1947 Harrison had a breakdown and was hospitalized. Cage remained close to Harrison during the long period of his recovery, but Harrison was spending less time in New York. Harrison's intensive interest in Morris in the early fifties would have had less of an impact on Cage than if that interest had manifested itself in 1946 (L. E. Miller, 2002a: 85, 87-90).

Walter Gropius's founding Bauhaus manifesto urged all artists whether architects, painters, or sculptors to return to the ideals of craft; to work together without distinction of craftsman or artist for social benefit (Gropius, 1919a: 38). Gropius announced in an address to Bauhaus students the same year that out of these ideals 'a universally great, enduring, spiritual-religious idea will rise again', which will express itself in a great *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total art work) that shall shine out like a cathedral, casting its 'abundance of light into the smallest objects of everyday life' (Gropius, 1919b: 36). As Weingarden (1985: 10) put it, the aim was to 'to break down the boundaries... between art and life'. Just as the ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* makes clear the link to nineteenth century German artistic ideals, the metaphor of the cathedral makes the link to the romantic idealization of the gothic clear. This motif was also echoed visually in the manifesto through the accompanying woodcut of a cathedral by Feininger. Nevertheless, in other ways the Bauhaus was not nostalgic in the way Morris or Ruskin had been: its teachers were not against, for example, mechanized production; similarly, its radical and experimental teaching methods were a far cry from earlier practices. As it also did with anti-Renaissance discourse, the Bauhaus adoption of elements of nineteenth century romantic medievalism often avoided the most reactionary elements of earlier ideas while being inspired by what had been progressive in such thinking. Even after the romantic medievalism of the early Bauhaus had in part dissipated, the rhetoric of breaking down the barriers between art and life remained (Cianci, 2001: 137; Weingarden, 1985: 10-2; Whitford, 1992: 31-2; Wingler, 1975: xviii, 1, 4).

With his extensive contact with Bauhaus-associated figures, and familiarity with associated modernist publications, it is almost certain that Cage would have come across these ideas before he started reading Coomaraswamy. Moholy-Nagy, for example, had intended his American Bauhaus to further 'the creation of objects which will satisfy human needs that are spiritual as well as utilitarian' (Moholy-Nagy, 1947: 11). In fact, Cage had started referring to these ideas in his writings at least ten years before he started reading Coomaraswamy. In Cage's 1935 article 'Counterpoint', for example, he was already seeking to blur the distinctions between art and life:

Music becomes a craft, extending the definition of the word from manual dexterity to mental dexterity. And Life remains Life. Whether it is to be 'communicated' as sublime, pathetic, profound, comic or tragic, depends not upon the craftsman with reference to his craft, but with reference to the way he lives (1935: 43).

Cage's comparison of the construction of a piece of music to the construction of a chair or the design of a building in 'Listening to Music' (1937) also seems to suggest this link (Cage, 1937: 17-8). His references to the usefulness of music in that essay (ibid.: 17) and in the article 'Grace and Clarity' (1944: 92-3) could also be inspired by such ideas. Discussing his artistic endeavour of the twenties and thirties with Joan Retallack, Cage recalled that among his early inspirations was Moholy-Nagy's *The New Vision* and 'various books about the Bauhaus'. The Bauhaus and Moholy-Nagy, Cage said, encouraged 'participation in the art of doing it yourself', encouragement towards artistic activity and '*making art*' (Cage and Retallack, 1996: 87, emphasis original). Therefore, there is no reason to assume that Cage's theories of art and life and all people as artists derive exclusively from Coomaraswamy. Such influences were already in the culture around him and were important to the practice of a number of his professional contacts.

At most, Coomaraswamy's theories reinforced and refocused ideas Cage already held. The ideals of the Bauhaus and the ideals of Coomaraswamy were separated by a gulf of ideology that can easily be overlooked if similarities in rhetoric are all that is concentrated on. Nevertheless, what Coomaraswamy's presentation of 'art and life' theories probably did do was give Cage the notion that such ideas were part of 'the Oriental worldview' and thus were appropriate to his new found direction. In fact, such attitudes had very little to do with Coomaraswamy's studies of Indian art. While Coomaraswamy implied that most European art was made with an 'art for art's sake' attitude, this attitude was only one aesthetic approach and typical mostly of a particular late nineteenth-century movement. Ironically, what Cage suggested was a typically Asian approach was chiefly his own ideas sparked by the theories of a different late nineteenth-century European movement. Whether Cage came to the rhetoric of art and life through Coomaraswamy or had done so earlier through Bauhaus contacts, Ruskin, Morris, and Arts and Crafts Movement ideas provided a founding influence. This influence should be thought of in terms of the development of a meme rather than a concrete link. What connects the ideas of Morris, Coomaraswamy, the Bauhaus, and Cage is the belief that the arts have a social and moral value and should be part of everyday life; yet they differ in varying ways aesthetically, ontologically, epistemologically, and/or politically to an extent that each view can not be said to be congruent with one another. Although Cage's later ideas of art and life were closer to the ideas of the Bauhaus luminaries, or even Morris, than they were to those of Coomaraswamy, Cage's development of those ideas was distinctly his own.

#### 5.2.4 'Museums... are ways of preserving'

The last area of possible influence between Coomaraswamy and Cage that shall be investigated here relates to their respective view of museums. In his reply to Harrison, Coomaraswamy had seemed to suggest that art galleries and concert halls isolated art away from its necessary position in 'all the activities of life' (1988: 405). The idea that a healthy society would not need museums was replicated in his published writings. The supposed similarity of this position to Cage's own vocal disparagement of museums was enough for Patterson to suggest that 'Like Coomaraswamy, Cage deemed contemporary museum culture a needless barrier between life and art' (Patterson, 1996: 78/2002b: 185). Gann (2010: 91) followed suit, suggesting that, like Cage, Coomaraswamy 'harshly criticizes the museum culture that separates works of art from daily life' (see also: 94). Nevertheless, this argument is not wholly correct. Again, Cage and Coomaraswamy were far from agreement in their respective stances. Coomaraswamy did not criticize museum culture, he criticized modern society for needing museums. Given present conditions, Coomaraswamy believed museums to be essential.

Coomaraswamy spent most of his working life employed as curator and research fellow by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The idea that he would have stayed in this employment for thirty years if he rejected the need for museums is questionable: with independent financial means he could afford to pick and choose where he worked. Coomaraswamy lamented the fact that modern society had banished art objects from everyday life. If there was to be renewal, museums would be a vital resource. Coomaraswamy believed a good museum preserved the best work of the past while acting to awaken modern society from its ignorance of traditional art and its values. 'It should be one of the functions of a well organized Museum exhibition to deflate the illusion of progress', he argued (1943: 12, 93). With a faith in the power of craft as idealistic as Morris's, Coomaraswamy believed that exposure to things both useful and beautiful would bring about change in values and tastes (ibid.: 13, 20-2). Although Coomaraswamy found it galling that the objects proper to a museum were no longer in use, he felt that they could still be useful through their ability to inspire the soul and the mind (ibid.: 10; 1946b: 255-6). Audiences would be led to wonder at a work's meaning. Then 'the painful truth' could be impressed upon them: 'that most of these works of art are about God, whom we never mention in polite society' (1943: 20). There was nevertheless one type of museum exhibition that Coomaraswamy deplored; this was the display of the work of living artists.

Coomaraswamy believed that a museum which exhibited such works only served as an agent or advertiser. If a modern work was worthwhile it would find use or at least a market, if it had no purpose or market then the only use it could be in a museum would be to serve the vanity of the artist (*ibid.*: 7).

As with the material surveyed in the previous section, Coomaraswamy did not discuss this theme in the two books Cage is known to have read. However, it is possible that Cage was influenced by Coomaraswamy's discussion of galleries and concert halls in his 1946 reply to Harrison (see 5.2.3 above). Taken by itself, that letter could be read to imply that Coomaraswamy lamented the existence of those institutions. Therefore, although it is possible that Cage's attitude toward museums was influenced by Coomaraswamy, his attitude was in fact oppositional.

Cage regarded museums as a needless refrigeration of culture. 'Museums and academies are ways of preserving', he argued, that aimed to prevent culture from changing (Cage, 1958a: 44). In a new era of electronic potential, Cage felt it was good that old-fashioned art was being shut up in museums out of the way (1961b: 198). In the sixties, 'museum' became another of Cage's derogatory terms. His usage of the term in this manner reveals exactly why his views in this regard differed from Coomaraswamy's. 'There are oodles of people who are going to think of the past as a museum and be faithful to it,' he insisted, 'but that's not my attitude' (Cage, Kirby, and Schechner, 1965: 53; see also, *ibid.*: 71; Cage, 1961b: 229-30; Cage and Montague, 1985: 210).

By the end of the sixties, Cage's position softened into a slightly patronizing acceptance of the right to existence of museums. Although they would not be needed in the future any more than concert halls, that was no reason to get rid of them. Unnecessary things could still provide enjoyment (Cage, 1969b: 15; Cage, Kirby, and Schechner, 1965: 58). Cage continued to hold this view into the nineties. In 1991 he collaborated with a museum in Munich to create an installation using objects lent by different museums from the local area. Using chance operations, the borrowed objects were mixed-up and displayed in randomly determined locations in the gallery. In this way, although he still regarded museums as 'stultifying', he could find a museum exhibition an enjoyable experience (Cage and Retallack, 1996: 141-2). Nevertheless, by removing the objects from their contexts, the objects lost exactly the range of meanings Coomaraswamy had demanded from their exhibition in a museum.

### 5.3 A Close-reading of 'Defense of Satie' (1948)

In the sections above, Cage's ideas have primarily been presented removed from their original contexts in order that trends of thought can be identified and analysed. While it is intended that the reader will use the findings above to inform their readings of Cage's texts and theories, it is still useful to analyse one of Cage's texts in detail. The ideas and idiomatic language Cage drew from Coomaraswamy remained in Cage's intellectual repertoire for the remainder of his career; however, after the early 1950s Suzuki's version of Zen was his chief guide to Asian philosophy – although, as Suzuki and Coomaraswamy arrived at their interpretations via interlocking spheres of influence, these were not wholly separate. In 1948 Cage was yet to become particularly interested in either Suzuki's thought or Japanese culture. His primary references were the esoteric Catholic-Vedānta Perennialism of Coomaraswamy, the psychology of Jung and Campbell, and the holistic art vision of Moholy-Nagy's *New Vision*. The influence of these sources on Cage's thought stands out particularly clearly in his lecture 'Defense of Satie' delivered at Black Mountain College in the summer of 1948. It is thus this text that shall be considered in detail here. Several quotations from the lecture have featured in the text above in order to illustrate individual themes in Cage's writings. In context, how Cage used these ideas to explain and justify his musical ideas can be seen more clearly.

Coomaraswamy's attack on the culture of modern art and its processes had clearly set Cage pondering. Cage starts the lecture by contemplating the fact that rather than conforming to traditional or conventional methods, contemporary artists work in the way they individually consider best. Speaking presumably primarily about himself and his colleagues, he suggests that

we lament what we call the gulf between artist and society, between artist and artist, and we praise (very much like children who can only window shop for candy they cannot buy) the unanimity of opinion out of which arose a Gothic cathedral, an opera by Mozart, a Balinese combination of music and dance. We lament the absence among us of such generally convincing works, and we say it must be because we have no traditional ways of making things. We admire from a lonely distance that art which is not private in character but is characteristic of a group of people and the fact that they were in agreement (Cage, 1948b: 78).

Such unanimity is longed for, but, Cage suggests, it is ultimately unobtainable. It can only be glimpsed through the shop window of the past. Nevertheless, Cage argues, individualist

artists directed solely by their own ideas are also admired. Art which obviously copies older work is disliked. The result of this admiration has been to make contemporary music difficult to understand. Although composers realize this they continue on their individual paths nevertheless. Some composers end up producing works which struggle to find use or purpose. Others prefer to look to the music of the past, which ‘does not belong to them’ temporally speaking (ibid.: 78). Instead, Cage argues, should we not look to what can be agreed upon between the two poles? His solution suggests a rapprochement inspired by the model of Jung’s integration of the personality:

I suspect that our admitting two opposite positions, that of the traditional artist and that of the individualist, indicates a basic need in us for this pair of opposites. We need, I imagine, an art that is paradoxical in that it reflects both unanimity of thought and originality of thought (ibid.: 78).

The final sentence of this quotation introduces an idea that ran throughout Cage’s subsequent career. By grounding his musical and philosophical innovations in Asian philosophy and music he could reflect unanimous values and yet still be original. ‘Oriental’ thought was perfect, it must have seemed, because, as Coomaraswamy had said, in all respects it was oppositional to modern European values. We will return to the problematics of this approach in the chapter that follows.

Turning to focus exclusively on music, Cage argues that, in order to be made, a composition must have structure (akin to the structure of the human body) and form (akin to the form an individual’s life takes). It must also have method (akin to the system by which individuals organize their lives) and material (akin to how individuals choose to clothe themselves). He then proceeds to question whether each of these four elements of music should adhere to traditional conventions or follow individual inspiration. He addresses ‘material’ first. Just as people ‘feel imposed upon’ by standardized or forced conformity in matters of clothing, so there should be no effort to standardize or agree upon material in composition. In the matter of method, as syntax in language had been successfully experimented upon by modernist writers, and as people from different cultures live in different ways, this too should be individual. So too, unquestionably, should form be a matter of personal choice; people should not be forced to conform their manner of living to the dictates of tradition. Only structure, Cage argues, need be bound by traditional conventions. ‘There must... as a *sine qua non* in all fields of life and art, be some kind of structure – otherwise chaos’ (ibid.: 79-80). Just as it is ‘fine’ that human bodies are

structured the same, it is fine that artistic structures (a sonnet, a sonata) are the same. ‘We call whatever diverges from sameness of structure monstrous’, Cage added somewhat problematically (cf. Cage and Kostelanetz, 1970: 34).

Having determined that only structure need abide by agreed-upon conventions, Cage turns to contemporary art music. Experiments in material, method, and form – quarter tones, electronics, serial tone rows – had all been made and should have been welcomed. Experiments with structure have been less forthcoming: ‘there has been only one new idea since Beethoven,’ Cage claims (1948b, 81). That new idea was found in the works of Webern and Satie. Beethoven structured his works ‘by means of harmony. With Satie and Webern they are defined by means of time lengths’. Cage then comes to the controversial crux of his argument: Beethoven was wrong, Satie and Webern were right. It must therefore be agreed upon that musical structure is determined by time length. The legacy of Beethoven must be overturned. Why? Making a further quadripartite division, Cage argues that sound is made up of pitch, loudness, timbre, and duration. Silence ‘is the opposite and, therefore, the necessary partner of sound’; silence ‘is characterized only by its duration’ and cannot be heard in terms of pitch or harmony. Therefore, duration or time-length is the most important element of sound. To nail his argument Cage then reaches for Coomaraswamy. Coomaraswamy had divided the world into traditional and modern with the decisive split starting in Renaissance-era Europe. Cage adopts this theory to drive home his point about Beethoven:

It took a Satie and a Webern to rediscover this musical truth, which, by means of musicology, we learn was evident to some musicians in our Middle Ages, and to all musicians at all times (except those whom we are currently in the process of spoiling) in the Orient. Beethoven represents the most intense lurching of the boat away from its natural even keel (ibid.: 81).

European and American music – which Cage imagines metaphorically as a boat – was now way off course and in real danger of being shipwrecked ‘on an island of decadence’ (ibid.). Returning to practical matters, Cage defines how music should be made; probably not uncoincidentally, his definition happily described his own practice: ‘There can be no right making of music that does not structure itself from the very roots of sound and silence – lengths of time. In India, rhythmic structure is called Tala. With us, unfortunately, it is called a new idea’ (ibid.: 81-2).

With Beethoven dismissed and time-length crowned as the only proper structuring principle, Cage next attempts to explain how these correct principles came about in the music of Webern and Satie. Like most of the rest of his argument, Cage's answer to this question was more speculative polemical fantasy than rigorous analysis. In the late nineteenth century, tonality had given way to atonality and Schönberg's twelve-tone system. As tonality was essential to Beethoven's harmonic structuring system, it was necessary that a new structuring system come into being. Schönberg had not provided this for the twelve-tone system. Satie and Webern had also been confronted with this problem, and both solved it the same way. Each asked 'How can music be given structure if not through its tonal relations?' Both came to the conclusion 'by means of time lengths' (ibid.: 82). Although their music differed in form, method, and material, they both structured their works identically. Therefore, Cage concluded, 'Structure can and ought to be agreed upon, and the underlying necessary structure of music is rhythmic' (ibid.: 83).

To end the lecture Cage changes tack again, returning to the theme of his first four paragraphs: the simultaneous pull towards both tradition and individualism. 'The function of a piece of music and, in fact, the final meaning of music may now be suggested', he announces. This purpose was 'to bring into co-being' elements that should be 'agreed upon' – these he called 'Law elements' – and elements which should be left open – these he called 'Freedom elements'<sup>146</sup>. His final paragraph introduced these elements into an argument that pulled threads from Jolas in *transition*, Moholy-Nagy's *New Vision*, Jung, Campbell, and Coomaraswamy into a syncretic whole:

Music then is a problem parallel to that of the integration of the personality: which in terms of modern psychology is the co-being of the conscious and the unconscious mind, Law and Freedom, in a random world situation. Good music can act as a guide to good living. It is interesting to note that harmonic structure in music arises as Western materialism arises, disintegrates at the time that materialism comes to be questioned, and that the solution of rhythmic structure, traditional to the Orient, is arrived at with us just at the time that we profoundly sense our need for that other tradition of the Orient: peace of mind, self-knowledge (ibid.: 84).

In the years to come, Cage adapted or discarded as many of these principles as he subsequently kept. Yet the idea that duration or time-length was the fundamental principle

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<sup>146</sup> Pritchett (1993: 207 f.n.19) suggests that Cage may have taken these terms from Coventry Patmore.

of a work remained constant in his later pieces. The idea that music could ‘act as a guide to good living’ proved equally long-lasting. Furthermore, Cage’s later advocacy of discipline was little more than an attempt to integrate law and freedom elements. And, to the end, Cage tried to convince musicians and audiences of what should be agreed upon and what should be left free for individuals to decide (see, for example, Cage, 1991: 255-6). However, before Cage’s later ideas can be thoroughly investigated, it is necessary to investigate his influences stemming from Suzuki. As this is beyond the scope of the current project, no more can be said at this time (see introduction). A further notion that Cage carried over to his later work was the idea that the ‘Orient’ provided a solution to most problems. Just as Cage sought to Other himself from European culture, he looked to and found what was Other in Asia. As such, it is necessary to consider Cage in relation to the discourse of Orientalism; this is the subject of the chapter that follows.

### **Conclusion**

Cage primarily took words and phrases from Coomaraswamy, not meanings. These words and phrases formed the starting points for his own ideas, many of which were oppositional to the original meanings outlined by Coomaraswamy. This was entirely the case with the phrase ‘art imitates nature in her manner of operation’, and was predominantly the case with the aesthetic theory of *rasa*. Beyond those two key ideas were a number of other terms and phrases which are ultimately more difficult to classify.

The rhetoric and ideas Cage borrowed from Coomaraswamy can be placed into four groups; they are listed in these categories below. Group one contains ideas from Coomaraswamy’s writings that Cage reproduced with only minor modification. Group two contains ideas that Cage found in Coomaraswamy’s writings and which he subsequently used in his own work with sometimes considerable modification, but which still retained some link to Coomaraswamy’s meaning. Cage did not necessarily retain the explanations with which Coomaraswamy rationally grounded these theories in philosophy, religion/theology, or history. Because of this, Cage was unable to logically or rationally defend most of these ideas in the way Coomaraswamy was able to. Group three contains ideas or phrases which Cage probably came to through Coomaraswamy but whose meaning in Cage’s work has little or no link to Coomaraswamy’s meaning. Group four contains those ideas which Cage had already encountered before encountering Coomaraswamy.

Coomaraswamy should only be regarded as a secondary source in these cases, and his influence on Cage in these cases should not be regarded as certain.

**Group 1 – Ideas Cage took from Coomaraswamy and reproduced with only minor modification.**

- i. Based in the Orientalist premise that Asia and Europe were locked in a dialectical relationship, the Traditionalist premise that prior to the Renaissance all peoples were united by the same values. Cage reproduced the premise, but not the values that Coomaraswamy attached to the premise.
- ii. The related idea that Medieval Europe and Asia held similar values and that Asia continues to hold to these values. Again, Cage reproduced the premise without the values that Coomaraswamy attached to the premise.

**Group 2 – Ideas Cage took from Coomaraswamy and reproduced with significant modification of meaning.**

- i. The aesthetic theory of *rasa* and associated terms. Coomaraswamy's description of the theory was vague and contained certain errors. His depiction of *rasa* theory was based on the workings of the theory in theatre and literature; he gave few details of the application of the theory to music. While he may have tried to replicate Coomaraswamy's meaning, Cage failed. Significant elements of Cage's depiction of the operation and philosophy of *rasa* were his own invention. Further, he mistakenly referred to the *rasas* as 'the permanent emotions'. Writers on Cage should avoid using the two terms as synonyms. His depiction of *śāntarasa* was not indebted to Coomaraswamy, instead it probably derived from Gita Sarabhai. In the early seventies, Cage added new elements to his depiction of *rasa* that had no connection to Coomaraswamy. In particular, this pertains to his unconventional division of the *rasas* into white and black modes.
- ii. The idea that 'the Orient' provided the solution to most of the problems of modern societies.
- iii. A number of related principles relating to cultural and social values; namely, a negative attitude towards: the idealization of masterpieces; the quest for large audiences and monetary reward; preserving works for posterity; the

development of aesthetics and art-appreciation; the idea of genius; the desire for self-expression in art; the desire to assert individualism.

**Group 3 – Ideas Cage took from Coomaraswamy which he reproduced with little or no link to their original meaning.**

- i. ‘Art imitates nature in her manner of operation’. The phrase originated in Aristotle and was quoted by Aquinas before being quoted by Coomaraswamy. Cage took the phrase from Coomaraswamy but retained neither Coomaraswamy’s meaning, nor that of Aquinas, nor that of Aristotle.

**Group 4 – Ideas Cage had encountered prior to reading Coomaraswamy.**

- i. Art could ‘act as a guide to good living’.
- ii. Art should not be separate from life.
- iii. Art should be useful, not stuck in a museum.
- iv. Anyone can be an artist.
- v. In the gothic era, artistic tastes and purposes were unanimous.
- vi. Art and morality are fundamentally linked; the art a society produces reflects its values.
- vii. The possibility and desirousness of a universal aesthetic language.

In most cases above, Cage was inspired by Coomaraswamy’s criticism of something, or an idea found in Coomaraswamy’s work, and then reproduced those ideas filled with his own meanings. It is not clear whether Cage’s departures from Coomaraswamy’s meanings indicate that he did not understand Coomaraswamy’s writings adequately, whether he did not read Coomaraswamy’s writings closely enough, or whether he did understand them but chose not to reproduce the original meanings instead preferring to substitute ideas of his own. In many cases it is likely to be a combination of all three.

In cases where Cage did not reference Coomaraswamy as the origin of his ideas it is possible that Cage scholarship has suggested an origin for Cage’s material which cannot solely be attributed to Coomaraswamy, or which had little or nothing to do with Coomaraswamy. Further, it is possible that Cage did not attribute material where he knew he had substantially changed Coomaraswamy’s meaning. Thus, even though he reproduced surface meanings or ideas he had found in Coomaraswamy, by not referring to them as

Coomaraswamy's, he may have felt there was no problem with adding his own meanings. We therefore must be careful how we discuss Cage's ideas borrowed from Coomaraswamy, how we characterize Coomaraswamy's views, and the judgments and depictions we derive based on Cage's readings of Coomaraswamy.

Further, because Coomaraswamy based his ideas in philosophy, religion, and art originating from India *and* Europe, it is unwise to automatically regard all ideas that Cage encountered through Coomaraswamy's writings as Indian or Asian simply because they appear in Coomaraswamy's texts. The context of the idea needs to be considered carefully before any such labelling is made. In many cases, because of the tangled nature of Coomaraswamy's sources, the multiple agencies involved, and/or the disrupting patterns of colonialism, any labelling of area of origin may be difficult, impossible, or wrong-headed. Ironically, Coomaraswamy was decidedly modern in his multicultural identity and thinking. The reproduction of his ideas in Cage's writings and in much of Cage studies has failed to take that into account.

## 6. John Cage and Orientalism

What I am writing today is the history of buffaloes whereas all schools of Brahminism have been writing only the history of cows... I am as un-Hindu as the buffalo is, and I am as Indian as the buffalo is (Kancha Ilaiah, 2005: 138).

### 6.1 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, and Postcolonialism

The eighteenth century saw the start of an expansion of European colonialism that peaked in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries; by 1914 around 85 percent of the world was under European control. Human and financial exploitation occurred on a geographically unprecedented scale, while the lives and traditions of millions were permanently altered (Israel, 2006: 603). During this period, the colonial powers constructed a knowledge base of the societies and cultures they sought to control. This discourse grew more complex over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but it continued to be limited by its original epistemic formations.

In the early period of orientalist research, vague generalizations became codified into facts and ideas about Asia – the Orient<sup>147</sup> – and Asians – Orientals – became a body of knowledge on the subject. This discourse became the domain of orientalists, scholars who specialized in the study of the languages, religions, and laws of Asian countries. Nevertheless, they were not generating knowledge disinterestedly. The generation of knowledge was often financed, directed, disseminated, or used by the colonial powers either directly or through their agent companies. In turn, the wide dissemination of that knowledge created further forms of knowledge – nevertheless, it was still confined by its founding episteme. The combination of power and knowledge made it possible for numerous different bodies to make statements on the Orient which in turn contributed to the construction of the discourse: colonial governors, bureaucrats, and policy makers; politicians, journalists, and empire polemicists; missionaries, and religious leaders; travel writers, poets, artists, and opera librettists (Trautmann, 1997: 20). While much of this discourse painted the Orient and Orientals in negative terms, this was not always the case.

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<sup>147</sup> In order to save the present chapter from a sea of ‘scare quotes’, the words Orient and Orientals will appear without such marks in this chapter; nevertheless, scare quotes should be understood as implied whenever such terms are used.

In the late eighteenth century, as well as in periods of the nineteenth, fervour for a romanticized Orient swept through Europe. Indeed, as Raymond Schwab argued in *The Oriental Renaissance*, it can be considered integral to the development of romanticism. Whether in politics or religion, linguistics or poetry, popular entertainment or high culture, what has been termed Orientalism was widespread.

*Orientalism*, Edward Said's groundbreaking 1978 problematization of the whole field, provoked a wide-ranging questioning of the academic and popular representation of Asia and Asians. Depictions of these subjects, Said argued, were founded in representations determined by the need to create and maintain colonial hegemony. '[A] representation,' Said argued (2003: 272), 'is *eo ipso* implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the "truth," which is itself a representation'. These, he argued, must be viewed 'as inhabiting a common field of play defined for them, not by some inherent common subject matter alone, but by some common history, tradition, universe of discourse'. In relation to European representations of Asia – in his study, primarily Western Asia – Said termed that discourse Orientalism. Through uncovering the manipulation of knowledge by imperialist power, Said attacked the mechanisms for the representation and control of Asia in European and American thought. Inherent in the relation of Said's theory to the strategies of Foucault is the possibility of contrary action: through exposing the entanglement of power/knowledge, comes the exposure of points of resistance<sup>148</sup> (Trautmann, 1997: 19; Rouse, 1994: 99; R. Young, 1995: 159-60).

Said argued that the discourse of Orientalism was not separate from the colonial quest for control of territories. The circumstances of its formation not only directed what knowledge was sought, it conditioned how that knowledge was interpreted and through that what could be said on the subject (Said, 2003: xiv; Drayton, 1998: 232, 235, 237-8, 243-4, 251; Franklin, 2006: 2-3). Some of those who partook in the construction of this discourse did so for comparatively positive reasons – Sir William Jones (1746-94) is often cited as an example<sup>149</sup>. Nevertheless, while there may be a difference between knowledge resulting from the benevolent study of other cultures and knowledge crafted through war and self-aggrandizement, both can become grist for the ideological mill (Said, 2003: xiv). Jones too aided British colonial hegemony. Benevolent knowledge, if that is what it was, and the more aggressive kind, both mingled together as they became ingredients in the rich stew of

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<sup>148</sup> See Rouse, 1994: 92-113.

<sup>149</sup> On Jones, see Cannon (1990) and Franklin (2011).

the European understanding of the homogenous region *it* defined as the Orient. Once commingled, myths took on lives of their own; generalizations based on distortions became the basis for laws that governed whole peoples. Prejudices became facts (Said, 1985: 199; Burroughs, 1999: 184). Orientalist discourse did not just control what was said; through what Spivak (1988: 280-3) terms epistemic violence it affected subject formation and object formation. It silenced by appropriating the agency of those it spoke of for its own ends: 'because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action' (Said, 2003: 3; see also Inden, 1990: 37-8). This silencing was multifaceted and varied agents contributed to it. In India, it doubly affected those already marginalized by indigenous power structures through the homogenizing and hegemonizing British legal codification of heterogeneous Indian structures of dominance (Franklin, 2006: 15). In this case, a key effect was to reify elite constructions of Indian religion, law, and sociology (see, for example, Chakravarti, 2006; Dirks, 2001; Inden, 1990; Pennington, 2005; Spivak, 1988).

The goal of taking and retaining power led to a particular construction of the Oriental subject. The simultaneous drive for knowledge and power necessitated the gathering and structuring of knowledge in a way conducive to colonial rule. Said argued that this process led to the construction of the undifferentiated Oriental subject. All Orientals were held to be largely the same; what held for the peoples of one region could be relied on for another. The disparate cultures and peoples of an immense region were reduced to a set of generalizations (Burroughs, 1999: 184-5; Said, 2003: 33-8, 144-5, 229-231, 341-2). What Said called Orientalism was the 'archive of information' that was built up on the Orient and Orientals, and the 'family of ideas' that bound that archive together. The contents of that archive explained why Orientals behaved as they did, and predicted how they would or would not behave in a projected circumstance. Orientalism 'supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere' (Said, 2003: 41-2). It allowed Europeans to see Orientals as 'a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics'. Once established, this discourse seemed to become self-evident and therefore to explain all that needed to be explained. Said's theory of Orientalism is thus about more than the content of the discourse, it concerns how the boundaries of the discourse became the boundaries of imagining: Orientalism is more 'a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought than it is simply... a positive doctrine' (Said, 2003: 42, see also 176-7). 'Europe's collective day-dream of the Orient' became the reality that was looked for, and more often than not, found

(Kiernan, 1969: 131; King, 1999a: 32-3; Loomba, 2005: 19-20; Said, 2003: 45-6, 53, 93-4). Nevertheless, what was constructed had as much to do with the prejudices and desires of its builders as it did with the locations and peoples in question.

‘The Negro is not. Any more than the white man’ wrote Frantz Fanon (1986: 231). The development of empires and constructions of the peoples subordinated were central to competing constructions of European national and ethnic identities. European self-identities were integral to shaping the projected identity of Europe’s ‘Others’. In forming the idea of the Western self – its origin and development, its culture and philosophy, its historicity – Europe’s internal and external Others were simultaneously excluded and used as a measuring stick to create an idealistic construction of Self. Enlightenment-era European theories built on longstanding stereotypes of those at its margins to imagine that its Others existed in a dialectical relationship to Europe, the negative to Europe’s positive. It was believed, in the words of Lord Cromer, that ‘the Oriental generally acts, speaks, and thinks in a manner exactly opposite to the European’ (quoted in Said, 2003: 39). What ‘they’ are not, ‘we’ are; and vice versa (Bayly, 1996: 143; Bhabha, 1994: 340-1; Bryant, 2001: 30-1; Dirks, 2006: 278-80; Greene, 1998: 208, 215-6; King, 1999a: 3-4, 78-9; Loomba, 2005: 53-4, 91-3, 163-4; Marshall, 1970: 1; Nandy, 1983: 71-2; Said, 2003: 4-5, 7-8, 39, 40, 43-6). The ‘Orient’ and the ‘Occident,’ the ‘East’ and the ‘West,’ are not physical or biological realities but created categories that exist as unstable references. Although the Orientalist construction was shaped by both sides of that divide, it was European interests that normally directed the initial development of the construction; it was colonial desires and the certainty of superiority that were normally behind those interests (Bayly, 1999: 461-62; Bhabha, 1994: 57-8, 62, 340; Burroughs, 1999: 173-5, 178-80, 182-3; King, 1999a: 212; Loomba, 2005: 91-2, 105; Marshall, 1998b: 592-93; Nandy, 1983: 73; Ray, 1998: 508-11, 528; Said, 2003: 4-5, 8).

This was not an equal meeting of free nations: the balance of power lay stacked heavily in Europe’s favour. To become the Orient of the European imagination, Asia and Asians, in Said’s terms, needed to be ‘Orientalized’ (Said, 2003: 5-6). That happened through the appearance of the tropes of the discourse in all avenues of life and thought. Asia was always mediated through Orientalism. The individual Oriental came to be imagined as always subordinate to the collective; not an individual but *an* Oriental, *an* Arab, *an* Indian. After all, did not European individuality only emerge at the Renaissance?

As the Orient was considered pre-modern this was a logical deduction. ‘We are to assume,’ wrote Said (ibid.: 230),

that if *an* Arab feels joy, if he is sad at the death of his child or parent, if he has a sense of the injustices of political tyranny, then those experiences are necessarily subordinate to the sheer, unadorned, and persistent fact of being an Arab.

What was denied, to return to Fanon (1986: 232), was ‘the open door of every consciousness’. Coterminous with the construction of the European Other, there developed a self-conception tied into it – of what it was to be ‘Occidental’ or a Westerner. An equally essentialized construction, the West also took on the appearance of reality (Said, 2003: 348-9, Loomba, 2005: 91-2; Nandy, 1983: 71).

In *Orientalism*, Said focused principally on West Asia and North Africa and representations of those areas in predominantly French texts. In the decades since the work’s publication, Said’s theories have been found to have considerable applicability to many colonial and postcolonial areas of study across Asia and beyond. Colonialism today is not dead: economic imperialism and neocolonial invasions both cultural and militaristic continue. Some formerly colonized nations have themselves become colonizers. Postcolonialism has grown into a field of scholarship that has moved forward to investigate the wider implications of Said’s theories (Kaul, 2009: 306-11, 314, 322-3, 326; Breckenridge and Veer, 1993b: 2-3).

Said’s *Orientalism* has itself been criticized on a number of levels. Some criticisms point out that he tended to ignore the considerable differences found in the varying texts he surveyed, whether temporal or geographical. Other critics have pointed to Said’s tendency to disregard the frequently blurred lines between the colonizer and the colonized, domination and agency, which have resulted, this criticism suggests, in the reinforcement of the east/west bifurcation and a denial of indigenous agency in the ongoing production of Orientalist ideas (Loomba, 2005: 46-7, 91-2; Bhabha, 1994: 101-4; Franklin, 2006: 2-3, 15-6; Bayly, 1996: 142, 168, 36, 369-70; Veer, 1993: 23; Trautmann, 1997: 21-5; King, 1999a: 192-3; R. Young, 1995: 160-5; Rocher, 1993: 215; Heehs, 2008: 240-1; Lopez, Jr. 1995b: 12). In the context of the present thesis it is necessary to recognize that Postcolonialism itself is a discourse shaped by ideology. Said’s theory of Orientalism is a structure of knowledge that brings a particular perspective to bear on the material it encounters. This can be seen clearly if the example of Traditionalist discourse is used. Just as Coomaraswamy’s theories depend on reifying particular subjectivities, and on particular

ontological, epistemological, ethical, and ideological beliefs, so does Postcolonialism. From this position, Postcolonial discourse has its own epistemological limitations. While there are some areas of overlap, in general their respective ideologies preclude agreement. In areas of opposition – such as that which forms the purview of the Subaltern Studies collective, or the writings of Dalit activist Kancha Ilaiah – they seem incommensurably opposed.

This chapter uses a methodology drawn from Postcolonial discourse analysis. In utilizing this approach I adopt a different methodology from that used in the previous five chapters. This results in a more subjective style. Why is this worthwhile? Postcolonial discourse analysis reveals numerous problematic aspects of Cage's thought, and shows the importance of the findings of the preceding chapters. It builds a different viewpoint from which to consider Cage's art and thought. This perspective casts into relief the extreme difficulty – if not impossibility – of one of the fundamental aims of Cage's later work: to go beyond subjectivity in order to create art that allows the experience of things 'as they are' (Cage and Charles, 1981: 234). The findings of this chapter raise troubling questions for many of the claims made by and for Cage and suggest a number of further unexplored avenues of investigation into the art and thought of Cage. If there is to be any meaning to Cage's belief that 'the world is one world now', then I consider it vital to raise these issues (Cage, 1959d: 75). How the problematics of Cage's art and thought can be addressed while also taking account of the other subjectivities Cage evoked remains a question for future research.

## **6.2 Cage and Orientalism**

Said's *Orientalism* primarily focused on depictions of Asia in eighteenth and nineteenth century European literary sources. In considering Orientalism in relation to Cage the particular circumstances of musical production have to be considered. Said himself wrote a number of texts on music and the history of music<sup>150</sup>, but it is not primarily his writings on music that will be looked to in this instance. Between the publication of *Orientalism* and the present day, postcolonial theories have informed research across the arts and

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<sup>150</sup> On Said's writings on music see Derek B. Scott (2009: 165-84). Said and Cage met in the late 1960s when both were attached to the Institute for Advanced Studies at the University of Illinois. Said mentioned Cage very occasionally in his writings. His most insightful evaluation of Cage is contained in the essay 'From Silence to Sound and Back Again' (1997: 519-26).

humanities. The present investigation will be informed both by Said's original theory and investigations of Orientalism in recent cultural musicology. It will draw on a variety of differing sources that together create meaning in relation to Cage: Cage's writings and interviews, his scores and music, academic writings on Cage (Cage Studies), and CD and DVD releases and their respective liner notes. Together these will be referred to as Cageian discourse. Cage's music, along with art music in general, should not be seen as exempted from the concerns of the marketplace (D. B. Scott, 2000: 1). Thus, the continuation of Cageian agency in the form of publisher and estate will be noted. The present chapter aims to present a preliminary analysis of this subject area building on the findings of the previous chapters. In addition, examples drawn from across the history of Cage's borrowings have been utilized where extensive further exegesis is not required. Nevertheless, a complete analysis will only be able to be completed once Cage's borrowings from Chinese and Japanese thought have been properly investigated.

In 'The End of the Renaissance', Leonard B. Meyer's influential essay on Cage and experimentalism in the arts, Meyer (1967: 72) argued that 'underlying this new aesthetic is a conception of man and the universe, which is almost the opposite of the view that has dominated Western thought since its beginnings'. What could possibly explain such a radical break? Meyer (1967: 72-3) postulated an answer: 'many of these artists have read and been influenced by both Eastern and Western writings on Oriental philosophy'. This idea is so simple it appears obvious. The Orient, being widely seen as the opposite of Europe in every way, would without question influence Cage and his colleagues to produce art 'almost the *opposite*' of 'the view' of 'Western thought' (emphasis added). Such views abounded at the time Meyer wrote, and in significant ways had been encouraged by Cage himself. Although more recent literature on John Cage has avoided the worst excesses of such simplistic binarism, the legacy of that view remains in Cageian discourse in the questions that are asked about him and in the boundaries of the discussion that surrounds him.

Cage 'was not an orientalist', claimed Joan Retallack (Cage and Retallack, 1996: xxxiv). It is not immediately obvious which meaning of the word she here refers to. In the original context it is most likely that she was suggesting that Cage was not what now tends to be known as an 'area specialist'. If that is the case, then she is perhaps right. However, by the time Retallack wrote those words, the word 'orientalist' had gained numerous other connotations stemming from the theories of Said. Instead, Retallack claimed that Cage used

'Eastern thought' 'as *clinamen*, a refreshingly alien element that skews business as usual'. In the sense Said used Orientalism, Retallack's description of Cage's use of Asian material contradicts her earlier assertion. In arguing that Cage looked to Asia as 'alien' and *used* it for his own purposes, Retallack perhaps unknowingly argued why Cage *was* an Orientalist.

In *Orientalism*, Said (2003: 2-3) related the concept at the heart of his argument to three interdependent meanings (King, 1999a: 82-3). This chapter will show that each of Said's meanings is applicable to Cage. The first of Said's meanings relates to anyone who positions themselves or is positioned as an academic expert on 'the Orient'. The second meaning of the term concerns the dialectic of Orient and Occident. This is the idea of Orientalism as an 'ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident"'. Orientalism in this sense can be found in numerous locations: politics, religion, academia, publishing, music, fine and decorative art, film, the list goes on. The third meaning is broad and relates to the relation of power/knowledge. In this sense,

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said, 2003: 3).

This chapter will be structured around these three interrelated meanings. From the start it should be pointed out that Cage was not a 'classic orientalist'. Cage furthered a style of Orientalism, stemming from but not identical to the main stream, that has been referred to in this thesis as affirmative Orientalism; it is also sometimes referred to as 'Occidentalism'. It is the mirror image of the Orientalist binary. The ontological and epistemological distinction is identical or closely related, but the values attached to the distinction are inverted. This same stream of Orientalism is central to the writings of Coomaraswamy and Suzuki, and, in varying degrees, to the writings of Campbell, Jung, Huxley, Watts and other of Cage's sources. Nevertheless, as it is the same ontological and epistemological distinction that is postulated and furthered, the difference between Orientalism and affirmative Orientalism does not alter how the subject should be approached.

### 6.3 Expertise

In the previous section the first meaning of Orientalism was identified as focussing on experts on Asia, specifically academic experts. Cage was not a conventional academic; however, as we shall see, he positioned himself and was positioned by others as an expert in the field. As such, he gathered the weight of authority around his words. The language with which Cage used to describe his knowledge of Asian religions and philosophies tended to suggest that his knowledge was formed through rigorous study, which in turn furthered belief in the extent of his knowledge. Instead, Cage's knowledge in the subject was largely autodidactic and gained from unsystematic reading of a narrow type of material primarily written for a non-specialist American and European readership. In addition, over a two (or three) year period he attended a public series of lectures by Suzuki. While this is not inconsiderable, the way he depicted his study often suggested his knowledge was considerably broader than it was. For example, talking to Daniel Charles in 1971, Cage said: 'After *studying Oriental thought as a whole*, I took Suzuki's courses for three years'<sup>151</sup> (Cage and Charles, 1981: 94; emphasis added). Ignoring for the moment the issue that the multifaceted nature of Asian religious and philosophical traditions is effectively erased by claims such as 'Oriental thought as a whole', and that the major gaps in his knowledge show quite clearly that he had not studied it 'as a whole', he claimed a much wider area of study than he could reasonably justify from the limitations of his reading material. His sources only covered a small number of traditions.

It is also noticeable that Cage made much of the fact that he had *studied* (e.g. Cage, 1959c: 143; Cage and Charles, 1981: 40, 91; Cage and Grimes, 1986: 48; Cage and Wallace, 1958: 47; Kostelanetz, 2003: 67, 183). To the end of his life, Cage frequently mentioned his attendance at Suzuki's lectures. The way in which he described his relationship to Suzuki suggested that this was a relationship of teacher to student. For example: 'I didn't study music with just anybody; I studied with Schoenberg. I didn't study Zen with just anybody; I studied with Suzuki' (Cage and Duckworth, 1989: 27). However, the relationship between his studies with Schönberg and Suzuki was not identical; his attendance at Suzuki's public lectures was informal and not subject to any review or feedback. Neither was the relationship one of Zen master to student, another possible connotation of his depiction. After the period in which he attended Suzuki's lectures, Cage

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<sup>151</sup> The number of years he attended Suzuki's talks is not clear. It was either two or three; probably two (see Patterson, 1996).

continued to read a small number of translations of original texts or general books on the subject; that essentially formed the limits of his study.

This impression was also furthered by claims Cage made regarding the relationship of his studies to his compositional techniques and associated elements of his thinking: for example, ‘I was led to non-acting and disorder by the Orientals’ (Cage and Charles, 1981: 215). This suggests that it was Oriental agency that led him rather than his own. His authority was also magnified by the confidence with which he pronounced on Asia and Asians, not only in the early talks in which various examples have already been highlighted but also in his later interviews. This can be illustrated with two Cage quotations on subjects explored in section 5.1 above. Firstly, on *rasa*: ‘If you have, as you do in India, nine permanent emotions, and the center one is the one without color – the others are white or black – and tranquillity is in the center: freedom from likes and dislikes’ (Cage and Montague, 1985: 213). Secondly, on the constant presence of music:

Duckworth: ...it seems to me that when you focus on [4’33’] it becomes art silence rather than real silence. And that the understanding of real silence is what that piece is about. But that the only way you can get to real silence is through artistic silence. Is that accurate?

Cage: Thoreau came to this same attitude of mind and use of his faculties without my being anywhere around.

Duckworth: Yes, but you’d be hard-pressed to name another one who came to that attitude, wouldn’t you?

Cage: Well, I would think quite a lot of people in India feel that music is continuous; it is only we who turn away. This is a cliché is Indian thinking and, surely, in Indian experience (Cage and Duckworth, 1989: 22).

In both cases, key aspects of Cage’s interpretation were misprisions caused by his lack of knowledge of the subject matter and willingness to bend the material to confirm his own thinking. As Carolyn Brown (2007: 38) remarked: ‘[Cage] enthusiastically believed every word he uttered’. Cage’s confidence in the validity of his interpretations of material deriving from Asia was frequently hard to justify, yet it made him appear to be an expert on Asian thought.

Above all else, there were the numerous occasions on which Cage used Asian philosophical and religious traditions, doctrines, figures, or associated terms and references to explain or defend his work, or to criticize or praise the work and habits of others.

Occasionally, he would seek to put his research in perspective; however, in probably the most famous instance of this, the claim was in effect offset by further claims and by the context. In the introduction to *Silence* Cage wrote:

What I do, I do not wish blamed on Zen, though without my engagement with Zen (attendance at lectures by Alan Watts and D. T. Suzuki, reading of the literature) I doubt whether I would have done what I have done (Cage, 1968a: xi).

An acknowledgement was made, but that acknowledgement was used for the purposes of name-checking two figures regarded at the time as leading authorities on Zen, and to reiterate the effect of Zen on his work (see also Chou, 1971: 225). Nevertheless, it was not only Cage's efforts that produced his authority.

Writers surveying Cage's work have frequently presented him as an authority on Asia, emphasizing the length of his study, the influence of his ideas, and the depth of his understanding. This trend was started in the infancy of Cage studies. Calvin Tomkins (1965: 98) noted that 'It would have been difficult to have found a student more receptive to the wisdom of the Orient than Cage'. That trend continued, as the following examples show. The magnitude of Cage's studies grew with the years: Margaret Leng Tan (1989: 34) claimed 'Ever since 1945, Cage has drawn upon the ancient teachings of India, China, and Japan'; Tom Johnson (1989: 268) added 'But of course, he did study Zen for a very long time'; and Retallack pointed out that Cage 'studied [Buddhist texts] for five decades' (Cage and Retallack, 1996: xlv). According to the brief biography in the 2010 John Cage diary published by the John Cage Trust, the chance operations in Cage's music reflected 'his *lifelong* study of Zen Buddhism' (Silverman, 2009: unpaginated; emphasis added). Other writers point out the extent of the connection between Cage and Asia in received opinion. According to Gena, 'eastern philosophy and Zen' are 'synonymous' with Cage (Feldman and Gena, 1982: 69); Robert Coe thought Cage had done 'as much to introduce a deliberately Buddhist view into the cultural discourse of the West as any artist alive' (Cage, Anderson, and Coe, 1992). The most grandiose assertions have (perhaps unknowingly) even claimed enlightenment and religious authority for Cage: 'It is perfectly accurate and even interesting to characterize John Cage as an American Zen master' Retallack claimed, adding oxymoronically 'as long as it is entirely clear that he was not a formally trained Zen Buddhist' (Cage and Retallack, 1996: xl; see also, M. L. Tan, 1989: 54; M. C. Richards, 1982: 39). Most recently, Alexandra Munroe, curator of the Guggenheim Museum's major 2009 exhibition *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989* made the

same claim: ‘Thoroughly identified with Japanese Zen, Cage is most revered as a modern Zen master’ (Munroe, 2009: 201). These assertions, with lessening degrees of authority, have then been repeatedly made in CD liner notes, concert programmes, newspaper articles, and on internet pages. Only in some more recent studies, such as Patterson (1996/2002b/2002c) and Gann (2010), have Cage’s misprisions been teased out and a more complex picture emerged. Even then, Cage’s status as an expert has not really been questioned.

Cage’s authority can also be gauged from the influence he has had on others. Kyle Gann (2002: 257) remembers that for many artists of his generation, Cage’s writings provided ‘the first signal that there was something interesting to be found in... phenomena exotic to traditional Western spirituality’. Cage’s words and actions encouraged the avant-garde to look ‘East’ (M. L. Tan, 1989: 54). *Silence* became a bible for his young followers in the New York art scene; his ideas and theories filtered into the wider American and European arts scene as they continue to do to the present (Corbett, 2000: 170; Gann, 2010: 194; Leonard, 1994: 172; S. Richards, 1996: 166-7). British musician Sam Richards (1996: 3) wrote:

when I was a student in the 1960s many of us who were interested in Cage felt and acted as if we were initiates into a cult. This was not Cage’s responsibility but it did make an awareness of his music and ideas feel like a form of esoteric knowledge.

This may have been part of its appeal.

Many of Cage’s ideas were associated with Zen and ‘the Orient’; this was understandable, it was how Cage had explained his ideas. Yet, because this was many of his readers’ first encounter with the traditions he was presenting, his very personal version of these traditions shaped how these traditions were interpreted and shaped how Cage himself was viewed. In this sense, Cage was more of a cultural authority than a scholarly one. Nevertheless, he was not entirely unconnected to academia.

Throughout his life Cage was for periods employed as a teacher (including the Cornish School, Mills College, Black Mountain College), fellow (including Wesleyan University), or visiting professor (including University of Illinois, and Harvard University). His books, including the seminal *Silence*, were mainly published by Wesleyan University Press. These positions and publications added to the weight that was attached to his views. Cage was not an academic ‘area specialist’, and thus not an orientalist in the original sense of the term; however, his depictions of Asian matters carried weight and were not

unconnected from academic authority. What gave Cage's words weight was partly his claims to have *studied* – he was 'the Zen Buddhist scholar' Suzuki's 'pupil' (M. L. Tan, 1989: 37); it was made clear he knew more about the subject than his readers and listeners. Simultaneously, as he positioned his music as an expression of the knowledge he had been led to 'by the Orientals', his music also acted to reinforce the authority of his words and to further disseminate ideas on 'the Orient'.

#### 6.4 Dialectics

Orientalism in Said's second usage refers to the formation and continuation of a style of thought based in the dialectical distinction made between Orient and Occident. In this section, Cage's version of the Orientalist dialectic will be outlined and demonstrated. It will be argued that Cage believed that it was possible to discover an essence of Oriental philosophy. This belief resulted in him making generalizations about Asian religious and philosophical traditions and Asian people based on his own formulation of that essence. It will be further argued that the idea of this essence was the product of Orientalism in Said's second sense.

Cage suggested to Margaret Leng Tan that it was '[t]he *strangeness* of what I was doing [that] led many to think of it as Oriental' (M. L. Tan, 1989: 39, emphasis added). In relation to musical Orientalism, Derek B. Scott argued that

it does not matter if elements are taken from the culture of the Other or not; it only matters that there are signifiers of difference that construct a sense of Otherness... its purpose is first and foremost not to *imitate* but to *represent* (2009: 176).

To give one example: despite no real link between Cage's prepared piano compositions and Asian musical styles, the Orientalness of Cage's music was reified to the point where it could become what it had been suspected of being. Cage's words were as important to this process as his music.

To begin, we shall examine a number of illustrations from throughout Cage's career which characterized this trend. The most obvious are Cage's numerous mentions of what characterizes the Oriental or the Eastern as opposed to what characterizes the Western or Occidental. Many relevant examples appear in the chapters above. In these characterizations the Orient is often treated as a homogenous entity with little temporal, geographical, religious, philosophical, political, or social differentiation. In Cage's writings, the words of a syncreticizing nineteenth-century Bengali guru mingle with those

of a semi-mythical third-century BCE Chinese Dàoist, a ninth-century Chinese Chán master, and a fourteenth century German Christian scholastic master and mystic. Their position in respect to social and ideological issues – if Cage was even aware of them due to the limitations of the material he read – was erased along with their differences and most of their identities. Made to speak in English translations sometimes paraphrased by Cage into his own vernacular idiom, they become mythical, malleable, and largely divorced from their respective contexts. Glossed by his renderings, they become the timeless stereotypes of Orientalist discourse. Thus, although it was unlikely to have been Cage's intention, his writings preserve the hegemony of Orientalist representations (cf. King, 1999a: 23; Loomba, 2005: 53-4; Said, 2003: 208, 240).

Cage's early longing for the unanimous consistency of the gothic became a susceptibility to the romantic Orientalist trope of the 'mystic East' (for example, see Cage, 1946: 25, and cf. King, 1999a: 147). In Cage's later thought, romantic Orientalist stereotypes were equally evident: 'I was led to non-acting and disorder by the Orientals. Well, the Orientals don't have our problems. They are infinitely closer to the environment than we are' (Cage and Charles, 1981: 215). Cage's 'Orientals' are largely a faceless mass with no individuality; indeed self-expression is consistently something Cage treats as only a 'Western' phenomenon (cf. Veer, 1993: 31-2). The effect of these beliefs can be seen occasionally in Cage's thinking through the use of the language of the racial or group mind: for example, 'The Hindu mind is moving' (Cage and Charles, 1981: 21). Similarly, on occasion Cage followed Suzuki in reproducing elements of the Orientalist-derived affirmative racism of Japanese right-wing nationalist *nihonjinron* polemics<sup>152</sup>. For example, on two occasions he suggested that there was 'a difference between the Japanese mind and the Western mind'. According to Cage, because 'the Japanese mind' processes vowels and consonants differently to 'the Western mind', 'a great deal of experience is meaningless to the Western mind, whereas all experience is meaningful to the Japanese mind' (Cage and Dickinson, 1987: 38; Cage and Retallack, 1996: 77-8). Whatever their relation to reality, these last ideas at least might be considered flattering. But does that make them any ontologically different from their negative flip-side? Apparent praise reifies significant distortions.

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<sup>152</sup> See Dale (1986) and Yoshino (1992).

Many of Cage's Orientalisms are less obvious than the examples cited above. In the following quotation Cage discusses *rasa*, an idea he originally took from a work by Coomaraswamy; as shown in 5.1 this idea had been creatively adapted by Cage and bore little resemblance to the original source. By this stage it had no wider applicability beyond his own practice. Retallack asked Cage, 'Is "comedy" for you an idea that is coextensive with humor?' Cage replied:

Humor, in *Eastern philosophy*, must be connected with the mirthful. As such, it's one of the white emotions, rather than the dark ones... There is the strong flowing through all of these of freedom from likes and dislikes... So I've seen the mirthful in that context – as being white, opposite the dark (Cage and Retallack, 1996: 160, emphasis added).

Cage's answer essentialized his personal interpretation of a single element of one aesthetic theory and suggested that his interpretation was the interpretation not just of Indian philosophy but 'Eastern philosophy' in general. The same principle is also there in 1958 in 'Indeterminacy' when Cage lectured his audience on drawing from 'the Ground of Meister Eckhart' in relation to dualism, nondualism, and 'the "deep sleep" of Indian mental practice' (Cage 1961a: 36-8). As shown earlier, it is highly questionable whether Cage's use of the term nondualism agreed with the Scholastic theories of Meister Eckhart or to how his sources would have interpreted the 'deep sleep' of the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*. These postulations were based on what *he* thought would be the case based on his knowledge of the Orient. In a number of similar examples, Cage's idea of Indian philosophy appears to have been conceived in a dialectical relationship to what he termed 'German philosophy'. Cage's adoption of 'German' as an insult seems to have replaced 'Renaissance' in his lexicon; it served a similar purpose (see 5.2.1). As such it was part of a wider trend in Cage's thinking to relate anything he disapproved of to Europe and anything he approved of to Asia. For example, Cage claimed: 'I think there is a grand difference between German philosophy, which has tended to insist upon consistency and unity and such things, and the philosophies of India, which have separate goals' (Kostelanetz, 2003: 47; see also, Cage, 1969b: 15; Kostelanetz, 2003: 278). What is damaging about such simplifications lies in what they erase.

Simplifications such as this can be unconsciously complicit in epistemic violence related to the colonial legacy. One aspect of this can be glimpsed in relation to the following example pertaining to India. According to Cage in 1979,

There's no contradiction between these things which are contradicting... If we take as the guide for our thinking and living philosophy structured as it is in India, into *artha, kama, dharma, moksha*. If we take a German point of view, then everything must be consistent... (Cage and Reynolds, 1979: 589; transliterations as original).

The terms Cage used relate to *puruṣārtha*, the goals of human life of traditional Brahmanism (King, 1999b: 18). But what if, like Indian Dalit activist Kancha Ilaiah, you are Indian and reject traditional Brahmanism because it seems to be an authoritarian oppressive force responsible for violence against you and your culture and traditions? (See Ilaiah, 2004; 2005; and, Dirks, 2001: 54; Veer, 1993: 26-7, 31-2). Cage's Orientalisms do not just mistake myths for a continent, they disguise oppression and dominance within the countries romanticized. Cage's reification of (his own highly individual interpretation of) traditional Brahmanic values as *the* values of all Indians continued a long trend in Orientalist discourse, which in turn furthered existing trends of dominance and oppression in India (see, for example, Chakravarti, 2006; Dirks, 2001; Inden, 1990; Spivak, 1988).

Cage's knowledge of Asian societies was limited by the boundaries of Orientalist discourse. His knowledge of the extent and variety of Asian philosophies, religions and cultures, the terminology and language that he used, and the values that he placed on concepts, were all primarily formed from within that discourse. Orientalism limited the types of Asian philosophy Cage encountered and shaped how he understood the material he did encounter; in turn, Cage reinforced and furthered the same limitations when his own thought was disseminated.

With the exception of Suzuki's Zen perspective, Cage had little knowledge of the variety of highly sophisticated traditions of Indian or Chinese philosophy – traditions in which logic and rationalism were often not alien whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist (see for example: Ganeri, 2001a, 2001b; Garfield and Edelglas, 2011; Hansen, 1992; King, 1999b; Siderits, 2007; R. J. Smith, 2008). Cage focussed only on anti-rational and anti-logical discourse from a small number of schools and interpretations; such themes confirmed the Orientalist stereotype of the irrational and illogical Oriental. Because Cage read these ideas into all Asian thought, even where such themes were of little relevance, his thought erased the philosophical differences within and between the different traditions he borrowed from and thus reinforced the assumptions of Orientalism.

A comparable situation can be observed in relation to Indian political thought. Cultural representations of India in American and European culture allowed Cage to

discover the thought of Coomaraswamy, Rāmakṛṣṇa, and Gāndhī, but not, for example, the radical leftist thought of the influential philosopher and political leader B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar, who encouraged his followers to join him in converting to Buddhism, clashed publicly with Gāndhī over what he believed was the Mahātmā's support for the caste-system; his beliefs stand in even greater opposition to Coomaraswamy's aristocratic elitism (see Ambedkar, 2002; 2011; Jaffrelot, 2005). Throughout his career Cage principally focused only on differences between East and contemporary West. While he was aware of social stratification within Europe and America, his attitude towards Asia was typified by 'Well, the Orientals don't have our problems'. The message of the East was 'nichi nichi kore ko nichi: every day is a beautiful day' (1958a: 41; see also, 1957a: 95). Like the modernist interest in the 'primitive', Cage's interest lay in how 'they' could solve 'our' problems. Continuities in social stratification between Asia and Europe and America (apart from the hegemonizing global village<sup>153</sup>) were silenced by his concentration on what was different. Just as he never discussed similarities between those countries apart from at a mythical level, neither did he seem to conceive of regional differences or social stratification within the societies of those countries (Cage, 1959c: 143; Said, 2003: 106-7). Yet, did Cage not frequently claim that there were no longer distinctions between 'East' and 'West'? '[T]he distinctions between self and other are being forgotten', he claimed in the mid-sixties (Cage, 1968c: 32). A considerable irony of Cage's thought was that, in a number of instances, he reproduced the Orientalist binary while simultaneously believing he had evaded it.

The reason for Cage's adoption of the dialectic lay partially in the theories of Coomaraswamy. As shown in chapter five, one of the few ideas Cage took relatively faithfully from Coomaraswamy was the idea that Orient and Occident were united in thought and values before the Renaissance wrought a change that ushered contrary values into modern Europe. Itself a product of romantic Orientalism and affirmative Orientalism, Coomaraswamy's theory was grounded in a romantic view of a universal religious truth decipherable in the Orient and the European past. This theory preserved the Orientalist dialectic: there was still the East, but instead of existing opposed to the West in general it was opposed only to the modern West. As will be shown in subsequent research, Suzuki also postulated universalism and an essentialized essence of Oriental thought entangled in

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<sup>153</sup> For example, Cage and Turner, 1991: 8.

the processes of European, American, and Japanese colonialism; however, unlike Coomaraswamy, Suzuki's Orientalist universalism was centred on a modernized nationalistic depiction of Japanese Zen (see, for example, Sharf, 1995: 107-60). Because of the universalism of both theories, Cage could easily move from Coomaraswamy to Suzuki still holding on to Coomaraswamy's theory of a universal essence that only modern Europe diverged from. The writings of Campbell, Jung, Huxley, Watts, and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* could also be understood by Cage in a similar way: each also reproduced universalisms and stereotypes that had emerged from the same discourse.

Cage's adoption of the Orientalist dialectic logically stemmed from Coomaraswamy's theory but was not identical to it. In Cage's thinking there were *two* interrelated divisions of the world. The first was essentially the Orientalist dialectic: the Orient is the opposite of Europe. The second was the tripartite division identified in section 5.2.1. This division retained the opposition of Orient and modern Europe but suggested that America was separate to both. In this second division, an America shorn of European influence was regarded to be potentially congruent with Asia; however, this was only achieved through what Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000: 21) described as Cage's 'ideological conflation of "America" with "the world"'. What stopped the world being one was Europe (Cage, 1959c: 143; 1959d: 73). Just as European modernism had imagined it was creating an art of universal significance, the Cageian alternative sought to establish 'an American/experimental counter-(or complementary) hegemony to European modernism' (Born and Hesmondhalgh, 2000: 21). Cage's twin divisions of the world can be glimpsed in the following quotation: 'It will not be easy, however, for Europe to give up being Europe. It will, nevertheless, and must: for the world is one world now' (Cage, 1959d: 75). This suggested to Cage that in order to discover universal spiritual and philosophical values, the necessary thing was to emancipate oneself from those European values that had been introduced subsequent to the Renaissance (in his later thinking 'German thought'). In music one could do that by 'go[ing] for inspiration to those places, or return[ing] to those times, where or when harmony is not of the essence' (Cage, 1946: 25). In order to see an American modernist hegemony as non-contradictory to one-worldism, Cage had to imagine that his thought had universal value and that his thought was analogous to that of the Oriental Other. What is key here is not Cage's stereotypical romantic view of the East and the medieval, but the flexibility of his idea of the West.

Cage's initial encounter with Coomaraswamy's theories not only gave him the idea of a universal spirituality and philosophy, it also empowered him to believe that he had as much right to take what he wanted from 'Eastern philosophy' as 'European thought'. Note in the following quotation how 'West' is not identical to 'Europe': 'It was thanks to Coomaraswamy that I began to suspect that... Eastern thought was no less admissible for a Westerner than is European thought' (Cage and Charles, 1981: 105). Coomaraswamy's theory that Asian and pre-Renaissance values were identical and Campbell and Jung's belief that the world's 'myths' should be harnessed for the benefit of the European/American Self, both encouraged Cage to feel validated in creating his own syncretic theories. The pick-and-choose methodologies of Campbell and Huxley provided him with a model. Cage felt he had the right to take what he wanted from Asian philosophies and religions and to combine these borrowings as he wished. In essence, he felt he had as much proprietary right to 'Eastern thought' as he did to thought 'belonging' to his own culture:

People are always saying that the East is the East and the West is the West and you have to keep from mixing them up. When I first began to study Oriental philosophy, I also worried about whether it was *mine* to study. I don't worry any more about that (Cage, 1965a: 136, emphasis added).

One did not need to be afraid of mixing them up because 'the world is one world now'. Nevertheless, although he questioned whether it was correct to mix them up, he did not question how real the categories of East and West were. Cage continued to postulate a reified Oriental principle or essence and a similarly reified European principle or essence. It was this that led Cage to simultaneously speak one-worldism while continuing to reproduce the idea of the Orientalist dialectic. Instead of Kipling's classic Orientalism 'East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet', Cage intimated that 'East is East and Europe is Europe and never the twain shall meet'. What is different here is not the idea of the East, but the idea of the *West*. While America had been (at least in principle) freed from the dialectic, the opposition of East and Europe remained identical (Cage, 1959d: 73, 75). Cage had not altered his perception of the Other, he had altered his perception of the *Self*. The identity of the Other did not change because this was a desire for the Other inspired by a psychological need to evade the Self (see J. D. Katz, 2001, especially pp.44-5; D. B. Scott, 1998:156). In Cage's art, silencing the Self led to a music he believed was analogous to Oriental music (e.g. Cage and Charles, 1981: 200); in Cage's thinking, silencing the Self

led to a philosophy which he believed was analogous to Oriental *thought*. Despite his claims otherwise, Cage's depiction of the East continued to rely on the ontological and epistemological divide of Orientalism.

Initially Cage decided to implement in his music some of the ideas he had encountered through Coomaraswamy and this led to his belief in an Oriental philosophical essence. 'At first, my inclination was to make music about the ideas that I had encountered in the Orient' he said in 1980. This included the use of *rasa* theory in the *Sonatas and Interludes*. 'But then I thought, instead of talking about it, to do it; instead of discussing it, to do it. And that would be done by making the music nonintentional' (Kostelanetz, 2003: 67; see also, Cage and Charles, 1981: 103). Huxley (1946: 8) had argued that 'The Perennial Philosophy teaches that it is desirable and indeed necessary to know the spiritual Ground of things, not only within the soul, but also outside in the world'. Cage noted that the traditions he was interested in used meditation or yoga as a method of 'going inward'; however, 'as a musician' he wanted to go 'outward'. Therefore he came to his own conclusions about what that might entail (Cage, 1965b: 11; 1988a: 7; 1989: 241; 1993a: 107-8; 1993d: 65; Cage and Oliver, 1980: 205).

Cage regarded traditional practices as not relevant to him in New York, which in turn reveals a considerable amount about how he conceptualized religions. His famous question 'What nowadays, America mid-twentieth century, is Zen?' characterized that attitude (Cage, 1968a: xi; see also, Cage and Wallace, 1958: 47). This attitude had consequences for how his thought developed and how he depicted the traditions he focused on. For example, although Cage was undoubtedly influenced by a similar stance in Suzuki's highly individual modernization of the Zen tradition, it meant he showed no interest in the extensive rituals, intercessionary actions, and other devotional practices of Japanese Buddhism or any other religious or philosophical tradition he investigated (see Heine, 2008; Heine and Wright, 2008; Sharf, 1995; cf. Cage, Anderson, and Coe, 1992 and Cage, 1965b: 11). Instead, he assumed that there was an essence behind those ideas that he could discover for himself without guidance (Cage, 1961a: 262; Kostelanetz, 2003: 185). In an interview in 1984 he suggested that 'Indian aesthetic theory', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the study of Zen, and Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy* had all led him to the same conclusion: 'they all say the same thing: namely, a quiet mind is a mind that is free of its likes and dislikes' (Cage and Grimes, 1986: 48; see also, Cage, 1959c: 143; 1967c: 71; Cage and Montague, 1985: 70-1). In 1974 Cage told an interviewer 'My attitude

was not to do those things that Oriental people did but to find, if I could, *the principle of Oriental thought*' (Kostelanetz, 2003: 184-5, emphasis added). Cage's friend Minna Lederman, and Joan Retallack both also suggested that this characterized Cage's thinking (Lederman and Cheevers, 1987: 106; Cage and Retallack, 1996: xxix). Probably inspired by similar ideas in Coomaraswamy and Suzuki as well as Campbell, he seems to have thought that there was a principle that grounded *all* Asian thinking. Nevertheless, because his knowledge of those traditions was limited to sources that relied on the ontological and epistemological division of the Orientalist dialectic and the stereotypes created by that discourse, the principles Cage thought he had discovered were often distorted essentializations (Cage, 1979b: 181). 'What clearly are mid-twentieth-century American are Cage's own ideas', Chou Wen-chung pointed out (1971: 225). As with many Orientalisms, it is not depictions of the Other that Cage presented but reflections of the Self.

The idea of a homogenous 'Oriental philosophy' and a 'principle of Oriental thought' are themselves largely a product of Orientalism. Instead, there are different religious and philosophical traditions interpreted in different ways at different times by different people in different places. There are overlaps, there are continuities, and there are significant divisions. A unifying principle of the Orient relies on the idea of Asia being everywhere and always the same (cf. Said, 2003: 37-8). Several of Cage's sources themselves suggested that there was such an essential principle and that they were able to characterize that principle. They also relied on essentialized depictions of the mythical 'Orient'. These ideas were descended from colonial appropriations of religious power and the efforts of anti-colonial religious and political reformers to wrest control back and simultaneously assert their own power. In all this, and in differing ways, the figure of the Oriental became a powerful symbol for Europeans, Asians, and Americans attempting to negotiate the battleground of late-colonial modernity. Cage became part of that process.

While Cage frequently mentioned different traditions, whether Hinduism or Buddhism (which are names given to groups of differing but related traditions) or Zen (which is a tradition partly descended from the latter that itself contains different schools), his theories were often not internally consistent with any one tradition or school. Like Campbell and Huxley, Cage picked and chose from what he liked in order to further his own theories (cf. Coomaraswamy, 1988: 193). Cage presented his sources as delivering a consistent message, logically leading from one to the other despite significant ontological

disparities. Cageian discourse has largely accepted this. Patterson (1996: 151), for example, claims that although Cage's writing style and rhetoric changed between the forties and fifties his 'basic cosmology remain[ed] the same'. Yet as shown above, the ontology Cage outlined in the fifties was opposed to that of his chief influences of the forties. Cage's cosmology may have appeared to remain the same, but only because he ignored the numerous ontological differences in the theories of his sources. Building up his own essentialized picture of what 'Eastern philosophy' was, Cage synthesized and pronounced as he thought fit.

Cage's knowledge of Asian religious and philosophical traditions was bound by the limitations of his sources; these limitations were compounded by his propensity to reify depictions of essential essences thus minimizing the diversity of what he encountered. Ultimately this meant that the principle he thought he had found could not take into account the diversity of religions, schools, and traditions in Asia. It is very simple to contradict the notion that Cage could have come to 'the principle of Oriental thought'. To take a striking example, where is Islam in Cage's Oriental thought? Cage's notion of the Orient stretched far beyond East Asia: it included India and seemingly stretched as far west as the Caucasus (Cage, 1946: 22). Islam is one of the major religions of Asia; it is a significant religion in India pre- and post-partition (not forgetting that reifications of Hinduism as the essence of Indianness have played a significant part in nationalist and communalist violence in the country<sup>154</sup>) as it is also in general in South and Central Asia; in addition, East Asia has a significant Muslim population. Yet, discussing Norman O. Brown's interest in Islam, Cage said Islam was 'something of which I could have no experience' (Cage and Retallack, 1996: 212, see also *ibid.*: 161-2). By his own admission, Islam was 'unknown' to Cage: 'I didn't even know the ABC's of it' (Cage and Corbett, 1992: 187). This line of argument can be taken further. As we have seen, Cage made sweeping comments on India and Indians yet had little knowledge of Hindu traditions outside Vedānta/Neo-Vedānta (even then, as shown in chapter four, his views had little in common with the Advaitin beliefs of Coomaraswamy). His knowledge of Indian Buddhism was comparatively slight, and he had no knowledge of Indian *ādivāsi* (tribal or indigenous) or Dalit traditions. Even if the extent of his knowledge of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism and Dàoism is left unquestioned for the moment, there were many other widespread East Asian traditions he had no knowledge of. Therefore, how could Cage judge what 'the principle of Oriental thought' was? Quite

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<sup>154</sup> See, for example, Brass, 2003; Jaffrelot, 1996; Shani, 2007.

simply, it was not possible. That he believed he could, and that he believed there was such a principle, was the result of Orientalism. In the case of Cage's misprisions, what is problematic is not that Cage had these ideas; it is problematic because he circulated these ideas while being regarded as a figure of authority on Asia. It is in the intersection of power/knowledge that Said's third meaning of Orientalism lies.

### **6.5 Power/Knowledge and Representation**

In 1984 the Museum of Modern Art [MOMA] in New York staged the exhibition *'Primitivism' in 20th-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*. The exhibition was a landmark as much for the controversy it caused as for the significant public interest it generated. It was criticized on several fronts, but the reason of interest here is its deliberate evasion of the political implications of the exhibition's concept (Torgovnick, 1990: 119, 121-3). As Torgovnick (1990: 122) argued, 'in a way typical of the Western tradition, the exhibition re-enacted the dynamics of colonialism by positing the importance of primitive productions solely in terms of their relationship to modern art'. Writing in the accompanying catalogue, William Rubin, the exhibition's curator, was adamant that 'the specific function and significance' of the 'Primitive sculptures' he displayed was 'irrelevant' to the exhibition 'except insofar as these facts might have been known to the modern artists in question' (Rubin, 1984: 1:1). While Rubin acknowledged that the Moderns' interpretation of such works was largely 'creative misunderstanding', he thought that 'it little matters, of course, if artists misinterpreted the objects in question if that misreading was of use to them' (Rubin, 1984: 1:35; Torgovnick, 1990: 122, 127). Torgovnick and numerous others have argued that it *does* matter and that there is no 'of course' about it. The depictions of the 'primitive' in the exhibition were shaped by earlier discourse that was part and parcel of colonialism. Those depictions continue to influence how African and Pacific arts are seen by peoples outside of those regions, and how the creators of that art and the cultures and peoples they represent are viewed.

Rubin's attitude has largely characterized the approach of Cage studies to Cage's 'creative misreading' of his Asian sources. Gann (2010: 90) notes Cage's misreadings, but makes no further comment. Patterson (1996: 46), on whom Gann based his findings, suggests that the only people who might object to Cage's borrowings are 'those insisting on "pure" conceptual translations':

Cage appropriated (and often reconfigured) rhetorical extracts for the specific purpose of enhancing his own aesthetic agenda... His rhetorical borrowings, then, were never meant as ends in themselves or as reflections of their original sources... He himself intimated on several occasions that he appropriated only that which he found useful in the advancement of his own ultra-modernist agenda (Patterson, 1996: 48; see also Patterson, 2002c: 58-9).

There are consequences that this attitude overlooks inherent in the power/knowledge held by the orientalist. The intersection of power/knowledge holds the potential for epistemic violence; this is the key to Said's third meaning of Orientalism.

In Said's third and central meaning, Orientalism is a style of 'dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (Said, 2003: 3). The orientalist is given power to represent the Orient itself due to the colonially-created power imbalance between Asia and the European-American sphere. Inden (1990: 38) argued:

The knowledge of the orientalist is, therefore, privileged in relation to that of the Orientals, and it invariably places itself in a relationship of intellectual dominance over that of the Easterners. It has appropriated the power to represent the Oriental, to translate and explain his (and her) thoughts and acts not only to Europeans and Americans but also to the Orientals themselves.

This section will argue that Cage came to embody this power, partially in the field of art music and wholly in Cageian discourse. Within Cageian discourse, scholars and writers have relied on Cage's depictions of the traditions he represented and consequently have repeated Cage's mythical and invented views of the Orient as facts about Asia. As demonstrated in chapters four and five, it appears that the boundaries of Cage's knowledge of the Orient have controlled what can be known of Asia within Cage Studies. The Orient does not appear directly in Cage's works, it is represented; Cage was always the middleman, choosing what was depicted, paraphrasing, interpreting, and ventriloquizing his own voice (Said, 2003: 40, 62). The Orient became the locus of the origin of Cage's experimentations. Whatever he did could be traced back there; as he changed so the Orient changed with him. This is wholly in keeping with the history of Orientalism. The Orient has been made to be what the West has needed it to be (Said, 2003: 273-4). It shall be suggested that in Cageian discourse, 'it is finally Western ignorance which becomes more refined and complex, not some body of positive Western knowledge which increases in size

and accuracy' (Said, 2003: 62). The central Orientalism of Cageian discourse is its blindness to the heterogeneity of Asian religions and philosophies.

To begin with it will be shown that Cage has been seen as being able to represent the Other. Few commercial recordings of the *Sonatas and Interludes* fail to mention its 'Eastern' connections. Many discuss *rasa* theory borrowing exclusively from Cage's depiction (see below), others mention gamelan or Coomaraswamy (for example, Henck, 2003). One recent release took this line of thinking to an extreme. In 2008 the leading German contemporary art-music label Wergo, a division of the publishers Schott, released a CD entitled *Orient | Occident*. The Oriental element of this release was music by Cage. Wergo have a significant link to Cage through the large number of other Cage releases in their catalogue, including Cage's recordings of *Roaratorio* and the complete *Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)*. Their 2008 Cage release was a record of a 2006 concert from Stuttgart where pianists Elmar Schrammel and Philipp Vandré played selections from the *Sonatas and Interludes* and selections from various works by Cage's friend, the composer Hans Otte. According to Ingo Ahmels, who was responsible for the concept of the concert and recording, the idea was that 'Otte's piano music rooted in the Western tradition be allowed to enter into a dialog with a sound world located in the Far East... John Cage's gamelan-like *Sonatas and Interludes*' (Ahmels, 2008: 21-22). Thus, in the concert, 'Cage's Far Eastern Piano' was positioned in the 'far east' of the concert hall, and Otte's 'Occidental Piano' in the west of the hall. It was not only the sound of the prepared piano that led Ahmels to suggest this set up: Cage's piano 'symbolized the Orient, because of the spiritual location for which Cage had shown a preference'. In the concert hall, Cage's Othered piano figuratively represented the space of the Orient; in the booklet notes, Cage's misprisions represented its voice. Cage's music comes to represent the Orient, speaking for it and about it.

The Otherness of Cage's thought has become part of its appeal and its mystique. A further example demonstrates the ability of Cage to represent the agency of the Other, while also demonstrating the flexibility and ambiguity of the Otherness to which Cage has become connected. In 1993 Cage's collaborator Henning Lohner completed a film memorial to Cage which included extensive excerpts from Cage's music and the participation of a number of noted figures including Merce Cunningham, Noam Chomsky, Dennis Hopper, Yoko Ono, Margaret Leng Tan, Iannis Xenakis, and John Zorn. Another interviewee was the influential German dramatist and litterateur Heiner Müller; in an

interview for the film, Müller suggested that ‘Cage is the revenge of the dead Indians on European music’. This in turn suggested the completed film’s title: *The Revenge of the Dead Indians: In Memoriam John Cage*. In 2008 the title was released on DVD by New York based label Mode Records, home of the Complete John Cage Edition. The title presumably is meant to refer to deceased Native Americans and not late members of the population of South Asia (the legacy of geographically challenged colonialists leaves a certain ambiguity). Nevertheless, the identity of the Indians mentioned is fairly irrelevant. What this trope does is encapsulate Cage’s supposed Otherness. No Native American voices appear in the film; no Native American art or music is considered. Cage had little connection to Native American culture<sup>155</sup> and no claim to Native American agency. The title reveals numerous problematic implications: can Native Americans really not manage to seek amelioration for themselves, thus requiring the intervention of a European-American composer? (cf. Said, 2003: 20). Do Native Americans really think introducing indeterminacy into European art music is fitting revenge for past wrongs? In this instance what started as a German stereotype of the romantic primitive Other, transferred to the American context becomes just another usurpation of Native American tribal names and imagery. ‘This strange white custom is particularly insulting when one considers the great lack of attention that is given to real Indian concerns’ argued artist Edgar Heap of Birds (1991: 341). The title reveals less about Cage’s life and work than it does the desires of Cage’s admirers. The air of Otherness surrounding Cage seems to have become one of his chief appeals. Utilizing his words or techniques allows the European or American artist to imagine they are leaving the bounds of their culture to do something of more than local relevance. It encourages the belief that the modernist desire for universal art is within reach. Yet, this Otherness which Cage’s work promises is still controlled by American and European voices. The flexible identity of the Other takes on the form that is desired of it. ‘Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand’, Said (2003: 7) argued.

Despite the lack of any real link between Cage’s compositions and Asian musical styles, the Orientalness of Cage’s music has been reified to the point where it has become

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<sup>155</sup> The exceptions are chiefly a handful of references to sand painting in his lectures (see section 3.1.3 above; Cage, 1949a, p.65; Kostelanetz, 2003: 230; Nicholls, 2002c: 18), and the presence of a vocal part for a Native American singer in *Apartment House 1776*.

what it never actually was. The widespread belief in the Orientalness of the prepared piano was not just down to its sound. Its association with the Orient was reinforced by Cage's comments on the instrument, his claims that the *Sonatas and Interludes* were inspired by Indian aesthetics, and later by his general association with 'Eastern philosophy'. In all these examples, the East is spoken for and to but not considered in relation to itself. Consider the following example. In the 1948 Vassar College lecture, Cage told his audience:

The absence of harmony in my music frequently suggests to listeners oriental music. Because of this, the *Book of Music* was used by the OWI [Office of War Information] during the war as *Indonesian Supplement n.1*, which meant that when there was nothing urgent to do on the radio-beamed-to-the-South-Pacific this music was used, with the hope of convincing the natives that America loves the Orient (Cage, 1948a: 40).

The fact that Cage's music was used was probably down to Cage's teacher and friend Henry Cowell who 'served as senior music editor at the overseas desk of the Office of War Information' during the Second World War. Numerous different musics were broadcast (Higgins, 2002: 17; see Cowell, 1946: 304-10). What is significant – apart from the example of the knowledge of the orientalist being co-opted by the state – is the manner in which this story, in being retold by Cage and subsequently Tomkins, Tan, and others, furthered the belief in the Orientalness of Cage's music. As Tomkins (1965: 98) and Tan told it, Cage's 'music for the prepared piano was so Eastern in quality that the OWI, during the war, used to beam it on short wave to the South Pacific' (quoted by M. L. Tan, 1986: 39). What mattered in Cage's telling and Tomkins's retelling of the story is not what 'they' listened to, but what 'we' played 'them'. Not what 'they' think, but what 'we' think 'they' think. How Indonesian listeners heard these broadcasts was not considered relevant. The only thing the story actually tells us is that a US governmental agency seems to have believed that Cage's music was 'so Eastern in quality'. Nevertheless, we should ask: in what ways would Indonesian listeners have heard it? As modern or traditional? Asian or American? To the present author's knowledge, Cage's reception in the different countries

of Asia has never been systematically studied. With one exception, it has hardly even been discussed<sup>156</sup>. This is a significant oversight and is indicative of the discourse.

The only notable study to have raised this issue is John Corbett's essay 'Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others' (2000). Corbett (2000: 178-80) argues that Cage's post 1950s works rely on 'conceptual Orientalism': not a direct imitation of Asian musics, but a philosophical imitation whereby aspects of the work's concept are linked to Asian religious or philosophical doctrines, or associated signifiers. Corbett (2000: 168) argues that 'Within Orientalism the Oriental object can never represent itself, but is essentialized and represented as a combined projection of Western desires and anxieties and a reassertion of Western control'. An effect of this is that the Orientalisms entangled in Cage's theories have not only affected how Asian culture has been understood in America or Europe but have also affected East Asian art music.

An example of this can be observed in a comment by Cage not discussed by Corbett. In the early seventies Cage told Charles about his experiences in Japan:

I think that what we played for them gave them the chance to discover *a music that was their own* – rather than a twelve-tone music. Before our arrival, *they had no alternative* other than dodecaphony. Neo-classicism was not really accessible to them, because it would have meant a simple return to their classicism. In fact, our music, that is, the music David Tudor played for them, was *the only music* that could afford them an appreciation analogous to their appreciation of traditional Japanese music... So we deserve a small part of the credit for the fact that contemporary Japanese music features elements similar, although not identical, to those of ancient Japanese music (Cage and Charles, 1981: 200, emphasis added).

Cage's psychological association of the Self with the Other led him to believe that his novel musical devices not only were Other but were *the only art music* viable for East Asia.

Corbett argues that Cageian-derived conceptual Orientalism has become part of the musical language used to depict 'the Orient' in the works of a number of leading East Asian, Asian-American, and Asian-European composers. In turn, when works by these composers are played to American and European audiences it serves to reinforce the Orientalisms embedded in Cage's theories as well as furthering the authority of Cage as an

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<sup>156</sup> Apart from Corbett (2000: 179-80), the only real discussions on the subject located by the present author have been: C. Brown, 2007: 423-4; Cage and Charles, 1981: 200; Cage and Feldman, 1993: 71; Silverman, 2010: 182-5. These sources suggest that Cage's reception in Asia has been far from straightforward.

expert on the Orient. Nevertheless, Corbett suggests, we should not assume how those works are understood in East Asia. Tan Dun, who had known Cage when both lived in New York, found when he premiered his work *Ghost Opera* in Beijing that it was the Cageian elements the audience found novel (Tan Dun, 1997: unpaginated; cf. Cage and Retallack, 1996: 186-7). Corbett concluded:

The deep complexity of neo-Orientalist strategies is revealed: an Asian composer in the West uses techniques devised by a Western composer inspired by Asian philosophy – the work is played for an Asian audience which hears it as an artifact of the bizarre West. Orientalism is reflected back-and-forth like a musical *mise-en-abyme* (Corbett, 2000: 180).

What is needed is a thorough reception history of Cage and Cage-influenced music in East and South Asia. What we have at present are chiefly the myths of Cage's Otherness. As Cage himself remarked, '[in] Japan, I discovered that they didn't like me any more there than they do here [i.e. America]' (Cage and Feldman, 1993: 71).

Conceptual Orientalism relies on the presence of conceptual signifiers of Asia. In Cage's compositions, it has largely been Cage himself who has constructed the meanings of these signifiers for his listeners. To take an example explored above, in the case of the phrase 'art is the imitation of nature in her manner of operation' it has been Cage who has controlled how the phrase has been interpreted. Subsequently, despite his interpretation having no relation to the source he took it from, it has come to be associated with Oriental philosophy in Cageian discourse and has become associated with the concept of indeterminacy in his compositions. For example in booklet notes to a 2003 recording of the *Sonatas and Interludes* on ECM New Series, pianist Herbert Henck wrote that Cage

drew particular attention to the writings of... Coomaraswamy, for whom the origins of Indian art sprang from spiritual sources and works of art served above all to communicate spiritual and religious content. Coomaraswamy's view that art should imitate nature, not in its outward forms but in its manner of operation, was in perfect keeping with what Cage himself was trying to do, and it is not difficult to reconcile his radical reorientation toward chance as the central principle of composition with Coomaraswamy's conception of art (Henck, 2003: unpaginated (13)).

In fact, it is very difficult to reconcile Cage's chance operations with anything in Coomaraswamy's conception of art. Henck could only make that claim because Cage had

been the sole source of representation of Coomaraswamy's meaning. The purpose here is not to point out what is inaccurate, but to highlight the level to which Cage's own conceptions have come to represent the Orient in Cageian discourse and why this has epistemologically limited Cageian discourse.

It has been argued above that Cage came to believe that his thought reflected the 'principle of Oriental thought' which allowed him on occasion to attribute his own subjective interpretations to the Orient. What is particularly problematic in this regard is that Cage appears to have thought that his experience of a thing could be veridical. Cage claimed that his music and theories were veridical or objective; however, it will be argued that they were subjective (conditioned by his personal experience and his personal understanding of principles). 'My intention is to let things be themselves'. This, Cage said, meant 'see[ing] things as they are' (Cage and Charles, 1981: 232). At least by the 1970s, Cage had grounded his thought in an epistemology where this was possible. In conversation with Charles, Cage argued that he did not impose his subjectivity on others. In this he was following Thoreau who

wanted only one thing: to see and hear the world around him... he hoped to find a way of writing which would allow others not to see and hear how he had done it, but to see *what* he had seen and to hear *what* he had heard. He was not the one who chose his words. They came to him from what there is to see and hear (Cage and Charles, 1981: 233-4, emphasis original).

The experiences recorded by Thoreau were not subjective, they were veridical: 'They are no longer his own experiences. It is *experience*' (ibid.: 234, emphasis original). Therefore, '*He* no longer speaks, *he* no longer writes; he lets things speak and write *as they are*' (ibid.: 234, emphasis added). Because Thoreau's experiences were veridical, Cage claimed that agency no longer rested with Thoreau but was directed by the agency of the thing itself. This, Cage said, was what he tried to do in music. Cage had been attempting this since the 1950s when he had 'set about discovering means to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories' (Cage, 1957b: 10). 'Subjectivity no longer comes into it' he told Charles (Cage and Charles, 1981: 234).

Nevertheless, Charles challenged Cage, had he not previously argued<sup>157</sup> that his music created a situation 'markedly more subjective' because each member of the audience

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<sup>157</sup> Cage and Reynolds, 1962: 52.

can hear different things in the work. Was that not invoking ‘each person’s ‘subjectivity’ more strongly than ever before by saying that each one of us is supposed to feel what suits him’? (ibid.: 234). Yes, Cage replied, but the subjectivity in question is not that of the ego. ‘It designates instead the Self of Zen’. This subjectivity is not that of ‘Western philosophers’:

We are dealing with what each person is in the depths of himself: a Self, not reducible to an ego. If you put the problem of the nature of that Self to a Zen-Buddhist, he would probably answer it with *Nothingness* or *Nothing*. The Self is not an ego... The Self is what *I* do not impose on others. It is not a kind of ‘subjectivity’, but a reference to something which comes much before that and which – beyond that – allows that ‘subjectivity’ to be produced. It is a reference to the Nothingness that is in all things, and thus also in *me*. It would be more appropriate here to invoke, as I did concerning Suzuki, the soul’s *Base*, Meister Eckhart’s *Grund*. Or society! (ibid.: 234)<sup>158</sup>.

Cage claimed that he did not impose himself on others; his art was not the result of his subjectivity but was the presentation of things-as-they-are. Nevertheless, the truth of this claim should be assessed. The quotation above was Cage’s subjective interpretation of *Zen* and *Grund*, as well as Jung (cf. section 3.3.2 above) and the social theories of McLuhan. Cage’s texts do not necessarily inform the reader of what *Zen* wants, what *Indians* think, or what *Meister Eckhart* meant, more often they inform of what *Cage* thought *Zen* wanted, what *Cage* thought *Indians* think, and what *Cage* thought *Meister Eckhart* meant. It was Cage’s subjective interpretations which led him to his compositional strategies as well as to his ideas of ‘what *Zen* wants’.

Cage’s theories were epistemologically limited by his own subjective experience; in other words, the construction of reality that Cage suggested was universally valid is unlikely to be so because his knowledge of reality was bound by the limits of his own experience. Unless it is claimed that Cage’s experience of reality and the ontological beliefs suggested by that experience are universally valid, then Cage’s ontological beliefs must be

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<sup>158</sup> He explained similar ideas in slightly different ways at different times, for example ‘what *Zen* wants is that mind not cut itself off from Mind but let Mind flow through it’ (Cage, 1993a: 108). Another example is: ‘In Buddhist thought, mind goes full circle: out from the ego through sense perceptions to the world of relativity, around and down to the Absolute (what Eckhart called the Ground), back through what Jung called the Collective Unconscious, and then in through dreams to the ego’ (Cage, 1993d: 65).

regarded as subjective. This is, firstly, because, as Steven Katz (1978: 22-74) argued, the possibility of a *universal* veridical experience is epistemologically highly questionable; if people have had experiences of things-as-they-are, then those experiences would appear to have been subjectively conditioned. To quote Barbara H. Smith (2009: 74):

The veridicality of any creature's, including any individual human's, cognitive processes can be seen not as the accuracy of its perceptions of a presumptively objective reality... but as the relative effectiveness of that creature's ongoing interactions with its particular environment, given its particular structure and modes of operation.

Secondly, it is because Cage's theories on reality were shaped by his subjective and often unreliable interpretation of materials (e.g. by Coomaraswamy, Suzuki, Jung) that were themselves subjective interpretations of earlier theories. Thirdly, it is because, as was shown in 4.2.3, even between Cage's sources (Coomaraswamy and (Cage's) Suzuki) there is no ontological agreement. The universalist ground that Cage's interlinking social and musical theories rely upon for authority is of highly questionable veracity. In Katz's words, 'There is no *philosophia perennis*, Huxley and many others notwithstanding' (ibid.: 24).

Zen, like Brahmanism, conditions how veridicality is cognized and thus the claims that are made by members of that tradition about things-as-they-are (S. Katz, 1978). The same is true for Cage in relation to Cageian discourse. In the case of sects of Zen or Brahmanism, claims to knowledge of things-as-they-are are grounded in traditions: lineages, texts, commentaries, exegesis, training, rituals, and other factors. In Cageian discourse, such claims are grounded chiefly in Cage's responses to texts that claimed to communicate the essence of religious traditions (for example, by Coomaraswamy, Jung, Suzuki, et al.)<sup>159</sup>. In many cases Cage's interpretation of these texts was highly subjective, being conditioned by his own circumstances. As sects and lineages of Brahmanism and Zen reify the subjectivity of their traditions over the subjectivity of their Others, so Cage and Cageian discourse has reified Cage's experience and perspective. Cage was 'confined and focused – as are we all – by his various contexts' (Roth, 1995: 140). Cage studies and the

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<sup>159</sup> In a small number of other cases, it was grounded in Cage's interpretation of translations of original texts; even in these cases his interpretations were conditioned by his readings of the former category of texts. This specifically applies to James Legge's translation of the texts attributed to Zhuāngzǐ (published 1891); and John Blofeld's translation of the *Chuánxīn Fǎyào (Essentials of Mind Transmission)* of Huángbò Xīyùn (published 1947).

performance practice of Cage's music have frequently been confined and focused by those contexts also.

In representing the Orient, Cage played a part in determining Asian reality for his American and European readers. This can be made clearer with a further example. Whereas in the forties and fifties Cage had distanced his ideas from ideological questions, from the late sixties onwards he began to associate those ideas with anarchism. He either ignored or did not comprehend the right-wing connotations of some of the material he had borrowed during the forties and fifties; however, because Cage adjusted his material to confirm anarchism, Cageian discourse has been ignorant of the original context of the material. Because Cage did so, Cageian discourse has presented Zen as anarchic and anti-hierarchical. Nevertheless, there is no real ideological link between Zen as practiced in Japan and anarchism – in fact, for centuries the opposite has often been the case: Zen has a long history of involvement with authoritarianism and hierarchism in Japan both institutionally and politically. Most notably in the twentieth century, Zen institutions worked to support the authoritarian regime that was in power until the end of the Second World War and defeat left-wing and progressive movements; D. T. Suzuki and his thought have been implicated in this (see Heine, 2008; Ives, 2009; Jerryson and Juergensmeyer, 2010; Victoria, 2003; 2006). Yet Kostelanetz (1996: 82) claims that Cage's 'scrupulous absence of hierarchy reflects... Zen Buddhism, which Cage studied intensively at Columbia University'; and Patterson argues that 'based upon the ideological affinities that Zen and Taoism share with anarchic political theory, one could comfortably suggest that East Asian philosophy was a logical precursor to Cage's subsequent interest in social theory' (Patterson, 1996: 243; 2002c: 58).

Cage's texts postulated numerous principles: the principle of Eastern philosophy, what Zen wants, what a sound's agency is, what the self is, what gods are or are-not, what is or is not a Buddha, what the numinous is, and what veridicality reveals. Cage's ability to speak on these matters with an authority that exceeded that of his own subjectivity came from his perceived authority to speak on the Orient. However, as chapters four and five show in relation to Coomaraswamy, that authority is questionable. The resulting axioms were Cage's subjective interpretations conditioned by his experiences which included but were not limited to being a white, male, twentieth-century experimental American composer. Although shaped by his experiences and desires, Cage's subjective interpretations have been reproduced as objective facts; through that authority they have

had power over knowledge and representation. In this way, Cage's subjective interpretations of 'Eastern philosophy' shaped meaning in the discourse for which he became an authority. In relation to Said's arguments, the result has been to epistemologically limit Cageian discourse in relation to Asia. Because Cage became an authority on the Orient, his subjective opinions and interpretations came to appear objective. As a result, he dominated, restructured, and had authority over the Orient in the discourses for which he was an authority.

The purpose of the present chapter is not to analyse the effect of this on Cage's music – that will be covered in subsequent research – its purpose is to argue that Cage's belief in the objectivity of his theories and music, combined with his standing as an expert on the Orient and his frequent espousal of Orientalist stereotypes, has worked to epistemologically limit Cageian discourse. In other words, in matters pertaining to Asia, unless a writer has access to information outside of Cageian discourse and the texts Cage relied upon, writers whose primary knowledge is derived from Cageian discourse will be liable to repeat Cage's subjective interpretations as objective 'facts'. If it is true that a number of Cage's key depictions of Asian religious and philosophical principles were grounded in Orientalism, it will therefore be the case that Cageian discourse has repeated and furthered those Orientalisms. At a personal level, Cage's beliefs are not the issue. The problem is that Cage's ideas were disseminated widely and granted a significant authority.

Cage admitted that what he adopted were often not traditions of thought or practice: in many cases his theories came from his own attempts to arrive individually at the mystical essence of 'Eastern thinking'. This was an impossible task. There is no mystic essence of 'Eastern thinking' because there are different traditions whose competing claims to veridicality are frequently not in agreement. Unless one system is accepted as the way things are in actuality (cf. *yathābhūta*), then what is witnessed are different competing and overlapping traditions, sometimes separated by time, sometimes by class, gender, ethnicity, and power, sometimes by geographical boundaries. The situation is heterogeneous, but – as shown in relation to the theory of *rasa* – Cage's writings often depicted homogeneity. The reification of the homogeneity of the Orient is the key device that Said argued allowed the control of representations of the Orient and thus colonial hegemony.

As Cage came to be respected as an expert on the Orient, his interpretation of the concepts, doctrines, and stories he utilized went largely unquestioned within Cage studies. In a variety of cases his interpretations have been shown to have limited connection to the

original idea he claimed to represent, or were reifications of an idea held by a small number of people within one tradition. Nevertheless, Cage's interpretations continue to be reified. This may be because, encouraged by Cage's words, the myth of the innate Orientalness of Cage's work persists and finds new ways of being explained. For example, Patterson (1996:117) claims that his study approaches 'Indian stylistic borrowings' in Cage's works in a manner indicated in Coomaraswamy's quotation from the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* ('the (real) picture is not in the color, nor in the surface, nor in the surroundings (but in the mind)' (see 4.1.5)). Patterson therefore suggests that the real Orientalness of Cage's work is conceptual not aesthetic. Because of this, he can argue that Cage's work was Oriental even before Cage came into contact with Coomaraswamy.

*Double Music* [1941], co-written with Lou Harrison... was composed well before Cage's studies of Coomaraswamy, and is therefore indicative of his pre-existent sympathies with India rather than demonstrative of any genuine Indian 'influence' (Patterson, 1996: 117).

What has stayed constant has been Cage's power over the subject of the Orient. Within Cage studies, Cage's often highly original interpretations have dominated what is known about the ideas he borrowed, and directed what further research has been done. Similarly, as shown by Corbett (2000), Cage's interpretations have had considerable influence in contemporary art music discourse. Because Cage reified his own interpretations of Asian material as *the* Asian interpretation and gained an authority that resulted in those claims being widely disseminated, his interpretations have not been questioned in a number of key areas. Here again similarities are found to the problematics of Primitivism. To quote Susan Hiller:

by articulating their own fantasies about the meaning of the objects and about the peoples who created them, artists have been party to the erasure of the self-representation of colonized peoples in favour of a western representation of their realities (Hiller, 1991: 2).

Within Cageian discourse this has had the effect of only allowing representations of Asia which conform to Cage's representations to be heard.

Cage's writing style also worked to increase this limitation. There are few references in Cage's writings – indeed without considerable sleuthing it is often impossible to know where Cage came by his information. Sources written in different times and places representing different traditions are alienated from their contexts and presented together

undifferentiated. It is sometimes impossible to tell reputable sources and hearsay apart. We might be reading a paraphrase of the words of a saint, a scholar, or a drunken friend telling jokes (Cage, 1959b: 78). One result is to make it difficult for the reader/listener to confirm or deny the information Cage presents and therefore to have the possibility of forming any opinion other than Cage's. What has been presented as 'Eastern philosophy' in Cageian discourse frequently turns out to be only Cage's idea of what something might mean, skewed to relate to his own situation. Nevertheless, because Cage put these ideas into the mouths of 'the Indians' or 'the Orientals', Cage studies has continued to do likewise. Academic legitimacy might even be argued to have strengthened the spread and authority of Cage's ideas.

This is a small scale version of what Said argued occurred on a wide-spread level in European and American discourse on Asia. Said (2003: 19-20) argued that in the discourse of Orientalism what can be said about the Orient has been epistemologically limited by earlier conceptions of the Orient in the discourse. One expert's findings influence the next expert's findings which influence the next expert's findings and so on and so on; text piles upon text each reinforcing the validity of the next. Yet, the origin of those seemingly authoritative findings have frequently been formed from prejudice, stereotype, 'creative misunderstandings', misreadings, romanticism, partial information, and guesswork, and have often been directed by self-interest and the desire for power and control. The circumstances of the production of those texts and the interpretations entangled with it lie unquestioned because the construction of the discourse confirms its claims to authority. Spivak (1988) subsequently argued that the result of the workings of Orientalist discourse in India acts against the possibility of free subject-formation among subalterns. What is left is a silence that cannot speak. This epistemic violence works to erase the possibility of a voice emerging which is not limited by the boundaries of the discursive conflict. Analysing the figure of the *satī*, the right of whom to represent was claimed by colonizers and religious conservatives, modernizers and nationalists, Spivak argued:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-construction and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization (1988: 306).

Coomaraswamy, as Spivak notes (*ibid.*: 301), was a twentieth-century voice in that debate from the side of religious conservatism. Instead of attempting what may be impossible

and seeking to regain the silenced voice, the varied processes that led to that erasure should be understood. Instead of a new reification, focus should be drawn to the heterogeneity and contradictions behind such essentializations (Loomba, 2005: 194-6; Spivak, 1988: 307-8). In the context of American politics and society, Cage might have agreed with this line of thought; he used an argument that could be considered related to suggest why he was against minority identities (see Cage and Rettallack, 1996: 51). Yet, because he stuck to the dialectical Otherness of the Orient, he could not conceive that his own comments on Asia acted to further the hegemony of Orientalism – that his concept of silence could be an agent of silencing.

The example of *rasa* can be used to illustrate these processes in Cageian discourse. Coomaraswamy's version of *rasa* was shaped by conceptions of India developed by forces that competed over the authority to speak for the Orient. Consciously or unconsciously his depiction was shaped by colonial-era conceptualizations of Indianness. And, while he claimed to represent Indians, he shaped the material he discussed in line with his own ideology. Cage read a work by Coomaraswamy and interpreted it in his own way. Idiosyncrasies in Coomaraswamy's account were magnified by Cage's reading. He was influenced by the representation of the tradition within Coomaraswamy, but also altered it to fit in with his own aesthetic programme. However, as Coomaraswamy represented the theory as being applicable to all Indians then Cage did too. Over the years, Cage changed the conception he had taken from Coomaraswamy in several important ways until it had little similarity to the original which itself was an essentialization entangled in struggles for authority. Nevertheless, because Cage had come to be regarded as an expert on Asia, his representation of *rasa* theory was not questioned in Cage studies. Instead, his interpretation and errors were frequently reproduced, each time further reinforcing the authority of Cage's interpretation as well as a representation of India entangled in earlier discourse. Text has piled on top of text until Cageian discourse appears to view Cage's highly idiosyncratic version of *rasa* as unquestioned fact. Cage's interpretation of *rasa* was reproduced by many of the leading authorities on Cage, as well as in numerous booklet notes, each time reinforcing the verisimilitude of Cage's interpretation. It has not been pointed out that there is no one version of what *rasa* is, and that the version of *rasa* that has been reproduced in the discourse has little resemblance to the varied ways that *rasa* relates to dramatic or musical traditions in India. Because Cage's version has gained authority in the discourse, it has been trusted to the extent that it has not been considered necessary to look outside the

discourse to check for other representations. Nevertheless, one solution is not to reify a different supposedly more traditional interpretation of *rasa*; instead one can point to the heterogeneity of the uses and interpretations of the concept. This solution has been attempted in discussing Coomaraswamy in this thesis; however, how could this approach inform performance practice?

The recent example of Amelia Cuni's 2007 realization of Cage's *Solo for Voice 58* from the *Song Books* (discussed above in section 5.1.5) provides an ameliorative to recordings such as *Orient | Occident*. Instead of relying on Cage's conceptions of Indian musical traditions, Cuni developed a new interpretation of Cage's *rāgas* informed by her own decade long musical training in India. In consultation with the composer and musician Ulrich Krieger, Cuni created a realization that engaged with Cage's ideas but refused to make the Indian elements wholly subservient to Cage's aesthetic dictates. In some cases this meant adopting unCageian musical devices; it also meant developing a new and personal approach to *rasa* informed both by traditional interpretations and Cage's ideas (see above, section 6.1.5, and Cuni, 2007: 15-24). Crucially, the result does not claim to be representative of either Indian classical music traditions or Cage's theories. In fact, Sandeep Bhagwati (2007: 9) suggests in the booklet notes, it may 'irk the many for whom Cage is the epitome of non-semantic, non-intentional, "clean" music' and be 'equally disconcerting to even the most broadminded of Indian music aficionados'. It claims to represent nothing more than the experience of the piece as developed by the performers. Rooting the piece in personal experience allows it to be freed from some of the problematics of claims to representation that have been identified here. Cuni's realization engages with Indian musical traditions to a greater extent than any other Cage performance known by the present author, yet does not claim to be able to represent India and is at pains to point out the heterogeneity of Cage's understanding of Indian music. In doing so, it works to counter some of the more extreme claims made for Cage within Cageian discourse.

## **Conclusion**

Investigating the contexts of Cage's sources and their ideas reveals a pattern of stereotypes of Orient and Occident interacting with religious and philosophical traditions that have grown and multiplied between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries. Discourse on the Orient from across Asia, Europe and America has been influenced and affected by numerous agents from across those continents. European conceptions of the Orient were

hardened and altered by both Europeans and Asians during eighteenth and nineteenth century colonial encounters; in the process Indian and European conceptions of Indian religions were formed and adjusted and new religious traditions emerged. Out of those processes and the dynamics of the emerging Indian nationalist movement, affirmative Orientalist religious discourse grew into a powerful tool that has been used to further both progressive and reactionary causes across Asia. In India and Japan, religious reformers syncretically combined traditional and modern ideas while also often being strongly reliant on the stereotypes and dichotomous thinking of Orientalism. Svāmi Vivekānanda, the Theosophical Society, Krishnamurti, Coomaraswamy, and Suzuki variously merged highly selective elements of Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism with mysticism, occultism, Platonism, and Perennialism, while also influencing and being influenced by European and American thinkers such as William James, Rudolph Otto, and Jung. These modernized religious conceptions were spread through Europe and America between the 1890s and 1950s either as ‘Hinduism’, ‘Buddhism’, ‘Zen’, or more generally as ‘Eastern philosophy’. American and European writers such as Campbell, Huxley, and Watts wrote Westernized versions of this syncretic religious discourse which led to further dissemination. Influenced either directly or indirectly by all of the above, Cage absorbed the stereotypes and tropes of affirmative Orientalism and ‘Eastern philosophy’. Combining these with contemporary American and European discourse on the Orient and the modernist desire for a universal language, he created his own syncretic theories of Oriental art and thought. His theories grew out of but were not identical to any earlier systems of thought. Yet, through a complicated set of historical, cultural, and circumstantial conditions, his vision gained the authority to represent Asia. Cage’s subjective and highly individual theories came to be regarded as ‘Eastern philosophy’ just as his music has been regarded by some to be representative of Asian music. Within contemporary art music discourse, Cage’s interpretations continue to play a decisive role in the shaping and controlling of Asian signifiers and the associated production of truth. The power his textual and artistic productions gained reified his knowledge; unwittingly, he played a role in limiting what is and can be said about Asia.

Cage believed that he was being politically progressive in hastening the global village. Because of this he saw subjectively appropriating ‘Oriental philosophy’ as a politically progressive act. Nevertheless, the epistemological limitations of Orientalist discourse seem to have led Cage to ignore the ideological implications of his borrowing,

the materials he took, and the theories he created with those materials. Cage's writings imply that just as there was only one barrier between subjectivity and veridicality there was only one boundary between Self and Other, that of ethnic and cultural difference between East and West. As soon as that boundary was removed then the us/them Orient/Occident barrier would fall to reveal unity. This ignored the power structures that run within and between communities and countries: political, social, religious, sexual, and gender stratifiers which variously unite and separate humans irrespective of any construction of Orient and Occident.

Possibly because of the centrality of the possibility of veridical experience to his theories, Cage did not take into account that, despite almost exact genetic similarities, humans have different experiences which condition how they in turn experience and construct the world.

I would like to be able to say that all men, all over the earth, are but one and the same person... I cling to the idea that all those who are living now, wherever they are, are more or less subject to the same information (Cage and Charles, 1981: 180). Even if one discounts issues of access and censorship, the same piece of information can be interpreted in many different ways. For example, Cage saw liberation in Brahmanic culture; the Dalit activist and academic Kancha Ilaiah sees persecution and authoritarian control in those same ideas (see Ilaiah, 2005). Cage constructed what he believed was a universal artistic and social philosophy in the belief that a universal experience beyond subjectivity was possible. The dichotomous nature of his conceptualization of the Orient led him to believe that the 'Oriental philosophy' he utilized and developed was ideologically neutral (see Said, 2003:106-7). Many of the ideas Cage took were entangled in political and ideological circumstances which altered how those ideas have been used and interpreted and continue to be used and interpreted by different people in different locations in different circumstances. The way he described Indian philosophical and religious terms is a case in point. On a number of occasions he reified elements of elite Brahmanic thinking as being *the* Indian philosophy or religion, the way of *the* Indian mind. In so doing he unintentionally reproduced and furthered patterns of dominance within Indian society.

What is problematic about Cage's Orientalism is the manner in which he coupled the affirmative-Orientalist universalizing 'essence of the Orient' to his own programme in a way that functioned to erase what he considered irrelevant to himself. The result flattened the multifaceted reality of certain areas covered by his expansive gaze. While some of

Cage's Asian rhetoric and concepts have a basis in an established tradition, many were Cage's own imaginative theories based on assumptions about the nature of 'Eastern philosophy'. What Cage's interpretations of Asian material chiefly reveal, therefore, are aspects of his own desires. Cage's writings, as well as certain texts of Cage studies, contain extensive misprisions entangled with valuable exegesis. It is often difficult to tell Cage's inventions from traditional material without extensive investigation. Cage's claims in regard to his Asian borrowings should not be accepted and reproduced without informed assessment.

Cage needs to be seen as a figure of his time. His theories and interpretations were entangled with those of his context and cannot escape it through claims to veridicality. Cage needs to be viewed against the wider context of American, European, *and* Asian history. At present in Cageian discourse, Cage is seen in relation to American and European history and *Oriental myth*. To quote Moira Roth (1995: 140), we need to know 'what is erased in order to erect these fictions'. In the present thesis what was erased around Cage's borrowings from Coomaraswamy has been investigated. There is much more work to be done. The processes of Orientalism limited the boundaries of Cage's thought; those boundaries have become the epistemological limitations of the production of meaning around Cage. What was erected was a monolithic representation of the mythic homogenous Orient. What needs to be explored now is not only where Cage's vision was expansive, but also where it was narrow: what needs to be heard are the sounds that have been obscured by the roar of Cage's silence. By focusing on the sacred cow, Cageian discourse has not been able to see the buffaloes (cf. Ilaiyah, 2005: 138).

## Abbreviations

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <i>Acts</i>    | <i>Bible, New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles.</i>  |
| <i>An.</i>     | Aristotle, <i>De anima (On the Soul)</i> .  |
| <i>1 Apol.</i> | Justin Martyr, <i>First Apology</i> .   |
| <i>2 Apol.</i> | Justin Martyr, <i>Second Apology</i> .  |
| <i>Autol.</i>  | Theophilus of Antioch, <i>Ad Autolyicum</i> .   |
| <i>CAPhys.</i> | Thomas Aquinas, <i>Commentary on Aristotle's Physics</i> .  |
| <i>CAPol.</i>  | Thomas Aquinas, <i>Commentary on Aristotle's Politics</i> .   |
| <i>Crat.</i>   | Plato, <i>Cratylus</i> .  |
| <i>CU</i>      | <i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i> .   |
| <i>Dhv.</i>    | Ānandavardhana, <i>Dhvanyāloka</i> .  |
| <i>En.</i>     | Plotinus, <i>Enneads</i> .  |
| <i>GS</i>      | Meister Eckhart, <i>German Sermons</i> .  |
| <i>IR</i>      | Polydore Vergil, <i>De inventoribus rerum (On Discovery)</i> [I Tatti Renaissance Library edition]. |
| <i>John</i>    | <i>Bible, New Testament, the Gospel According to St. John</i> .                                     |
| <i>Loc.</i>    | Abhinavagupta, <i>Locarna</i> [commentary on <i>Dhv.</i> ].   |
| <i>LS</i>      | <i>Lañkāvatāra-sūtra</i> .  |
| <i>Met.</i>    | Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> .   |
| <i>Matt.</i>   | <i>Bible, New Testament, the Gospel According to St. Matthew</i> .                                  |
| <i>MU</i>      | <i>Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad</i> .  |
| <i>NŚ</i>      | <i>Nāṭyaśāstra</i> , ascribed to Bharata-Muni.  |
| <i>PE</i>      | Eusebius, <i>Praeparatio Evangelica</i> .   |
| <i>Phd.</i>    | Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> .  |
| <i>Phys.</i>   | Aristotle, <i>Physics</i> .   |
| <i>Ps.</i>     | <i>Bible, Old Testament, Psalms</i> .   |
| <i>Rep.</i>    | Plato, <i>Republic</i> .  |
| <i>ST</i>      | Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i> .   |
| <i>Symp.</i>   | Plato, <i>Symposium</i> .   |
| <i>Tim.</i>    | Plato, <i>Timaeus</i> .   |

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## **Pinyin → Wade-Giles conversion table**

|                       |                           |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Chán                  | Ch'an                     |
| <i>Chuánxīn Fǎyào</i> | <i>Ch'uan-hsin Fa'yao</i> |
| Dào                   | Tao                       |
| Huángbò Xīyùn         | Huang-po Hsi-yün          |
| Lǎozǐ                 | Lao-Tzu                   |
| <i>Yìjīng</i>         | <i>I Ching</i>            |
| Zhuāngzǐ              | Chuang-Tzu                |