

MUSICS AND THE GENEROSITY OF GOD

By

Gerald Chien Liu

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Approved:

Robin M. Jensen

Ted A. Smith

John S. McClure

Jean-Luc Marion

Paul DeHart

Gregory F. Barz

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To 公公, any sounds we shared
always gave way to the generosity of God.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

If life began with a bang, it manifested musically. Musics preceded heartbeats and breaths, and motions like uncertain steps.¹ Before there were ears to hear them, musics of miraculous proportion like the crackle of light, the hiss of the air and the lapping of water against land filled the world. Before the writings of Moses or Pythagoras and the earthly mission of Jesus of Nazareth, musics like drums pounded in the third millennium B.C. where Shanxi Xiangfen Taosi, China is now located.² Sounds have saturated every particle, place, and organism with musics. Our world is one of sonic ubiquity where musics have no discernable beginning or end.³

¹ Both “music” and “musics” will be used interchangeably throughout. The plural “musics” acknowledges the variety of musics in the world. Notably, in some cultures, “music” as a word does not exist. Instead, local terminology in other cultures often designates musical activities or artifacts. See Jean Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1990), 54-55. See also Bruno Nettl, “The Universal Language: Universals of Music” in Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts*, new ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 42-49. In contrast to Nettl, I argue for unifying characteristics of all musics - that all musics consist of sound and that all musics instantiate the charity of God.

² Robert Bagley, “The Prehistory of Chinese Music Theory” in Various, *Proceedings of the British Academy: 2004 Lectures*, vol. 131 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 44.

For more on the precedents of Chinese music, see Elizabeth May, *Musics of Many Cultures: An Introduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 63.

See “Ubiquity” in Jean François Augoyard et al., *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2006), 130-45. Augoyard critically examines sonic ubiquity with regard to “architecture and urbanism,” “psychology

The current project centrally argues that the limitless variety of musics given by sonic ubiquity manifest the generosity of God and only as God deems fit. Before unpacking the theological freight of the primary thesis, it is crucial to note that usage here of the English words “sounds” and “musics” operates synergistically or synoptically, even at times synonymously. Sounds and musics refer to what can be heard and crafted for hearing by humans, other sentient beings, or ultimately, the Divine. Therefore, the terms do not limit or signify differences in the audible phenomena of the world according to criteria associated with human intention or the lack thereof. Rather, musics happen without precise deliberation or universal definition. When the author’s nephews yank at guitar strings or bang on piano keys, they produce sounds remarkably different from musics like *Fuoco (Libra Sonatine)* by Roland Dyens or *Trois novelettes* by Francis Poulenc. Sounds like the whirring of the author’s laptop fan and clicking of its keys seem infinitely remote from the musics occurring in the Ryman auditorium three miles from his former Nashville apartment or leaking from the headphones of his roommate at the time who lived in the next room. While humans determine such differences, musics commit to no categorical forms or set of regulations.

Musics also persist as given in sounds that are perceptible not only to human ears but other corporeal parts as well. The author and the bugs on his car windshield literally feel the bass when he turns up the volume of his parked car’s stereo. Musics persist imperceptibly too, for instance, frequencies beyond human hearing. Some musics require human interaction or even production. Others do not.

and physical and applied acoustics,” “physiology of perception,” “sociology and everyday culture,” “textual and media expressions,” and “musical aesthetics.”

Some musics occur naturally. And others occur technologically. In any case, whether creaturely or crafted, or resulting in part from a combination or permutation of efforts like these, sonic ubiquity gives musics continuously.

Because all sounds give musics, retaining the distinction between sounds and musics, no matter how helpful at times, becomes less important. And this is not because the author says so. The distinction between sounds and musics becomes relativized—a line for crossing and playing, even erasing; or to put it musically, a line that fades away—because musics do not depend upon human theories of the sonic in order to be. Musics simply happen. As they occur, musics exclude no artist, composer, performer, listener, or recipient. They even summon those refusing to engage sonically. The incessant call of musics inexplicably and mysteriously manifests Divine generosity. To put it another way, God gives in the musics all sounds give.

The argument here does not require God as a hypothesis. Rather, it depends upon God as a reality already given and without beginning; a reality that with respect to sonic ubiquity, cannot be heard without God. In this regard, the current project theologically embraces French Economist, writer, and lover of music, Jacques Attali's demand for theoretical indiscipline. Attali once issued a "call to *theoretical indiscipline*" for the sake of recognizing music as a "herald of society."⁴ The current project offers one articulation of what music heralds—the giving of God.

⁴ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Theory and History of Literature; (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 5. [Italics Attali.]

Articulating that music heralds the giving of God does not begin with human intellection. It starts from what God gives, specifically that music itself instantiates Divine charity shareable by all. French philosopher and musicologist Vladimir Jankélévitch has intimated this way of understanding music. For Jankélévitch, music “conceals a purpose: to *express infinitely that which cannot be explained.*”⁵ Animating the statement of Jankélévitch further, a double constitution occurs in any musical encounter. We constitute or determine music, but music also and according to purposes never fully known constitutes and determines us.

Therefore, the study at hand does not bring music closer to the aims of theology in a fashion similar to how sociologist Tia DeNora legitimates music as a realm for sociological inquiry.⁶ DeNora wants to show why music is worth sociological attention by justifying music as a sociologically robust realm of inquiry. In the current study, however, musics present themselves as theologically legitimate phenomena already, with or without human interest, and not requiring any justification except for their own. Moreover, the current project never attempts

⁵ Vladimir Jankélévitch and Carolyn Abbate, *Music and the Ineffable* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003), 71. [Italics Jankélévitch.]

On the musical equivocation of Jankélévitch, he writes “Music means nothing and yet means everything...In the hermeneutics of music, everything is possible, the most fabulous ideologies and unfathomable imputed meanings. (11)”

On the theologically charged in Jankélévitch, he writes “I will be more precise: the mystery transmitted to us by music is not death’s sterilizing inexplicability but the fertile inexplicability of life, freedom, or love...And the ineffable, in complete contrast, cannot be explained because there are infinite and interminable things to be said of it: such is the mystery of God, whose depths cannot be sounded, the inexhaustible mystery of love, both Eros and Caritas, the poetic mystery par excellence. (72)”

⁶ Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2000).

to justify, or trace reasons, for how music speaks theologically and the line of inquiry does not depend upon the longstanding philosophical tradition of studying musics according to the affections. The mystery of how musics instantiate the generosity of God has less to do with what we feel with regard to music and instead concerns how the music “feels” us and even without us. Thus, the method undertaken is testimonial, maieutic and phenomenologically oriented, in order to yield to what the theological charity of musics demands.⁷

⁷ The following pages may run the risk of theological incoherence, if not untenability, for some. Joshua Davis might associate the following study with what he calls “Christian radical phenomenologies,” and detect theological inconsistency “with regard to the application of grace.” See Joshua Davis, “The Call of Grace: Henri de Lubac, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and the Theological Conditions of Christian Radical Phenomenology” in Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology*, 1st ed., Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press), 190ff.

Admittedly, belief and fallible instincts choreograph the proceeding arguments of the current project. Therefore, Davis’ call for further research of Maurice Blondel and Henri Bergson in order to clarify arguments resting upon a “conceptual precondition” of “the ontological unity of nature and grace” deserves further inquiry. Yet discourse and intellectual history can only and ever explore what nondiscursives like musics continuously provide in full that humanity only understands in part. Blondel concurs. See his inquiry into the relationship between the natural and supernatural in Maurice Blondel, Alexander Dru, and Illyd Trethowan, *The Letter on Apologetics, and History and Dogma*, [1st ed. (New York,: Holt, 1965), 159-60.

Blondel writes:

[T]he supernatural will not remain in conformity with the idea which we conceive of it unless we acknowledge it to be beyond our human grasp, and that in determining the genesis of the idea of revelation, or in showing the necessity of dogmas or of revealed precepts, we never do anything more than indicate blank spaces which cannot be filled in or established in their reality by any resources of ours. Even when we show that this system of rational requirements rests upon the most concrete living experience, and even when we determine the conditions which seem to us necessary if what we think and will is to *exist*, it is not our philosophy, integral though it may be, which will produce, as in a seedbed prepared for it, being itself, the living

Critically, in these pages neither is there attempt or intent to provide sonic proof for the existence of God or theological resolution with regard to sound. The current project departs from a place of rational abandon and deficiency held together by a belief in the unity of all things as given by God. God here means the one who biblically self identifies as *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh* (I will be what I will be) and the one whom Christian churches have come to believe as triune Creator, Savior and Redeemer of all times, places, persons, and sounds. Yet in as much as God may be known by theological vocabulary like “Creator,” “Savior,” “Redeemer” and “Trinity,” God is beyond Being, even in the supreme sense, and remains forever undefined by human, biblical, and/or doctrinal description or any other kind of articulation. Only God fully defines God.

While musics instantiate the unverifiable and arguably, historically illegible giving of God, there is no attempt to construct what Don Ihde calls a “secular theology” founded upon the noise in the world.⁸ In other words, musics do not function as the basis for a theology formed by the material world (i.e. sonic ubiquity). God grounds all theology that humanity articulates. The natural world is a creation of God in which God manifests with different degree. Creation does not

truth, the gift which brings salvation. And it is just by the acknowledgement of this impossibility that philosophy is reconciled with theology.

⁸ Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, 2nd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 15.

Ihde writes, “A theology is not a philosophy, and what is needed is not a revival of theology, not even a secular theology. For so long as the gods remain silent—and if they are dead they have fallen into the ultimate silence—no amount of noise will revive them. But if they speak they will be heard only by ears attuned to full listening. For what is needed is a philosophy of listening. But is this a possibility?”

root the theological argument underway, but rather, God, the creator. Nevertheless, while the current project wants to maintain distinction between God and the world, no phenomenon separates itself from God, not even the blasphemous. The current project therefore attempts to loosen what Christian Scharen diagnoses as the problem of “constricted imagination” within Christianity and other religions.⁹ “There is no truly or completely ‘secular’ culture or arena of human life if you believe that God is Creator of heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them (Ps. 146:6, Acts 14:15),” as Scharen writes.¹⁰ Furthermore, the associated risk of idolatry is averted because neither sonic ubiquity nor musics are made equal with God in any way. More to the point, musics are not God and share no univocity with the Divine. Musics are instead gifts from God where the incomprehensible generosity of the Divine is perceivable here and everywhere.

Neither does the ensuing argument amount to natural theology. Though an underlying belief that in the natural world God interacts with humanity grounds claims throughout the following pages, the formal structures of nature have not been imposed upon God.

To clarify, the current project does not assert that all sound discloses the reality of the triune God in full. It does, however, suggest that all sounds manifest the charity of God and that the God giving in all sound is the triune God, who may indeed choose to overwhelm recipient in a sonically revelatory event. Identifying overwhelming instances of sound exceeds human hermeneutics and the project

⁹ Christian Batalden Scharen, *Broken Hallelujahs: Why Popular Music Matters to Those Seeking God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

here. Only the giving of God grants experiences of revelatory scale. What follows is a historical, theological, and phenomenological reading of musical events—especially ones from avant-garde composers during the postwar era (primarily the 1950’s)—explained using conceptual framing and phrasings from Western Christianity, with concentration upon the phenomenological writings of Jean-Luc Marion. The argument here asserts that sonic ubiquity gives musics and that these musics disclose truth exceeding what seems possible or even rational. In the sonic ubiquity of musics, the generosity of God manifests. Where musics never cease, God gives.

An exponential number of starting points exists for research regarding the theological intelligibility of music. Importantly, the study here does not rearticulate or rearrange arguments from works like Bruce Ellis Benson’s *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* or Stephen Webb’s *The Divine Voice: Christian Proclamation and the Theology of Sound*.¹¹ Benson primarily focuses upon erasing the divide between composing and performing by calling for more rigorous study of how musical performance involves dialogue that leads to new insights related to creativity and meaning.¹² Benson emphasizes conversation and improvisation as fundamental musical performance practices that give life to what music is. Performance practices also more fully substantiate any particular ethic of

¹¹ Bruce Ellis Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2003).

See also Stephen H. Webb, *The Divine Voice: Christian Proclamation and the Theology of Sound* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2004).

¹² Benson discusses musical dialogue in a Gadamerian sense. German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer helped guide Benson’s project. For the role of Gadamer in Benson’s book, see Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, xiv.

Werktreu (or faithfulness to a musical work) and open more robust doorways for theological understanding of music in general according to Benson. Benson only hints at music as an instantiation of theological truth in the last lines of his work, and he very specifically locates his theological analysis of music at the site of musics performed by humans. Nevertheless, he does write:

It [Music] is a game that has a long history, a performance practice that has been preserved and handed down over the years. That game belongs to all of its participants, and none of them can claim priority. For the game—the very performance tradition of music making itself—is a gift that none of them own and that no one player can control. It belongs to all of them and none of them.

Nothing more, nothing less.¹³

The current study agrees with Benson’s final assertion that musical performance is a gift owned by no player, composer, or listener. Yet it departs from Benson by more broadly and explicitly asserting that all musics, performed, improvised, or otherwise, instantiate Divine giving, not just those musics performed by humanity.

Webb aims to develop a self-described Reformed Christian “theo-acoustics” that positions sound, and specifically, vocal sound, as the most fundamental category for understanding God. “The Word of God spoken in Jesus Christ” (in a Barthian sense) communicates gospel truth throughout the world that we too often fail to hear, especially in the sonorousness of gathered worship and in Christian preaching. Webb also speaks specifically about music. In particular, he discusses Charles Ives. For Webb “No other American tried harder to hear music in every

¹³ *Ibid.*, 191.

sound, no matter how dissonant” and the genius of Ives translates to a broader theological insight that all noise “echoes the Word spoken by God in Jesus Christ.”¹⁴

The current project does not privilege the sound of the voice as Webb does; Webb writes, “the human voice, in the end, must be the measure of all earthly sound.”¹⁵ Neither does the current project freight sound with the Reformed outlook that anchors Webb’s writing. It does, however, proximately align itself with Webb’s Christian interpretation of noise via Ives. The current project also sees promise in Webb’s final assertion that an eschatological transformation of our imagination will occur “when we enter heaven” transforming our imagination of heaven itself but also presumably correcting our earthly assumptions about the meanings, theological and otherwise, about sound. The author of the current project believes encounter (akin to what Webb describes eschatologically) is the primary starting point for any theology—that is to say, revelation is the primary starting point for theology. Yet such revelation need not wait until the eschaton. God may manifest beyond measure in current encounters with the musics of sonic ubiquity, and especially for those unable to grasp the elocutions of speech or other discursively tied ways of communicating holy grace and love.

But how can we know that such revelatory encounters indeed occur? The revelatory sonic moments must remain contingent and predictable only according to the will of God. For if humanity can create criteria to know precisely when and how such revelatory encounters take place, then it is not God who reveals, but

¹⁴ Webb, *The Divine Voice*, 229.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 228.

rather humans who determine the character of Divine decibel and its pronouncement. All musics instantiate the giving of God. Some musics, as God determines, manifest giving of revelatory proportion. Clearer to the point, sonic ubiquity instantiates the generosity of God, and only some sounds reveal God overwhelmingly.

Again, the current study limits theological investigation to how historical musics like the postwar compositions of Boulez and Cage are productive for experiencing and thinking about how God gives. The musics of Boulez and Cage take center stage in the following pages as well because for Jeremy Begbie, who has in many ways defined theological study of music from the late twentieth century until now for English speakers, the postwar musics of Boulez and Cage together encompass the spectrum of the theologically pernicious (and even sinful) in modern and “postmodern” music. By offering an alternative to Begbie’s assessments of Boulez and especially Cage, the author of the current project hopes to show that even musics considered theologically transgressive or simply unfit disclose promising and even radiant trajectories for expanding theological analysis of music in general. Departing from Begbie’s argumentation thus provide a fruitful departure point for making a case that all musics instantiate the generosity of God.

Chapter II will first trace how Begbie has arrived at his theological conclusions regarding music from the beginning of his work to his current position. It will diagnose two theologically limiting consequences for musics in general that follow from his line of thinking and especially his readings of Boulez and Cage: theological ventriloquy and sonic xenophobia. Theological ventriloquy describes

the tendency within theological discourse to use music as that which voices the presuppositions and results of discursive theology, instead of appealing to music as instance of theological claims such as Divine charity. Sonic xenophobia excludes certain musics as unfit for theological inquiry.

Chapter III characterizes Begbie's treatment of Boulez as sonically xenophobic. For Begbie, the music of Boulez emblemizes the fate of modern thinking and must be ousted from any theological engagement. The all-encompassing and all-controlling mode of composition from Boulez known as total serialism shows that absolute organization from humanity does not lead to innovation or ascent to freedom, but destruction and defiance of boundaries and order authored by God. Therefore, the postwar music of Boulez must face exclusion from serious theological inquiry. In contrast to Begbie, the author of the current project reexamines the postwar serial output of Boulez as visionary not only for its musical ingenuity, but also for its response to societal ruin in the wake of World War II and promising for future theological research that queries redemption and its relationship to musical embodiment and expression.

Chapter IV begins by recounting how for Begbie, Cage's postwar music emblemizes the nihilism of "postmodernity" in its random derivation and apparent disregard for artistic intention. Similar to the failure in Boulez's music, neither does Cage's sonic surrender lead to freedom. It perverts the order of human transcendence over nature as granted by God. Begbie's logic against Cage, however, enforces a kind of theological ventriloquy, whereby proper authorial intent is required in order for music to operate theologically and lend itself to theological

interpretation. What Begbie misses, however, is that Cage's music, and especially a piece like 4'33" gives expansive hope with regard to theological study of music by suggesting that all sounds give musics and intimating the claim that all musics instantiate the generosity of God.

In order to clear the way for detailing the theological profundity at work in a piece like 4'33", chapter V sifts through assumptions that might arise with respect to 4'33" and its theological interpretation. Chapter V disassociates Cage's interest in South and East Asian religion and philosophy such as the *I-Ching* or Zen Buddhism from 4'33" as roots for deriving theological meaning. Choosing to parse Cage's own commentary on Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* as theologically primary instead, chapter VI introduces French Catholic Phenomenologist, Jean-Luc Marion's writings concerning givenness and freedom, his icon/idol heuristic, and lastly, the saturated phenomenon, in order to approach Cage's 4'33" as an exemplary portal for imagining musics as instances of Divine charity. Chapter VI also introduces sacramental dimensions for sonic ubiquity as instantiation of Divine charity. Crucially, neither Cage's musical invention nor Marion's phenomenological concepts operate as normative tools for theological analysis of music in general. Rather both Cage and Marion respectively provide musical and conceptual openings for conceiving of musics granted by sonic ubiquity as instantiating the giving of God.

Application of concepts from Marion also does not entail a phenomenological revision of what Begbie does with his understanding of Christian doctrine and sacred sources. Music does not in the following pages illustrate or

ventriloquize phenomenological method. As Marion writes, “But perhaps involving oneself in phenomenology does not consist in involving oneself in phenomenological doctrines, their history, and their archaeology, but in what the phenomenologists themselves are involved in—the things themselves—that is to say in the phenomena and their description.”¹⁶ In this way, phenomenological concepts approximate the nondiscursive experience that music provides, which at the most basic level is a constant sense of what Christians might call grace, and what the current project has (via Marion) philosophically chosen to detail as givenness.¹⁷ With or without precise remembrance of concepts borrowed from Marion and the theoretical support of Cage’s 4’33”, however, sonic ubiquity gives musics that participate in the charity of God and even the revelation of God.

¹⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 2007), 409.

¹⁷ John Milbank offers another perspective, but one that seems complementary:

There are no ‘things’ (as Augustine sees in *De Musica*) but only tensional *ratios* which in their ‘intense’ state, do not pre-contain all that they later unfold, but have an ‘incorporeal’ power for expansion. Creation is therefore not a finished production space, but is continuously generated *ex nihilo* in time. To sustain this process, the monads, seeds or ratios also self-generate, but in this they do not ‘assist’ God, who supplies all power and all being, but rather participate in God. For if God is an internally creative power-act, then he can only be participated in by creatures who do not embody an infinite coincidence of act and power, but a finite oscillation between the two, yet are themselves thereby radically creative and differentiating. (In this sense everything created ‘lives’ and even ‘thinks’ such that humanity intensifies the deepest impulses of the cosmos.) See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory : Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK ; Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 405.

Chapter VII explores the implications for sonic ubiquity and its musics as instantiating Divine charity in the era of modern technology. Focusing upon the diagnosis of modern technology from German philosopher Martin Heidegger's *Bremen Lectures*, the chapter asserts that sonic ubiquity now occurs inextricably within an inescapable technological age.¹⁸ Divine generosity nevertheless persists when technology thoroughly ensnares all musics. Addressing modern technology and its relationship to theological study of music is also key with respect to Begbie because his writings speak very little on the matter.

The concluding chapter VIII provides final statement that musics appear as given instantiations of God's generosity, with or without the conscious permission or acknowledgement of the recipient and with or without clear identification of the one who gives them. This does not mean, however, that God may not decide for full disclosure in sound (even if such an event is reserved only for the beginning of life or its eschatological consummation). Neither does the overarching claim of the current project engage in an acousmatic reduction—the assertion that musics have no identifiable sources.¹⁹ Instead concentration shifts from answering questions regarding the poles of origin and telos with regard to Divine charity and musics toward an invitation to focus strictly upon the sounds themselves. Sounds

¹⁸ Heidegger, Martin. *Bremer Und Freiburger Vorträge*, Gesamtausgabe. Iii. Abteilung, Unveröffentlichte Abhandlungen, Vorträge, Gedachtes/Martin Heidegger; (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1994).

¹⁹ For detail regarding the acousmatic reduction, see Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1997). Scruton updates his argument in "Sounds as Secondary Objects and Pure Events" in Matthew Nudds and Casey O'Callaghan, *Sounds and Perception : New Philosophical Essays* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 50-68.

everywhere announce themselves and participate in an impossible but paradoxically perceptible generosity of infinite magnitude, unified and yet different in every case. But whether we pay attention or not, sonic ubiquity always grants musics, and in all sound, God gives.

CHAPTER II

JEREMY BEGBIE THE THEOLOGICAL PIONEER

Beethoven once insisted that “Music is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy.”²⁰ Yet what does music reveal? Too often, finding out in theological studies rarely moves beyond hymnody or the study of sacred music. And even when a link between the sacred and the sonic occurs, musics are often reduced to illustration of theological claims, even though musics can do so much more. Musics display truthfulness of faith and life in remarkably unexpected ways. They are given and give as much as and beyond what we can precisely imagine or determine, to an inestimable extent (the current author humbly suggests) that only God can enact and fathom.

Jeremy Begbie has made his theological mark by diagnosing widespread inattention to music’s theological value and by offering methodological options for substantively exploring and articulating what music has to offer theology.²¹ Yet Begbie as well consistently limits the scope of his arguments by positioning music

²⁰ J. Bottum, “The Soundtracking of America,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, March, 2000 (268:3), 56.

²¹ I was unable to procure a copy of *Music and God’s Purposes* after numerous attempts, including contact with the publisher and with Begbie. “We no longer have any copies of this title. There are a number of companies on the internet that can trace out of print books it might be worth trying them,” Trish Clapp (Publisher Services Development Manager, Orca Book Services), in e-mail to author, July 6, 2010; “The booklet you cite is very a much a small booklet—written years ago, and, alas, of little value today. (You’re not missing anything!),” Jeremy Begbie, in e-mail to author, March 16th, 2010.

primarily as theological illustration. Sonically speaking, Begbie's method submits music to ventriloquy, where preconceived doctrines of Christian ecclesial tradition and the Bible become voiced in music to the extent that music does not, and perhaps cannot, theologially speak for itself or instantiate theological truths. Another limitation appears in Begbie's musical preferences. He privileges examples from Western tonality as exemplary of theological claims. He justifies his musical preferences by presuming that the music of Western tonality will be most familiar to his readers. Yet because his musical selections have sedimented into a standard preference for what kinds of musics are fit for theological study (Bach, Mozart, Messiaen, etc.), sonic xenophobia becomes a risk. In other words, only certain musics become acceptable for theological analysis while others are excluded as unsatisfactory and even adversarial for critical and faithful examination.

One slight alternative to Begbie's method of ventriloquy appears in part in the writings of Catherine Pickstock.²² She affirms music as a "prime mode" by which the presence of God is made known:

[T]o fully understand this phenomenon [music], it will be argued, it is not sufficient to see musical composition, performance, and reflection as simply reflecting wider cultural and philosophical tendencies, nor as contributing to them in its own idiom. Instead, we need to see musical composition and theory as itself, at least in the modern era, a prime mode of philosophical reflection which possesses resources which allow it both to take to an extreme and yet to criticize the most fundamental intellectual tendencies of our times.²³

²² Chapter 4 discusses how Pickstock also deploys the method of ventriloquy in her theological writings about Messiaen.

²³ Catherine Pickstock, "God and Meaning in Music: Messiaen, Deleuze, and the Musico-Theological Critique of Modernism and Postmodernism," *Sacred Music* 134, no. 4 (2007): 40.

Pickstock emphasizes in the above quotation the philosophical capacity of music to operate as a way of thinking and reasoning to inform current theoretical discussions of culture. The words move beyond ventriloquism because music functions as a particular modality to generate thought. Yet Pickstock does not entirely veer away from a ventriloquist method. Compare for example her writings about twentieth century French Composer, Olivier Messiaen, with Begbie's.²⁴

For Begbie, Messiaen makes theological music in *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps* (1940) by shaping the piece according to his Biblical commitment.²⁵ According to Begbie, Messiaen's self-stated description of the piece as an "homage to the Angel of the Apocalypse, who raises his hand heavenwards saying: 'There will be no more Time.'" make the movements of the piece theological.²⁶ The music articulates Messiaen's preconceived theological perspective. Music therefore participates in theological ventriloquy. Likewise for Pickstock, Messiaen purposely infuses his music complex harmonic patterns associated with biblical cosmology and so the

²⁴ Pickstock also favors Western tonality as a prime mode of musical reasoning. Therefore sonic xenophobia also becomes a risk in her writings.

²⁵ Again, Begbie also definitively forms aesthetic outlook regarding "beauty," music included, with "the quite specific God attested in Scripture—the gracious, reconciling, self-revealing God of Jesus Christ." See Jeremy Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie, *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*, The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.), 84.

²⁶ Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine; (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 140; footnote 38.

harmonies become theological.²⁷ In alignment with Begbie, Pickstock sees Messiaen's authorial intent behind *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps* as determining its theological value. The music ventriloquizes the composer's faith for both Begbie and Pickstock.

Moreover, the analysis of Pickstock shows how scholarship following the lead of Begbie risks sonic xenophobia. Portraying Messiaen as a Thomist modernist, Pickstock valorizes Messiaen as a true composer of God (only God creates true and undistorted non-identical repetition) over and against his pupils like Pierre Boulez who compose impure nonrepetitive music.²⁸

To be fair, Begbie recognizes the complexities and "dangers" of "leaning too heavily on 'authorial intention'" as a decisive factor regarding whether or not a particular music speaks theologically.²⁹ Take for example his reflection on music and temporality:

The fact that music is so time intensive and time involved gives it special powers to disclose something of the nature and character of time...It is easy to think that the timing of music is entirely something *we* make...But the Austrian musicologist Victor Zuckerkandl has argued...a distinctive view of time...in which time is not some kind of absolute container or channel...nor simply something we project from our minds onto the world, but an *intrinsic dimension of the physical world*. Musical experience, in other words, can serve to remind us of what is arguably a profoundly Christian insight: that time belongs to the very fabric of the good creation to which God is

²⁷ Catherine Pickstock. "Quasi una sonata: Postmodernism, Religion, and Music," *Logos* 47, no. 1-2 (January 1, 2006): 51-88.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time*, 145.

committed, something confirmed and sealed in the life, death, and raising of Jesus Christ.³⁰

In music, the physicality of time, without any recourse to a particular author, bears witness to God. The reference to Zuckerkandl is curious, however, because Zuckerkandl brackets out the God Begbie introduces. Zuckerkandl writes, “The musical view of the universe differs from the religious view in that it is attained not through faith and revelation but through sense perception and observation. The purely dynamic, the nonphysical element of nature, which we encounter in the musical experience, is not God.”³¹ Begbie sidesteps Zuckerkandl’s atheism, while still holding onto Zuckerkandl’s phenomenological argumentation about the “*intrinsic*” element of time in music in order to a relationship between creation (temporality and music included) and Jesus Christ. Even if Begbie’s tilting of Zuckerkandl towards theology is granted, the problem of ventriloquy still persists. With or without an author offering theological guidance, music still strictly reminds or refers listeners to deeper truths about the world, like temporality. Time is unmade, but not music. Humans make music and realize that it refers to deeper insight into created dimensions of the world like time. Music illustrates theological truths. Music does not itself instantiate the significance of temporality or how God gives in the created world.

³⁰ Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth : Christian Wisdom in the World of Music, Engaging Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 220. See also the chapter “Music’s Time” and the thirty references listed on index page 306 of Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time*.

³¹ Victor Zuckerkandl, *Sound and Symbol*, Bollingen Series, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 374.

Heidi Epstein's *Melting the Venusberg: A Feminist Theology of Music*

primarily focuses upon disassembling masculine biases in theological analysis of music and elevating the importance of examining musics in terms of its array of somatic and sensual experiences and meanings. Yet she also provides sharp critiques to both Begbie and Pickstock. While Epstein applauds the pioneering theological creativity of Begbie, she too cautions against ventriloquist tendencies in his writings, making the accusation that "his theologising reduces music to a mere proof-text for biblical doctrine."³² Epstein distrusts Pickstock's advocacy of music as a prime mode for philosophical thought with further polemical remarks in which she describes Pickstock's musical analyses as "supersessionist" and "colonialist."³³ For Epstein, Pickstock endorses certain musics and excludes others in ways that promote Christian empire and utopic visions of faithful life. For example, according to Epstein, Pickstock judges what musics fit theological aims based upon Augustinian notions of tunefulness and election. As a corrective to both Begbie and Pickstock, Epstein chooses "to redefine music theologically as redemptively transgressive, fleshly *imitatio*."³⁴ For Epstein, musics remote from the sacred as well as those in violation of holiness may (even in spite of how they appear) sound out deliverance.

The current study departs from Begbie and Pickstock and takes the argument of Epstein one step further to insist that all musics instantiate the

³² Heidi Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg: A Feminist Theology of Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 84.

³³ *Ibid.*, 94.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

generosity of God. The relegation of musics to theological ventriloquism becomes impossible because musics no longer *ornament or rearticulate preconceived beliefs, but manifest a truth for belief—that God gives. The* associated risk of sonic becomes outmaneuvered because xenophobia any music announces the holy. No music simply channels theological discourse. Instead musics everywhere make audible the mystery of God’s giving.

Begbie’s Theological Discourse about Music

None of Begbie’s three books still in print—*Voicing Creation’s Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (1991), *Theology, Music and Time* (2000), and *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (2007)—nor his edited two collections of essays about music and art—*Beholding the Glory: Incarnation Through the Arts* (2000), and *Sounding the Depths: Theology Through the Arts* (2002) speak about music as instantiation of Divine generosity.³⁵ From his out-of-print first tract, *Music in God’s Purposes* (1989), to his most recent collection of essays co-edited with Steven Guthrie and entitled *Resonant Witness: Conversations Between Music and Theology* (2011), Begbie commits to a ventriloquist method that risks sonic xenophobia. For Begbie, music “advances theology” by “enacting theological wisdom” in the form of intentional and organized sound-making and

³⁵ Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation’s Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), ———, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music*, Engaging Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), ———, *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000). ———, *Sounding the Depths: Theology through the Arts* (London: SCM, 2002).

hearing.³⁶ As for the theological wisdom that music manifests, Begbie cautiously offers the following pregnant statement: “I am taking theology to be *the disciplined thinking and rethinking of the Christian gospel for the sake of fostering a wisdom that is nourished by, and nourishes, the church in its worship and mission to the world.*”³⁷ By “*disciplined thinking and rethinking,*” Begbie means an intellection that exercises the mind and imagination, but also all other faculties of the body, “including our willing, feeling, sensing, and bodily actions.”³⁸ Jesus Christ enables such integrative thinking in which the Holy Spirit infuses freedom so that the entirety of any human being can “find their true role in relation to God and one another in the world.”³⁹

Four key corners frame what Begbie means by “*of the Christian gospel*” First, theology can only begin kerygmatically with “the announcement that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Triune creator, the God of Israel, has acted decisively to reconcile the world to himself.”⁴⁰ Second, this beginning communicates the presence of a living God actively transforming the world and us. Third, this beginning orients theology as a knowledge from God in as much as it is learning about God. Fourth, theology therefore requires prayer and worship “thinking

³⁶ Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time*, 5. [Italics Begbie’s.]

³⁷ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 19. [Italics Begbie’s.]

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

appropriately *about* God means regularly engaging *with* God.”⁴¹ The aforementioned four corners are principally derived from Scripture.

For Begbie, Scripture demands strenuous fidelity from any theological investigator because Scripture, before any other sources of theological knowledge, mediates gospel “first and foremost” through its “life-transforming writings.”⁴² When Begbie suggests that theology proceed “*for the sake of fostering a wisdom*” he writes:

To be wise means to judge what it is right to say and do in those situations in a way that is faithful and true to God. We become wise *in order to live well*. As “lived knowledge,” wisdom is directed toward a lifestyle thoroughly ‘in tune’ with God—godly living—that resonates aptly with the Creator’s intentions for us and his world. Theology aims at generating and celebrating this kind of wisdom.⁴³

The kind of wisdom Begbie proposes takes shape in community, and especially and primarily, in the church. In this way, theology is “*nourished by, and nourishes, the church in its worship and mission to the world.*” Begbie claims, “Theology’s first calling, I would contend, is to help build up the people of God, to shape the Christian community for the sake of its worship and mission to the world.” For Begbie, “All Christians who think intelligently about their faith along these lines are theologians.”⁴⁴ Begbie also points to “pitfalls” that may trouble the application of theology to music.

⁴¹ Ibid. [Italics Begbie’s.]

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 21. [All italics Begbie’s.]

Begbie's Pitfalls for Theological Analysis of Music

Five pitfalls concerning the interplay between music and theology arise for Begbie: *theological imperialism*, *theological aestheticism*, limiting theological study of music to the categories of *worship music* and *moral adjudication*, and considering only *words*.⁴⁵ Theological analysis of music cannot proceed neutrally. For Begbie, this is a false assumption of theological aestheticism. Additionally, theological analysis cannot theologially imperialize or treat music in a procrustean manner where music is forced to fit Christian meanings. Nor can theological study of music simply concern music identified as worship music or limit its social benefit to ethical claims. Lastly, though sung text is a type of music, the theological meaning of music involves more than, and is at times independent of lyrical content or music with lyrics.

The first two are *theological imperialism* and *theological aestheticism*. Theological imperialism positions music as illustration only. Music itself serves as an instrument through which theological meaning is grasped rather than positioned as a source for theological knowing. Music becomes sonic territory that is colonized and controlled by theological purposes. Theological aestheticism seeks to avoid the instrumentalization of theological imperialism by advocating the interpretation of music according to its own terms. For Begbie, theological aestheticism rightly seeks to protect the integrity of music from the tainting of outside hermeneutics. Theological aestheticism errs according to Begbie, however, in presuming that music can be approached with neutrality. Begbie stresses that

⁴⁵ [Italics Begbie's.]

music cannot speak for itself because any interpretation of music begins from a particular standpoint. In response to the problems of theological imperialism and theological aestheticism, Begbie suggests that the reader instead depend upon the truth of the gospel as a means of navigating safe passage.

The next three pitfalls Begbie sees comprise the narrowing of theological discussion about music to (1) *worship music*, (2) *moral adjudication*, and (3) *words*. Begbie recognizes that music composed from sacred text or written with religious lyrical content like hymns or praise choruses contains gospel meaning. Therefore, such music deserves study. Music for theological consideration, however, must not be confined by the category of worship according to Begbie. Instead, music within culture at large deserves dedicated theological analysis.

Begbie also does not want to limit theologizing about music and culture to *moral adjudication*.⁴⁶ For Begbie, theological exploration of music can produce ethics. For example, Begbie suggests how an ecological ethics that mirrors the ecology of the trinity can proceed from understanding music as a component part of creation and witness to God's call for environmental responsibility.⁴⁷ Yet this kind of correlation should not reduce music to moral argument. For Begbie, the gospel communication of music incorporates but also exceeds ethical issues. Finally, according to Begbie, words, though vital as bearers of gospel proclamation do not capture the presence of the gospel within any particular piece of music.

⁴⁶ [Italics Begbie's.]

⁴⁷ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 185 - 209.

Later it will be shown, however, that Begbie engages in what he calls *theological imperialism*, in spite of his caution against it. Additionally, although he may be right to theoretically problematize theological aestheticism, in actual practice, musics already provide a resolution for an impossible conundrum like this one. Begbie problematizes the restrictive use of music as mere illustration, but despite a few ambiguous remarks about how music may contribute to theological imagination, the overwhelming majority of Begbie's assertions fail to escape this pitfall. For Begbie, the theological efficacy of music is utterly normed by prior propositions.

Begbie does describe his writings as preliminary. He encourages extension and departure from his current theologizing about music. His encouragement supplies much of the motivation for the chapter here. If a neutral hermeneutic towards music is impossible, then theological aestheticism no longer poses an actual risk or danger as Begbie cautions against. More provocatively, the possibility of theological aestheticism becomes mere intellectual exercise. Because where human neutrality is impossible concerning theological analysis of music, music stages another particular and definitive interpretive authority, ultimately undetermined by intellection but given from God.

Therefore, developing criteria for determining which musics facilitate worship and pronounce ethical decree and where these musics occur becomes elusive. This does not mean, however, that theological discourse about music becomes irrelevant. Therefore, Begbie's caution against concentrating upon words in the analysis of music becomes ironic because any music cannot avoid

engagement with words. Interpreting nondiscursive phenomena like music for the sake of theological literacy almost always involves discourse.⁴⁸ Though Begbie was referring to lyrics rather than discourse when demanding more intentional focus to musical sounds and meaning rather than linguistic ones, his restrictive urging cannot be maintained. As musicologist Daniel Chua states, discourse “fundamentally” contaminates music and music is “both culturally constructed and embedded within deeper epistemological structures.”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, repeatedly corresponding musics to religious texts or institutions, as Begbie does again and again in his theological articulations about music, underestimates the theological profundity of musics.

Theological Ventriloquy

Perhaps Begbie’s most concise formulations of his theological method toward music can be found in his essay, “Created Beauty: The Witness of J. S. Bach.”⁵⁰ The title itself encapsulates Begbie’s method. Western tonal music witnesses as “a beauty” fashioned by humanity but celebrated unto God, creator of all things. The essay’s contents more explicitly connect Begbie’s claim to the Bible:

If we are to think of the phenomenon of beauty, at least initially [and Begbie

⁴⁸ Chapter 6 of the current project, however, discusses how sonification might also serve as a means of articulating interpretation of music and theological claims in general.

⁴⁹ Daniel K. Chua, ‘Music as the Mouthpiece of Theology’ in Jeremy Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie, *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*, The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.), 138.

⁵⁰ Begbie and Guthrie, *Resonant Witness*, 83-108.

precedes this excerpt with the example of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*.]—in other words *proportion and consonance of parts, brightness or resplendence, perfection or integrity*, and as *affording pleasure upon contemplation*—then these strands need to be constantly reformed and transformed, purged and purified by a repeated return to the saving self-disclosure of Scripture's God.⁵¹

Begbie further punctuates, "And to care about these criteria, for the Christian at any rate, is ultimately to care about the God to whom the church turns for the reshaping of all its words."⁵² For Begbie, Scripture and doctrine function as the timeless scripts or scores for understanding God that episodic and humanly created artifacts like music express. That Begbie uses the imagery of strands is significant, because for him, the aesthetic and nondiscursive dimensions of music are never cut loose to manifest what is of God but always tied down to discursively based sources, mostly biblical and doctrinal ones, about God.

Consider another earlier example in another essay from Begbie, "Through Music: Sound Mix," found in *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation Through the Arts*. Begbie analogizes tonal harmony to the simultaneity of Chalcedonian Christology and Trinitarian theology. Playing two harmonious notes together, like an octave (pressing a white "C" key on the piano and the next white "C" key to the right), illuminates the cooperation between the divine and human nature of Christ. Likewise, playing three harmonious notes (C-E-G) at once, a three-note chord or triad, reflects the trinity. *Consistent throughout Begbie's corpus of writing*, music almost always functions as theological illustration of what has already been theologically decided and stated. For Begbie, theology comes to expression in music

⁵¹ Ibid., 84-85. [Italics Begbie's.]

⁵² Ibid., 85.

the same way that a ventriloquist speaks through an inanimate object. To use Begbie's language, it is as if he stumbles into the pitfall of *theological imperialism*.

In Begbie's latest single authored work, *Resounding Truth*, a similar syncing of musical examples to theological doctrine as discussed in "Through Music: Sound Mix" occurs. Begbie claims that music embodies actions of hearing and making within communities to foster a freedom given by God that encourages responsibility to self, neighbors, and God.⁵³ (Importantly, Begbie never explicitly defines what he means by music. His reticence provides an opening for recommending other trajectories for the theological study of music as will be later shown.) Amplifying the theological argumentation of "Sound Mix," *Resounding Truth* asserts that music can "*bring and hold together different dimensions of the gospel*."⁵⁴ In discussing the interweaving and tense succession of chords and dissonances in the opening chorus of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, "Kommt, Ihr Töchter" ("Come, you daughters") and its allusion to the multilayered meanings of Jesus carrying his cross, Begbie notes that the "overlapping" nature of such music and other harmonious works also conveys Trinitarian space into which humans are invited to share.⁵⁵ Such sharing entails "participating in the life and love of the Triune God by virtue of Jesus's death and resurrection and the giving of his Spirit; only within this movement of grace can our relations with others become truly

⁵³ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 288.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 293-94.

free.”⁵⁶ Begbie therefore speaks with interplay of three primary theological resources, Scripture, the Church, and the Christian to make his claims, but none of them are music.

Yet despite significant consistency across time and space with regard to sacred writings, institutional beliefs, and communities of faith, Christians in both theory and practice have never been completely unified. Understandings of Christian unity and authority are not without significant difference and contest. Begbie mistakenly positions the Bible and Christian congregations as uniform wholes that support a ventriloquist method for theological analysis of music. Music simply “re-sounds” what the Bible and *ekklesia* proclaim. The Bible, however, contains radically different portrayals of musics. In 2 Chronicles, trumpeters dutifully praise God in the temple of the Lord (5:13). In Revelation 4, angels use trumpets to call forth fire and the wrath of God (6-12). Even Begbie admits:

Scripture provides little direct help in answering the kinds of questions that might readily be asked: What place should music have in human life? How do we go about evaluating different pieces of music? What makes good music? It certainly does not supply anything like a “theology of music.” ...Gaining theological wisdom about music from Scripture will come more from taking account of the whole sweep of God’s creative and redemptive purposes that Scripture recounts than by scrutinizing specific biblical reference to music.⁵⁷

The wholeness and implied consistency in the “sweep of God’s creative and redemptive purposes that Scripture recounts,” seems dubious at best. Moreover, God demands genocide as a measure of rescue and retribution for the Israelites (1

⁵⁶ Ibid., 294.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 59.

Samuel 15:3). Jesus dies and rises differently across all four gospels (Matthew 27:45ff, Mark 15:33ff, Luke 23:44ff, and John 19:28ff). The normative poles of the Church and Scripture do not cohere as Begbie suggests. Likewise, his intended audience of Christian readers probably do not resemble a coterie of the like-minded faithful, or musically agreeable. The challenge surfaces to find a way of discussing music theologically while balancing degrees unity and difference, with respect to normative religious sources like the Bible, doctrine and congregations, but also beyond them.

Elsewhere Begbie does write that “in all this, we have not only been uncovering the potential of music to generate fresh means of advancing doctrinal understanding, but likely uncovering some of the reasons why music has so persistently been drawn into the purposes of God in the life of the Church.”⁵⁸ Again, in Begbie’s framework, music does not generate doctrinal understanding *per se*. Rather it operates primarily as “fresh means” – a new or arguably just another enunciation – for broadcasting preconceived doctrinal understanding. The purposes of God are determined by the systematic claims of humans. “The Church” does not adopt music. She co-opts it into re-articulating *a priori* doctrine. Or readers of Begbie might interpret within his writings an assumption that music is *prima facie* doctrinally orthodox. In either case, uncovering has not taken place, but rather further entrenchment of music into theological ventriloquy.

Across his works, Begbie presents a continuity of musical theology that engages doctrines of creation and Trinity, a conception of temporality, and a

⁵⁸ Ibid.

concept of what it means to be human. Yet Begbie does not form his theological conclusions *from* music except for passing suggestions ironically found as well in writings like “Created Beauty: The Witness of J. S. Bach.” Begbie claims that Bach’s music can “provoke us to imagine” the relationship between “natural” and “artistic” beauty. Begbie asserts that Bach exemplifies how the human receives the gift of nature from God, and how humanity may fashion beauty from it. Yet apart from these momentary comments, Begbie mostly regards music as sonic elucidation and not sonic generation of theological claims.⁵⁹

Sonic Xenophobia

Begbie admits that his restriction to Western tonality is a concession and a matter of theoretical practicality. He chooses Western music because it has a range that encircles a variety of works from Rachmaninoff to the Grateful Dead, and it will be best known to his readers. Plus, “[f]inding a definition of music that encompasses Indonesian gamelan and, say, J.S. Bach’s *St. John Passion* seems well-nigh impossible.”⁶⁰ As versatile as an appeal to Western tonality may be, when Begbie circumscribes his musical choices this way, he nevertheless narrowly suggests what counts as theologically appropriate music, despite the admission that his choice is an insufficient restriction. He does not want “to assume that music of this kind is superior to all others; we are not presuming any particular value judgments about music outside the Western tonal tradition. Second, I am not

⁵⁹ Jeremy Begbie, “Created Beauty: The Witness of J.S. Bach” in Begbie and Guthrie, *Resonant Witness*, 83-108.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

suggesting that this music is the only kind worthy of theological attention.”⁶¹ Yet due to the fact that his method has set the roundtable for public discourse about music and theology and become a convenient standard thus far, his arguments have already had the effect of drawing boundaries for theological study of music, despite his qualifications.⁶² Searching for an alternative that can bear the multifaceted nature of what humans know as musics then becomes of paramount importance.

Begbie sees instances where the blending of musical cultures sheds theological light. One example is the album, *Simunye*, where I Fagiolini, a vocal ensemble from Oxford University, and Sdasa Chorale, a church choir from Soweto, South African, recorded a compilation of traditional hymns intertwined with African polyrhythmic structures.⁶³ For Begbie, the combined choirs exemplify gospel freedom expressed in musical overlapping. Yet Begbie’s anecdote could be viewed as a token gesture.

Even so, some monumentalism, that is to say, reifying the great works and normative claims of a canonical past as culturally and theologically exemplary, is perhaps unavoidable in any form of theological argumentation that depends upon a

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Take for example how only one essay treats current music beyond the North American context and another popular music study does not move much further than the stylized form of jazz in Begbie’s latest volume of collected essays, Begbie and Guthrie, *Resonant Witness*. Sustained theological consideration of religious plurality and music also appears missing. There are of course exceptions to this trend. See for example Philip Vilas Bohlman, Edith Waldvogel Blumhofer, and Maria M. Chow, *Music in American Religious Experience* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). But Bohlman has not received the same kind of attention as Begbie in discourses related to music and theology.

⁶³ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 291.

specific tradition such as Christianity. Again, however, one could convincingly argue that no single Christian tradition has ever existed. In other words, there is no one Christianity, but rather, Christianities, just as there are various reflections upon what comprises authentic performances and interpretations of Bach and Mozart.

Many times, Begbie uses music in licit historiography that results in a narrative of faithfulness and apostasy of his own making. Western tonal musics (especially from the 18th century) exemplify the gospel best. Postwar experimental musics corrupt what God has musically intended the most. Ironically, the way in which he historically pinpoints musics appropriate and adversarial to theology reduces the theological significance of musics to mere allegory—Bach composes melodious *Goldberg Variations* like God who creates beauty in the world—and the total serialism of Pierre Boulez captures the pathology of modernity that is antithetical to the order of God. In both cases, whether diminishing the positive theological role or exaggerating the transgressive implications of musics, music does not move beyond illustration for Begbie. More importantly, God's participation within musics seems lamentably remote in Begbie's framework.

Can Music Talk Back?

Acknowledging the trajectory of ventriloquism in Begbie, and its problematic function as a norm for theological analysis of music, a chief concern is to figure out how musics can talk back theologically. In other words, what communicable theological possibilities do musics offer in their array of sonic forms? The current study asserts that musics instantiate the giving of God.

Following an accusation from Nietzsche that Wagner was a “ventriloquist of God,” Daniel Chua asks precisely how theological speculation about music can avoid “being another act of ventriloquism” in “Music as the Mouthpiece of Theology”, an essay ironically included in Begbie’s most recent volume, *Resonant Witness*.⁶⁴ Continuing the work of his earlier book, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning*, Chua’s essay in the Begbie volume examines the historical development and demise of 19th century “absolute music.”⁶⁵ Chua introduces and interprets ventriloquism within the context of absolute music as a detrimental creative trend where composing giants in the canon of Western tonality attempt to remove instrumental music from the world, and from history. Because the world and history have not delivered their promises of progress and peace, musical minds like Beethoven believe they have what it takes to musically render progress and peace in sublime compositions.

Tragically, in such attempts, absolute music becomes a “catastrophic” outcome of its culture and the times in which it flourished. Music may escape expressing the harmony of the spheres, but its newly asserted autonomy coincides with the rise and assertion of the modern ego (the true ventriloquist) upon aesthetics. For Chua, the unrelenting ambition of the composer to inflate instrumental music with artistic idealism results in pieces of harmonic collapse that

⁶⁴ Chua, “Music as the Mouthpiece of God,” 137-61. Chua begins his essay, “Nietzsche once accused Wagner of being the “ventriloquist of God” (137).

⁶⁵ Daniel K. L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge UP, 1999), 277.

utter phrasings of musical “nonsense.”⁶⁶ Transposing Chua’s argument to the current discussion of Begbie, the implication is that theological ventriloquy privileges ego-driven or anthropomorphic understandings of God. As a trend in theological research of music, ventriloquy shuts down a possibility that understanding of God may arrive on its own with no recourse to human efforts. Disclosure of holiness may surface in a phenomenon as seductive but also as mundane as music.

Chua analyzes the interruptive and erratic motivic transitions in Beethoven’s *String Quartet in C# minor, Op. 131*, third movement, and the “chattering” setting of the epigram *Der schwer gefasste Entschluss: Muss es sein? Es muss sein!* [The Hard Reached Decision: Must It Be? It Must Be!] in the *String Quartet in F major, Op. 35* finale to argue that the height of compositional decisions from absolute music show an inability to furnish musical resolution. The pieces sputter out in tonal muttering of “metaphysical deflation.”⁶⁷ The ventriloquism cannot overcome its artificial ends of separation from history and pure musical autonomy according to Chua. A masterpiece of absolute music like Beethoven’s, demonstrates Habermasian “incompletion” where musical pretense dissipates in the horizon of artistic play.⁶⁸ The piece is an incomplete project, never fully expressing what it aims to articulate.

It remains unfinished, and simply reifies this fact in every occurrence of its performance. Chua views the Beethoven’s *String Quartet in C# minor* as a

⁶⁶ Ibid., 284.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 276-86.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 289.

foreshadowing model for the failure of modernity to reach completion. Modernity continues as an “incomplete project” and subsequent movements and ideas described as postmodern “merely plays with this fact.”⁶⁹ In order to drive home his point, in a final stroke, Chua takes a theological turn with his argument. He retrieves the contrasting narratives of Babel and Eden in Genesis, and with rhetorical twist, recalls with Max Weber that “instrumental knowledge cannot rebuild Eden—only Babel.” Instrumental music like Beethoven’s cannot provide passage to an apex of human creative aspirations driven by modern hopes. Instead, it crumbles under the weight of presumptuous and misguided aspirations leaving behind the ruin of an ultimately empty sonic sign.

Music of God and Mozart

When Begbie privileges selections from Western tonality both to represent and provoke the imagination of beauty and the integrity of creation given by God, does he also rely upon and advance ventriloquist logic from a kind of composite modern theological cultural ego? One might deduce that with regards to performance and reception of music, Begbie proclaims and pursues a way back from Babel to Eden. Yet neither the history of music nor the unfolding of the Biblical canon portrays this kind of return.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the phenomenology of

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ For more direct musical comparisons between Begbie and Chua, consider whether or not the repetition Begbie highlights in Beethoven, Symphony no. 6 in F major (first performed 1808) anticipates the chatter Chua finds in the String Quartets, C# minor (1826) and F major (1826). Though Begbie focuses on the first movement, a clearer connection might be found in the final and fifth movement of

Jean-Luc Marion may provide theological vernacular for understanding how music, without necessary recourse to Biblical or human hopes, may speak theologically.

Consider the contrasting interpretations of Mozart's last symphony, the *Jupiter Symphony* (Symphony 41 in C Major, K 551; completed August 10, 1788) from Begbie and Marion. For Begbie, music illustrates faith claims. He suggests that a "perfect cadence" (a musical resolution that expresses "both an ending *and* a new beginning") in the piece's third movement elucidates how the resurrection of Jesus is an ending that generates a "new beginning" in the history of humankind.⁷¹ One does not need to see or hear the perfect cadence Begbie references in order to identify how his method of musically analogizing doctrine limits theological possibility in the examination of music. Begbie interprets Mozart's composition as an echo of what Christians believe to be true instead of approaching the piece as an instance of that truth. For Begbie, music can only amplify and exemplify. It cannot give its own particular theological cry.

Begbie admits that using the *Jupiter Symphony* as an analogy for the resurrection is "cheeky." Yet it is not the imbalance of the comparison that appears brash, but rather the persistent presumption that music does not communicate and participate as such in the giving of God. According to Begbie, "the created world is neither divine nor heading for divinity. Music praises God in its createdness, in its

the pastoral symphony. See bars 209–216 of the Shepherd's Song [*Hirtengesang*] in Ludwig van Beethoven and Jonathan Del Mar, *Symphonie Nr. 6 in F-Dur = Symphony No. 6 in F Major : "Pastorale" : Op. 68*, Bärenreiter Classics (Kassel ; New York: Bärenreiter, 2001), 19.; audio available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42rIQA-tdB4&feature=related>, approx. 6:48 [website last accessed July 19th, 2012.]

⁷¹ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 266-67.

finite otherness.”⁷² The current study asserts instead that humans do not merely hear and practice music as theological and as operative within a “sonic order” given by God. Musics act upon us as instances of Divine charity. They encounter us as innately sacred manifestations (irrespective of form and intent) within the sonic ubiquity that God gives.

Marion offers a contrasting interpretation of the *Jupiter Symphony* that phenomenologically conveys this theological stance. He suggests that the *Jupiter Symphony* constitutes the hearer, not the other way around.⁷³ The piece determines the perception of the listener. Furthermore, the symphony does not illustrate *doxa*. Rather, it participates in *doxa* and also falls within the realm of *paradoxon*—that which is contrary to expectation. The music of Mozart approaches Marion as “pure givenness mediated by almost no objectifiable given,” but only “an actuality immediately its own.” For Marion, the sonorousness of the *Jupiter Symphony* offers a charity “without or beyond the sounds that it produces.” The piece comes forward as a paradox, which suspends and inverts “the phenomenon’s subjection to the I.” The inversion results in constituting the one (composer, performer, or audience member) musically approached by the piece as a witness, a “worker of truth,” who “cannot claim to be its [truth’s] producer.”⁷⁴

⁷² Ibid., 306.

⁷³ Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 2002), 216.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 216-17.

Yet another way of grasping how musics instantiate Divine charity and with specific reference to the *Jupiter Symphony* is the appearance of the C-D-F-E Credo sequence in the finale of the work. The Credo is a recurring musical feature in Mozart across his corpus, and his use of it does not duplicate ancient liturgical practice but it does extend it.⁷⁵ The melody of the Credo is itself another prayer. Mozart notates the Credo on scores, and in any performance of its musical form (whether or not orchestras play with such intent), the musical gesture participates in a history of sacred devotion given by God. The Credo, a musical device featured by Mozart, but also shared by Mozart's contemporaries as well is inextricably linked to a legacy of sonic praise. As Barth said to a gathering of Mozart admirers in the Music Hall of Basel on January 29, 1956, "As these eyes seem to *see*, so Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, in his great freedom, may have *heard*, and then in this same great freedom, have played as it was given to him to play."⁷⁶

That sonic ubiquity provides musics like Mozart's that are ultimately given by God does not require surrendering to an intellectually disempowering outlook, but rather an admission that intellection cannot fully comprehend manifestations of the theological in the world. Recognizing that musics like Mozart's instantiate God's generosity defers to the possibility that musically, God may be disclosing theological truth as God desires and according to how God provides, without boundary, without separation from ordinary phenomena like sounds, and without

⁷⁵ Hermann Abert, Stewart Spencer, and Cliff Eisen, *W.A. Mozart* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2007), 267.

⁷⁶ Karl Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, 1756/1956* (Zollikon,: Evangelischer Verlag, 1956), 59.

the justifications of human reasoning, but welcome to human recognition and investigation. Theological ventriloquy is no longer possible, because musics do not simply channel understanding about the Divine but participate in the mysterious giving of God.

Begbie does insist that only faith in God makes any musical interpretation possible at all. He writes, “We can dare to go further: ultimately, it is *only* as we are reconciled by the Spirit to this God—a God who makes possible the flourishing of the world in all its particularity and diversity—that we will be *able* to honor the integrity of music properly.”⁷⁷ Begbie thereby attempts to draw a fine line that on the one hand refrains from conforming musical meaning to written and preconceived Christian dogma. On the other hand, Begbie’s theological understanding of music remains firmly directed by monolithic understandings of Scripture, Church, and doctrine. His approach to music depends upon an institutionally and discursively based confessional belief and argument about God as creator and redeemer of all things, including theological knowledge about music.

What if, by contrast, musics did not merely function as theological allegory, but rather, perhaps shockingly, instantiated what God gives? The following chapters work through this theological possibility by examining selected musical works from two postwar avant-garde composers, Pierre Boulez and John Cage, who are also incidentally, Begbie’s primary theological adversaries, in order to recommend sonically-shaped theoretical angles for attending to the theological

⁷⁷ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 23. [Italics Begbie’s.]

profundity of musics as instantiation of Divine generosity.⁷⁸ Especially with Cage, the current study asserts that his most well known work, 4'33", opens a theologically promising doorway that Begbie's reliance upon Western tonality should not be so quick to close. Cage's piece, whose performed duration of four minutes and thirty-three seconds simply and shockingly welcomes all sound from anyone or anywhere as music, suggests that sonic ubiquity provides incessant musics in every place and for every one. 4'33" paradoxically offers a unifying presentation of what constitutes music and a unifying critique that resists reducing musics of the world according to any standard of uniformity. Interpreting 4'33" with Marion's conceptualization of givenness, the musical precedent of Cage becomes one portal for a broader theologically understanding that all musics instantiate wide array of what God gives.

⁷⁸ That Begbie singles out Cage as theologically suspect follows a suspicion toward Cage first rehearsed more than a generation ago by Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 63, 96. For detail regarding Wolterstorff's critique in the current argument, see chapter 3, page 86.

CHAPTER III

PIERRE BOULEZ THE FATALIST

Among twentieth century composers, and perhaps among all composers for Jeremy Begbie, John Cage proves the most threatening to his theological understanding of music. Yet whenever Begbie mentions Cage, he pairs him with Pierre Boulez.⁷⁹ Begbie concentrates on *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence*, a collection of letters between Cage and Boulez from 1949–62 to position the postwar output of both composers as the most transgressive works of music to emerge for discourse regarding theology and music.⁸⁰ From these letters, Begbie concludes that Cage’s music represents the looming nihilistic horizon of “postmodern” thinking. The postwar output of Boulez showcases the inevitable desolation to which modernism leads. Borrowing a phrase from Austrian American Art Historian and psychoanalyst Ernst Kris, Begbie faults the total serialism of Boulez with “control at the price of destruction.”⁸¹ By dismissing landmark innovations from these two figures in the history of Western music, Begbie closes the door to countless possibilities for generating sonically based theology.

⁷⁹ Begbie primarily develops his critical evaluation from an exchange of letters between Cage and Boulez spanning the years from 1949 to 1954.

⁸⁰ Pierre Boulez, John Cage, and Jean Jacques Nattiez, *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1993).

⁸¹ In *Theology, Music and Time*, Begbie borrows the words of Ernst Kris to soften this description of Boulez as “undoubtedly exaggerated” 192. Yet “Control at the Price of Destruction” serves as a heading to his introduction of Boulez in *Resounding Truth* (246).

The current chapter shows how Begbie mischaracterizes the music of Boulez and suggests avenues of theoretical promise that Boulez offers to theological analysis of music, including musical ways of thinking that help to prevent sonic xenophobia. Summarizing Begbie's critical remarks concerning Boulez will also help to focus the next chapter's discussion of how Cage becomes Begbie's principal theological adversary.

Boulez began his professional music career freelancing and playing the *ondes martenot* at the infamous *Folies Bergère*.⁸² The *ondes martenot*, one of the earliest electronic instruments and something like a theremin with a keyboard, can be heard on Radiohead tracks like "How to Disappear Completely" and underneath the electronic music of the Gorillaz. *Folies Berger* was a Paris theatre that excited its patrons with shows including ballet, acrobatics, pantomime, operetta, animal acts, and comedy, as well as semi-nude chorus girls and outrageous sets. In this same setting, only a generation before Boulez began his career as house *ondiste* [ondes martenot player], Joséphine Baker had donned and danced in her banana skirt and not much more for delighted admirers.

From the 1960s until now, musical publics have grown to appreciate and come to know Pierre Boulez (b. 1925) more as a conductor than a composer. Indeed, Boulez has won twenty-five Grammy awards for conducting. Only for his *Repons* has he won a Grammy as a composer.⁸³ Boulez biographer Dominique

⁸² Dominique Jameux, *Pierre Boulez* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 17.

⁸³ Of course the Grammy is generally ambivalently valued in the world of classical music. Boulez himself has never accepted the awards in person. Yet whether these mark distinction or other decorations of prestige like his Léonie

Jameux describes the ascent of Boulez’s conducting career as follows, “Between 1963 and 1973 Boulez emerged as one of the great orchestral conductors of our time, to a point where this image came near to eclipsing that of the composer in the eyes of public and press alike.”⁸⁴ Yet it is the uncompromising innovation and relentless push to challenge musical convention that have sealed him as an icon of modern music in the 20th century and positioned him as a still sought after artist and guiding voice for music, musicians, and audiences in the 21st.⁸⁵ This chapter concentrates upon his musical advances of the 1950s.

Sonning Music Prize (1985, first given to Stravinsky in 1959), Kyoto Lifetime Achievement Prize in Arts and Philosophy (2009), or Edison Award (2010), Boulez has without a doubt consistently and indelibly shaped modern music.

Incidentally, his total of twenty-six awards ranks third just after Quincy Jones (27) for all-time number of Grammy awards won. Boulez far exceeds more popular acts like U2 – 22, Michael Jackson – 13, and The Rolling Stones – 2. Classical music conductor, Georg Solti (1912 – 1927) currently leads with thirty-one.

⁸⁴ Jameux, *Pierre Boulez*, 126.

⁸⁵ Modern music as I am using it in this sentence refers to developments within Western intellectual music that begin with the “impressionistic” composing of Claude Debussy in the late 19th century and find their thrust in the atonal explorations of Arnold Schoenberg in the early 20th century. For a primer on these turns of events, see Joan Peyser, *The New Music; the Sense Behind the Sound* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1971).; Robert P. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music : A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America*, The Norton Introduction to Music History (New York: Norton, 1991).; Eric Salzman, *Twentieth-Century Music : An Introduction*, 4th ed., Prentice-Hall History of Music Series (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002).; and Christopher Butler, “Innovation and the Avant-garde, 1900–1920” in Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople, ed. *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 69-89.

Total Serialism

Total serialism sought to “control” every musical value, or the totality of musical series including rhythm, timbre, dynamics, duration, and pitch.⁸⁶ At the age of twenty, Boulez had already distinguished his version of serial composing from the inventor of serialism, Arnold Schoenberg, and one of Schoenberg’s most celebrated students, Anton Webern.⁸⁷ To oversimplify, Schoenberg used serialism or dodecaphony (“atonal” or “12-tone” music) to manipulate all twelve chromatic notes (all black and white keys on a piano) of Western tonality into thematized sets that determinately unfolded in an inevitable harmonic progression.⁸⁸ A dodecaphonic piece nearly decides for the composer which notes should be written. Webern both expanded and refined the harmonic application of twelve-tone technique to develop musical motifs that remained grounded in tonal

⁸⁶ For Boulez and the invention of total serialism, see G.W. Hopkins and Paul Griffiths. "Boulez, Pierre." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/03708?q=pierre+boulez&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1 - firsthit [last accessed July 21st, 2012].

⁸⁷ For an introduction to the historical significance of music from Schoenberg and Webern, see “Schoenberg, Webern and the Austro-German Tradition” in Peyser, *The New Music; the Sense Behind the Sound*, 1-79. For a more technical composition related introduction, see George Perle, *Serial Composition and Atonality: An Introduction to the Music of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern*, 6th ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

⁸⁸ For a more detailed explanation of Schoenberg’s views of harmony, see Arnold Schoenberg and Robert Dana Walden Adams, *Theory of Harmony. Harmonielehre* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948).

structures.⁸⁹ As a result, his pieces arguably have more emotional clarity and impact than his musical mentor, Schoenberg.

Boulez penned his total serial works according to an all-encompassing and all-consuming compositional technique. He also gave them emotional intensity, which he learned as a pupil of composer and organist, Olivier Messiaen (b. 1908). In this way, Boulez used musical values as raw materials where every parameter was meticulously structured into a whole “contained into a great architectural complex.”⁹⁰ Growing out of the serialist influences of Messiaen and Webern (via Schönberg), as well as early experimental works written by Boulez such as *Livre pour quatuor*, Boulez’s total serialist music was first premiered by pianist Yvette Grimaud in 1946, in the performances of the *First Piano Sonata* and *Sonatine*.

Foundations of Musical Modernism made Marginal

Begbie portrays the total serialist compositions of Boulez as following a predetermined musical logic such that the pieces “composed themselves.”⁹¹ This presupposes for Begbie a false ideal where “logical consistency” becomes paramount over compositional ingenuity (or any creative intervention from the

⁸⁹ Kathryn Bailey and American Council of Learned Societies., "The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern Old Forms in a New Language." (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.07665>. [last accessed July 21st, 2012]. Bailey begins her study by writing, “Webern consciously adhered in one way or another to the requirements of the conventional tonal structures into which he moulded his work” (xi).

⁹⁰ Boulez, Cage, and Nattiez, *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence*, 44.

⁹¹ Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2000), 187.

composer for that matter). According to Begbie, the logic of Boulez defies the “God-given home” of sounds and harmonies in the world. The exacting compositional formulas automatically and artificially produce musical works without any recourse to human personality or the musical ratios and proportions evident in nature.⁹² For Begbie, Boulez entirely disregards the gifts of God like human will and its role in artistic decision-making and the world’s harmony that suggests how music should sound.

If the pieces of Boulez composed themselves, however, their formation must demonstrate a radical musical autonomy. Yet the works do not display such musical independence. Pieces like *Structures Ib* (1950-1951) or *Polyphonie X* (1950–51), no matter how mechanistic they sound, do not generate themselves. In fact, Boulez unwaveringly commits to compositional constraint in order to arrive at musical invention.⁹³

For Begbie, however, Boulez’s structural ideation imprisons music.⁹⁴ In Boulez’s schema, music cannot offer what is “enriching for human beings.” In fact, Begbie wonders whether “anything that could be recognizably interesting or enjoyable” could escape the “abstraction” and “artificiality” of Boulez’s compositions. He goes so far as to associate Boulez’s total serialism with

⁹² Ibid., 193-94.

⁹³ Of *Structures Ib* Griffiths writes, “But, transfigured by the experience of compositional rigour, the turbulent variety of the earlier works now has the more abstract aspect of creative virtuosity” (26). See Paul Griffiths, *Boulez* (London: New York Press, 1978), 21-27.

⁹⁴ For readers curious about the link between the philosophical school of structuralism and the music of Boulez, see Edward Campbell, *Boulez, Music and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2010).

“Nazism.”⁹⁵ That Boulez participates in cultural and religious extermination borders on extremism from Begbie.

Begbie first treats the work of Boulez in *Theology, Music and Time*, and faults his music with three overarching criticisms: musical monotony, musical unintelligibility, and artistic irresponsibility. Begbie’s critical evaluation amounts to a move of sonic xenophobia that ousts the total serialist music of Boulez as unfit for theological inquiry and understanding.

Musical Monotony

Concerning musical monotony, Begbie faults the music of Boulez as demonstrating a crippling paradox, “With every element in a constant state of variation, without repetition, theme or any sense of development, the music quickly generates a curious and debilitating sense of monotony.”⁹⁶ In other words, despite the music’s constant change, it bores listeners. Frank Burch Brown seemingly shares Begbie’s assessment of Boulez. When writing about music that can produce theological meaning in sacred and secular contexts, he disparages “some avant-garde classical works” that “create highly cerebral conundrums.”⁹⁷ Brown,

⁹⁵ Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music, Engaging Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 246 - 47. Begbie headlines his discussion of Boulez with “*Control at the Price of Destruction*” and writes “What was Nazism if not ‘control at the price of destruction,’ ‘order equivalent to disorder’?”

⁹⁶ Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time*, 188.

⁹⁷ Frank Burch Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste, & Christian Taste : Aesthetics in Religious Life* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2000), 246.

however, offers a corrective his dismissive statement and the overall evaluation of Boulez from Begbie with his twelfth assumption about Christian taste:

Almost every artistic style that has been enjoyed and valued by a particular group over a long period of time and for a wide range of purposes has religious potential. That is because life typically finds various and surprising ways of turning religious. As Augustine said, our hearts are restless until they rest in God.⁹⁸

Without suggesting that the heart of Boulez has found or will find rest in God, from the time of total serialism until now, the popularity of his music and his role as conductor continues to increase, far exceeding the elite ears of classical music audiences (or those who find his music boring). The theological value of his music may yet come to the fore.

Renowned conductor and pianist, Daniel Barenboim, captures the inspiring evolution of Boulez as a formidable artist by stating, "But he [Boulez] is a great strategist. And he doesn't overestimate himself. He is too intelligent to stick to beliefs or opinions when they are no longer necessary. I remember him coming to my concert in Paris once and being very disparaging about Bruckner. But then, 15 years later, there he was conducting Bruckner himself, not out of weakness but because his thinking evolved."⁹⁹ Reflecting upon what he calls the "genesis of a work and its character," Boulez himself also surprisingly describes serialism and the development of total serialism in a theological light.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid., 251.

⁹⁹ Michael Kimmelman, "Boulez's Gentle Roar," *New York Times*, January 6, 2010.

It is only very seldom that the composer finds himself in the presence of a world that he has glimpsed, like Schoenberg, in a single flash of heightened awareness, a world he then has to bring into actual existence. This 'theological' aspect of the composer's task is more an aspiration than a fact ('...and you shall be like gods'), since it implies a most improbable degree of knowledge.¹⁰¹

The musical tedium accompanying the sophistication of the total serialism does not articulate monotony. Rather the music voices ennui that gives way to theological interpretation.

The ennui of Boulez is idiomatic to avant-garde experimentation attempting to break away from centuries of musical convention (while at the same time acknowledging the importance of this past). It will also be shown later as idiomatic to the aftermath of World War II in which the music of Boulez sought to bring renewal, albeit idiosyncratically, but nevertheless, of theological scope.

Musical Unintelligibility

But before the theological value of Boulez can be espoused, two more critiques from Begbie remain, the next being how Begbie struggles to hear intelligibility in the music of Boulez. Begbie further states, "Although a piece of music does not have to yield all its meaning in perception, a modicum of perceptual intelligibility would appear to be necessary to apprehend it *as music*."¹⁰² For

¹⁰⁰ Boulez, 'Putting the Phantoms to Flight' in Pierre Boulez and Jean Jacques Nattiez, *Orientations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1986), 76.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁰² Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time*, 188.

Begbie, “Total serialism seemed to engender a kind of ‘entropic’ anarchy.”¹⁰³ Begbie assesses the total serialism of Boulez as tedious nonmusic and entirely chaotic, and since the debut of Boulez’s serial output until now, listeners, musicians, and composers have acknowledged the works as admittedly mazelike and difficult for many listeners. But they have also found the pieces exhilarating, inspiring, and still innovatively pathway making. Given the amount of scholarly literature dedicated to deciphering Boulez’s works, as well as less charitable popular descriptions of it being excessively “mathematical” or “computerized,” it is clear that his music is not only acknowledged as *music* and musically comprehensible. Experts and everyday listeners identify his music as paramount in 20th century musical experimentation—assuredly as a result of its repeating and recognizable features—in addition to challenging their preconceived notions of what music should be.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ See for example the following titles: Campbell, *Boulez, Music and Philosophy*. Joan Peyser and Charles Wuorinen, *To Boulez and Beyond*, Rev. ed. (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2008). Jameux, *Pierre Boulez*. Griffiths, *Boulez*. Paul Griffiths, *A Concise History of Avant-Garde Music : From Debussy to Boulez* (New York: Oxford UP, 1978). Rocco Di Pietro, *Dialogues with Boulez* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2001), Mary Breatnach, *Boulez and Mallarmé : A Study in Poetic Influence* (Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press; Ashgate Pub. Co., 1996). Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: Ircam, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Alex Ross, "The Godfather: At Seventy-Five Pierre Boulez Is Still Laying Down the Law," *The New Yorker* 2000. Peter F. Stacey, *Boulez and the Modern Concept* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1987). Lev Koblyakov, *Pierre Boulez : A World of Harmony* (New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1990). Miguel A. Roig-Francolí, *Anthology of Post-Tonal Music: For Use with Understanding Post-Tonal Music* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008).

Artistic Irresponsibility

Begbie carries his argument for artistic irresponsibility from *Theology, Music and Time* over to *Resounding Truth*—the only other book from Begbie that mentions Boulez. *Resounding Truth* portrays Boulez’s artistic irresponsibility as a refusal to fashion art according to the constraints of nature given by God.¹⁰⁵ In *Theology, Music and Time*, Begbie specifies that these constraints are “tradition,” “nature,” and “temporality.”¹⁰⁶ Boulez misunderstands artistic freedom as freedom from such constraints. Therefore, his music tonally destroys the parameters of human freedom given by God and participates in artistic irresponsibility.

Begbie, however, conceives of these constraints too narrowly. The following paragraphs suggest how these constraints, the very criteria that Begbie sees as lacking in the music of Boulez are in fact operative, and position Boulez’s music as theologically robust, rather than woefully deficient for theological analysis. Of course Boulez does not adhere to the constraints as Begbie describes them because, for him, tradition, nature, and temporality do not limit musical possibility. Rather, they resource acts of musical innovation. In this sense, Begbie’s categories are mislabeled as constraints. They are perhaps more fruitfully understood, according to human freedom given by God, as catalysts for musical creativity. Tradition, nature, and temporality provoke new music making in Boulez, music making with theological implications.

¹⁰⁵ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 248.

¹⁰⁶ ———, *Theology, Music, and Time*, 191-95.

Tradition

What Begbie seems to miss is that in order to achieve his compositional ends, Boulez had to plunge rebelliously into the tradition of Western music. Boulez necessarily immersed himself in Western musical tradition, if only to find the waters toxic for his creative output. Consider Boulez's first letter to Cage in January of 1950:

If you get "Contrepoints," tell me what you think of my article "Trajectoires". I am writing one for the second issue on Bach and his importance for today. This will be 1) an attack on all the official fossilized teaching claiming to derive from Bach but actually going against him -; 2) a violent attack on all neoclassicism and the return to "pure music", which camouflages an inexcusable indigence - ; 3) this will on the other hand focus on the parallel that Berg made between Bach and Schönberg (regarding historical position, -; 4) which will then be an attempt to analyze what of value one might draw today from Bach's oeuvre: a certain unitary technique, existing alongside an essentially variable form, despite all appearances.¹⁰⁷

No matter how vituperative Boulez's rhetoric gets, total serialism did not come from "scratch" as Begbie implies.

Begbie references a quote from Boulez in Christopher Butler's *After the Wake: An Essay on the Contemporary Avant-Garde*. Butler reports Boulez as stating the following:

For me it was an experiment in what one might call Cartesian doubt, to bring everything into question again, make a clear sweep of one's heritage, and start all over again from scratch, to see how it might be possible to

¹⁰⁷ Boulez, "Moment de Jean-Sébastien Bach," *Contrepoints*, no. 7 (1951): 72–86. Article reprinted in Boulez, "Bach's Moment," in *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, ed. Paule Thévenin, trans. Stephen Walsh (Oxford: Oxford UP; New York: Clarendon Press, 1991), 3–14. See Boulez, Cage, and Nattiez, *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence*, 45.

reconstitute a way of writing that began with something which eliminates personal invention.¹⁰⁸

The selection that Begbie uses from Butler is actually a footnoted translation of a quotation from Boulez:

C'était, pour moi, un essai, ce qu'on appelle le doute, le doute cartésien; remettre tout en cause, faire table rase de son héritage et recommencer à partir de zéro pour voir comment on peut reconstituer l'écriture à partir d'un phénomène qui a annihilé l'invention individuelle.

Crucially, Begbie misses both the paradoxical nature of Boulez's statement by interpreting it and Butler's stance towards the quotation literally. The statement is paradoxical because Boulez does not undertake a "clear sweep," but rather invents his total serial output as a direct response to the tonal conventions that came before him.

Boulez does not make music from scratch but rather music deemed new by virtue of its relationship to a Western tonal past. The music of Boulez clearly falls within a tradition of music making. Boulez's cry of renunciation are as Butler later writes in *After the Wake*, "no more radical than those involved in our giving up representational habits in looking at painting" and require taking up the challenge of learning a new language so that of those post-war artistic works that endure, like Boulez's, we can encounter them by "inhabiting the present rather than taking refuge in the past."¹⁰⁹ Total serialism began as an outgrowth of the early 20th

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Butler, *After the Wake: An Essay on the Contemporary Avant-Garde* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980), 163; fn 9.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 155-60.

century efforts from Schoenberg (which could be contrasted to the 18th century music of Bach).¹¹⁰

In 'Bach's Moment' Boulez writes:

Bach perfects and expands this structuring [prelude, fugue, chorale, recitative, air, and other tonal forms] to the point where it can play a decisive part in the stabilizing of musical forms. ... Schoenberg's work, in direct contrast to Bach's, goes in search of a new constitution of the sound world; and it seems to me that this is its main and unique virtue: an important discovery, if ever there was one, in the history of musical morphology.

Then Boulez summarizes:

It becomes evident that the parallel between Bach and Schoenberg is devoid of real meaning. If there is a comparison to be made, it can only be between Bach and Webern. Examining their respective positions—the one in relation to tonality, the other in relation to serialism—we can say that they are symmetrically placed. I shall actually borrow the geometrical term *antiparallel* to define their relationship more precisely. As we have seen, the former works principally by extending the old; the latter is essentially out to conquer the new...[Later, it matured as a] duty to combine the advances of the Second Viennese School with those of Stravinsky and Messiaen, but now in a clear, precise manner which could be justified logically.¹¹¹

Far from naively snubbing his nose at more tonally oriented composers, Boulez fully engaged icons of tonality like Bach, and leaned upon modern favorites like Stravinsky and Messiaen. Stravinsky is perhaps best known for his association with Disney's *Fantasia*. Begbie approves of Messiaen as theologically sound because of Messiaen's explicit Catholicism and overt, religiously themed works such as the

¹¹⁰ Boulez, Thévenin, and Walsh, *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, 7-9.

¹¹¹ Griffiths, *Boulez*, 21.

See also Jean Jacques Nattiez, *The Battle of Chronos and Orpheus: Essays in Applied Musical Semiology* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2004), 74-78.

eschatologically leaning *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* [*Quartet for the End of Time*] (1940–41) and *Le Corps Glorieux* [*The Glorious Body*] (1939). Boulez's appreciation for Messiaen is, however, paradoxically fierce. On the one hand Boulez recounts:

sudden feeling of attraction to a master of whom one knows, with an inexplicable sense of certainty, that it is he, and only he, that is going to reveal you to yourself. This is a kind of magic exercised partly by his music, but also by the power of his personality, by his immediate appeal and by the overwhelming force of his example.¹¹²

On the other hand, Boulez also remembers decisive compositional advice from Messiaen regarding musical innovation. Messiaen told him, "Giving an example is as necessary as learning to forget it: 'Throw away the book I have taught you to read and add a new, wholly unexpected page!'"¹¹³ Begbie forgets that Boulez read and learned from the books of music's past before disregarding them in favor of newer compositional methods. One unforgettable and "immensely influential" and serialized piece from Messiaen is the *Modes de valeurs et d'intensités* [*Modes of Values and Intensities*] (1949). *Structures Ia*, hailed by many as par exemplar of total serialism, borrows its note order from *Modes*.¹¹⁴ Therefore, the total serialism of Boulez never was a clean break or separation from tonal tradition. Nor were more tonally oriented composers such as Messiaen unaffected by serialism. Only after beginning with serious attention to the heritage of Western music that preceded

¹¹² Jameux, *Pierre Boulez*, 12.

¹¹³ See *Ibid.* This quotation from Boulez originally comes from a speech at the Paris Opéra, December 10, 1978, on the occasion of Messiaen's seventieth birthday. See also Boulez, "The Power of Example," Boulez and Nattiez, *Orientations*, 418-20.

¹¹⁴ Butler, *After the Wake*, 30.

him, does Boulez emerge with works like *Structures Ia* and his *Second Piano Sonata*, also mentioned in the letter from which the excerpt above is taken. In fact, Boulez tips his hat to Bach in the *Sonata*, or turns his cap around in an act of defiant respect. The last movement of the piece is based upon the tone sequence H C A B, a retrograde of B A C H.¹¹⁵

Nature

In the same way, and more contextually significant, neither does Boulez remove himself from the constraint of nature as Begbie suggests. Boulez instead shows how nature refuses to operate as a constraint. Far from “denying his rootedness in the material world” or nature, total serialism is a culminating expression of the world in which he lived. In one sense, it is a representation of the strict discipline of Boulez’s eight years in Catholic seminary in Saint Etienne and his hardship when studying higher mathematics with the Lazaristes of *the Cours Sogno* at the age of sixteen in Lyon. In another paradoxical sense, total serialism is musical arithmetic submitting to its own limits. It is a display that no matter how much humanity attempts to measure and quantify phenomena in the world, such as music, they cannot be contained. Nature, in fact, provides conditions for musics to flourish in surprising ways.

Lyon suffered heavily as the center of French resistance under occupation of the German *Wehrmacht*. The experiences and circumstances of Boulez in Saint

¹¹⁵ Peyser, *To Boulez and Beyond*, 136. Peyser helpfully notes, “Bach’s use of his own name in *The Art of the Fugue* provided the inspiration for this choice [from Boulez].”

Etienne and Lyon ground a fixation within Boulez for musical resistance and evolution that matched the social hopes associated with the end of WWII. Boulez acquired an unquenchable need to make his mark as a composer of serious music in his early years as an adult.¹¹⁶ One might remark that a shift away from what Begbie means by nature—the “non human-physical world”—with connection to Pythagorean and Augustinian notions of harmony and proportion seems to take place here. For Begbie, Boulez violates the raw “materials of sound” by mechanizing them and denying their nature. Yet Boulez’s environment is neither harmonious in a Pythagorean sense nor in the Augustinian view an evenly metered universe of immanent perceptible beauty given by God.¹¹⁷

Instead, the postwar music of Boulez responds to a nature ravaged by a war driven by anti-semitism and xenophobia. His music defiantly announces the affirmation of life, no matter how crippled and fractured and in all of its array, in response to country wide destruction. His severe compositional technique is a musical grimace towards the world in which he lived.¹¹⁸ Social musicologist, M. J.

¹¹⁶ See the influence of the postwar poetry of René Char upon Boulez in Jameux, *Pierre Boulez*, 22-23. The Lazaristes were priests of a lay religious order founded in 1625 by Saint Vincent Depaul.

¹¹⁷ Augustine and R. Catesby Taliaferro, *St. Augustine on Music. Book I-Vi*, The Classics of the St. John's Program (Annapolis, MD: The St. John's bookstore, 1939). See for example, 144–147.

¹¹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno and Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Philosophy of New Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 102.

For cultural analysis with regards to musical innovation from 19th century tonality, see Daniel K. L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge UP, 1999). beginning with “All who hope in

Grant, while admitting the difficulty of identifying political and cultural critique within the aesthetic protest of postwar music, still states:

The iconoclastic stance taken by Pierre Boulez in his infamous essay 'Schoenberg is Dead' may be explained away as a typically modernist manifesto on the historical legitimacy of serialism: read in the context of a society whose suppression of the performance of new music was the least worrying aspect of a cultural conservatism more obviously manifested in the suppression of Algerian dissidents and those, including thinkers of such repute as Sartre, who supported them, the essay takes on whole new dimension.¹¹⁹

While Grant interprets Boulez's essay with regard to Algerian dissidents, there appears to be room in Boulez's remarks below for veiled social critique pertaining to Schoenberg's Jewish identity as well. Consider the satiric religious reference below. It is as if Boulez wants to indirectly identify Schoenberg's identity as a Jew and reverence him musically with subtle geo-political language:

We should anyway guard against seeing Schoenberg as a sort of Moses dying within sight of the Promised Land, having brought the Sacred Tablets of the Law from a Sinai which many insist on confusing with Valhalla. (Meanwhile, the Dance Round the Golden Calf is in full swing). We are certainly indebted to him for *Pierrot Lunaire* and a few other more-than admirable works—*pace* the mediocrities all around us, who would like to limit the damage to 'Central Europe'.¹²⁰

humanity, even those who see through the delusions, are dragged into the bottomless pit of aesthetic torment" (272–275).

¹¹⁹ M. J. Grant, *Serial Music, Serial Aesthetics: Compositional Theory in Post-War Europe*, Music in the 20th Century (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2001), 22. Prof. Grant's first name is Morag-Josephine but she publishes under M.J.

¹²⁰ Boulez, Thévenin, and Walsh, *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, 214.

Whatever may be evident regarding the social critique within Boulez's aesthetic reflections, we can answer clearly Begbie's musical query: "to what extent does Boulez's 'computerised passion' do violence to the materials of sound?" Absolutely none. Boulez is not torturing the materials of Western music, but using these resources to respond to the anguish of his contemporary context. If anything, he desperately wants to ensure that Western music before, during the mid-twentieth century, and afterwards continues to captivate and challenge listeners, performers and composers with "beauty" in an era when perhaps art in general (and not just the avant-garde) seemed a frivolous pursuit.

Take for example the last lines of Boulez's encyclopedia entry on Schoenberg:

But, apart from their technical difficulties, Schoenberg's works—especially Op. 23—require of the player a clear understanding of the form, whose interpretation implies at the same time 'unity and regularity'. When this double obstacle has been overcome, then beauty can unfurl generously and cast its spell over the listener: some of the pieces—Op. II no. 3 especially—are among the most extraordinary achievements ever to have sounded on a keyboard.¹²¹

In excerpts like the above, Boulez promotes a musical attitude open to recent musical experimentation and evolution. In compositions like the ones so far discussed, Boulez demonstrates a command of music that rattles the assumptions of what it means to compose for the sake of new and creative growth. The postwar serial works of Boulez emerge in large part as musical response in the face of societal ruin, not artistic control at the price of destruction.

¹²¹ Ibid., 292.

Temporality

To reiterate, even at his most vigilant as a young composer, Boulez does not forget the past. He faces it first, and then decisively moves forward. The Epistle to the Hebrews suggests that followers of Christ do the same, “Therefore let us go on toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God, instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (Heb. 6:1)” Boulez admits that a musical foundation already exists. In order not to sink back into the conventions of musical history, we must advance in our musical thinking. Begbie therefore mischaracterizes and conflates the unwavering commitment to musical change and heritage from Boulez as a desire to “discard directional temporal continuity.”¹²²

Early works from Boulez like *Structures Ia*, which musicologist Paul Griffiths calls the “*locus classicus* of total serialism” may jar listeners from anticipating or detecting directional continuity within the time span of the piece.¹²³ Indeed, Griffiths admits that the “palindromic arrangement of tempos” creates a feeling of “undifferentiated stasis.”¹²⁴ Yet Griffiths also points out that upon closer examination, an “increasingly forceful presence of an Eb provides a point of focus and a remnant of order.”¹²⁵ Thus, a purposeful continuity in relation to harmony

¹²² Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time*, 195.

¹²³ Griffiths, *Boulez*, 21.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

becomes evident. Also, the “duration serialism brings about a direct relation between density and rhythmic regulation.”¹²⁶ The piece’s temporality, though broken, inverted, and reversed, nevertheless has a velocity. The tempo, though unpredictable, displays a regularity of irregular meter. Also, as Boulez completes *Structures Book I* (1950–51) and other total serial masterpieces like *Polyphonie X* (1950–51), Boulez actually weds himself to some of the most extreme forms of compositional constraint ever seen or heard in order to arrive at musical invention.¹²⁷

Nevertheless, to Begbie this music of Boulez has no direction because it sounds “mechanistic.” While a descriptor like mechanistic may connote constraint, and seemingly fold back the critique Begbie wishes to leverage against Boulez, for Begbie mechanistic describes a “modern pathology.” Boulez, in music like *Structures*, rejects coming to terms with the flow of time within the world. It is as if the music attempts to exit the “contingency in the world at large and its interplay with structure.”¹²⁸ Through exacting composition, Boulez leaves no room for contingency, which in everyday life, cannot be avoided. By meticulously scoring each musical component so that they are governed formulaically, Boulez’s music expresses an unattainable freedom from constraints or a discontinuity with how

¹²⁶ Ibid., 24.

¹²⁷ Of *Structures Ib* Griffiths writes, “But, transfigured by the experience of compositional rigour, the turbulent variety of the earlier works now has the more abstract aspect of creative virtuosity” (26). See also Ibid., 21-27.

¹²⁸ Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time*, 197.

qualities such as harmony, duration, tension, and resolution function in the world created by God.

Begbie's description of the music from Boulez as mechanized is not only temporally derived and psychologically framed, but spatial. For Begbie, the "sound-blocks" or collective control of attack, combination, and length of pitches, and the use of silence that perforate a work like *Structures* evoke the emptiness of a sonic desert. Begbie does not consider that these pauses may actually punctuate musical exploration in search of more promising and newer (or at least more open) sonic territory.¹²⁹ Silence, as any listener or musician knows, can function as an integral part of music and its temporality. Taken together, perhaps the silences as well as the disjointed clusters of sound in pieces like *Structures* and *Polyphonie X* help to chart a listening experience as mundane, contingent, and yet still pulsating as life itself, rather than a musical encounter that merely amplifies the creaking gears turning in a social consciousness governed by the pathology of modernism. Instead, Boulez places hearers in creative conditions that may subvert but also reconceptualize the very conditions of what makes music music, and more importantly, what makes music thrive and grow.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Or to perform interpretation similar to Begbie, does not salvation come by way of entering the desert – Exodus 16 and Matthew 4 as examples?

¹³⁰ For further reading on the groundbreaking efforts of contemporaries sharing Boulez's drive for musical progress as well as newer post-tonal works that challenge listeners to re-conceive what music is and what music can be, see Miguel A. Roig-Francolí, *Understanding Post-Tonal Music* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008). and the accompanying volume, Roig-Francolí, *Anthology of Post-Tonal Music: For Use with Understanding Post-Tonal Music*.

Boulez lived in a world where the conditions for conventional ways of musical life were quickly vanishing in correspondence to the lingering devastation of central Europe from the Second World War.¹³¹ In response to his social context, Boulez no longer believed in the methods of traditional tonality. They became unintelligible to him. They did not fit the time in which he lives, and could not operate as means to the musical “happiness” or the “good life.”¹³² With this musical diagnosis, Boulez undertook radical experimentation in order to reinvigorate his compositional process and reach for a new horizon of musical satisfaction in the late 1940s and early 50’s.

In *Theology, Music and Time*, Begbie seems to acknowledge Boulez’s negative, yet sustained relationship to Western music’s past as he states that Boulez’s “music is no less dependent on traditions than any other, even if largely by negation.”¹³³ Yet in *Resounding Truth*, Begbie adopts a more divisive interpretation of how Boulez interacts with his musical past. “The attempt to wrestle free from constraints altogether, as even Boulez realized, is ultimately self-defeating. We become imprisoned, not free.”¹³⁴ The intricate weaving that Boulez undertakes, is for Begbie, headed toward musical ruin with disastrous theological implications.

¹³¹ For a parallel basis for the analysis here, see Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2006).

¹³² For more on the unintelligibility of musical life specific to France in the time of Boulez’s rise as a composer see Daniel Barenboim, ‘On Pierre Boulez,’ Daniel Barenboim, *Everything Is Connected: The Power of Music* ed. Elena Cheah (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2008), 177-80.

¹³³ Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time*, 218.

¹³⁴ ———, *Resounding Truth*, 249.

Boulez and the Provocation of New Music

Where the music of Boulez actually heads, however, is toward a logic of practice that seeks to challenge and free composers, provoking performers and listeners away from aural complacency, artistic laziness, and fear of change.¹³⁵ Even now, he continues to do so as a conductor and mentor to younger generations of musicians.¹³⁶

Contrary to the cold calculating musical automation that Begbie prescribes to Boulez's early output, the pieces of Boulez from the 1940s and 50s did not compose themselves anymore than the paths of a labyrinth unfurl autonomously. Indeed, Boulez states, "To me, each of my compositions is like a labyrinth, and a labyrinth can go on forever."¹³⁷ The compositions are meticulously formulaic, but they do not eschew a telos. While, on the one hand, the works forge ahead with recognition that the telos of Western tonality cannot suffice as an ultimate musical destination. On the other hand, even Boulez came to realize that the compositional destination of these early pieces proved to be an artistic dead end. As Begbie also

¹³⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 1990).see esp. pgs. 81-3.

¹³⁶ Pierre Boulez et al., *Inheriting the Future of Music Pierre Boulez and the Lucerne Festival Academy = L'avenir De La Musique, Un Héritage: Pierre Boulez Et L'académie Du Festival De Lucerne* ([Berlin]: EuroArts,), videorecording. See esp. minutes 13:46–15:00; 54:00ff.

¹³⁷ Dennis Polkow, "Boulez Future: Music's Greatest Living Figure Looks Ahead," *Newcity Music* January 19, 2010.

notes with the quotation from Boulez, "Serialism is long dead." Boulez freely and reflexively admits, "It was killed by the same people who wrote it."¹³⁸

At this point, one could dive more deeply into the well of serial composing and its potential or possibilities for theological discourse. Directions for the theological promise of Boulez in particular will be shown in latter pages. For now, serialism, total or not, dead or alive, has from its inception coexisted and interacted with Western tonality, as has been shown in concise manner above. As provocative as Boulez may speak at times, his understanding of the relationship between musical innovation and musical past is not without nuance:

Any ignoring of technique and its importance brings a fearful vengeance with it, nothing less than a mortal disease inherent in the work. If you simply adopt a traditional technique, which has a purely factitious, illogical, decorative relationship with the facts of the historical situation, all your vital energies will be absorbed and exhausted by the sheer stylistic exercise, and the result will be... a white sepulcher.¹³⁹

Even in his early works, Boulez does not seek to suppress musical memory. Rather, he desires at all costs, not to repeat the past and, therefore, exhausted one trajectory for the sake of musical innovation in the middle of the twentieth century.

The past is an opponent to Boulez only insofar as its idolization neutralizes the freedom to articulate sense of the present and build towards the future. The past is an inextractable partner to Boulez because even at his most reactionary,

¹³⁸ Michael Kimmelman, "Boulez's Gentler Roar," *New York Times* January 6, 2010, 3.
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/10/arts/music/10boulez.html?pagewanted=3&_r=1 [last accessed, July 19th, 2012].

¹³⁹ Boulez and Nattiez, *Orientations*, 65.

memory of musical canon germinates his musical ideas and makes possible the encouragement toward listeners that they refrain from resting upon convention.

“Total serialism” only describes the earliest of Boulez’s major works. Again, Boulez admitted to the limitations of his extreme form of serial technique, and in many ways renounced it in his later compositions such as *Le Marteau Sans Maître* [*The Hammer without Master*] (1953–55), *Structures II* (1956–61), *Pli Selon Pli* [*Fold According to Fold*] (1957–80s), *Cummings ist der Dichter* [Cummings is the Poet] (1970), *Repóns* (1996/1998), and the more recently Grawemeyer awarded *Sur Incises* (1996/1998). Boulez has withdrawn even seminal total serial pieces like *Polyphonie X* for revision without yet announcing a rerelease of the work. Yet whether one likes or agrees with Boulez’s serial output – which I have previously asserted is a matter of opinion and taste for Begbie – it seems dangerous to characterize even his early “mistaken” output for sonic heresy or heterodoxy, which is what Begbie’s charges against Boulez seem to suggest.

Begbie and Musical Critiques without Caution

First, Begbie has detemporalized Boulez. For Begbie, Boulez embodies a negative ideal: control at the price of destruction. Largely ignoring the developmental arc of Boulez’s musical production and life so far (at the time of this writing, Boulez is still active as a conductor and composer who is very different from the musician Begbie describes), Begbie has truncated his musical contribution to a failed, but nevertheless significantly influential, experimental phase that theologians of music must now resist at all costs. While the musically educated may

be able to see past Begbie's caricature, his critique has the effect of dismissing in toto one of the most important musical minds of the last century. More pointedly, Begbie's critique limits the scope and sophistication of Christian reflection upon the interplay between music and theology over time.¹⁴⁰

Second, Begbie has denaturalized Boulez. He has extracted the music of Boulez out of its natural environment. He has swept "away the urgency, the appeals, the threats, the steps to be taken, which make up the real, really lived-in, world" that was Boulez's musical environment.¹⁴¹ Begbie too easily criticizes Boulez's middle 20th century output as incarcerating and pathologically mechanistic. Begbie wants clear 'good guys' and 'bad guys' in Western avant-garde music from the middle of the twentieth century. Yet such clear division cannot be. Nor is a completely balanced view possible.

Boulez's music was mocked as much as it was praised, and recognized as well as ignored. Boulez himself admits that total serialism led to musical implosion, yet not the type of theological destruction Begbie claims. These aspects of reception and aversion happened concurrently, successively, and without precise measurement. In other words, the score was never final. By forgetting the messiness and artistically ambivalent musical cultures operating in the late 1940s and early 50s, Begbie fails to imagine with adequacy the context in which Boulez came to prominence as a composer. Begbie writes a hagiography of theologically

¹⁴⁰ For more regarding the threat of eliminating history in theological discourse, and to see an inverse model of the argument that bases the one I am making here, see Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2007), 21-22.

¹⁴¹ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 82.

sound music as evidenced by his discussion of composers like Boulez's teacher, Messiaen.¹⁴² More controversial, but arguably as critically and historically acclaimed composers like Boulez, who oppose Begbie's musical vision, face exclusion not only from Begbie's mode of theological interpretation in particular, but also the entire discourse concerning theological analysis of music, given Begbie's overarching influence and ability to set the agenda for theologizing with regard to music.

Third, Begbie evades tradition by manipulating it to his own ends. Here, it seems fitting and ironic to parallel Begbie's evaluation of Boulez to those who monopolize discourse as discussed by Pierre Bourdieu:

Those who have the monopoly on discourse about the social world think differently when they are thinking about themselves and about others (that is, the other classes): they are readily spiritualist as regards themselves, materialist towards others, liberal for themselves and dirigiste for others, and, with equal logic, teleological and intellectualist for themselves and mechanist for others.¹⁴³

Begbie too swiftly excludes an evolutionary and celebrated artist like Boulez. Begbie's sonic xenophobia prompts him to view only one kind of musical history as theologically exemplary. Through narrow musical judgment and overstatement of theological boundaries, he has established the "preconditions" for "adequate decoding" of what can and cannot musically serve God and neighbor.¹⁴⁴ As a result,

¹⁴² Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 163-76.

¹⁴³ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 80.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

Begbie's writing has produced a monopolizing effect upon the discourse regarding the interplay between music and theology.

Persuasively re-describing a relatively unfamiliar musical history towards particular Christian ends, Begbie has also moved his own standing from pioneer to principal authority regarding music and theology. His musical selections and exclusions have the effect of standardizing what musics suit theological inquiry. Yet Begbie prematurely dismisses a composer like Boulez, who does not exemplify modern fatalism reflecting irresponsibility towards freedom, both human and Divine. The music of Boulez may lend itself to theologically systematic thinking after all in spite of Begbie's portrayal and perhaps even the intention of Boulez.

Boulez and Directions for Theological Promise

Multiple paths have yet to be investigated regarding theological consideration and analysis of Pierre Boulez and only four are considered below. First, Begbie's assessment of Boulez as artistically irresponsible, musically monotonous, and unintelligible parallels Dieter Henrich's interpretation of the three definitions Kant gives to philosophy:

(1) Philosophy "solves the problems of metaphysics by refuting dogmatism."

(2) Philosophy is a "theory of mental activity and of the unity of the subject" but remains incomprehensible without freedom.

(3) "[P]hilosophy is the subordination of everything to freedom."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Dieter Henrich and David S. Pacini, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2003), 80.

In Begbie's case, Boulez's music refutes Christian dogma, especially with relation to the created order. Begbie therefore interprets Boulez as musically embodying Kantian confidence in philosophy. For example, Begbie reads the total serial output of Boulez as exemplifying belief that right theory can resolve musical stagnation and the longstanding association of music to the harmony of the spheres (that the ratios of music reflect balanced proportions present in the earth and universe) or in Begbie's case, that music must coincide with Christian dogmatic belief. Definitions (2) and (3) require a more nuanced comparison to Begbie's evaluation of Boulez. On the one hand, Boulez seems Kantian within his own framework and within Begbie's caricature because freedom is diagnosed as the cause and reason for his musical monotony and the structure upholding his excessively controlled method of composition. On the other hand, Boulez's music becomes unintelligible to listeners like Begbie who sees Boulez's music as a distortion of freedom. According to Begbie, is Boulez a musical version of Kant whose sonic enlightenment must be battled by Christians?

The symmetries between Henrich's interpretation of Kant and Begbie's interpretation of Boulez need not lead to such opposition. Recurring to the statement from Boulez that he wanted to "*reconstituer l'écriture à partir d'un phénomène qui a annihilé l'invention individuelle.*" [reconstitute a way of writing that began from a phenomenon which eliminates personal invention (trans. mine)], one might instead position Boulez in a positive Kantian light. Boulez wants more direct attention to musical phenomenon apart from musical custom in the same way that Kant builds upon the Cartesian critique of tradition (Descartes) to

formulate arguments against dogma for the sake of utterly empirical and rational examination and understanding of phenomena in the world.¹⁴⁶ Sonic attention within the framework of Boulez involves bracketing canonical conventions of understanding musical processes in order to bring listeners into close and unadulterated proximity to sound. He sustains customs that make Begbie's theological analysis of music seem narrow. Adopting a Kantian based interpretation of Boulez could help theological approaches to music avoid idealized and confining accounts and at the same time provide clarifying parameters for what can and cannot be claimed about music in good faith.

A second is the application of post-tonal theory to Boulez's postwar output. Incidentally, post-tonal theory can also be applied to tonal music for the sake of innovative musical discovery and analysis of musical classifications that may bear fruit for theology like transformation. Take for example Steven Rings *Tonality and Transformation*.¹⁴⁷ Rings applies David Lewin's transformational theory to pieces from Bach, Mozart, Schubert, and Brahms and Mahler to inform and challenge his readers to "de-familiarize" themselves from diatonic masterpieces so that a "renewed intensity" of hearing may arise towards new understanding of tonal intentions as milieu of clarities and ambiguities in which sonic insights may

¹⁴⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge UP, 1998), 428-31. See also Immanuel Kant and Raymund Schmidt, *Kritik Der Reinen Vernunft*, Philosophische Bibliothek, Bd. 37a (Hamburg, Germany: F. Meiner, 1971), 402a-09a. A374-380.

¹⁴⁷ Steven Rings, *Tonality and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011).

occur.¹⁴⁸ Though his project does not have a theological aim, Rings does set out to encourage listeners to re-examine the way in which music is encountered and tonal assumptions are presumed so that topoi like conversion and transformation can be sonically re-imagined. If one wanted to analyze music analogically as Begbie does, but take a different music theory tack, then Lewinian re-imagination of music with regard to conversion and transformation may provide one resource for generative theological assertions.

A third promising path of theologically engaging Boulez is the dialectic prodigalism that seems operational in much of his biography as he transitions from *L'enfant terrible* to a beloved conductor. Such prodigalism results from adhering to binary but dialogic principles of “material/invention, past/future, choice/chance, discipline/freedom, strictness/improvisation, rational/irrational, order/disorder, necessary/unpredictable, deliberation/surprise, firmness/flexibility, precise/imprecise, conscious effort/free proliferation, stability/transformation, kernel/development, continuity/discontinuity, continuity/separation, partitioning/through-composing, construction/destruction, striated/amorphous, macrostructure/microstructure, global/local, definite/indefinite,

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 5. Rings writes, “The models I develop here thus offer new ways of thinking about some very familiar aural experiences. The hope is that those aural experiences may be de-familiarized in the process, making us acutely alive to them again, and allowing us to sense tonal effects with renewed intensity, and in new ways. For surely one of the great values of music theory is its potential to refract, alter, and intensify musical experience, in ways both subtle and not-so-subtle, as new discursive concepts are brought to bear on the sonic stuff of music. Tonal music is no different from any other music in this regard: it admits of, and rewards, many modes of analytical engagement.”

centrality/absence” as delineated by interpreters like Nattiez.¹⁴⁹ Not only the music of Boulez, but also his life has so far has unfolded like a labyrinth with unending and unexpected stops, reverses, twists and turns, moves from musical devastation to musical reinvention and redemption. An interpreter may not “err” in suggesting that the biography of Boulez shows “mazing” grace at play despite the apparent “absence of center and logos” in his music and his identity as a composer, conductor, and artist.¹⁵⁰ A profound Divine generosity threads itself within the entangled and complex life of Boulez, regardless of his and our knowing.

The writings of Boulez on composing and conducting music comprise a fourth avenue for fruitful theological investigation. Essays like ‘Putting the Phantoms to Flight’ clearly gesture towards theological wisdom. Perhaps even ‘Schoenberg is Dead,’ or ‘What’s New?’, and ‘Freeing Music’ may have content that enhances Christian theological concepts such as what Ethicist and Homiletician Ted Smith via Walter Benjamin calls “mortification” and the “messianic.” For Smith, mortification names a moment of domination without granting it authority to define the meaning of its historical occurrence. If Boulez’s essays mortify, they name the dominating effects of Western tonality and refuse to allow such important, but also artistically oppressive (at least for Boulez and so many of the postwar avant-garde) musical development to chart the course of future composing. No matter how settled, inescapable, authoritarian, or monolithic Western music may seem, more “flexible,” and maybe more “effective,” musical

¹⁴⁹ Nattiez, *The Battle of Chronos and Orpheus*, 82.

¹⁵⁰ Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern a/Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 168-69.

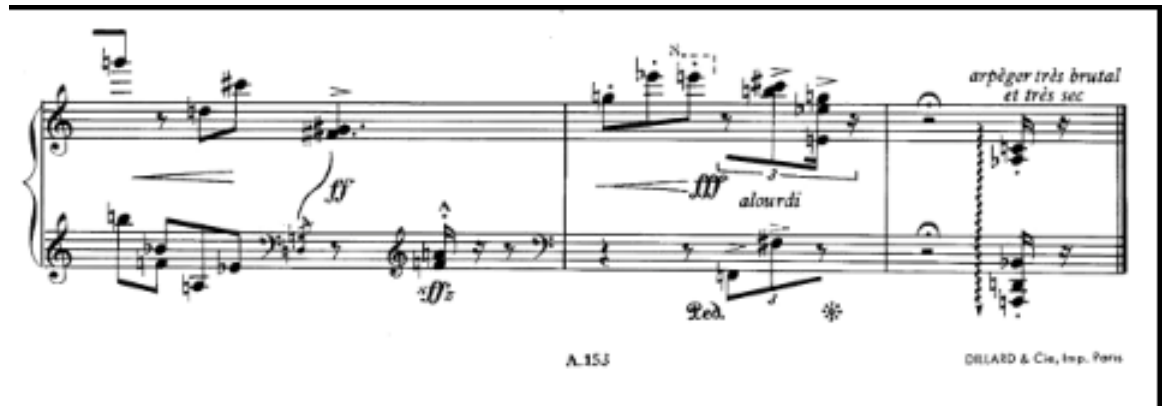
“communication” may yet be upon the horizon. If we find ourselves hard of hearing when confronted by Boulez’s music, maybe his writing offers a more approachable, even if still musically charged and complex, theological entryway.

Therefore, a musical past like Boulez’s, once shunned, becomes retrievable as a means of refusing all too easy “narratives of progress or decline, inviting us to see an end beyond the end in sight and to hear the story from that end.”¹⁵¹ Does the corpus of Boulez, including the failed experiments of postwar total serialism, welcome a future far greater than what seems apparent, what we think ought to be, and what we currently imagine? For now, the author leaves these possibilities as wagers for others to theologically consider in the future.

¹⁵¹ Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice*, 255-56.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN CAGE THE NIHILIST



[Figure 3.1. Excerpt from the *Premier Sonata* by Pierre Boulez,]

In the middle of an August 29, 1952 program at Maverick Hall that featured works by Cage, Christian Wolff, Morton Feldman, Earle Brown, and Henry Cowell, David Tudor debuted Boulez's *Premier Sonata* [above]. Indeed, Cage had enthusiastically informed Boulez in an earlier letter, "David is going to play your first Sonata on programs this summer and in the Fall."¹⁵² The significance of the letter here, however, extends beyond the fact that it foreshadows Boulez's new piece. In this same correspondence, Cage also meticulously wrote about conceiving

¹⁵² Pierre Boulez, John Cage, and Jean Jacques Nattiez, *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1993), 132. Nattiez footnotes that Cage's remark refers directly to the Maverick Concert Hall performance.

his chance method for *Music of Changes* and his keener interest with electronic music and magnetic tape:

The composition however uses 16 charts and so the durations are segmented (as in the *Changes*) to make possible otherwise impossible situations. It often happens that, with plus and minus operations, a sound “ends” before it “begins” or even that the sound that “follows” it happens first. In general superposition 1 to 8 increase density and those from 9—16 increase fragmentation. ... All my interest is now in this field [of magnetic tape recording] and I doubt whether I will be writing any more “concert” music.”¹⁵³

Cage’s letter numbers thirty-eight of forty-eight in the collected correspondence that Begbie investigates. The range of the letter’s content, with excited news of upcoming performances and painstaking explanation of works in progress, fits neatly within the arc of the written exchanges between Boulez and Cage in general. In other words, Cage’s epistle doesn’t stand out.¹⁵⁴ Like any personal writing of an incandescent mind, it illuminates the mystery behind creative excellence and/or exposes the madness behind progressive music making. What is stunning, however, about the letter’s timing and its content, is what Cage leaves unsaid.

4’33” debuts at the same concert where Tudor introduces Boulez’s *Premier Sonata*. Yet Cage never mentions 4’33” to Boulez, not even when he writes about the upcoming Maverick Hall benefit concert. Four years before his letter, before any

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ As another example, see Boulez discussing what would become *Polyphonie X* in Letter 26. Ibid., 80-89. [Unfortunately, in this letter Boulez also calls Dizzy Gillespie’s be-bop “Rubbish.”]

correspondence with the then twenty-four year old Boulez had begun, the thirty-four year old John Cage had already started conceptualizing the musical parameters of his most celebrated composition. Having at this point found a partner to share his most recent musical innovation, why would he refrain from mentioning 4'33"?" This chapter brings 4'33" into the spotlight again, but for the sake of theological advance instead of announcing musical innovation; 4'33", a piece elided by Cage in his correspondence with Boulez, and overlooked by Begbie too.

Let it Be

According to Begbie, if Boulez defies God given freedom with the modern and fatalistic determinacy of total serialism, Cage wrongs music, humanity, and God's world by assuming a "postmodern" stance of "letting it be." For Begbie, Cage's postwar output amounts to musical heresy driven by creative indifference. Yet Cage's willingness to step back compositionally, as it will be later shown, opens a doorway for counteracting theological ventriloquy, where, to restate, preconceived doctrines of Christian ecclesial tradition and the Bible become voiced in music to the extent that music does not, and perhaps cannot, theologically speak for itself or instantiate theological truths. There is more musical purpose and theological promise happening in the music of Cage than Begbie is willing to admit. One may characterize the compositional method of Cage as radically passive, but Cage's postwar output displays limited compositional intent only insofar as Cage does not allow his compositional aims to overtake the music that may already be taking

place in the world, outside of his artistic will and control; music that the current project deems as especially exemplary for grasping Divine charity in sonic ubiquity.

Cage first appears in Begbie's *Voicing Creation's Praise*.¹⁵⁵ Yet not until *Theology, Music and Time*, does Begbie reproach Cage's compositional method. Begbie later rearticulates the arguments against Cage from *Theology, Music and Time* in *Resounding Truth*. Notably, Begbie's critique of Cage closely resembles the critical remarks of Nicholas Wolterstorff. Wolterstorff misunderstands Cage's compositional approach as a "total subservience to materials" and misclassifies 4'33" as a piece calling for "de-aestheticization"¹⁵⁶ Referencing Wolterstorff's *Art in Action*, Begbie decries "the 'Cage' attitude—the total subservience to materials" that eliminates human freedom and intent in art.¹⁵⁷

The opposite, however, is the case. 4'33" comprehensively aestheticizes every sonic occurrence, and does not demonstrate absolute subservience to ambient noise, but rather promotes audition that can hear music in any surrounding context or available field of sound. Ironically, Wolterstorff even includes a quotation from Begbie asserting as much—that there is no separation between music and life. In any case, Begbie charges Cage with submitting to sounds rather than making them into music.¹⁵⁸ For Begbie, Cage's compositional passivity

¹⁵⁵ See Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 221.

¹⁵⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 63, 96.

¹⁵⁷ Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 206.

becomes theologically undermining because God intends for humanity to create and order the materials of the earth. Like Boulez, Cage perverts an order of freedom, which God has bestowed to humanity according to Begbie. Sinisterly, Cage's methods amount to the practice of musical abandonment and by relation, theological nihilism.

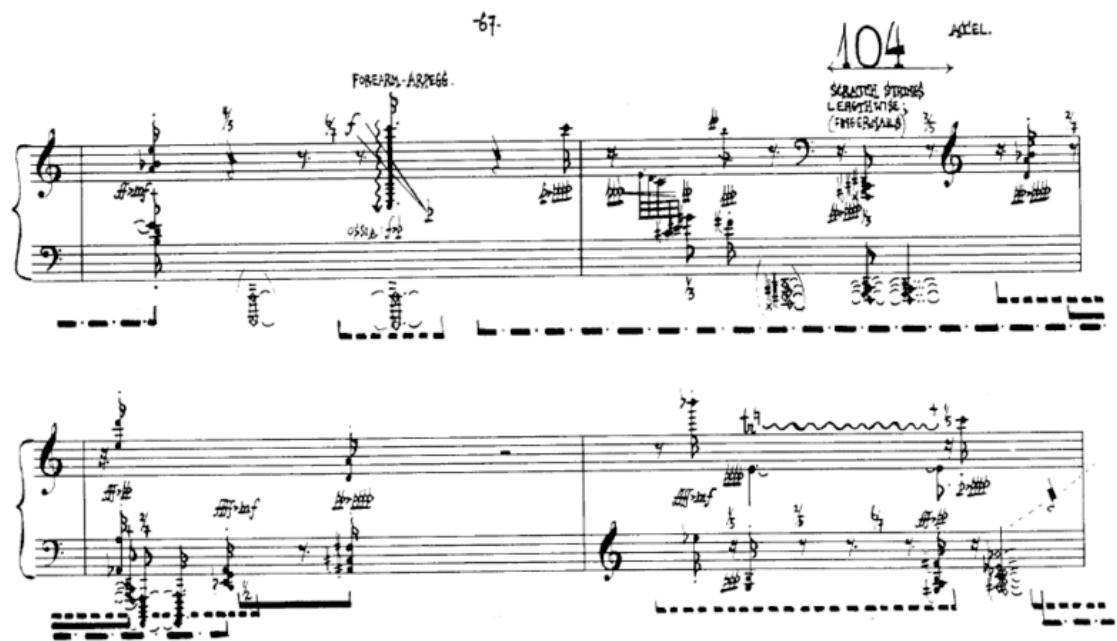
Music of Changes

With regard to Begbie diagnosing a lack of compositional intent in the postwar output of Cage, while Cage's music may at times seem to hide compositional aims, Cage never writes music without meticulous compositional directions. Take for example an excerpt from *Music of Changes* (1951), the piece to which Begbie immediately refers as emblematic of Cage as an aloof artist.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ See Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 194. See also ———, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music*, Engaging Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 250.

¹⁵⁹ Note that in both *Theology, Music and Time*, and *Resounding Truth*, Begbie confusingly uses both *Music for Changes* and *Music of Changes* to refer to the 1951 piece in question. The correct preposition is "of." Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time*, 188, ftnt 36 on 90, ftnt 69 on 96 ———, *Resounding Truth*, 250. The official title is *Music of Changes*. See the 'Chronology of Works' section found in the definitive Cage biography by David Revoll, *The Roaring Silence: John Cage, a Life*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Arcade Pub., 1992), 358.

In *Theology, Music and Time*, one must also query Begbie's misapplication of a quotation from Pritchett to the *Music of Changes*. Begbie adopts Pritchett's language to say that *Music of Changes* "but was now the result of nothing at all but geometry: the sounds simply 'happened.'" [James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage, Music in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 66.] Yet Pritchett's phrasing here describes the *String Quartet* only, a piece completed nearly two years before *Music for Changes*.



[Figure 3.2. Excerpt from John Cage, *Music of Changes* Edition Peters, 1961 Henmar Press Inc.]

Whether one can read music or not, it is apparent from the first two measures above that Cage specifies how the piece should be performed. Cage does not let the performance of his piece “be.” In English, he painstakingly instructs when to utilize the forearm to play an arpeggio (a series of chordally related notes) and scratch the strings lengthwise. Cage goes so far as to overstate the obvious, with “fingernails” please, to mandate particular body parts and particular technique for rhythmically situated gestures that determine how the piece should be performed. As unconventional as the score may be, Cage isn’t simply allowing the performer to play whatever he or she fancies. Neither does the piece proceed without clearly choreographed performance.

Even with the random procedure of tossing of coins or prayer sticks, which were methods used to craft the score for *Music of Changes*, the suggestion that Cage

let the music be seems inaccurate. As Paul Griffiths states, “the sounds are all *dictated* by chance.”¹⁶⁰ Cage’s chance operations, as unpredictable as they might have been, still provided controlling criteria to which Cage unwaveringly submitted for forming the composition. Consider the depiction by Michael Nyman:

[I]n *Music of Changes* of 1951...[t]he materials [for composing] were laid out in charts which governed superpositions (how many events are happening at once during a given structural space), tempi, durations, dynamics and sounds (of which half contain silences). The categories from which the material was drawn were single sounds, aggregates (like the mixed timbre sometimes obtained on a prepared piano when a single key is depressed), complex situations in time (constellations) and sound of both definite and indefinite pitch (noises).¹⁶¹

In the same way, as bizarre as the accompanying performance practice Cage requests may have seemed, or still seem today, it neither permits nor accepts undisciplined musicianship. Rather, proper execution of Cage’s piece demands virtuosity. In its premier, only David Tudor could play the piece as Cage had intended.¹⁶² Nyman refers to John Tilbury’s recollection, “For David Tudor (who

¹⁶⁰ Paul Griffiths, *Cage* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 27. [italics mine]. See also Silverman’s lucid description of the compositional techniques involved in *Music of Changes*. Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 103-07.

¹⁶¹ “Inauguration 1950–1960: Feldmann, Brown, Wolff, Cage,” in Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 61.

¹⁶² Griffiths, *Cage*. See also James Pritchett, “The Development of Chance Techniques in the Music of John Cage, 1950-1956” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1988., 1988). Pritchett writes, “Tudor’s unique abilities made *Music of Changes* possible for Cage; without them such a work would have been a mere compositional exercise that would never be heard.... *Music of Changes* became a sort of collaboration between Cage and Tudor, who would learn each part of the

gave the first performance) *Music of Changes* was a great discipline, because you can't do it unless you're ready for anything at each instant."¹⁶³ Cage's commitment to an approach of compositional freedom produced a piece of music unleashed of convention and seemingly out of control. Despite the impression of compositional indiscipline, *Music for Changes* demanded precision in performance in order to create the resulting wild and seemingly random sonic output.

Begbie and Doxography

Without continuing a more detailed examination of *Music of Changes*, the rebuttals above suffice to diagnosis Begbie's assessment of Cage as overly simplified. More pointedly, Begbie has made a doxographic caricature. Richard Rorty explains that "doxography is the attempt to impose a problematic on a canon drawn up without reference to that problematic, or, conversely, to impose a canon on a problematic constructed without reference to that canon."¹⁶⁴ As with Boulez, Begbie manipulates the historical record by choosing works and writings from the Cage corpus to galvanize his theological program. Begbie overemphasizes a particular method from a specific time with hardly any mention of context and with little analysis considering the particular composer's artistic identity.

score as soon as Cage had completed it. "At that time," says Cage, "he [Tudor] was the *Music of Changes*." [Cage quotation from *For the Birds*, 178.]

¹⁶³ Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 62.

¹⁶⁴ Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner, *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 62.

He contemporizes these musical artifacts and their creator who deserve theological dismissal right now. Despite their historical contexts, Begbie does not make allowances for their significance and shortcomings with respect to the past. Scholars of Western music have agreed in canonizing Cage as a groundbreaking (and controversial) composer. Such distinction would seem to warrant the potential for migrating Cage's ideas towards theological analysis of music. Yet Begbie casts Cage's pioneering output—like Boulez's—as pathological, or more ominously, irredeemable and heretical. For Begbie, Cage's music embodies “death of the artwork.” Cage “represents a virtual denial of any human transcendence over nature, an attitude that, within a Christian ecology at least, needs querying.”¹⁶⁵ And both Cage and Boulez “play out some of the central pathologies of modernism.”¹⁶⁶ Begbie replaces John Cage, 20th century avant-garde composer with sixty years of works equally varied in a number of ways or more, with a reductionist simulation of Cage that serves as an all too easy target for theological critique.

Of course there is nothing wrong with allowing one's theological vision to determine the parameters within which to create an argument. The current project has already and will continue to endeavor to do as much (while at the same time deny that the theological vision operational in the current project belongs entirely to the author). Yet among many moves that raise suspicion with regards to Begbie's assessment of Cage is the way in which Begbie seems to disregard generations of musical scholarship about Cage in order to reinstate him as a theological villain.

¹⁶⁵ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 251.

¹⁶⁶ ———, *Theology, Music, and Time*, 197.

When Begbie applies the Beatles 1970 album and anthem, “Let it Be,” as a dominant descriptor for Cage’s compositional ethic, not only does Begbie flippantly and anachronistically deploy a popular culture headline to capture what he understands as theologically troubling in Cage. He also sensationalizes Cage as a theological adversary. He religiously distorts the risk, success, or suspicion of Cage’s music as it has been understood amongst musical critics and educators so far. The force of Begbie’s misapplied caption, in addition to exaggerated critique of excerpts from Cage’s corpus to illustrate the theologically inappropriate, amounts to doxography of a high order.

Cage and Musical Freedom

Although Begbie inaccurately portrays Cage’s 1940s–50s compositional output, he does helpfully acknowledge that Cage’s method leads to musical freedom. Begbie even suggests that Cage’s outlook may attract some Christians.¹⁶⁷ Yet Begbie worries that “the cost is an evacuation (or near evacuation) of the notion of music as constructive, of the idea that human shaping could be fruitful and enriching.”¹⁶⁸ For Begbie, Cage’s theory leads to the demise of musical craft, or in Begbie’s own macabre words, “the death of artwork,” and the “virtual denial of human transcendence over nature.”¹⁶⁹ Cage is an inverse mirror of what Begbie finds problematic in Boulez. Whereas Boulez represents for Begbie denial of

¹⁶⁷ ———, *Resounding Truth*, 251.

¹⁶⁸ ———, *Theology, Music, and Time*, 194.

¹⁶⁹ ———, *Resounding Truth*, 251.

material rootedness in the world demonstrated by control at the price of destruction, Cage represents the denial of human transcendence over nature that results in musical implosion.¹⁷⁰

Yet Cage's musical vision also provides a vista of musical conditions for theological intellection that does not repeat the trend of ventriloquism. His theory offers more than a convenient negative pole of nihilism compared to Boulez as a positive and yet equally dangerous pole of idealism turned into fatalism. Instead Cage's theory coincides with a musical understanding of givenness that communicates the generosity of God.

According to Begbie, what motivates Cage to murder artwork, deny human transcendence, and let music be, is an overriding belief that human purposes corrupt musical creation. For Begbie, it seems that Cage prefers sonic incoherence. Begbie states emphatically, "Cage's stress is very much on the 'randomness' of the extra-human world, not on its inherent order." Furthermore, Cage suppresses "any conception of human forming altogether."¹⁷¹ Begbie argues, "It is, then, one thing to spurn the worst of humanity's aggressive imposition on natural order; it is quite another to spurn any notion that we are to shape our environment."¹⁷² Instead of committing to maniacal control of musical process like Boulez, Cage dismantles music and makes it unintelligible by adhering to and advocating musical anarchy.

¹⁷⁰ See also *Ibid.*, 242.

¹⁷¹ ———, *Theology, Music, and Time*, 195.

¹⁷² ———, *Resounding Truth*, 252.

Yet, is it the case that Cage spurns any notion that we are to shape our environment? Does Begbie's accusation match Cage's purposeful writing of *Music for Changes*? Consider a statement from Cage that arguably lends support to Begbie's initial description of letting it be and his more trenchant accusation that Cage protests any shaping of the environment (at least with regards to sound) by humans:

Again there is a parting of the ways. One has a choice. If he does not wish to give up his attempts to control sound, he may complicate his musical technique towards an approximation of the new possibilities and awareness, (I use the word "approximation" because a measuring mind can never finally measure nature.) Or, as before, one may give up the desire to control sound, clear his mind of music, and set about discovering means to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments.¹⁷³

Excerpted from "Experimental Music" in *Silence*, Cage makes one of his strongest statements regarding the autonomy of sounds and the relationship of a composer to them. Cage's words follow paragraphs that ponder the technological advance of magnetic tape in 1957. He has just described the limitless possibilities for using tape as a recording device to capture, rearrange, and manipulate sounds—including those from nature—to form experimental music. Facing the sea of opportunities for music-making that tape provides, Cage argues that the composer must make an aesthetic decision of whether or not to forfeit self-initiated purpose as a dominant method for creating new music. Cage does not forbid humanity from choosing to shape its environment. He says upfront that one must make a compositional

¹⁷³ John Cage, *Silence; Lectures and Writings*, 1st ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1961), 10.

decision about how to harness technology toward musical discovery, especially with regard to efficient and responsible use of existent natural soundscapes.

At the essay's end, Cage describes composition as "purposeful purposelessness or purposeless play" that affirms life.¹⁷⁴ It is purposeful because Cage bears the composition by way of decisions, namely committing to a method he cannot control and an outcome he cannot foresee. Cage's chance method, however, also involves purposelessness because coins and sticks are tossed deliberately but without concern for the outcome, or rather, with commitment to whatever the outcome will be. These processes together combine into an act of purposeless play that is for Cage a ludic, life-giving approach to musical composition.

Cage's methods are not to be identified as a passive protest of human involvement in producing music or the natural sounds of the world, as one might suspect given Cage's interest in Zen. Rather, Cage deploys compositional methods and theory that have potential to send creative jolts to one's musical craft. Artistically, one has applied substantial force and trust toward all of one's musical expertise by throwing it all up in the air.¹⁷⁵ Such forfeiture may resemble the surrender involved in theological engagement. Cage's musical stance approximates the unreserved openness required of humans when we attempt to articulate,

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹⁷⁵ For more concerning the theological merit of purposeless play, and indeed, worship understood as purposeless play, see Zsolt Ilyes, "The Human Person at Play: A Model for Contemporary Liturgical Understanding," in *The Liturgical Subject: Subject, Subjectivity and the Human Person in Contemporary Liturgical Discussion and Critique*, ed. James G. Leachman OSB (London: SCM Press 2008). For a more subtle, historical consideration of worship as play, see Bernhard Lang, *Sacred Games: A History of Christian Worship* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1997).

perceive, or understand anything about an infinite God.¹⁷⁶ Making such a stand requires an act of volition resulting from freedom that is given.

Contrary to Begbie's moral appraisal, it is as if Cage argues that the composer is free to take all manner of musical approaches toward sound and proceed with varying degrees of imagination toward sonic materials. Yet Cage's compositional approach works only so long as expression does not presume self-importance or self-indulgence separated from life. And it works only so long as the music is believed to be embedded in a world that cannot be musically escaped. In this way, a kind of artistic humility pervades the compositional method of Cage. Though Cage's reasoning seems to forfeit music and its formation altogether, he convincingly makes the point that "[i]n fact, everything is gained. In musical terms, any sounds may occur in any combination and in any continuity."¹⁷⁷ Moreover, musical sound happens from and beyond the control of the composer. This does not suggest the cessation of making music or intending its creation. Nor does a piece like 4'33" embody the complete release of influence from artistic subjectivity, as if such absolute subjective submission were possible. Rather, music, no matter how aleatory or subtle in its relationship to human determination, still involves active human participation, at least most of the time.

¹⁷⁶ For a more rigorous account regarding the surrender involved in theological communication and flashpoints that illuminate much of my thinking, see "Analogy and Doxology" as the "double-indirectness" of theological speech in Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 1 (London,: SCM Press, 1970), esp. 215-19.

¹⁷⁷ Cage, *Silence*, 8. For play that wagers everything as a paradoxical strategy for total victory, which in Cage's case would be the invention of new music, see "Deep Play" in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures; Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), esp. 440.

Musical Freedom

According to Begbie, God is triune creator of all things, music included. Music is given by God, but also embedded in the world created by God, a place which Begbie calls “our God given home.”¹⁷⁸ Therefore, music is by nature a feature of the world’s ecology and a witness to God’s relationship with the world. Begbie suggests for example, how music intimates knowledge regarding the function of time granted by God within the world (rhythm and repetition), and reveals order instituted by God at the heart of creation (tonal harmony). For Begbie, music also invites its participants to “develop what lies at hand, to fashion things as yet unfashioned”—in the case of music, to arrange sounds in such a way that they must echo intention and demonstrate order. It is precisely that which Begbie deems as a lack of intention and order in Cage that proves so musically vexing and theologically transgressive.

What Begbie misses, however, is that Cage exercises intention and a kind of order when he claims that any sounds may occur in any combination and any continuity. Cage’s chance methods are another approach at fashioning the unfashioned, albeit with less artistic governance. Whether desirable for Begbie or not, the music of Cage may also be articulating something about humanity and the world created by God that Begbie’s tonal examples could not have stated. This does not mean that Begbie does not make astute criticisms of Cage’s music. It does, however, imply that Cage’s music may also be theologically useful precisely where Begbie finds the music most troublesome. Where Begbie neglects facets of Cage’s

¹⁷⁸ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 218.

compositional method, theory, and outlook as discussed above, these facets may reflect unexpected theological claims. For example Begbie often associates biographical facts of composers, like whether or not they are Christian, with whether or not their music is theologically sound. Yet curiously, he does not mention Cage's theologically laced biography, which will be discussed anecdotally now.

Like Boulez, Cage underwent religious training as a child. Yet different from Boulez, he did so voluntarily. One can only guess what residual effects came from Cage's childhood study of Greek, the New Testament, and Hebrew with a local Rabbi. Cage dedicated himself to these languages as well as different stints of volunteerism for congregations because he wanted to be a Methodist Episcopal Minister like his grandfather.¹⁷⁹ In discerning whether or not he was called to religious orders, he even went so far as to attend St. Alban's, a Liberal Catholic

¹⁷⁹ Revill, *The Roaring Silence*, 31. See also Silverman, *Begin Again*, 5-7.

Incidentally, the Christian tradition of Methodism permeates Cage's early life, his genealogy, and even his first marriage. See below from Revill, *The Roaring Silence*, 17-19. and Silverman, *Begin Again*, 21.

His grandfather, Gustavus Adolphus Williamson Cage (dates unpublished), and great-grandfather, Adolphus Cage (1819–1905), were both Methodist Episcopal preachers. Gustavus was ordained an Elder in the church. Cage's parents, John Milton Cage and Lucretia Harvey met while Lucretia played piano at a First Methodist Episcopalian Church in Colorado. It would be Lucretia's third marriage. Cage would be her third born son. Gustavus Adolphus Williamson III was stillborn. Revill writes, "Gustavus Adolphus Williamson IV, their second son, was born deformed, with a head larger than his body, and died at two weeks. Then in Los Angeles' good Samaritan Hospital, at five o'clock in the morning of September 5, 1912, John Milton Cage junior was born." See also ———, *Begin Again*, 4-5.

Silverman notes that Xenia Kashervaroff, Cage's wife, was "a daughter of the Archpriest of Eastern Orthodox Russian-Greek Church of Alaska, Father Andrew Petrovich Kasheveroff...Xenia's prominent religious background may have figured in Cage's attraction to her. But she was not exactly 'her father's daughter.'"

Church in the Hollywood Hills near Franklin Avenue. He joined this church and even served as an acolyte in Mass until his parents became distressed over his involvement in the church. They said he would have to choose the church or them. After seeking the advice of the church's then priest, Father Tetteimer, and confiding that he had decided for the church, the priest replied, "There are many religions. You only have one mother and father." and told Cage to go back home.

It remains difficult to speculate how much of these early religious influences help theological analysis of Cage's music. Yet it seems plausible that Cage's theological profundity may reside in a place deeper than his music alone can reveal. Without any further probing in this writing, what seems especially generative with regards to theology and what threatens Begbie's program most from Cage is that 4'33" may in fact exercise freedom given by God and lead to musically expansive thinking rather than the sonically vapid.

In 4'33", Cage musically exercises freedom granted to the world that Begbie finds untenable. It is a freedom where music appears with and without regard for human intention and where the activity of God participates in existence in unpredictable ways. Begbie, on the other hand, prefers to keep his hands tied when pressed for a description of music:

If we were pressed for a definition [of music], we might say something to the effect that music is organized sound, or patterns of organized sounds, designed to produce certain effects, and as such, it is different from naturally or randomly occurring sound and from noise. Even if some composers deliberately blur the boundary between the musical and the nonmusical, most people, most of the time, know what music means.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 29.

What music means comes from what “most people, most of the time, know.” Begbie, however, never clearly describes the most people to whom he refers. His populist argument does not suffice.

Not only does the appeal to the consensus of the majority seem rather dismissive, it reifies the conditions by which theological ventriloquy emerges. Human intent (and only with large and homogenous enough agreement) determines what music is. If, however, intentionality is necessary in order for music to be music, then the meaning of music is constricted to the anthropomorphic. Music merely expresses the aims of its creator(s). While such an anthropomorphic move may buffer against the false presumption of what Begbie calls theological aestheticism, that theological interpretation of music can happen neutrally, it also roots a contradiction in another primary pitfall Begbie wants to avoid. Though he criticizes theological imperialism, when he grants chief authority concerning music’s definition to majority rules thinking, he actually increases the risk of theological imperialism. Because human intent determines what music is, it seems to follow that human intent would determine what music is theological. Again, music becomes reduced to mere illustration and we enter back into the historical trend of theological ventriloquy. The theological horizons Begbie purports shrink and appear as the nearby shores of our own creativity.

By contrast, *4’33”* shakes the foundations of what music is, and in its own particular way, showcases a redefinition of music—Sounds everywhere give music. Therefore, Cage’s musical method also expresses musical thinking able to counteract theological ventriloquy because his method acknowledges that sounds

may speak musically without any recourse to human intent. The display of the piece also underscores the impossibility of absolute silence on earth and wherever humans live. Sounds persist in all places making a purely silent realm a utopia. Humans may experience quiet, but silence never occurs.

The Impossibility of Absolute Silence

The ubiquity of sound makes silence and its hearing factually impossible. Cage had a similar realization in his visit to a Harvard anechoic chamber (a chamber designed to produce silence) before composing 4'33".¹⁸¹ At Harvard, Cage could hear both a high pitch (his nervous system) and a low one (his circulation).¹⁸²

Philosopher Roy Sorensen dismisses the claims of Cage as mythic, concluding instead that Cage probably suffered from tinnitus. Yet no laboratory then or now has managed to manufacture a room of absolute silence. Whether Cage actually heard the static of his nervous system or the persistence of his pulse, they still contributed to the fact of sonic ubiquity. Sorensen goes on to retort that an anechoic chamber is silent when empty and implies that any number and kind of empty spaces are likewise silent.¹⁸³ Yet he even a space designed for quiet—an anechoic chamber—occupied or not, is merely echo-free (hence “an-echoic”),

¹⁸¹ For an approximate dating of Cage’s visit to the anechoic chamber at Harvard of 1951-1952, see Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2010), 160-66. Argumentation about how 4'33" asserts that sonic ubiquity provides musics will not be discussed here.

¹⁸² Cage, *Silence*, 8.

¹⁸³ Roy A. Sorensen, *Seeing Dark Things: The Philosophy of Shadows* (New York: Oxford UP, 2008), 289. Matthew Nudds and Casey O'Callaghan, *Sounds and Perception: New Philosophical Essays* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 143.

designed to showcase a radical reduction of sound. The chamber never fully achieves silence and engineers have not yet managed to negate the emergence of sound in any place.¹⁸⁴

Sorensen concedes that silence proves elusive for now, but he holds out for a future when humans will attain absolute silence or ultimately confront silence when the world implodes in a “heat death” (and so burn in silence).¹⁸⁵ He further insists that “the vast majority” of the universe lies empty (and therefore without sound). Yet contrary to Sorensen’s pronouncement, science has found that matter (visible and “dark”) fills the universe and that the sonic density of space broadcasts all kinds of indefinable crackles.¹⁸⁶ Hearing silence is a riddling paradox at best or utter impossibility because it requires the heat death Sorensen punctuates. Silence has a sound as Simon and Garfunkel sang in 1964, and the definitional expanse performed in 4’33” that sonic ubiquity gives music leads to theologically fruitful discourse about how God gives in musics.

Ellipsis in the Cage and Boulez Letters

The historical precedent of 4’33” in disclosing that sounds everywhere give musics continues to provide a piercing conceptual framework for reversing the

¹⁸⁴ See for example Leland H. Hemming, *Electromagnetic Anechoic Chambers: A Fundamental Design and Specification Guide* (Piscataway, NJ: Wiley-IEEE Press, 2002).

¹⁸⁵ Sorensen, *Seeing Dark Things*, 290.

¹⁸⁶ See <http://science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/focus-areas/what-is-dark-energy/> [last accessed July 19th, 2012] and D.A. Gurnett, “Sounds of Space,” *American Geophysical Union, Fall Meeting 2005, abstract #ED43B-0851* (2005).

trend of theological ventriloquy and deriving further possibilities for understanding music's relation to God. For all of the notoriety and groundbreaking stature of 4'33" within the canon of Western music, however, the piece remains fairly obscure. In order to raise awareness and prepare a theological appropriation of 4'33", it will be helpful to survey three tributaries for its formation: Cage's lecture at Vassar College, East and South Asian influences that became embedded within the mid-20th century musical compositions and writings of Cage (as well as his lifetime output), and the most vital source for 4'33", Rauschenberg's *White Paintings*. Each of these sources also exhibits pronounced theological dimensions.¹⁸⁷ Only his Vassar College lecture is discussed below. The next chapter concentrates upon the East and South Asian influences and the primary influence of the *White Paintings* by Rauschenberg.

Coda: The Maverick Hall Concert

By the time of 4'33" in 1952, Cage had already been working as a professional composer for approximately fifteen years.¹⁸⁸ He was quite well-known, though not financially secure. Kyle Gann debunks the myth that 4'33" brought monetary gain to Cage, "the piece wasn't commissioned. The concert was a

¹⁸⁷ For a broader exploration of influences for 4'33", see "The Path to 4'33": 1946–1952' in Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence*, 121 - 66. Gann summarizes the multiple and most widely- discussed paths presumed as leading to 4'33": Cage's interest in "Eastern and Western strains of religious mysticism," the Vassar lecture, a 1948 pitch to Muzak to buy a silent piece from Cage, the *I-Ching*, Cage's experiences at Black Mountain College, *The White Paintings*, and Cage recognizing the existence of sound even within anechoic chamber engineered for absolute silence at Harvard.

¹⁸⁸ Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, 6.

benefit for a good cause. The money people paid to hear David Tudor play did not go to Cage, or even to Tudor.” Likewise, Alex Ross also writes emphatically, “The Maverick concert was a benefit; Cage earned nothing from the premiere of 4’33” and little from anything else he was writing at the time.”¹⁸⁹ Indeed, the Boulez sonata was the showcase piece for a concert benefitting the Artists Welfare Fund. And despite the *context of lack*, or perhaps galvanizing it, pianist David Tudor made history with his penultimate performance of the evening, incorrectly listed as follows:

4 pieces john cage
 4’ 33”
 30”
 2’ 23”
 1’ 40”¹⁹⁰

Setting his stopwatch at the piece’s beginning, and opening and closing the instrument’s lid as well as turning pages to mark transition between movements, Tudor passively, but purposely “played” one of the 20th century’s most

¹⁸⁹ Alex Ross, "Searching for Silence," *The New Yorker* 86, no. 30. October 4, 2010 Ross continues with astonishment, “He had no publisher until the nineteen-sixties...From the mid-fifties until the late sixties, he lived in a two-room cabin measuring ten by twenty feet, paying \$24.15 a month in rent. He wasn't far above the poverty level, and one year he received aid from the Musicians Emergency Fund. For years afterward, he counted every penny. I recently visited the collection of the John Cage Trust, at Bard, and had a look at his appointment books. Almost every page had a list like this one:

.63 stamps, 1.29 turp., .25 comb,
 1.17 fish, 3.40 shampoo, 2.36 groc,
 5.10 beer, 6.00 Lucky
 ‘I wanted to make poverty elegant,’ he once said.”

¹⁹⁰ The mistake is titling the piece as four separate pieces rather than one work with four movements. Revill, *The Roaring Silence*, 11. For a scanned image of the original program, see Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence*, 6.

controversial and most influential musical compositions. Yet nature accompanied Tudor with paradoxical subtlety and obviousness.

The rustling of leaves from oak, maple, hemlock, and shagbark hickory trees introduced an ambient chorus that reverberated throughout his performance. Raindrops against the roof percussively punctuated the second movement. One can only imagine what sounded forth from other nearby critters in the Catskill Mountains setting, not to mention the uneasy whispering from the audience in attendance. After Tudor had completed the piece, Maverick Concert Hall, a rugged barn-like structure with an upper paneling of windows reminiscent of honeycomb, had transformed into a legendary shrine of new music.¹⁹¹

Adoration, however, did not effuse from the recital audience. Instead they sat stunned, perplexed, and pissed in reaction to what they heard. Earle Brown, as reported by Cage biographer David Revill remembers, "A hell of a lot of uproar...it infuriated most of the audience."¹⁹² It is now oft quoted lore that one audience member who was an artist shouted with vehemence, "Good people of Woodstock, let's run these people out of town."¹⁹³ Silverman puts his own twist on the shock value of 4'33" by writing that the piece also made it into the gossip column of Walter Winchell, "which also reported scandalous news of the genitally reassigned

¹⁹¹ The recreation here of Tudor's premiere performance of 4'33" is indebted to Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence*, 1-4. See also Silverman, *Begin Again*, 118-19.

¹⁹² Revill, *The Roaring Silence*, 166.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 165-66. See Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence*, 8. See also, Ross, "Searching for Silence." A video of David Tudor remembering this disruption in the performance is available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HypmW4Yd7SY>. [last accessed July 19th, 2012].

Christine Jorgensen.”¹⁹⁴ Few could have imagined that the piece would become Cage’s most famous work and a landmark in the history of musical composition.¹⁹⁵ Perhaps none would have surmised its theological origins and promise.

Before Maverick Hall: The Vassar Lecture

The first public mention of ideas that would eventuate in 4’33” took place at a national intercollegiate arts conference, The Creative Arts in Contemporary Society, from February 27–29, 1948, at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New

¹⁹⁴ Silverman, *Begin Again*, 119.

¹⁹⁵ James Pritchett, “John Cage” in Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., 29 vols. (New York London: Grove; Macmillan, 2001), vol. 4, 798. “4’33” has become Cage’s most famous and controversial creation.” The Encyclopedia of Popular Music calls 4’33” “far and away his most famous.” “Cage, John” *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, Ed. Colin Larkin. Muze Inc. and Oxford UP, Inc. 2009 Vanderbilt University. 7 September 2010 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t270.e3990>>

In “Expanding Horizons: The International Avant-garde, 1962–75,” however, Richard Toop writes “To the end of his life, Cage insisted that his most important contribution was the ‘silent’ piece 4’33”, but in terms of influence on musical practice *Cartridge Music* (1960) may have stronger claims.” Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople, ed. *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 465.

Robert P. Morgan also notes, “While 4’33” may well exemplify Cage’s musical philosophy more purely than any other composition (he still considers it his most significant work), it brought him to a difficult impasse. Either he could give up composing entirely, on the ground that if all sounds can be viewed as music, musical “composition” is hardly necessary—or he could devise methods for preserving the activity of composition (and performance) as redefined by this conception of radical intentionlessness. Cage, of course, chose the latter course....” Robert P. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America*, The Norton Introduction to Music History (New York: Norton, 1991), 363.

York.¹⁹⁶ The conference was initiated, organized, and implemented by students, virtually all of them undergraduate women from Vassar.¹⁹⁷ Capturing the energy of the “1200 souls” who attended, the conference proceedings were enthusiastically examined and publicized in the school newspaper, the *Vassar Miscellany News*.¹⁹⁸ The paper described the conference as an “attempt to see the art not as isolated aesthetic problems, but as fields of human endeavor inextricably connected with politics, science, and sociology” and that this aim or conference “destination is not just this Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, but every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from now on.”¹⁹⁹ Beyond its unusual student inception, and in spite of its university context, the symposium remains a key gathering for retrospectively interpreting 4’33”, and an arguably seminal but largely forgotten discussion from American post-war intellectuals and artists regarding themes of unity and confluence within artwork and aesthetics.

In attendance with Cage were seminal figures in the history of shaping modern American aesthetic and philosophic thought: literary scholar, F.O.

¹⁹⁶ David Revill notes that from 1940-43 Cage also worked for the WPA recreational project. During this time, Cage’s invention of games that do not “make any sound...for fear that it would disturb the patients” for children visiting a San Francisco hospital may have also been an early impetus for 4’33.” See Revill, *The Roaring Silence*, 73.

¹⁹⁷ “Vassar Plays Hostess to Arts Conference,” *Vassar Miscellany News*, February 25, 1948, 3.

¹⁹⁸ “Public Opinion,” *Vassar Miscellany News*, Wednesday March 10, 1948, 2. See also, “Conference Studies Artist and Medium,” *Vassar Miscellany News*, Wednesday March 3, 1948, 4.

¹⁹⁹ Carol DeCamp, “Arts Conference,” *Vassar Miscellany News*, February 25, 1948, 2.

Matthiessen, dancer and choreographer, Merce Cunningham, novelist, Irwin Shaw, painter, Ben Shahn, poet, Malcolm Brinnin, and philosopher, Paul Weiss. On Friday evening, February 27 at 8:15pm, Harvard professor of English, F. O. Matthiessen gave the keynote address.²⁰⁰ His groundbreaking *American Renaissance (1941)*, stands as a founding text for the field of American Studies.²⁰¹ The book painstakingly queries author purposes and the very identity of literature within the half-decade where American “masterpieces” were birthed including: *Representative Men (1850)*, *The Scarlet Letter (1850)*, *The House of the Seven Gables (1851)*, *Moby-Dick (1851)*, *Pierre (1852)*, *Walden (1854)*, and *Leaves of Grass (1855)*. Matthiessen injects Coleridge and Eliot into his critical analysis of distinctively American fiction, and this may suggest a literary genealogy linked to questions about faith.²⁰² More could, however, be made of Matthiessen’s recent return from a Presbyterian Church of America (P.C.A.) conference held in Chicago just before attending the Vassar conference.²⁰³ At the conference, he had in fact served as one of the Massachusetts

²⁰⁰ "Committee Releases Conference Program," *Vassar Miscellany News*, February 25 1948 3.

²⁰¹ As Matthiessen pithily summarizes, “The double aim, therefore, has been to place these works both in their age and in ours.” See F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*, A Galaxy Book (London, New York [etc.]: Oxford U.P., 1968), vii-viii.

Sadly, Matthiessen would commit suicide only two years after this conference. More recently F. O. Matthiessen has been remembered through the new endowed LGBT chair at Harvard, the F.O. Matthiessen Visiting Professorship of Gender and Sexuality.

²⁰² ———, *American Renaissance; Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London, New York [etc.]: Oxford UP, 1941), xvii. Matthiessen discloses, “The two critics who have helped me draw a circle of definition around my subject are Coleridge and Eliot.”

Vice Presidents of the Presbyterian Church of America (P.C.A.).²⁰⁴ In any case, the possibility that Matthiessen's ecclesial commitments informed his scholarship seems less remote than the brief theological consideration of Cage's biography.

The following morning from 9:00–10:30am, Merce Cunningham and Irwin Shaw led the Drama and Dance Panel. At the time, Shaw was completing his panoramic and wildly successful first novel, *The Young Lions* (1948).²⁰⁵ The epic novel surgically inspects the lives, identities, and mortality of three male protagonists undergoing the complexities and tragedies of World War II.²⁰⁶ In Shaw's moral allegory, a salient theme is the Jewish identity of protagonist Noah Ackerman, as Noah comes to terms with his religious and cultural identity in defining himself as a poet and a soldier.²⁰⁷ Shaw's work, like that of Matthiessen (if his lay leadership is bracketed momentarily and we return to the connective fibers of *American Renaissance*), seems to coincide with 4'33". Both Shaw and Matthiessen shared a deep-seated conviction that cultural coming of age grows out of latent social unity and entanglement. For them, life was ubiquitous and relentless in its connectivity. A similar perception of cultural connection and unity seems operative in 4'33".

²⁰³ "'Prof. F.D. Matthiessen, Ben Shahn and Irwin Shaw Highlight Plans for February Arts Conference'," *Vassar Miscellany News*, February 4, 1948.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰⁵ *The Young Lions* was made into a film that Shaw disdained.

²⁰⁶ Irwin Shaw, *The Young Lions* (New York,: Random House, 1948).

²⁰⁷ James Richard Giles, *Irwin Shaw*, Twayne's United States Authors Series ; (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 97-100, Shaw, *The Young Lions*.

Choreographer and dancer, Merce Cunningham, would embark on his most ambitious season of solo performances in four years and for the rest of his career following the Vassar symposium.²⁰⁸ Two of the three pieces from Cage that Merce performed that year were the ephemeral “Dream” and suite for toy piano, “A Diversion.” These pieces seem to intentionally or ironically hint at Cage’s eventual silencing of the piano in 4’33”.²⁰⁹ Little is known about Cunningham’s other dances during the year of the conference: “Dream,” “The Ruse of Medusa,” “A Diversion,” “Orestes” and “The Monkey Dances.” Yet in a 1998 interview with Laura Kuhn, Cunningham acknowledges the influence of “Indian classical theater” for *Sixteen Dances for Soloist and Company of Three* (1951). These works also had music composed by Cage using his chance techniques.²¹⁰ While it is unclear exactly what Cunningham means by Indian classical theater, his statement to Kuhn bears theological resonance because the history of Indian theater is a ‘religious’ one, and especially given the close relationship between Cage and Cunningham, perhaps the subtle Indian religious influence in the choreography of Cunningham also inspired

²⁰⁸ For Merce Cunningham a performance chronology, see David Vaughan and Melissa Harris, *Merce Cunningham: Fifty Years*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Aperture, 1997).

²⁰⁹ Also worth noting is that in 1952, when Cage debuts 4’33”, Cage composes music for only one of Cunningham’s dance performances, within the same month of August.

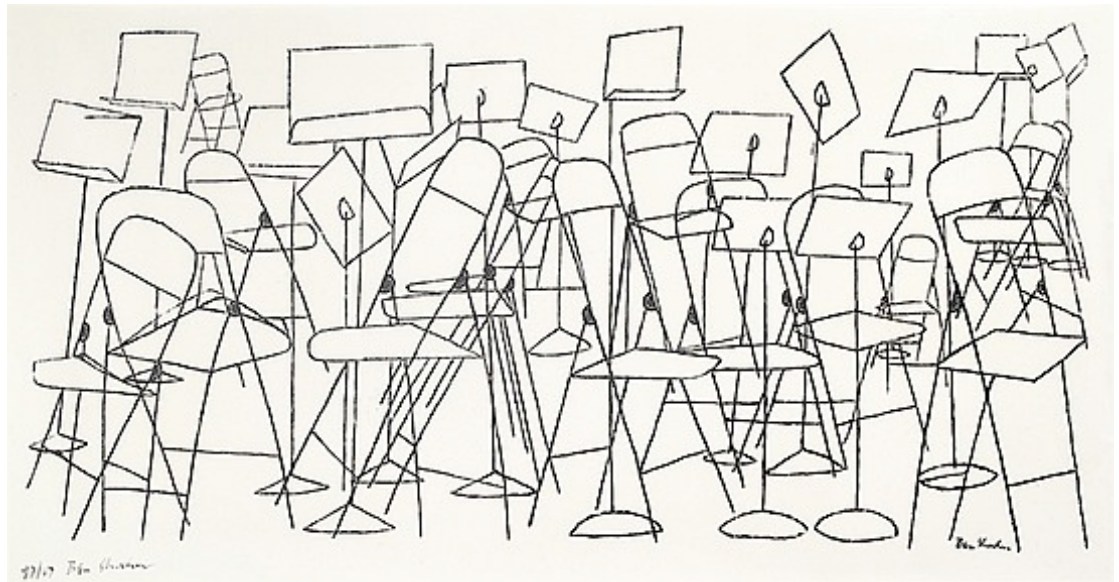
²¹⁰ Merce Cunningham et al., *Art Performs Life: Merce Cunningham, Meredith Monk, Bill T. Jones*, 1st ed. (New York: Walker Art Center; Available through D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 1998), 24.

Cage or allowed Cage to find recognize compositional openings he had not before noticed.²¹¹

Following Student Discussion Groups and lunch, the Saturday afternoon 2:00pm Art and Music panel began. John Cage spoke with social realist painter, Ben Shahn.²¹² At that time, Shahn had succeeded as a rare breed of artist able to produce and sell works with an ethic of no-compromise for galleries, public exhibitions, and private collections, as well as more populist outlets and venues like magazines, advertising campaigns, and corporate buildings. One piece wedding the creative and the commercial, completed in the same year of the conference and unmistakably relevant to Cage's lecture and anticipatory of 4'33", is Shahn's *Silent Music* (1948).

²¹¹ See Manohar Laxman Varadpande, *History of Indian Theatre* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1987), 90. Varadpande writes, "The earliest known Indian playwright Bhasa (c. 400 BC) wrote about 13 plays the majority of which are dedicated to the Krishna pantheon. See "Devotional Traditions," in Phillip Zarilli and Gary Jay Williams, *Theatre Histories: An Introduction* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006). where Darius L. Swann speaks about the origins of Indian theater in the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, "sources of Kṛṣṇa's life and exploits" (180). See also "Theater of Krishna" in M.L. Varadpande, *History of Indian Theatre: Loka Ranga Panorama of Indian Folk Theatre* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1992), 231-92.

²¹² "Arts Conference Schedules Weiss of Yale, John Cage, Original Composer for Dance," *Vassar Miscellany News*, February 25, 1948, 1. See also Silverman, *Begin Again*, 71.



[Figure 3.3, Ben Shahn's *Silent Music*.]

Soby notes that *Silent Music* was “originally conceived as a drawing for the Columbia Broadcasting System’s folder, “The Empty Studio.””²¹³ Notice above the absence of musicians or any prominent reference to music aside from the empty music stands. Of the painting, Shahn states, “The emotion conveyed by great symphonic music happens to be expressed in semi-mathematical acoustic intervals and this cannot be transposed in terms of ninety portraits or caricatures of performers.”²¹⁴ Apparently, the intervallic music of which Shahn speaks cannot be painted at all. The canvas contains no musicians or scores or any item that would suggest the presence of music. Yet Shahn’s depicted absence of the musical somehow portrays silence as unseen melody or an unpainted, but nevertheless, suggested ubiquity. After all, the title suggests that music is there, only inaudible or

²¹³ James Thrall Soby, *Ben Shahn* (West Drayton, Middlesex UK: Penguin Books, 1947), 20.

²¹⁴ Shahn as quoted by Soby. *Ibid.*, 47.

invisible. While *Silent Music* conveys the invisibility of acoustical science, 4'33" also phenomenalizes the invisible, and maybe the immeasurable too.²¹⁵

From 8:15–9:30pm, American poet and literary critic as well as former member of the Vassar English department, John Malcolm Brinnin closed the Saturday proceedings just before the 10:30pm "Informal Dance and Smoker." Brinnin was a formidable poet of his era, but he would be most remembered for first bringing Dylan Thomas to the United States.²¹⁶ Even so, Brinnin's verse also seems to capture a near indescribable or ineffable ambient ambition similar to or perhaps the same as the one that would drive Cage to write 4'33". Consider the last three stanzas of Brinnin's *At Land's End* from the 1951 collection, *The Sorrows of Cold Stone*:

XI

What do these ribs ache for—
Heart's blood? Mind's eye?
Pride of immortal soul?

XII

What do they cradle?
Love?
Time?

²¹⁵ In addition to *Silent Music*, Shahn also offered to the public in 1948, *Allegory*, a defiantly red painting of a giant geometric lion protecting supine persons enveloped by fire. The painting is based upon a Chicago fire that killed four children, but it also suggests outrage from Shahn concerning the deaths by burning of his "own [Jewish] brothers and sisters." Shahn as quoted by Matthew Baigell, *American Artists, Jewish Images*, 1st ed., (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 98-101. Baigell derives his interpretation from Ziva Amishai-Maisels, "Ben Shahn and the Problem of Jewish Identity," *Jewish Art* 304, no. 19 (1987): 12-13.

²¹⁶ Brinnin is also associated with the eventual death of Dylan Thomas from alcoholism. See Barbara Stewart, "John Malcolm Brinnin, Poet and Biographer, Dies at 81," *New York Times*, June 30th, 1998. <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/30/books/john-malcolm-brinnin-poet-and-biographer-dies-at-81.html> [last accessed July 19th, 2012].

Air?

XIII

Air.²¹⁷

The remedy for Brinnin's aching body is "Air", an intangible, but ubiquitous vapor, which we share and upon which our lives depend. Air is not only oxygen, but free, and a manifestation of freedom that enables life and satisfies artistic yearning. Note as well that the first line above from Brinnin's *At Land's End* clearly alludes to the biblical book of Genesis.²¹⁸ The charity at work in Brinnin's poem gestures towards the givenness that will be discussed later concerning 4'33".

For the final day, at 9:30am on a Sunday morning, Paul Weiss, Yale University professor of philosophy provided summary and discussion. Weiss, the author of treatises like *Nature and Man* (1947), also fixates upon the significance of freedom:

Whatever necessities there are, result from the exercise of freedom. A thunderclap, the moving of a billiard ball, an impulsive act or an act of design are on a par because they are all the outcome of free occurrences by which indeterminate possibilities are made into determinate actualities.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ John Malcolm Brinnin, *The Sorrows of Cold Stone: Poems 1940-1950* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press 1951), 16. It is also probably not incidental that Brinnin had studied modern dance and composed poetry for "dance-dramas," such as *Eclogue for Dancers*. See "John Brinnin Discusses Writing on Saturday for Arts Conference," *Vassar Miscellany News*, February 25, 1948, 1.

²¹⁸ Stanza II of the poem also deploys imagery from the Tanakh:

So was the Ark a-waste on a plateau:
Processional giraffe, lynx, ocelot
Printing the sand below.

See Brinnin, *The Sorrows of Cold Stone*, 14, 16.

Weiss describes a freedom not unlike the musical type Cage seeks to achieve in 4'33." It is as if Weiss offers another description of Cage's balancing of purposeful and determined commitment to purposeless and indeterminate compositional methods. Weiss also repeatedly and paradoxically discusses God in *Nature and Man*. "Philosophy is Godless cosmology. This is true even when its discourse is pious and its ostensible topic [is] God. The philosophic mind senses the unity behind different inquiries."²²⁰ Weiss's philosophy contemplates actions akin to Cage's methods of chance. Furthermore, Weiss problematizes the relationship between God and philosophical thinking in such a way that the submission to ubiquitous sound as music featured in 4'33" may offer response.

Reality, written by Weiss a decade earlier, *also* considers radical spatial unity with less direct reference to freedom, but consideration of unending possibility. This book and *The Nature of Systems* made the reportage by the Vassar Miscellany News.²²¹ In *Reality*, Weiss writes, "The whole of space consists of spatialized objects

²¹⁹ Paul Weiss, *Nature and Man* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1947), 18. Weiss ends his discussion of "Necessity and Freedom" with the following meditation: "A world of necessity without freedom is a world in which logicians dwell. It is a world in which there are logical connections between existents, but no real movement from one to the other. A world in which there is freedom without necessity is a world in which romantics live. There is movement and life in it, but nothing definite and fixed before or after. Our world is more complex. To be at home in it we must be both rational and practical, constrained yet free, humble and adventurous, beings who know that they have been determined to determine for themselves what they will be" (19).

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 210. For other entries discussing God, see index page 276.

²²¹ ———, *The Nature of Systems* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1930).

having unitary magnitudes, and of undivided intervening spaces between them.”²²² Moreover, Weiss discusses spatial ubiquity, “All actualities thus are in a limited portion of a limited space, but any one could occupy a spatial region outside the boundaries of our actual present pace. The concrete swims in an apeiron, beyond which there is nothing but the possibility of further space.”²²³ Again, uncanny conceptual overlap regarding ubiquity emerges, and coincidences like these ideas may have fertilized Cage’s conceptualization of 4’33”.

The title of Cage’s talk is religious “A Composer’s Confessions.” In this lecture, he discusses ideas for a work-in-progress that would be reinvented as 4’33.” Cage called the piece, *Silent Prayer*.²²⁴ Though his lecture primarily recounts his maturing into a professional composer, the ending paragraph unfurls with a mix of nostalgic faith and musical hope:

Each one of us must now look to himself. That which formerly held us together and gave meaning to our occupations was our belief in God. When we transferred this belief first to heroes, then to things, we began to walk our separate paths. That island that we have grown to think no longer exists to which we might have retreated to escape from the impact of the world, lies, as it ever did, within each one of our hearts. Towards that final tranquility, which today we so desperately need, any integrating occupation—music is one of them, rightly used—can serve as a guide.²²⁵

²²² — — —, *Reality* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1938), 190.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 191.

²²⁴ John Cage and Richard Kostelanetz, *John Cage, Writer: Previously Uncollected Pieces*, 1st ed. (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 27. For historical contextualization and interpretations of Cage’s announcement that he would shop *A Silent Prayer* to the Muzak corporation as “a piece of uninterrupted silence,” see Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence*, 126-34, 76. and Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Towards a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 18-22.

²²⁵ Cage and Kostelanetz, *John Cage, Writer*, 44.

The music that Cage actually makes, however, 4'33" defies and overtakes the contraction to subjectivity and veneration of music as guide that Cage wants to implement.

4'33" heralds a way forward by provoking hearing that orients itself with regard to sonically expressed freedom. Such freedom is within reach, but also far beyond the imagination of Cage. Music does not submit to the parameters of time, but time takes on a new musical dimension.²²⁶ The emptiness of the piece surrenders to a sonic expanse that showcases musical ingenuity. Yet this expanse also escapes reason and intent. It may lead listeners to unsuspected and unexpected theological possibility where theologically, music begins to speak "for itself."

The theological themes detectable in Cage and in his colleagues, while emphasized with only minor interpretation, do not occur as religious veneer. They appear as elemental to each artist and thinker. Shared uncanny aesthetic explorations of spatial unity and ubiquity, as well as a common concern for the theological lie underneath the ending of Cage's lecture, but also Matthiessen's Presbyterianism and perhaps his literary analysis too, Shahn and Shaw's investigation of Jewish identity, Weiss's philosophical musings on God, Biblical allusions in Brinnin's verse, and even Cunningham's curiosity for Indian sacred theater. Only preliminary mining of these theological similarities and coincidences

²²⁶ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 18. And Salome Voeglin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 80-81.

has taken place because their connection to 4'33" remains somewhat elusive. Further interpretation of the Vassar symposium must cease for now in order to proceed with more promising avenues related to the theological significance of Cage's 4'33." Upon closer examination of the leap year weekend occasion of the Vassar Lecture, one can detect an unusual synchronization and interpenetration of imaginations curious to pursue penetrating questions and create seminal works elaborating upon shared concepts of unity, ubiquity, the ambient, and the theological.

CHAPTER V

RELIGION IN 4'33"

Letter to Helen Wolff

Two years following the Maverick Hall concert, 4'33" premiered on April 14, 1954, at the Carl Fischer Concert Hall in New York.²²⁷ Following the performance, literary publishing giant Helen Wolff and mother of Cage's student, Christian Wolff, sternly warned Cage that he would ruin his reputation as a serious composer with a piece that seemed like a musical prank. In crafting a charitable response to her that would also expose the understated musical seriousness of 4'33", Cage turned to the religion section of his library. Following the lead of Ananda Coomaraswamy (ஆனந்த குமாரசுவாமி), who in the *Transformation of Nature and Art* wrote, "it has become more and more difficult for European minds to think in terms of unity," Cage replied:

You know my constant interest in 'oriental thought' and you may think this has been misused to bring about musical action which you cannot accept. As I see it useful art has been illustrative or significant of belief, didactic. But what is that art which is not didactic, nor symbolic, but to be experienced following having been taught? Clearly, life itself of which we have only to become aware.²²⁸

²²⁷ Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2010), 190.

²²⁸ Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, Second edition. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1935), 3.

John Cage, "Letter to Helen Wolff," (1954 [undated]). I received a copy of the letter by e-mail attachment from Kyle Gann Oct. 4, 2010.

Cage's notion that life itself is an experience of art rearticulates the rhetorical point from Coomaraswamy that Western minds would benefit from more intellection focused upon unity.²²⁹ Cage's statement also shows how his conceptual explorations of unity, ubiquity, the ambient, and freedom that were only beginning to break the surface at his Vassar lecture blossomed as he familiarized himself with the language and phrasings influenced by his study of South and East Asian philosophies and religions.

Nevertheless, as insightful as the East and South Asian influences are for interpreting the eventual birth of the musical statement of 4'33", they do not ultimately anchor the theological profundity of the piece (even though some might presume that any association of 4'33" to theology must have its roots planted in these Asian fields). Still, rehearsing the relationship between Cage's music and the array of East and South Asian influences that fascinated him bolsters historical understanding of 4'33", its musical innovation, and its theoretical implications.

East and South Asian Influences

David W. Patterson helpfully divides Cage's "oriental" influences as both East Asian and South Asian.²³⁰ We have discussed one primary South Asian influence already, Coomaraswamy. On the East Asian side, though Daoist thoughts from

²²⁹ Curiously, Cage's critics in theology, like Nicholas Wolterstorff in addition to Begbie share the view that life and art are not separated. See chapter 3 of the current project.

²³⁰ David W. Patterson, "Cage and Asia: History and Sources" in David Nicholls, *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 41-59.

Kwang-tse [pinyin: Zuangzi; 莊子] and Lao-Tse [pinyin: Laozi; 老子] appear in the 1950s writings of Cage, by 1952, use of the I-Ching [易經], a Han Dynasty text devoted to cosmological numerology, geomancy, and hexagram-based proverbs concerning life and its changes, defines Cage's middle 20th century corpus. Begbie has already brought attention to one *I-Ching* driven piece, Cage's magnum opus of chance, *Music of Changes* (1951). While writing *Music of Changes*, Cage also completed other *I-Ching* and chance-driven works like *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951) the last movement of *Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra* (1951), *Seven Haiku* (1951–52), *For MC and DT* (1952), *Two Pastorales* (1951–52), and *Water Music* (1952).²³¹

Those familiar with Cage and his music perhaps think first of Zen when considering religious facets of his music. Prior to the I-Ching driven works, Cage delved into Zen via Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki. Zen, however, did not immediately make its way into his composing. For example, Cage's *Construction* series, *First Construction (in Metal)* (1939), *Second Construction* (1940), and *Third Construction* (1941), all written during Cage's initial fascination with Suzuki, show no influence from Zen.²³² The *Construction* series instead more clearly exhibits music focused experimentation, like play with rhythmic structure and how Cage's rhythmic experimentation could collaborate with modern dance.²³³ For the most part, the

²³¹ James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, Music in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1993), 89.

²³² Pierre Boulez, John Cage, and Jean Jacques Nattiez, *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1993), 50.

influence of Suzuki remains relatively dormant in Cage's initial postwar music.²³⁴ Not until discursive pieces like "The Juilliard Lecture" and subsequent expositions like the "Lecture on Commitment" does Cage explicitly speak about Zen and use it to structure his artistic output.²³⁵

Zen Inspired Speeches

The "Juilliard Lecture" took place on March 27th, 1952 at 2:30pm for the International Federation of Music Students' 6th Annual Symposium of contemporary Music, just five months before the Maverick premiere of 4'33".²³⁶ Referencing Suzuki, Cage states that before Zen, "men are men and mountains are mountains," but that during the study of Zen "things become confused," and after studying Zen they are "Just the same, only somewhat as though you had your feet

²³³ For more detailed musical analysis of the *Construction* series, see Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, 16-20.

²³⁴ The influence of Suzuki may have been operative earlier, but still not in any of Cage's nondiscursive music. David W. Patterson points out that East Asian philosophy undergirds the rhetoric of the "Lecture on Nothing" (1949-50) and the "Lecture on Something" (1951-52). For example, in the "Lecture on Something," direct reference to the *I-Ching* occurs.

²³⁵ I write "pieces" because the lectures are artworks both in their visual presentation and in the ways in which Cage "performs" them. See Appendix A for a look at sample pages from the lectures.

²³⁶ "John Cage's Juilliard lecture was presented as part of the International Federation of Music Students' 6th Annual Symposium of Contemporary Music, held at Juilliard from March 23 to March 29, 1952. Cage spoke in the Concert Hall on March 27 at 2:30pm." Jeni Dahmus (Archivist, The Juilliard School), in e-mail to the author, October 11, 2010. Cage also participated in "Town Hall Short Courses" that were presented collaboratively by Juilliard's Extension Division and Town Hall during the 1949/50 and 1950/51 academic years. He appeared as a guest speaker in Robert Tangeman's Contemporary Music course.

are a little off the ground.”²³⁷ The oblique quotation illustrates a paradox that for Cage functions as a departure point for considering musical meaning and perhaps any other phenomena in the world. Dedicated study does not produce clarity with regard to the perception of humans and creation. Cage applies this paradoxical realization when he further writes, “Now, before the study of music, men are men and sounds are sounds.” Afterwards, “things get a little confused,” and the perception of sonic distinctions also floats away from its grounding. For Cage, Suzuki and Zen provide conceptual vocabulary for portraying the point that identifying what music is becomes no clearer with discursive study of music. Moreover, even the instrumentality of the Asian sources floats away as Cage evolves from the insights they provide into the nondiscursive and phenomenally open musical composition, 4’33”.

Cage delivered the “Lecture on Commitment,” in February, 1961 for the Beta Symposium at Wesleyan University. He only anecdotally invokes the name of Suzuki on this occasion. Cage begins his talk with a cryptic, but interpretable cautionary word about commitment, “As Suzuki said: Living in the city I don’t see how you’re going to do it [commit]; living in the country you’d have a chance.”²³⁸ The quotation, in somewhat opaque and bizarre fashion, suggests that discipline to artistic creative process requires focus best harnessed away from urban settings and within rural contexts. The use of Suzuki becomes clearer, however, as Cage develops the train of thought concerning commitment. Cage writes, “Consider, he

²³⁷ John Cage, *A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writings*, [1st ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967)], 95-96.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

[Suzuki] says, one's relation to music like that to, for example, animals, weeds, stars, garbage, or people one may never meet again, provided one is not exclusively professional keeper, breeder, disposer, or exploiter of these."²³⁹ Commitment is not so much about placing oneself in an environment of nondistractedness in order to concentrate upon creative process. Rather, commitment is a totalizing musical disposition that finds music or art available everywhere life is, especially in those places where humanity ceases to consider itself as keeper of things in the world, but rather a receiver of a variety of given phenomena.²⁴⁰ For Suzuki, places far from the city may have been easiest for learning how to commit to cherishing what the world provides. Cage came to the awareness that locations of profound musical commitment were in abundance in every kind of musical surround.

Music Everywhere Life Is

One can see how Cage's transposition of Suzuki's Zen maxims in the "Julliard Lecture" and the "Lecture on Commitment" may have thematically governed the atmospheric concert piece of 4'33". In enigmatic speeches like these, Cage emphasizes that human theoretical coherence does not govern music's identity. He also gradually develops a message that music exists wherever life does. Cage's erasure of the boundaries between music and life and downplay of the importance for intellection as a primary means of grasping the musical dovetails with the discovery and exercise of freedom that 4'33" urges for its listeners—that

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 119. Cage also writes on his own, "We are as free as birds. Only the birds aren't free. We are as committed as birds, and identically."

the ubiquity of sound can be encountered as music in any place, at any time, and by anyone. Yet Suzuki and Zen were not the only East Asian sources percolating in Cage's musical thought prior to the composing of 4'33". Pinpointing exactly how they influence the landmark piece becomes fuzzier, or to use Cage's Suzuki-based language "more confused," when other tributaries of Cage's musical thought are explored.

Huang Po and The Doctrine of Universal Mind

Often overlooked is how pronounced Chinese Zen Master Huang Po's advocacy of "nothingness" also infuses Cage's musical mindset just before the inception of 4'33". It could be said that 4'33" manifests a form of musical nothingness, which positively results in the recognition of sonic ubiquity. During a summer six-week stint at Black Mountain College shortly before the Maverick Hall performance, Cage interrupted his own music-making in order to schedule a nighttime reading of Huang Po for residents.²⁴¹ Additionally, "Manifesto," another discursive piece by Cage, was probably drafted near this time of this event. It included selections from Huang Po's *The Doctrine of Universal Mind*.

Compare the following excerpt from Cage's "Manifesto" and Huang Po's *Doctrine of Universal Mind*:

²⁴¹ Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 114.

outside the control of the human mind. For Cage, full musical understanding, as opposed to the “nothing” of writing, hearing, and playing, arrives instantaneously and unpredictably, like a gift, as human ears remain open to the effects of music, rather than insistent to determine what music is and means.

Notice too how the original unusual typeset from Cage above evokes a musical reading of “Manifesto.” The directional brackets suggest movement. The partitioned text creates a sense of rhythm and dynamics. The quotation marks function something like a *dal segno* (*D.S.*).²⁴⁴ These prose alterations are not idiosyncratic to “Manifesto.” The “Juilliard Lecture” and “Lecture on Commitment” exhibit similar attributes. The point in showing them here is to suggest that the musical ascesis that would shape the radically open statement of 4’33” had already taken root and made itself known in the rhetoric of Cage. In fact, “Manifesto” *graced* the program booklet for Julian Beck and Judith Malina’s translation of Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* (an 1896 French play that anticipates theater of the absurd and surrealism). *Ubu Roi* opened at the Greenwich Village Cherry Lane Theatre August 5th, 1952, publicly foreshadowing Cage’s newfound stance of musical awareness just three weeks before the Maverick Hall debut of 4’33”.²⁴⁵ Cage’s musical writings

²⁴⁴ The comparison above is based upon a correlation between Cage and Huang Po first suggested by Patterson. Yet Patterson chooses a selection of text from Huang Po that communicates the inverse of the “excellent condition” Cage promotes. He also does not present to his readers the original musical image of Cage’s “Manifesto.” Patterson, “Cage and Asia: History and Sources,” 55-56.

²⁴⁵ The precise date has been surmised based upon Cage’s explanatory superscription for “Manifesto” and the public online archives of the Cherry Lane Theater. See John Cage, *Silence*, xxxii-xii. <http://www.cherrylanetheatre.org/history.php?page=fifties> [last accessed July 19th, 2012].

function like a workshop where he tinkers with concepts of restraint to craft a rubric of performance and musical form based upon and in celebration of the ambient and free.

From the inseparability of life and art and unintelligibility of what music is even after dedicated study that Cage gleans from Suzuki and Zen to the insistence upon surrender to the wisdom provided by music as a phenomenon in the world from Huang Po and the organizing of these thoughts in musically structured prose, one sees how East Asian ideas deeply shape the compositional method and aims of Cage leading up to 4'33". Nevertheless, the theological thrust of the piece does not begin with these sources, but elsewhere. Yet before moving toward expanding this vital point, a brief word about Indian classical musician, Gita Sarabhai the other major South Asian influence upon Cage deserves mention.

Pinpointing Sarabhai's precise contribution to Cage's works is challenging.²⁴⁶ Cage described Sarabhai as one "who came like an angel from India" in the Vassar lecture.²⁴⁷ She had given Cage a copy of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* before returning to India after studying counterpoint and modern music with him. Sarabhai studied with Cage in order to diagnose what she ascertained as an undesired infiltration of European musical practices upon classical Indian music. Cage seems to have gained more from her as he credits his psychological wellness to the perspicacity of Ramakrishna. Yet the impressions of the gospel or any other modes of exchange between Cage and Sarabhai with regard

²⁴⁶ Silverman, *Begin Again*, 66.

²⁴⁷ John Cage and Richard Kostelanetz, *John Cage, Writer: Previously Uncollected Pieces*, 1st ed. (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 41.

to 4'33" and Cage's greater musical output mostly persists as a matter of speculation.²⁴⁸ The influence of Coomaraswamy, mentioned at this chapter's beginning, but also invoked in the Vassar lecture, is only slightly easier to infer.

"Oriental" Philosophy Converging within a Sermonic Letter

After using the thoughts of Coomaraswamy to disarm the incensed publisher, Wolff, Cage compares the audible experience of life as art like 4'33" to the *I-Ching*, "I am therefore not concerned with art as separate from such awareness (nor is the *I-Ching* (Hex. 22, Grace))."²⁴⁹ The appeal to the I-Ching signals a cosmological facet in his description of a unifying musical concept. In the letter's concluding remarks, Cage writes, "4'33" is also a matter of consultation. Each person present will receive his own hexagram." What Cage means cannot be known precisely. He is in part also directing his *I-Ching* usage toward an earlier snarl from Wolff that she had consulted the I-Ching regarding the piece, and "it gave back the hexagram 'Youthful Folly.'"²⁵⁰ Notably, the Wolff family had published the 1950 Pantheon Books one-

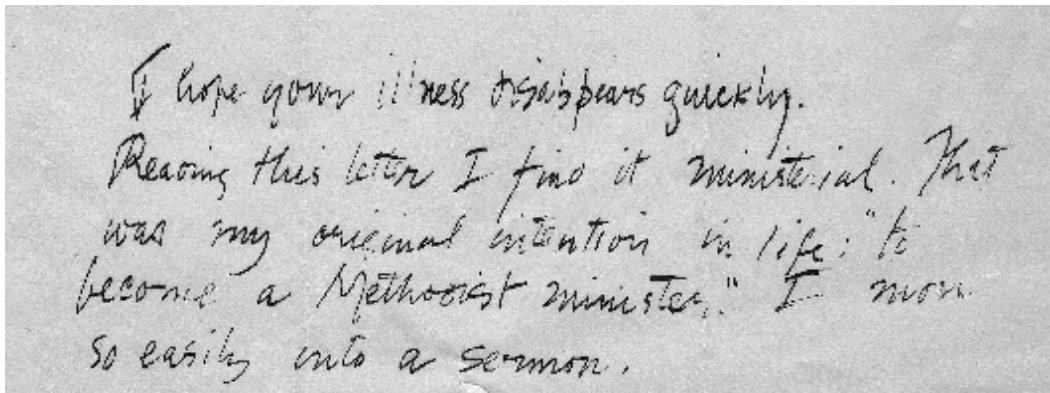
²⁴⁸ Patterson suggests that *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* comprised the bulk of Cage's study in "oriental philosophy" as mentioned in the Vassar lecture. Yet he also admits that *The Gospel's* "relation to Cage's artistic thought is relatively tangential." See David Patterson "Cage and Asia," 48–49 Silverman, however, provides *Series re Morris Graves* as a piece where Cage "arranged syllables quoted from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna according to metrical patterns in his *Quartet for Percussion* (1935): riHAHArIHAHArIHAHArIHAriOM!HAHArIHAriHAHArIOM!HAHA." (Silverman, *Begin Again*, 261.

²⁴⁹ Cage, "Letter to Helen Wolff."

²⁵⁰ Silverman, *Begin Again*, 118.

volume edition of *I-Ching*.²⁵¹ Beyond the adolescent quality of these parting shots, Cage seems earnest in his suggestion that 4'33" imparts sonic omens to the ears of listeners, and these omens of sound possess some kind of divinatory value.

At the bottom of his type-written letter to Wolff, Cage handwrites the following:



[Figure 4.5. Excerpt from handwritten letter from John Cage to Helen Wolff- I hope your illness disappears quickly. Reading this letter I find it ministerial. That was my original intention in life: 'to become a Methodist minister.' I move so easily *into a sermon*.]²⁵²

Curiously, Cage closes his correspondence to Wolff with a ministerial and homiletic twist.²⁵³

Beyond mere rebuttal to Wolff's advice that he quit joking around, Cage's letter proclaims a new attitude towards hearing music as ubiquitous, unifying,

²⁵¹ Ibid. See also Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes, *The I Ching; or, Book of Changes*, 1 ed., Bollingen Series, (New York: Pantheon, 1950).

²⁵² See chapter 3 of the current project for more biographical information regarding Cage's desire to become a Methodist Minister.

²⁵³ Quoting from the same section of the letter "I move so easily into a sermon," Silverman also agrees, "In 4'33" he [Cage] preached listening, as opposed to merely hearing." Silverman, *Begin Again*, 118.

dialogical and cosmological. As a sermonic transcript, this letter from Cage also presents an alternative epistle to compare with Begbie's use of the correspondence with Boulez to construct theologically negative portrayals. Pieces like 4'33" do not evacuate the very meaning of music, and correspondingly, any theological possibility, as Begbie suggests. 4'33" gestures towards an infinite sonic expanse that demands musical testimony of a new categorical scale. Though 4'33" emerges from multiple strands of religious and philosophical thought, its effect speaks for itself. And the magnitude of what it communicates even leads Cage to reevaluate his understanding of the piece as its author. Rather than determining what the work expresses, he finds himself instead constituted by a musical occurrence that provokes feelings related to religious calling and a musical event that in order to be understood, may demand description he had neither intended nor foreseen. As Cage experiments with South and East Asian sources to transition from an idea about a *Silent Prayer* to a groundbreaking piece called 4'33", he eventually moves toward elucidation about the piece that "ministerially" or mystifyingly reconciles grumblings from critics like Wolff. The elucidation exceeds even what Cage had hoped for as the composer of the piece and what can be accurately comprehended with regard to musical knowledge. What Cage encounters is a givenness that he had already witnessed and also failed to completely grasp in the primary motivator for his composing of 4'33"—Robert Rauschenberg's White Paintings.

The White Paintings and Another Letter

While conceptual convergences at Vassar and the peculiar influences from

South and East Asia raise intrigue regarding connection to 4'33", Cage himself directly credits Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* for providing the necessary courage to compose the work:

I gave a talk, at uh, Vassar College, and I was fresh from my first studies of oriental philosophy, and I was full of it. And in the talk that I gave at that symposium, I said that there should be a piece that had no sounds in it. But I hadn't yet written it. And the thing that gave me the courage to do it, finally, was seeing the white empty paintings of Bob Rauschenberg, to which I responded immediately.

I've said before that they were airports for shadows and for dust. But you could say also that they were mirrors of the air.²⁵⁴

A brief historical wind-up to how the canvases came to be will assist connecting Cage's experience of *The White Paintings* to 4'33".

Mountaintop Experiences

Visual artists, dancers, writers, poets, photographers, and musicians flocked to Black Mountain College in North Carolina in the immediate years following World War II. Rauschenberg, with his then wife, Susan Weil, joined the first wave of artistic migration to Black Mountain in the years 1949–50. Though Rauschenberg primarily studied and experimented with basic concepts related to modern art, his works from this period laid foundational advances that appear later in the *White*

²⁵⁴ http://www.sfmoma.org/multimedia/audio/aop_tour_404, November 2008 [last accessed July 22nd, 2012]. See also "To Whom It May Concern: The white paintings came first; my silent piece came later. – J.C." in "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work" Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, 98, 102.

Cage was not the only postwar composer looking to painting for musical innovation. Morten Feldman also looked to Rauschenberg and Rothko for musical inspiration. See Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 523.

Paintings and lead to new aesthetic movements for painting. One is *This is the First Half of a Print Designed to Exist in Passing Time*, where lines successively accumulate as stacked slashes of erasure across black background prints of fourteen wooden blocks.²⁵⁵ As the layering of white strips overwhelms a black background, the effect is that *This is the First Half* culminates into a “white void.”²⁵⁶ Rauschenberg’s fixation upon simplicity with emphasis upon white lines, opaque background, and repeated procedures of production like re-using one woodcut printing block again and again, anticipates minimalist conventions.²⁵⁷ His methods also become his primary means for expressing a series of four theological works—*Trinity (1949)*, *Eden (1950)*, *Crucifixion and Reflection (1950)*, and *Mother of God (1950)*.²⁵⁸ *The White Paintings* appear to merge both aspects of his aesthetic ingenuity and religious curiosity.

In *Trinity and Eden*, one can clearly spot the resemblance to the black and white color scheme and stripped down method of composition in *This is the First Half*. Except in these works, sometimes large and sometimes small oblong and circular shapes punctuate the lines. Red or silver flecks or trim also occasionally accent the canvases. *Mother of God* introduces a more complicated arrangement of

²⁵⁵ *This is the First Half of a Print Designed to Exist in Passing Time* will be abbreviated as *This is the First Half* in subsequent pages.

²⁵⁶ Walter Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s* (Houston: The Menil Collection : Houston Fine Art Press, 1991), 23.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁵⁸ Robert Rauschenberg, Barbara Rose, and Elizabeth Avedon, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg*, 1st ed., Vintage Contemporary Artists Series (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 26.

color and literally transforms Rauschenberg's vector style from *This is the First Half*, *Trinity*, and *Eden* into maps. He presents a collage of twenty-two North American city road maps dominated by a circular orb that also evokes a white void.

Crucifixion and Reflection returns to a black and white basis lying underneath mixed panels of cream, beige, and dark grey, with contrastingly clear representations of faith in the form of outlined crosses and collaged Hebrew-language newspaper clippings.²⁵⁹ Without difficulty, a viewer can see how the stark segmentation of the outlined crosses and muted coloration in *Crucifixion and Reflection* prefigures the compositional aesthetic of the *White Paintings*. Though the *White Paintings* themselves may appear devoid of any perceptible form or purpose, their minimalist content and resemblance to religious evocations in other Rauschenberg works provide striking corollaries for considering the theological implications of 4'33".

In the summer of 1951, Rauschenberg re-enrolled for his second stay at Black Mountain. He and Weil had a baby son, but the couple divorced not long after in 1952.²⁶⁰ Thus, Black Mountain became "Rauschenberg's primary living and working space."²⁶¹ Flowing in the wake of these life changes, the minimalist tactics and religious turn in Rauschenberg's first Black Mountain paintings culminate in six of the original seven *White Paintings* canvases.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg*, 44-46, 49-51.

²⁶⁰ Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg*, 62.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² Keep in mind that Rauschenberg gave directions that *The White Paintings* could be remade and fabricated as needed. For this reason, tracking "original" canvases proves an elusive task.



[Figure 4.6. - Rauschenberg, *White Painting*, 1951]

Rauschenberg previews what his work on the *White Paintings* entails in an October 18th, 1951 letter to renowned New York art dealer, Betty Parsons, whose Betty Parsons Gallery had presented *Mother of God* and hosted Rauschenberg's first solo exhibition earlier that year.²⁶³ Describing himself as one "sobered up from summer puberty and moonlit smells," his newfound clairvoyance has brought an "emergency" artistic response—the *White Paintings*—that public audiences must

Barbara Rose writes, "In 1965, Rauschenberg gave permission and clear instructions to Pontus Hulten (as arranged by Billy Klüver) to fabricate his *White Paintings* in Stockholm for the exhibition "*Den inre och den yttre rymden* [Inner and Outer Space]" at the Moderna Museet. One work, the two-panel *White Painting*, was fabricated and exhibited. In 1968, Rauschenberg authorized Brice Marden, then his studio assistant, to execute as necessary any missing units and to freshly paint the entire set. Rauschenberg considers this second, complete set of the five *White Paintings* (pls. 31–35) his current official version of the works and ascribes to them, in line with his original concept, the date of 1951. These were shown for the first time together at Castelli Gallery, New York, October 12–27, 1968." Rauschenberg, Rose, and Avedon, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg*, 80.

²⁶³ <http://www.sfmoma.org/press/releases/news/359> [last accessed July 19th, 2012].

see.²⁶⁴ The White Paintings perform visual triage and rescue, perhaps especially for Rauschenberg with relation to his recent personal upheaval; and they are “not art because they take you to a place painting has not been.” Instead, they are “large white (1 white as 1 God) canvases...with the innocense [sic] of a virgin.”²⁶⁵ For Rauschenberg, the paintings present a cartography of mystery, “they take you to a place painting has not been.” More important than Rauschenberg’s claim regarding the importance of the canvases with regard to the history of art so far, is his description that the paintings move those who see them. Interpreters do not strictly decide what they express, but the canvases constitute gazers, just like they did to Rauschenberg himself as he stumbled into quasi-theological language in order to discursively portray their significance to Parsons. The canvases provoked within Rauschenberg an unexpected and theologically pregnant reaction.

Encouraging a kind of immediate consciousness within time, the canvases activate self-negating religious practice. “[T]hey are a natural response to the current pressures of the faithless and a promoter of intuitional optimism. it [sic] is completely [sic] irrelevant [sic] that I am making them —Today is their Creator [sic].”²⁶⁶ However one interprets the sensational correspondence of Rauschenberg to Parsons, the *White Paintings* are not theologically neutral. Rauschenberg’s language to Parson’s seems to restate the sentiment of the newspaper clippings he embedded in the lower right hand corner of *Mother of God* two years earlier, “An

²⁶⁴ Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg : The Early 1950s*, 230.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

invaluable spiritual road map...As simple and fundamental as life itself." What Rauschenberg did not and indeed could not convey or foresee in his letter to Parsons was the way in which Cage would sonically modulate the latent theological tendencies and visual erasure of the canvases into an iconic musical statement gesturing towards givenness suggestive of holy charity.

Another White Painter

Whether, as Rauschenberg implores, today ultimately created the *White Paintings*, he wasn't the first to paint white canvases. In 1918, Kazimir Malevich, founder of the avant-garde Supremetist movement that produced geometric abstract paintings, especially ones emphasizing circular and square form, painted *White on White* as a representation of the aesthetic belief, Supremetism—"the supremacy of pure feeling or perception in the pictorial arts."²⁶⁷ Malevich's painting was among the most radical in its day. It combined personal affections as Malevich's "hand is visible in the texture of the painting," while the "imprecise outlines of the painting's inner asymmetrical square generate a feeling of infinite space rather than definite borders."²⁶⁸ A similar balance of communicating accessible infinite space undergirds Rauschenberg's *White Paintings*. The *White Paintings* radicalize theological associations from Rauschenberg's previous religious works from *Trinity* to *Mother of God* and his simplicity of compositional style beginning with *This is the First Half*.

²⁶⁷ See http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=80385, [last accessed July 19th, 2012].

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

More “Silent” Composers

Neither was Cage to first to compose “silent” music. Alphonse Allais, a French humorist and friend of a composer, Erik Satie, whose works influenced Cage, wrote a piece with entirely blank measures called *Funeral March for the Obsequies of a Deaf Man* (1897). Satie’s own *Vexations* (approx. 1893) includes directions that “To play this motif for oneself 840 times in a row, it will be good to prepare oneself beforehand, and in the greatest silence, thorough serious immobilities.”²⁶⁹ His *musique d’ameublement* is the historical inverse of 4’33”. Instead of performing silence and emphasizing environmental sound, Satie’s piece scores music as environmental sound and requests that audience members not listen to it. Others like Erwin Schulhoff’s “In futurum” in *Fünf Pittoresken* (1919) and *Yves Klein’s Monotone Silence Symphony* (1947–48) were scored only with rests and twenty minutes of silence. 4’33”, however, is not a musical punch line. Nor does an experimental contrast of rest or silence against sound drive its musical argument. Instead, 4’33” asserts that sonic ubiquity gives musics superabundantly and without limit.

Sites of Givenness

Cage’s dual claim for sonic ubiquity concerning the location and content of

²⁶⁹ As quoted in Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence*, 76-77. Referencing Robert Orledge’s *Satie Remembered* (Portland: Amadeus, 1995), Gann also writes that Cage found the piece in 1949, had it published in *Contrepoints*, and performed it at the Pocket theater in New York “on September 9, 1963, at which a team of twelve pianists (including David Tudor and composers Christian Wolff, James Tenney, Philip Corener, David Del Tredici, and John Cale) took turns playing through the 840 suggested repetitions, a feat which took eighteen hours and forty minutes.”

music comes from his interpretation of the canvases of Rauschenberg as “never empty” and expressive of a “poetry of infinite possibilities.”²⁷⁰ Of Rauschenberg’s work, Cage writes, “[I]t is as though” the White Paintings initiate a “visit on the part of the stranger (who is divine).” One may sense in Cage’s words resonance of Huang Po and the notion of nothingness, but Cage here speaks of encounter and Divine mystery. Therefore he moves one step outside the words of the venerable Tang Dynasty sage. Cage makes a theological appeal, perhaps unawares. In a sense, Cage’s interpretation blurs the Orthodox distinction between images and prototypes, the former possessing no internal holiness yet perhaps suggesting divine connection and the latter portraying an invisible reality that compels the viewer to prayer.²⁷¹ Though he begins subtly with analogical phrasing, “it is as though,” Cage ends with an aesthetic outlook with theological implications. Yet as quickly as the meeting is established, “the stranger leaves, leaving the door open.”²⁷² The opening Cage provides *in his descriptions of Rauschenberg have theological implications not only* for visual art, but also for 4’33” and music elsewhere.

For Cage, the *White Paintings* open as sites of “[g]ifts, unexpected and unnecessary.”²⁷³ These gifts are near and in hand “not picked up in distant lands

²⁷⁰ Cage, *Silence*, 103.

²⁷¹ Robin Margaret Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2004), 72-73.

²⁷² Cage, *Silence*, 103.

but are things we already have.”²⁷⁴ The paintings espouse a unity similar to how Cage read Coomaraswamy as unifying art and life, but in this particular interpretation a conversion also takes place with theological implications where paradoxical proximity accompanies visually activated generosity. The expectation of viewers—a “pained struggle” to see a definitive picture where there is none—is “converted” from “wanting what we don’t have” to the unceasing “enjoyment of our possessions.” Our possessions amount to more than things we own according to Cage. Such enjoyment comprises the world itself.²⁷⁵ For Cage, the White Paintings show the givenness of the world as possessed and enjoyed.²⁷⁶

²⁷³ Ibid. For those who might contest my linking of Cage’s ideas regarding encounter and charity in the paintings of Rauschenberg, note Cage’s superscription on the first page of “On Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work”:

It [the article] may be read in whole or in part; any sections of It may be skipped, what remains maybe read in any order. The style of printing here employed is not essential. Any of the sections may be printed directly over any of the others, and the spaces between paragraphs may be varied in any manner. The words in italics are either quotations from Rauschenberg or titles of his works. To Whom it May Concern: The white paintings [sic] came first; my silent piece came later (98). [Italics Cage.]

Though Cage’s ambivalence about the use of his writing may also undermine my theological interpretation, I hope to convince the reader otherwise.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. Referring to other Rauschenberg works like *Monogram*, Cage does humorously make some exceptions to things already had “(...I needed a goat and the other stuffed birds, since I don’t have any, and I needed an attic in order to go through the family things)”

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ In a sense, the *White Paintings* are a negative culmination of the effect of ready-made art like DuChamp’s *Fountain*, perhaps even a secret testament to the original *Fountain*’s having vanished. Cage was also a confidant of DuChamp, and Morton Feldman once said “Duchamp freed the mind from the eye, while Cage freed one’s ears from the mind.” See Morton Feldman, “H.C.E. (Here Comes Everybody).”

But Who or What Gives?

Cage writes, "Having made the empty canvases (A canvas is never empty), Rauschenberg became the giver of gifts."²⁷⁷ Can such comprehensive having and enjoying be attributed to Rauschenberg as Cage suggests? Cage misidentifies who gives in the paintings. Cage's anthropomorphic attribution contradicts his theological starting point. His misidentification then sounds like Begbie now. Human intent determines theological operation within artwork. Rauschenberg creates the *White Paintings*. His creation facilitates a Divine encounter. The Divine encounter leads to a consciousness of comprehensive charity affirmed by the world or nature.

Yet whereas Cage and Rauschenberg use theological language to describe visual effect in the *White Paintings*, Begbie instead uses music to convey Christian doctrine. This use marks the ventriloquist trend in Begbie's writings. Though Begbie's theological argumentation concerning music appears direct in its appeal to God, in actuality, it isn't direct enough. Music may indeed disclose something about the creation of God, for example nature and time, but that disclosure does not necessarily lead to the Christian insight of creation's relationship with Jesus Christ. In fact, Begbie is only able to establish such a link because prior to his description of music as disclosive of time, a decision has already been made that time comes from

Interview with Peter Gena. *Triquarterly*, 54 (Spring 1982): 51-73; David Revill, *The Roaring Silence: John Cage, a Life*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Arcade Pub., 1992), 214-15., and Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence*, 88.

²⁷⁷ Cage, *Silence*, 103.

God.²⁷⁸

Yet where does God come from? In formulating dogmatic assertions like the one above about music and temporality and other facets of creation, Begbie has missed articulating much about a primary concern. He has neglected some kind of discussion regarding God's presence. Or, Begbie has at least made God very remote from phenomena in the world. If time is a gift of nature, or the world, and music grants reminder that the gift of time belongs to God and gives Christian insight, then somehow music must also disclose something about the presence of God. Indeed, the current project approaches the question of Divine presence by suggesting that all musics instantiate the generosity of God.

In his remarks concerning the *White Paintings* of Rauschenberg, Cage speaks toward the impossibility of God's presence. He imprecisely sketches a portrait of encounter with Diving giving. The theological abstraction Cage observes in the *White Paintings* also appears as foundational to his subsequent, seemingly blank "canvas" of music, 4'33". The next chapter overtly links the observations of Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* from Cage to his seminal composition 4'33", so that what Cage attempted to describe as Divine charity can be conceptually clarified. The aim is to incorporate Marion's concepts of the icon/idol heuristic, givenness, freedom, and the saturated phenomenon in order to show how Cage's 4'33" offers a historical portal, a musical one, introducing the argument that all musics

²⁷⁸ See Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music*, Engaging Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 220. See also the chapter "Music's Time" and the thirty references listed on index page 306 of ———, *Theology, Music, and Time* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

everywhere instantiate the generosity of God.

CHAPTER VI

THE UBIQUITY OF MUSIC AND SACRAMENTAL LIFE

The music of John Cage does not simply define “a new stance toward *hearing*.”²⁷⁹ A piece like 4’33” provides passage from a theological convention to treat music as reiteration of preconceived doctrine (theological ventriloquy) to re-examination of musics as instances of Divine charity, perhaps even manifestation of the revelatory. At one level 4’33” provides opening to a musical world where the ubiquity of sound gives music without limit. Yet at a deeper stratum, the piece has an elemental musical sensibility that destabilizes the stances of its listeners and performers into unanticipated considerations of unforeseen and unpredictable musical moments as manifesting Divine giving of inexplicable proportion.

The mode of hearing that 4’33” defines and the freedom it espouses proceed from the inspiration of the *White Paintings* from Robert Rauschenberg. Yet 4’33” does not silently mime or replicate the effect of the canvases. Nor does it link to them in a causal chain. Rather, both artworks are unified by a ubiquitous charity. They share a givenness that paradoxically appears within and eludes their artistic intentions and perceptions, bringing them to their limit. For this reason, the generosity suturing the artworks is perhaps more easily understood in a theological register.

²⁷⁹ Jean Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 52. [italics Nattiez.] Here, Nattiez elucidates his point by comparing the music of Cage to Russolo, Varèse, Schaeffer, and Murray Schafer.

Theologically reassessing how *4'33"* and *The White Paintings* redirect audience attention to immanent and immediate audio and visual surrounds involves at the first an understanding that their artistic affects do not emphasize or embody the ready-made, but bear witness to the already made, in a sense, the given. They bring awareness to what is given in the ordinary and everyday by implying that music and visual art have no bounds. The pieces also suggest that music and visual art have no identifiable point of origin or fundamental need for human authors or guiding concepts (like doctrine). Musics and the visual arts exercise freedom and instantiate givenness. They do so by amplifying and magnifying limitless musical and visual gifts that intimate an infinite charity active within the world and for humanity.

Cage comes close to an explicit interpretation of this idea when he intuits that Rauschenberg's canvases convey an optic "poetry of infinite possibilities" and initiate a "visit on the part of the stranger (who is divine)."²⁸⁰ His language seems prototypical of how theology and phenomenology can unite to explain the nature of things in the world. The realm of infinite possibility makes divine encounter perceptible. Admittedly, phenomenology does not perfectly describe what Cage experiences. Other methods might also suffice. Yet noticing a phenomenological character to Cage's commentary in retrospect makes for an uncomplicated and theologically illuminating advance to concepts from Marion. Marion's ideas like his icon/idol heuristic, givenness, and the saturated phenomenon help orient Cage's analysis of Rauschenberg toward an argument that radical charity and mysterious

²⁸⁰ John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, 1st ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 103.

divine encounter also intercept the sonic content of 4'33" and any sound for that matter.

On Jean-Luc Marion & Phenomenology

Marion came to prominence first as a Cartesian scholar and a phenomenologist, and then as a writer of theology. Therefore, his corpus of thought contains ideas that intersect as much as they diverge from one another. For this reason, the use of Marion does not follow chronological or developmental order. Moreover, a comprehensive review of Marion's projects will not take place or become necessary for our purposes. That Marion's ideas help elucidate rather than create the argument of Divine charity within sonic ubiquity is key because music is not here illustrating phenomenological claims. Phenomenology simply provides vocabulary to describe the elusive nondiscursive theological contribution of music. Rather, selections from his argumentation regarding his icon/idol heuristic, givenness, and the saturated phenomenon will be deployed as approximate guides for discovering how a piece like 4'33" participates in the instantiation of gifts from God.

Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy that probes and articulates the philosophical significance of phenomena in the world. Anything a human can encounter in the world can be considered a phenomenon, including the apparent and nonapparent. The latter category becomes especially important for the theological dimension of the study here because God and God's giving do not, for all practical purposes, appear as other phenomena do or even at all. They remain most

of the time entirely elusive to sight. Though the language of appearance has an ocularcentric connotation, phenomenology's chosen source material also includes the sonic. Therefore, the chapter brings phenomenological concepts to bear upon a theoretical device for theological hearing and attention to sound.

Though heavily indebted to Cartesian writings on mind and body and Kantian modes of perception, phenomenology began as a separate philosophical discourse with the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61) are perhaps the most well known phenomenological thinkers. Historically, phenomenology has focused upon the question of *Being* by reinterpreting the limits of transcendence and immanence and challenging the notion of causality. A shared and agreed upon outcome of such reconsideration among phenomenologists is that metaphysics, the philosophical investigation of what exists (ontology) and what and how reality is (epistemology of the world based upon causality and sufficient reason), has come to an end.²⁸¹ Neither reason nor causal thinking can suffice for understanding the world because reason alone and privileging causal thinking reduces the world “by regarding it as thought or consciousness of the world” rather than the world itself.²⁸² Arguably, Cage reached a similar conclusion but by different means and articulation when he studied Zen

²⁸¹ For a more thorough definition of metaphysics, see Robin Le Poidevin, “What is metaphysics?” in Robin Le Poidevin, *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009), xvii-xxii.

²⁸² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, [Rev.]. ed. (London [Atlantic Highlands], NJ: Routledge & K. Paul; Humanities Press, 1981), xvii.

and sought to apply the mode of thought to his compositional method.²⁸³ Drawing a parallel like this is not without philosophical warrant or precedence, because Heidegger also studied Zen and Asian philosophies in order to develop his phenomenological arguments.²⁸⁴ In any case, eschewing a metaphysical basis for theologically understanding a phenomenon like sound vitally grounds the proceeding arguments that music instantiates God's giving. The generosity of God, while perceivable, exceeds frameworks of human reason, cognition and comprehension, three nonnegotiable domains of knowledge for metaphysical integrity and certitude.

For phenomenologists, the world does not appear according to the rules of human thought. The world simply "worlds."²⁸⁵ In order to approach the world as it appears, phenomenologists endeavor to illuminate understanding about phenomena in the world without first "falling back on ourselves."²⁸⁶ The world does not manifest according to the laws of reason or causality. Rather, it appears simply as itself according to itself to which phenomenologists develop incomplete and fluctuating categories of understanding in order to interpret the world's ways of

²⁸³ See chapter 4 of the current project.

²⁸⁴ Reinhard May and Graham Parkes, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East Asian Influences on His Work* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996).

²⁸⁵ Heidegger writes perhaps the most efficient summation of phenomenological stance toward the world, "*Welt weltet.*" in "Die Gefahr" in Martin Heidegger, *Bremer Und Freiburger Vorträge*, Gesamtausgabe. Iii. Abteilung, Unveröffentlichte Abhandlungen, Vorträge, Gedachtes / Martin Heidegger; (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1994), 47.

²⁸⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

appearing.²⁸⁷ Intention and to a degree, immediate sensation take the philosophical lead. Though pioneers like Husserl and his notion of a “pure” observer initially made phenomenological discourse seem disembodied and again visuocentric, Merleau-Ponty, and more recent concentration upon embodiment like Lisa Guenther’s *The Gift of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction* and Marion’s *The Erotic Phenomenon* have shown otherwise.²⁸⁸

In the latter half of the twentieth century, as phenomenologists have reinterpreted the boundaries of transcendence and immanence, *Being* and existence, they have also interrogated the commitment to methodological atheism that has established these limits by “turning towards God.” The turn marks a particular stance regarding phenomenology’s rejection of metaphysics. The revelatory, in addition to the reasonable, is considered accessible to human thinking not only as a boundary or limit to uphold and acknowledge for intellection concerning self and the world, but an inevitable destination of philosophical inquiry that seeks to understand life. For theological phenomenologists, revelation is also foundational to theological discourse. As will be shown later, Marion in particular affirms that music can deliver the revelatory.

²⁸⁷ Edmund Husserl and Donn Welton, *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology*, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 39-59, 65. Jean-Paul Sartre and Hazel Estella Barnes, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), 5. For an interpretation based upon human embodiment as part of the world, see “Freedom” in Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 504-30.

²⁸⁸ See Lisa Guenther, *The Gift of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction*, Suny Series in Gender Theory (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). and Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Emmanuel Lévinas (1906–95) pioneered the move toward God within phenomenology. Others like Jean-Luc Marion (b.1946), Michel Henry (1922–2002) and Jean-Louis Chrétien (b. 1952) have followed with decisive integration of their faith and belief into their philosophical and theological writings.²⁸⁹ And again, subsequent paragraphs concentrate on the work of Marion. It will soon become apparent, however, that the operation of linking phenomenological method with theological concerns becomes complex due to the theoretical maneuvering involved in replacing presuppositions that are usually bracketed (bracketing presuppositions or committing to a philosophical epoché is a standard practice in phenomenology) with confessed faith commitments.²⁹⁰ Though not sharing the religious innovation of the aforementioned thinkers, Alfred Schutz, F. Joseph Smith, and Thomas Clifton were among the first to incorporate phenomenology in the study of music, especially with relation to ethnomusicology (the study of music and

²⁸⁹ For Marion, Henry, Chrétien and others, see Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology and The "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, 1st ed., Perspectives in Continental Philosophy; (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000). For an introduction to the theological turn in Lévinas, who was deceased by the time of Janicaud compilation of essays, see Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Duquesne Studies. Philosophical Series, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969). Not mentioned above is Jean-Yves Lacoste, also a pivotal thinker in this movement and Paul Ricouer. For an introduction to Lacoste, see Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute : Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, 1st ed., Perspectives in Continental Philosophy; (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004). For a North American perspective, see Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology*, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

²⁹⁰ For an introduction to epoché, see Husserl and Welton, *The Essential Husserl*, 322-33. See also pages 371-373.

culture).²⁹¹ Paul Ricouer (1913–2005) has also widely influenced ethnomusicology and has separately contributed to phenomenology’s theological turn.²⁹²

More explicitly, Bruce Ellis Benson intertwines theological concern with phenomenological analysis of music in *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music*.²⁹³ In conversation with minds like Husserl, Heidegger, Ingarden, Gadamer, and Levinas, Benson challenges the dichotomy between composer and performer in order to promote a phenomenological and theological ethic of listening and dialogue grounded in the spontaneous and growing creation and re-creation, and experimental hospitality and intersubjectivity of improvisation. Benson strikingly outlines how the performance of music manifests as a ludic tradition belonging to and controlled by no one. Performances of music are gifts shared by all. He also mentions the importance of Boulez and Cage as “self-proclaimed rebels” whose experimentations erase divisions between performer

²⁹¹ Alfred Schultz, “Fragments on the Phenomenology of Music,” in *In Search of Musical Method*, F.J. Smith, ed. (London: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers 1976), 23–71. F. Joseph Smith “Toward a Phenomenology of Music: A Musician’s Composition Journal,” in *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring, 1995): 21–33. Thomas Clifton, *Music as Heard: A Study in Applied Phenomenology* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983).

²⁹² One example of Ricouer deployed in ethnomusicology is Helena Simonett, *Banda: Mexican Musical Life across Borders*, Music/Culture (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2001). Of course Ricouer also stands within the locus of religious innovation in phenomenology. Yet his hermeneutic approach strives to maintain a separation between “religious allegiance” and philosophical undertaking. In addition to Ricouer’s contribution in the Janicaud volume, see also Morny Joy, “Paul Ricouer, Solitude, Love, and the Gift,” in Jonna Bornemark and Hans Ruin, *Phenomenology and Religion: New Frontiers*, Södertörn Philosophical Studies ; (Huddinge: Södertörn University, 2008).

²⁹³ Bruce Ellis Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2003).

and composer.²⁹⁴ Yet Benson remains committed to categories of musical genre and a view a musical history anchored in Western tonality that distinguishes his work from the ultimately spatial argument here of music as immanent in sonic ubiquity and instance of God's giving.

In addition to theology and music, phenomenological method has been deployed for questions regarding, race, gender, psychology, and cognitive science to name a few.²⁹⁵ Again, for the purposes of the study currently underway, further elaboration of phenomenology as a school of thought will give way to selective interpretation. The current project will only explore those phenomenologists and phenomenological ideas (mainly Marion's) where they help clarify the question concerning givenness and its relation to God's giving within music. The author promotes phenomenological theology as one kind of solution for conundrums in the theological study of music and one way of interpreting Cage's work and theological appropriation of it. Realizations about musics as given and as participating in God's giving could occur without the aid of phenomenology or even Cage's 4'33".

Additionally, here particular facets of phenomenology open conditions for thinking about music theologically. Yet uncritical and generalized use of

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 189.

²⁹⁵ See for example; Simone de Beauvoir, Constance Borde, and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, *The Second Sex* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009). Louis A. Sass, Josef Parnas. "Phenomenology of Self-Disturbances in Schizophrenia: Some Research Findings and Directions," *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 8, no. 4 (December 2001):347–356, Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008).

phenomenological discourse for theology risks contracting contemplation and writing about God and Divine giving, shortening historical purview, univocalizing cultural variances, and evacuating notions of human identity (with relation to gift, but also to history, culture, and human identity proper).²⁹⁶

For example, among her many critical remarks, theologian Katherine Tanner speaks about how phenomenology “disallows” revelation that would exceed phenomenological description, how Marion’s description of givenness occludes the historical consideration that gift giving has varied considerably over time and that giving differs across cultures, and how Marion’s version of gift actually reifies competitive forms of exchange that evacuates identities of Christ and humanity as transparent pointers to God.²⁹⁷ While these criticisms exceed the scope of the argument at hand, there may be theological promise in working out a positive theory of gift based upon obligation and an empowering kind of reciprocity with relation to economic writings about other gift cultures.²⁹⁸ More directly tied to this

²⁹⁶ For recent criticisms of phenomenology’s use within theology, See Joshua Davis, “The Call of Grace: Henri de Lubac, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and the Theological Conditions of Christian Radical Phenomenology” in Benson and Wirzba, *Words of Life*, 181-95.

For additional debate about the theological ramifications of gift, especially those Trinitarian and with relation to cultural and philosophical problems as set forth by “modernity,” see also John Milbank, “Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic,” *Modern Theology* 11, no. 1 (1995). And Sarah Coakley, “Why Gift? Gift, Gender, and Trinitarian Relations in Milbank and Tanner,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 2 (2008).

²⁹⁷ See Katherine Tanner “Theology at the Limits of Phenomenology” in (Kevin Hart, *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 203, 15, 22-27.

²⁹⁸ Annamma Joy, “Gift Giving in Hong Kong and the Continuum of Social Ties,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 28, no. 2 (2001).

chapter, Tanner also criticizes Marion's appeal to art as iconic as demonstrating "a rare taste for a rare class."²⁹⁹ British theologian John Milbank also makes a similar kind of critique about modern art's violently perfecting the boundary between spectator and performer.³⁰⁰ Both remarks from Tanner and Milbank would seem to extend to the use of an avant-garde piece like 4'33", except that Cage's piece is arguably a critique against the elitism that Tanner and Milbank find as problematic. The piece itself is a striking example of utter musical accessibility available for all. In any case, among many theological options, the author finds developments in the joining of phenomenology and theology theoretically most convincing for treading the still new ground of sonic theology.³⁰¹

Begbie's Phenomenological Reliance and Discretion

A latent phenomenological vein also runs through Begbie by way of Jewish and Austrian musicologist, Viktor Zuckerkandl. More than any other scholar of

²⁹⁹ Tanner in Hart, *Counter-Experiences*, 216.

³⁰⁰ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*, Radical Orthodoxy Series (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003), 36.

³⁰¹ Perhaps one of the earliest uses of the term "sonic theology" is found in Guy L. Beck, *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound*, Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993). In this study, Beck seeks to broaden the meanings of "sonic" and "theology" in order to trace new "hermeneutic paradigms" for understanding the interconnectivity between a prominent sample of Hindu sectarian traditions. The current project proposes yet further trajectories for sonic theology by exploring sound and music as phenomena of God's charity.

For Beck's further innovations regarding sonic theology, see Guy Beck, *Sonic Liturgy: Ritual and Music in Hindu Tradition* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2011). For monographs paralleling the pioneering work of Beck, see Annette Wilke and Oliver Moebus, *Sound and Communication: An Aesthetic Cultural History of Sanskrit Hinduism* (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2007).

music, Zuckerkandl catalyzes Begbie's claims about the theological profundity of music. Zuckerkandl generates his ideas from developments in philosophy of language and phenomenology. He mixes Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Husserl with musical pioneers such as fellow Austrian musicologists Erich Moritz von Hornbostel and Carl Stumpf, who in many ways began ethnomusicology, or the study of music in various cultural environments. Notably, Stumpf advised Husserl's habilitation thesis in Halle in 1887 and *Logical Investigations* is dedicated to Stumpf.³⁰² Physicist and pioneering author regarding the perception of music, Hermann von Helmholtz, by contrast championed "internal" or physiological grounds for justifying Western tonality as ideal and "natural" sound. Constellating minds like these, Zuckerkandl forms phenomenological and mystical explanations for the true nature of music and its universal presence.³⁰³ Begbie, has in turn, extended the conceptual framework of Zuckerkandl, especially regarding music and temporality. Yet Begbie gives little focused attention to the phenomenological

³⁰² Denis Fiset, "Carl Stumpf," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2009). See also <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/stumpf/> [last accessed July 19th, 2012].

³⁰³ For the significance of Hornbostel and Stumpf for ethnomusicology, see Philip Bohlman, "Representation and Cultural Critique in the History of Ethnomusicology" in Bruno Nettl and Philip Vilas Bohlman, *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music: Essays on the History of Ethnomusicology*, Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). For Helmholtz, see Hermann von Helmholtz and Alexander John Ellis, *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music* (London,: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1875). 1912 and 1954 editions.

outlook of Zuckerkandl even though phenomenology acts as a primary dialogue partner for Zuckerkandl's arguments concerning the nature of music.³⁰⁴

The use of phenomenology here, however, differs markedly from Begbie. Begbie does not attend to phenomenology as a method for generating theological claims from music. The phenomenological pulse in Begbie is muted by his more common ventriloquist use of music to voice Christian doctrine. Of course theological ventriloquy is not problematic in every case. For example, a major triad can help exemplify and perhaps even demystify Trinitarian relationship.³⁰⁵ Yet if God is creator of all, and music is a part of God's creation, then it becomes vital in theological discourse that study of music also consider how music not only illustrates beliefs about God, but (perhaps more provocatively) how music instantiates what is of God. Theological ventriloquy does not make room for such instantiation because music exclusively functions as a conduit for preconceived notions of belief.

Begbie does come close to proceeding from music as an instance of God's relationship with the world when he mentions how the balance of distinction and interpenetration of harmonizing notes "embodies" the reconciliation and freedom

³⁰⁴ See for example Zuckerkandl responding to Husserl's use of music as an object exemplary of time by asserting that "Our hearing of time corresponds to our seeing and touching of space." Victor Zuckerkandl, *Sound and Symbol*, Bollingen Series, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 254. For Husserl's discussion of temporality and melody, see Husserl and Welton, *The Essential Husserl*, 194-96.

³⁰⁵ "Sound Mix" in Jeremy Begbie, *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 147-48. For a similar argument based upon a major interval, C-E, see ———, "Sound Theology: Meaning in Music," *The Christian Century* 124, no. 23 (2007): 23-24.

of God.³⁰⁶ Yet he does not develop this fertile train of thought. The approach underway in this chapter differs because it treats music as a first manifestation to which theological description responds. As such, the following pages do not proclaim, "Listen to this! It's what givenness sounds like!" The classifications of idol, icon, givenness, and saturated phenomenon only approximate how music instantiates God's giving. Such giving, though argued here as perceivable, remains ultimately incomprehensible and never adequately articulated for conceptual understanding. Moreover, the reorienting Cage to take place does not involve re-educating Cage. There is no need to convert his statements toward clearer theological expression. Neither is it necessary to make 4'33" a religious piece of music. Rather, phenomenological discourse aims to theoretically clarify and bridge what Cage intuits in the *White Paintings to 4'33"* for the sake of describing a persistent charity already operative in all sound that suggests the grace of God.

A Eucharistic Reference

A more explicit phenomenological appeal in Begbie occurs in his Eucharistic arguments with reference to Marion. (In fact, Begbie only refers to Marion with regard to the Eucharist.) What Marion provides Begbie is a Eucharistic framework, a persuasive account about how temporality and Eucharistic presence function in the Eucharist independent from the will of the Church. The Eucharist is pure gift given in time provided and determined by Christ. From the past, it is temporalized as memorial that gives meaning to the present by activating a remembrance and

³⁰⁶ Begbie, "Sound Theology: Meaning in Music," 23-25.

pledge of Christ's faithfulness. From the future, it is temporalized as eschatological announcement, a promise of Christ's return and our redemption. From the present, the Eucharist is "dailyness and viaticum."³⁰⁷ It reminds us of God's daily grace to be received in every instant, hour, and day. Even in death, we cannot be separated from Christ. One day Christ will return. The Eucharist is a pure gift temporalized from past and future, and finally from the present as gifts strictly determined by the presence of Christ.³⁰⁸

For Begbie, Marion's interpretation of the Eucharist also coincides with musical repetition. Past, present, and future "co-inhere" in musical repetition resembling the function of temporality in each celebration of the Eucharist. In the same way that communicants do not seek to recover an event that is forever retreating, musical repetition does not carry forward reiterated motifs in order to preserve musical phrases "that otherwise might be lost in oblivion." Instead, past, present, and future literally harmonize and unfold in peace in musical repetition. Likewise, at every repeated table celebration, God not only calls us anew again, reminding us of the ministry of Jesus and the resurrection of Christ, but also beckons us to experience such love now and continue to live in it when final judgment occurs. While Begbie assuredly identifies sacramental thinking in Marion that illuminates characteristics related to the approach and reception of consecrated bread and wine (or grape juice), music still functions as theological demonstration in his sacramental argumentation, in this case, of an awareness of

³⁰⁷ Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 172.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 171-72.

time at the Lord's Supper based upon Marion's assertions concerning Eucharistic temporality.

Marion, however, also provides theoretical description of phenomena in the world that helps reverse Begbie's tendency to use music analogously. For example, music functions as a theological amplifier of preconceived claims. Marion's ideas help to counteract the strain of theological ventriloquy in Begbie's writings and generally found within theological examination of music. Instead he supplies phenomenologically-based concepts that help with the theological deciphering of what music articulates. Specifically, his assertions provide vocabulary for talking about how music instantiates Divine charity.

To make the phenomenological transition at hand clearer, let us begin by foregrounding what Begbie remains discreet about in his appeal to Marion (unless one counts his touching upon Marion's language of gift)—Marion's phenomenological espousal of time within the Eucharist.³⁰⁹ In the passage from Marion that Begbie uses, Marion differentiates between time as experienced in Eucharistic presence and the "ordinary conception of time" that Heidegger diagnoses as persisting in "metaphysics as a whole, from Aristotle to Hegel (and Nietzsche)."³¹⁰ Rehearsing the intellectual history which Marion references will not be necessary here. What is crucial to grasp en nuce is that Marion expands Heidegger's diagnosis into a theological ailment inherited from metaphysics that phenomenological thinking can resolve. Time or the present—what Marion also

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 172.

³¹⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 170

calls the “*here and now*,”—determines what is present. Though Begbie adopts Marion’s description of Eucharistic temporality and language of gift, he presumes the presence of God in his theological analysis of music without asking and explaining how such presence takes effect musically.

Presence and the Present

Marion summarizes the metaphysical view critically as follows, “The present assures an objective possession of that which *is* (in the) present.”³¹¹ The present grants presence. A theological suspicion arises because both past and future are disqualified by the “primacy of the present.” Past and future are also prohibited from “producing the available and assured hold over being that only the present confers.” The Eucharistic implication is that the presence of Christ, in the moment of celebration, becomes subject to time rather than its creator.

In opposition, Marion insists that the “eucharistic presence of Christ as consecrated bread and wine” determine their own reality, temporality and reception. Not only does Marion take a clear phenomenological stance when he claims that the gifts themselves (the phenomena of the Eucharistic elements) determine their own reality, temporality and reception. He also makes a phenomenological clarification by insisting that any question of time must also query presence, and interpret the relationship between these two phenomena. This kind of clarification is crucial for, but not limited to sacramental discussion. Rather, phenomenologists frequently query presence along with that of temporality

³¹¹ Ibid.

because phenomena in the world appear temporally. In a similar fashion, but irreducible to the world of phenomena, time and presence are fundamental concerns for theology because God, though eternal, acts within time.

Of course God is not ultimately reducible to a phenomenon. Once again, even as phenomenon *par excellence*, God does not appear as other phenomena do. The partnership of time—at least with respect to Christianity—is delicate given that faith and its study rest upon unrepeated and unverifiable referents like creation, the pasch, ascension, and unforeseen but nevertheless anticipated events like the eschaton and the renewal of all things, not to mention elusive concepts like infinity. The author of the current project shall not attempt to explain these complexities here, but acknowledge them as enormities exceeding the scope of the current argument and deserving of their own investigation at another time.

Rauschenberg, Cage, and Marion

The *White Paintings* are not a Eucharistic celebration. Nor do they activate Eucharistic presence. Yet the sacramental interpretation from Marion arguably applies to Rauschenberg and Cage's interpretation of the canvases. In a sense, Rauschenberg reconstructs the problem of temporality as understood by metaphysics. When Rauschenberg writes that the paintings are created by "Today," his statement resembles the misguided presumption that present grants presence.

Rauschenberg, however, also perceives a way out of such thinking, which Cage follows. Though Rauschenberg does not seriously consider the magnitude evoked when he associates the whiteness of the paintings with "1 GOD," Cage does. His

articulations of radical giving and Divine encounter in view of the *White Paintings* parallel how Marion specifies that the gifts of the Eucharist give their own temporality, reality, and reception. Cage's words sound proto-phenomenological. Yet a problem arises because Cage ultimately attributes such charity and mystery to Rauschenberg. Therefore, he still roots his commentary in authorial intent. As such, from a different angle, Cage more precisely articulates a historical example of visual ventriloquy. Rauschenberg decides and furnishes for his canvases what they will portray.³¹² In order to remedy the problematic dimensions of Cage's commentary on the *White Paintings*, and return to the alignment between Marion and Cage, especially with regard to how givenness of a sacramental character and its relationship to the individuality of phenomenon pertain to the theological dimensions of 4'33", we will now turn to Marion's art focused arguments in *The Crossing of the Visible*.

The White Paintings as Iconographic

According to Marion, the painter serves instead as an escort for a charitable work occurring with the "occasion" of the painting. A painter like Rauschenberg does not ultimately create or control meaning within a work as its author. Instead, "The painter records. He does not invent."³¹³ The painting "gives itself [*se donne*],"

³¹² Of course it is debatable whether the *White Paintings* actually participate in ventriloquism. In a sense Cage prematurely misinterprets the *White Paintings* in part because he does not anticipate Rauschenberg's later directions of abandon regarding the distribution and further showing of the artwork, which dissolve notions of authorship and what the canvases portray.

and initiates a “welcome” or it summons an encounter between viewer and artwork which is made possible by a gift that establishes and “surpasses the scope of the welcome,” the labor and intent of the artist, and the expectation of the viewer.³¹⁴ The gift parallels Cage’s suggestion of the giving in the *White Paintings* as being the world itself. Yet the world is given in such a way that a “disproportion” emerges and an at first improbable, perhaps impossible link, becomes perceivable. A component part of this disproportion is the displacement of the author as primary determiner of the artwork’s effect and in our case, its theological profundity.

For Marion, paintings, including Rauschenberg’s, make visible a givenness that exceeds artistic exchange. The *White Paintings*, and for Marion, any painting exceeds exchange by catalyzing a visual fusion. Cage detects radical charity in the *White Paintings* but misattributes it to Rauschenberg. The charity he perceives actually coincides with the motion of the divine stranger whom Cage also rightly apprehends in the *White Paintings*, even though this stranger evades direct comprehension. The *White Paintings* function as icons that overwhelm the intention of the artist and the expectation of the viewer by exposing an irreconcilable distance. They share an unanticipated generosity that compels piety in the artist’s craft and the viewer’s gaze by literally making the unseen (that is the divine) seen.³¹⁵ And as icons, *The White Paintings* have no “autonomous glory.”³¹⁶

³¹³ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 36.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

Though Rauschenberg proclaims that “Today is their Creator,” the paintings do not merely mark the invention of artwork by time. Their creation and manifestation exist with profound dependency upon a mysterious presence. The canvases provoke a gift-giving encounter with a divine stranger, which Cage noticed from the start. Yet Cage erred in his attribution of how such presence became constituted. Neither the generosity nor the divine encounter of the *White Paintings* occurs as a result of efforts from Rauschenberg. On the contrary, the artwork gives and invites the viewer into experiencing overwhelming charity and incomprehensible but approachable vulnerability that is God’s giving.

4’33” and Freedom

Because 4’33” shares the radical generosity and Divine encounter of the *White Paintings*, the elucidation of God’s giving can proceed in a musical register. For anyone experiencing 4’33”, introspective stereo mixes with exterior soundscapes providing fields of sounds without boundary. From the clairaudient to the crystal clear, 4’33” presents an array of concurrent and contrasting sonic possibilities that incessantly produce music. Furthermore, noises from insects, animals, and humans contrapuntally interact with the ambience of nature and the built environment to give matrices of music that exceed even the parameters of the piece itself. Sonic ubiquity gives music effusively.

While the “argument” of the piece that all sound gives music takes shape within the artistic and temporal frame that Cage has constructed,

³¹⁶ Ibid., 34.

the musical charity of sonic ubiquity to which his composition attests has no dependence upon the specificity of the piece itself or upon the intent or identity of its author. 4'33" just happens to operate as one portal, one postwar avant-garde funnel, that helps persons, musically learned or not, recognize that all sound gives music. 4'33" therefore paradoxically instantiates the giving of God as a piece of music itself, but also vanishes to reveal the wider implication of sonic ubiquity as granting musics that instantiate Divine generosity since the work does not sound out any tone in particular. Rather, it draws attention to the musical surrounds of any context where it is performed. The recognition that all sound gives music has neither beginning nor end with respect to 4'33" because a portal or funnel has no identifiable beginning or end, only openings. And Cage does not originate the idea of music's ubiquitous availability. Like Rauschenberg in relation to the *White Paintings*, Cage merely escorts the musical summons of sonic ubiquity to more explicit audibility.

Cage directs attention to sonance outside human creativity. Yet neither do the sounds to which he draws attention originate in nature. The sonic content piercing through the frame of 4'33" discloses freedom, which is given by God.

On the one hand, Cage, like so many composers before him, makes music for the sake of freedom. Ancients engaged in music as a key to the harmony of the universe. Romantics modernized and transformed the music of the spheres sentiment by inventing absolute music as mirror of the subject, "who could believe itself to be invisible and omnipotent like God, when in reality it was invisible and

impotent like the aesthetic.”³¹⁷ Absolute music therefore practiced theological ventriloquy of the highest and most dubious order. Instead of impersonating through music beliefs about God, composers deified themselves by voicing in music their highest hopes of 19th century aesthetics. Wagner, who first introduced the term absolute music in 1846, creedally penned, “I believe in God, Mozart and Beethoven...I believe in the Holy Spirit and the truth of the one, indivisible Art... I believe that through this Art all men are saved, and therefore each may die of hunger for Her.”³¹⁸ In a way, 4’33” destabilizes the Romantic deification of musical minds, but only by way of diffusion, moving deification from musical giants to music itself. The composer is finally free, relinquished from his duties of having to create music intentionally. And 4’33” demythologizes the ancient belief in music of the spheres by making the concord of the universe realized and immanent. Music does not articulate invisible proportion and beauty, but the environmental surround is an already and immediately audible harmony. The music is free and given, unfettered from the composer’s intent and the listeners’ expectations.

Yet perhaps unbeknownst to Cage, the musical veneration of 4’33” also discloses a freedom independent from music. An absolute freedom provokes Cage to compose as he does and grounds a radical charity at work in his composition, the

³¹⁷ Daniel K. Chua, “Music as the Mouthpiece of Theology” in Jeremy Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie, *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*, The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.), 159.

³¹⁸ Daniel K. L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge UP, 1999), 240. Chua provides a modified translation from Richard Wagner, ‘Ein Ende in Paris’, *Sämtliche Schriften*, 1:135.

canvases of Rauschenberg that he interprets, the sonic and visual in general, and indeed, the world.

Freedom is free, even from Cage and his musical work, even though it consents to activation in 4'33". Taking another theological cue from Marion (and he perhaps from the apostle Paul [1 Cor. 7]), Marion describes freedom as the horizon of all possibility. Here, Marion places a phenomenological shift upon Kant's metaphysical explanation of freedom as "the possibility of all experience."³¹⁹ Freedom is not one among many possibilities, but the "possible par excellence."³²⁰ As such, freedom is not subject to human will, but revealed.

Neither does humankind control freedom. Instead, freedom "precedes" any decision to exercise it. In its anticipatory role, freedom "exposes" humanity to the radical potential of "as if."³²¹ In contrast to Kant, Marion removes the condition of causality for understanding freedom.³²² He also neutralizes Kant's description of freedom as a "pure transcendental idea."

Rather, for Marion, freedom manifests as radical potential that may provoke human actions. Or it may simply reside latently as that which is not defined by

³¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge UP, 1998), 533.

³²⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham UP, 2002), 48.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

³²² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. For example, Marion counters a statement like this one from Kant, "Thus freedom and nature, each in its full significance, would both be found in the same actions, simultaneously and without any contradiction, according to whether one compares them with their intelligible or their sensible cause. (537)"

theoretical determinations or physical applications. Put another way, freedom is grander than what we can grasp or deploy or experience for ourselves, and yet it grants participation in the graspable, deployable, and the ubiquitous like sound. As such, freedom escapes and anticipates “all theory subsequent to and before it.”³²³ In decisions to exercise freedom, humanity never knows what is being done, or why.

Freedom, not the self, provokes creative output like 4’33”, for “freedom always precedes the reasons for being free, since it provokes them.”³²⁴ In this way, Nietzsche mistakenly describes music as that which is “the direct copy of the will itself, and therefore represents the metaphysical of everything physical in the world, and the thing-in-itself of every phenomenon.”³²⁵ Musics exercise freedom, a freedom that is given, appearing within, but unbound by the world. Yet freedom does not operate as an abstract ventriloquist in a different key. It permeates life as gift.

Its summons does not participate in the conquest of human imagination or become the adopted vocabulary of vacuous art. Freedom does not control or predetermine its manifestations and is never fully brought to light in conceivable or concrete form. Its exercise continually varies with relation to its use. Despite its interplay with human will, freedom remains foreign to it because God gives freedom. Freedom often persists in actions that ignore or undermine recognition of

³²³ Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 52.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

³²⁵ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, and the Case of Wagner* (New York: Rusell & Russell, 1964), 124.

its theological root because God gives freedom without conditions. According to Marion, humankind exercises freedom from the urging of absolute possibility that never fully discloses itself. Freedom plays the role of mysterious provocateur, compelling without command, inspiring expressions of that never really amount to liberation, and that sometimes result in nothing at all or motivate measures contrary to emancipation. Though Cage endeavors in 4'33" to compose a piece of musical ubiquity and freedom that successfully replaces superstitions like dependence upon God, he fails to recognize that the absolute possibility of freedom that his piece instantiates in part is linked to a gift from God who is free and whom the Bible provisionally describes with the self identification of absolute liberty as *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh* (I will be what I will be).

The use of Marion here to displace the authorship of Cage as a determiner of what 4'33" communicates differs from German Cultural Theorist Theodor Adorno's appeal to form as the locus "where the work frees itself from being simply a product of subjectivity."³²⁶ For Adorno, form, an expression of will, a strategy of an author, acts as an intermediary between subjective activity and the product of subjective activity. Though the bare structure of 4'33" acts as scaffolding for the liberating rediscovery that all sound can be heard and used as music, it is not a crossing that both cancels and creates what Cage theorizes and what musically manifests. Form follows from freedom. Form materializes from a horizon of all

³²⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, Gretel Adorno, and Rolf Tiedeman, *Aesthetic Theory, Theory and History of Literature* ; (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 142.

possibility, which precedes the musical thought of Cage and enables the overlap Adorno details by provocation.

Moreover, freedom provokes Cage to explain his impression of the *White Paintings* with a trace of indecision, and misrepresentation mixed with theological risk. "It is *as though* the encounter was extended into a visit on the part of the stranger (who is divine)." Freedom, "the very horizon of all that is possible", provokes experimentation that approximates pure experience of freedom without granting itself absolutely. Specific to our examination of Cage, his *as though* is a flickering articulation of a cosmological possibility within the realm of freedom's *as if*. Cosmological possibility seems apt for what Cage describes because the Divine stranger does not enter the realm of fact, but traverses somewhere between probability and actuality, or within the domain of what one might call belief or even faith. In the viewing of plain white canvases, a visit with a divine stranger seems to have occurred for Cage. Freedom opens 4'33" in a similar manner.

As the piece displays that all sound can be heard and used as music, it exercises freedom and instantiates givenness available to everyone. Music occurs everywhere and gives itself freely to every person in the world. Every human can perceive sound immediately before them wherever they are, even persons unable to hear.³²⁷ Pitches have pulses that can be felt. Sounds reverberate in surplus as complete musical phenomena and as sonic components ready for incorporation

³²⁷ For a more pointed excursus regarding the nuances and challenges of developing a Christian (and self-stated Reformed) "theo-acoustics" with regard to deafness and audism (prejudice based upon hearing), see Stephen H. Webb, *The Divine Voice: Christian Proclamation and the Theology of Sound* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 51-55.

into a larger musical scheme, process, or abundance. Therefore, 4'33" offers one interpretation of how sonic ubiquity gives music. And because 4'33" announces what the *White Paintings* display, and these canvases exhibit a charity that compels Cage to transgress the perceptual powers of his own subjectivity and speak with theological discretion about a Divine Stranger, it also seems likely that the "emptiness" of 4'33" surrenders to a sonic expanse that showcases musical ingenuity and generosity beyond Cage's artistic contribution. This sonic expanse is unmade and unconditioned by reason and intent.

If the *White Paintings* mirror the invisible, 4'33" echoes what cannot be seen and what is (at least initially) unheard. Stunning the expectation of its listeners, 4'33" promotes hearing musical content that is "hidden in plain sight" and that saturates their entire field of audibility. It displays unbounded, free sound. This same sound announces a more radical freedom, a givenness, a giving of God, or what Christians might call "grace" or "love," perceived within but irreducible to audible content.

One may want to counter notions of 4'33" as manifesting freedom by pointing out that the very idea of ubiquitous music depends upon the piece's duration, its concert hall context, and genre association with 20th century serious music. Undoubtedly, these parameters enable the composition to communicate a musical perspective that few would intuit and even fewer would accept upon first attention. One may also make the critique that 4'33" operates as the ultimate exercise in ventriloquy because it merely functions as a shell through which any sound and musical ideology emanates, including the notion of sonorous grace. The

author of the current project commits the same foul as Begbie and others. He merely uses an all-purpose piece of music to evoke a more general theological claim.

Let us take the last critical remark and use it as a suture to fortify responses concerning the piece's duration and context. In the case of music, theological ventriloquism requires two subjects, a human with theological knowledge and music, which "voices" this knowledge. What you theologically hear is what music gets...from someone else. Yet consider the performance practice of 4'33" and the relationship it has with its author and its musical content. Though 4'33" may exemplify the assertion that all sound can be heard and used as music, its open statement that music exists everywhere does not rely upon the conditions, chronological or otherwise, laid out by Cage.

First, no dimension of the piece is fixed. In 1960, Cage made clear that "the work may be performed by any instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time."³²⁸ Secondly, with or without Cage's caveat, or even the frame of 4'33", the ubiquity of sound as music does not rely upon the creative output of any single mind or specific musical occurrence. The theory of 4'33" precedes and exceeds any particular performance of the piece. It neither commences with the piece's inception.

Nor does it belong to its author. The theory generating 4'33" does not originate or cause a musical method. It acknowledges and attests to a particular realm of the world's givenness—the ubiquity of sound. 4'33" does not surrender to

³²⁸ See photograph of 4'33" score published by CF Peters in 1961 in Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"* (New Haven: Yale UP 2010), 184.

the illusion of ventriloquy. Rather from itself, as a historical precedent of art that nevertheless continues in various permutations today, it unconceals a vibrant phenomenological realization, sonic ubiquity grants music. The compass of phenomenological realization associated with 4'33", however, also points in other directions.

Sonic ubiquity not only grants music. Sonic ubiquity is itself given and its givenness exercises freedom and voices God's charity. The same disqualification of intent with relation to purpose and production applies to the theological profundity that 4'33" showcases. Because 4'33" has no cause, neither Cage nor the array of sounds it emphasizes as music for any particular performance, it is an ideal musical piece for phenomenological examination, which analyzes phenomena in the world without the presumption of causality, including the notion that the author of the current project could cause 4'33" to operate in a theological manner. In no way am I does the author of the current project claim that 4'33" is a theological work, but rather that it automatically participates in a world resonating the generosity of God.

Every sound and therefore every music that sounds give emanates as synecdoche from the givenness of God. Here perhaps sacramental sensibilities akin to the eucharistic interpretations of Marion and Begbie take over where phenomenology remains more or less confessionally silent. The argument underway aims towards a sacramental understanding of all sound. We have already seen how latent phenomenology pulses within the writings of Begbie to drive theological arguments. Yet his sources like Scripture, the Church, and the knowing

Christian mute the further reaches of phenomenology's effectiveness for the theological study of music.

The current project, however, wants to foreground phenomenology by using the historical precedent of 4'33" to suggest a more expansive approach for traversing the frontier of theological analysis of music, without advocating phenomenology as a normative method. Therefore theological theorizing about music takes place based upon its particular manner of manifesting. Such manifestation displays giving from God. Yet admittedly, there exists the possibility that nothing theological manifests; that music communicates theological absence. But how could one be absolutely sure? That sacramental hopes for sonic ubiquity may also end up dashed, however, disables any attempt at theological ventriloquy too.

In any case, what sonic ubiquity suggests is that music exercises freedom. The freedom that 4'33" iterates gives. It provides space for using music to illustrate dogmatic claims as Begbie maintains, but it also coincides with the ability of music to generate theological insights as the current project aims to show, namely that music is a gift from God. Defining music according to sonic ubiquity and injecting this definition with theological purposes shifts the attribution of music strictly to human intent or authorship. It prevents the ventriloquist use of music to voice the theological claims of others. Further, connecting theological purposes to the ubiquity of sound as music does not automatically make God the ultimate composer of all that can be heard and experienced as music. Like freedom itself, music simply occurs and without necessary relation to any particular cause. It does, however,

make God the origin of all sound. Furthermore, the absence of causality does not preclude theological possibility because God does not need to cause an occurrence for it to bear sustained, inexplicable witness to the holy.³²⁹

Music and Givenness

The givenness of music in sonic ubiquity demarcates its possibility as gift from God. That music is given without recourse to an initiating human giver or human recipient absolves it from the complication of debt, which makes giving impossible because every gift then enters into an economic exchange. A gift cannot involve reciprocity. Yet a recipient receives a gift and feels beholden to the giver. In order to undo inevitable obligation to reimburse a gift received, a recipient must not know that a gift has been given. Such ignorance from a recipient, however, eliminates his or her standing as a recipient and consequently, erases the identification of gift giver as donor.³³⁰

With the giver made “anonymous”, and the receiver likewise bracketed out, the gift of music “gives itself from itself, as much from the viewpoint of the giver as from the viewpoint of the receiver.”³³¹ Music gives itself freely. Music proceeds as an undetermined and undecided gift to a recipient who has no one to recompense.

³²⁹ One may want to position God as cause of life. While the argument underway believes in God as creator, it finds reducing God to the status of a prime mover problematic.

³³⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Given Time. I, Counterfeit Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 10-33.

³³¹ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham UP, 2008), 94.

The recipient still enters into debt, but ironically owes no one everything. The insolvable debt internalizes as grounds that every facet of the recipient's being is given. Yet even if no such realization takes place, givenness nevertheless has occurred and continues to take place, without limit and without restriction, freely and with abandon. The giver also yields to the givenness of music in such a way that the giver must consent, consciously or not, to the fact that it is the gift, and not the self, that has obliged the giver to enter into givenness. The giver has been constituted by an "anterior gift." A primordial charity has already preceded any decision to give. In this case, a giver may be giving without knowing, or may be participating in givenness, without controlling the givenness that is occurring.³³²

Marion uses the questioning of the righteous in Matthew 25:37-40 as biblical analogy to exemplify how givenness can occur with recipient and donor bracketed. "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?"³³³ The agents of charity in the passage do not know that they have given to Christ and Christ has acted as an anonymous recipient in the "least of these" who have benefited from the quenching of thirst and satiation of hunger. Parallel to Marion's reading of the gospel, that sound announces itself and offers itself in every place, subtly and sonorously,

³³² Ibid., 91.

For a historical introduction into the "bracketing" method that Marion is here deploying, see Husserl's explanation of the phenomenological ἐποχή, or suspension of judgment in Husserl and Welton, *The Essential Husserl*, 65-67.

³³³ NRSV, Matt. 25:37-39.

whether we knowingly or unknowingly participate in the giving or receiving of musical possibility, makes it utterly given.

Because any and all experiences of sound—live, recorded, and otherwise—in life and in the world, are given, any and all musics are likewise gifts. Again, music no longer depends upon or originates with authorship. This is not to discount the participation of humans within musical process. Yet music does not originate with humankind, even when and if human beings are seen as creating music. Humans do not originate anything, but participate in an ongoing creation arising, flourishing, and failing out of what phenomenology calls givenness. The continuity of givenness suggests not only recipients—humanity and in some cases God—but also an ultimate donor—one bracketed out, but nevertheless one whom Marion, and the author (and many others?) imprecisely, maybe even mistakenly, identify as God. God enables and participates in the givenness of sound, music, and more provocatively, the world without being confused with it. Human intention may have something to do with determining what music is, but not always and not ultimately.

Music and the Saturated Phenomenon

Marion describes the concept of the saturated phenomenon as an innovation within phenomenology.³³⁴ He writes, “The saturated phenomenon will be described as *invisible* according to quantity, unbearable according to quality, absolute

³³⁴ For Marion’s description of the saturated phenomenon, see especially “The Saturated Phenomenon” in Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 18-48. And Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

according to relation, irregardable according to modality.”³³⁵ The categories of quantity, quality, relation, and modality derive from Kant’s appropriation of Aristotelian arguments concerning the nature of synthesis in thinking and understanding.³³⁶ For Kant, quantity refers to understandings of “unity,” “plurality,” and “totality.” Quality refers to “reality,” “negation,” and “limitation.” Relation takes up questions “of inherence and subsistence [Inhärenz und Subsistenz]” (qualities relating to nature and essence), “of causality and dependence,” and “of community.”³³⁷ Modality concerns the logical avenues of “possibility – impossibility,” “existence – non-existence,” and “necessity – contingency.”³³⁸ An elaborate excursus detailing the connections of these categories between Aristotle, Kant, and the intervening contributions of Descartes, Husserl, and Heidegger, with Marion’s phenomenological innovation surpasses the current aim to identify sonic ubiquity as a realm in which saturated phenomena occur.

The idea of a saturated phenomenon accounts for phenomenological exchange in which a phenomenon gives its own reasons for its manifestation to the extent that the intuition of an interacting subject is overwhelmed. As a result, unforeseen, unexpected, unanticipated, and unconditioned limits of

³³⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), 199.

³³⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 212, A80/B106.

³³⁷ Immanuel Kant and Raymund Schmidt, *Kritik Der Reinen Vernunft*, Philosophische Bibliothek, Bd. 37a (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1971), 118, A80/B06.

³³⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 212, A80/B106.

phenomenology become exposed.³³⁹ In the subversion of these limits, theology begins its work of expanding musical understanding.

Marion rejects the necessity of positioning quantity, quality, relation, and modality as original concepts contained in understanding that are prior to (*a priori*) rational judgments. Instead, Marion views Kant's quadrant of categories as realms affected and developed by phenomena in moments of encounter. En brief, for Marion, there is no rational *a priori* in phenomenological thinking. The subject's intuition is acted upon and constituted by that which it encounters.

This means for the theological analysis of music that the subject's intuition does not suffice as a catalyst for theological examination. Because sounds permeate life no matter where we are, or what we intend, musical innovations like 4'33" help us identify (without authorizing or causing such identification) the surplus of music overwhelming the rational structures we place upon musics in the world. In portals and wide-open instances of music like Cage's composition, we come to recognize that the ubiquity of sound is a limitless realm for the occurrence of saturated phenomena whereby the subject becomes constituted by the music, not the reverse. Musical phenomena may phenomenologically exceed any measurability with regard to quantity, override dimensions of quality, completely satisfy notions of relation, infinitely outmaneuver and advance the boundaries of modality, and

³³⁹ For a more thorough discussion of Marion's invention of the saturated phenomenon and its link to the genealogy of phenomenology, especially with regard to how Kant and Husserl's definitions of the phenomenon, see Jean-Luc Marion, "The Banality of Saturation" in Jean-Luc Marion, *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 2007), 383-85.

See also Christina M. Geschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 79-83.

therefore theologically disclose the revelatory. The possibility exists for musics to become transformed into saturated phenomenon and directly constitute our theological reception and interpretation of the sonic.

Marion grants place of privilege to music as providing occurrences of saturation.³⁴⁰ He describes the experience of hearing an aria as a moment of sheer joy enabled by “the pure and simple listening of the sonic intuition that it delivers.”³⁴¹ The restraint and genuineness he receives manifests inexplicably. He cannot imagine limiting the intuition that the sound gives to conceptualization. He writes, “Not that it [the music] pleases without concept—but rather because it calls for all, and calls for them because it saturates them all. Then, we listen to a saturated phenomenon.”³⁴² Saturation occurs in the musics that sonic ubiquity gives. Whereas Marion lists three “principle domains” by which revealed phenomenon occur, (1) “the painting as spectacle, that due to excess of intuition, cannot be constituted but still can be looked at (the idol);” (2) “a particular face that I love, which has become invisible not only because it dazzles me, but above all because in it I want to look and can look only at its invisible gaze weighing on mine (the icon),” and (3) “the theophany, where the excess of intuition leads to the paradox that an invisible gaze visibly envisages me and loves me;” a fourth

³⁴⁰ Marion, *Being Given*, 216.

See also Sander van Maas, "On Preferring Mozart," *Bijdragen* 65, no. 1 (2004): 107.

³⁴¹ Marion, *Counter-Experiences*, 394.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

complements his project—music, understood according to the ubiquity of sound—
as a domain for the saturated phenomenon.³⁴³

The Persistence of God's Musical Giving

Therefore, musics, as gifts from God, infiltrate aspects of life where God seems utterly remote. Unsuspectingly, musics bestow the revelatory without remainder and without explanation or intent beyond the incomprehensibility of Diving giving. Consider again the phenomenological understanding of the Eucharistic as pure gift given in time provided and determined by Christ. At the Lord's Supper, communicants share in an ironic meal whose past, present, and future, have as much to do with the shedding of blood, sin, and all of the bitterness of life and death as it does resurrection, forgiveness, and the sweet redemption of all things. The sacrament acts as passageway between sin and salvation, banality and blessing. Adrienne von Speyr writes, "It is not true that the citizens of heaven are indifferent to what happens on earth. They are in fact deeply concerned, unable to say: I no longer know what suffering is."³⁴⁴

³⁴³ ———, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 47-48. Marion also writes, "The banality of the saturated phenomenon suggests that *the majority of phenomena, if not all* can undergo saturation by the excess in them of intuition over the concept or signification. In other terms, the majority of phenomena that appear at first glance as poor in intuition could be described not only as objects, but also as phenomena that intuition saturates and therefore exceeds all univocal concept." ———, *Counter-Experiences*, 390.

³⁴⁴ Adrienne von Speyr, *The Holy Mass* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 98. For a protestant (and United Methodist) version of this type of thinking, see John Wesley and Charles Wesley, "Hymns on the Lord's-Supper by John Wesley, ... And Charles Wesley, ... With a Preface, Concerning the Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice. Extracted from Dr. Brevint," In *Eighteenth Century collections online*.

Astonishingly, a rebuttal like hers does not reduce to beliefs or ritual associated with anamnesis, but manifests in life. Exposing the lie of indifference depends upon another truth radiating behind von Speyr's declaration. The citizens of heaven and the people of earth are one and the same. Therefore, even those seemingly far from paradise, eating the most common of meals or unable to ingest life-giving nourishment, know pain and perseverance. Likewise, sonic ubiquity that gives musical instances of God's generosity does not preclude the acoustics of anguish, injustice, and evil. Sounds of cherishing and perishing and every sonance in between may indeed clash within sonic portals of Divine generosity. Or in and of themselves, they may announce freedom, redemption, and relationship with God, bringing into union the natural with the supernatural through a scandalous proclamation of transformed reality. Sounds saturate the world with Divine charity.

(London: printed by G. Paramore; and sold by G. Whitfield; and at the Methodist preaching-houses, in town and country, 1794), <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO?c=1&stp=Author&ste=11&af=BN&ae=T203406&tiPG=1&dd=0&dc=flc&docNum=CW122085429&vrsn=1.0&srchtp=a&d4=0.33&n=10&SU=0LRF&locID=nash87800>. *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, extracted from Dr. Brevint (London: G Paramore 1794; Online at John Rylands University Library of Manchester: Religion and Philosophy), 18. John Wesley writes:

Our Saviour hath given us by his death three kinds of life: and he promises to nourish us in every one of them, by these tokens of bread and wine, which he hath made this sacrament. ...[The first is] to set out as new and fresh the Holy sufferings, which purchased our Title to Eternal Happiness. The second is, both to represent and convey to our Souls, all necessary Graces to qualify us for it: and the third is, to assure us, that when we are qualified for it, God will faithfully render to us the Purchase. And these three make up the proper sense of those words, *Take, eat, This is my Body*.

CHAPTER VII

THE SPOOK OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY AND THE GENEROSITY OF MUSICS

If clairaudient and audible soundscapes everywhere provide sonic fields yielding music without boundary, then musics abide by no definable limits. The implicit assertion in pieces like 4'33" that musics occur ubiquitously permits further contemplation of unknowable scale along a theological range, namely that musics without limit give with a relentless and comprehensive charity that only God could sustain. Cage noticed and stated such a scandalous idea. He described the *White Paintings* as giving gifts "unnecessary and unexpected" that enabled "encounter" with "the stranger (who is divine)" and subsequently applied his uncanny observation as principal motivation for composing 4'33".³⁴⁵ Both his articulation and his artistic application enact one particularly fruitful example of how finite attempts at displaying infinite possibility invite query regarding Divine generosity.

Today musics everywhere resound in an age of modern technology. The irreversibly technological era seems remote from any notion of the Divine. Moreover, for some, modern technology even transgresses music itself. If all sound, or sonic ubiquity, however, gives musics that instantiate the giving of God, in any soundscape, identified as theological or not, God persistently gives.³⁴⁶ Even

³⁴⁵ Cage, *Silence*, 103, 98. See also pgs. 137,138, and 131 above.

transgressive resonances do not halt Divine generosity. Perhaps more sensationally, neither does skepticism that musics manifest the giving of God.

Consider a theological reading of the cultural artifacts of radio and magnetic tape— two of the first comprehensive fusings of music and modern technology. The meteoric rise of magnetic tape and radio provides a vibrant snapshot of the reality-altering and theologically compelling symbiosis between the musics of sonic ubiquity and modern technology. For Theodor Adorno, a towering 20th century cultural theorist who lamented the influence of modern technology upon music, the advent of radio haunts with what he calls a “spook,” an eery sense that authenticity in music has deteriorated to a phantom-like presence with the rise of technology. Contemporaries like Martin Heidegger appear to agree with Adorno’s assessment.

In fact, Heidegger coins the neologism, *das Ge-Stell*, as a comprehensive descriptor for the age of modern technology and its deleterious effects. For Heidegger, the influence of the age of modern technology does not reduce to philosophizing about say the improvement of apparatuses, architecture, products, devices, services, and selves. Rather, the age of modern technology, *das Ge-Stell* encompasses a radical and totalizing permanent shift of life. It threatens the world as an inescapable and relentless “Enlistment” of all things, a perpetual provocation to which persons and all things must surrender as commodities and stockpileable goods, including the musics given by sonic ubiquity. Yet contrary to Adorno,

³⁴⁶ For an example of an argument linking acousmatic reduction to phenomenological thought, see Kim-Cohen’s comparison between Husserl and Schaeffer in Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Towards a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 15.

Heidegger asserts that even within *das Ge-Stell*, flashes of truth still pierce through the modern technological age.

Heidegger associates flashes of truth to Being, a metaphysical designation that probes the ontological conditions, histories, and horizons of existence. Yet Marion sees in conceptualizations like *das Ge-Stell* a nod toward thinking about truth with regard to revelation. The current chapter agrees with Marion's interpretation of Heidegger and suggests that from the inception of radio and related technologies like magnetic tape music has not spooked, but engaged in an interplay of concealing and revealing of what is true. Musics like those of Pierre Schaeffer and John Cage convey flashes of truth, unsuspected as immune to any technological threat and surprisingly rich for positive theological engagement with music in the age of modern technology.

The Rise of Modern Technology and Music

In 1877, Edison constructed the first phonographic recording for playback of a nursery rhyme with a telephone diaphragm, a needle, and tinfoil.³⁴⁷ The sound fidelity of the new recording technology increased over the years, and in 1915, Edwin S. Pridham and Peter L. Jensen increased wattage to Edison's rudimentary invention by experimenting with a power transformer and twelve-volt battery to invent what would ostensibly become the first loudspeaker. The increased amplification made phonography more popular than ever as a means of hearing music. The subsequent birth and broadcast distribution of radio, however, would

³⁴⁷ James P. Kraft, *Stage to Studio: Musicians and the Sound Revolution, 1890-1950* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), 1.

give musics reach and widespread appeal of magnitude that at that time boggled the imagination.

In 1836 Samuel F.B. Morse had already demonstrated how code could transmit over telegraph wires. Morse code came into frequent use in the 1890s. Yet in 1906, Reginald Fessenden showed how “continuous wave” transmissions could be accomplished with “more powerful alternators” and so the sending and receiving of voiced audio soon became a widespread reality. It would not be long before the wireless telegraphy of Fessenden and others enabled communication between the most “inconsequential” and remote regions. Musically, the transmission of phonographic recording and even live performance frequencies manifested like wind in the air.

The early radiophonic innovations in sound communication also coincided with developments in the motion-picture industry.³⁴⁸ In 1894 William K.L. Dickson introduced the coin-operated Kinetoscope on Broadway first linking phonograph and camera. By 1923, Lee de Forest finally synchronized sounds and photographs following the ingenuity of Theodore Case, who copied recorded music onto a narrow filmstrip. De Forest had also invented the first vacuum tube, the triode “audion” in 1906.³⁴⁹ And in 1926 Western Electric and Warner Brothers had bettered the volume and application of the loudspeaker by Pridham and Jensen by

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 1-2.

³⁴⁹ Lowell Cross, "Electronic Music, 1948-1953," *Perspectives of New Music* 7, no. 1 (1968): 34.

incorporating high quality amplifier tubes and slow-turning phonographs with the technological advances in film to make and release sound movies.³⁵⁰

Two years later in 1928, inspired by the evolution of magnetic recording beginning in 1898, Dresdener Fritz Pflaumer modulated from his expertise in gilding cigarette paper with decorative bronze particles toward patenting a way of coating paper with magnetic powder for the purpose of producing magnetic tape. His patent would eventually overtake the popularity of the phonograph and permanently change the social mobility, use, and influence of recording. And in the two decades that followed, improvements in audio and visual technologies exploded in growth, with one innovative burst taking the form of frequency-modulation broadcasting, or FM radio.

In the United States in 1922, approximately 10,000 families possessed a radio. By 1939, 27 million out of a total of 32 million families in the U.S.A. owned a radio.³⁵¹ Radio was seen initially not only as an opportunity to broadcast programming across the country, but also as a means of educating the masses. It was thought that broadcasting European art music would reinforce democratic values and help educate and bring culture to the working classes of the United States. Today's radio broadcasts have departed from such aims to a hilarious degree.

³⁵⁰ Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 2.

³⁵¹ Theodor W. Adorno and Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, Nachgelassene Schriften. Abteilung I, Fragment Gebliedene Schriften / Theodor W. Adorno; (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), 13. Robert Hullot-Kentor quotes from Dickson Skinner, "Music Goes into Mass Production," *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, April 1939, 485.

In the early days of radio, however, *Harper's Monthly* reported that although the working classes preferred popular music to classical forms, the majority of black and white Americans listened to at least one symphony or one opera per week.³⁵² And in 1937, New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia regularly embroidered broadcasts of Beethoven and other canonized composers with commentary regarding their historical importance. His erudition was meant to inspire more sophisticated listening and cultural taste far and wide across new broadcast frequencies.³⁵³ Radio carried the social hopes that embedding and investing cultural riches such as classical music in everyday American soundscapes would provide meaning to ordinary lives. Radio would yield a return of a smarter and therefore more reasonable general American populace.

Radio and Adorno

From 1938–1941, Adorno and his wife Gretel (Margarete) Karplus moved to New York, where he undertook a research position with the Rockefeller funded Princeton Radio Research Project led by Austrian émigré and sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld.³⁵⁴ The Princeton Radio Research Project investigated the cultural shifts associated with radio and especially the perceived hunger for culture and self-improvement both from broadcasters and reported observations of the American

³⁵² Skinner, "Music Goes into Mass Production," 487 as found by Robert Hullot-Kentor in Adorno and Hullot-Kentor, *Current of Music*, 17.

³⁵³ Adorno and Hullot-Kentor, *Current of Music*, 16-17. Robert Hullot-Kentor references this historical instance from Alton Coor, "Mayor Mild in Music Talk," in *World-Telegram* (New York: New York, 1937).

³⁵⁴ Adorno and Hullot-Kentor, *Current of Music*, 9-11.

radio public. Adorno did not publish his English writings from these years, but compiled them under the working title, *Current of Music*. We now have a bound, posthumous version of his manuscripts and can trace their influence upon *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses* (1943), *The Stars Down to Earth* (1952–53), and an English version of *Über Jazz* that never came to fruition.³⁵⁵ *Current of Music* also provides a commercial music companion to *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1949), but also perhaps to *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (with Max Horkheimer, 1947) and *Minima Moralia* (1951).³⁵⁶

Untangling the connections between later works and *The Current of Music* exceeds the scope of this chapter. Instead engagement with Adorno's thoughts on radio will concentrate on key assertions from chapter VI, "Space Ubiquity," and chapter VII, "Ubiquity-Standardization and Pseudo-Activity" from the section *Radio Physiognomics* in *Current of Music*. More directly, Adorno's early formulations regarding radio chart key registers for theologically navigating what the ongoing relationship between modern technology and the musics of sonic ubiquity entail now.

In "Space Ubiquity" Adorno begins by dialoguing with an article *Spooks in Radio* by Günther Stern. According to Adorno, what Stern fears most about radio in 1930 is how radio technology shocks its listeners by homogenizing performances of particular musical works into replica broadcasts that haunt every place. Musical distinction that would otherwise occur as a result of singular performances

³⁵⁵ For Adorno's planned English adaptation of *Über Jazz*, see *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

dissolves into creepy “plurality” and “numerability” having nothing to do with musical ingenuity or array but rather with the different spaces in which the same radio music plays.³⁵⁷ Yet for Adorno, the “spook” of radio, a term Adorno adopts from Stern, disappears, “or at least recedes into the background,” once radio becomes a customary phenomenon. Adorno states that no one, apart from those succumbing to irrationality or ignorance of the technical implications of radio, will experience the continuity of music from location to location as a “ghost-like apparition any longer.”³⁵⁸ For Adorno, the haunting of radio will continue instead as an eerie and dissonant absence of the musical aura prior to the broadcast.

In order to illustrate his point, Adorno uses the image of Wagner resounding in a concert hall while also seeping into the hall’s lobby for those waiting to enter. For Adorno, it is precisely the paradoxically remote quality of radio music in its proximity, the uncanny ways in which music manifests in space without actually being there, and not its scattering into different loci, that shocks. With radio, no matter how nearby the listening device is, music seems eerily distant. Adorno therefore agrees with Stern that the plurality of musics causes shock, but only insofar as musical plurality undoes the presumption associated with the radiophonic replication that it is the “thing itself.” For Adorno, live music possesses an aura similar to that argued by Benjamin concerning the *hic et nunc*—here and now. Music injects space with sonic immediacy and authority.

³⁵⁷ Adorno and Hullot-Kentor, *Current of Music*, 130-31.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

In Benjamin the aura of original artwork involves a ritualistic quality that grounds tradition, craftsmanship, and superhuman powers into an authentic experience of reality. Reproduction, however, neutralizes this effect. For example, Benjamin saw motion pictures as a “non-auratic” practice—a practice failing to evoke aura—due to their dependence upon reproducibility. Granted, Adorno notes that music is by nature intended for reproduction and therefore he departs somewhat from Benjamin’s portrayal of aura. Nevertheless, for Adorno live music possesses aura, an authenticity, where a live reproduction “*has its ‘here’—either the concert room or the opera—and its ‘now’—the very moment it is executed.*”³⁵⁹ Broadcast of the live concert, on the contrary, grants only a “subjective” here and threatens the now in its delay. What haunts is not the power of the technology, but the “pre-technical concept of authenticity haunting an art technique basically opposed to it.” Radio spooks Adorno because in its reproducibility, it has technologically vanquished the authenticity of the thing itself.

In “Ubiquity-Standardization and Pseudo-Activity,” Adorno first clarifies what he means by the distinctions “subjective” and “objective.” An objective phenomenon adheres and admits to its structure. A subjective phenomenon conceals its structure even though it is bound to it. For Adorno radio is principally subjective because it lulls its listeners into forgetting the fact of radio’s ubiquity and the related consequences. One major consequence is standardization. For Adorno, radio standardizes music because the same musics now play across locales. Standardization, according to Adorno, coincides with authoritarianism by

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 139-41.

eliminating choice with the offer of identical material to wide ranging publics. He asserts, "This standardization, in a way, is the essence of radio itself," and it is precisely this essence that threatens unadulterated musical listening and consequently, authentic human life.³⁶⁰

Yet also for Adorno, forms of resistance to radio's standardization, or pseudo-activity, can take place. For example, a listener may turn the radio dial, though the new station may strangely resemble the content of the former one.³⁶¹ Another listener might submit fan mail in order to influence the operation of radio. Yet such reactions to radio's standardization seem to Adorno idealistic and futile. Why would a captive or captured listener makes friends with their captor?

In Adorno's day, broadcasting institutions were known to cleverly reverse the intent behind such reactions and lull concerned or dissenting listeners into radiophonic interactivity. Adorno gives examples such as the NBC radio shows "The Home Symphony" where an amateur musician at home or a school symphony can play along with "an orchestra under the baton of a first-rate conductor." He describes the program "Music is My Hobby" where a home listener is invited to sit-in and play with a professional orchestra.³⁶² Radio listeners transform into radio guests, and effect a broadcast etiquette where speaking poorly of their host would seem socially impolite at best and irrationally rude at worst.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 148.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 149-63.

³⁶² Ibid., 169.

A last straw according to Adorno is to “switch-off” the radio. But switching-off the radio also becomes an irrational indulgence. Listeners turn off the radio believing that the move operates like a lethal blow to radio’s ubiquity. Adorno writes, “the individual who cannot possibly alter the ubiquity-standardization of the radio phenomenon transforms it and every pleasure he might get from it into the pleasure of destruction.”³⁶³ Yet the gesture devolves into a useless protest because for Adorno, “It creates the illusion of might and power, but it really means only that the rebel is withdrawing from contact with the very public events he believes he is altering.”³⁶⁴ The phenomenon ceases to exist (but only for the listener for in actuality, with or without the listener, it persists) and the listener is left alone. For Adorno, switching-off moves toward asociality or even anti-social behavior. Only when radio no longer exists and the listener ceases to assume the role of listener can the listener influence ubiquity-standardization. In other words, switching-off can never truly happen as long as one lives.

Radio of course persists and its targeted publics continue to listen. In a closing reflection regarding the durability of his theorizing for the Princeton Radio Project, Adorno wrote, “Der Mangel dürfte wesentlich den Grund haben, daß mir der Übergang zur Hörerforschung nicht glückte. Er wäre dringend notwendig: vor allem zur Differenzierung und Korrektur der Theoreme.” (The problem might essentially consist of the reason that I did not succeed in transition to audience research. This research would have been necessary, foremost for differentiation

³⁶³ Ibid., 173.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

and correction of the theorems.)³⁶⁵ Adorno realized that he had too quickly divided the identities of radio broadcasters and listeners, as if they did not or would not hold together in single individuals. Not long after Adorno's investigations of radio, audiences not only heard radio but also used it for music-making purposes.

Musical pioneers like Cage and Schaeffer fearlessly instrumentalized radio and related technological developments like magnetic tape for sonic invention and announcement of societal transformation. Their radiophonic and magnetic tape ingenuity also provides entryway for theological reassessment of Adorno's belief that radio merely conceals a diffuse authoritarian agenda, which radically displaces and reduces authenticity in music to a remote phantom presence. If the serendipitous results of the experimentation from Schaeffer and Cage are also in any way irreducible to their own efforts, then the modern infiltration and standardization of technology in music is not in fact a pseudo-activity as Adorno states. The unstoppable interfacing of the technological in music and perhaps in many more facets of life does not spook, but unsuspectingly bears what could be described as true.

Magnetic Tape Recording and Cage

As radio receded into the background, becoming more and more ghostlike, and for Adorno ever scarier as a mortification of aura, German electrical manufacturing firm AEG bought Pflaumer's early patent upon the manufacturing process of magnetic tape in 1928. In partnership with the chemical firm IG Farben,

³⁶⁵ Adorno and Hullot-Kentor, *Current of Music*, 48.

together they developed a production-ready tape that resulted in the fabrication and sale of the recording machine, the Magnetophone. By the 1930s, several specialized versions of the Magnetophone had entered into German “military communications, intelligence work, and radio broadcasting.”³⁶⁶ In fact, German state radio became the largest customer of the Magnetophone, which allowed for the recording and reproducing of radio programming to enable censorship. In the United States, American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) financed research at Bell Laboratories to apply magnetic tape recording technology to develop consumer grade telephone answering machines. No consumer products materialized for AT&T at the time due to fear that answering machines would cannibalize upon existing telephonic usage.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, however, demand for magnetic tape recording surged in Germany and the United States. The United States Naval Research Laboratory had discovered AC bias in 1920. AC bias tempered recording distortion and noise issues. The evolution of magnetic tape since then allowed for widespread radiophonic and military applications by both the Allied and Axis Powers.³⁶⁷ Schaeffer’s radio duties in Vichy France give a glimpse of such application, though he himself was reluctant at first to adopt magnetic tape recording and found the Magnetophone an idiosyncratic machine.³⁶⁸ After the war’s end, American companies like Ampex and Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing

³⁶⁶ Mark H. Clark, "Making Magnetic Recording Commercial: 1920-1955," *Journal of Magnetism and Magnetic Materials* 193 (1999): 9.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ Cross, "Electronic Music, 1948-1953," 45.

(3M) had continued to improve upon the design of the Magnetophone and magnetic tape, building recording machines and producing professional grade tape for markets in the United States.³⁶⁹ In short, the proliferation of radio and the success of Pflaumer's patent ignited an entirely new horizon of music-making.

Addressing a Seattle Arts Society organized by Martha Graham protégée Bonnie Bird in 1937, Cage cast a vision for the use of magnetic tape as an instrument of musical composition:

The special function of electrical instruments will be to provide complete control of overtone structure of tones (as opposed to noises) and to make these tones available in any frequency, amplitude, and duration. WHICH WILL MAKE AVAILABLE FOR MUSICAL PURPOSES ANY AND ALL SOUNDS THAT CAN BE HEARD, PHOTOELECTRIC, FILM, AND MECHANICAL MEDIUMS FOR THE SYNTHETIC PRODUCTION OF MUSIC.³⁷⁰

Two years later and again in Seattle, he made his vision musically manifest in *Imaginary Landscape No. 1* at the radio studio of the Cornish School. "The work, to be performed as a recording or as a broadcast, calls for muted piano, cymbal, and 2 variable speed turntables playing Victor test recordings of fixed and variable frequencies." Three years later in 1942, and this time in Chicago, Cage put the finishing touches upon *March (Imaginary Landscape No. 2)*, "for percussion quintet and amplified coil of wire," and *Imaginary Landscape No. 3* "for percussion, tin cans, muted gong, audio frequency oscillators, variable speed turntables, frequency recordings, buzzer, amplified coil of wire, and marimbula amplified by a contact

³⁶⁹ 3M is perhaps better known for Scotch® tape and Post-it® notes.

³⁷⁰ John Cage, *Silence; Lectures and Writings*, 1st ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1961), 4. [Capitalized lettering Cage's.]

microphone."³⁷¹ Cage composed two more *Imaginary Landscape* works, in 1951, *No. 4* (for twelve radios, 24 performers, and a conductor) and in 1952, *No. 5* (for any 42 recordings). These pieces represent only a snapshot of his electronic oeuvre.³⁷² More significantly, they show that magnetic tape is a musical instrument; a possibility Adorno's mass reproduction and standardization arguments failed to foresee, and an opportunity that Schaeffer later politically exploited with his *musique concrète* compositions.³⁷³

Pierre Schaeffer and Musique Concrète

Pierre Schaeffer was a contemporary of avant-garde composers like Oliver Messiaen and John Cage, and a teacher of Pierre Boulez. Schaeffer was also a

³⁷¹ Cross, "Electronic Music, 1948-1953," 38.

³⁷² For early magnetic tape compositions, hear Cage and others on Clara Rockmore et al., *Ohm+ the Early Gurus of Electronic Music, 1948-1980* (U.S.A.: Ellipsis Arts, 2005), Sound recording. Or visit <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/williams-mix/audio/1/> [last accessed July 19th, 2012] for an internet accessible audio version of Cage's *Williams Mix*.

³⁷³ In the winter of 1957 before the Music Teachers National Association in Chicago, Cage approvingly states:

And it is a striking coincidence that just now the technical means to produce such a free-ranging music are available. When the Allies entered Germany towards the end of World War II, it was discovered that improvements had been made in recording sounds magnetically such that tape had become suitable for the high-fidelity recording of music. First in France with the work of Pierre Schaeffer, later here, in Germany, in Italy, in Japan, and perhaps, without my knowing it, in other places, magnetic tape was used not simply to record performances of music but to make a new music that was possible only because of it.

John Cage, "Experimental Music" in Cage, *Silence*, 9.

practicing Catholic, and a radio engineer turned electroacoustic music pioneer and inventor of *musique concrète*. Like Stern, Schaeffer championed acousmatic listening and advocated for focus strictly upon the *objet sonore* [sonic object]; musical attention to sounds without ascribing their significance to any particular source, experience, or information. Schaeffer saw context as fogging understanding of sounds as sounds.³⁷⁴ For example, the information in speech might interfere with the “pure” reception of vocal sonorities. While one can also infer a concern similar to Adorno’s worry about the negation of aura, Schaeffer’s acousmatic thesis appropriates context quite differently with regard to its influence upon sonic and musical integrity.

With a more charitable stance than Adorno’s Benjamin inspired diagnosis of radio’s spook, Schaeffer realized that “both the cinema and the radio possess a unique power over the concrete or the real: They both evoke magically, expressing through their own registers that which cannot be said through verbal language.” Schaeffer did not view radio or its standardization as a danger to authenticity. Radio extended the boundaries of musics and presented a new frontier for artistic expression and social change. For Schaeffer, “the significations that one imparts to actions, to images, or to sounds; this is the way in which they acquire a personal

³⁷⁴ Though Schaeffer’s acousmatic thesis shows similarity with Stern, it actually has a much earlier root in Pythagorean argument for hearing sounds as autonomous objects. For a fuller genealogy of the acousmatic thesis, see Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford UP, 1997). For a concise response to Scruton’s portrait, see Andy Hamilton, “The Sound of Music” in Matthew Nudds and Casey O’Callaghan, *Sounds and Perception: New Philosophical Essays* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 148.

sense, and not through established meanings, which can lie.”³⁷⁵ Schaeffer perceived and instrumentalized radio as a viable form of sonic resistance totalitarianism, and his theory and practice now offers a provocative path for theological interpretation of musics in late modernity, especially with relationship to the evolution of modern technology.

Musique concrète put the acousmatic thesis into action with exploratory recording and compositional reassembling and broadcasting of sounds in order to detach them from “their culturally or experientially defined meanings and associations.”³⁷⁶ Schaeffer designed musique concrète under the conditions of two professional terminations. The first was Jeune France, a youth initiative sponsored by Axis allied Vichy France, but driven by Schaeffer as a conglomerate of arts education workshops and performances in literature, music, theater and technological innovations like radio aimed at forging new community, challenging social control, and transcending ideological hegemony.³⁷⁷ The organization was quickly seen as a threat to the State and dissolved by Vichy, and Schaeffer was fired in 1942.

Vichy, however, rehired in 1943 to run Studio d’Essai and give him a second chance at producing radiophonic propaganda. For Schaeffer, the post became

³⁷⁵ Jane F. Fulcher, “From ‘The Voice of the Maréchal to Musique Concrète: Pierre Schaeffer and the Case for Cultural History.” In Jane F. Fulcher, *The Oxford Handbook of the New Cultural History of Music* (New York City: Oxford UP), 392.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 395.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 386-91. The name, Jeune France, is borrowed from the concert society of the four musicians Messiaen, Jolivet, Baudrier, and Daniel-Lesur; the society also actively partnered with Schaeffer.

another opportunity for sneaking in public forms of resistance. Schaeffer's experiments in resistance would far exceed the limitations first conceived by Adorno in his observations of radio in the United States.

Studio d'Essai operated as a live lab for publicly broadcast microphonic sound tests and a forum for introducing works from Surrealist and resistant poets like Aragon, Eluard, Desnos, and Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as Resistance lauded composers like Arnold Schoenberg, Darius Milhaud, and Paul Dukas. Schaeffer galvanized and politicized the indefinable qualities, unforeseen potential and uncomfortable and problematic nostalgia for a musical source that radio broadcast carried, the spookiness of radio into unsuspected acts of freedom. He approached radio as an opportunity for *perruque* (French for "wig" but here meaning the worker's own work disguised as work for the employer).³⁷⁸ In line with his fate with respect to Jeune France, Vichy soon relieved Schaeffer from his duties at Studio d'Essai. Yet his latest removal came the January before the liberation of Paris and unemployment did not stop Schaeffer from using radio announce societal transformation and renewal.³⁷⁹ Lowell Cross references the historical work of Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre to note the following:

On August 24, 1944, Schaeffer was responsible for the joyous broadcast announcing the liberation of Paris. He read from Victor Hugo ("Assez de honte! Redevenez la grande France!"), played "La Marseillaise" (to which thousands of ecstatic Parisians responded by throwing open their windows

³⁷⁸ For more on the tactic of *perruque*, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 25.

³⁷⁹ Fulcher, *The Oxford Handbook of the New Cultural History of Music*, 393-95.

and singing along with their radios), and appealed to all parish priests to ring their church bells in celebration.³⁸⁰

A glimpse into the advent of musique concrète during the mid twentieth century brings into focus how a modern technology like radio complexifies, commodifies, and subverts the social reality and influence of the musics that sonic ubiquity gives. The advent of musique concrète also raises theologically oriented questions, queries that reach beyond Adorno's fear that radio transgresses musical integrity and genuineness. When Schaeffer's programming culminates in a sonic heralding of a war's end and hope for a better future, redemptive pronouncement breaks forth between the crevices of cultural and personal ruin. His radiophonic provocation vocalizes unsuspected rescue in the midst of socially comprehensive tyranny and ruin and maybe even more than Schaeffer could have imagined. It is as if what is true has the final pronouncement over widespread cultural violence and transgression.

Heideggerian Perspectives

In order to tease out exactly how the musical experimentations of Cage and Schaeffer not only demonstrated new creative uses of radio and magnetic tape but also dramatic departure from Adorno's initial assessment of technology's rise in music and approach toward theological reassessment of the interface between musics and technology, the late essays of Martin Heidegger will now be introduced.

³⁸⁰ Cross, "Electronic Music, 1948-1953," 39-40. For Collins and Lapierre, see Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, *Is Paris Burning?* (New York,: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 256-57.

Perhaps more than any other Western philosopher of his time, Heidegger late in his career commits to dispelling the suspicions that technology is a strictly negative development in modernity (of course with meticulous care and theoretical caution). In contrast to the haunting assessment of Adorno, Heidegger claims that although modern technology traumatically instrumentalizes and commodifies all of life, the age of modern technology nevertheless becomes a context in which truth still manifests and interrupts human perception and human capitulation. His later *Bremen Essays*, contemporaneous with the tape explorations of Cage and the musique concrète of Schaeffer, and the genealogy behind those writings, in spite of Heidegger's own political leanings provide conceptual language for interpreting how Cage and Schaeffer overcame the authoritarian spook of technological developments like radio and magnetic tape. They also provide a place of departure for shifting from associating haunt with the interplay between music and technology toward theological promise that even in the denaturalization, mechanization, and commodification of sonic ubiquity, the Divine nevertheless continues to give.

The Question Concerning Technology

Deeper inquiry into Heidegger's perspective regarding technology must begin elsewhere than *The Question Concerning Technology*, which is a summative piece that saliently presents technology as an overriding ethos of life instead of an oft used label for things in the world. Instead the accent must fall upon Heidegger's earlier preparatory writings that evolve into *The Question Concerning Technology* –

The Origin of a Work of Art and the Bremen lectures entitled, *Insight into What Is*. The current study therefore begins with a short excursus of *The Question Concerning Technology*, but quickly traces a genealogy of Heidegger's thought regarding technology in order to arrive at a more nuanced theological assessment of music in the modern technological age.

In *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger argues that "[e]verywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it."³⁸¹ For Heidegger, this is the essence of technology. It has nothing to do with the technological, but rather an inescapable limit upon human freedom that binds us everywhere. Here, one notices some parallel with Adorno's discussion concerning the spook of radio. In order to understand why technology has changed life the way it has and what options humanity has as it tries to navigate the paradigm shift of modern technology, Heidegger begins by disrupting two common and interlocking misconceptions about technology, related to but distinct from modern technology, regarding the instrumental and anthropological.

First, technology is not merely a means to an end [*ein Mittel für Zwecke*]. Secondly, neither is technology merely a practice of people [*ein Tun des Menschen*].³⁸² While for example a jet provides transport to a destination and a

³⁸¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 4.

³⁸² Ibid. ———, *Vorträge Und Aufsätze*, Gesamtausgabe. 1. Abteilung, Veröffentlichte Schriften 1910-1976 / Martin Heidegger ; (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 10. Heidegger also points out that these two

computer provides Internet access to information, encapsulating understanding of technology according to illustrations like these places too much reliance upon causality.³⁸³ For Heidegger, the causal dimensions of technology come to play in a bringing-forth [*Her-vor-bringen*]. Heidegger explains that the bringing-forth does not coincide with a correct idea, that technology is instrumental or a practice of people. The bringing-forth is what the ancient Greeks called *aletheia*, the Romans *veritas*, and today, what we call truth [*Wahrheit*].³⁸⁴ Therefore, Heidegger continues, *techne* (craft whether technological or artistic) belongs to *poesis* (composition, bringing-forth). In contrast to Adorno, Heidegger locates at the root of the technological a positive operation of bringing-forth, rather than a negation of what once was. Yet somehow, in the age of modern technology, the bringing-forth of truth associated with *techne* has become submerged and hidden.

For Heidegger modern technology conceals what is true and instead proliferates as a provocation. *Her-vor-bringen* transforms into *Her-aus-fordern* – “Bringing-forth” becomes “challenging-away.” The challenging-away or provocation

misconceptions coincide, i.e. using technology as a means to an end is a practice of people.

³⁸³ A comparative evolution of Heidegger’s transition from the fourfold of “The Thing” to the four causes of “The Question Concerning Technology” must remain for another essay. For these two passages, see Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 6. And Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, [1st ed., His Works (New York,: Harper & Row, 1971), 171. Or see *Die Frage nach der Technik* in Heidegger, *Vorträge Und Aufsätze*, 11-12. And Martin Heidegger, *Bremer Und Freiburger Vorträge*, Gesamtausgabe. Iii. Abteilung, Unveröffentlichte Abhandlungen, Vorträge, Gedachtes / Martin Heidegger ; (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1994), 12.

³⁸⁴ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 11-12, ———, *Vorträge Und Aufsätze*, 15-16.

of modern technology “unlocks” resources such as gold or oil from the ocean floor, or particles from nature, to be shaped [*umgeformt*] into stored commodity or energy to be “distributed” and converted [*umgeschaltet*] anew. Unlocking, shaping, distributing, and converting comprise the revealing of modern technology. For Heidegger, modern technology is a perversion of what technology once was. Modern technology replaces the technological possibility of unconcealing truth with the revealing of how persons and the world can be used for commodification (speculative or actual) and orderability. To reformulate with regard to Adorno, for Heidegger, modern technology does not negate aura. Instead it conceals the authentic in a new life-threatening and totalizing order of all things for use and commodification.

In order to see how Heidegger arrives at his assessment of the deleterious transformation brought about by modern technology and how Heidegger links the questioning of technology or *Technikon* to the need for reflection upon “arts” like music or *techne* as a means of pious quest for truth, it will be necessary to retrace *The Origin of a Work of Art* to the series *Insight into What Is* and their developmental influence in Heidegger’s stance regarding modern technology.

Insight into What Is

In 1949 Allied personnel in the American Zone oversaw Radio Bremen and the postwar transition of its broadcasts under occupation, which included public law. In the same year Heidegger presented in Bremen a series of four lectures entitled *Insight into What Is* (1949). These appeared a generation after the

publication of *Sein und Zeit* (1927). In them Heidegger treats the themes of proximity and time according to how “things” and humans are in the world.

Notably, *Insight into What Is* does not directly discuss the advent of modern technology and its relationship to music. And Heidegger does not speak directly of God in the lectures. Though he does mention divinities [*die Göttlichen*].

Nevertheless, the lectures present a theologically pregnant discovery that truth announces itself in the communications of modern technology. While Heidegger myopically limits the truth of Being to Being itself, his argumentation suggests how perception of the Divine approaches humanity, rather than becoming an object or realization that we produce for ourselves. For Heidegger, modern technology does not negate authenticity in musics or make aura something to be feared as Adorno contends. Rather, modern technology conceals truth that cannot be concealed. Heidegger’s claim introduces one philosophical foundation for articulating how the generosity of God becomes perceivable in sound.

In the first essay, *The Thing* [*Das Ding*], Heidegger extends an argument begun ten years earlier in *The Origin of a Work of Art* [*Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*] (1935–36) regarding how a thing stands on its own and discloses itself.³⁸⁵ Heidegger examines Van Gogh’s *A Pair of Shoes* (1886) in *The Origin of a Work of Art* to explain that Van Gogh’s portrait, more than any other investigation of an actual pair of shoes, can disclose what peasant shoes are in truth. For

³⁸⁵ Heidegger continues to elucidate this idea of how essence emerges from an artwork’s standing by considering truth in the structure of a Greek temple (G.A. 5, 30ff; *PLT*, 40ff). Yet, I want to depart from this extension of Heidegger’s argument in *The Origin of a Work of Art* and concentrate upon the central illustration of the jug in *The Thing*.

Heidegger, the essence of art is the truth of beings setting itself to work [*das Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen der Wahrheit des Seienden*].³⁸⁶ The truth or essence of peasant shoes at work is their “reliability” [Verlässlichkeit]. Their reliability consists of an invisible history of usefulness and profound belonging between peasant work and the world established and sustained by the trustworthy equipmental-being [das Zeugsein] of the shoes.³⁸⁷ This invisible history and belonging embedded in the peasant shoes becomes unconcealed in Van Gogh’s painting, and in effect, the painting reproduces “the thing’s general essence.”³⁸⁸ A painting accomplishes this by standing on its own as a happening where the truth of beings begins to work.

In *The Thing*, while Heidegger could appeal to another painting such as Cezanne’s *Milk, Jug and Bowl* (1873–77), he brings his mode of analysis back to the originating thing itself by considering the concept of a jug:

However, the thingly character of the thing does not consist in its being a represented object, nor can it be defined in any way in terms of the objectness, the over-againstness, of the object. The jug remains a vessel whether we represent it in our minds or not. As a vessel the jug stands on its own as self-supporting.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁶ Martin Heidegger and Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Holzwege : [Unveränd. Text Mit Randbemerkungen D. Autors Aus D. Handexemplaren]*, His Gesamtausgabe : Abt. 1, Veröffentlichte Schriften 1914-1970 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), 5. See also Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 35.

³⁸⁷ Heidegger and Herrmann, *Holzwege : [Unveränd. Text Mit Randbemerkungen D. Autors Aus D. Handexemplaren]*, 23. See also Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 33.

³⁸⁸ Heidegger and Herrmann, *Holzwege : [Unveränd. Text Mit Randbemerkungen D. Autors Aus D. Handexemplaren]*, 26. See also Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 36.

Like Van Gogh's painting, the jug stands on its own as self-supporting. Heidegger then asks as we may just have been pondering, "But what does it mean to say that the container stands on its own?" and more importantly, "What does any of this have to do with the generosity of God in musics?" Let us arrive at a response by incrementally following Heidegger's train of thought. For Heidegger, the jug stands on its own as a thing, which conjoins earth and heaven [*Erde und Himmel*] and divinity and mortals [*die Göttlichen und die Sterblichen*]. The jug illuminates and also obscures understanding of proximity and time in the union between earth (near) and heaven (far) and the connection between mortals (finite) and divinity (the immortal) respectively.

To help clarify such correlation, recall that artwork, like Van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes*, un-conceals the general essence of a thing—in this case, peasant shoes. The painting functions as a happening where the truth of the shoes begins to work. Heidegger arrives at his assertion by an examination of the shoes as equipment whose portrait magnifies their equipmental-being. Equipment and equipmentality have association with "use" or "utility." This association carries over into Heidegger's examination of the jug as more than merely object, or *Gegenstand*, in *Das Ding*.

The jug, as a unification of heaven and earth, divinities and mortals, what Heidegger calls a fourfold [*das Geviert*], exceeds categories of *Gegenstand*. When used or poured, the jug does not stand "against" [*Gegen-stand*] our understanding

³⁸⁹ Heidegger, *Bremer Und Freiburger Vorträge*, 5-6. See also ———, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 165.

as a material thing that appears. Instead, it stands true (*Ver-stand*) and un-conceals its presence in the act of pouring by granting purview of the fourfold. That an object communicates truth has vast implication for how the musics given in sonic ubiquity instantiate the generosity of God. The jug presents itself. As a thing, it “things,” to use Heidegger’s language. The jug things to the extent that it presences “world.” Presencing world comprises abiding by the fourfold, where proximity and time become presenced and problematized in the encounter and disclosure of both near and far, heaven and earth, infinite and finite, divinity and mortals.³⁹⁰ Moreover, presencing is not limited strictly to the jug as such. For Heidegger, all things thing as the jug things.

In the still un-translated second Bremen lecture, *Das Ge-Stell*, Heidegger introduces a conundrum by the same name that circumscribes his conceptualization of a thing.³⁹¹ *Das Ge-Stell*, is for Heidegger a totalizing enlistment of all things, sound and humanity included, as reserve stock or population [*Bestand*] ready for use and to be ordered [*Bestellen*] as commodifiable [*bestellbares*] technology [*Technik*] to service the proliferation of the world. *Das Ge-Stell* represents one historical portrait that may still aptly describe the perplexing and challenging circumstance of making theological claims about music in an age

³⁹⁰ Heidegger writes, “*Das Ding verweilt das Geviert. Das Ding dingt Welt. Jedes Ding verweilt das Geviert in ein je Weiliges von Einfalt der Welt.*” Heidegger, *Bremer Und Freiburger Vorträge*, 20. See also ———, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 178. The English translation is, however, imprecisely rendered.

³⁹¹ Because the essay *Das Ge-Stell* is in many ways an early draft of “The Question Concerning Technology” [*Die Frage Nach Der Technik*], one may look to the latter essay as a kind of later rendition of *Das Ge-Stell* that is available in English translation.

overwhelmed by technology. According to Heidegger, *Gegen-stand*, or object, has become *Be-stand*, or stock, with the loss of *Ver-stand*, understanding. Importantly, though Heidegger states that *das Ge-Stell* captures the essence of modern technology, modern technology is for Heidegger the current state of all things whether technological or “natural.” The fourfold has no immunity from *das Ge-Stell*. Even “god” cannot escape *das Ge-Stell’s* speculative hold.³⁹² Theology becomes complicit and incarcerated in the age of modern technology. In this way, *das Ge-Stell* describes a predicament affecting the entirety of what manifests in the world.

At the risk of digression, but for the sake of important clarification, the term *das Ge-Stell*, is most often translated into English as “enframing”.³⁹³ When comparing the English rendering with the German, however, there does not seem to be substantive reason for using the root of “frame.” An explanatory note in “The Origin of the Work of Art” [*Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*] (1935–36) contains perhaps the earliest published mention of *das Ge-Stell*. Heidegger writes, *Gemäß*

³⁹² Heidegger, *Bremer Und Freiburger Vorträge*, 31. Heidegger writes:

Dazu ist nötig, daß wir beachten, wie das Bestellen alles, was ist, im vorhinein befällt: Natur und Geschichte, Menschliches und Göttliches; denn wenn heute eine schlechtberatene Theologie sich die Ergebnisse der modernen Atomphysik bestellt, um mit deren Hilfe ihre Gottesbeweise sicher zu stellen, dann wird dadurch Gott in den Bezirk des Bestellbaren gestellt.

[To this end it is worth noting, that we observe how the ordering in advance infests all that is: nature and history, human and divine; then if today a poorly advised theology authorizes the achievements of nuclear physics, with the help of its divine evidence, then God will be placed in the domain of the orderable. Trans. author’s.]

³⁹³ For reasons to support translating *das Ge-Stell* as “enframing,” see———, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 83-84. See also ——, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 19-20.

dem bisher Erläuterten bestimmt sich die Bedeutung des auf S. 51 gerauchten Wortes "Ge-stell": die Versammlung des Her-vor-bringens..."³⁹⁴ Albert Hofstadter translates this as "In accordance with what has so far been explained, the meaning of the noun "Ge-Stell," frame, framing, framework, used on page 62, is thus defined: the gathering of the bringing-forth..."

Acknowledging the inevitable discrepancy between page numbers 51 and 62 due to the different phrasing lengths associated with Hofstadter's translation and the original essay from Heidegger, I have underlined "frame, framing, framework" to clearly show that Hofstadter's inclusion of "frame" and related cognates is an English-language addition, and not found in the original German. This is important to note because *das Ge-Stell* more precisely entails gathering (as Hofstadter also renders) rather than framing or the philosophical permutation "enframing." Consider a synoptic read of the explanatory pages from "The Question Concerning Technology" and "The Origin of the Work of Art." One sees Heidegger clarifying the association of framing with *das Ge-Stell*. He notes conventional German usage of *Gestell* for "bookrack" or "skeleton." Yet he does not reintroduce the term as derived by intertwining the concepts of *Gestalt* [figure] and *stellen* [to put, place].

Given the strong influence of Jünger's concepts like *Totale Mobilmachung* from *Der Krieg und Krieger* and the expansion of this idea in *Der Arbeiter*, which precede *Das Ge-Stell* [*Über die Linie*, though also formative for Heidegger's thought was not completed by Jünger until 1950], it seems that the combination of *Gestalt*

³⁹⁴ Heidegger and Herrmann, *Holzwege* : [Unveränd. Text Mit Randbemerkungen D. Autors Aus D. Handexemplaren], 72.

and *Stellen* comes closer to “enlistment” rather than “enframing.”³⁹⁵ “Enlistment” also seems nearer to the nouns *Stelle*, or “appointment (to a post)”, and *Gestellung*, draft or conscription. I make mention of the noun *Stelle* because in the German editions of *Holzwege* and *The Bremen Lectures*, Heidegger transitions from *Ge-stell* with a lower-case ‘s’ to *Ge-Stell*. Therefore, it seems that Heidegger is not simply thinking of the verb *stellen*, but the noun, *Stelle*. While “The Origin of the Work of Art” concerns art, and thus, the rendering of framing fits, *Das Ge-Stell* concerns a circular conflict of modern technology. In *das Ge-Stell*, humanity aims to control the world with technology but also ends up being controlled, taken into the aims of technology. Therefore, the language of conscription is better suited. “Enlistment” also intimates Heidegger’s appeal to the Greek term *logos* as foundational for grasping *das Ge-Stell*. According to Heidegger’s use of the term, *logos* influences *das Ge-Stell* at the level of *logon didonai*, a “given account,” where humans and things in the world are provoked [*Herausfordern*] to be secured for long term management [*Sicherstellung*].³⁹⁶ Conscription as a type of enforced calling for the sake of securing (people and things) fits what Heidegger means here.

Enlistment also captures the pervasion of what makes radio haunting for Adorno, and Stern before him, and what gives wider application to Benjamin’s

³⁹⁵ Ernst Jünger et al., *Briefe 1949-1975* (Stuttgart; Frankfurt: Klett-Cotta; Klostermann, 2008).

See also Ernst Jünger, *Krieg Und Krieger* (Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1930). And ———, *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft Und Gestalt* (Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1941).

³⁹⁶ Heidegger and Herrmann, *Holzwege: [Unveränd. Text Mit Randbemerkungen D. Autors Aus D. Handexemplaren]*. I am translating with direct reference to the German. Again, for an English version that raises questions regarding translation see, Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 83.

diagnosis of the loss of the “here and now,” the aura or authenticity of an artwork. Notably, only two years after Heidegger illustrates his claim about un-concealing the essence of a thing in *The Origin of the Work of Art* using Van Gogh, Adorno laments the commodification of Van Gogh and Cézanne copies, “which are so faithful to the original that they look like something unique although they are reproduced; and which, framed like original pictures, often serve to deceive the observer.”³⁹⁷ By so doing, Adorno seems to share the insight of what Heidegger later names the predicament of Enlistment, where things are not only reproduced in dilutions of the original, but that “un-genuineness” creates an inescapable social milieu, hiding truth from human beings and conscripting them into the purposes of modern technology as it contributes to making arts, visual, and more specific to the case here, sonic, ubiquitous. Enlistment is the scariest spook. Enlistment haunts as it masks truth and becomes an overwhelming haunt in the spatial connotation of the word, trapping and transforming every phenomenon in the world as it enlists and distributes them for unending exchange and sale.

In Heidegger’s third lecture, *The Danger [Die Gefahr]*, Heidegger stresses that this “universal” situation threatens to make humans completely forget “the truth of Being,” which evidences itself in part with the fourfold.³⁹⁸ The threat, however, carries a paradoxical twist, which Heidegger relays in the final lecture,

³⁹⁷ Adorno and Hullot-Kentor, *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, 142.

³⁹⁸ For the universality of *das Ge-Stell*, see Heidegger, *Bremer Und Freiburger Vorträge*, 40. For the threat of complete forgetfulness of the truth of Being, see ———, *Bremer Und Freiburger Vorträge*, 53.

The Turning [Die Kehre]. Though Enlistment prevents the true, it also ironically operates as the realm in which “the truth of Being” manifests. Therefore, Heidegger acknowledges the threatening dimension of modern technology that Adorno perceives, but refrains from making it essential. Heidegger departs from Adorno because he does not give up the possibility that the realm of modern technology may also, paradoxically, admit flashes of the true. For Heidegger, humanity cannot escape the overwhelming processes of Enlistment. And yet due to the very fact of inescapability, securing human consciousness of truth becomes possible if one learns to navigate a way of life with respect to the imposed limits and control of Enlistment, which Heidegger promotes.

Quoting the poetry of Hölderlin’s “Patmos,” Heidegger states, “*But where danger is, grows / The saving power also*” (italics from English translation).³⁹⁹ Salvation seems to mean here the realization that in spite of the tyranny or fact of Enlistment, opportunities arise where truth becomes unconcealed. Heidegger does not define what he means by truth beyond the notion of *aleitheia* – an unconcealing of what is.⁴⁰⁰ As Heidegger introduces a soteriological dimension to his evaluation of the modern technological age, he conveys a crucial paradox: undoubtedly, the modern technological age thoroughly threatens or spooks, to retrieve Adorno’s language, but precisely in its inescapable haunting, a “saving power” grows. Heidegger’s articulation provides philosophical entryway for thinking about how

³⁹⁹ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 42. See also ———, *Bremer Und Freiburger Vorträge*, 72.

⁴⁰⁰ Heidegger, *Bremer Und Freiburger Vorträge*, 29.

musics continue to participate in Divine giving amidst the totalizing and truth-concealing atmosphere of Enlistment.

Certainly for Heidegger, one cannot but resign as a participant in Enlistment. Yet insight into the truth of what is becomes obtainable in a fulsome sense despite such capitulation, because the world can spontaneously bring and disperse (for our reception and consideration) “the truth of Being,” akin to the way in which the pouring of a jug unexpectedly manifests a deeper appreciation and consternation regarding proximity and time.⁴⁰¹ This line of argumentation may seem to situate the world as oppositional to Enlistment. On the contrary; Heidegger definitively claims that Enlistment and the world are the same [*Welt und Ge-Stell sind das Selbe*].⁴⁰² The equivalence of Enlistment and the world reflects the paradoxical assertion that rescue surfaces on the horizon of what threatens and scares.

According to Heidegger “the truth of Being” arrives spontaneously and fleetingly to save us from the comprehensive deception of modern technology. Enlistment, in its various forms including the radiophonic, does not negate aura with the effect of producing an apparition or wraith of what once was. Rather, it conceals truth which despite the apparent success of persistent and totalizing hiding measures, still manifests anyway. The truth of Being approaches the essence of humanity in order to unite (*vereignen*) them both into an event which grants insight into what is. This eventful encounter results in a kind of transformational consciousness of how things are in the world.

⁴⁰¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays* (New York: Garland Pub., 1977).

⁴⁰² Heidegger, *Bremer Und Freiburger Vorträge*, 53.

In other words, the event delivers understandings of truth and offers opportunity for entering into true Being or true ways of Being. Whereas Heidegger begins his series of lectures with a visual illustration, Van Gogh's *Peasant Shoes*, the crux of his argumentation and its metaphysical designation gives way to the theological and sonic revelation. The truth of Being disrupts Enlistment as a flash of truth coming out of the stillness [*der aus der Stille kommt*].⁴⁰³ In this final idea from *The Turning*, although Heidegger establishes an ontological foundation for conceiving of how truth manifests in an age of modern technology, the *Blitz* Heidegger admits actually exceeds categories of Being and Being's place within modern technology.

Heidegger recognizes disclosure that cannot be understood according to the truth of Being and he tiptoes toward theological language in his attempts to capture extraordinary interruptive excess of truth. Whereas Heidegger subtly laces his metaphysical discovery with theological reserve, Marion explicitly recasts the Heideggerean truth of Being as truth of revelation. Marion writes:

Truth, at least the truth given without restraint by revelation, does not discover (itself) so much as it recovers from intuition all intentions, inundates significations with (albeit extravagant) objectivities, and saturates the horizon with its givenness without measure. In this situation, truth no longer comes from doxa, (true or false) appearance, but from paradoxon, an appearance that contradicts opinion or appearance, and above all saturates the horizon.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 77. Again, I am translating directly from the German. For an English translation, see Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, 1st ed., Harper Colophon Books Cn 419 (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 49.

⁴⁰⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 16.

Truth does not merely appear or adhere to principles of appearance, or *doxa*, but gives itself paradoxically. Truth remains given even when one perceives only fear in the effects associated with modern technology. Revelation bestows truth as a saving event because the givenness of truth is itself an uninvited, unforeseen, and unpredictable recovery, not only from the terrorizing totality of modern technology, but also from any human presumption that what we observe, interpret, and comprehend is ultimately the case.

Dutch Contemporary Musicologist, Sander van Maas has directly applied Marion's conceptualization of givenness to the paradoxical operation of music as sacred. Surveying theological reflection of Mozart from Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Marion, van Maas calls for renewed reflection upon sacred music apart from categories of the sensually apparent, or *doxa*, and instead with respect to what gives itself without showing itself, a *sacral more* that music publicly gives.⁴⁰⁵ Yet appeal to a classic example like Mozart is well worn and musically remote from the mid 20th century writings of Heidegger. Looking to the postwar ingenuity of Pierre Schaeffer and John Cage instead grants a contemporary and wider vista of how what Heidegger describes as the *Blitz* manifests, how rescue beyond human expectation and purview flashes through the apparent control of a technological reality, and suggests how so much more than what Heidegger describes signals itself in the interplay between music and technology. Schaeffer and the beginnings of *musique concrète* exemplify how clever musical fortitude and

⁴⁰⁵ Sander van Maas, "On Preferring Mozart," *Bijdragen* 65, no. 1 (2004): 109-10.

inventiveness can create musical openings within which blitzes of truth disrupt the totalization of modern technology. Cage and his early experimentations with magnetic tape display how the technologically transgressive becomes musically advancing and redemptive.

Yet the musics of Schaeffer and Cage do not merely participate in political liberation or artistic innovation that they devise. Their musics also display what could be described as a recovery of paradoxical truth à la Marion. The recovery of paradoxical truths does not result from the composers' intentions, but rather in spite of them. The musics of Cage and Schaeffer show that that precisely at the impasse of what appears as absolute concealment and loss of the authentic, unpredictable and even unfathomable uncovering occurs – what Heidegger skillfully but nevertheless with hedging intimates as *aleithea*. Truth appears as glints of rescue to the current desolation of technology and unexplainable nearness that at the very least approximates Marion boldly identifies as the revelatory, and at the unexplainable most, embodies it.

Consider an entirely different historical anecdote to illustrate how truths paradoxically appear in technological musics. Just shy of seventy years after Mozart completed his *Jupiter Symphony*, on March 25, 1857, Édouard Léon Scott de Martinville patented the phonautograph, believed to be the earliest device for recording sound. The phonautograph did not record sound for playback, but literally etched out a graphical presentation of it for visual analysis. Scott and his

colleagues believed seeing sound made it more understandable.⁴⁰⁶ A recording from the device still exists, *Au clair de la lune* ('By Moonlight' 1860). It is the earliest known "recording" predating those of Edison. And ironically in 2008, a group named First Sounds engineered a way to do precisely what the phonautograph inventors did not set out to achieve. They engineered a way to play back what Scott had graphically recorded. The single-minded goal of the engineers to retrieve the original recording beyond Martinville's original intentions does not amount to a blitz of truth. Rather, the First Sounds personnel succumb to the provocation of the technological and the continuity of musics given by sonic ubiquity. On the one hand, their experimentation can't help but "restore" an auditory dimension that grounded the invention of Martinville. On the other hand, their sonic retrieval does not fixate enough upon what any documentation of sound truly offers for interpretation.

Today, sound is not simply made legible but functions as a type of writing itself known as sonification or auditory display. Auditory displays like sonar and sonogram have become familiar symbolic vernacular for articulating events that elude the grasp of discursive language. More examples include tornado signals and audible alerts on personal computers and electronic devices (the Macintosh ping of new e-mail or bonk of a misplaced click – cleverly called "earcons"). Legible sound also occurs isomorphically or identically to that which it is trying to convey. Sonocytology, amplification of inaudible vibrations from cellular life, and digital transcoding, rendering sonic data in electronic portraiture like wave forms or

⁴⁰⁶ Jonathan Sterne and Mitchell Akiyama, "The Recording that Never Wanted to Be Heard and Other Stories of Sonification" in Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld, *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (New York: Oxford UP, 2012), 546.

producing music via midi hardware like the JazzMutant Lemur and ReaTable or software like Ableton Live, are examples of isomorphic auditory display and sound design. Sonic science has also come together in artworks such as “Life Music,” where composer John Dunn and biologist Mary Anne Clark (1999) sonify DNA sequences by assigning pitches to amino acid sequences and Christian Dayé (2006) who sonically represents a variety of socioeconomic data using the time/space coordinates of Magellan’s 1519–1522 circumnavigation of the globe.⁴⁰⁷ What would it mean to develop sound engineering, sonification, auditory display, and sound design with respect to theological interpretation and expression?

One analysis of popular music and homiletic theory steps toward an answer. In *Mashup Religion*, John McClure analogizes the machinations of musical software like DAW [Digital Audio Workstation] interface and the methods of developing theological discourse and proclamation.⁴⁰⁸ McClure advocates for invention in theological discourse and proclamation based upon “intertextuality,” where discursive originality comprises multivocality in sources.⁴⁰⁹ McClure provides a kind of kaleidoscopic reconfiguration regarding the loss of aura Adorno develops via Benjamin. The plurality and countless musics that modern technology allows

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 552.

⁴⁰⁸ John S. McClure, *Mashup Religion: Pop Music and Theological Invention* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press), 49, 53. Although McClure uses music to illustrate in similar fashion to Jeremy Begbie, in contrast to Begbie, McClure gestures toward openings for expressions of hope and faith that may surface alongside and beyond his method of analogy.

⁴⁰⁹ McClure borrows his use of intertextuality from the literary theory of Mikhail Bakhtin. McClure reads Bakhtin as arguing that all writing seeps with otherness claimed as ownness. Ibid., 86.

and corrupts become seedbeds of opportunity for theological invention, and not simply the loss of a meaningful “once was” like aura. Additionally, McClure accepts and reassembles McLuhan’s aphorism that the medium is the message. The DJ creatively remixes the *hic et nunc*, and transforms the shock of recorded and broadcast sounds into danceable awe. With an eye toward theological composition and preaching, McClure advocates “a shift toward pragmatic, postsemiotic invention, in which the invention of religious meaning across languages and cultures supersedes language and culture-bound invention.”⁴¹⁰

The shift he proposes is perhaps more radical than he realizes in its gesture toward the phenomenological. Instead of preacher as DJ, what if a DJ preached, using artifacts of sound culture to craft and proclaim a message from mixing, cutting, sampling, beatmatching, and scratching within her booth or room, and not constructed at the desk of exegesis and announced from a pulpit, but rather for a gathering of revelers, or audiences online, or record label subscribers? The multivocal implication in this instance expands McClure’s argument and updates use of Cageian method for explicitly theological content that copies and reassembles sound within the unbreakable grip of technology beyond meaning toward divergent expressions to an ultimate Incomprehensibility that gives over and over again. Of course, the DJ as preacher would also find that the proclamation of the final mix eludes absolute authorial control. The giving of God in sound, after all, occurs alongside and irrespective of human tampering and creativity.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 88.

Specific to North America, theological reading could also begin to examine how electronically based music leapt from radio stations to conferences and concert halls to reinvention. Musicians like New York Sheridan Square DJ Francis Grasso introduced turntable mixing in disco music in the late 1960's. Chicagoan Frankie Knuckles birthed what would become House music in the late 1970's and early 80's, which led to Techno music from Juan Atkins, Derrick May, and Kevin Saunderson in Detroit, the mix-tape from Tom Moulton, who resided at zip code 12345, and the inception of Hip Hop from Kool Herc and Clive Campbell in the Bronx.⁴¹¹ Long before the influential moves of these DJs, music fused with modern technology in the likes of Bessie Smith records cut in the 1920s and 30s, the wave of guitar amplified and microphonic hits from Chuck Berry, Jimmy Hendrix, Aretha Franklin, Patsy Cline, and Hank Williams in the 1950s and 60s, and the exponential number of canonized, obscure and forgotten, mundane and unlikely musics fully engaged with modern technology since. Going back even further, in 1884, Herman Hollerith filed a patent for compiling statistics that would lead to a business called International Business Machines (IBM) under Thomas J. Watson, Sr.⁴¹² And the rest, as they say, is history. Modern technology has simply furthered the world's musical

⁴¹¹ For Grasso, see Fiona Buckland, *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), xii. See also Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a Dj Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey*, 1st American ed. (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 128-33.

For Knuckles, Atkins, May, Saunderson, and Moulton, see Brewster and Broughton, *Last Night a Dj Saved My Life*, 174-82; 208-13. For autobiographical reflection from Kool Herc on the history and social significance of hip hop and more on Clive Campbell, see Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), xi-xiii.

⁴¹² Emerson W. Pugh, *Building IBM: Shaping an Industry and Its Technology*, History of Computing (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

array. What would it mean to hear the artifacts from popular movements of electronically touched musics like these with respect to what Heidegger describes as the *Blitz*?⁴¹³ Surrendering to the inextricable influence of modern technology upon musics does not discount the possibility of more being given than the current age initially recognizes, not destruction but redemption, not artistic deterioration, but musical re-imagination and new instantiations of the authentic and even the theologically profound.

Before and during the time of radio and magnetic tape to the proliferation of mobile phones, computer devices, games, modes of surveillance, exploitation, voyeurism, and beyond, modern technology has gradually and permanently contributed to and changed the ubiquity of sound and music in the world. For Adorno, modern technology makes the authentic of music a phantom that haunts our listening. We can only surrender to the absolute loss of what once was. And yet for Heidegger, precisely within an era of irreversibly horrifying danger, the possibility of resignation opens itself to the creepy possibility of redemption, a saving power exceeding what even Heidegger could conceive.

Beyond both Adorno and Heidegger, and in concert with Marion the argument here suggests that an unexpected redemption exceeds the truth of Being. Every musical sound, whispering and weak, obnoxious and overwhelming and everything in between becomes somehow disrupted by theological marvel—that in any given music, even the technologically complicit, God gives. Musics do not shock

⁴¹³ See also “An Ethnographic Approach to Studying Popular Culture” in Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 162-83.

following the lead of technological necromancy. What musics are and can be falls along a horizon that stretches without knowable limits, a redeeming sonic field within which the stillness of a divine and incomprehensible voice may reveal itself without limit. Announcing and committing to theological truth of this magnitude seems too great, even preposterous or creepy.⁴¹⁴ And of course, it is.

⁴¹⁴ As David Foster Wallace writes, “naïveté is the last terrible sin in the theology of millennial America.” David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest: A Novel*, 1st ed. (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Company, 1996), 694. It is precisely at the site of such transgression that music becomes most theologically pregnant.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

“In the end, its powers are not physical, but spiritual: for music does not make miracles, does not cure plagues or snakebite; music cannot make grain grow, or rain fall. Music does not change owls into princesses or bring back a departed lover; music does not literally make others submissive or assuage their desires...And as for joy, music is not its cause, but its companion.” – Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*⁴¹⁵

“In order to treat depth as breadth viewed in profile, in order to arrive at an isotropic space, the subject must leave his place, abandon his point of view on the world, and think in a sort of ubiquity. For God, who is everywhere, breadth is immediately equivalent to depth. Intellectualism and empiricism do not give us any account of the human experience of the world; they tell us what God might think about it.” – Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*⁴¹⁶

If only we knew
what music is.
If only we understood.
- Adam Zagajewski, *Poets Photographed*⁴¹⁷

Sonic Ubiquity

“The world sounds.”⁴¹⁸ Without ceasing, sounds permeate every environment and constitute the places they inhabit and the persons they encounter.

⁴¹⁵ Vladimir Jankélévitch and Carolyn Abbate, *Music and the Ineffable* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 128.

⁴¹⁶ English translation modified by the author. For the French, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie De La Perception*, Bibliothèque Des Idées. (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 296-97.

⁴¹⁷ Adam Zagajewski and Clare Cavanagh, *Unseen Hand*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 66.

The relentless presence of sonic ubiquity gives musics no matter where we are. And given musics everywhere instantiate the generosity of God. Musics, therefore, do not merely illustrate insights about the Divine. They euphoniously manifest holiness in the world.

For pioneering theologian of music, Jeremy Begbie, however, the tonal departures and postwar innovations of avant-garde composers like Pierre Boulez and John Cage defy what God grants. More viciously, they disintegrate theological dimensions of musics. For Begbie, the music of Boulez embodies “control at the price of destruction” and Cage’s compositions promote an aesthetic of “Let it Be.”⁴¹⁹ According to Begbie, Boulez cancels out any sense of musical contingency and order provided by God. Boulez brutalizes Western tonality by controlling every musical value with preconceived compositional formula, resulting in music strangled by an unsustainable structural density and sonic destruction unfit for theological examination. Cage transgresses in counterpoint to the absolute control of Boulez. Begbie sees in his compositions artistic release of detrimental proportions. According to Begbie, chance operations in the music of Cage absolutely disregard God given permission for humans to create and apprehend music with purpose. By relinquishing authorial intent, Cage produces musics tantamount to theological nihilism.

⁴¹⁸ Kandinsky as quoted by Michel Henry. See Michel Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 1st ed., Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham UP, 2008), 134.

⁴¹⁹ Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth : Christian Wisdom in the World of Music*, Engaging Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 246, 50.

Especially in his critique of Cage, Begbie adopts a kind of Boethian line toward music and human freedom. For Boethius, knowledge comprised freedom exercised in rational judgment that appropriately discovers and determines how the consonant harmonic ratios of the world correspond to musical forms.⁴²⁰ Steeped in Pythagorean tradition, Boethius wrote, “the power of the intellect ought to be summoned, so that this art [music], innate through nature, may also be mastered, comprehended through knowledge.”⁴²¹ Similarly, Begbie emphatically claims that God has freed human beings to create music purposefully, not randomly, and music happens only when the condition of human intent is present. For Begbie, God meant music to be made in accordance with an intentional order and harmony in art and the world granted by God.

Two problems arise, however, when musician and music must conform to a theological perspective like Begbie’s. The first is theological ventriloquy, where the musician and music no longer speak for themselves. Instead they voice preconceived beliefs or doctrines. Humanity decides what Christianity is and determines what it sounds like. The same goes for music at large. Therefore, God’s movement within musics reduces to anthropomorphism and human rationality or at least human mediation.⁴²² Ventriloquy may reanimate *a priori* theological ways

⁴²⁰ “What a musician is” in Boethius, Calvin M. Bower, and Claude V. Palisca, *Fundamentals of Music* (New York: Yale UP, 1989), 50-51.

⁴²¹ “Introduction: Music forms a part of us through nature, and can ennoble or debase character” in *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴²² See for example, the problematic arguments of Wolterstorff in Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action : Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

of knowing, but it precludes receiving musics as gifts that directly manifest what is holy, as instantiations of Divine charity.

The second problem is sonic xenophobia. Though Begbie creates several pathways for considering music theologically, his continued prioritization of Western serious tonal musics has domesticated theological scholarship of music. While Begbie acknowledges that differences in music exist, and he also positions his restriction to Western tonality as a measure against imparting “Western conceit and hegemony,” his acknowledgement of difference is arguably token in its elocution.⁴²³ His focus upon Western tonality has become a narrowing and normative methodological preference for theological analysis of music in general.⁴²⁴ If Begbie’s selections disclose truths about God, an implication is that those musics outside his range of choice do not participate in Divine disclosure or

1980), 92. See also where Wolterstorff mischaracterizes Cage as chiefly composing with regard to Zen Buddhism, 195.

⁴²³ For Begbie writing about musical diversity, see his discussions about popular musicians like Elvis Costello, and his reflection upon Balinese gamelan music and singing the South African national anthem in South Africa in Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 13-15, 29-31, 289-93. For his explanation of focusing upon Western tonality as a measure of prevention against hegemony and conceit, see pg. 29.

⁴²⁴ See for example Catherine Pickstock, "God and Meaning in Music: Messiaen, Deleuze, and the Musico-Theological Critique of Modernism and Postmodernism," *Sacred Music* 134, no. 4 (2007). But also Bruce Ellis Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2003). Benson’s phenomenology of music does not contest the use of “classical music,” but rather questions privilege given to the genius of composers instead of theological concentration upon the virtuosity and dialogue of performers. Benson requests that his readers “look back” to Western music of the 1800s for theological rediscovery in the performance practice of music, see pg. 16. Musical others become vital in musical conversation, but primarily as interpreters post performance. See “Being Musical with the Other,” pgs. 163-191.

at least not that well. A border exists for what musics can be deemed theologically adequate and appropriate.

Evading sonic xenophobia, the fear of foreign musics, and the risk of theological ethnocentrism in the study of music means discovering how countless sounds in the world may also present themselves as holy gifts. These musical gifts sacralize, even sacramentalize, earthly existence with and without our knowing and irrespective of our permission. These musical gifts do not conform to preconceived belief, but resist theological ventriloquy as they mysteriously, and perhaps even unknowingly, unite as participants in Divine generosity.

Such charity sounds not only improbable, but also impossible. Yet givenness is neither marked by reception of a gift nor the awareness of one sent.⁴²⁵ This impossibility perhaps incites resistance to music's claim of truth and the announcement of Divine charity in reality. But precisely at the moment of refusal, theological encounter happens. Theological interaction with musics has already begun and taken root due to the fact that what cannot be possibly received can neither be possibly rejected.⁴²⁶ The givenness of music occurs with or without need to identify a sender or recipient. With or without human awareness, God gives in musics, unnoticeably, impossibly, indulgently and even overwhelmingly.

⁴²⁵ For more explication regarding transaction and gift, see chapter 5.

⁴²⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, "The Banality of Saturation" in Kevin Hart, *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 404-05.

The Charitable Call of Musics

Musics manifest God's giving and announce the holy. They play a part in a Divine summoning or what could be described as calling.⁴²⁷ Joseph Ballan writes, "In our own silence, we learn that that which gives itself to be heard exceeds our capability of listening to it, but that beauty (in art, in the world), far from being indifferent to our response, beckons it, provoking the almost imperceptible movement in which listening becomes speaking and singing." And Ballan continues, "Additionally, to offer the world in ones' naked speech and song is not only to pronounce this opening to the other, this receiving, but it is to speak and to sing to another person (or, perhaps, to God)."⁴²⁸ Furthering Ballan's thought and removing his theological hedge, the receipt of musical summoning moves us from passive experiences to active proclamations and songs, the voicing of doxology for life and even for God.

The holy giving from musics within sonic ubiquity arises from the experience of a double constitution. We perceive sounds as musics. But the Spirit of God has informed musics so that they act upon us as a provision of sonic ubiquity that shares the infinite generosity of God.⁴²⁹ One might contend that retrieving

⁴²⁷ For more on musical communication unrelated to theology, especially concerning cognitive and physiological experimentation as well as research into educational and commercial contexts, see Dorothy Miell, Raymond A. R. MacDonald, and David J. Hargreaves, *Musical Communication* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2005).

⁴²⁸ Joseph Ballan, "Between Call and Voice: The Antiphonal Thought of Jean-Louis Chrétien" in Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology*, 1st ed., Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham UP), 205.

Boulez and Cage to support an assertion that musics instantiate the generosity of God merely widens Begbie's Western musical borders without bringing serious challenge to them. That Boulez and Cage clearly belong to a stylized musical canon, however, in no way diminishes the infinite charity operating within their music and all musics that exceeds any mode of categorization or preference. Such generosity finds a way to all persons and places without limit and without discretion to anyone except its own will. It fills all musics without limit and gives of itself according to itself; a radical charity which these pages can only provisionally describe by theologically interpreting particular musical minds and events.

Importantly then, those who experience music do not ultimately decide its theological significance. Neither authorship nor the intention of listeners captures or constitutes what musics theologically elucidate. Rather, music, in its limitless myriad of occurrences, constitutes its recipients. And in as much as musics resist our theological definitions and scandalize our theological argumentation, we are, alongside our examinations and in spite of our analyses, re-defined, so to speak, by musics amplifying the giving of God. In moments unexpected, sounds profoundly anticipate and announce a holy arrival (whether foreseen or desired) exceeding their own natural and empirically perceived parameters.

⁴²⁹ For a non theological investigation of sound and the complexities of its perceptual modalities, see Casey O'Callaghan, *Sounds: A Philosophical Theory* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford UP, 2007), 196-207. Concerning the history of aesthetic debates about music, especially with regards to developments in Western philosophy and tonality, see Andy Hamilton, *Aesthetics and Music*, Continuum Aesthetics (London; New York: Continuum, 2007).

Hopes for Hearings of Sonic Ubiquity

Musics manifest God's giving in unlikely and obscure places, as well as moments not necessarily rare or unique. Even the spoken and written display a definitive paradox—the betrayal that sounds pronounced and clairaudient (like when we read), those ordinary, mundane, and quickly forgotten pitches surprise us with an incomprehensible encounter with the generosity of God. Consider the practices of homiletics and liturgics. In preaching, sermons of all kinds—the truest, the transgressive, the false, and the forgotten—share Divine charity. In other words, whether or not a preacher preaches well (however one chooses to adjudicate this standard), the generosity of God abides within and in spite of what is actually said.

As Smith writes, redemption can happen irrespective of whether preaching actually delivers the promises of God.⁴³⁰ Not only this, but redemption hoped for can surface in proclamations far from the mouths of ministers. The public sphere and each sound emanating from within its enclosures bring instances of Divine charity utterly near. Those sounds therefore communicate homiletically. What would it mean to publish preaching books and structure preaching pedagogy with homiletic riches like sonic ubiquity and its share of Divine charity in mind? The works of Thomas H. Troeger, Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, Stephen H. Webb, John S. McClure and Audrey D. Thompson approach a question like this one without addressing it directly as the project here describes.⁴³¹ More direct response must

⁴³⁰ Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2007), 26.

also entail shifting from the study of Scripture and exegesis as central to sermon preparation. Instead, a myriad of preaching resources make themselves available because any sonic resource declares the giving of God. Training future preachers and homileticians would then endeavor to instill in students openness for the revelatory as heard and experienced in life, even the most unexpected arenas of life, as primary source for sermon preparation. Perhaps this would also entail far greater returned attention to the sounds of prayer as well as the murmurings of every place that nondiscursive manifestations become audible and perceivable.

As for liturgics, and more broadly worship, collective praise and prayer can no longer be understood as strictly wrought by the people. Instead, a vast attunement on offer from God in phenomena like the musics of sonic ubiquity compels persons to reverence for the Divine and love for neighbors in innumerable spaces. The call of God in sound happens in the splash of baptism and the clink of the Eucharistic. In the squeak of faucets and scrape of plates wherever persons gather, God also gives. Moreover, sounds of public outcry also attest to Divine charity. Mark L. Taylor describes something like this in his exposition of dramatic “theatrics of counterterror” (the Occupy movement might serve as an example for him) and how they “spill over into all sectors of human life” to demand justice in

⁴³¹ Thomas H. Troeger, *Ten Strategies for Preaching in a Multimedia Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996). Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997). John S. McClure, *Mashup Religion: Pop Music and Theological Invention* (Waco, TX.: Baylor UP, 2011). Stephen H. Webb, *The Divine Voice: Christian Proclamation and the Theology of Sound* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2004). Audrey D. Thompson, "'Til Earth and Heaven Ring: A Theological Theory of the Sense of Sound in the Black Preaching Event of the Word" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2010).

the face of American greed and unbridled incarceration.⁴³² But Taylor separates the liturgical inside of the ecclesia from the public worship active in the world too much in order to maximalize his point about recognizing public liturgies. Zolt Ilyés offers a finer grained analysis when he asserts that liturgy involves free action. Liturgy requires no end. It manifests as holy play. In liturgy, the unending gifts of God such as grace, forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life are celebrated and anticipated.⁴³³ If liturgy arises from a free “ludic spirit” as Ilyés suggests, then surely sounds (even unanticipated and “atheological” ones) inside and outside congregations glorify God and compel praise, gratitude, redemption, and conversion from humans and creation everywhere (Luke 19:40).

The unity, but not uniformity, that musics share in sonic ubiquity as instantiations of Divine charity has implications for theological study of culture more broadly defined. Culture often refers to plural anthropological practices and contexts that give shape to how humans group and understand themselves.⁴³⁴ Within such a framework, musics are artifacts of culture, structured and produced according to human intent. Sonic ubiquity, however, grants musics whether humanity intends them or not, and these given musics instantiate the generosity of God, whether humanity intends them to do so or not. Therefore, theological study

⁴³² Mark L. Taylor, *Executed God: Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress; Alban, 2001), 160ff.

⁴³³ Zsolt Ilyés, "The Human Person at Play: A Model for Contemporary Liturgical Understanding," in *The Liturgical Subject: Subject, Subjectivity and the Human Person in Contemporary Liturgical Discussion and Critique*, ed. James G. Leachman OSB (London: SCM Press 2008), 143.

⁴³⁴ Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 1-24.

of culture must reconsider the very definition of culture, at least with respect to sound and music, and the social dimensions from which theological arguments become possible. Even if such reconsideration does not happen, an individual or a gathering of persons could experience music of such revelatory proportion that instantly, like a *Blitz* of truth, a persuasive and thoroughly reasoned articulation of theology could flow from unsuspecting hands or announce itself from normally silent mouths. The likelihood of such an event could be described as Divine Inspiration or delusion. Or it could simply be another facet of God's blessing in sonic ubiquity.

Those constituted by the *Blitz* of musics pervasive in the world might include scholars and practitioners without any theological training, interest, or inclination. For example, those experts in the study and practice of musics without theological background or curiosity now have theological doorways thrust open to them wherever their minds, ears and artistic sensibilities lead, and this study requests and welcomes their insights.

Cage himself is an example of a musician whose mind becomes changed by the phenomenal truths communicated from sound. Consider the double phenomenological epoché Cage performs when he dismisses "belief in God" "which formerly held us together and gave meaning to our occupations," and recommends music as a substitute "guide" in the Vassar lecture.⁴³⁵ Cage rightfully dismisses or first brackets the constraint of "belief in God" because God is not bound by our

⁴³⁵ John Cage and Richard Kostelanetz, *John Cage, Writer: Previously Uncollected Pieces*, 1st ed. (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 27. See also chapter 3 of the current project.

belief or *doxa*. Belief instead entails paradox. Cage demonstrates this in his second bracketing of music as a guide that constitute hearers and participants.

Outmaneuvering any individual's claim upon it, the plurality of music sonically leads to unsuspected horizons of meaning and unity. Cage's Vassar ideas arguably culminate in 4'33", but the awareness he espouses arrives independent from his compositional invention, without his intent, theologically freighted and as utterly given.

Cage admits as much in his theoretical writings like *Silence*, where he feels the need to borrow from Thomas Aquinas (via Ananda Coomaraswamy) and Meister Eckhart in order to elucidate what he has musically discovered. From Thomas, Cage adopts the musical motto, "Art is the imitation of Nature in the manner of her operation."⁴³⁶ From Eckhart, Cage states, "Music is edifying for from time to time it sets the soul in operation. The soul is the gatherer-together of the disparate elements (Meister Eckhart), and its work fills one with peace and love" in order to articulate what he cannot find words to describe.⁴³⁷ Investigating the

⁴³⁶ Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, Second edition. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1935), 110.

Coomaraswamy captions a chapter VI with the phrase from Aquinas in its entirety, "Art is the imitation of Nature in the manner of her operation, Art is the principle manufacture."

See also Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part I, Question 117, Article I (Vol. 5, 177). Original Aquinas reference provided by Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2010), 93.

⁴³⁷ John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, [1st ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1961), 62.

For another Eckhartian reference in *Silence* especially apt for the current discussion that predates 4'33", see Cage's March 1949 contribution to the journal, *The Tiger's Eye* in Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, 64.

Eckhartian and Thomist references in Cage has remained undeveloped in the current study in order to avoid any likelihood of associating his uses of such figures as a postwar version of ventriloquy. Though its references deserve further inquiry, a work like 4'33" is not theological because Cage references thinkers from Christian antiquity.

Rather, the musical precedent of 4'33" historically emboldens a way of understanding music has little to do with his artistic influences, a way of recognizing the theological profundity of musics that 4'33" excels in exposing but in no way possesses, namely, that music gives of itself as an instance of Divine generosity. In order to frame such a conceptually elusive but sonically sensible assertion the phenomenological vocabulary of Marion has been deployed here and in previous chapters "after-the-fact" to offer one fruitful philosophical approach for grasping how music theologically communicates without the assistance of preconceived thought. Yet with or without the descriptive language of Marion or the example of Cage, musics participate in giving of Infinite proportion.

As musics share Divine generosity without border and without ultimate definition, discovering the theological wonder of musics becomes amplified to those who research or simply experience culture without any particular recourse to the academic discourses involving music or theology. With regard to visual arts,

But one must achieve this unselfconsciousness by means of transformed knowledge. This ignorance does not come from lack of knowledge but rather it is from knowledge that one may achieve this ignorance. Then we shall be informed by the divine unconsciousness and in that our ignorance will be ennobled and adorned with supernatural knowledge. It is by reason of this fact that we are made perfect by what happens to us rather than by what we do.

Robin Jensen suggests that elements of “sophisticated secular culture” might best serve objectives like religious transformation and conversion, and she cites “film, video, and print graphics” as possible modern corollaries to the techniques of the 5th century monk, Paulinus, who commissioned additional paintings of Christ, saints, and biblical stories to focus the attention of pilgrims to his basilica in Nola, Italy to thoughts of God.⁴³⁸ And what if these cultural resources spoke of God even in events where there was no intention of them doing so?

Since sounds fill all places, persons have the opportunity to encounter the generosity of God wherever they are. Likely encounters include the sonically familiar like conversations, the cacophony of home, the stillness of the outside, and even the hum of a workplace. Encounter with Divine generosity also includes the absurd and gizmodically indulgent like a holographic Tupac coming back from “beyond the grave” to make an appearance for the revelry of Coachella.⁴³⁹ Even when the modern technological age thoroughly embroiders musics, God’s giving in musics does not cease or become corrupted. And in cases where human death and life cluster in disharmony, the generosity of God may bestow judgment as well as grace. For example, the roars, whispers and cries of the crowds, the crack of whips, the repeating knock of hammers, the creaks of wood, the beating of breasts, and the

⁴³⁸ Robin Margaret Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community*, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2004), 75-76.

⁴³⁹ Christopher Farley, "Tupac Hologram Performs at Coachella," *Wall Street Journal*, 4/16/12 2012.

ceasing of breath from the Messiah offer an indictment of sin and a gift of salvation.⁴⁴⁰

Frontiers of Scholarship for Sonic Ubiquity

In addition to homiletics and liturgics, theological studies of culture, scholarship in music, and encounters of sonic culture more broadly, at least two frontiers of scholarship come into view for widening the scope of theological analysis of music. The first entails developing hermeneutical criteria or an “infinite hermeneutic” to understand what the Spirit of God gives, without authenticating what gives and what is being given.⁴⁴¹ The second involves committing to theological modularity, where essentialist ideas and absolute adequations about the theological meaning of music become inconceivable. Developing hermeneutical criteria for the Divine givenness of musics exceeds the range of the current argument. Yet a few suggestions concerning theological modularity are offered in closing.

⁴⁴⁰ Further discussion of how sonic ubiquity bestows the judgment of God will not be occur here.

⁴⁴¹ For an introduction to Marion’s conceptualization of an “infinite hermeneutic,” see for example, Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, 1st ed., Perspectives in Continental Philosophy, (New York: Fordham UP, 2002), 126. and ———, *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 2007), 408. For selections from readers of Marion and their estimation of an infinite hermeneutics, see Marion, *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* 173, 245, 375.

See also a visual arts based argumentation for “multivalence in interpretation” from Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen*, 33.

Researching musics as instances of Divine generosity, whose theological disclosure ranges in proportion, rather than audible vessels through which prescribed tenets of faith become melodiously voiced places a new onus on the analysis of live settings. More expansive approaches to theological listening, documentation, and interpretation of live musics are needed. Theological examination of the charity of God in musics localized by sonic ubiquity means committing to “an embodied incarnational theology that helps us listen for the signs of our own times, to try to understand what we reveal about ourselves to one another and to God, and to try to discern the presence of the God of peace as we take account of the cacophony of modern life in a noisy world.”⁴⁴² The aim of studying live settings then does not amount to verification that God is indeed giving, but rather to display an impossible to reckon conceptual gift that in musical experiences, God gives.

A wide theological listening that includes ethnomusicology but is not limited to it is in order. Cognitive and neurological approaches also warrant consideration.⁴⁴³ Theological modularity entails navigating the plural, elusive, and multivalent sonic emanations of God’s generosity without definitively mapping sonic phenomena and without requiring interpretive coherence to an unrealistic degree. Brandon Labelle’s *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life*, Salomé Voeglin’s *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*,

⁴⁴² Lucy Winkett, *Our Sound Is Our Wound: Contemplative Listening to a Noisy World* (London: Continuum, 2010), 8.

⁴⁴³ Michael H. Thaut, *Rhythm, Music, and the Brain: Scientific Foundations and Clinical Applications*, 1st pbk. ed., (New York: Routledge, 2008).

and Leigh Landy's *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization* introduce new methodologically mixed ways of accounting for and deciphering the tonality of the streets, sound art, and sound-based musics. Their hermeneutics remain open and have potential for bolstering future theological projects concerning music.⁴⁴⁴ Indeed authors like them have only just begun to detail the infinite abundance made audible to us.⁴⁴⁵ The limitless participation of sounds in God's giving requires unseen methods and hermeneutics and finer analyses yet to come that endeavor to detail the pulsations of infinity.

Theological modularity also provides space for the "untrained" interpreter to recognize theological profundity in music. She too has license to articulate with others the pronouncement of miraculous encounter, just as so many persons create music of the highest regard and caliber without training. Attending to perceptual modalities outside of institutionalized learning reiterates how the theological significance or meaning of sonic ubiquity spills over into every place. Musics continuously intercept expectations and decision-making. They vex experiencing

⁴⁴⁴ Brandon Labelle, *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (New York: Continuum, 2010).

Salome Voeglin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (New York: Continuum, 2010).

Leigh Landy, *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

Sound artists sometimes contest to their work being classified as music. Yet perhaps the rehabilitated and radicalized description of music we have been using immunizes any colonizing side effects such classification may cause. For a concise argument outlining support for sound art as "non-musical sound-art" see Hamilton, *Aesthetics and Music*, 44-45.

⁴⁴⁵ See also Leigh Landy, *Making Music with Sounds* (New York; London: Routledge, 2012).

subjects and their judgments, even blasphemous ones, with varying degree. An incomprehensible Clarion that is paradoxically audible but also more sonorous than sound itself appears in all musics—the giving of God.

In revelatory instances of sound that overwhelm logical and theological precision, a paradoxical sharing in the din of the sacred occurs. Only the One who eternally gives from an immemorial past, an incomprehensible present, and an inevitable future authorizes and reliably comprehends sonic encounters of charity like these. Humanity can only receive them in full and wonder. The holy generosity reaches at times fear-invoking registers like the song of the Sirens. At other moments, it is as clandestine in its announcement as a sigh or a breeze, or murmurs of long forgotten preachers or philosophical influences kept under wraps.⁴⁴⁶ The generosity of God has an Orphic quality to it, except without any myth or cruel twist of fate. In sonic ubiquity, God delivers to us life beyond what can be seen and accompanies us neither in front nor from behind, but only toward, ever arriving for redemption not yet heard, foreseen, or imagined.⁴⁴⁷ Invisibly, but perceptibly, sounds saturate everywhere as gift of a holy elsewhere. And unexpectedly, even impossibly, they absolutely intone and summon every being to perceive musics as instances of God's giving.

⁴⁴⁶ See Lucy M. Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South: A People Without a History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1984), 14. and Reinhard May and Graham Parkes, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources : East Asian Influences on His Work* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁴⁴⁷ Hear for example Acts 1:7-11.

APPENDIX

A. Cage Lecture Excerpts

“Juilliard Lecture” Excerpt, pg. 96:

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the question was asked : After the lecture
, what is the difference between “Dr. Suzuki
mountains are mountains before studying men are men and
men are men and mountains are mountains after studying Zen
?” Suzuki answered :
“Just the same , only somewhat as though you
had your feet a little off the ground.”
music, men are men and sounds are sounds. Now, before studying
music things aren’t clear . While studying
music men are men and sounds are sounds. After studying
At the beginning, one can hear a sound and tell That is to say:
that it isn’t a human being or something to look immediately
; it is high or low — at

“Lecture on Commitment” Excerpt, pg. 118

I'll tell you one thing: being committed as I am now to commitment is very odd. As Gertrude Stein said, “There isn't any there there.” If only it were a pearl, I could reach to my forehead and find it. As Suzuki said: Living in the city I don't see how you're going to do it; living in the country you'd have a chance. And there's his article entitled *Hands*. (Let them get dirty. And who was it said something about roots—not just the roots but the dirt attached to them? Compare the trees sent to Nebraska which refused to grow simply because their roots had been cleaned up.)

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Is it true that when a murder is committed, each one of us is the murderer? If so, then ought we not be more generous to one another?

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As he says, there are already so many sounds to listen to. Why then do we make music? Consider, he says, one's relation to music like that to, for example, animals, weeds, stars, garbage, or people one may never meet again, provided one is not exclusively professional keeper, breeder, disposer, or exploiter of these.

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