Chance, Non-intention and Process

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Abstract

This paper addresses some of the theoretical and philosophical misconceptions regarding aleatory procedures in art. A common misconception is the idea that and the aleatory remain opposed to system, constraint and operation. The chance operation, I argue, does not constitute the suspension of structure but, instead, opens up new non-anthropocentric perspectives, and entails absolute commitment to the adherence towards rigorous processes. Further, this paper considers the question of whether the process (in process based art) should be considered as part of the work, and if it is indeed intrinsic to the work, of whether process should be encountered in the final manifestation of the work. This essay argues against the prevalent misconception regarding the apparent paradoxical status of the intention to produce non-intentional art. On the one hand—following Jacques Derrida's notion of iterability—the category of intention can never be pure enough to ensure that it can be put into direct opposition to chance and non-intention. On the other hand, intention and non-intention, in generative art, constitute structurally distinct phases of the entire operation and remain at least one step removed from each other.

What is often called 'generative art' covers a diverse collection of practices ranging from chance operations through to process generated work involving mathematical algorithms or the interaction of environmental variables. What is common to much of the theoretical underpinning of chance and process based approaches—from Marcel Duchamp and John Cage, through Fluxus, to the literary theories of Jackson Mac Low, Oulipo, and Language Poetry—is that the employment of an operation—over which the artist has no control—performs the function of liberating and distancing the genesis of the work from anthropocentric subjective volition. In short these procedures constitute a suspension of what is commonly called 'expression.' The substitution of process, or chance procedure, for spontaneous aesthetic decisions performs, in phenomenological terms, an abstention, or *epochē*, which brings about a radical shift in perspective, away from the 'natural attitude,' or, as Joan Retallack puts it: a redirecting of the 'geometry of attention.'[1] The aleatory procedure is put in place in order, as Cage often says, to 'bypass taste and memory.' In other words, the operation not only constitutes an abstention from aesthetic decisions but, further, the putting out of action of preconceptions of what something should look like, or sound like, based upon what one has heard and seen before. In this sense, the chance operation allows one to arrive at the unforeseen. This forms the basis of what Cage calls 'experimental action,' which aims at overcoming the subjectivised notions of genius and self-expression that have dominated modernist art and music.

In this paper I intend to address some of the theoretical and philosophical misconceptions regarding aleatory procedures. First, I wish to address the supposed opposition between the

aleatory and the constraint, or between chance and the operation. I would like to argue that chance in art is not free play but a rigorous adherence to a system that allows free play to happen. Second, I wish to address the question of whether the process should be considered as part of the work and consequently should, in some way or another, be manifested in the final outcome. Third, and perhaps most important of all, I wish to argue against the prevalent misconception regarding the apparent paradoxical status of the intention to create non-intentional works.

The Rigour of Chance Operations

One of the earliest and most thorough overviews of aleatory processes in the visual arts comes from the Fluxus artist George Brecht who published a pamphlet in 1966 entitled "Chance Imagery."[2] Brecht examines Surrealist practices involving automatism, and the automatic painting of Jackson Pollock, but ultimately Brecht is more interested in the 'mechanical' chance processes carried out by the Dadaists: Marcel Duchamp, Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp, and Max Ernst, where the result of the chance operation is accepted as final, and there is no subsequent attempt to modify or correct it. Duchamp accepted the shapes mapped out by three falling one-metre strings for his *Trois Stoppages-Etalon* (*Three Standard Stoppages*, 1913-1914), Tzara composed poems by drawing words, cut from a newspaper, out of a hat, and Arp pasted down, without alteration, scraps of paper that had been made to fall onto his canvas. In all these cases the final result must be accepted without appeal. The rigour of chance is the rigour, no matter how simple the procedure, to adhere completely to the process. To disallow the outcome of a chance operation, or to modify its results—even one of its outcomes, would compromise the process, for it would reintroduce the volitional activity of the artist, and consequently allow impulsive aesthetic decisions into the work. In all the operations outlined above, the artist must first institute a system, or a set of rules, which map occurrences onto artistic outcomes, and these decisions must be predetermined. Here certainly intention comes into play (and this will be discussed later). Duchamp decides that he will use three strings, that they will be one metre in length; that the dimensions of the canvas will be such and such, that the straight edge of the stoppage will be on a certain side of the fallen string. Yet all of these decisions are at least one step removed from any possible subjective aesthetic determination. Fluxus artist Dick Higgins' notion of 'post-cognitive' art includes the strategy of placing 'the material at one remove' from the composer'[3]—an idea very similar to Brecht's notion of the 'irrelevant process,' where two or more independent events combine in the chance operation. Brecht writes:

> In general, bias in the selection of elements for a chance-image can be avoided by using a method of selection of those elements which is independent of the characteristics of interest in the elements themselves.[4]

In an after-note written eight years after "Chance Imagery," Brecht seems to move away from the procedure of automatism, stating that, when the article was written, he had only recently met Cage, and thus 'had not seen clearly that the most important implications of chance lay in his work rather than in Pollock's.'[5]

John Cage

Cage's rejection of taste and memory stems from a basic distrust of the dominant notion of expression in art and music. Firstly, Cage sees the function of (his) music as being the initiator of change—change in the receptive understanding of both composer and audience, and, consequently change in regard to the possibilities of what music can be. With self-expression, Cage argues, we simply repeat what we already know according to habit. Secondly, the imposition of feelings blocks the way to the listening of sounds as sounds. This idea, Cage takes from the Zen Buddhism, which he studied under Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki: the doctrine of non-obstruction (and interpenetration). As he explains to Daniel Charles:

> Emotions, like all tastes and memory, are too closely linked to the self, to the ego. The emotions show that we are touched within ourselves, and tastes evidence our way of being touched on the outside. We have made the ego into a wall and the wall doesn't even have a door through which interior and exterior could communicate! Suzuki taught me to destroy that wall. What is important is to insert the individual into the current, the flux of everything that happens, And to do that the wall has to be demolished; tastes memory, and emotions have to be weakened; all the ramparts have to be razed. You can feel an emotion; just don't think that it's so important... Take it in a way that you can then let it drop!...[6]

But this does not mean that one cannot experience music and art emotionally. As Cage continues: '…I give the impression that I am against feelings. But what I am against is the imposition of feelings.' [7] Cage develops Suzuki's idea into his stricture of non-intentionality, which, as he says, not only governs his music, but also his life. Music then, in Cage's terms, functions to facilitate the audition of sounds as sounds rather than as a vehicle which transports the composer's inner emotional affects to others.

Indeterminacy

Cage's operations usually consisted of submitting the variable elements of musical composition— pitch, duration, amplitude and timbre—to a series of decisions or numerical data arrived at by means of an aleatory system. Although he utilised a variety of procedures, Cage's method of choice was the casting of the *I Ching,* which involves a binary system of determinations based on the number 64, to be arrived at by the tossing of a coin. Other systems involved the utilisation of observations of slight imperfections in a sheet of paper, and in his later years Cage procured lists of random numbers from Bell Laboratories before obtaining his own computer to generate the numbers. However, as Cage soon discovered, a score that is created by means of chance operations alone remains a fixed score. In order to ensure that each performance of a piece would significantly differ each time it occurs further systematic variations are introduced within the time of the performance. This Cage calls indeterminacy.

Scores in which the composition remains indeterminate of its performance may also be created by means of chance operations but they extend the aleatory mechanisms into the sphere of performance and, to a certain extent, into improvisation on the part of the performers. This however, is not without its problems. Although intention on the part of the composer is radically suspended, voluntarism on the part of the performer is brought back into the work. In other words, the performer, in attempting to improvise in the process, in the worst case, relies on what they already know (according to taste and memory), and perhaps, in the best scenario they indulge in a kind of automatism. Cage often complained that his performers were prone to backsliding into aesthetic improvisation. Yet one must sympathise with the performers, since it would appear that improvisational non-intentionality, free from taste and memory, unassisted by the imposition of an 'irrelevant process,' would present great difficulties to anyone, let alone trained professionals set in their ways. Cage was well aware of this problem as indicated in an interview with Bill Shoemaker in 1984:

> What I would like to find is an improvisation that is not descriptive of the performer, but is descriptive of what happens, and which is characterized by absence of intention. It is at the point of spontaneity that the performer is most apt to have recourse to his memory. He is not apt to make a discovery spontaneously.[8]

The composition of music according to mechanical chance operations is a rigorous activity. It is 'the highest discipline,' according to Cage, because it suspends all aesthetic judgment, but, as Cage argues, it is the composer rather than the work that is subjected to discipline.[9] Indeterminacy, on the other hand, would seem to be troubled by the lack of abstention from subjective values of taste. As Cage says: 'chance operations are a discipline, and improvisation is rarely a discipline… Improvisation is generally playing what you know, and what you like, and what you feel…'[10] Cage came up with various strategies to circumvent taste and memory in performance, such as letting the performers get in each other's way; giving them instruments to play that they have little or no control over; dividing time in order to reduce repetitions; and creating technical layers of complexity. But none of these strategies seem to be equal to the rigour of chance procedures. In short, non-intentionality and indeterminate improvisation, however constricted, seem to be concepts, in Cage's work, that remain opposed to each other. This is perhaps the result of a tension that exists between, on the one hand, Cage's wish to not force his emotions on an audience, and, on the other hand, his politically anarchic desire to refuse to dictate to his performers. To effectively maintain the abstention of taste would require the score to treat the performers as mere machines (as a kind of mechanical indeterminacy), yet Cage, it seems, preferred to give his performers a certain humanistic freedom, even at the cost of letting subjective decisions into the work. One could say that the use of computers or machines that run real-time aleatory algorithmic processes would seem to solve some of the problems associated with the human deployment of indeterminacy.

Chance and Operation

N. Katherine Hayles understands Cage's methods, quite rightly, as an attempt to open the possibility that would permit us 'to grasp through our intentions a world that always exceeds and outruns those intentions,' and 'to subvert the anthropomorphic perspective that constructs continuity from a human viewpoint of control and isolation.'[11] In this way we can think of the chance operation functioning as an abstention that opens the way to a renewed phenomenological starting point. However, contrary to Husserl's phenomenology, Cage's work is concerned with worldly processes rather than intentional objects. In *Empty Words,* he writes:

> To focus attention, one must ignore all the rest of creation. We have a history of doing precisely that. In changing our minds, therefore, we look for that attitude that is non-exclusive, that can include what we know together with what we do not yet imagine.[12]

Hayles observes that the conjoining of the words 'chance' and 'operation,' since chance is 'in excess of our expectations,' and operation derives from *operari* and *opus*, would seem to be at odds. Yet, if we don't have a system (procedure, operation, process) we are left to flounder in the arbitrary, which means to return to the anthropomorphic perspective, to whim, caprice, and other forms of conscious and unconscious voluntarism. I would argue that chance in Cage's terms *implies* operation, or procedure. The gist of this is that 'chance' and 'operation,' in Cage's terms, essentially equate to the same thing: *disconnection*.

In an Interview with Cage, Daniel Charles compares the utilisation of chance operations to the approach of Xenakis, which uses probability formulae to control the direction of statistical tendencies. Cage replies: 'What I hope for is the ability of seeing anything whatsoever… If you are in that stage of mutation, you are situated in change and immersed in process. While if you are dealing with a statistic, then you return to the world of objects…'[13] Because Cage seeks the unforeseen 'anything whatever,' the process remains radically disconnected from what it 'lets' emerge. The more irrelevant the process, in Brecht's sense, the more creative subjectivity is distanced, and the more the arbitrary is put out of action. If one of the most essential outcomes of the chance operation is the acceptance of what something is, rather than what we think it should be, then the desire to find complexity, or resemblance to the operations of nature—or how we customarily think nature to be—in the result would constitute a presupposition that gets in the way. Consequently, the emphasis on what might constitute a more authentically random procedure, where one might wish to value one procedure over another, on perhaps statistical grounds, would seem to constitute a presupposition that would be essentially contrary to Cage's experimental methodology as a way to the unforeseen. Chance is not some mystical realm to which appeals are made—however much a certain mysticism associated with the *I Ching* might suggest this. Chance is not free play; rather, it is an abstentional operation that allows free play to happen.

Chance and Anti-chance

Within the history of twentieth and twenty-first century process based practices a number of

debates and contentious issues have arisen that I feel have often contributed to certain misconceptions regarding the practice of aleatory and process based operations. For instance, the French literary group Oulipo (*Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*) has consistently argued for the employment of mathematical structures which work as constraining procedures in the generation of poetry and novels but at the same time they vehemently oppose the utilisation of aleatory methods. The Oulipo tend to associate chance operations historically with Surrealism, where a certain stress is put on the links between aleatory procedures, and the unconscious.[14] Chance has tended in surrealist theories to be regarded as a means of quasi-mystical transcendence. The Oulipo's founder, Raymond Queneau's rejection of the aleatory is, as Jacques Roubaud observes, a 'rejection of the mystical belief according to which freedom may be born from the random elimination of constraints.'[15] Yet this would seem to constitute a very odd conception of the chance operation. The chance operation would surely constitute the imposition of a constraint rather than the elimination of constraints and would seem to constitute as much a formal constraint as the mathematical procedure. Queneau insists on what he calls *voluntary*, or *conscious* approach to literature, by which he means, not that *writing* should be spontaneous or rational, but that the *formal constraint* must be consciously predetermined and voluntarily enforced. If what is conscious and voluntary is the adherence to the procedure rather than what it suspends, how cannot the same be said of aleatory systems? However, the difference between Oulipian deterministic procedures and the aleatory/indeterminate procedures of Duchamp and Cage is that deterministic procedures—such as acrostics, mesostics, diastics, or mathematical operations such as the Oulipian (s + 7) method[16]——assuming that the source materials remain the same— always deliver the same results.

The Reception of Chance

It is not hard to see how contingency systems allow the artist to bypass aesthetic judgments of taste, but what are the implications of the utilisation of such systems in terms of their reception by an audience. Is the experience of listening to an indeterminate piece of music, or a chance derived artwork, ostensively any different from the experience that one may receive from a work composed by more subjective means? Should the work of art actively work to prevent a subjectivised response, so that the audience might open up to hear sounds as sounds? Cage had indicated in 1965 that his recent work had turned to a concern with processes: 'setting a process going which has no necessary beginning, no middle, no end, and no sections.'[17] Here process becomes more important than objects, but if process has primacy then in what way would an audience—which is not engaged in the making of the work—encounter the process at work? This of course was a criticism made of Cage's methods by the 'minimalist' composer, Steve Reich, in "Music as a Gradual Process" (1968). Although Cage accepts the results of processes, Reich argues that these processes cannot be heard in the music itself, thus: 'the compositional processes and the sounding music have no audible connection.'[18] Cage responds to this criticism in an interview in 1983 arguing that it is not necessary for the audience to understand, and thus participate, in the process because, he says, 'I'm on the side of keeping things mysterious… If I understand something, I have no further use for it.'[19] Cage somewhat ingenuously dodges the question. Certainly, for the audience, the aleatory processes in Cage's work *are* mysterious, but it would be stretching the

point to say that they remain mysterious for the composer who at all times has an intimate knowledge of them. The question becomes: if the work is not an object but a process, should—or to what extent should—the process be encountered as part of the work (which is not to say that it should be fully understood)? The risk would seem to be that if process is not encountered in the work the receiving subject falls back on traditional modes of reception where the work of art is read as a product of expression, that is, of the direct or indirect transmission of the inner emotional life of an original and authentic subjectivity.

Robert Morris observes a trend in art since World War II where 'artists have increasingly sought to remove the arbitrary from working by finding a system according to which they could work,'[20] Morris cites Cage's use of chance operations as an example of this thread that has run from Duchamp through to Jasper Johns and Frank Stella and to Conceptual Art. In opposition to this thread, Morris observes the continuance of another systematising thread of methodologies that he refers to as bearing towards a 'phenomenological' direction, where the system that orders the work is not derived from a prior and external logical system, but from 'the "tendencies" inherent in a materials/process interaction.'[21] In other words, forms are discovered in the activity of interacting with material properties. In this way of working—epitomised for Morris, by the work of Pollock—the material, in a certain way, determines the working process, and, more importantly, for Morris, the process is made manifest in the work. This is exemplified, quite literally, in Morris' 1961 work, *Box with the Sound of its Own Making*: a ten inch cube that plays back, from a tape player concealed within it, the recorded sounds of its own construction. In other words, encountering the process in the work effects the way we read the work.

In the first case, contingency systems such as the chance operation, and the found object, put in place, in the making process, a radical abstention from aesthetic position-taking. But if no residue remains of the operation, the conditions of the genesis of the work become obscure, and nothing would seem to offer resistance to reading the work, not only in terms of its purely morphological aspects of audition, but, even worse, as a product of the artist's interiority. In the second case, the material/process interaction makes its processes manifest, and thus provides a context for the work, and, as Morris insists, reveals information rather than purely aesthetic form. Yet it must be emphasised that the latter tendency, by inviting spontaneity (as seen in the example of Pollock), and allowing the arbitrary to enter the making process at any point, falls short of the more rigorous aesthetic abstention that the chance operation performs. Are the non-volitional activities of contingency systems, and the revealing of process in materials/process works mutually exclusive? Can we conceive of a radically disconnecting system that, at the same time, reveals itself as such?

I would suggest that works such as Reich's early process works combine both radical aesthetic abstention and manifestation of process. Reich argues for perceptible processes that can be heard in the music as it is performed, in fact 'pieces of music that are, literally, processes.'[22] Such (gradual) processes include: 'pulling back a swing, releasing it, and observing it gradually come to rest.'[23] In the same year that "Music as a Gradual Process" was written, Reich composed a process piece entitled: *Pendulum Music: For Microphones,*

Amplifiers and Speakers, which consists of three or more microphones suspended from their cables directly above speakers. The microphones are pulled back by the performers, and then let go in unison, allowing them to swing over the speakers, thus creating pulsed audio feedback according to changing phase relations. The piece ends shortly after the microphones come to rest. We are able to *hear* the process in such events, Reich contends, because they occur gradually and thus invite 'sustained attention.'[24] But, at the same time, according to Reich, the sound that one hears moves away from intentions, and what is distinctive of such processes is that 'they determine all the note-to-note details and the over all form simultaneously. One can't improvise in a musical process—the concepts are mutually exclusive.'[25]

Processes and Systems

In the visual arts a similar attention to processes characterised the work of Hans Haacke in the early 1960s. Haacke was interested in 'real-time systems' where physical, biological or social components interact with each other. Informed by the systems theory of cybernetics, Haacke's real-time systems, such as *Condensation Cube* (1963/1965)—a rectangular clear plastic container containing just enough distilled water to create condensation—are physically real open systems, responding to changes in their environment. They employ physically interdependent processes that fluctuate according to cycles and feedback loops. Haacke's systems were not constructed with aesthetic considerations in mind. They do not represent attempts to solve formal problems; rather, the look of the work is accepted as the look of a system in action, without aesthetic interference on behalf of the artist. As Haacke says, 'The structuring of elements, the materials and conditions… (of the systems), became a function of their performance.'[26] In the late 1960s, Haacke turned his attention to the social dimension of systems. In *Gallery-Goers' Birthplace and Residence Profile, Part 1* (1969), visitors were asked to indicate with a red pin, on maps of the five boroughs of New York City, their birthplace, and with a blue pin, their place of permanent residence. Haacke took photographs of each location and arranged them on the gallery wall in accordance with each location's distance from Fifth Avenue, along with other statistical information. In *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real-Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System as of May 1, 1971* (1971), Haacke displays one family's concentrated ownership of tenement buildings in the slum districts of Manhattan (Harlem and the Lower East Side). In another work, *News* (1969), a Teletype machine prints out real-time news agency feeds, which progressively accumulate on the floor in a heap.

Haacke's early pieces resemble Reich's processes, and one can see a direct connection between these early process pieces and the later real-time social systems that are often exclusively considered under the art-historical term of 'institutional critique.' In many ways, Haacke's process works carry out the prescriptions of Sol LeWitt, which were published in his "Paragraphs on Conceptual art" and "Sentences on Conceptual Art" in the late 1960s.[27] Some of LeWitt's 'paragraphs' and 'sentences' resemble the non-intentional methodologies of Cage, Higgins, and Reich, for example from "Paragraphs…":

> To work with a plan that is pre-set is one way of avoiding subjectivity. The plan would design the work…. In each case, however, the artist would select the basic form and rules that would govern the solution of the problem. After that the fewer decisions made in the course of completing the work, the better,[28]

And from "Sentences…":

> The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with. It should run its course.[29]

Within these few short pages a number of extremely interesting ideas are developed. However the full impact of LeWitt's paragraphs and sentences never really surfaces in his own work, which remains largely confined to formal geometric seriality. I would suggest that the most interesting elaboration of these ideas shows itself in the 'real-time' systems and 'real-time social systems' of Hans Haacke, Dan Graham, and Martha Rosler during the 1960s and 70s, and in typological systems of Marcel Broodthaers, John Baldessari, Ed Ruscha, Bas Jan Ader, Bernd and Hilla Becher and others.

The apparent paradox of non-intention

A common objection, however, to the idea of non-intentionality in art is that the process of making art can never be entirely non-intentional, since there is always the decision to begin the work in the first place. Thus, many commentators have pointed to what they see as an irresolvable paradox of non-intention, where the desire to erase intention must surely be considered to be an intention itself. Seth Kim-Cohen presents a compelling argument for an alternative to what he calls the 'sound-in-itself' tendencies of sound art—which he sees as a function of Greenbergian formalism and Husserlian phenomenology. Utilising Jacques Derrida's 'critique' of phenomenology in *Speech and Phenomena*, Kim-Cohen argues for a 'non-cochlear' sonic art which, rather than celebrating the immediacy of sound as presence, and addressing itself exclusively to the senses, instead takes a textual and conceptual direction. The rather unwieldy term 'non-cochlear' is of course the aural equivalent to Duchamp's notion of non-retinal painting that is to be in the service of the mind. However, in arguing against Cage, Kim-Cohen calls into question the viability of chance operations as an artistic procedure, citing Christoph Cox's observation regarding the apparent paradox of the intention of non-intention. Kim-Cohen suggests that artistic expression and intention are ultimately unavoidable because one must always consciously make a decision how to begin. Moreover, Kim-Cohen maintains that if we accept the various 'death of the author' positions of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault then the problem of avoiding authorship would seem to become a non-problem and consequently the necessity to 'absent' the volition of the artist from the process disappears.[30] However, this would seem to require the artist to be able to continue making art, according to self-conscious conceptual intention or aesthetic volition, while remaining secure in the knowledge—perhaps with a certain amount of irony—that such operations are largely mythical. Although Kim-Cohen often cites Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena*, he neglects to observe Derrida's insistence that the traditional Western concepts, which conceive of the self-presence of speech in terms of a voluntaristic

metaphysics—where in the fulfilment of meaning-intention one says what one means (*vouloir-dire*) with complete transparent access to the certitude of the operation—need to be deconstructed. Moreover, the primacy afforded to the voice—which is seen to animate an original and prior meaning content, prior to language and signification—is so entrenched in the tradition that it cannot simply be dismissed once and for all, but requires constant vigilance requiring an immense and sustained labour. In shifting from traditional notions of aesthetic autonomy to an idea based conceptual model of sound art, Kim-Cohen—along with analytical conceptual artists such as Joseph Kosuth[31]—finds himself arguing for the primacy of intention when considering art as a discursive practice. Yet again he misses the argument that Derrida makes against the relative purity of the intentional act. There is a structural condition, Derrida argues in "Signature Event Context," that underlies all semio-linguistic communicative acts, where each signifying mark or unit must necessarily be infinitely repeatable and alterable, and thus must function independently of an author's intention. This condition, which Derrida calls 'iterabilty,'[32] ensures that '…a context is never determined enough to prohibit all possible random deviation.'[33] There is, as Derrida suggests, always 'a chance open to some [Epicurean] *parenklisis* or *clinamen*':[34] a swerve that deflects where meaning falls. In a similar way, Joan Retallack, also citing Epicurus and Lucretius, describes Cage's chance operations as a 'composed clinamen.'[35] The consequence of iterability, for Derrida, is that any utterance or signifying element can not only be taken out of context, but also radically disengaged from an originating intention.

It is not that intention is mythical. Nor does this mean that we should simply oppose non-intention and iterability to the conceptualist idea of the purity of intention and transparency of language. Derrida suggests that we conceive of communication as a 'differential typology of forms of iteration' in which intention 'will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance [*l'énonciation*].'[36] It's not that the aleatory work of art can be seen as an instance of iterability in the Derridean sense. But, to the extent that we are concerned with the constitution of meaning, the acceptance of chance operations is certainly linked to the question of accepting iterability for what it is. In simplified terms, Derrida's notion of iterability paves the way for rethinking non-intentional—but not non-meaningful—artistic procedures.

Yet, even if one does not accept Derrida's arguments for diminishing the importance assigned to intentional acts, it would be wrongheaded to describe the non-intentional practices of Cage, and others, as an attempt to erase intention. The use of aleatory procedures does not prescribe, nor necessitate, the negation of intention. Rather it proscribes its displacement. This displacement is achieved not directly through an act of willing, but indirectly through the imposition of a constraining system, procedure, or process. In the formulation of the chance operation decisions must be made. But after a certain point in these operations all decision-making tends to be suspended. The artist does not directly put intention out of action. Rather, the artist formulates a predetermined process, or set of rules, which then put intention out of action. The artist is always at least one step removed from the operation. As Sol LeWitt writes in "Sentences on Conceptual Art," 'The artist's will is secondary to the process he initiates from idea to completion.'[37] This requires not a negation

of will but a displacement from central to secondary: from the idea of creator-author-origin to that of enabler.

Moreover, I would argue that at this point a certain kind of intentionality comes into play characterised by a resolve to let the process run its course and to abstain from any authorial interference; as Robert Morris puts it: it involves 'going through with something'[38] or in Retallack's terms, the courage of the artistic swerve and the operational wager. This intention to hold back is not dissimilar to what Martin Heidegger names as 'resoluteness' (*Entschlossenheit*). Resoluteness entails, particularly in Heidegger's later writing, a willing non-willing, or a willing that is a letting.[39] This would allow us to twist free from a certain anthropocentrism that Heidegger calls representational thinking (*Vorstellung*) and its flip-side: modern subjectivism. Since it constitutes the very basis of modern Western thinking right down to everyday modes of cognition, this mode of cognition is not something that we are able to simply step out of at will. As Duchamp stated in 1946: 'the "blank" force of Dada was very salutary. It told you "don't forget you are not quite so blank as you think you are!"'[40] Heidegger's notion of non-willing does not, however, require deferring one's will to a higher will (such as God's will). Nor do Cage's chance operations make an appeal to a divine oracle. Both, rather, are forms of acceptance.

I have argued that in art chance, or the aleatory, cannot be thought separately, or in opposition to, the procedure, process, system, or constraint, and that the showing of process allows the work to be read as a work of process rather than a product of expression. I have tried to demonstrate that even the most conceptual work can be submitted to what Joan Retallack refers to as a poetics 'with the courage of the [Epicurean] swerve, the project of the wager.'[41] The swerve, the unpredictable shift in direction that, as Retallack proposes, redirects the geometry of attention, and has the potential of jolting us out of the default set of predispositions that Pierre Bourdieu calls the 'habitus.'[42] Moreover, the avant-garde practice of putting creative, or even conceptual, decision-making a step removed from the will of the artist—by letting phenomena be—allows an encounter with these phenomena that avoids the distortion of aesthetic and conceptual presuppositions. In this sense, such a practice could be said to perform a fundamental phenomenological operation. Cage's redirection, however, I would suggest, is largely aesthetic, rather than phenomenological, but his methodology has the possibility of opening up and reconfiguring our thinking in a phenomenological direction. However, although aleatory procedures radically re-order the attention of the artist, to what extent can it be said that they perform such a shift in terms of the receiving subject? This is a question that requires further consideration.

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[1] Joan Retallack, *The Poethical Wager* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 10.
[2] George Brecht, *Chance-Imagery* (ubuclassics, 2004), http://www.ubu.com/historical/gb/brecht_chance.pdf, Date Accessed 28/11/2011.

Originally published as: George Brecht, *Chance-Imagery,* (New York: a Great Bear Pamphlet by Something Else Press, 1966)

[3] Dick Higgins, *A Dialectic of Centuries: Notes Towards a Theory of the New Arts* (New York: Printed Editions, 1978), 30.

[4] Brecht, *Chance-Imagery*, 23.

[5] Ibid., 25.

[6] John Cage and Daniel Charles, *For the Birds* (Boston: M. Boyars, 1981), 148.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Interview with Bill Shoemaker (1984) in Richard Kostelanetz (ed.) *Conversing with Cage* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1988), 222.

[9] Interview with Roy M. Close (1975), ibid., 219.

[10] Interview with Stanley Kauffmann (1966), ibid., 223-4.

[11] N. Katherine Hayles, "Chance Operations: Cagean Paradox and Contemporary Science," in Perloff, Marjorie, and Charles Junkerman, eds. *John Cage: Composed in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1994).
227-8.

[12] John Cage, *Empty Words: Writings '73-'78*, 1st ed. (Middletown;
London: Wesleyan University Press; Marion Boyars, 1979), 179.

[13] John Cage and Daniel Charles, *For the Birds*, 147.

[14] Many of the Dadaists were interested in discovering the underlying 'acausal orderdness' of chance operations. Hans Richter points out that Paul Kammerer's book *Das Gesetz der Serie* (The Law of Seriality), which attempts to determine the laws of acausal relationships, was published in 1919 when many of the artistic experiments with chance were taking place. The Jungian concept of 'synchronicity,' and Freud's theory of the unconscious played an important role in the linking of chance operations to a kind of universal order independent of causality. Hans (Jean) Arp writes: 'The law of chance, which embraces all other laws and is as unfathomable to us as the depths from which all life arises, can only be comprehended by complete surrender to the Unconscious. I maintain that whoever submits to this law attains perfect life.' Quoted in Georges Hugnet: "The Dada Spirit in Painting" (1932 and 1934) in Robert Motherwell (ed.) *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press), p 140, and Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-art*, p. 55.

[15] Jacques Roubaud, "Deux Principles parfois respectés par les travaux oulipiens," *Atlas de littérature potentielle,* 90, cited in Warren F. Motte, *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986),

[16] A textual constraint where each substantive is replaced by the seventh following substantive in the dictionary.

[17] Cage, "An Interview with John Cage," Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Winter, 1965) 50-72, 55.

[18] Steve Reich, *Writings About Music* (Halifax: The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974), 10.

[19] Interview with Laura Fletcher and Thomas Moore (1983), in *Conversing with Cage*, 208.

[20] Robert Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making," *Artforum*, Vol. 8, no. 8,

April 1970, pp. 62-66, reproduced in Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily: Writings of Robert Morris*, New ed. (MIT Press, 1995), 75.
[21] Ibid., 77.
[22] Reich, *Writings About Music*, 9.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 11.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Hans Haacke, *Hans Haacke: For Real: Works 1959-2006*, ed. Matthias Flèugge and Robert Fleck (Dèusseldorf: Richter, 2006).
[27] "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* Vol. 5, no. 10, Summer 1967, 79-83). "Sentences on Conceptual Art," First published in *0-9* (New York), 1969, and *Art-Language* (England), May 1969. Both appear in Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*.
[28] Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology,* eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, 12-16 (Cambridge MA.; London: MIT, 1999), 13.
[29] Sol LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (106-108), 107.
[30] Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Towards a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 114-5.
[31] See particularly: Joseph Kosuth, "Intentions(s)" in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology.*
[32] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Northwestern University Press; Evanston, Il., 1988).
[33] Jacques Derrida, "My Chances/ Mes Chances: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies." In *Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Literature*, edited by Joseph Smith and William Kerrigan, 1-32 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 4.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Joan Retallack, *Poethical Wager*, 16.
[36] Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 18.
[37] LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," 106.
[38] Robert Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making," 87.
[39] See *Unterwegs zur Sprache,* see also the earlier essays *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* ("The Origin of the Work of Art"), and *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* ("The Essence of Truth").
[40] Marcel Duchamp, *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp: Salt Seller, Marchand Du Sel*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), 125. Originally published in "The Great Trouble with Art in This Country" From an interview with James Johnson Sweeney, *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art,* Vol. XIII, no. 4-5, 1946, 19-21.
[41] Joan Retallack, *Poethical Wager*, 3.
[42] Joan Retallack (Talk), "John Cage's Anarchic Harmony: A Poethical Wager," Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison, April 22, 2009, Pennsound, http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Retallack/Madison_04-09/Retallack-Joan_Cage-Lecture_Madison_04-22-09.mp3, Date Accessed 28/11/2011.