

John Cage, the City, and Chance (Halberstadt/Venice, 13 Sep 24–15 Sep 25)

Halberstadt, Cage-Haus / Venice, Deutsches Studienzentrum in Venedig, Sep 13–15, 2024

Deadline: Jul 15, 2024

Karina Pawlow

John Cage, the City, and Chance. An Interdisciplinary Workshop (Halberstadt 2024 / Venice 2025).

“From a musical point of view, and I’m sure from the visual point of view, one thing makes everyday life far more fascinating and special than, say, concert life. That is the variety of sound with respect to all the other things, including space.”

In this statement, extracted from a 1987 interview with Richard Kostelanetz, composer John Cage emphasizes the unique and captivating nature of the everyday auditory environment. He notes that it is enriched by a multitude of sounds and their dynamic interactions with space. Additionally, Cage suggests that sound perception entails not just auditory but also visual engagement. This radical approach to music and art has left a lasting impact on modern artistic expression. The composer’s exploration of soundscapes has inspired a new way of perceiving and creating music, breaking away from traditional notions and embracing the richness of everyday sounds.

This philosophy is evident in Cage’s television piece, the “Sounds of Venice,” created in 1959. The composition is tailored for a solo television performance utilizing 20 items and the playback of four single-track tapes, each running at 7 1/2 inches per second for 3 minutes. These items and sounds mirror the city of Venice, including its diverse bells, boat horns, and a toy imitating a cat’s meow. Executing the piece demands the artist’s visual and spatial imagination to translate the floor plan and three pages of timed notations into sounds and movements. Unlike a written composition, however, walking through a city is noticeably marked by chance: You never know when a cat will meow, a seagull will squawk, or a gondolier will start belting out a famous aria.

Expanding upon Cage’s composition and chance as guiding artistic principles, the Young Cage initiative, Halberstadt, is orchestrating an interdisciplinary two-part workshop. The first workshop (September 13th to 15th, 2024) will delve into how Cage’s emphasis on the auditory environment as a wellspring of inspiration challenges artists to contemplate the multifaceted nature of sound and its interaction with visual and spatial elements. Hence, we will convene in Halberstadt, the home of the JOHN-CAGE-ORGEL-KUNST-PROJEKT. The city’s historical significance, particularly its organ tradition, will play a pivotal role in our workshop, which encompasses a visit to spaces of the organ. Additionally, participants will partake in activities such as sound walks, a Cageian method, fostering active listening to the surroundings and documentation of encountered sounds. The workshop will culminate in the creation and presentation of one or more new compositions.

The second part, scheduled for February 10th to 13th, 2025, in Venice, will complement experiences from the first part with those in and of the city itself. A themed auditory, architectural, and topographical stroll through the city and some museums helps with orientation as participants will seek additional sounds “by chance,” potentially augmenting their compositions and stimulating new conceptualizations. Moreover, we will continue to engage in aesthetic-political reflections on indeterminacy, fostering contemplation and discussion. The series will conclude with a discussion at the German Centre for Venetian Studies and a concert conducted by workshop participants.

Program Overview:

Part 1: September 13th-15th, 2024

Halberstadt, Cage-Haus

Part 2: February 10th-13th, 2025

Venice, Deutsches Studienzentrum in Venedig (German Centre for Venetian Studies)

We are looking forward to receiving submissions (current projects and motivation max. 500 words and a bio of max. 150 words) from advanced Master and Doctoral students and Early Career Researchers of music and arts, as well as musicology, architecture, urban studies, art history, aesthetics etc. Participants are expected to partake in both workshops. They will primarily be conducted in German, so a minimum proficiency of B1 level is required. Please send both abstract and bio in one PDF file to Karina Pawlow (we.are.young.cage@gmail.com). The deadline for submissions is July 15, 2024. Accommodation and travel modalities as well as subsidies available upon request or on the website of the project.

Reference:

CFP: John Cage, the City, and Chance (Halberstadt/Venice, 13 Sep 24-15 Sep 25). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 10, 2024 (accessed Sep 6, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/42075>>.