

The Art of Patience and Hesitation

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The Art of Patience and Hesitation

Maria Chávez

The past few years I have been writing papers that address the phenomenology of sound and its effects on society's Neuroplasticity.¹

In these papers, one point prevails: one's expectations in various art and performance settings are groomed over time by mass media. So, one can view the artist's role as one that challenges this conditioning, thereby exercising society's Neuroplasticity. This form of grooming allows for the social, cultural, and historical structures to remain in place, shaping the public's perspective or interpretation of how performance and art works.

I've found that society's experience with art and performance practice conditioning is centered on the idea of an 'ending.' It seems time to take a closer look at the space and journey between 'experience' and 'conclusion.'

Since the invention of instruments, audiences have become accustomed to seeing a musician perform on an instrument that was placed in front of them. Music performance in the 20th century was no different. Stemming from John Cage's iconic *4'33"*, that space between the experience and conclusion is what seemed to trigger society's curiosity: the space between the audience's experience and the ending of the piece is a space of hesitation mixed with anticipation.

When the pianist David Tudor walked up to the piano in *4'33"* and simply raised his right hand into the air, the audience sat in anticipation and hesitation. This play on the human psyche, challenging expectations, drew the audience members away from reality, suddenly having to focus with intensity as everyone waited for the first note to be performed.

I find an affinity towards artists that are able to play on this idea of hesitation, and when I think about the 'humanity' of hesitation there's something so honest about that space. That's my favorite part about the *4'33"* piece. Yes, the shifting in silence that proved to never be truly silent was sonically fascinating, but for me it was the play on the mind and society's conditioning and patience. The focus on forced patience also made me see the parallel between Cage's work and his association to Zen practice.



Maria Chavez performs 'The Language of Chance' during festival Le Guess Who? 2018. Broadcast November 25, 2018. VPRO Vrije Geluiden. Video. [\[View at article URL.\]](#)

If we dig a little deeper into the space between experience and conclusion we can also uncover a layer of curiosity, where the audience member, who is now in a state of hesitation and anticipation, is also carried by a curiosity that will only grow for as long as the piece lasts. The mind suddenly removes itself from reality and wanders into imagination, with curiosity leading the way:

“When will he start?”

“Will he start?”

“How will he start?”

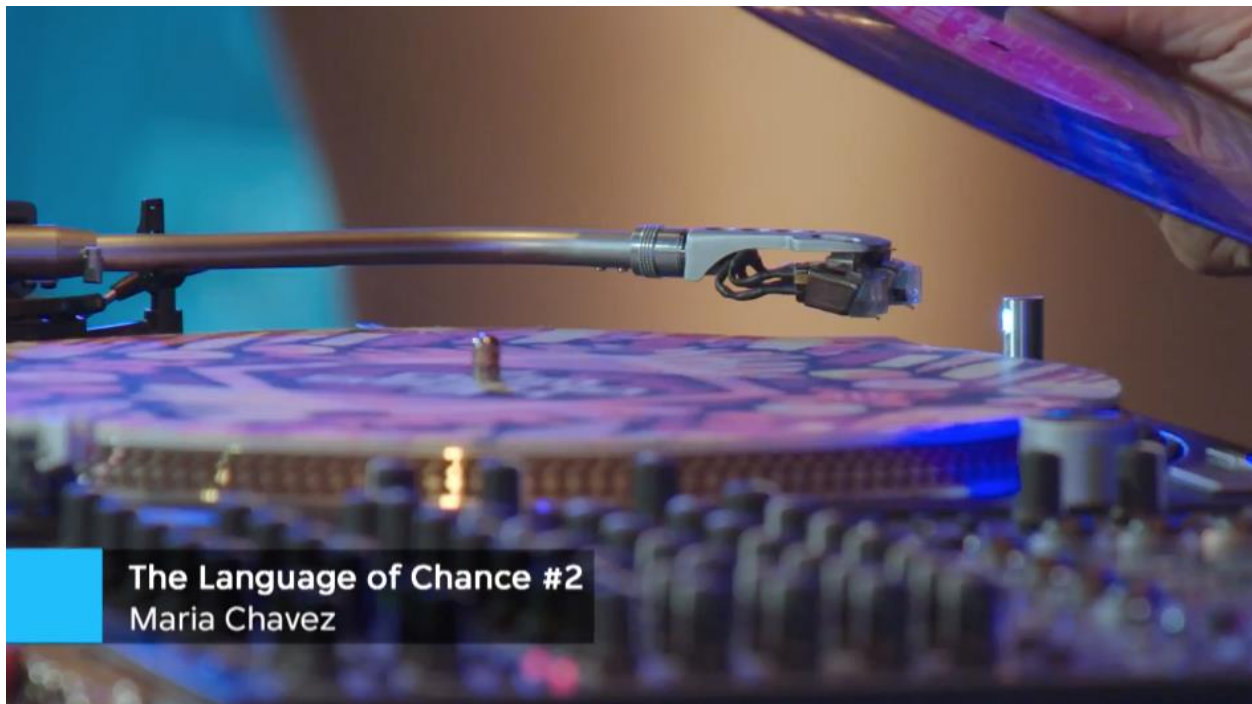
“Is this the start?”

The object perspective of the piano and *the musician’s hand in the air* pulls one further into one’s mind, trying to make sense of this play on what’s customary on a stage with this instrumentation.

Cage wasn't just making a sonic realization about silence with 4'33". It was also a play on social anxiety in relation to conditioning within a performance setting, and when mixed with his experience of patience (Zen Buddhism), it made the gap between experience and conclusion so important that it changed the face of performance practice forever.

“As long as our brain is a mystery, the universe, the reflection of the structure of the brain will also be a mystery.” –Santiago Ramon y Cajal

Cage's exploration of these factors reminds me of teleportation, but rather than thinking of it as an outward experience (the teleportation through space that we see in science fiction films and TV) the works of Cage and others in this exhibition present a different view of teleportation, where one is triggered to travel inwards.



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This play on hesitation/anticipation/anxiety/patience is one that I have utilized in my own performance practice. Prior to my sabbatical, I would find myself in certain performance settings where I knew that if I allowed a loop to play a little “too long” that I

could shock people by suddenly cutting all of the electricity off on stage, abruptly ending the piece. I found that if the moment felt appropriate, and safe, that this type of ending allowed the piece to suddenly jolt the listeners out of their trance state of listening, abruptly bringing them back to reality, or to the conclusion of the work.

The act of imagination can be seen as a form of viewing and experiencing: something removed from reality but provoked by reality. Imagination can be active, with one's imagination "running wild." This form of detachment from reality is what really strikes me as vital when it comes to creating multimedia installations that are productive for the development of Neuroplasticity. The act of capturing our focus and redirecting it engages us to readjust our understanding of the artworks themselves. It hopefully pulls us in towards an internal journey that then elegantly leaves us with a greater understanding of how we all experience art.

¹Chávez, Maria, "Too Much Reality," *e-flux Architecture Essays: Survivance*, June 2021. <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/survivance/397525/too-much-reality/>.