



Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition

Christopher Shultis

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Christopher Shultis has observed an intriguing contrast between John Cage's affinity for Thoreau and fellow composer Charles Ives's connection with Emerson. Although both Thoreau and Emerson have been called transcendentalists, they held different views about the relationship between nature and humanity and about the artist's role in creativity. Shultis explores the artist's "sounded" or "silenced" selves—the self that takes control of the creative experience versus the one that seeks to coexist with it—and shows how recognizing this distinction allows a better understanding of Cage. He then extends the contrasts between Emerson and Thoreau to distinctions between objective and projective verse. Having placed Cage in this experimental tradition of music, poetry, and literature, Shultis offers provocative interpretations of Cage's aesthetic views, especially as they concern the issue of non-intention, and addresses some of his most path-breaking music as well as several experimentally innovative written works.

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