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Amsterdam School of the Arts

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Column by Jan Zoet, 24 September 2013, de Theaterschool

This is a school.

Here we are now.

But at the same time we are connected to other **heres** and **nows**,
at other places and in other times.

We are online and can move via our screens and pads and phones to any time and place.
Virtual that is. And this continuous awareness of other parallel worlds that distract me from
here and now is, at least for me, fascinating but it also makes me nervous.

I hardly (or not at all) find patience to really read that book, listen to that lecture or music
piece if it takes longer than five minutes.

I am most of the time in a hurry and need to grasp the essence of a meeting, a process or
any other complex set of relationships and meanings in a minimum of time. Hoping I do not
make a mistake and trust myself and others.

And I notice it is everywhere around me.

We want the finished image, not the process. Copy paste and continue.

We are so afraid to miss something that we forgot how to witness and really engage what is
around us.

It's the dark side of digital revolution.

It is consumerism.

It is entertain us.

It is Barbarism.

It is politics.

It is desperate economics in times of transition.

It is fascinating and scary

So what is a school, and an art school in particular, in this confused old world.

Or what should it be?

Is it about finding new forms and new stories because the old ones are told?

Do we need to be even more online and create virtual theatres?

Hack the old ones and transform them?

Redefine art?

Call it culture as the officials started doing.

Go for high art

and forget the low,



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Be avant-garde,
Or just old school
Avoid the system
Include the system

or do nothing at all?

Maybe that is the answer. Do nothing. Enough contemporary confusion and listings.

Let's be here and now again for a while. In the school. And realise that nothing really changed. Transition is of every times where things matter.

And artists have always been the carriers of dreams, sharing the will to provoke and the potential of change. And were always questioned.

And yet there were (and always are) young artists in times without subsidies who couldn't accept the cruelty and absurdity of the world they were living in. And just did what they wanted to do. Without compromises. And focus on who they were and what they wanted to make.

One of them was John Cage, one of the leading and influential composers and teachers of the post-war avant-garde of the 20th century. He was also instrumental in the development of modern dance, mostly through his association with choreographer Merce Cunningham.

Cage is perhaps best known for his 1952 composition 4.33 which is performed in the absence of deliberate sound. Silence. It is a piece of music that provoked conventions but also is a most wonderful experience like when I heard it in a popular talk show, DWDD, on Dutch Television. It was the confrontation of the fast world of infotainment where a one minute sound bite is already considered too long and the pure truth of art of the here and now and the awakensness of senses that it caused.

So what can we as a school learn from John Cage? We Students and Teachers of an Art School. As he was an acclaimed teacher himself. He published in his autobiography '**Some Rules for Students And Teachers**' that he actually borrowed from Sister Corita Kent (who worked at Immaculate Heart College and wrote them in 1967-1968, originally titled Immaculate Heart College Art Department Rules)

I would like us to follow his rules. They go like this.

John Cage: Some Rules for Students and Teachers

RULE ONE: Find a place you trust, and then try trusting it for awhile.



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RULE TWO: General duties of a student - pull everything out of your teacher; pull everything out of your fellow students.

RULE THREE: General duties of a teacher - pull everything out of your students.

RULE FOUR: Consider everything an experiment.

RULE FIVE: be self-disciplined - this means finding someone wise or smart and choosing to follow them. To be disciplined is to follow in a good way. To be self-disciplined is to follow in a better way.

RULE SIX: Nothing is a mistake. There's no win and no fail, there's only make.

RULE SEVEN: The only rule is work. If you work it will lead to something. It's the people who do all of the work all of the time who eventually catch on to things.

RULE EIGHT: Don't try to create and analyze at the same time. They're different processes.

RULE NINE: Be happy whenever you can manage it. Enjoy yourself. It's lighter than you think.

RULE TEN: "We're breaking all the rules. Even our own rules. And how do we do that? By leaving plenty of room for X quantities."

HINTS: Always be around. Come or go to everything. Always go to classes. Read anything you can get your hands on. Look at movies carefully, often. Save everything - it might come in handy later.