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I, Serena Yang , hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Music History.

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John Cage and Van Meter Ames: Zen Buddhism, Friendship, and Cincinnati

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John Cage and Van Meter Ames: Zen Buddhism, Friendship, and Cincinnati

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by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the previously undocumented friendship between John Cage and Van Meter Ames from 1957 to 1985 and Cage's residency at the University of Cincinnati (UC) from January to May 1967. It considers Zen Buddhism as the framework of their friendship, and the residency as evidence of Cage's implementation of his 1960s philosophy. Starting in 1957, Cage and Ames explored their common interest in Zen and social philosophies through extensive correspondence. This exchange added to the composer's knowledge of Zen and Western philosophies, specifically pragmatism. Cage's five-month tenure as composer-in-residence at UC enabled the two friends to be in close proximity and proved to be the highlight of their relationship. I suggest that this friendship and Ames's publications contributed to Cage's understanding of Zen during the 1960s and the development of his philosophy from this period. In the 1960s Cage's spiritual belief diverged from his study of Zen with Daisetz T. Suzuki in the 1950s and was similar to Ames's philosophic outlook. Cage and Ames both sought to bridge Western and Eastern cultures, assimilate Chinese philosophy, and modify Zen philosophy for modern society by adopting Thoreau's humanistic and social theories, and relating pragmatism to their ideal social model.

This study documents the friendship between Ames and Cage, and Cage's residency at UC through programs, newspaper and magazine articles, correspondence, and Ames's 1967 diary. It also examines Ames's articles and monograph *Zen and American Thought* (1962), and unpublished typescript "A Book of Changes" (1967–71), which demonstrates Ames's insight of the composer's music, personality, and aesthetics. Cage implemented his 1960s philosophy throughout his residency at UC. In a broader view, the residency realized part of his personal global planning that was to fulfill Marshall McLuhan's concept of a global village, through his

visiting appointments at various institutions of higher learning. I argue that Cage and Ames's friendship and the philosopher's writings on Zen and American philosophy influenced the formation of the composer's amalgamated philosophy of the 1960s.

Van Meter Ames and John Cage, June 15, 1966

Photography courtesy of Archives and Rare Books Library, University of Cincinnati

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Second, I would like to thank the University of Cincinnati's (UC) Archives and Rare Books Library, who gave me an exceptional opportunity of researching Van Meter Ames papers and Cage's 1967 residency at UC. Colleague Lauren Fink catalogued Van Meter Ames papers during her time at the Archives and Rare Books Library at UC in 2011. As a percussion major, she realized the importance of this archive, bringing it to the attention of her applied teacher, Professor Allen Otte, an internationally recognized performer, scholar, and personal friend of Cage late in the composer's life. As a member of my thesis committee, Professor Otte, had connection to some of the people involved in this topic (The LaSalle Quartet, Jeanne Kirstein, and Carl Solway) and gave me helpful information about Cage, which was not preserved in Ames's papers. In addition, I would like acknowledge the other member of my thesis committee, Dr. Jeongwon Joe, for her helpful insights and comments.

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TABLE

Introduction

From January to May 1967, John Cage (1912–1992) was composer-in-residence at the University of Cincinnati (UC). He had been invited by his friend Van Meter Ames (1898–1985), professor emeritus of philosophy, who was fourteen years older than the composer. Their friendship had begun ten years earlier in 1957 after Cage's recital at the Cincinnati Art Museum, where Ames had been attracted to the composer's adoption of Zen Buddhism[1] in his music. According to Ames's unpublished diary, they had kept in touch in the intervening period and frequently exchanged publications through the mail.[2] Zen Buddhism was one of the central topics of their discussions. Previously Cage had learned Zen from Daisetz T. Suzuki's writings and lectures at Columbia University around 1950. However, Suzuki's understanding of Zen differed from Ames's. Suzuki publicly critiqued Ames's writings on Zen in his articles "The Philosophy of Zen" and "Zen: A Reply to Van Meter Ames."[3] It is this distinction between Suzuki's and Ames's understanding of Zen that has allowed me to determine whether Ames influenced Cage, and if so, the extent of his influence.

Through contact with Ames's unorthodox understanding of Zen, Cage developed his society-oriented philosophy of the 1960s. Thereafter, Cage's and Ames's lives intertwined with

[1] Zen Buddhism is a school of Buddhism that originated in China during the sixth century as Chán Buddhism. During the Chinese Tang dynasty (618–907 C. E.), Zen Buddhism spread to Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. In Japan, Chinese Chán Buddhism was translated into the Japanese pronunciation of "Zen" Buddhism. Zen Buddhism thereafter developed in Japan, paralleling with Chán Buddhism in China. Both Cage and Ames studied Zen Buddhism from Japan. Therefore I employ "Zen," "Zen Buddhism" or "Japanese Zen" in general to represent Japanese Zen Buddhism in my thesis (although Zen Buddhism technically includes Chinese Chán Buddhism, Japanese Zen Buddhism, Korean Seon Buddhism, etc). I use "Chán Buddhism" to specify Zen Buddhism in China and use "Buddhism" to refer to the entire religion and philosophy, which includes numerous Buddhist schools.

[2] Van Meter Ames, diary, 1966–1967, Van Meter Ames Paper, 1966–1995, University of Cincinnati, OH (hereafter VMAP).

[3] Daisetz T. Suzuki, "The Philosophy of Zen," *Philosophy East and West* 1 (1951): 3–15; idem, "Zen: A Reply to Van Meter Ames," *Philosophy East and West* 5 (1956): 349–52.

their similar philosophical outlooks. While Ames synthesized Zen and American philosophies, specifically pragmatism, Cage combined Zen with social concerns and practical anarchism. Cage considered his five-month residency at UC in 1967 part of the realization of his idiosyncratic global planning, an ideal he derived from mixing Zen philosophy and Marshall McLuhan's notion of a global village. Ames, as Cage's fellow traveler in developing an amalgamated philosophy of Zen and Western philosophies, had played an indispensible role in helping to realize Cage's plan. Ames later recalled Cage's speeches and activities during the residency in his diary and attempted to publish it as historical fiction, in a typescript titled "A Book of Changes" (1967–71), which reveals his understanding of Cage's aesthetics and social philosophy.[4]

To date, no one has researched Cage's residency in Cincinnati nor considered Ames's contribution to Cage's understanding of Zen and the development of the composer's amalgamated philosophy of the 1960s. Therefore, in my thesis, I aim 1) to document the twenty-nine year friendship (1957–1985) of Ames and Cage; 2) to reconstruct Cage's residency at the University of Cincinnati (January–May 1967); and 3) to determine the possible influence of Ames's publications on Zen and American philosophy on Cage's understanding of Zen and the formation of his amalgamated philosophy during the 1960s.[5]

[4] Van Meter Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, VMAP.

[5] An artistic work based on Ames's typescript "A Book of Changes" is Lauren Fink and Professor Allen Otte's thirty-eight page mesostic poem. It is a possible realization of Cage's score ____, ____ ____ *circus on* ____ (1979), which includes a direction of reducing a book's words to a mesostic poem. They constructed the mesostic poem with the spine "VAN METER AMES A BOOK OF CHANGES," and chose words and wing words from "A Book of Changes." The result is a performative poem based on Ames's typescript and about Cage's 1967 residency at UC. Fink performed the mesostics as a Cageian work *MATRICULAPHONY, a percussive circus on Van Meter Ames's A BOOK OF CHANGES*, in her bachelor degree's recital in the College-Conservatory of Music in April 2013.

Methodology

In order to establish a framework for Cage and Ames's friendship, I examine both of their connections to Zen Buddhism: first, through their writings and works, such as Cage's *4'33"* (1952) and Ames's *Zen and American Thought* (1962); second, through secondary sources that are related to both of their concepts of Zen Buddhism.[6] Next, I use the primary sources in the Van Meter Ames papers at UC and the John Cage Collection at Northwestern University's Music Library to document 1) the friendship between Cage and Ames through their correspondence and Ames's 1967 diary; 2) and their activities in Cincinnati through programs, Ames's diary entries, and newspaper and magazine articles. From this compilation, I examine the implementation of Cage's 1960s philosophy as reflected in his activities and lectures during the residency. In addition, I identify the references to Cage in both Ames's published articles and unpublished book typescript "A Book of Changes," which is about Cage's five-month residency at UC in 1967. Finally, I use these findings to determine the influence of Ames on Cage's synthesis of Zen and Western philosophies.

Literature Review

On the topic of Cage and Zen, scholars have provided many different viewpoints and approaches. In describing the Eastern influences on Cage, Margaret Leng Tan and David Patterson provide the most exhaustive studies, including Cage's exposure to Indian philosophy,

[6] Van Meter Ames, *Zen and American Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1962); secondary sources include Kay Larson, *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012); Mark Douglas Nelson, "Quieting the Mind, Manifesting Ming: The Zen Buddhist Roots of John Cage's Early Chance-determined and Indeterminate Compositions" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1995); David W. Patterson, "Cage and Asia: History and Sources," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 41–59; Helen Westgeest, *Zen in the Fifties: Interaction in Art between East and West* (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 1997).

Japanese Zen, Chinese Chán Buddhism, and Taoism.[7] Specifically focusing on the Japanese influence, David Revill's *The Roaring Silence* documents Cage's study with Suzuki and his absorption and application of Zen.[8] He argues that it was Cage's own ascetic tendency that had been inspired by Zen, which the composer applied to his music and personality (instead of Zen's disciplines). Similar arguments have been made by other scholars. Wen-chung Chou claims that though stimulated by Eastern concepts, Cage's silence, indeterminacy, and chance are subjected to the "American product."[9] Ihab Hassan concludes that Cage remained an American original of multiple styles, where Zen tradition along with American pragmatism and international avant-garde tradition all converged.[10] In *No Such Thing as Silence*, Kyle Gann catalogues the mix of influences on Cage's Eastern philosophy and concludes that the Zen-inspired work *4′33″* is an outgrowth of several interests instead of Zen practice.[11] Sam Richards's "John Cage as a Buddhist" contends that Cage took from Zen the necessity of a discipline but invented his own to regulate his compositions.[12] In "Religion and the Invention(s) of John Cage," Sor Ching Low points out that Cage disseminated Zen through his own invention of Zen persona, but his application of emptiness was only a simulation of Zen, which resulted from the

[7] Margaret Leng Tan, "'Taking a Nap, I Pound the Rice': Eastern Influences on John Cage," in *John Cage at Seventy-five*, ed. Richard Fleming and William Duckworth (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 34–57; Patterson, "Cage and Asia."

[8] David Revill, *The Roaring Silence: John Cage, a Life* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992).

[9] Wen-chung Chou, "Asian Concepts and Twentieth-century Western Composers," *The Musical Quarterly* 57 (1971): 225.

[10] Ihab Hassan, "In the Mirror of the Sun: Reflections on Japanese and American Literature, Bashō to Cage," *World Literature Today* 69 (1995): 304–11.

[11] Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4′33″* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

[12] Sam Richards, *John Cage as. . . .* (Oxford: Amber Lane, 1996).

misunderstanding of the concept.[13] In Joan Retallack's *Musicage* and Austin Clarkson's "The Intent of the Musical Moment: Cage and the Transpersonal," both authors discover the similarity between pragmatism and Cage's 1960s spiritual philosophy.[14] Kay Larson's *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists* focuses on Cage's learning of Zen around the 1950s to 1962 and considers Suzuki as the main contributor of Cage's Zen understanding.[15] Though Larson associates Cage's understanding of Zen philosophy with other artists around him, such as Leo Castelli, Merce Cunningham, Morton Feldman, Jasper Johns, Yoko Ono, Robert Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol, she does not consider Cage's friendship with Van Meter Ames. These slightly variant arguments all imply that, as the stimulus of his artistic aesthetics, Cage assimilated Zen into his musical language in an amalgamation with American styles and philosophies. None of these publications on Cage mention the possible influence of Van Meter Ames on his many publications on Zen, which he shared with the composer.

While few articles provide a complete study of Ames's publications on Zen, Suzuki's writings in reply to Ames reveal the two scholars' dichotomous viewpoints, which will explain the different facets of Cage's understanding of Zen. In "Zen: A Reply to Van Meter Ames," Suzuki argues that Zen Buddhism is not a concept and cannot be analyzed by philosophy, logic, linguistics, or science.[16] It is a form of wisdom that can only be attained by practice and

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[13] Sor Ching Low, "Religion and the Invention(s) of John Cage" (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 2007).

[14] John Cage, and Joan Retallack, *Musicage: Cage Muses on Words, Art, Music* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1995); Austin Clarkson, "The Intent of the Musical Moment: Cage and the Transpersonal," in *Writings through John Cage's Music, Poetry, and Art*, ed. David W. Bernstein and Christopher Hatch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 62–112.

[15] Larson, *Where the Heart Beats.*

[16] Suzuki, "Zen: A Reply to Van Meter Ames," 349.

experience. In "The Philosophy of Zen," Suzuki criticizes Ames's research because it "does not cover the entirety of Zen."[17] The same arguments are extended in numerous reviews of Ames's 1962 monograph *Zen and American Thought*. In his *American Quarterly* review, Robert Detweiler considers that Ames's choices of Zen-related themes are unrepresentative and his "repeated translations of American ideals into Zen terminology" result in "an ambiguous argument for the universal validity of Zen."[18] William S. Weedon's review in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* suggests that Ames's scope of research omits certain themes that might be worthy to explore, and readers tend to learn Zen from comprehension instead of "pure experience."[19] William Horosz in his review further documents Ames's confusion of Zen and Western "pure experience": "Zen views the mystery in experience with mystic overtones, while western naturalism evaluates it in objective and scientific tones."[20] Though there are discrepant opinions on Ames's writings, these reviews document Ames's efforts at comparing and linking Zen with American philosophies, which, as I will argue, is parallel to Cage's internalization of Zen into his own American philosophy and points to the influence of Ames.

Scope

My thesis examines the friendship of Ames and Cage, focusing specifically on their common interest in Zen Buddhism, which intersected with Ames's specialty in Japanese culture.

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[17] Suzuki, "The Philosophy of Zen," 3.

[18] Robert Detweiler, "Review: *Zen and American Thought* by Van Meter Ames," *American Quarterly* 15 (1963): 219.

[19] William S. Weedon, "Review: *Zen and American Thought* by Van Meter Ames," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 22 (1963): 83.

[20] William Horosz, "Review: *Zen and American Thought* by Van Meter Ames," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 23 (1963): 456.

The discussion of Zen also references Chinese Buddhism and Taoism because of their close origins and parallel developments to Japanese Zen. The documentation of Cage's residency at UC includes activities and discussions that related to music, art, and Zen. Cage's impact on other fields in Cincinnati, such as cinema and poetry, is also discussed briefly in this study.

Chapter 1

John Cage and Zen Buddhism

Cage's Study of Zen

In the mid 1940s, John Cage went through multiple upheavals in both his private and professional life. He divorced Xenia Andreyevna Kashevaroff after their ten-year marriage and faced the reorientation of his sexuality. Professionally, he encountered audiences' incomprehension of his work *The Perilous Night* (1944) and found himself frustrated with the traditional meaning of composition. "Self-expression is what I had been taught," Cage said, "But then, when I saw that everyone was expressing himself differently and using a different way of composing, I deduced that we were in a tower of Babel situation because no one was understanding anybody else."[1] The personal turmoil coupled with the difficulty he faced in his career led Cage to a period of depression during which he considered psychoanalysis. Cage recalled this difficult period in a 1974 interview: "It was only in the middle forties when, through personal circumstances that ended in my divorce from Xenia, that I required help as an individual who needed help, and that was going to come as usual from psychoanalysis. . . ."[2] Instead of seeking out a psychoanalyst, he investigated various Asian philosophies and soon found that Indian philosophy suited him well. He later concluded that it performed almost the same function of psychoanalysis for him.[3]

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[1] John Cage, quoted in Maureen Furman, "Zen Composition: An Interview with Jon Cage," *East West Journal* (May 1979): n.p., quoted in Mark Douglas Nelson, "Quieting the Mind, Manifesting Ming: The Zen Buddhist Roots of John Cage's Early Chance-determined and Indeterminate Compositions" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1995), 4.

[2] John Cage, quoted in Paul Cummings, "Interview: John Cage [May 2, 1974]," typescript at the Archives of American Art, quoted in Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing Cage* (New York: Limelight, 1991), 13.

[3] Ibid.

During his investigation of Asian philosophies, Cage was exposed to Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy's writing on Indian art (*The Transformation of Nature in Art*[4]) and attended his lectures at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1945. That same year Cage launched a music-and-culture exchange project with the Indian musician Gita Sarabhai for a half year, where he taught her modern composition, and she taught him Indian music and culture. From both Sarabhai's teaching and Coomaraswamy's lectures and writings, Cage realized the importance of the mind and environment in terms of making music. Sarabhai taught Cage that "the purpose of music is to sober and quiet the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences."[5] The composer recalled: "We learned from Indian thought that those divine influences are, in fact, the environment in which we are. A sober and quiet mind is one in which the ego does not obstruct the fluency of the things that come in through our senses and up through our dreams."[6] Instead of composing music to communicate with a listener, Cage found the reason for music is to open the minds to all sorts of sounds and to make the audience attentive to the environment, for the purpose of sobering and quieting the mind.

Yet, Cage's issues regarding his sexual orientation were not entirely resolved until he encountered Zen Buddhism (hereafter Zen). Around 1950 Cage attended the Zen scholars Alan Watts and Daisetz T. Suzuki's lectures after his exposure to Indian philosophy, in which Cage had become seriously interested in the Far East. Different from Indian philosophy, Zen provides a means to deal with trauma, and it made Cage less confused about his sexuality.[7] The Zen

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[4] Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934).

[5] John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 185.

[6] Richard Kostelanetz and John Cage, *John Cage* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 77.

[7] John Cage, quoted in Bill Womack, "The Music of Contingency: An Interview," *Zero* 3 (1979): n.p., quoted in Kostelanetz, *Conversing Cage*, 44.

Buddhists exhort their disciples to acknowledge the origins of their pain and then move beyond it, and the expression or articulation of trauma should be avoided. Cage explained: "If we keep emotions and reinforce them, they can produce a critical situation in the world. Precisely that situation in which all of society is now entrapped."[8] This idea of dismissing the invidious expression of emotion seemed to alleviate Cage's distress in accepting his sexual orientation. The musicologist Peter Yates recalled:

> When I first knew John Cage [in the early 1940s] he was stubborn, gifted, argumentative. As the gift took hold, he became more silent, preoccupied with himself and the growing of his thought. He entered the room like a bodhisattva, floating. After he had studied Japanese Zen philosophy and learned by it to master himself, he became, as he has remained, the man of the great smile, the outgoing laugh, willing to explain but not, in my recent experience, to argue, tolerant of misconception, self-forgetful, and considerate. Around him everyone laughs.[9]

The influence of Zen can also be observed in Cage's lectures. He opened his "Lecture on Nothing" at the Artists' Club in New York in 1950 with a paradoxical remark in the typical Zen style: "I am here, and there is nothing to say. If among you are those who wish to get somewhere, let them leave at any moment. What we require is silence; but what silence requires is that I go on talking."[10] With this lecture, Zen philosophy seemed to eclipse Cage's previous interest in South Asia and adumbrated his Zen period.

Cage had attended Daisetz T. Suzuki's lectures at Columbia University for three years in the early 1950s. Suzuki had started his life-long career of writing and translating books about Zen Buddhism into English for the publisher Open Court Press in La Salle, Illinois in 1898, a year after he came to the United States. He returned to Japan in 1909 and taught English as a

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[8] John Cage and Daniel Charles, *For the Birds* (New York: M. Boyars, 1981), 56.

[9] Peter Yates, *Twentieth Century Music* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 309.

[10] Cage, *Silence*, 109.

professor at Tokyo Imperial University. For the next forty years, Suzuki kept contact with the West through his writings and translations of Zen texts. In 1950 he returned to the United States for a six-year visit. His English publications and public lectures created an unprecedented "full-blown New York fad" [11] of Zen Buddhism. This period was later described as the "Zen boom" in the United States, which delineated the unexpected influence of Zen in various fields of Western culture, including music, painting, literature, semantics, religious philosophy, and psychoanalysis during the 1950s and 1960s. As Larry A. Fader has claimed, "Thinkers of the stature of Martin Heiddeger, James Bisset Pratt, and Arnold Toynbee; writers and artists like Jackson Pollock, Herbert Read, Rudolf Ray, J. D. Salinger, Merce Cunningham, Jackson MacLow or Dizzy Gillepsie; philosophers of religion such as John Cobb, Richard DeMartino or Hutson Smith" were all touched directly or tangentially by this introduction of Zen into Western culture.[12] Suzuki's class, "The Development of Buddhism Thought," at Columbia University was the central platform for him to lecture on Zen. He introduced several ideas, which were new to Western culture. One was the idea of non-rational thinking. Suzuki maintained that all humans have tendencies for abstracting, analyzing, and categorizing the contents of what they experience, which can block our perception and shift our reality. Author Mark Nelson provides a vivid description of this problem: "Conceptualizing distorts perception: it entails a retrospective sifting through perceptual stimuli which ignores some stimuli, speciously objectifies others, and—since it inevitably abets prospective filtering—impedes one's perceptual acuity in the present moment."[13] Therefore, Zen masters coax their disciples to discard these delusive, falsifying

[11] David W. Patterson, "Cage and Asia: History and Sources," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. David Nicholls (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 53.

[12] Larry A. Fader, "D. T. Suzuki's Contribution to the West," in *A Zen Life: D. T. Suzuki Remembered*, ed. Mazao Abe, Francis Haar, and Daisetz T. Suzuki (New York: Weatherhill Publishers, 1986), 108.

[13] Nelson, "Quieting the Mind, Manifesting Ming," 26.

tendencies of conceptualization and embrace irrational thinking in order to attain no-mind-ness, which is one of the prerequisites for enlightenment. For this reason, Suzuki utilized mystifying, incomprehensible sayings in the class to help rid students of conceptual thinking. Here is one of Cage's favorite stories regarding Suzuki's bewildering remarks: "Before studying Zen, men are men and mountains are mountains. While studying Zen, things become confused. After studying Zen, men are men and mountains are mountains. After telling this, Dr. Suzuki was asked, 'what is the difference between before and after?' He said, 'No different, only the feet are a little off the ground.'"[14] Living in accord with nature was the other concept that Suzuki introduced to the West. The third Zen Patriarch, Sosan Zenji, claimed: "If the mind makes no discrimination, the ten thousand things are as they are, of single essence."[15] The concept of oneness permeates everything in the world, including our existence, which is an inseparable part of nature. Thus, there is no point in correcting events beyond one's control, since, being part of nature, following the way that nature grows would be the best way for humans to live. Suzuki also conveyed this idea through his manner in the class. Cage recounted:

> The time was four to seven. During this period most people now and then took a little nap. Suzuki never spoke loudly. When the weather was good windows were open, and the airplanes leaving La Guardia flew directly over head from time to time, drowning out what he had to say. He never repeated what had been said during the passage of the airplane.[16]

Suzuki's style of teaching provides an example of living in accord with nature. His acceptance of the moment, as the typical manner of a Zen Buddhist, silently reminded his Western students that

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[14] Cage, *Silence*, 88.

[15] Chien-chih Seng-ts'an, "'Hsin Hsin Ming ('Verses on the Faith Mind')," in *The Eye Never Sleeps: Striking to the Heart of Zen*, ed. Dennis Genpo Merzel (Boston: Shambhala, 1991), 130, quoted in Nelson, "Quieting the Mind, Manifesting Ming," xiv.

[16] Cage, *Silence*, 262.

living without struggle with nature is the key for human to be released from all vexation and entanglements.

In addition to eliminating conceptual thinking and resolving to live as part of nature, the highest goal—*satori*, or enlightenment, of which Zen Buddhists pursue—proved to be an original, attractive idea for Westerners. Suzuki mentioned the idea of ego in order to explain *satori*, as Cage recalled:

> One of the lectures he gave was on the structure of mind. He drew an oval on the board, and halfway up the left-hand side he put two parallel lines which he said was the ego. "The ego has the capability to close itself in by means of its likes and dislikes. It stays there by day through its sense perceptions and by night through its dreams. What Zen would like, instead of its acting as a barrier, is that the ego would open its doors, and not be controlled by its likes and dislikes."[17]

In other words, Suzuki taught that humans have the ability to change their mind by giving up desire and value judgments since the ego is capable of transforming itself from an obstacle to a door. With our minds changed, we can become a faithful receiver of experience without any cognitive filter and potentially reach the goal of *satori*. Suzuki wrote:

> *Satori* may be defined as an intuitive looking into the nature of things in contradistinction to the analytical or logical understanding of it. Practically, it means the unfolding of a new world hitherto unperceived in the confusion of a dualistically trained mind. Or we may say that with *satori* our entire surroundings are viewed from quite an unexpected angle of perception.[18]

When a disciple reaches *satori*, all the opposites and contradictions are united into a consistent organic whole. The psychologist Carl Jung, who saw *satori* as the *raison d'être* of Zen, described

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[17] John Cage, "Empty Words: John Cage Talks Back," in *Loka: A Journal from Naropa Institute*, ed. Rick Fields (New York: Anchor, 1975), 97.

[18] Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Essentials of Zen Buddhism: Selected from the Writings of Daisetz T. Suzuki* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 84.

this concept as possessing such an "unsurpassed singularity." Its extremely simple, natural essence contradicts Western systems of abstract thought.[19]

Cage's Echoes of Zen Doctrine

> Since the forties and through study with D. T. Suzuki of the philosophy of Zen Buddhism, I've thought of music as a means of changing the mind. . . . I want to change it because I was, in the forties, in certain ways very confused both in my personal life and in my understanding of what the function of art in the society could be. It was through the study of Buddhism that I became, it seems to me, less confused.
>
> —John Cage

While Zen functioned as a type of psychoanalysis that unraveled Cage's personal entanglements, at the same time, the philosophy of Zen influenced his compositions. He formed a new musical aesthetic through Suzuki's teaching. His belief that analysis and conceptualization can block our perception caused Cage to realize that those human tendencies also block us from deriving "from art the mystery or direct, sensuous experience which is its prime function."[20] He found that intellectuality and the resulting value judgments had made art a victim of our business-driven society. Intellectuality also causes humans to communicate and express emotion, yet that communication always malfunctions in art. Cage observed: "Everyone was expressing himself differently and using a differ way of composing. . . . No one was understanding anybody else."[21] This situation caused Cage to disassociate all human intellectuality and communication from his music. As Zen Buddhists pursue purest experience without any cognitive filters, Cage theorized that music can provide a similar experience through being simply an action, which

[19] David W. Bernstein and Christopher Hatch, *Writings through John Cage's Music, Poetry, and Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 90.

[20] Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence*, 138.

[21] Cage, in Furman, "Zen Composition": n.p., quoted in Nelson, "Quieting the Mind, Manifesting Ming," 4.

exists without specific reasons and explainable meanings. M. C. Richards has compared Cage's theory to a Zen story that the composer often told:

> I am reminded of one of my favorite stories told by Cage: about the Zen monk who went up the mountain each day to take a bath. Others noticed it and wondered what spiritual significance the monk's action had. Someone asked, "Why do you go everyday up the mountain to wash yourself?" "No why, just a dip!" Cage means his music to be an activity, an action. Not forced on anyone. And there is always wit and warmth and surprising enlargement of consciousness that comes of it.[22]

Without value judgment or communication, an art work presents a simple action that can imitate nature or be a part of nature.

Echoing Suzuki's teaching of living in accord with nature, Cage taught that composers should find "a way to let the sounds be themselves."[23] To renounce the control of making music can open the minds of those people who either make music or listen to music, providing them with more possibilities of sounds than they had previously considered.[24] To go a step further, Cage said composers should produce works that cause the listeners to wake up "to the very life they're living" and that are an affirmation of life.[25] People then will realize that sounds are actually everywhere in our lives and "the dimensions of life are just the dimensions of music."[26] Cage compared the life of Buddha to his own in support of this argument:

> But no ivory tower exists, for there is no possibility of keeping the Prince forever within the Palace Walls. He will, willy nilly, one day get out and seeing that there are sickness and death become the Buddha. Besides at my house, you hear the boat sounds, the traffic

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[22] M. C. Richards, "John Cage and the Way of the Ear," in *A John Cage Reader: In Celebration of His 70th Birthday*, ed. Peter Gena and Jonathan Brent (New York: Peters, 1982), 47.

[23] Cage, in Womack, "The Music of Contingency: An Interview": n.p., quoted in Nelson, "Quieting the Mind, Manifesting Ming," 19.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Cage, *Silence*, 12.

[26] Richards, "John Cage and the Way of the Ear," 48.

> sounds, the neighbors quarrelling, the children playing and screaming in the hall, and on top of it all the pedals of the piano squeak. There is no getting away from life.[27]

In a life full of sounds, Cage believed that everyone can create music and the listeners can actually hear anything without knowing who wrote it. He maintained that to create the best art one must eliminate all traces of the self, or ego, and the dualistic character. And, in the end, an "unsurpassed singularity" that closes to the status of *satori* will emerge.

4'33" *(1952): The Aesthetic of Silence and Nothing*

In 1952 Cage premiered his long-awaited piece *4'33"* in Woodstock, New York, which baffled the public with its complete absence of musical materials. The pianist David Tudor performed three "*tacet*" movements, which together lasted for the duration of the title, using the closing and the opening of the keyboard lid to indicate each movements' beginning and ending. Cage mentioned the initial idea for a silence piece in his 1948 lecture "A Composer's Confessions":

> I have, for instance, several new desires: first, to compose a piece of uninterrupted silence and sell it to Muzak Co. It will be 3 or 4 and 1/2 minutes long—those being the standard lengths of "canned" music—and its title will be *Silent Prayer*. It will open with a single idea which I will attempt to make as seductive as the color and shape and fragrance of a flower. The ending will approach imperceptibility.[28]

The motivation that underlies both the idea for "Silent Prayer" and *4'33"* is the pursuit of silence, which resulted from Cage's engagement with Zen philosophy. Inspired by the concepts of abandoning conceptual thinking, emotive self-expression, desire to control, and value judgment, Cage pondered what would happen in a musical performance if there was no

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[27] Cage, *Silence*, 135.

[28] John Cage, "A Composer's Confessions," in *John Cage: Writer*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 43, quoted in Christopher Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 94.

intellectual intervention. He understood silence as the musical manifestation of the nothingness he sought:

> [W]hen I say "not anything happening" is what I call silence; that is to say, a state of affairs free of intention, because we always have sounds. Therefore we don't have any silence available in the world: we're in a world of sounds. We call it silence when we don't feel a direct connection with the intentions that produce the sounds. We say it's quiet when, due to our non-intention, there don't seem to us to be many sounds. When there seem to us to be many, we say it's noise.[29]

Cage found that silence is actually an illusion. The only place silence could exist is in a vacuum. Yet in the normal world we live, there is no such thing as silence. An often-quoted story from Cage's book *A Year from Monday* shows his discovery of this fact:

> It was after I got to Boston that I went into the anechoic chamber at Harvard University. Anybody who knows me knows this story. I am constantly telling it. Anyway, in that silent room, I heard two sounds, one high and one low. Afterward I asked the engineer in charge why, if the room was so silent, I had heard two sounds. He said, "Describe them." I did. He said, "The high one was your nervous system in operation. The low one was your blood in circulation.[30]

The non-existence of silence in the anechoic chamber dissolved the duality between sound and silence. Since there is no need for structure, Cage claimed that "the sound no longer comprises an obstacle to silence."[31] They are intrinsically linked like the two sides of a coin. Cage's opening remark in his lecture "Lecture on Nothing," "What we require is silence; but what silence requires is that I go on talking,"[32] reveals the nondualistic nature between sound and silence. This mystifying opening apparently models the quixotic sayings that Suzuki often used

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[29] John Cage, David Sylvester, and Roger Smalley, "Cage with David Sylvester and Roger Smalley," in *CageTalk: Dialogues with and about John Cage*, ed. Peter Dickinson (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 191.

[30] John Cage, *A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writing by John Cage* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 134.

[31] Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, 40.

[32] Cage, *Silence*, 109.

in his teaching. While many Zen stories seem paradoxical at first blush, the plausible dualistic situations are, in fact, the tool for the storytellers to demonstrate one-mind-ness as the essence of everything. The single nature produced by dissolving the barrier of sound and silence provided Cage's means to attain the "unsurpassed singularity" of *satori*.

An issue that *4'33"* addresses is the aesthetics of environmental sounds. Cage claimed the change in silence's definition had been caused by the verification of its nonexistence:

> Formerly, silence was the time lapse between sounds, useful towards a variety of ends, among them that of tasteful arrangement, where by separating two sounds or two groups of sounds their differences or relationships might receive emphasis; or that of expressivity, where silences in a musical discourse might provide pause or punctuation; or again that of architecture, where the introduction or interruption of silence might give definition either to a predetermined structure or to an organically developing one. Where none of these or other goals is present, silence becomes something else—not silence at all, but sounds, *the ambient sounds* [emphasis added]. The nature of these is unpredictable and changing.[33]

Cage claimed that once silence has been freed from any intentional use in a musical work, "silence" becomes the platform for environmental sounds and "the sounds of the environment have a value no less than that of composed music."[34] Cage further described its characteristics: "Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating. The sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between the stations. Rain. We want to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments."[35] For Cage, the ambient sounds *were* the musical materials in *4'33"*. As early as 1937, he declared his belief that in the immediate future, the use of noise in musical

[33] Ibid., 22.

[34] Paul Griffiths, *Cage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), 28.

[35] Cage, *Silence*, 3.

works would increase.[36] It would be an unlimited sources for composers and a way for listeners to experience existence without a filter."[37] Art and life, then, become the same phenomenon.

The use of environmental sounds also evoked two others Zen concepts: "interpenetration" and "unimpededness." Drawing from his classes with Suzuki, Cage explained these terms:

> Unimpededness is seeing that in all of space each thing and each human being is at the center and furthermore that each one being at the center is the most honored one of all. Interpenetration means that each one of these most honored ones of all is moving out in all directions penetrating and being penetrated by every other one no matter what the time or what the space.[38]

Noise, as the unintentional sounds existing without relationships to one another, seems to embody these two concepts. Each sound of noise is equal and central to the world since there is no natural hierarchy or subordination. The sounds as events can superimpose or happen in random order in whatever time or place since they are parts of the nature and operated by chance. To explain it in the terms of Zen, Cage wrote, "Each sound may become the Buddha."[39] Since "the Buddha's enlightenment penetrated in every direction to every point in space and time,"[40] sounds or noises permeate our lives in all sorts of ways and from diverse directions. Cage's most famous piece, *4'33"*, includes none of the composed sounds but, in fact, all the sounds in that space, and provides the best example to demonstrate the centricity of each sound and sounds from all directions.

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Helen Westgeest, *Zen in the Fifties: Interaction in Art between East and West* (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 1997), 77–78.

[38] Cage, *Silence*, 46.

[39] Ibid., 70.

[40] Ibid., 66.

The Influence of Zen in Cage's Chance and Indeterminate Music

Strict discipline is one of the essential, indispensible ways for Zen masters to train their disciples. In order to free one's mind from the obstruction of the ego and to live comfortably in all types of environments, a Zen Buddhist adopts and practices an extreme form of daily disciplined action. British philosopher Alan Watts discusses this discipline in detail:

> Although Zen people do have a very exacting and demanding discipline, the function of this discipline is rather curious: it is to enable them to be comfortable. It is to enable them, for example, to be able to sleep on a concrete sidewalk on a cold, wet night and enjoy it. It is to enable them to be able to relax completely under any situation of hardship. Ordinarily, if you sit out in the cold you will start shivering. This is because you will be resisting the cold, tightening your muscles against it. But Zen discipline teaches you something else, to take it easy, go with the cold, relax.[41]

Zazen, or Zen meditation, is the most common way to practice strict discipline since it trains the mind to concentrate on a single object. However, Cage, as a Zen disciple, never adopted *Zazen* as his everyday practice, but, instead, applied the underlying attitude of the Zen practices to his music. Cage said: "I decided that my proper discipline was the one to which I was already committed, namely the making of music. And that I would do it with a means that was as strict as sitting cross-legged, namely, the use of chance operations, and the shifting of my responsibility from the making of choices to that of asking questions."[42] Cage's discovery of the *I Ching* was the turning point for him to endorse music making as a discipline. His student Christian Wolff brought him a copy of *I Ching*, which had just been published by Wolff's father.[43] Cage found new inspiration in the book: "The moment I opened the book and saw the

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[41] Alan Watts, *Buddhism: The Religion of No Religion* (Rutland: Tuttle Publishing, 1999), 53.

[42] Cage, in Womack, "The Music of Contingency: An Interview": n.p., quoted in Kostelanetz, *Conversing Cage*, 45.

[43] Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes, *The I Ching; or, Book of Changes* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1950). Christian Wolff's father, Kurt Wolff, was one of the founders of Pantheon Books.

charts and the hexagrams which were used for obtaining oracles. . . . I saw a connection with the charts I had been using on my *Concerto* [*for Prepared Piano*]."[44] The *I Ching* ("Book of Changes") is an ancient Chinese classic book of divination. It includes a chart of oracular statements which is represented by sixty-four hexagrams. One may consult the oracle by throwing sticks or tossing coins and finding the corresponding explanation of this result through the chart's hexagrams.

At the time Cage discovered the *I Ching*, he was composing his *Concerto for Prepared Piano* (1950–51). The first two movements were composed with his own sound charts, where Cage systematized a range of orchestral sonorities. For the third movement he employed chance operations as his new compositional discipline, just as Zen Buddhists adopt *Zazen* as a strict practice. While Cage conceived the sonic events, he decided the order of events by chance, which symbolized the renouncement of the composer's control. Understanding that he consulted the *I Ching* oracle in order to direct his actions and that the number that comes up on the *I Ching* is the most appropriate number to that moment of one's life, Cage said about his chance works: "Instead of representing my control, they [the compositions] represent questions that I've asked and the answers that have been given by means of chance operations."[45] These operations enabled Cage to dissociate musical works from human intention, value judgment, dualistic relationship, and the control of ego, just like the minds of the Zen practitioners are freed by practicing the discipline of meditation. Author Kay Larson provides a vivid description of the result:

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[44] David Revill, *The Roaring Silence: John Cage, a Life* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992), 131.

[45] John Cage, quoted in Tom Darter, "John Cage," *Keyboard* (September 1982): n.p., quoted in Kostelanetz, *Conversing Cage*, 228.

> How can one judge a sound that has arisen of its own accord? It rises and falls, appears and disappears, and has no ego content whatsoever. A single sound is like a thought: here one minute, gone the next. Each sound is free to be itself. Nothing can cling to it: no interpretation, no ideas; no anger, no hurt; no "masterpiece" judgment, no "not-masterpiece" judgment.[46]

Cage adopted chance operation because it also imitated the processes of nature. Complying with Zen Buddhists' conviction that all things possess a mobile essence, Cage believed this technique could reveal the truth that chance plays an indispensible role in the operational system of nature. Carl Jung explained: "If we leave things to nature, we see a very different picture: every process is partially or totally interfered with by chance, so much so that under natural circumstances a course of events absolutely conforming to specific laws is almost an exception."[47]

Cage subsequently composed a four-volume piano work, *Music of Changes* (1951), where all elements, including pitch, rhythm, tempo, and dynamics, had been determined by chance operations based on the *I Ching*. In his subsequent work, *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951), Cage used an identical chance system, but freeing his control of musical materials. He employed twelve radios to generate sounds and decided their superimposition, tempos of tuning, structure, duration, and dynamics through the use of the *I Ching*'s method of tossing coins. Cage recalled: "When I wrote the *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* for twelve radios, it was not for the purpose of shock or as a joke but rather to increase the unpredictability already inherent in the situation through the tossing of coins. Chance, to be precise, is a leap, provides a leap out of reach of one's own grasp of oneself."[48] The composer understood that using unplanned materials

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[46] Kay Larson, *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 175.

[47] C. G. Jung, forward to Richard Wilhelm, *The I Ching, or Book of Changes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), xxii.

[48] Cage, *Silence*, 162–63.

and organizing them through chance operations could create more possibility of sounds than by employing fixed materials. This realization further led him toward the concept of indeterminacy.

Throughout the 1950s, Cage continually sought new sounds and compositional methods. On one hand, his definition of sound had suddenly been widened by his rumination on the Zen concept that "all beings are Buddha" (therefore all sounds can be music) and his discovery of the nonexistence of silence. On the other hand, the successful adoption of chance operations encouraged him to seek even more disciplined techniques to obtain unperceived sounds. Hence, in the late 1950s, Cage moved toward a radical concept called indeterminacy. In contrast to chance works, where the randomness is applied mostly to fixed objects, indeterminate works adopt indefinite notation, where the results are no longer fixed objects but rather processes of events or actions. Each performance, which follows Cage's directions, would therefore produce sonorities that are similar, but different in the details. For example, *Music for Piano* series (1952–56) include indefinite notation, where Cage derived pitches from paper imperfections and performer's duration and dynamic levels. In 1957 Cage composed *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*, using an exhaustive exploration of indefinite notation. The music has no overall score but parts with detailed descriptions, and may be played with any combination of instruments. Cage used the term "concert" instead of "concerto" to demystify the performance process[49] and to avoid the genre of the "concerto," implying that all sorts of processes of music making might be included in this piece. For one of the many notations, the pianist is instructed to drop his score and pick up the pages, and play according to the order of the result. Another instruction is for the performers to use transparent plastic: reading several superimposed notations on the transparencies in different orientations and then measuring the distances between points and lines

[49] James L. McHard, *The Future of Modern Music: A Philosophical Exploration of Modernist Music in the 20th Century and Beyond* (Livonia, MI: Iconic Press, 2008), 206.

as the values of musical elements. On one hand, Cage's indeterminate music has continued chance music's ideal of creating a method of music making, which is similar to the strict Zen discipline, to eliminate the control of ego. On the other hand, indeterminate music also manifests Cage's focus on the process of action, which is derived from his Zen belief that an art work presenting an action or process can imitate nature or be part of nature.

Cage's Understanding of Zen and the American Philosophies of Buckminster Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, and Marshall McLuhan

In the 1960s Cage's understanding of Zen philosophy diverged from Suzuki's teaching. Facing the social turmoil of world events during the 1960s, Cage shifted his concern from his own career as an artist to social and political issues, and world improvement. He became interested in social philosophers, such as Buckminster Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, and Marshall McLuhan, and attempted to resolve their humanistic philosophies with his understanding of Zen from the 1950s.

Cage met Buckminster Fuller at Black Mountain College in 1948 where they both were teaching. Cage invited Fuller to take a leading role in his production of Erik Satie's play *Le piege de Meduse*. Cage later found a strong affinity between Fuller's idea of a global utilities network and his own perspective on social improvement. Fuller pointed out that humankind was plagued by a lack of balance in human needs and world supplies, caused by population growth. Cage suggested that political powers should stop dividing nations and use intelligence, instead of political power, to solve political problems, since "the world is one place"[50] and people should have equal access to natural resources. To Cage, many of Fuller's arguments shared the same

[50] John Cage, quoted in Ellsworth Snyder, "A Conversation with John Cage [1975]," interview for Wisconsin Public Radio, quoted in Kostelanetz, *Conversing Cage*, 296.

basis as Zen Buddhism. The concept of a global village is similar to the Zen masters' perspective of one-mind-ness and the non-dualistic nature of world. Emphasizing the existence of individuals and even appropriation of resources corresponds to the Zen concept of unimpededness, where no one is inconsequential to the world and everyone is a Buddha. The difference between Fuller and Zen is the employment of intelligence. Fuller was aware of this dissimilarity between Asian and Occidental philosophies: while Eastern thought sought to live peacefully with nature, Western philosophies tended to struggle against nature in the pursuit of better living conditions. Cage recounted a section of one of Fuller's lectures in his book *Silence*:

> Buckminster Fuller . . . in his three-hour lecture on the history of civilization, explains that men leaving Asia to go to Europe went against the wind and developed machines, ideas, and Occidental philosophies in accord with a struggle against nature; that, on the other hand, men leaving Asia to go to America went with the wind, put up a sail, and developed ideas and Oriental philosophies in accord with the acceptance of nature.[51]

In his engagement with social problems in the 1960s, Cage seemed to endorse Fuller's Western philosophy instead of Zen. He addressed this in his 1982 interview with Monique Fong and Francoise Marie: "The important thing is to see the world as a single place, as Buckminster Fuller does, and to see our problems as global and to, as quickly as possible, free the world from the quarrels of nations and make it a single place that starts out with intelligence to solve its problems."[52] Understanding the urgency of freeing the world from plagues of all sorts, Cage considered Western methods to be more practical and efficient in dealing the problems than Eastern philosophies. Thus, the ideal world for Cage was accomplished by the combination of both philosophies: that is, perceiving the world through the eye of Zen and conceiving a beneficial global planning through humanistic intelligence.

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[51] Cage, *Silence*, 73.

[52] John Cage, interview by Monique Fong and Francoise Marie, 1982, ms., quoted in Kostelanetz, *Conversing Cage*, 278.

Experiencing the electronic era, Marshall McLuhan once diagnosed the situation of contemporary art through his understanding of modern society, as Cage recounted: "Formerly, by disciplines of yoga, *Zazen* meditation, the arts, and other fully engaging activities, one could make life endurable by changing his mind."[53] McLuhan believed that art and music "serve to open people's eyes and ears to the enjoyment of their daily environment."[54] However, living in modern society, where diverse information interacts simultaneously and technologies dominate communication, "our central nervous systems have been exteriorized,"[55] and our minds have been inevitably, uncontrollably socialized. Hence, in McLuhan's theory facing this electronic "global village" and the problems of a world mind have become the responsibility of contemporary art.

Through this diagnosis, Cage found a shared understanding between what McLuhan addressed, the idea of simultaneous interaction of information, and the concept of "interpenetration" in Zen philosophy, since, in the age of technology, the news has permeated human interaction in all sort of ways. Cage also agreed with McLuhan's conviction that technology could solve the problems of the world, although this diverged from his Zen belief during the 1950s of living in accord with nature. Cage maintained what modern society needed was to deal with the problems caused by technology with technology itself.

Finally, Cage incorporated the philosophies of American naturalist, idealist, and transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau with his understanding of Zen and involvement with social concerns of the 1960s. While a college student, Cage had read Thoreau's *On the Duty of*

[53] Kostelanetz and Cage, *John Cage*, 170.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

Civil Disobedience and had been an admirer of Thoreau's writings. In the mid-1960s, Cage read through Thoreau's works and enrolled as a life member of the Thoreau Society in April 1968. He found that his ideal social model had been prefigured in Thoreau's philosophy of anarchism. "That government is best which governs least"[56] is Thoreau's best-known motto that also epitomized Cage's politics. He summarized what he had learned from Thoreau: "Society, not being a process a king sets in motion, becomes an impersonal place understood and made useful so that no matter what each individual does his actions enliven the total picture. Anarchy (no laws or conventions) in a place that works. Society's individualized."[57] Cage realized that the anarchic society is the best place to carry out the Zen idea that "everyone is the center of the world." He therefore connected the two philosophies: "Every being is the Buddha just as, for the anarchist, every citizen is a ruler."[58]

Cage's development of indeterminate music, music without notation or fixed score, and performance without a conductor can best be understood through his adoption of the theory of anarchy during the 1960s. Anarchists maintain that one should not interfere with other people's lives. Author David Revill writes: "What one can alter above all, however, is not what other people do—one can simply discourage that—but what one does in one's own work, and if one changes other people, it is not by interfering with their work, but by example."[59] Accordingly, instead of being a composer who "tells other people what to do," Cage said that he attempted to

[56] Henry David Thoreau, "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience," in *Law and Literature: Text and Theory*, ed. Lenora Ledwon (New York: Garland Publication, 1995), 189.

[57] Cage, *A Year from Monday*, 161.

[58] Kostelanetz, *Conversing Cage*, 273.

[59] Revill, *The Roaring Silence*, 241.

be a composer who "gives instance of improvements in society"[60] or makes music a platform for listeners to build their own relationships with society. The composer once suggested to students in England: "Imagine that the music that you're writing is not music but is social relationships, and then ask yourself whether you would want to live in that kind of a society that would have that kind of music in it."[61] In the end Cage wanted to create a musical situation similar to an anarchic society where everyone is on his own and makes his own decisions.

In conclusion, Cage's relationship with Zen began with his interest in Asian philosophies in the late 1940s, and it reached its zenith in the 1950s through the teaching of Suzuki. In the 1960s, Cage diverged from Suzuki's teachings and combined his understanding of Zen with American humanistic philosophies to address current social issues. Presumably Cage's philosophical transformation in the 1960s had also been influenced by people that he associated with during that decade, such as Buckminster Fuller and Marshall McLuhan. A previously undocumented influence on Cage from this same period was philosopher Van Meter Ames. Their relationship and Ames's influence on Cage will be examined in the following chapters.

[60] John Cage, quoted in Robert Cordier, "*Etcetera pour un jour ou deux*," *Had (Paris)* (1973), n.p., quoted in Kostelanetz, *Conversing Cage*, 276.

[61] John Cage, in Huddersfield, England, Nov 22, 1989, quoted in Revill, *The Roaring Silence*, 243.

Chapter 2

Van Meter Ames and Zen Buddhism

This chapter explores Van Meter Ames's understanding of Zen Buddhism, which provided the focus of Cage and Ames's twenty-nine year friendship from 1957 to 1985. Ames first learned Zen during the late 1940s and 1950s from Chinese and Japanese Zen scholars, who emphasized the application of Zen in the modern world. This, in turn, inspired Ames to try and synthesize Zen and various American philosophies. He became involved in the controversy between Japanese Zen scholar Daisetz T. Suzuki (1870–1966) and Chinese scholar Hu Shih (1891–1962) from 1951 to 1956, where Ames shaped his opposition to Suzuki's conception of Zen and his adoption of Hu's intellectual approach to Zen. In 1962 Ames published a monograph *Zen and American Thought*,[1] which collects his ideas from the 1950s on the connections between Zen with American philosophies. Since Cage read this book in the same year it was published, his familiarity with Ames's viewpoint on Zen scholarship becomes one of the possible influences on Cage's philosophical transition during the 1960s. Hence, this chapter draws a sharp contrast between Ames and Suzuki, but aims to support the hypothesis of Ames's influence on Cage.

Ames's Study of Zen

Van Meter Ames, professor emeritus of philosophy at the University of Cincinnati (UC), was born on July 9, 1898 in De Soto, Iowa. He was a student of pragmatists George Herbert Mead and John Dewey, with whom he studied at the University of Chicago. From 1925 to 1966, he was on the faculty of the philosophy department at UC and became chairman in 1959. He

[1] Van Meter Ames, *Zen and American Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1962).

served as President of both the American Philosophical Association, Western Division (1959–1960), and the American Society for Aesthetics (1961–1962). As the son of "Chicago School" philosopher Edward Scribner Ames (1870–1958) and the student of two famous pragmatists, he was familiar with American philosophies, especially pragmatism and Santayana's naturalism. His research interests covered cosmopolitan ideologies, such as Japanese Zen Buddhism, and French existentialism and phenomenology, and some aesthetic fields, such as the novel, the arts, and music. He died in 1985 at his home in Cincinnati.

Ames's first contact with Zen Buddhism had been in 1947. According to the forward to his book *Zen and American Thought*, Ames met Chinese scholars Fung Yu-lan (1895–1990) and Lily Pao-Hu Chong Winters when he taught in the University of Hawaii from 1947 to 1948. Ames learned Zen from Fung Yu-lan's course "Taoism Led to Zen" and from his association with these two scholars. Fung Yu-lan, a scholar dedicated to introducing Chinese philosophy to the modern era, promoted the fusion of the social aspects of Confucianism and the contemplation of Zen, attempting to promote Zen's ideals in modern China. Fung's teaching inspired Ames to synthesize Zen and American philosophies. Starting in 1951, Ames wrote a series of articles on the subject of Zen and these philosophies. His works include "America, Existentialism, and Zen," "Zen and Pragmatism," "Zen and American Philosophy," "Zen to Mead," and "Current Western Interest in Zen."[2] His unorthodox understanding of Zen involved him in a debate between Suzuki and Hu from 1951 to 1956. In this controversy Ames's conception of Zen diverged from that of Suzuki, but was close to Hu's understanding.

[2] Van Meter Ames, "America, Existentialism, and Zen," *Philosophy East and West* 1 (1951): 35–47; idem, "Zen and Pragmatism," *Philosophy East and West* 4 (1954): 19–33; idem, "Zen and American Philosophy," *Philosophy East and West* 5 (1956): 305–20; idem, "Zen to Mead," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 33 (1959–1960): 27–42; idem, "Current Western Interest in Zen," *Philosophy East and West* 10 (1960): 23–33.

From 1958 to 1959, Ames spent a year as a Fulbright research professor in philosophy at the Soto Zen University in Komazawa, Japan. It was during this one-year fellowship that Ames acquired a deep insight into Japanese culture and Zen philosophy. He associated with many colleagues and students, who contributed to his reading of Zen texts and helped him translate his publications into Japanese. Among the contacts that Ames made that year, his friendship with Professor Masunaga Reiho and Dr. Kenneth K. Inada influenced his viewpoint of Zen. Both men were dedicated to bridging Western and Eastern cultures through Zen training. Their common belief—to combine the best qualities of both cultures is essential for the progress of mankind and for creating an humanistic society—confirmed Ames's previous publications that synthesized Zen and American thought. After his trip to Japan, Ames and his wife, Betty Breneman Ames, published a small book, *Japan and Zen*,[3] to record their impressions of Japan and learning Zen. In 1962 Ames collected his publications on Zen from the 1950s and published the monograph *Zen and American Thought*, which represents the culmination of his reflections on and ideas about Zen Buddhism.

Ames's Dichotomous Viewpoint from Daisetz T. Suzuki's Teaching of Zen

In the debate between Suzuki and Hu, where Suzuki criticized Hu for conceptualizing Zen through a historical setting, Ames pointed out contradictions in Suzuki's arguments and presented his ideas in several articles from 1951 to 1962. He questioned Suzuki's concept of living without purpose: "The more one studies [Suzuki's] *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind*,[4] in which Suzuki expounds the doctrine of no-purpose, the more one is aware of an end in view and

[3] Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, *Japan and Zen* (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati, 1961).

[4] Daisetz T. Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind: The Significance of the Sūtra of Hui-Neng (Wei-Lang)* (London: Rider, 1949).

of a search for the means to reach it. The end is the good life, as free-flowing activity—free of inhibition, worry, tension."[5] The idea that one can live with no-purpose is obviously teleological in the sense that there is an "end" of life. Ames found a similar problem in Suzuki's explanation of *mondo* and *koan*. Suzuki opposed things that were practical and useful in life. However, as Ames pointed out, Zen masters' use of *mondo* and *koan*, which are teaching methods that create paradox and bafflement, are useful in the search for enlightenment.[6] For Ames, it was impossible to separate Zen training from the concepts of means and ends. In regard to the practicality of Suzuki's ideas, Ames claimed that it would be impractical to learn Zen in the modern era without reading. "Zen warning against taking books too seriously," [7] Ames argued, would be easier to be accept in an agricultural setting such as Japanese culture, where Zen was naturally infused in the arts and cultural customs, than in an industrial society like the United States. Without the Zen spirit ingrained in the society, Ames contended that Americans' learning of Zen "must come first through hearing and reading about it as something new and strange," and "this makes for more consciousness of Zen, more conversation and thought about it, throughout the population of the United States than in Japan."[8] Suzuki responded, "Ames and many other philosophers, big or small, could never have experienced the truth of Zen dangling from the tip of their pen."[9] Ames challenged Suzuki to understand the differences between the conditions of pre-industrial Zen and modern society.

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[5] Ames, "Zen and American Philosophy," 317.

[6] Ames, "Zen and Pragmatism," 24. Ames wrote: "It is strange for Suzuki to hold against the pragmatist a concern for 'the practical usefulness of truth.' . . . The *mondo* and the *koan* are recommended for their usefulness, in the search for enlightenment. Suzuki speaks of what will lead to *sunyata*; he talks about going beyond mere reasoning and of what is defeating or futile in reasoning. Here is one teleological expression after another."

[7] Ibid., 32.

[8] Ames, "Current Western Interest in Zen," 25.

[9] Daisetz T. Suzuki, "Zen: A Reply to Van Meter Ames," *Philosophy East and West* 5 (1956): 350.

In contrast, Ames defended Hu's viewpoint and tried to bridge the differences between Hu and Suzuki. In the article "Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih,"[10] Suzuki criticized Hu's approach to Zen by his use of a historical setting: "One of my first impressions after reading Dr. Hu Shih's learned and instructive paper on Zen Buddhism in China is that he may know a great deal about history but nothing about the actor behind it."[11] Suzuki maintained that "Zen has its own life independent of history" and to discuss the history related to Zen is not the right approach: "Zen must be understood from the inside, not from the outside." [12] However, Ames disputed Suzuki's argument: "If Zen flourished as Ch'an in China from C. E. 700 to 1100, the historical approach would appear indispensable," and "If . . . Zen is the 'pure experience' that even a pragmatist may have, his knowledge about it does not preclude acquaintance with it."[13] Approaching Zen through its history would seem to be one of the ways to experience it. At the end of his article "Zen and Pragmatism," Ames mediated the differences between Hu and Suzuki: "If we can find in this world an other-worldly afflatus . . . then Suzuki and Hu are both right in what they contend."[14] Ames's idea was taken from Suzuki's saying that "there are no prescribed methods"[15] for learning Zen. The goal of Zen, or the gate to *satori*, should be able to be entered by many paths, either from tangible knowledge or irrational intuition.

[10] Daisetz T. Suzuki, "Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih," *Philosophy East and West* 3 (1953): 25–46.

[11] Ibid., 25.

[12] Ibid., 26.

[13] Ames, "Zen and Pragmatism," 19–20.

[14] Ibid., 32.

[15] Suzuki, "Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih," 36.

In response to Ames's viewpoint of combining Zen and Western thought, Suzuki voiced his objection in his articles "The Philosophy of Zen" and "Zen: A Reply to Van Meter Ames."[16] Suzuki claimed that Zen was not a concept, so it could not be compared with other philosophies: "When I say that Zen is life, I mean that Zen is not to be confined within conceptualization, that Zen is what makes conceptualization possible, and therefore that Zen is not to be identified with any particular brand of 'ism.'"[17] Though he recognized similarities between Zen and American philosophies, Suzuki maintained that they do not represent the entirety of Zen. It is actually the root of science, philosophy, and all other intellectual disciplines, and "every form of intellection starts from this primary Zen experience. . . ."[18] Therefore, Suzuki contended that it was reasonable to find Zen in American philosophies inasmuch as Zen can be found in everything that makes up of the world. Suzuki then indicated that understanding Zen from linguistic, logical, or philosophical perspectives can only keep the Western thinker away from the Zen experience. He concluded, "The more the latter [the Western thinker] strives to get at the meaning of a Zen expression, the deeper he gets into entanglement, and he finds himself more and more involved in his own schematization."[19] Thus, Ames's understanding of Zen through Western philosophies would only keep "the here and the now" away from his life and leave him at a conceptual distance from Zen, since "intellection is seeing and not touching."[20]

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[16] Daisetz T. Suzuki, "The Philosophy of Zen," *Philosophy East and West* 1 (1951): 3–15; idem, "Zen: A Reply to Van Meter Ames," 349–52.

[17] Suzuki, "The Philosophy of Zen," 3.

[18] Suzuki, "Zen: A Reply to Van Meter Ames," 352.

[19] Ibid., 349.

[20] Ibid.

Ames's Synthesis of Zen and American Philosophies

Observing Americans' interest in Zen since the 1940s and the "Zen boom" caused mainly by Suzuki in the Unite States during the 1950s, Ames analyzed the reasons for Zen's popularity in his article "Current Western Interest in Zen" and his book *Zen and American Thought*. On one hand, Zen seemed to be a fresh, guiding idea for Westerners in the face of social, political, and economic upheavals. Experiencing two world wars, the economic crisis of the Great Depression, and the Civil Rights movement, Americans doubted the advantage of science and technology, and questioned the meaning of life. Ames wrote: "[They] feel that there is something in Zen which is fresh and present and has a future. . . . There is a feeling that in Zen may be found what is needed in addition to science and technology."[21] Zen's teaching of humor and happiness seemed for Ames to be a way to release Westerners from the pressures of progress. Zen's promise of accessibility to everyone made some Americans willing to follow its path. On the other hand, Westerners sometimes believed the truth of life must be found through a hard path or on the other side of the world, though the answer, claimed Ames, had been told by their philosophic leaders: "The ancients of the Far East knew, and Americans from Emerson to Dewey knew, that life is its own end and answer. When this truth is put plainly it seems too plain. To appreciate it men need to seek it in the far past or on the far side of the world. . . ."[22] Zen, from the far East, seemed to be persuasive on addressing the meaning of life. Finally, Zen delighted its Western adherents by adding value to their past efforts. Ames claimed, "Today wise men of the East are stimulating the Western mind, apparently by infusing it with something foreign, but

[21] Ames, "Current Western Interest in Zen," 25.

[22] Ames, "Zen and American Philosophy," 310.

perhaps more by awakening it to resources of its own."[23] Zen philosophy teaches people to appreciate what they own, instead of seeking something just beyond their reach.

Building on these ideas, Ames attempted to draw parallels between Zen and Western philosophies. He believed that Zen can be reached by paths in either Asia or America, since the truth of Buddha is everywhere in the world. Moreover, Ames wanted to translate the exotic Eastern view into a familiar idiom. He understood that people tend to learn things in their own language, and as a foreign ideology, Zen is sometimes difficult to comprehend and assimilate. Therefore, he tried to domesticate Zen into familiar terms inasmuch as it helps people to grasp it. Although there might be difficult in translating every concept, he believed that the difference between the various philosophies can make people realize more about their own culture; he claimed, "[We] should welcome it and value it for its actual difference."[24]

Ames linked Zen mostly with pragmatism, discussing specifically the intersections between Zen and the ideas of American pragmatists William James (1842–1910), and his teachers at the University of Chicago, John Dewey (1859–1952) and George Herbert Mead (1863–1931). Beginning from the basic characteristic of humans, James contended that the character of self is social, and it is not separate from the world. Self is constructed by the recognition that one gets from peers. James also shared the viewpoint of American poet Walt Whitman (1819–1892) that human distinctions should be abolished and the existence of all members of the race should be loved and celebrated. Ames found the idea that all humans are created equal similar to Buddha's philosophy that all creatures are equal, and Zen's enlightenment is guaranteed to be accessible by every individual, regardless of his social

[23] Ibid., 305.

[24] Ibid.

background. In contrast, Mead approached the concept of self through social psychology. He described that the conscious self is at first an individual, but the world of nature involves him in social relations. He later termed this concept "I" and "Me." Ames explained, "The 'I' is spontaneous, impulsive, ceaselessly going ahead into the world, and over its experience with the world, meeting its own 'me' in endless dialogue."[25] Corresponding to the terms of Zen, the "I" is parallel to the concept of "unimpededness," in which each individual is an independent, intact being in the world, whereas the "Me," represents "interpenetration," and is the result of the continuous interaction with others. Ames added that the "self," being either "I" or "Me," is "on his own without being alone."[26] No matter where he is, he is in the world. Just like the Zen practitioners, though living in a monastery, they always belong to the oneness of the universe.

In addition, pragmatists share a similar viewpoint with Zen practitioners in pursuing a fulfilling life. They claim that the present moment is always the center of reality. If humans can stop striving for things outside what they are doing and stop contemplating what they are after, they would find that happiness simply comes in the here and now, in the ordinary experience of life. This is the same as Zen's idea of treasuring everyday experience and the present moment. In his article "Zen to Mead," Ames cites James to illustrate this idea: "Like Zen and Emerson, James feels that the sum of everything is in the present moment. . . . For James and for Zen the question is what is there, and that is the answer. For both, experience is to be defended against philosophy, unless philosophy can be saved from abstraction and brought close to life."[27] What James conveyed is the superiority of experience over theory and discipline, because the value of

[25] Ibid., 262.

[26] Ibid., 263.

[27] Ames, "Zen to Mead," 29.

life depends on the result of real actions. Moreover, pragmatists emphasize the importance of practice and firsthand experience. Dewey wrote, "We should regard practice as the only means (other than accident) by which whatever is judged honorable, admirable, approvable can be kept in concrete existence."[28] James saw practice and action as the means socialize the "I" into "Me." Ames contended that practice is the gist of both Zen practitioners and pragmatists' wisdom, in which practice leads people to learn, and to learn is the purpose of living, because learning makes people live better. However, Ames added that the practices of Zen and pragmatists are different in detail: "Practice, for Dewey, is vastly extended by science and complicated by the problems of democracy in a technological age. Zen is a way of facing life in the agricultural past of China and Japan."[29] In pragmatists' practice, intelligence and science function as the indispensible methods to conduct and enjoy life.

This reveals the main difference between pragmatism and Zen. Pragmatists claim that intelligence is inseparable from human existence and is a vital function of human existence, while Zen practitioners discard intelligence, viewing it as the root of lust, hatred, and the like. Pragmatists maintain that intelligence makes humans critical of their experience with the help of observing, analyzing, comparing, hypothesizing, and contemplating. It allows experience not to be an end in itself but an element of purposeful life. Ames wrote: "The Zen realization that life is for living, that experience is its own end, and that it comes back to the mind or self, is in the same vein, and this seems to be what Zen means by purposeless living. James would not accept a lack of purposes, in the plural, with no ends in view, nothing to be done."[30] Instead of following

[28] John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: Minton Balch, 1929), 32.

[29] Ames, "Zen and American Philosophy," 315.

[30] Ames, *Zen and American Thought*, 126.

purposeless living and non-intellectual intuition like Zen masters, pragmatists believe in behaving intelligently, that is, to know and to do what is good and right in human situations by actively solving problems, finding effective means, and seeking successful results. As they indicate, science and social techniques are the materialization of this procedure. Pragmatists believe in the power of the "sign process" in science. Although Dewey agreed with Zen philosophy that the pursuit of ideals must begin with the happiness that actual experience produces, he found that this happiness is not guaranteed to be experienced by everyone. In modern society, there are many people suffering from utter poverty and desperate circumstances. Philosophers' ideals need to be down-to-earth and carried out widely and quickly. Pragmatists expect science, technology, and economic policies to realize their goal of securing a basic living condition for everyone. When comparing this idea to a traditional Zen society, Ames found it similar to the living conditions in a monastery:

> We are now also enabled to realize that economic well-being does for men in general what a monastery does for a monk: gives a place, a peace, a security, and company within which, in return for a limited participation on his part, he can have unlimited freedom to explore the further paths. Once we have acceptable conditions we can move on to finding out what we can do with them. This is what Mead means by creative intelligence: using what we have, to take off from it, to discover new resources and uses for it.[31]

Though pragmatists diverge from Zen masters in their use of science and intelligence, pragmatism, in many aspects, is the counterpart of Zen in modern society. The resemblance of ensuring the basic needs for men reveals that both philosophies share the goal of pursuing a fulfilling life.

In addition to pragmatism, Ames drew a comparison between Zen and the transcendental philosophy of Henry David Thoreau. Ames saw Thoreau, who as a naturalist loved nature and

[31] Ibid., 268.

saw humans belonging to the cycle of nature, as taking a Zen direction of valuing the immediacy of the present moment. Ames summarized Thoreau's conviction: "When he [Thoreau] spoke of wanting to reduce life to its simplest terms he did not intend to 'live meanly, like the ants.' He 'wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.' Now, as then, he could save the savor of the moment by keeping a journal."[32] Even for a man who lived in modern society, Thoreau was able to carry out his ideal of living in nature with the spirit of present. Ames described Thoreau's practice: "Thoreau is significant for city dwellers now. . . . If they [the city dwellers] cannot get away to the woods they must try to have Walden at home. The spirit of Thoreau is present, whether they have him in mind or not, when they 'make arrangements' with bits of forest and beach to make living rooms livable."[33] With his down-to-earth approach, Ames considered Thoreau's philosophy as the materialization of Zen in the Western society.

In most of his articles that synthesize and compare Zen to American philosophies, Ames's goal was to mediate the differences between the East and the West, making them complementary to one another. He believed that when we use scientific and intellectual means, Zen philosophy is even more necessary, because humans are now on the road of progress, "where travel has the advantages of science but also the problems and fears it brings."[34] To some extent, Ames maintained, science keeps us away from the joy of life. As science and technology have relieved men from doing laborious work, people have been given more free time to have valuable pursuits. However, as Ames contended: "Pushing buttons saves trouble but may also rob us of life. . . . Modern leisure is all too easily perverted into ways of wasting time, which are

[32] Ibid., 81.

[33] Ibid., 85.

[34] Ames, "Zen and American Philosophy," 315.

a travesty of the aesthetic or of Zen; where there is nothing needing to be won or done, nothing to be learned; where discipline is skipped and insight lost. We need to get back to work and down to earth. . . ."[35] Ames arrived at the conviction that the old-fashioned business of working should be maintained or recovered in some cases, "otherwise there is nothing to anticipate, nothing to enjoy, either at the finish or along the way."[36] The old-fashioned work ethic teaches us to be practical and appreciate everyday doings. It also cures the Westerners' fear of scientific development. As Ames described the Westerners' predicament, man "has been afraid that the scientific development of signs, in lengthening his leverage, was somehow weakening his hold on his situation, while it was freeing him to control it." Zen's approach can be helpful here, Ames suggested: "When life on the level of everyday doings can be appreciated anew, then it does not lessen zest to be more naturalistic. There is nothing to fear."[37]

Moreover, Ames solved the contrary viewpoints of the pragmatists and Zen on the issue of purpose or purposeless living. Although pragmatists appeal for behaving intelligently, their goal is identical with Zen's intention of living without purpose—to know and do what is good and right for everyone. Ames proposed that developing good habits can meet both needs. Man can choose to form good habits with the help of intelligence, and then use his energy unconsciously. In the end it can lead a man to do the right thing without thinking. This is Zen's living with no purpose and the pragmatists' intelligent living. Still, with many of the other discrepancies between pragmatism and Zen, Ames maintained that it was unnecessary for Westerners to be upset or to worry about their inability to assimilate all of Zen's teaching. What

[35] Ames, *Zen and American Thought*, 259–60.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ames, "Zen and American Philosophy," 312.

Westerners should do, Ames instructed, is to experience Zen in their own ways. Since the way to Zen is individualistic, "it seems worthwhile for a Westerner, upon discovering Zen, to make what he can of it and take what he can assimilate."[38]

Ames believed that in a modern society Zen philosophy needed to be supplemented by Western viewpoints. The practice of Zen should enable one to understand the current world. In contrast, science has dominated most of human activities, such as to live, to build, to produce, to travel, and to make war. Zen practitioners need to realize the power of intelligence on changing the world. Ames spoke of his aim to synthesize Dewey's pragmatic perspective with Zen:

> Dewey, even more than James, relies with Peirce upon the growing momentum and sweep of the sign process, especially in science, to carry on a continual reconstruction of the present, the past, and the outlook for the future. But, instead of leaving Zen behind, this may give Zen, too, a new prospect . . . so a blend of Dewey and Zen is possible. Zen would need to add the realization that intelligence can remake the world.[39]

Ames wrote that the current life of Zen Buddhists had been changed by the dissemination of science. For instance, Zen universities have replaced the traditional monastery training to a certain extent. Zen masters must reconsider their opposition toward science, since it can assist them to carry out their ideals more efficiently.

In sum, Ames's position on Zen was based on his concern for the world. Ames disagreed with Suzuki's traditional conception of Zen because Ames was, on one hand, seeking for an efficient and proper way to solve the problems of Western society with the help of Zen and, on the other hand, attempting to make Zen more assessable to Westerners in a modern, industrial age. He believed that through combining the scientific and intelligent methods, Zen could be disseminated and carried out more efficiently in the modern era. This idea is close to not only the

[38] Ames, "Zen and Pragmatism," 20.

[39] Ames, "Zen and American Philosophy," 309.

viewpoints of Hu Shih, Fung Yu-lan, Reiho Masunaga, and Kenneth K. Inada, but also Cage's amalgamated philosophy of the 1960s. In fact, Cage, who fused his understanding of Zen from the 1950s with the American philosophies of Thoreau, McLuhan, and pragmatists during the 1960s, attempted to deal practically with social problems and to improve the world. While Ames refined his ideas in his publications of the 1950s and early 1960s, Cage disseminated his amalgamated philosophy through his music, and residencies and visiting appointments at various institutions of higher learning. His residency at the University of Cincinnati in 1967, where the composer lived in close proximately to Ames, represents a watershed event in Cage's philosophical outlook during the sixties.

Chapter 3

John Cage, Van Meter Ames, and the University of Cincinnati

This chapter documents John Cage and Van Meter Ames's friendship from 1957 to 1985 and Cage's tenure as Composer-in-Residence at the University of Cincinnati (UC) from January to May 1967, through letters, programs, diary entries, newspaper, and magazine articles. Cage and Ames's early friendship (1957–1966) was based on their common interest in Zen Buddhism and social philosophy. Ames influenced Cage in the formation of his philosophy during the 1960s, which synthesized Zen with Western philosophies and diverged from Suzuki's teaching of Zen during the 1950s. Cage's residency at UC was the highlight of his friendship with Ames because of their close proximity. Their relationship thereafter became even closer. Most of Cage's activities in Cincinnati reflected the implementation of his amalgamated philosophy of the 1960s. They also comprised a part of the composer's realization of his personal global planning, which was to fulfill Marshall McLuhan's concept of a global village, through his visiting appointments at institutions of higher learning during the 1960s. Ames, who participated in Cage's life throughout that decade, played an important role in helping realize Cage's goal.

Cage and Ames's Friendship (1957–1985)

The friendship between Cage and Ames began when they met at Cage's lecture recital at Cincinnati's Contemporary Arts Center[1] on February 15, 1957. After David Tudor performed Cage's *Winter Music* (1957), Ames approached the composer during the intermission and told him that he thought he detected Zen in his music. Cage recalled Ames's insight in his speech at

[1] In 1957 Contemporary Arts Center was located in the lowest floor of the Cincinnati Art Museum.

UC's Student Union on January 28, 1967: "I don't blame Zen for what I do, but I was glad he [Ames] detected Zen. He and [his wife,] Betty Ames came to the Rauh house [friends of the Ames's] the next day when we played and talked some more. Since then we have kept in touch, exchanging publications."[2] Living in New York and Cincinnati respectively, Cage and Ames corresponded throughout the 1960s and '70s. Cage was often delighted when receiving letters from Ames. He wrote in a 1968 letter to Ames: "I just this minute got back and was somewhat exhausted but your lovely note [card], Van, was there."[3] The two men became more and more familiar throughout the 1960s. At first, their relationship was based on their common interest in Zen Buddhism, social philosophy, and art. Later, especially after Cage's residency at UC, they became more like family members and shared intimate details of their lives. This progression in their relationship is traceable in Cage's salutations and letter signatures. In a 1962 letter to Ames, Cage still wrote in very polite tone and signed with his full name. However, in letters after 1966, he started to sign with first name and use more intimate expression. For example, "As ever, plus friendliest greetings,"[4] "I miss you and was glad to have your letter and news. . . . / my love to both of you [Van Meter and Betty Ames],"[5] and "You are both often in my thoughts, and I should have enjoyed being with you in your summer home—not far from Holland [Michigan]. / Love."[6]

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[2] John Cage, quoted in Van Meter Ames, diary, January 28, 1967, Van Meter Ames Paper, 1966–1995, University of Cincinnati, OH (hereafter VMAP).

[3] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, January 12, 1968, VMAP.

[4] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, May 23, 1966, VMAP.

[5] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, October 24, 1968, VMAP.

[6] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, June 1, 1969, VMAP. Van Meter and Betty Ames owned a summer home in Pentwater, Michigan—seventy-eight miles from Holland.

In the letters after 1966, Cage addressed all sorts of topics to Ames, ranging from his music to his private life, including topics such as his studies, hobbies (such as mushroom hunting), lectures, concerts, or travels. Here is an excerpt from a letter when Cage shared details about his personal life to Ames while he was a composer-in-residence of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign during the 1968–1969 academic year:

> [I am] working on the Notations book. [I] am really, it seems to me, too busy. And curiously I'm having difficulty sleeping. The food here is nothing special except for the home of Soulima and Francoise Stravinsky where it's magnificent "classical" French cooking.[7]
> I am about to finish the mss. of *HPSCHD* [(1967–69)] (over 600 pages) which will be performed here May 16 in the Assembly Hall. I do hope you'll be able to come to it. It will be a surprising event both visually and audibly. Now that the mss. are finished, I have to work to implement the production. It takes 7 harpsichords. Baldwin is loaning an electronic one. Trying to borrow "real" harpsichords. . . .[8]

They also shared details about their common friends, such as the architect Buckminster Fuller, pianist Jeanne Kirstein, and Cincinnati arts patrons Alice and Harris Weston. In a letter to Ames from the summer of 1967, Cage described his meeting with Buckminster Fuller:

> I spend two days in Montreal and saw the [Mrs.] Fuller some and had lunch with Bucky. . . . He and Mrs. Fuller (Anne) was in an auto accident and Mrs. Fuller suffered a concussion but is recovering. As we talked—Bucky and I—our eyes filled up with tears. He said that ordinarily he was free of being controlled by his emotions, but that the previous night he had slept well and long and that was probably why he was unable to curb his feelings.[9]

To Ames, Cage was willing to talk about his inner feelings without reservation. He seemed to view Ames as a friend with whom he could share the details of his life. When Cage's mother died in 1968, he reflected on her passing in a letter to Ames:

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[7] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, January 12, 1968, VMAP. Soulima Stravinsky was Igor Stravinsky's son.

[8] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, February 25, 1969, VMAP.

[9] Manuscript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, July 2, 1967, VMAP.

> My mother died two days ago. Somehow I am not unhappy, because for so many years she was not possessed of her faculties which formerly enabled her to so enjoy living. She didn't even enjoy TV these last years. Nor did she read. I saw her around the 9th of September and she was cheerful but grew distant even then through a kind of tiredness that surrounded her. She had no pains, they tell me, toward the end. She simply stopped eating and grew weaker.[10]

Thought their early friendship was limited to academic, intellectual topics, it influenced to some extent the formation of Cage's 1960s philosophy. Cage and Ames exchanged their own writings most frequently from 1962 to 1966. Cage wrote to Ames: "If you don't have my book, *Silence*, tell me, and I'll have a copy of that sent to you";[11] and then four years later, "I am always delighted to receive your papers. Please continue sending them."[12] He also shared with Ames information from books about anarchism and social philosophy: "I have never read Peirce or Dewey. I did read long ago [William] James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*.[13] Did you ever run across a book called *Man Against Society* [*Men Against the State*]?[14] If not, let me know, and I'll try to get a copy for you."[15] At the end of the letter, he asked Ames: "Have you have any suggestions for my reading? In the field, that is, of the interpenetrations of art and science?"[16] Evidently, Ames's opinions seemed to direct Cage's reading choices. After reading certain books, they often shared their reactions. Cage described the book that he recommended Ames to read:

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[10] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, October 24, 1968, VMAP.

[11] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, July 12, 1962, VMAP.

[12] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, April 19, 1966, VMAP.

[13] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Modern Library, 1936).

[14] James Joseph Martin, *Men Against the State: The Expositors of Individualist Anarchism in America, 1827–1908* (De Kalb, IL: Adrian Allen Associates, 1953).

[15] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, July 12, 1962, VMAP.

[16] Ibid.

> It [*Men Against the State*] tells of the anarchic communities of the last century in America and of the development of philosophical anarchism here. The communities worked in agricultural situations, but failed in the growing cities. Also they delighted in not talking together—doing without meetings, finding the chores to be done fully evident and time-consuming.[17]

In a letter from Ames to Cage, he addressed his opinion on Edgar Kaufmann's book *Introductions to Modern Design*,[18] which he had just finished reading:

> Betty and I have enjoyed reading the piece by Edgar Kaufmann on Design, and we also think it exciting. What he says about beauty and ugliness reminds me of Chapter II of the *Tao Te Ching*[19]: "It is because everyone under Heaven recognizes beauty as beauty, that the idea of ugliness exists." . . . We just wish that Kaufmann had spelled out his thought more, about disposability and loss of the middle scale, and situation design.[20]

Among the topics they discussed, Zen Buddhism was the most frequent one. Cage read Ames's two books about Zen in 1961 and 1962. He wrote to Ames upon receiving Ames's 1961 monograph, *Japan and Zen*[21]: "Your book is delightful and its arrival here a surprise which distracted me (to my pleasure) from my work. I have not quite read through it. But I did not want to delay sending you a word with thanks."[22] Cage found that Ames's second book, *Zen and American Thought*, which attempted to combine Zen with several American philosophies, resonated with his own interests in social philosophies of the 1960s, and further inspired him to study American pragmatist George Herbert Mead's writing. Cage wrote to Ames: "Some weeks ago I happened on *Zen and American Thought* in a bookstore, bought it and began reading. . . .

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Edgar Kaufmann, *Introductions to Modern Design: What Is Modern Design? What Is Modern Interior Design?* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1950). Edgar Kaufmann commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to design the house "Fallingwater" in western Pennsylvania.

[19] Laozi and Wing-tsit Chan, *The Way of Lao Tzu (Tao-Tê Ching)* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 101.

[20] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, January 12, 1967, VMAP.

[21] Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, *Japan and Zen* (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati, 1961).

[22] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, December 19, 1961, VMAP.

Your book begins, I trust, a change in my thought towards vital sharing. . . . I have sensed for some time now that my problems were no longer musical ones, but just social ones. My first next step will be to read Mead."[23] Cage and Ames were both trying to synthesize Zen with various Western philosophies. It is this similarity that contributed to the two men's close friendship and aided Cage's aesthetics to diverge in the 1960s from his understanding of Suzuki's teaching of Zen philosophy.

Cage as Composer-in-Residence at the University of Cincinnati (January–May 1967)

Cage's five-month tenure as composer-in-residence at UC enabled he and Ames to be in close proximity, which proved to be the highlight of their friendship. In November 1966 Dean Campbell Crockett of the UC Graduate School had announced Cage's residency at UC for Winter and Spring Quarters. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* reported this news on November 22: "America's leading avant-garde composer John Cage will be composer-in-residence during the second and third academic quarters of 1966–67 at the University of Cincinnati. . . . Mr. Cage is expected to arrive at UC at the beginning of the second quarter."[24] As early as April 19, 1966, in his letter to Ames, Cage had mentioned his need for an academic position due to financial problems:

> I am currently looking for a residence position, so that I would have, as I now do not, time for composition and writing. I have a commission from the Koussevitsky Foundation to write a work for orchestra and string sextet, with which I shall use the Ten Thunderclaps from Finnegans Wake. Also I have another book to finish. On top of which my current expenses due to my mother's having had a stroke and living in a nursing home, and now and operation, etc. are (my expenses) enormous. Thus I run from one engagement to another trying to make ends meet. Do you know of a place?[25]

[23] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, July 12, 1962, VMAP.

[24] "Cage to Be UC Guest Composer," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, November 22, 1966.

[25] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, April 19, 1966, VMAP.

Cage described his feeling toward an academic residency in his next letter: "After this season of running around, residence seems like green grass on other side of river."[26] After learning of Cage's artistic and financial needs, Ames started to make arrangements to bring the composer to UC. Cage described this process in a speech he gave on January 28, 1967 at UC: "Last spring he [Ames] wrote me that he wished I would come here, after learning that I was running around like a chicken with its head off, with no more time to settle down and work. But he said, 'The University might not want you!' . . . Then he telephoned me to say it just might happen. And here I am, happy to settle down to work."[27] In addition to Ames, Cage's tenure was made possible by the assistance of a group of Cincinnati residents. To underwrite the composer's residency, Ames invited his friends and Cincinnati arts patrons Harris and Alice Weston to take charge of raising outside funds to supplement the Graduate School's budget to bring Cage to Cincinnati. The LaSalle Quartet, ensemble-in-residence at UC's music college from 1953 to 1988, arranged for Cage's schedule at the College-Conservatory of Music (CCM).

On Sunday, January 8, 1967, Cage arrived in Cincinnati and started his tenure as composer-in-residence. At UC he gave two seminars in CCM, presented at least six lectures and after-concert discussions on various topics (e.g., Zen Buddhism, arts, world improvement, prepared piano, etc.), and one talk on UC's radio station about the Merce Cunningham Dancers and his position as their musical director. He participated in two film symposia in April with filmmakers Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, and Stan Vanderbeek, gave at least eight concerts from February 9 to April 27, and had performances of some of his works from the 1940s to '60s—*The*

[26] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, May 23, 1966, VMAP.

[27] John Cage, quoted in Van Meter Ames, diary, January 28, 1967, VMAP.

Perilous Night (1944), *Valentine Out of Season* (1944), *String Quartet in Four Parts* (1950), and *Atlas Eclipticalis* (1961), and "happening" works from the '60s such as *Where Are We Going? And What Are We Doing?* (1960–61), *Variations IV* (1963), and *0'00"* (1962). To recognize the financial assistance of Cincinnati's residents, Cage composed *Newport Mix* (1967) in April and dedicated it to arts patron Alice Weston.

During the residency, the composer's close friends David Tudor, Gordon Mumma, and Morton Feldman, and his partner Merce Cunningham (with his Dance Company) all came to Cincinnati and performed. Gordon Mumma visited Cage from March 4 to 7, and served as Cage's electronics assistant for the March 6 concert. On the same day, Morton Feldman arrived in Cincinnati and stayed at Ames's house for three weeks. Feldman had attended several of Cage's concerts and after-concert parties, and met Ames's friends, including Harris and Alice Weston. On March 10 Feldman read a short paper, "Some Elementary Questions," and had a discussion on contemporary music and his compositions with Cage with a few music students. Before he left Cincinnati, Feldman asked Ames to write a book about Cage, because he found that Ames possessed a special insight on the composer. Ames recalled in his diary: "Morty [Morton] wants me to do a book on Cage! I said a lot had been written about him. [Morton said:] 'Not by the right people. They don't understand him from the inside.'"[28] Encouraged by Feldman, Ames later compiled his diary from the period that Cage was in Cincinnati and typed a draft of his book, "A Book of Changes," about Cage. Although the typescript remains unpublished, it nevertheless symbolizes Ames's deep understanding of Cage.

Except for his friends from New York, Cage worked mostly with faculty, students and musicians at CCM, notably the LaSalle Quartet and the pianist Jeanne Kirstein. Cage had

[28] Van Meter Ames, diary, March 20, 1967, VMAP.

addressed his preference for collaboration in his letter to Ames on May 23, 1966: "For the concert there in April [1967], I'd rather like to work with musicians there. If some could be made available who were really interested."[29] The LaSalle Quartet performed Cage's *String Quartet in Four Parts* (1950) in a lecture-recital on February 9, 1967 and in a concert in Student Union's Great Hall on February 14.[30] Jeanne Kirstein, who had a strong interest in Cage's prepared piano music, was a professor of piano at CCM. On April 27 she played Cage's *The Perilous Night* (1944) and *Valentine Out of Season* (1944) after Cage's lecture "The Prepared Piano," in order to provide examples of Cage's techniques. Because of their frequent collaboration during Cage's residency, Kirstein became one of Cage's good friends. After Cage's residency, Kirstein continued to perform and record numerous works of the composer[31] and frequently visited him in New York. Cage composed *Etude Borealis* (1976) for Kirstein and her husband, Jack, who had been the cellist with the LaSalle Quartet.

Outside of CCM, Cage attended many informal activities with Ames and his friends. Some of them were related to school activities, such as the after-concert party on March 6 at Ames's house, which included music students, faculty, and young composers in addition to Cage, Feldman, and the painter Henry Gerson. Ames described the party in his diary: "So excited about having Cage here and the others. One group sat around Gordon who sat on the floor. Another around John, but kept shifting. A bearded Henry Gerson, painter, in a sweater. . . . It was a glorious evening: snow outside, fire inside, and the three stars. People didn't leave until 3 a.m."[32]

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[29] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, May 23, 1966, VMAP.

[30] The LaSalle Quartet kept Cage's *String Quartet in Four Parts* in its repertoire and recorded it for Deutsche Grammophon Records in 1976.

[31] For example, John Cage and Jeanne Kirstein, *Music for Keyboard 1935–1948*, CD-ROM (Columbia, 1970).

[32] Van Meter Ames, diary, March 8, 1967, VMAP.

Some other informal activities happened at Ames's house, where Cage often hung out. These included talking about Cage's new book (*A Year from Monday*[33]), going through Ames's notes on university lectures that Cage missed, having lunch and dinner together, preparing the mushrooms that Cage had found, playing chess and poker games with guests, such as Donald Justice, Gordon Mumma, and psychiatrist Marshall Gindburg (Ames's friend). Cage and Ames spent much of their leisure time together except for some personal time. On several Saturdays, Cage visited Carl Solway Gallery in downtown Cincinnati and played chess with the gallery owner. According to Solway, Cage's visits were a "life transforming experience"[34] for both his professional career and personal life. Cage suggested to Solway that he should exhibit art work by artists of his time with whom he could have a relationship, introducing to him the idea that "we should all open ourselves to everything coming to our life. Not shut up everything. Let everything come in."[35]

Most of Cage's activities in Cincinnati reflected his application of his 1960s philosophy and aesthetics. Cage was fascinated by Henry David Thoreau's concept of conviviality with a difference. That is, people treat each other with toleration and quietude, and are allowed to differ in a communal society. To carry out this concept in music, Cage produced musical "happenings," in which performers are asked to present simultaneous but unrelated musical events. Ames recalled in his diary: "Happenings are a misunderstanding of Cage's use of chance.

[33] John Cage, *A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writing by John Cage* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967).

[34] Carl Solway, interview by author, Cincinnati, OH, September 14, 2012. Solway and arts patron Alice Weston helped Cage produce his first professional visual art, the series of Plexigrams *Not Wanting to Say Anything about Marcel*, in 1969.

[35] Ibid.

They just reproduce fragments of social behavior in daily life. . . ."[36] Cage felt that, as he discussed on January 31, a composer was no longer an organizer but rather "one who sets up a situation for the performer to use freely, to lead the hearer to be more able to hear in his way."[37] In terms of the anarchism, when leaders (or composers) renounce their desires to control, individuals (or performers and listeners) can develop personalities and conviviality on their own. Cage believed that composers should model improvements in society through their music.

Cage performed several of his musical happenings during his residency, and Ames discussed these events in his diary. One of the notable happening pieces is *0'00"* (1962), which Cage performed twice on March 6 and May 11 at different musical events. The piece is a solo, which can be performed in any way by anyone. The soloist is asked to perform a disciplined action with maximum amplification provided. On March 6, 1967, Cage typed a letter. He wired everything on the platform, including the typewriter, chair, table, ash tray, etc. Therefore, all of his movements were amplified. Ames wrote:

> When he pulled up the chair, a great scrape. Adjusted the table, more scraping. Put the paper in the machine: a great rattling and harsh scraping. Then when he typed—what a glorification of a typewriter, with the keys whacking and clacking, the bell ringing, all unbelievably loud. When he tapped his cigarette on the ash tray, you could hear it as never. Took a swallow from a can of 7 Up, and you heard him swallow loudly. . . .[38]

On May 11 Cage read a paperback. As before, everything was amplified. Ames recalled:

> He was reading Veblen's *Theory of Business Enterprise*.[39] Turning the pages, tapping ashes from his cigarette, looking up footnotes in the back, all was noisy, but for long moments he was silently reading. . . . Then there was a thunder of drums, a wild ringing, jingling, and buzzing. Imperturbably, he went on reading, as if all alone, and I thought he

[36] Van Meter Ames, diary, March 8–10, 1967, VMAP.

[37] John Cage, quoted in Van Meter Ames, diary, February 3, 1967, VMAP.

[38] Van Meter Ames, diary, March 6, 1967, VMAP.

[39] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of Business Enterprise* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1904).

> soon would be, as more and more of the audience got up and walked out. He looked so conservative. . . .[40]

Developing and extending the idea of *4'33"*, both performances were the direct framing of everyday life. Although the direction of the piece, to perform a disciplined action, seems to define it as a non-musical piece, Cage's performances had prominently amplified the existence of those sounds that we all make but seldom notice. At the same time, it erased the distinction between musicians and audience, conveying the idea that everyone possesses an equal right to produce and to perform music.

In addition to *0'00"*, *Atlas Eclipticalis* and *Variations IV* were two other pieces on the March 6 concert. These three pieces comprise a series corresponding to the three lines of Haiku poetry: *Atlas Eclipticalis* is the first, representing "nirvana," the ultimate state of enlightenment; *Variations IV* is the second, expressing "samsara," the turmoil of everyday life; *0'00"* is the third, representing "individual action." Ames recalled the musical turmoil that Cage produced in *Variations IV*: "The performers one or more at a time wandered about the stage or a back room or back into the audience, dropping and banging things, opening or closing doors, climbing in and out of windows, scraping and slamming, kicking a tin can along the floor, etc. Bursting a paper bag. What not!"[41] In contrast to the solo piece *0'00"*, a sequel to *4'33"*, which represents one event, *Variations IV* is a piece composed for any number of performers, any sounds or combinations of sounds produced by any means, with or without other activities. It emphasizes the simultaneity of performative events, which can be explained as the application of McLuhan's idea that diverse information interacts simultaneously in modern society, or Zen Buddhism's concept of "interpenetration" that every being is moving out in all directions.

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[40] Van Meter Ames, diary, May 14, 1967, VMAP.

[41] Van Meter Ames, diary, March 6, 1967, VMAP.

On April 5 Cage performed another happening work, *Where Are We Going? And What Are We Doing?* at CCM. The piece, as published in *Silence*, is a composed lecture, which uses four single-track tapes to simulate the experience of simultaneously hearing four lectures. The lecturer, the only performer, has to read and tape each lecture independently, and then play them back simultaneously. Ames described the performance: "He spoke into a microphone. Then, one or two or three area [*sic*] time[s], you heard his voice on tapes from different machines."[42] Since the lines from one lecture are interrupted by lines from the other lectures, the simultaneity of the lecture blocks the expression of meaning from the text. The piece also realizes "interpenetration" through its interaction with the audience. The four individual centers (the lectures) are penetrating every individual (the listeners) in all sorts of ways: some listeners follow one voice, some combine two or three voices, others listen to four voices at the same time. Ames recalled his experience: "It was exasperating to try to follow one of the four voices, only to be distracted by one or two or three others! Until you just gave up, heard what you heard, and let it go at that—the experience indeed going beyond understanding."[43] Extending the concept of *4'33"*, which makes silence the context for environmental sounds, *Where Are We Going? And What Are We Doing?* once again reflected Cage's focus during the 1960s on the simultaneity of the environmental events. In the question-and-answer period after the concert, Cage explained the basis of the piece: "Our highest business is our daily life. As I become interested in the environment, I find that many things are going on at once. That is what I wanted to demonstrate. When we attend to just one thing we are not involved, we fill our heads with linear notions,

[42] Van Meter Ames, diary, April 6, 1967, VMAP.

[43] Ibid.

thinly. We need to be weaned from the thinness of our own intentions—to get into the more of what surrounds us."[44]

During his residency Cage composed a new "happening," the work *Newport Mix* (1967), for arts patron Alice Weston. *The Cincinnati Pictorial Enquirer* described the event as the highlight of Cage's Cincinnati residency.[45] Cage planned the work for a party on the Newport (KY) Yacht Club's yacht anchored on the Ohio River. In the early February, Alice and Harris Weston and many Cincinnati residents started an organizational committee to raise funds for the April 8 performance. Ames described how they gathered the money in his diary entry for February 14: "Each couple there to be responsible for getting four other couples, and the money left over to go toward the deficit for Cage's being here."[46] The piece was a broadcast of tapes provided by audience members. People who had been invited to dine on the yacht sent tapes of speaking, poetry, noise, etc. to the party host (probably the mother of Andy Joseph, Ames's close friend) in advance or brought them to the party. Guests with no tape recorder could use the equipment, provided by the composer, to prepare one at the door. Cage edited the tapes on the spot after receiving the materials, and then broadcast tapes simultaneously and *fortissimo* through the twelve tape recorder stations, which were located everywhere on the floating restaurant. Ames, who was one of the guests, wrote in his diary about the event:

> John was walking around with a handful [tapes] hanging down like spaghetti, over and over. He had Andy [Joseph] tape my Tokyo poem. A girl put part of it on a tape and played it over and over. The first part had been cut off and taken somewhere else. What a milling about in the continual roar, with people shouting to the ones right by them, so that I soon felt as hoarse as I did years ago at a football game.[47]

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[44] John Cage, quoted in ibid.

[45] "Stone Walls Do Not a Prison Make, nor Iron Bars, a Cage. . . ," *The Cincinnati Pictorial Enquirer*, July 9, 1967.

[46] Van Meter Ames, diary, February 14, 1967, VMAP.

[47] Van Meter Ames, diary, April 9, 1967, VMAP.

Inasmuch as the sounds of fine dining and talking were also part of the performance, the result was a new performance context. It resembled a happening, since the performance depended on audience members' participation and could not be reproduced. Cage said: "The important factor . . . is that the sounds obtained don't result from predetermined choice. . . . You can't keep up a willful control of what music will appear on a given tape. What is important is to make the situation complex. . . . The role of the composer is to prepare the elements which will permit the situation to become complex."[48] The composer also permitted each audience member to be the performer, making his or her own decisions. In this work, Cage aimed to realize the anarchic theory that every individual is the center of the world.

In the 1960s Cage not only associated his music with various social ideologies, but also actively applied his amalgamated philosophy (a fusion of his understanding of Zen from the 1950s with the American philosophies of McLuhan, Thoreau, and the pragmatists Dewey and Mead during the 1960s) to different fields of art. In his residency at UC, he associated with poets and filmmakers. He met poet Donald Justice, the Elliston Poet-in-Residence at UC for 1967–68, at Bill Clark's (Ames's friend) party on January 29. Cage was delighted when he learned that Justice would give a lecture about him on February 28. The lecture, "SILENCE and the Open Field: John Cage and Charles Olsen," was part of Justice's series of George Elliston Public Lectures in 1967. For some reason, Cage was unable to attend the lecture, but Ames did. Therefore Ames reviewed his notes on Justice's lecture for Cage at his house on March 1. Cage was ecstatic about many of Justice's points, which he found surprising and inspiring. Justice had carefully drawn numerous parallels between composing music and writing poetry. Ames reported that Justice's lecture had begun with "silence":

[48] John Cage and Daniel Charles, *For the Birds* (New York: M. Boyars, 1981), 170.

> Silence as poetry is more spaces between the words, more things left out; or silence absolute—the extinction of poems. (John [exclaimed]: Oh, the lovely man! Did he say that!) Our society has no use for poetry. So it is an excellent candidate for extinction. Silence thus is "inescapable and the unintended." (John [praised the argument]: "Did he say 'inescapable?' I didn't say that. I didn't think of that. That's wonderful.")[49]

Justice had then proposed the idea of poetry's ubiquity: "As Cage says, we possess nothing and everything is a delight. As music is everywhere for him, we may say the same of poetry. As music can be like glass architecture, free to include the environment, why not the same with poetry?"[50] Justice had argued that since music and language are suffused in daily life, poetry, as an art of language, which incorporates musical elements into the material of words, should be undeniably everywhere around us, too. Subsequently, the lecture renounced the conscious controls in writing; Cage, again, endorsed Justice's idea: "When self is cleared from the field, nature's fluency is attained. (Cage [said]: Did he say that? That's lovely!) Then we get a poem or a something free of literature and the tradition of the arts."[51] Justice had maintained that there is no necessity to define poetry. Since Zen Buddhism claims that "anything is a delight," poetry can be in any form with infinite possibilities.[52]

Inspired by Cage's connection of his music with various practical social philosophies and artistic media in the 1960s, Justice focused his poetry on practical and improvising aspects. He viewed poetry as performance: "We may think of a performer as filling outlines with color, or following his subconscious, or taste, or chance operations. We may think of the poet as a performer in the act of writing, producing a coexistence of dissimilarity, words at different levels,

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[49] Van Meter Ames, diary, March 1, 1967, VMAP.

[50] Donald Justice, quoted in ibid.

[51] Van Meter Ames, diary, March 1, 1967, VMAP.

[52] Ibid. Justice said: "So a poetry of infinite possibilities should be possible, as Rauschenberg puts in everything, a pair of socks, etc."

with discontinuities, prosy and more highly rhythmed."[53] He then used an example of Cage's writing to support his argument: "I am talking now of a poetry not yet written. There are passages in Cage's writing that we are willing to call poetry, with no recognizable beginning, middle, or end. There is no preconceived object but occasions for experience which will be new and unique at each performance."[54] Justice compared this non-structural, empty poetry to Rauschenberg's *White Painting* (1951) and Cage's *4'33"*, as the best means to make the daily experience affluent and the possibilities of poetry infinite. At the end of their meeting, Cage told Ames: "Don [Justice] didn't go over his lecture with me at all. I'd have told him of Jackson Mac Low's 'simultaneous poetry.'[55] It is a poetry produced by several people at once, with many voices. They are given a few directions to start with and then they go on their own. The result is aleatory."[56] Thought there are only a few sources documenting Cage's interaction with Justice, the poet's letter to Cage reveals their short, but close, relationship in Cincinnati: "This is mainly just to say how great it was (for me) that you were in Cincinnati when I was. I now find myself looking back on the whole blessed thing not without pleasure. Lots of nice people there, no doubt (I think of the Ames [*sic*] in particular), but without you and Nancy I might not have made it. . . . Take care of Cincinnati for me—oddly enough I miss the place."[57]

On April 28 Cage participated in a panel discussion "Cinema '67 Symposium" about the nature of cinema, with experimental and avant-garde filmmakers Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas,

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[53] Donald Justice, quoted in ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] For example, in the fifth of Jackson Mac Low's *5 Biblical Poems* (1955), three voices speak three poems simultaneously.

[56] John Cage, quoted in Van Meter Ames, diary, March 1, 1967, VMAP.

[57] Donald Justice, quoted in Van Meter Ames, diary, April 28, 1967, VMAP. Ames quoted Justice's letter in his diary: "In the afternoon he [Cage] had let me take a couple of letters from the poet Donald Justice."

and Stan Vanderbeek in UC's Union Faculty Lounge. Recorded in Ames's diary and the book *Cinema Now 1*, the discussion reveals Cage's perspectives on film and his application of musical philosophies to film. Cage began the talk with the renunciation of value judgments about movies: "My everyday reaction to film is that I enjoy all of it. Many people enjoy even poor films. It is hard to distinguish when we are overcome by the sheer pleasure of watching moving images."[58] Similar to the concept of viewing poetry or music as merely an act of process, Cage suggested that we view films as pure images without associating with any story, structure, or intention. He pointed out the approximation of his thought and Stan Vanderbeek's work of multiple images: "I think that the closest to the renunciation of intention . . . would, in my experience, be through the films of Stan Vanderbeek, a renunciation of intention which is effected through the multiplication of images."[59] Since one cannot track all images at once, the observer would have freedom to determine his way to look at the images without being controlled by the director's intention. As a consequence, multiplicity makes the intention vague and silent.

Another way to renounce the intention is to make film a reproduction of the environment and daily life. Cage pointed out the materialization of this idea in the fields of music, painting, and Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film* (1962–64)[60]:

> I did a piece called "Four Minutes and 33 Seconds," which has no sounds of my making. Rauschenberg did a white canvas with no images. A Korean Nam June Paik has done an hour-long film with no images. The Rauschenberg white surface is an airport for shadows and particles of dust. In my Four Min. and 33 Sec., the piece becomes the sounds of the environment. In music the sounds remain where they are. In the Nam Jun Paik film the room is darkened, the film is projected, you see the dust on the film and on the lens.[61]

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[58] John Cage, quoted in Van Meter Ames, diary, April 28, 1967, VMAP.

[59] Hector Currie, and Michael Porte, eds., *Cinema Now 1: Stan Brakhage, John Cage, Jonas Mekas, Stan Vanderbeek* (Cincinnati, OH: University of Cincinnati, 1968), 9.

[60] Nam June Paik, *Zen for Film*, 1962–64.

[61] John Cage, quoted in Van Meter Ames, diary, April 28, 1967, VMAP.

Since the events in the environment are ordered by chance, the white image in Paik's film represents the most primal image of environment without human intervention. Making the images circumvent the audiences can also create a situation that emulates daily life. Cage recalled: "In the Once Group in Ann Arbor, anybody was invited to bring a home movie. The audience was encircled by them. The result was absence of intention, which was an introduction to daily life."[62] Stan Vanderbeek's image ceiling had also caught Cage's attention: "You [Stan Vanderbeek] talked last night about your movie dome with the audience lying down and looking up? When the ceiling is covered with images, a person can't see it all, so has some freedom."[63] Cage believed that an audience member's freedom to choose a focus paralleled making decisions in daily life. Everyone is on their own.

Many American avant-garde composers held academic positions in universities in the late 1960s. For instance, Gordon Mumma taught at Brandeis University in 1966–67, Earle Brown taught at Peabody Conservatory in 1968, Lou Harrison taught at San Jose University in 1967, and Morton Feldman began teaching at SUNY-Buffalo as the visiting Slee Professor of Music in 1972. Since most American public institutions in the 1960s did not support avant-garde music for fear of controversy, universities provided the primary means of support for experimental composers in the United States. Cage, earlier than other composers, began his series of residencies at several colleges and universities in 1960: Wesleyan University (1960–61), University of Cincinnati (1967), University of Illinois (1967–69), and the University of California at Davis (1969). On one hand, Cage was obligated to find residencies due to his financial situation, and maintained his belief that "universities are the only places in our society

[62] John Cage, quoted in Van Meter Ames, diary, April 28, 1967, VMAP.

[63] Ibid.

where you can count on having conversation."[64] On the other hand, he aimed to realize McLuhan's concept of a global village with these appointments. He said: "The fact that I move around is related to McLuhan's description of the world as just one village."[65] Instead of composing at home in Stony Point, he began "to realize that my home is all around the world."[66] As a result, Cage's 1967 residency in Cincinnati was part of his personal global planning, carrying out and disseminating his philosophy around the country. Ames, as a friend in Cage's life who inspired him to study social philosophies, not only witnessed but also helped realize a part of Cage's global plan. Their nearly thirty-year friendship enabled Ames to play an important role in Cage's life and music, especially during the 1960s.

[64] John Cage, quoted in Van Meter Ames, diary, March 1, 1967, VMAP.

[65] John Cage, quoted in Lars Gunnar Bodin and Bebgt Emil Johnson, "Bandintervju med Cage," *Ord och Bild* 74 (1965), quoted in Kostelanetz, *Conversing Cage*, 24.

[66] Ibid., 25.

Chapter 4

Van Meter Ames's Writings on John Cage: The Man, His Music, and His Philosophy

This chapter considers Cage's character and philosophy through the writings of his friend Van Meter Ames. It examines Ames's published and unpublished writings that have references to Cage, including "Current Western Interest in Zen" (1960), *Zen and American Thought* (1962), "The New in Art" (1965), "A Book of Changes" (1967–71), "What Is Music?" (1967), "From John Dewey to John Cage" (1968), and "Is It Art?" (1971–72).[1] My discussion primarily focuses on Ames's unpublished typescript "A Book of Changes," which recounts Cage's integration of his artistic philosophy with his tenure at the University of Cincinnati (UC) and evinces Ames's deep understanding of and friendship with Cage. The typescript presents Cage in two perspectives—one from Ames's fictional description; the other from Ames's non-fictional recollection. I categorize the typescript into three types of writings: 1) Ames's description and conception of Cage, 2) Ames's record of Cage's activities in Cincinnati, and 3) Ames's private conversations with Cage. Under these three categories, I discuss the typescript thematically in order to see the range of their topics and to distinguish Cage's Zen philosophy in the 1950s from his new amalgamated philosophy of the 1960s. This chapter aims to verify that in the 1960s, Cage's personality, speeches, and activities reflected his concern for the world and attempt to carry out Zen philosophy through art, music, public discourse, and technology to solve social problems, which echoed Ames's idea of implementing Zen philosophy to improve the world.

[1] Van Meter Ames, "Current Western Interest in Zen," *Philosophy East and West* 10 (1960): 23–33; idem, *Zen and American Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1962); idem, "The New in Art," *Rice University Studies* 51 (1965): 19–38; idem, "A Book of Changes," typescript, Van Meter Ames Paper, 1966–1995, University of Cincinnati, OH (hereafter VMAP); idem, "What Is Music?," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 26 (1967): 241–49; idem, "From John Dewey to John Cage," in *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Aesthetics*, ed. Rudolf Zeitler (Uppsala: Universitetet, 1968), 737–40; idem, "Is It Art?," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 30 (1971): 39–48.

Ames's Writings on Cage

Ames started to refer to Cage in his writings in the early 1960s. His publications "Current Western Interest in Zen" (1960) and *Zen and American Thought* (1962) include brief references to Cage, mentioning the composer's acknowledgement of Zen as an influence on his music. Later in "The New in Art" (1965), Ames demonstrates his understanding of Cage's compositional techniques and philosophy, most likely acquired from his correspondence with Cage in the early 1960s and his own study of the composer's music. Ames sent this paper to Cage in early 1966 and presented it at the annual meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in October 1966. Since Cage was in residence in Cincinnati from January to May 1967, Ames's writings from 1967 to 1971 includes much more information about Cage's activities and aesthetics. Ames added a section on Cage's *Music for Carillon No. 5* to his 1966 paper "What Is Music?" after a telephone discussion with Cage on May 29, 1967. In his articles "From John Dewey to John Cage" (1968) and "Is It Art?" (1971–72), Ames derived materials from his diary entries during Cage's residency, extensively delineating the composer's 1960s philosophy and comparing it to John Dewey's viewpoints on art, technology, and social issues.

Among Ames's writings that reference Cage, the unpublished typescript "A Book of Changes" provides the most extensive discussion of Cage. From 1967 to 1968, Ames worked on this typescript, which focused on Cage's residency and his friendship with the composer. Morton Feldman had suggested to Ames that he should write a book about Cage on March 20, 1967, because he believed that Ames possessed a special insight into the composer. Ames drew materials largely from his diary entries and drafted the typescript in the style of historical fiction

or a semi-documentary. He recounted Cage's conversations during the residency (with audience members, students, Ames himself, and their friends in Cincinnati) and describes Cage's concerts and lectures in details, like a documentary. Though most of the narrative is based on real events, a fictional style dominates the typescript more than a factual recounting. Ames revised the narrative several times, and each chapter includes several drafts in the unbound typescript. These revised drafts show how Ames manipulated parts of the memoir according to his own will instead of the actual chronology and conceived it as fiction. For instance, one sentence from one of Cage's conversation in one version is sometimes followed by different sentences in another draft. The same information about the concerts or lectures occurs in different chapters and is presented in a different order in the various drafts.

Upon completing the typescript, Ames submitted it to several trade publishers from 1969 to 1971, including E. P. Dutton in January 1969, New Directions in September 1969 and February 1971, Doubleday in October 1969, and the Trade Division of McGraw-Hill in December 1969. However, they all rejected Ames's submission due to its lack of a unifying thread and unclear status between fiction and non-fiction. On January 28, 1969, Peggy Brooks, an editor at E. P. Dutton, wrote to Ames: "I'm afraid we don't feel we can make an offer [of publication] for it. We felt that, though much of it held the reader's attention, it ["A Book of Changes"] lacked a unifying thread which in a more traditional novel would be given by plot or characterization."[2] Similarly, on October 27, 1969, Walter I. Bradbury of Doubleday wrote to Ames: "Your script is at least a different kind of novel, in its dual presentation, and to that extent

[2] Typescript letter from Peggy Brooks to Van Meter Ames, January 28, 1969, VMAP.

at least would be worth considering if we were adding to the Paris Review Editions list. It doesn't seem to us to come off too successfully, though it's a good effort."[3]

Prior to submitting the typescript to publishers, Ames had sent it to Cage for feedback. Cage had replied with a guarded critique, but in a constructive manner:

> I am writing to my editor, J. R. de la Torre Bueno, Wesleyan Univ. Press to ask him if he'd read it and suggest what press would be best for it. I almost never read novels, so that my views are not even amateurish: merely ignorant. However, a quality you seem to me to have in conversation and in your articles is not always present in this manuscript and I think would be good to have in it, if it is to be published. That quality is "multi-dimensionality." Going at something from so many points, though they are not evidently compatible, that what is being talked or written about takes on life (irrationality or ambiguity, whatever). I see this here and there in this manuscript but it is often not present. I would suggest that you consciously multiply your thoughts by other factors than are at present included. For me, there is another problem: some things which you understand are not made understandable for the reader: e.g. when you're asked, Did you take notes ([poet Donald] Justice), your reply "Trust me" isn't (to me) revealing. This criticism may come from my every day now reading Thoreau who so sharpened his descriptive means.[4]

Cage had suggested to Ames that he should revise the typescript into a non-fiction account, where one point is usually examined or supported by multiple methods or perspectives.[5] According to Cage's conception of life in the 1960s, he preferred Ames to create the quality of multi-dimensionality in the typescript, which, the composer believed, was closer to everyday life.

In a response to Cage's critique and the publishers' letters of rejection, Ames rewrote "A Book of Changes" in 1971. It had originally comprised seven chapters, ranging from fourteen to twenty-six pages, and solely recorded the events of Cage's residency. In the revised version, Ames inserted chapters of his own autobiography between each chapter about Cage, increasing

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[3] Typescript letter from Walter I. Bradbury to Van Meter Ames, October 27, 1969, VMAP.

[4] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames, May 10, 1968, VMAP.

[5] In his own writings, Cage was not above mixing the factual with the fictional, such as his "imaginary" conversation with Satie in *Silence.*

Chapter	Working Titles	Contents	Period	Numbers of Drafts
Chapter I	John Cage in Cincinnati	Dinner party at Ames's house; Cage talked about his work *String Quartet in Four Parts*.	1967–68	4
Chapter Ia		Ames's reminiscence of his teenage years.	1971	3
Chapter II	The Crack of the Status Quo; Non-Instrumental Concert; Snow Concert	Ames describes Cage's performance of *Atlas Eclipticalis*, *Variations IV*, and *0'00"*, and the after-concert party at Ames's house.	1967–68	4
Chapter IIa	Iowa Boy	Ames recalls his experiences with women in college.	1971	3
Chapter III	Music and Literature	Cage's and Ames's discussion about philosophy in literature; Ames describes Cage's performance of *Where Are We Going? And What Are We Doing?*	1967–68	3
Chapter IIIa	*Pension a la Balzac*; Pension in Paris	Ames's reminiscence of his time in Paris and reading of Proust.	1971	4
Chapter IV	Filmmaker; Underground Movies	Ames's recollection of Cage's talk at "Cinema '67 Symposium"; Ames writes about André Gide's philosophy and draws comparisons between Zen and the philosophy of Mead.	1967–68	3
Chapter IVa	Dazzled in Italy	Ames writes about Santayana in Rome and compares Santayana's and Proust's philosophies.	1971	4
Chapter V		Ames reviewed his notes on poet Donald Justice's lecture on Cage; Ames records Morton Feldman's lecture on his own music.	1967–68	3
Chapter Va	Ferry Over into the Beyond; Chinese Philosopher in Hawaii	Ames's description of his experience with Taoism and Zen in Hawaii (1947–1948).	1971	4
Chapter VI	Noon Concert; Two Early Pieces; Jeanne Kirstein	Ames memories of Cage's lecture on prepared piano and Jeanne Kirstein's performance of *The Perilous Night* and *A Valentine Out of Season*.	1967–68	3
Chapter VIa	Zen Is Nothing/Zen in Japan	Ames's recollection of his Zen experience in a temple in Kyoto (c. 1958–1959).	1971	3
Chapter VII	The Newport Mix	The premiere of Cage's *Newport Mix*; Ames's conversation with the hostess "Ashura" about Zen during the *Newport Mix* party.	1967–68	3

Table 4.1 Chapters in the manuscript "A Book of Changes" (revised version)

the number of the chapters to thirteen (see Table 4.1). To achieve the quality of both multi-dimensionality and the necessity of a unifying thread, Ames chronologically describes the parts of his life and experiences with different philosophies, which, he believed, were parallel to the philosophies that Cage discussed during his residency. In a letter to the editor of New Directions, James Laughlin, Ames explained these revisions to the typescript:

> Now I have pretty much rewritten the book, and no longer think of it as a novel, though there are a couple of fictional or fanciful passages. The book now is largely and frankly about John Cage who one reply said is "marvelously depicted," and friends of his in various arts. He and they now appear under their own names. As for a unifying thread, though I am pretty much under the influence of Cage's dictum that "anything can follow anything," I think I have now achieved more unity by alternating the Cage chapters with chapters of my autobiography, which bring in several figures I hero-worshiped before coming to know Cage, and more or less related to him. These are Proust, Santayana, the Chinese philosopher Fung Yu-lan and Taoism (in Hawaii) which leads to a Zen Abbot and Japan, with continuing references to my great philosophy teacher at Chicago, George Herbert Mead, and [André] Gide a bit.[6]

Laughlin again rejected Ames's typescript in February 1971: "I am afraid that our schedule continues very overloaded, what with pressure from our more prolific 'regulars.'"[7]

Though the typescript remains unpublished, its dualistic nature—fiction and documentary—presents three types of useful information that support the main argument of this study: 1) Ames's description and conception of Cage, 2) Ames's record of Cage's activities in Cincinnati, and 3) his private conversations with Cage. The first is more subjective than the second, reflecting how Cage made Ames feel. The second and third types of information are factually based. Specifically, the third provides evidence of the possible influence of Ames on Cage. Supplemented by Ames's other writings that reference Cage, the following sections discuss the three types of information in Ames's writings.

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[6] Typescript letter from Van Meter Ames to James Laughlin, February 6, 1971, VMAP.

[7] Typescript letter from James Laughlin to Van Meter Ames, February 19, 1971, VMAP.

Ames's Description and Conception of Cage

According the Ames's letter to Laughlin in 1971, Cage was one of the figures that Ames admired. In "A Book of Changes," Ames describes Cage as the heroic protagonist of the story.[8] He observes that Cage possesses both the ideal personality of Zen (that the composer developed in the 1950s) and a messianic character (that Cage assumed in the 1960s). He subsumes Cage's humor and affinity to laugh as the characteristics of Zen. A passage of dialogue from Cage's talk with guests at a dinner party demonstrates Ames's conception of the composer:

> John Cage swallowed, not wine but a thought he thought better of, then smiled. [Cage:] "Why are people so delighted when they catch you in a contradiction? You'd think they'd caught a fish. And they can't eat it." His inaudible laugh opened his mouth. "Someone said to me, 'If you like silence, why don't you shut up?'" Again the laugh. It was contagious. Everybody laughed in the glow of the fire and camaraderie.[9]

Ames also praised Cage's characteristic of spotting things in a diverse landscape. Ames uses their trip to Holland, Michigan, in May 1967 to draw a metaphor to Zen's omnipresence: "When you get the feel of Zen, you can feel it anywhere. It's like John Cage spotting a mushroom at seventy miles an hour beside I-75."[10]

Perceiving Cage's tendency of worry about society in the 1960s, Ames describes Cage as a heroic character. He saw Cage as a public leader: "He was out of a book, out of Dostoevsky, worried about the world, wanting to save it, and everyone. Avant garde? For Cage, to be ahead was to lead, and a leader must serve. He talked, but knew it was better to set an example."[11]

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[8] According to Ames's letter to Laughlin in 1971, Cage was one of the figures that Ames hero-worshiped. (Typescript letter from Van Meter Ames to James Laughlin, February 6, 1971, VMAP.)

[9] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 1, VMAP.

[10] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 23, VMAP. Ames and Cage carpooled to Holland on May 9, 1967. Afterwards, Ames and his wife Betty Ames continued to head for their summer house in Pentwater, Michigan.

[11] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 22, VMAP.

Ames maintained that at a public event the composer was usually "the center of an effervescence that kept spreading to more individuals and groups" and "seemed to know everybody as if he had always lived here, and greeted each one as the friend he most wanted to see."[12] When Cage talked, Ames claimed: "He could not talk to a person without kindling affection. He delighted the whole audience by loving everyone in each seat at once."[13] Understanding that the composer wanted to reach all types of people, Ames spared no effort to illustrate how Cage valued friendship: "As if he did not have friends everywhere, he made us feel that his happiness depended on us, and he beamed to see that we enjoyed his company. . . . He cared about people in general, and hoped they could be saved from the way the world was going. . . . We all felt as refreshed by the friendly ambience he established as by the food and drink."[14] To Ames, Cage was a great man who possessed charisma and the ability to enlighten people. Ames often employed the image of light when describing Cage (such as "the center of an 'effervescence'" and "he 'beamed' to see that we enjoyed his company"). Ames even writes that Cage could enlighten people: "How could anyone dislike him, regardless of his music? His approach was utterly disarming, smiling, reaching out, making you glad to be alive and awake, however late the hour."[15]

Based on his perception of Cage's personality in the 1960s, Ames found similarities between the composer and John Dewey. He drew a comparison between Cage's society-oriented philosophy and Dewey's pragmatic perspective. In his article "Is It Art?," Ames discusses Cage

[12] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 5, VMAP; idem, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 3, VMAP.

[13] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 3, VMAP.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

and Dewey's common belief in science: "He [Diderot] and the Encyclopedists were forerunners of John Dewey, with their faith in science as the guide to a good life for man. Like Dewey, Cage wants to save the world for the vistas he sees ahead, through the ingenuity of Buckminster Fuller and other daring minds."[16] Ames also found that "both men want art to foster appreciation of life by opening the senses, mind, and heart to what is there, which is always fresh to the unjaded response."[17] These views on art are similar to the Zen disciplines of removing the obstruction of the ego and being a faithful receiver of experience. However, Ames thought that "Cage out-does Dewey in bridging the difference between life and art. Cage would introduce chaos from the environment into art and more order into the world."[18] The composer's concern for society was unconsciously ingrained in his art: "When he talks or writes about how to listen to music, or how to appreciate any art today, he invariably goes into how to live and how to reform the world to improve living, at the risk of making matters worse."[19]

Ames's Recollection of Cage's Activities and Speeches in Cincinnati

Each chapter on Cage in Ames's "A Book of Changes" is based on one event that the composer attended or organized during his residency at UC from January to May 1967. Ames described these concerts, lectures, parties, and symposia as a documentary. The implementation of Cage's amalgamated philosophy of the 1960s is the common theme underlying these events. In Chapter 2, for instance, Ames describes how Cage prepared for the performance of his musical happening for the March 6 concert in the Student Union (Cage performed *Atlas*

[16] Ames, "Is It Art?," 40.

[17] Ames, "From John Dewey to John Cage," 740.

[18] Ibid., 738.

[19] Ibid.

Eclipticalis, *Variations IV*, and *0'00"*): "He [Cage] ransacked my shelf of things for flower arrangements. He dumped out the box of odds and ends my handy man had been saving. I don't know what all he found: bits of wire, pipe, pieces of tin."[20] Ames thought that Cage presented his synthesis of the anarchic theory (everyone is on his own and makes his own decisions) and the Zen idea (everyone is the center of the world) when Cage let the audience join the process of music making: "He told the students to bring anything they liked that would make a sound. When a lady reporter asked him what to listen for, he said, 'Just keep your ears open.'"[21] Before the concert began, Ames describes the excitement of audience members: "More students sat at tables below the platform, with more unlikely objects wired through amplifiers to loud speakers strung about the walls. Excitement mounted as people craned to see, wondering what to expect."[22] The *Cincinnati Post* music critic, Eleanor Bell, reported, "The program of music by John Cage, presented last night at the UC, was quite an arresting event and managed to arouse its listeners to the two flattering extremes of attention: boos and cheers. . . ."[23]

In his residency activities, Cage reflected his idea of mixing Zen and social philosophy in most of his lectures and informal discussions. In the after-concert party at Ames's house (March 6), Cage talked about his belief in art for society: "[A guest asked:] 'You don't believe in art for art's sake?' The composer settled back, smiling benignly, seeming not to notice how the group around him had grown. 'I believe in art for society. That has implications beyond the

[20] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 15, VMAP.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Eleanor Bell, "John Cage Concert Produces Boos, Cheers, and Surprises," *Cincinnati Post* (March 7, 1967).

superstitions still being taught.'"[24] Cage claimed that making art should be an everyday experience just as Zen philosophy is available to everyone and people have a right to make their own decisions in an anarchic society. Cage opposed the idea of genius in the field of art: "Art has to be divorced from genius. We must recognize that everybody can do it. Children do it. Of course, it takes practice. [Just like] baseball and basketball take practice. . . . Some will play better than others, but the game is for everybody, or it's not the great American game that baseball has been, or that the human game should be."[25] He thought that society had no need for genius but for only ordinary mortals: "When you take down genius and masterpieces, we're left with ordinary mortals and ordinary stuff." Cage also reminded people not to belittle the things that everyone can do: "[A guest asked:] 'Are we talking about life or art?' [Cage:] 'Why not about both at once? It's as foolish to belittle art if everybody can do it as to give up life because everybody lives it.'"[26]

In a talk after the April 5 concert, where Cage performed *Where Are We Going? And What Are We Doing?*, the composer and audience members continued to discuss the everyday experience of composition. Cage was explaining that life is not boring when it is at the level of everyday experiences. Ames recalled in the Chapter 3 of "A Book of Changes": "Someone else asked whether being equally open to everything wouldn't destroy peaks and valleys and make everything grey. Cage [replied]: 'There will always be peaks and valleys in experience, and I like both. There would be no lack of multiplicity and variety, but rather an abundance of riches. You don't lose anything. It won't be grey.'"[27] Cage used the Zen idea of being a faithful receiver of

[24] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 3, VMAP.

[25] John Cage, quoted in ibid.

[26] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 3, VMAP.

[27] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 15, VMAP.

experience to make his point: "Open your eyes and don't become color-blind. Today what we can see and hear is being augmented in all fields, technically. Every blade of grass, flower, hand. . . . The effect is that of being enthusiastic about being alive."[28]

Ames's description of Cage's lectures shows that in Cincinnati the composer concerned himself with social issues as much as art. A common topic that recurred in Cage's lectures was the Vietnam War (1954–75). As Ames writes in Chapter 5, Cage discussed listening to a report on the Vietnam War: "Someone lent me a TV and I was fascinated for an hour, listening to people, who opposed the war in Vietnam, being answered by [David Dean] Rusk [1909–1994], until it was apparent that he wanted the war to go on, at least until we could have another one."[29] Cage drew a comparison between the Vietnam War and music: "The more I hear and read about politics and economics, and see how confusing they are, the more I am reminded of the hopeless complexity that music got into, until new departures had to be made."[30] He sought to combine society with art and viewed the responsibility of artists and composers as being that of making art for society and improving the world through art.

In addition to recalling Cage's remark on the Vietnam War in the Chapter 5 of "A Book of Changes," Ames included conversations between Morton Feldman and Cage during Feldman's visit to Cincinnati in March 1967. According to Ames's account, Feldman's lectures verified Cage's idea of mixing his understanding of Zen with his concern for the world. Feldman praised Cage for bridging music and life: "What's marvelous about John is that he went the way he had to, in relation to the world and to his own life. He is better than Beethoven, because he

[28] John Cage, quoted in Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 15, VMAP.

[29] John Cage, quoted in Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 17, VMAP.

[30] Ibid.

gets going in the world quicker. The work becomes a way of life. We are not involved in object-making."[31] Feldman also drew a parallel between Cage and Tolstoy because of the composer's dissemination of his lectures and lecture-like music: "Cage is an American Tolstoy, the only Tolstoy we've had. A large part of any performance of his is a lecture, the same as in Tolstoy, The Kreutzer Sonata, even Anna Karenina. When he stands up to talk about music, he talks about everything else, and you can be sure he'll get in how to live. His music is always an illustration of a lecture."[32] In the end, Feldman talked about Cage's recent travel as a performer and a composer-in-residence: "He [Cage] travels as much from one platform to another, as if he were an ex-minister."[33]

Cage and Ames's Private Conversations as Described in Ames's Writings

In "A Book of Changes" and Ames's publications after Cage's residency, the philosophy professor collected many of his private conversations with the composer that had taken place during his residency at UC. Many of their conversations are based on topics of common interest: art, chance operations, social problems, and Zen philosophy. Ames incorporated these conversations in alternation with his description of Cage and his own memoir, on one hand, showing their similar views on social issues and Zen philosophy, and on the other hand, demonstrating their open-mindedness to each other as friends. Though both men held similar views on combining Zen and Western philosophies, their conversations include both the general

[31] Morton Feldman, quoted in Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 17, VMAP.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

ideas about Zen that Cage had acquired mostly from Suzuki's teaching during the 1950s, and the amalgamated philosophy that the composers developed in the 1960s.

Cage retained his interest in all kinds of sound as he had once echoed the Zen doctrine of being a faithful receiver of experience (and sounds) in his *4′33″* (1952). Ames recalled his conversation with Cage one day at his and Betty's house in Cincinnati:

> I started to close the window against the noise when he waved, half laughing. Cage: "Oh, leave it open! I love it." He was sitting under [a painting of] a Modigliani lady, with *Encounter* and *Partisan Review* in his lap. "I hope you don't mind too much. At the airport, people hold their ears when I open mine." Ames: "But you like delicate sounds too." Cage: "The clink of a teaspoon against a cup of [*recte* and] saucer is lovely."[34]

Cage believed that we should always live as part of nature, because "when you want to concentrate, get on with your own work, and try not to be distracted by what is around you, then you lose the environment and your work too, you are not happy-empty BUT miserable-empty!'"[35] Applying this idea on his compositions, Cage felt that, as a composer, he was responsible for making an audience aware of all types of sounds: "Usually, if we don't avoid the environment we close our eyes and ears to it, or open just enough to see where we're going and hear what might run over us. My idea [of composition] is not to say or express things, but to arrange things so that each of us can see and hear what there is to see and hear. Mm?"[36] When performing music, Cage viewed the unexpected sounds from the environment as the key to make music sound fresh each time:

> Don't play it too loud, so that you shut out the house sounds. Open the windows and let in the outdoor sounds. Then a recording will be fresh each time! It will be more like a

[34] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 5, VMAP.

[35] John Cage, quoted in ibid.

[36] Ibid. In Chapter 2 of "A Book of Changes," Ames explains Cage's habit of using "Mm" at the end of the sentences: "He [Cage] asked for assent to what he said by uttering something between 'hem' and 'hum,' with the 'h' silent, as in the first syllable of 'um-hum.' This sound was not so much a question as an affirmation of his own remarks, and also an appeal." (Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 3.)

> live rendition which cannot be forced into a mechanical repetition. Even the slips and mistakes of actual playing may add unexpected charm, and at least give a human touch as welcome as the marks of hand work in graphic art.[37]

Indeed, for Cage, there were no two things (or sounds) the same in the universe just as everyone is unique to Buddha. Ames reflected on Cage's idea through the example of a piano:

> You [Cage] play a record in the evening and hear something outdoors. You look and see lights there. Play the record the next afternoon and it isn't dark. We used to think a piece composed for the piano was something fixed, and that one piano was equivalent to another. But when our ears open, when we stop conceiving and perceive, we find that no two pianos are the same. One is a [New York] Steinway and one is a [Cincinnati] Baldwin. I should say the other is another Baldwin![38]

Since nothing is ever the same, there's no more being bored with the plausible sameness and repetition in everyday experience once we open ourselves to the environment. In response to Cage's idea, Ames quoted the Eastern take on traveling: "The goal of being bored is somehow attractive, as if being interested were naïve. The ancient Chinese and Japanese always enjoyed seeing what there was to see in traveling, or in observing the changing seasons or hours of the day at home."[39]

Ames and Cage's conversations also included chance operations. Since Cage gave as many lectures as concerts during his residency, Ames raised the question of Cage's choice of topics for his lectures: "When you lecture, I suppose with all you have to say, since you can't say it all, you have to have a way of choosing when you seem not to, to get some arrangement out of Zen stories, things your friends did and said, teachers, parents, yourself, ideas, jokes, art, life, how to improve the world."[40] Cage said: "I do choose, but I choose chance. The coins tell me I'll

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[37] John Cage, quoted in Ames, "What Is Music?," 242.

[38] John Cage, quoted in Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 5, VMAP.

[39] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 5, VMAP.

[40] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 20, VMAP.

have so many sections for so many ideas of whatever sort, each idea to consist of so many words."[41] Cage drew a parallel between the *I Ching* and the form of a sonnet: "[It's] like writing a sonnet. You do need an idea, or the germ of one. Then the fixed form makes decisions for you."[42] This idea corresponds to the Zen practice of doing *Zazen* as the routine of your everyday life; then enlightenment will come naturally. Though Cage claimed that he left all the decisions to chance, Ames still saw a contradiction between Cage's lectures and concerts: "You say you get your time scheme by a chance device, but then you stick to your time-table as if there were a reason for it. You don't pay any attention to the audience, keeping to your schedule whether people walk out on you or not."[43] However, without asking for an explanation, Ames found the contradiction fascinating: "That's part of the fascination. It goes beyond understanding. So does having a colleague keep adjusting the knobs on the amplifiers, as if to help people hear better!"[44]

Some of Cage's conversations with Ames reflect his amalgamated philosophy, which he had previously developed during the 1960s. For example, when Ames asked him what would become of composers, Cage replied that composers should share the right of creating music with the audience, instead of conveying personal emotion to the audience: "[Cage:] 'I don't mind not being a composer, if I can put sounds together. Mm?' . . . [Ames:] 'Won't that diminish the composer?' [Cage:] 'It's not a question of diminishing him but of giving a different function.' [Ames:] 'Can it be as important?' [Cage:] 'A lot more, and more fun. It's less possessive, more sharing.'"[45] It appears that Cage aimed to apply the anarchic idea that every citizen is a ruler to

[41] John Cage, quoted in ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 5, VMAP.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 3, VMAP.

the relation between composers and listeners. He promoted the idea that a composer should let audience members hear the music in their own way: "As I once said, [a composer is] someone who sets up a situation for a performer to use freely, who in turn should leave the hearer the option of hearing in his own way. Mm!"[46]

Drawing his ideas from other American philosophies, Cage quoted Thoreau when he and Ames were discussing how to appreciate music: "What Thoreau said of seeing applies to hearing: 'We shall see but little if we require to understand what we see.'" Cage pointed out that to understand music from its background requires knowledge and described how it does not really present the music:

> It is not necessary to know the life of Beethoven. Whether he was impetuous or not, filled with longing and defiance or not, his music is. Say the *Missa Solemnis* is religious if you like. That's just trying to say what it is. When we talk about it, why is it hard to say what something is without saying what it is like? In life, when we say the water is cold, we don't mean that it represents cold. When we come out of the shade into the sun and say it's warm, we feel that it is warm, not that it is like being warm.[47]

Cage maintained that when listening to music, we should feel it without the obstruction of our ego or intellect. This is similar to the teaching of Zen that one can only grasp it with his own bare hands.

Ames proposed that developing good habits can meet both the needs of Zen masters' living with no purpose and the pragmatists' intelligent living in his "Zen and American Philosophy."[48] During his time with Cage, Ames discussed a similar idea on forming good habits. Cage said to Ames that good habits, which create good character, will eventually bring an open mind and the ability to perceive all types of sounds:

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 5, VMAP.

[48] Ames, "Zen and American Philosophy," 317.

> I'd say, you should have enough character to be able to free. The Zen men say it takes years of discipline to be able to act spontaneously, and be capable of art. And art should help people to wake up and be aware of the possibilities. That's why I want music to use all the sounds of instruments, voices, machines, the environment. It's when you don't know what's coming that you pay attention and are alert.[49]

Cage believed that this same idea could also be applied to everyday life. He proposed that more people attend basketball or football games instead of concerts because they thought that going to a game for an unknown result is worthier than attending a concert with an expected program: "Can you blame people for going to basketball or football instead? There they don't know how it's going to come out, what stupid errors will be made or brilliant plays. They get their money's worth. Relatively."[50] But at least, Cage claimed: "They still know pretty much what to expect. There are the same rules, or not much change." They know that all the games will be regulated by the rules. So as in life, with good habits as the basis of our lives, we do not have to be afraid of unexpected situations since we have open minds.

Ames and Cage discussed the composer's residency at UC as fulfilling McLuhan's idea of a global village. Ames summarized that what Cage had brought to Cincinnati was mostly unexpected:

> Ames: "We've had no experience with visiting composers. . . . The president never heard of you. If he had known your name, if he'd had any idea of your non-music, if he'd been warned that you'd spill aesthetics into ethics, that you always relate art to life, and that when you get up to talk about how to listen you go into how to live—if by any stretch, he could have guessed how you would hurt our ears, give more lectures than concerts, and turn a concert into a lecture, you wouldn't be here, my friend." Cage: "The advantage of being unknown. Mm!"[51]

Though Cage left UC for other concerts during his residency, Ames thought that Cage's influence on Cincinnati had still been significant. Cage's presence in Cincinnati had affected

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[49] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 5, VMAP.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 9, VMAP.

diverse groups of people: "It's good you [Cage] can be here and keep getting away too, for your sake. I hardly know you're gone before you're back. No one can say you neglected us, with all the performances and talks you give, not only for music people but for this group and that group, students, women, psyche men, everybody."[52] Cage said that it was technology that had enabled him to realize personal global planning, to meet people in Cincinnati, and to find how residents in Cincinnati are different from people in New York: "The airport makes me too available. It's strange how self-conscious you people are here, about being in the mid-west, when you're a suburb of New York. An hour and a half and you're there. And who's more provincial than New Yorkers? Most of them hardly leave their neighborhoods and subway habits. Who'd want to live the way they do?"[53] He praised Cincinnati for the good relationships between the university, the city, and its residents:

> You know you're lucky here. Whatever you say about universities, they are almost the only place where you can have conversation, not just cocktail talk. You have an unusual relationship here between town and gown. You are drawing people out who begin to see who have been with them underground. I'm as surprised to look around and see who some of them are as they are to see me.[54]

For Cage, being a composer-in-residence at UC had made a valuable connection between the residents of the city and himself.

In conclusion, Ames's writings on Cage from 1960 to 1972 demonstrate his increasing familiarity with the composer's music, personality, and philosophy. Specifically, the typescript

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[52] Ibid. Cage gave some lectures for the Department of Psychiatry at UC. Horatio Wood Ginsburg writes in "News and Reports: John Cage Concludes Cincinnati Visit": "Cage lectured at several Seminars, and came to know of many members of the [Psychiatry] Department through more informal gatherings. He directed an extraordinary concert of his music with students from the music school at The Great Hall of the Student Union in March, and many in our Department were at Wilson Auditorium for the first Cincinnati appearance of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, for whom John Cage is music director." (Horatio Wood Ginsburg, "John Cage Concludes Cincinnati Visit," *The Department of Psychiatry News and Reports* 2, no. 4 (June 1967): 4.)

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

"A Book of Changes" records Ames's understanding of and friendship with Cage. He recalled the events from Cage's residency and describes the composer as the heroic protagonist of his memoir. In the 1971 revision of "A Book of Changes," Ames alternated his own autobiography with Cage's residency, revealing that Ames believed that parts of his life had been similar to Cage's. Ames may have valued his friendship with Cage so much because he considered the composer as one of the few fellow travelers he met on the road of practicing Zen in America during the 1950s and 1960s. From the documentary part of this typescript, Ames's detailed records of Cage's lectures and activities in Cincinnati have revealed the composer's application of his artistic aesthetics and philosophy during his residency at UC, which verified his belief in bridging life with art and making art for society. Cage's and Ames's private conversations during this time demonstrate how similar were their viewpoints on social issues and Zen philosophy. Overall, Ames's writings document Cage's realization of personal global planning through university residencies and Ames's possible influence on Cage's amalgamated philosophy of the 1960s.

Epilogue

The Influence of Van Meter Ames on John Cage's 1960s Philosophy

From 1957 to 1985, John Cage and Van Meter Ames enjoyed a friendship based on their common interests in Zen and social philosophies. They first met at Cage's lecture recital at Cincinnati's Contemporary Arts Center in 1957 where Ames had detected the presence of Zen in Cage's music. The two men lived in close proximately in 1967 when Cage was a composer-in-residence at the University of Cincinnati (UC). From 1967 to 1968, Ames first drafted the typescript "A Book of Changes" to document their friendship and Cage's five-month residency at UC, which demonstrates his familiarity with the composer's music, personality, and philosophy. In the 1970s and 1980s, Cage and Ames became more like family members, sharing intimate details of their lives through correspondence. Three years before he died in 1985, Ames wrote Cage a letter about his hospitalization, which marked the end of the written documentation of two men's friendship.[1]

During their twenty-nine-year friendship, Cage read several of Ames's publications:[2] Ames sent and Cage read *Japan and Zen* (1961) in December 1961; Cage bought *Zen and American Thought* (1962) from a bookstore and read it in July 1962; Ames sent Cage "The New in Art" (1965) on April 11, 1966, and "What Is Music?" (1966) on January 5 1967; Ames sent the typescript "A Book of Changes" (1967–71) and Cage gave his critique after reading it in May 1968. Starting in 1967, Cage published several books that reflect his amalgamated philosophy of

[1] Typescript letter from Van Meter Ames to John Cage, January 29, 1982, John Cage Correspondence, 1901–1993, Northwestern University Music Library.

[2] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames, April 19, 1966, VMAP. Cage: "I am always delighted to receive your papers. Please continue sending them."

the 1960s and concern about society, including *A Year from Monday* (1967), *M: Writings, '67–'72* (1973), *Empty Words: Writings '73–'78* (1979), and *For the Birds* (1981).[3] Several common viewpoints underlying Ames's and Cage's writings reveal the proximity of their thoughts during and after the 1960s. They both argued that Zen philosophy should be carried out practically in modern society and attempted to synthesize Zen and Western ideas. As this study has shown, Ames's writings contributed to the formation of Cage's society-oriented philosophy. This epilogue aims to examine this influence by analyzing Ames's and Cage's writings and lectures after 1967.

Ames's and Cage's Similar Philosophies

As Americans practicing Zen in the United States, both Ames and Cage attempted to bridge Western and Eastern cultures. Ames followed the teaching of Masunaga Reiho and Dr. Kenneth K. Inada, two scholars he met at the Soto Zen University in Komazawa, Japan, who combined the best qualities of Eastern and Western cultures by contributing to the foundation of a humanistic society and the progress of mankind. Cage was particularly drawn to the philosophies of Western thinkers such as Meister Eckhart, Henry David Thoreau, and Buckminster Fuller, who, the composer found, possessed sympathetic reverberations of ideas rooted in ancient Eastern civilizations. Ames and Cage also associated Chinese philosophy with their own ideas. Ames supported the Chinese philosopher Hu Shih's viewpoint of Zen by disputing Suzuki's criticism of Hu's ideas. Ames maintained that learning the historic knowledge of Zen in China is a feasible way to experience Zen. Cage found Taoism compatible to his

[3] John Cage, *A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writing by John Cage* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967); idem, *M: Writings, '67–'72* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); idem, *Empty Words: Writings '73–'78* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1979); idem and Daniel Charles, *For the Birds* (New York: M. Boyars, 1981).

concept of social science. He claimed his affinity to Chinese philosophy in an interview with Daniel Charles in 1971:

> I now feel closer to Huang-Po and Chuang-tze than to Indian philosophies. People sometimes think that all my Fuller and McLuhan ideas have definitively "liberated" me from my youthful passion for the East and the Far East. But the Huang-Po Doctrine is quite literally applicable to an ethics of the Global Village! I feel closer to Chuang-tze today than ever before![4]

The composer also felt that Chinese philosophy had infiltrated American society in multiple ways. In his text "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1971–72," Cage wrote: "We're indebted to China for its language, the *I Ching*, Lao-tse, Chuang-tse, Zen Buddhism too. . . . Given us the Chinese sense of nature, the Chinese sense of society."[5]

In the 1960s Ames and Cage held similar views on Zen Buddhism. They attempted to adapt Zen for a modern, industrial society. According to his response to Suzuki, Ames thought the traditional way of learning Zen was no longer applicable in an industrial society.[6] In the current world of the 1950s, Ames wrote, "Zen would need to add the realization that intelligence can remake the world."[7] Zen masters should be aware of science in order to carry out Zen's ideal of service more effectively. Similarly, Cage considered that Zen philosophy in modern society should be focused on solving social problems: "It's impossible to naively believe in Zen in the middle of the twentieth century, as if nothing had changed!"[8] He claimed that a broader goal was

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[4] Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, 227.

[5] Cage, *M*, 213.

[6] Van Meter Ames, "Zen and Pragmatism," *Philosophy East and West* 4 (1954): 32.

[7] Van Meter Ames, "Zen and American Philosophy," *Philosophy East and West* 5 (1956): 309.

[8] Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, 228.

necessary for Zen practitioners: "Private prospect of enlightenment's no longer sufficient. [What we need is] not just self- but social-realization."[9]

Both Cage and Ames were attracted to and discussed Thoreau's philosophy in the 1960s. Ames saw the connection between Zen and Thoreau's philosophy in the aspect that wisdom should bring emancipation from abstraction and a return to immediacy. He also found a strong relation between Taoism and Thoreau's humanistic and anarchic theories. Ames wrote in *Zen and American Thought* (1962): "He [Thoreau] could see human doings belonging to the round of Nature. He would be free of government, church, and society, especially when they were unjust. . . . He was like the early Taoists of China in their rejection of society for Nature, although, like the later ones, he could recognize that the good life must also be social."[10] Ames favored Thoreau and Taoism because of their sociable qualities. Conversely, Cage had read Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* (1849) as a college student (1928–30) but revisited the book and read Thoreau's other publications, such as *Walden* (1854), beginning in 1967 while at the University of Cincinnati. Thereafter, Cage frequently referred to Thoreau's philosophy in his music and writings. He was attracted to Thoreau's non-dualistic view on nature: reality is never twofold and humanity is always part of nature. Similar to Ames, Cage leaned toward the social aspect of Thoreau's philosophy rather than to its transcendentalism. Considering the intact human right in nature, the composer believed in Thoreau's motto "That government is best which governs least."[11] Applying this anarchic idea to music, Cage conceived indeterminate music, in which he reduced the composer's control of music and allowed for musicians' own

[9] Cage, *A Year from Monday*, 53.

[10] Van Meter Ames, *Zen and American Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1962), 79.

[11] Henry David Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," in *Aesthetic Papers*, ed. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody (Boston: The Editor, 1849), 189.

decisions. For example, the score of his orchestral work *Renga* (1976) is based on 361 drawings from Thoreau's journals. Seventy-eight musicians read their individual parts based upon their own perceptions of the sketches without the assigning of fixed pitches, contributing their fragments to the sound of the composite drawing.[12]

The strongest parallel between Cage's and Ames's 1960s philosophies is their relation to pragmatism. To modify Zen philosophy for modern society, Ames synthesized Zen with American philosophies, especially pragmatism, in his publications from the 1950s and 1960s (Ames had been the student of pragmatists Mead and Dewey at the University of Chicago). He found that both Zen masters and pragmatists treasure everyday experience and the present moment. While Zen masters emphasize experience with irrational intuition, pragmatists combine experience with intellect, which, Ames believed, was essential to solve social problems in the modern world. With the help of intellect, pragmatists expect science, technology, and economic policies to secure a basic living condition for everyone and to help implement their social ideals in the world. Cage associated pragmatism with his theory of anarchy. He proposed his utopian social model based on practical anarchism. Daniel Charles asked Cage in a 1970 interview: "A few days ago, we were talking together about anarchy, and you said: 'What I want is a practical, or practicable, anarchy. . . .' Cage [replied]: 'Exactly.'"[13] Cage in his practical anarchism believed that social organizations should concentrate on utilities and technology and give every person access to what he needs to live. Cage combined his spiritual belief in the 1960s with pragmatic concerns, since he thought individuals, who are interconnected in society, are

[12] Percussion Group Cincinnati, ensemble-in-residence at the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music, premiered the concerto *Renga with Music for Three* in 1984. For more about the genesis of this work, see Thomas J. Kernan, "The Percussion Group Cincinnati: A History of Collaboration between Ensemble and Composer" (MM thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2010), 54–55.

[13] Cage and Charles, *For the Birds*, 53.

responsible for the overall social and environmental framework they share. He applied these forms of anarchic harmony to the relations between composers, musicians, and the audience in his 1960s compositions, aiming to give instances of social improvement.

Cage had assimilated his ideas about pragmatism from Ames. He had written to Ames on July 12, 1962, after reading Ames's *Zen and American Thought*, "I have sensed for some time now that my problems were no longer musical ones, but just social ones. My first next step will be to read Mead."[14] Ames had inspired Cage with Mead's concept of self in social psychology, describing in *Zen and American Thought* that the conscious self is at first an individual, but the world of nature involves him in the social relations. In 1979 Cage quoted and expanded this notion in his book *Empty Words: Writings '73–'78*:

> George Herbert Mead said that when one is very young he feels he belongs to one family, not to any other. As he grows older, he belongs to one neighborhood rather than another: later, to one nation rather than another. When he feels no limit to that to which he belongs, he has, Mead said, developed the religious spirit. . . . The religious spirit must now become social so that all Mankind is seen as Family, Earth as Home.[15]

Cage occasionally discussed Ames's synthesis of Zen and pragmatism with other people. He wrote in a letter to Ames, "I had occasion at Bluffton to mention your book (*Zen and American Thought*) for, believe it or not, the thought was expressed in a discussion period that 'the western man is unable to benefit from the eastern man!'"[16]

Ames and Cage corresponded through most of their twenty-nine year friendship. Ames's overall influence on the formation of Cage's amalgamated philosophy of the 1960s includes bridging Western and Eastern cultures, assimilating Chinese philosophy, modifying Zen

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[14] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, July 12, 1962, VMAP.

[15] Cage, *Empty Words*, 181.

[16] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, January 12, 1968, VMAP.

philosophy for modern society, adopting Thoreau's humanistic and anarchic theories, and relating an utopian social model to pragmatism. Though they lived close to one another for only five months in 1967, Cage's and Ames's lives tightly intertwined in terms of their spiritual interests and philosophical outlooks throughout their friendship. Cage recorded his impression of the residency in Cincinnati, which Ames had arranged, in a mesostic that he wrote for the Van Meter Ames Memorial Concert in November 1985, in memory of the philosopher and his good friend. Returning to when they met, Cage recalled Zen as the recurring theme of their friendship and time in Cincinnati.

do i detect the presence of zen?

you gaVe us
so much pleAsure
we thaNk our lucky stars

so Much to think about
that you wEre
wiTh us
that wE
weRe here together

Actually
you reMain
i sEe you
aSking[17]

[17] John Cage, program for Van Meter Ames Memorial Concert, November 1985, John Cage Correspondence, 1901–1993, Northwestern University Music Library.

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Appendix 1: John Cage's Residency Schedule at the University of Cincinnati from January to May 1967

Dates in 1967	Location	Event(s)
January 8	Cincinnati, Ohio	arrived in Cincinnati; lived in 1071 Celestial Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.
January 22	Student Union, University of Cincinnati (hereafter UC)	presented a lecture.
January 29, 4:00–6:00 p.m.	Bill Clark's house, 3135 Gilbert Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio	attended a party for the 1967 Elliston Poet Donald Justice.
January 31, 8:00 p.m.	Kenneth E. Caster's house, 425 Riddle Road, Cincinnati, Ohio	attended a meeting of Jolly Boys (a faculty group in Cincinnati) with Ames, who presented his paper "What Is Music?"
February 9, 1:00 p.m.	Annie Laws Auditorium, UC	LaSalle-Cage lecture set: Cage lectured on *String Quartet in Four Parts*. The LaSalle Quartet performed *String Quartet in Four Parts*.
February 9	Newport Yacht Club, Newport, Kentucky	attended a dinner party in his honor.
February 11	Alice and Harris Weston's House	attended a dinner party; performed *Winter Music* at the party.
February 12	Ames's house, 448 Warren Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio	attended a dinner party. The LaSalle Quartet performed Cage's *String Quartet in Four Parts*.
February 14, 8:45 p.m.	Student Union, UC	The LaSalle Quartet performed Cage's *String Quartet in Four Parts*.
February 28, 4:00 p.m.	McMicken Hall, UC	Donald Justice lectured on Cage: "Silence and the Open Field: John Cage and Charles Olson."
March 1	Ames's house, 448 Warren Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio	Ames reviewed his notes on Justice's lecture for Cage.
March 4–7	Cincinnati, Ohio	Gordon Mumma visited Cage and Ames.
March 6	Cincinnati, Ohio	Morton Feldman visited Cage and Ames for three weeks.
March 6, 8:45 p.m.	Student Union, UC	Cage organized the concert "A Program of Music." Electronics assistant: Gordon Mumma Program: *Atlas Eclipticalis* (conducted by Cage); *Variations IV*; *0'00"* (solo by Cage)
March 6, evening	Ames's house, 448 Warren Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio	attended an after-concert party.

March 10	College-Conservatory of Music, UC	Feldman read his paper "Some Elementary Questions," and had a discussion on contemporary music and his compositions with Cage and a few music students.
March 20		Feldman suggested that Ames should write a book on Cage.
March 29		lectured on music.
April 5		lectured on Other Arts.
April 5, evening		performed *Where Are We Going? And What Are We Doing?*; spoke at the after-concert lecture.
April 7		Jeanne Kirstein performed Cage's works. Cage participated in a discussion about his music for four hours.
April 8, noon	Ames's house, 448 Warren Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio	had a lunch with Van Meter and Betty Ames.
April 8	Newport Yacht Club, Newport, Kentucky	premiered *Newport Mix*.
April 12	Union Losantiville Room	lectured on "World Improvement"; read three sections from his book *Diary: How to Improve the World (You'll Only Make Matters Worse)*.
April 14	Ames's house, 448 Warren Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio	consulted with Ames about the wording of some passages in the Afterward of his book *A Year from Monday*.
April 15	UC Radio	talked for half an hour on the UC radio about the Merce Cunningham Dancers.
April 21, 8:00 p.m.	Wilson Auditorium, UC	organized the first performance of "Spring Arts Festival" (April 21–30). Musical Director: John Cage Pianists: Gordon Mumma, David Tudor, John Cage Dancers: Merce Cunningham Program: *Suite for Five*; *How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run* (Cage as reader)
April 26	UC	participated in a panel discussion on American underground film with Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, and Stan Vanderbeek.
April 27, 1:00 p.m.	Laws Auditorium, UC	lectured on "the Prepared Piano." Jeanne Kirstein performed Cage's *The Perilous Night* and *A Valentine Out of Season*.

April 28, 4:00 p.m.	Union Faculty Lounge, UC	"Cinema '67 Symposium": Cage participated in a panel discussion with Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, Stan Vanderbeek, and James McGinnis.
May 6	Ames's house, 448 Warren Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio	had dinner with Van Meter and Betty Ames.
May 9–14	Holland, Michigan	traveled with Ames and David Tudor to Holland, Michigan; hunted for mushrooms on the way to Holland.
May 11, 8:15 p.m.	Dimnent Memorial Chapel, Hope College, Holland, Michigan	performed *Fontana Mix* and *0'00"*.
May 17	Jim Vaughan's house, 10 Interwood Place, Cincinnati, Ohio	attended a meeting of the Jolly Boys with Ames. Cage read some passages from his book *A Year from Monday*.
May 19, afternoon		attended a cocktail-buffet party; discussed Thoreau and Fuller's philosophies with Carl Condit.
May 20	Ames's house, 448 Warren Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio	played chess with the psychiatrist Marshall Gindburg (Ames's friend).
May 29, morning		talked about his work *Music for Carillon No. 5* on the phone with Ames.
May 31		left Cincinnati.

Appendix 2: Photos of John Cage in 1967

Photo 1. John Cage—Picking a Mushroom "on way to Holland, Michigan," May 9, 1967.

Photography courtesy of Archives and Rare Books Library, University of Cincinnati

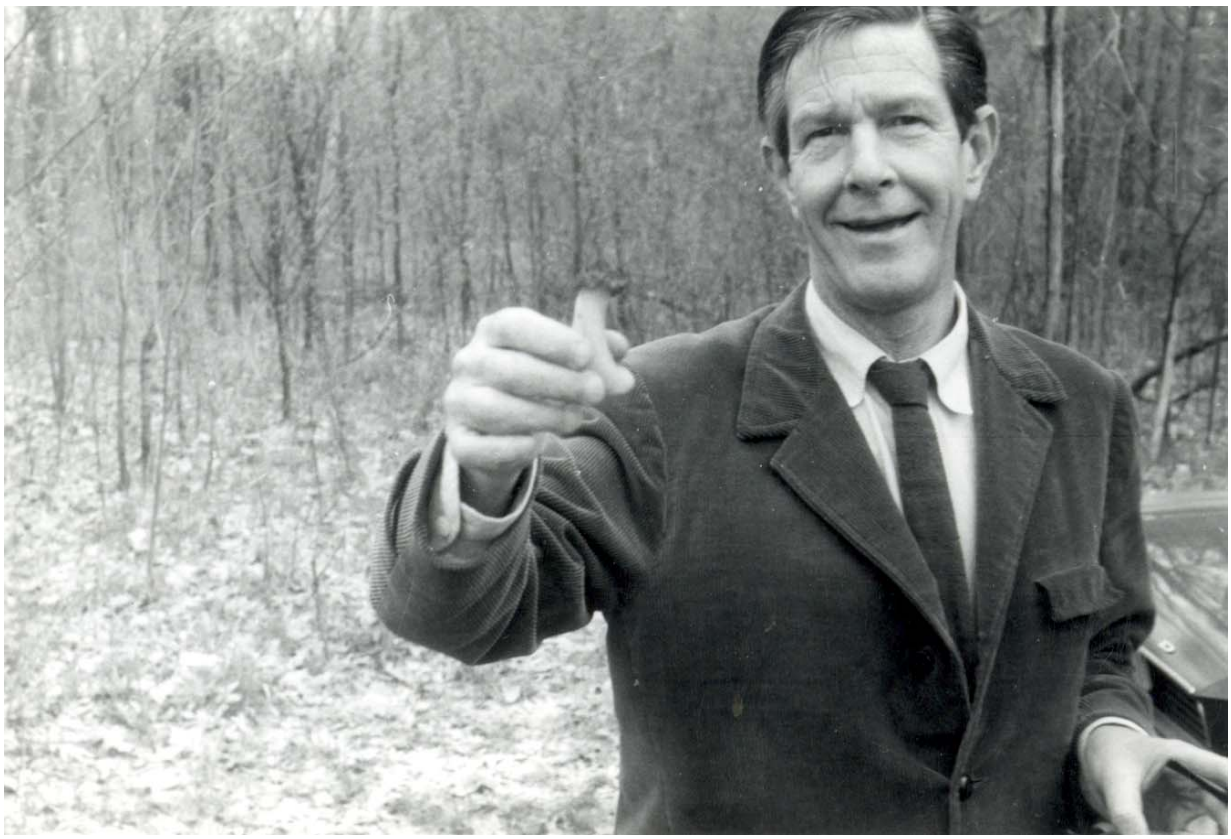

Photo 2. John Cage Holding a Mushroom—"in 'purgatory' near Constantine [Michigan] on way to concert in Holland [Michigan]," May 9, 1967.

Photography courtesy of Archives and Rare Books Library, University of Cincinnati