

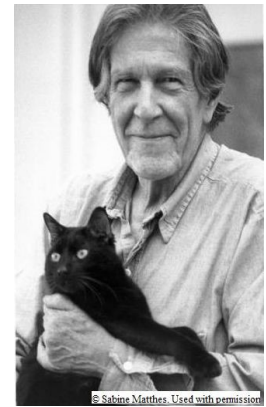
John Cage and Merce Cunningham 1942-1992

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[John Cage - Representative Works](#)

The collaboration between John Cage, the composer, poet and artist, and Merce Cunningham, the dancer and choreographer, extended from 1942, when they met at Seattle's Cornish School, and continued until Cage's death in 1992. [Their personal relationship is well established from personal commentary but is not mentioned in the literature because the temper of the time was not "out" as it is today; I do not make anything of it in my report because I respect Cage's view, which is that he resented categories.]

This 50 year period began the last three years before the end of WWII (the same year that US forces landed on Guadalcanal) and three years before Truman dropped the bombs on Japan in Hiroshima and Nagasaki-- and continued through and beyond the Korean (1950-1953) and Viet Nam (1954-1975) conflicts and the myriad changes of the 1960's. [There is some controversy regarding Cage's lack of participation in WWII; this has been explained by Cage having assisted his father, who was an inventor working at times for the US government, with some particular research which was significant to the war effort.]



The era of the 60's was characterized by a growing sense of planetary connection, concern for human rights (the women's movement, the civil rights movement), civil disobedience (protests, riots), technological quantum leaps, and numerous artistic, intellectual, political and economic upheavals. And this was the era when Cage came into prominence. In 1968 Cage and Buckminster Fuller were asked to participate in a dialog through the auspices of a newly formed interdisciplinary branch of the Department of Justice, headed by R.G.H. Siu, the purpose of which was to develop a framework of social justice values for President Johnson's "Great Society." Joan Retallack, the author of *Musicage: Cage Muses on Words* [Art Music](#) (Wesleyan University Press, 1996) was hired as a consultant, and brought in Cage and Fuller, who were thrilled to be given the potential to have an effect on society through their socialaesthetic notions.

In 1965-1967 Cage published his "Diary: How to Improve the World" and Fuller's geodesic dome had housed the US exhibition in Montreal. Cage's work expressed his awareness of world problems of hunger, lack of shelter, and the war in Viet Nam. Retallack interviewed both men extensively and then (without making copies) gave the tapes to a secretary in the Justice Department for transcription. Right after that, Humphrey lost to Nixon and when Nixon took over, the tapes became classified, Siu was fired, all of the materials from the interviews were classified and Retallack was not allowed to have them back. Joan Retallack was intensely embarrassed by these events, as she felt she had wasted the two men's time; she withdrew from working with them for a while but she and Cage reconnected later, the outcome of which were the interviews which resulted in her book, *Musicage*.

Cage's (and by extension, Cunningham's) political views are very much based on what he considered to be the obvious results of technological development, as exemplified in the work of Buckminster Fuller and others; that technology would eventually provide enough food and goods to care for everyone on the planet. To Cage, planetary ecology, responsible agribusiness (he was a vegetarian), and concern for all human life were key issues and he spoke about them often in his work. Cage "took his work...to be a contribution to the global conversation among those who care about the future of the planet." (*Musicage*, Joan Retallack, p. xxvii.) Cage's primary political stance was a support of anarchy, which he felt would be the most appropriate form of government in a world where everyone's basic needs (food, shelter) were satisfied and there was plenty of leisure to pursue artistic and personal goals. The world has again proven to be less interested in accomplishing these goals than Cage or Fuller would have liked, but the game is not over yet.

Economically, probably what is most significant about this era is the nature of the planetary interconnection with all people, occurring in response to technological developments; it is said that human technology changed more during these 50 years than in the last two millennia. The issues pertinent to this change were discussed in books by two important authors: (1) Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* (Bantam Books, 1991), and (2) John Naisbitt's *Megatrends*, which, like Toffler's books, diagnosed current trends as they apply to contemporary social structures--work, the family, personal relations, business, and international concerns. In essence, what these books are saying is that this era, the one in which the Cage/Cunningham collaboration flourished, was an era of remarkable, technologically-inspired, planetary wide change and rebirth. Primary to Toffler's thinking is the notion that human history may be subdivided into three developmental eras--the agricultural, the industrial revolution and now, what we're experiencing currently, the information age. Toffler offers a remarkably usable context for the current global confusion. John Naisbitt's *Megatrends* is currently out of print, but an additional book, *Megatrends 2000* covers trends into the 21st century. A useful analogy which I read somewhere (but have long since forgotten the source!) is with the space program: one might compare the venturing out of humans into space to the first venturing of sea-based life forms onto the surface of the planet. (This may be attributed to Carl Sagan, but I cannot be sure.)

In keeping with all of the important trends during this era is the sense of global interconnectiveness with all of the planet's myriad cultures and ethnicities, and specifically, in the United States, that of interest in and study of Asian cultures, particularly Zen

Buddhism. Cage was immersed in the philosophy of Zen and spent two years attending weekly lectures at Columbia University, given by D.T. Suzuki. [See [*Zen and Japanese Culture*](#) by Daisetz T. Suzuki (Princeton University Press, 1993.) D.T. Suzuki is not to be confused with Shinichi Suzuki, founder of the Suzuki violin method.] The primary focus of Zen is to break through all the myriad forms of human superficiality and to get to what lies behind them all; Zen has no taste for complexities and feels that intellect is only one of many screens that interfere with taking hold of what is in fact, reality. Zen attempts to open the psyche up to a greater awareness of life, and this awareness is all inclusive with respect to other cultures; it moves one beyond the ordinary, just as the LSD-induced trances of the time were said to do. [Cage, by the way, was never interested in and probably never took drugs. He had friends who did, though, he says. Probably this was, among others, John and Yoko, who also introduced him to macrobiotic cooking.]

It should be noted that Zen is not a religion in any traditional sense, but a philosophy or way of life, one that accepted poverty (*wabi*, in Japanese, and the turning away from what is fashionable to what is simple and beautiful and honorable), and discouraged a dependence on worldly things such as power, wealth and reputation. This also was in keeping with current trends, the "hippie" movement and the then-current youth rebellion against parental values. With respect to Cage's voice, musically, Zen philosophy meshed with his sense of removing his own personality, history and taste from the compositions. The goals of both Cage and Cunningham were to let the sounds and images stand for themselves and let the auditors put into the works what they will.

From *Musicage*, p. xxix: "Cage worked in service of principles and values derived from what in lifelong study he took to be the best, the most practically and spiritually relevant, of Eastern and Western thought, hoping that someday global humanity might live with pleasure in anarchic harmony--in mutually consensual, non-hierarchical enterprise."

The year 1968 was a significant year in the United States; it was the "Summer of Love" in Berkeley, California, and the height of the hippie period in Haight Asbury. I was staying in Berkeley with a public school music teacher who was running for an administrative position on the school board and was involved in the free school movement. There were hippies everywhere (I was one, in my own Midwestern sort of way), marijuana was \$10 for a shoebox, a lot of people experimented with LSD, and the University of California campus at Berkeley was full of long haired, beaded, students, most of whom seemed to carry musical instruments, had a dog with them, or both. Everyone shared, communal living was the order of the day, Elton John's "Tiny Dancer" was in vogue, and revolutionary ideas were in the air; Cage, Camus, Bertrand Russell, Henry Miller, R.D. Lang (*The Politics of Experience*), and Eric Hoffer (*The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, and *The Ordeal of Change*) were all popular books of the time.

The primary tenet was not to be "straight," which characteristic would be indicated by a support of Nixon politics and, specifically in California, Raeganism. What we supported were blacks, minorities, and women. Bobby Seale and the "Chicago Seven" had an effect on the Republican National Convention. There was outrage over the war in Viet Nam, our parents' racism, and over the notion that one should "act like a lady." Our mothers told some of us that, of course women could have jobs, but, of course, "they'd never compete

with men." (Huh?? How could you have a job and not compete with men?) Households rang with screaming matches over religion (I was against it), race (we couldn't reconcile our parents' claims to be Christian while remaining bigots), and most of all, with ecological concerns and the War. Our parents were thinking with their own mindsets, conditioned by the Great Depression and the terms of WWII, which conflict was caused by the injustices of the Versailles Treaty and which war was probably, relative to Viet Nam, in retrospect, relatively justified.

The prevailing intellectual temper of this era was rather anti-intellectual and consisted primarily of struggle--the struggle between a younger generation of "over-fed, long-haired, leaping gnomes," as one rock and roll song put it, and those who, like my parents, clung to the past and the things that had served them then. This was the generation which had endured pre-war economic devastation and struggled intensively to provide their families with more security than they had, growing up. Thus when the GI's returned from the European conflict in 1945 (WWII ended in 1945, Viet Nam ended in 1975--30 years that convulsed with incredible social changes), what they wanted most were jobs, educations in some cases, and to buy a house and raise a family. Theirs was a society predicated on the status-quo; the division of the races, the subjugation of women in the home, the complete emotional commitment to the goals of the government, and obedience to authority. Business, government, law, education, the arts--all the sources of power and control--existed in what was a man's world based on two models; sports and the military. Women's place was in the home. Traditionally, men were the heads of households and there was no arguing with them on issues, particularly ones involved with the sacredness of their power.

The temper was anti-minority, anti-gay, anti-women, and sexually repressed. Any deviation from these social norms was met with shock, rejection and horror. The intellect as divorced from practical considerations, per se, was not looked upon with favor; the sort of intellectual experimentation favored by the avant-garde was viewed with suspicion, as being too frivolous, and was certainly not favored by a generation which had seen and survived poverty, global depression and war.

From Cage's *Empty Words*, (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1979. p. 5): "It may seem to some that through the use of chance operations I run counter to the spirit of Thoreau (and '76, and revolution for that matter). The fifth paragraph of *Walden* speaks against blind obedience to a blundering oracle. However, chance operations are not mysterious sources of "the right answers." They are a means of locating a single one among a multiplicity of answers, and, at the same time, of freeing the ego from its taste and memory, its concern for profit and power, of silencing the ego so that the rest of the world has a chance to enter into the ego's own experience...Rome, Britain, Hitler's Germany. Those were not chance operations. We would do well to give up the notion that we alone can keep the world in line, that only we can solve its problems. More than anything else we need communion with everyone. Struggles for power have nothing to do with communion. Communion extends beyond borders; it is with one's enemies also. Thoreau said: "The best communion men [sic] have is in silence." Works by Cage/Cunningham affronted the bourgeois with avant-garde notions since the 1940's; by the early 60's, Cage was particularly active in New York though not always well received. He regretted but was not at all discouraged by unsupportive responses from New York audiences, and developed a

stronger international following during a six month world tour. Throughout many of the collaborations, most of the audiences were those which had been insulated from both the abandonment of conventional tonality (as expressed in Schoenberg), the post WWII development of magnetic tape, and the beginnings of electronic music--characterized by Tompkins as the "great revolutions in twentieth-century music." [See [*Duchamp: A Biography*](#), Calvin Tompkins. Owl Books, 1998].

A geographic outcome of the radicalism of the Cage/Cunningham era was the notion of the "global village," a phrase coined by Marshall McLuhan ([*War and Peace in the Global Village*](#), out of print. ISBN #0671689967.) Interestingly, this phrase has passed into a sort of universal usage, along with another phrase from his book by the same title, "the medium is the message." Doing a search on amazon.com revealed dozens of books with the phrase "global village" and Hillary Clinton's book [*It Takes a Village*](#) is also reminiscent of the phrase. What McLuhan meant by this phrase is the interconnectedness of all of mankind through the technological developments current at that time. McLuhan, Cage and Fuller had during the 1960's an Utopian sense of trying to save the world; Cage's work can be said to be a collaboration in that his aim was to work on the global problems of the world in a practical and constructive way. "Global Village" is also the title of an etching by Cage which he turned into a diptych in his home by placing it opposite a mirror which reflects a window giving a view to his back yard.

Cage's work consisted of a lifetime effort to dislodge "cultural authoritarianism (and gridlock)..." (*Musicage*, p. xxvii.) Thus the Cage/Cunningham collaboration, which began decades before the real flourishing of these various significant societal changes, had very strong intellectual underpinnings related to the broad changes in society; their ironic and sometimes bizarre works speak clearly to the issues of the time, the rebellion of youth, and the inevitable changes brought about by technology, which changes shocked and abused the sensibilities of the previous generation.

For further insights, see [*Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage*](#) by George J. Leonard. University of Chicago Press, 1995.

John Cage - Representative Works

[Piano Works - 1935-1948](#). Collection for solo prepared piano. 40 pages. Published by C.F. Peters.

[4' 33"](#). For tacet (any instrument or combination of instruments). With performance notes. Composed 1952. 2 pages. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Sonatas And Interludes For Prepared Piano](#). Collection for solo prepared piano. Composed 1946-8. 40 pages. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Prepared Piano Music, Volume 1 - 1940-1947](#). Collection for solo prepared piano. 80 pages.

Published by C.F. Peters.

[Prepared Piano Music, Volume 2 - 1940-1947](#). Composed by John Cage (1912-1992). Collection for solo prepared piano. 78 pages. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Ryoanji - Percussion Obbligato](#). Percussion part (spiral bound) for percussion obbligato (2 instruments of different material). With percussion notation. Photoprint edition - publisher prints this title after order is received. Composed 1983-85. 3 pages. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Works for Piano, Prepared Piano and Toy Piano](#). Edited by Margaret Leng Tan. For piano, prepared piano and toy piano. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Party Pieces \(Sonorous and Exquisite Corpses\)](#). Edited by Hughes. For flute, clarinet, bassoon, horn, piano (5 scores needed for performance). 20 short pieces composed collaboratively by John Cage, Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison and Virgil Thomson (1949)

[Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs The \(1942\)](#). For voice, piano. (Eng). Duration 2'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Radio Music \(1956\)](#). For radio (s), 1 to 8 performer (s). To be performed as a solo or ensemble for 1 to 8 performers, each at one radio. Duration 6'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[String Quartet in Four Parts \(1950\)](#). For 2 violin, viola, violoncello. Duration 20'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Suite for Toy Piano](#). For toy piano (piano). Duration 8'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Third Construction \(1941\)](#). For percussion (4). Duration 15'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Aria \(1958\)\(Score in color\)](#). For Voice (any range). To be used alone or with FONTANA MIX, or any parts of CONCERT. Secular Choral Works. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Living Room Music \(1940\)](#). For percussion (4). Percussion and Speech Quartet. Duration 6'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Six Melodies for Violin and Keyboard \(Piano\)\(1950\)](#). For violin, piano. Duration 15'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Two \(1988\)](#). For flute, piano. Duration ca. 15'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Imaginary Landscape No.3 \(1942\)](#). For percussion (6). Duration 3'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[4' 33" \(No. 2\)](#). (Solo to be performed in any way by anyone.) Composed by John Cage (1912-1992). for instrument (tacet). With performance notes. Composed 1962. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Fourteen \(1990\)](#). For piano solo, flute (piccolo), bass flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, horn, trumpet, percussion (2), 2 violin, viola, violoncello, contrabass. This edition: Photoprint Edition. Photoprint editions are made to order. Printed on high quality paper and cover stock, they are made on a Canon digital printer from clean digital masters. Most of the photoprint editions are saddle stitched, but larger books have wire spiral binding. Duration ca.15'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Music for?\(1985\)/Percussion1](#). For percussion. This edition: Photoprint Edition. Photoprint editions are made to order. Printed on high quality paper and cover stock, they are made on a Canon digital printer from clean digital masters. Most of the photoprint editions are saddle stitched, but larger books have wire spiral binding. Percussion 1 part. Duration ca.30'. Published by C.F. Peters.

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[Composed Improvisation for Steinberger Bass Guitar \(1989\)](#). For Bass Guitar. Duration 8'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Concert for Piano and Orchestra \(1957-58\)](#). For piano solo. 63 pages,to be played,in whole or part,in any sequence; 84typesof composition are involved.To be performed,in whole or in part,in any duration,with any number of performers,as a solo,chamber ensemble,symphony,concert for piano and orchestra,aria,etc.(Se. Published by C.F. Peters.

[One \(1988\)](#). For piano. Duration 10'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Four 2 \(1990\)](#). For SATB. This edition: Photoprint Edition. Photoprint editions are made to order. Printed on high quality paper and cover stock, they are made on a Canon digital printer from clean digital masters. Most of the photoprint editions are saddle stitched, but larger books have wire spiral binding. Secular Choral Works. Duration 7'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Music for?\(1985\)/Flute](#). For flute. This edition: Photoprint Edition. Photoprint editions are made to order. Printed on high quality paper and cover stock, they are made on a Canon digital printer from clean digital masters. Most of the photoprint editions are saddle stitched, but larger books have wire spiral binding. Flute part. Duration ca.30'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Forever and Sunsmell \(1942\)](#). For voice, percussion (2). (Eng). Duration 5'.

[A Flower \(1950\)](#). For Voice and Closed Piano. Duration 4'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[1007488](#). For piano. Duration ca.35'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Etudes Australes \(1974-5\) Books I and II](#). For piano. Book I:Etudes 1 to 8; Book II:Etudes 9 to 16. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Etudes Australes \(1974-5\) Books III and IV](#). For piano. Book III:Etudes 17 to 24; Book IV:Etudes 25 to 32. Published by C.F. Peters.

[First Construction \(In Metal\)\(1939\)](#). For percussion (6) with assistant. Duration 9'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Four 6 \(1992\)](#). For any way of producing sounds. (If performed as a solo,the 1st player's part is used and the title becomes One 7). Duration 30'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Freeman Etudes Books 1 and 2 \(1977-80\)](#). Edited by Paul Zukofsky. For Violin. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Freeman Etudes Books 3 and 4 \(1991\)](#). Edited by Paul Zukofsky. For Violin. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Imaginary Landscape No.4 \(March No.2\)\(1951\)](#). For For 12 radios (24 players and Conductor). Duration 4'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Song Books Instructions \(1970\)](#). For Solo Voice. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Song Books Volume 1 \(1970\)](#). For Solo Voice. Solos for Voice 3-58.Some songs may be used with Atlas Eclipticalis. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Song Books Volume 2 \(1970\)](#). For Solo Voice. Solos for Voice 59-92.Some songs may be used with Atlas Eclipticalis. Published by C.F. Peters.

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[Credo in Us \(1942\)](#). For percussion (4) (including piano and radio or phonograph). Duration 12'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Score \(40 Drawings by Thoreau\) and 23 Parts \(1974\)](#). For Any instruments and/or voices, Tape. This edition: Photoprint Edition. Photoprint editions are made to order. Printed on high quality paper and cover stock, they are made on a Canon digital printer from clean digital masters. Most of the photoprint editions are saddle stitched, but larger books have wire spiral binding. Sacred Choral Works. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Litany for the Whale \(1980\)](#). For 2 Voices. Vocalise for 2 Voices. Duration ca.12'. Published by C.F. Peters.

Music of Changes: [Vol. 1](#), [Vol. 2](#), [Vol. 3](#), [Vol. 4](#). For piano. Duration 43'. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Nocturne for Violin and Piano \(1947\)](#). For violin, piano. Duration 4'. Published by C.F. Peters.

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[Sixty-two Mesostics re Merce Cunningham \(1971\)](#). For Solo Voice using Microphone. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Dream \(1948\)\(arranged for Viola Solo and Viola Ensemble\)](#). For solo viola, 4 viola. This edition: Photoprint Edition. Photoprint editions are made to order. Printed on high quality paper and cover stock, they are made on a Canon digital printer from clean digital masters. Most of the photoprint editions are saddle stitched, but larger books have wire spiral binding. Duration 5'. Published by C.F. Peters.

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binding. Published by C.F. Peters.

[Thirteen Harmonies \(from Apartment House 1776\)\(1986\)](#). Edited by Transcribed By R. Zahab. For Violin, Keyboard (2 copies needed for performance). This edition: Photoprint Edition. Photoprint editions are made to order. Printed on high quality paper and cover stock, they are made on a Canon digital printer from clean digital masters. Most of the photoprint editions are saddle stitched, but larger books have wire spiral binding. Duration 38'. Published by C.F. Peters.

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